
INSIDE: BUM RUSH ● FALLACY OF THE LEFT-WING
MEDIA ● AMERICAN EXPRESSION ● BARBARIANS
AT THE GATE ● THE PIN-STRIPED PATRIOT ACT

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ESSAYS BY ANDY WORTHINGTON,
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**Torture
Nation**

The **ColdType** READER



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Bum rush

Mark Ames tells how the workers lost the big class war showdown of 2009

I was there when the so-called “Class War” went down. I saw the whole thing happen, on a cul-de-sac called Golden Pond Lane. Until now, no one has told the real story of what went on that warm spring day in Connecticut. So I will. Before I take you to that epic battle, bear with me for a brief digression – I promise it will pay off later.

I was born and raised a few miles away from what was known as “The Serial Murderer Capital of the World” – Santa Cruz, California circa early-mid-1970s. At one point there were three major serial murderers working the same beach town’s turf at once. Which probably explains why I was an inveterate bedwetter until I was about five.

Over time serial killers lost their shock value and got absorbed into pop culture, while I learned to hold in my piss until I got out of bed. Life returned to normal. But one incident from that scene haunted me then, and still gives me bladder-spasms today. It involved the most notorious of all the Santa Cruz serial killers, Edmund Kemper, an ogre-sized nerd who specialized in murdering hitchhiking hippie girls, chopping up their bodies and sodomizing the cuts. One day Kemper picked up a young dance student named Aiko Koo, drove her into the woods, and pulled out a gun to terrify her. It worked. As Kemper later said,

“I pulled the gun out to show her I had it... she was freaking out. Then I put the gun away and that had more effect on her than pulling it out.”

Now here comes the really disturbing part: instead of killing her right then and there, Kemper put the gun down, stopped his car and got out, then closed and locked the door. I repeat: Kemper locked himself out of the car. With his gun inside, next to the girl. He gave the victim a chance to save herself.

Guess what the girl did? She unlocked the door and let him back in.

As Kemper himself later explained, “She could have reached over and grabbed the gun, but I think she never gave it a thought.”

She never gave it a thought.

After she let him back in the car, Kemper went to work according to serial-killer script: he taped her mouth and squeezed her nose, suffocating her to death...yada-yada-yada. The ol’ Freud Gone Wild schtick, no surprises here, folks.

It’s not the murder that’s so horrifying, it’s that she unlocked the door and let him back in.

That was us, “the people,” in the opening battle of the Great Class War a few weeks ago – right when we had our one chance to win, we went Aiko Koo. Proving that she’s the depressing norm, not the horrifying aberration.

One day Kemper picked up a young dance student named Aiko Koo, drove her into the woods, and pulled out a gun to terrify her. It worked

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The plan was to transform the bus into a kind of Class War Assault Vehicle, and steer it straight into the upper-class New England hamlet where all the AIG execs live: Fairfield, Connecticut

You may have heard about the big Class War Showdown in the news last month: a group of protestors angry over AIG bonuses chartered a bus and toured the mansions where the AIG executives lived, going straight to their front doors. With no intention of Christmas caroling or trick-or-treating. No, this had class war written all over it. And for the first time, the plutocrats were running scared.

Golden Pond Lane

Here's how the "Battle of Golden Pond Lane" unfolded: On Friday, March 20—after a week of populist rage over news that Americans were funding obscene multimillion-dollar bonuses to the same AIG multimillionaires who ruined our economy, word spread about an anti-AIG bus tour of the mansions of the company's execs, planned for March 21. The plan was to transform the bus into a kind of Class War Assault Vehicle, and steer it straight into the upper-class New England hamlet where all the AIG execs live: Fairfield, Connecticut. It was like Stripes meets Spartacus, and I wouldn't have missed it for the world. The robbed would see exactly where the robbers lived, what their homes looked like, what their addresses were, where their front doors were located...

The bus tour was arranged by a cryptosocialist organization called Connecticut Working Families, a group with deep ties to the notorious ACORN group, the bogeyman of the Fox News bitter-cracker mob. That was all the plutocrats had to hear—a busload of commies and ACORN panthers were heading into their neighborhood, like Mugabe's goons, to burn down their mansions. For about 36 tense hours, suburban-New York's plutocrats felt like the Byzantine Christians in 1453, with the barbarians just hours away from slaughtering and raping anything that moved in Fairfield, Connecticut. In a panic, nine AIG execs announced that they were handing back their million-dollar bonuses to the American taxpayers. It was incredible. For the first time in living

memory, "the people" were starting to win. They had the power to instill fear and claw back some of their wealth.

And all because of the Magic Class-War Bus and its Angry Pranksters. It wasn't easy getting a seat on the bus, and if I hadn't tracked down the cell phone number for Joe Dinkin, the communications director for the Connecticut Working Families Party which organized the bus tour, I probably wouldn't have made it on board. "I've been getting all kinds of death threats and crazy calls today!" Dinkin told me, laughing nervously. "Rush Limbaugh attacked us on his show today, and that got all his crazy fans after me. They posted my cell phone number on Limbaugh's site, and ever since then it's just been crazy, the things these people said to me on the phone. Death threats... Man, the hatred in their voices is just crazy!"

Dinkin was laughing, but I don't think he knew just how ferocious a monster he'd pissed off with his bus tour idea.

The next morning, I drove out to the AIG Bus Tour meeting point, which was the local ACORN office in the depressed center of Bridgeport, Connecticut — one of those decaying mid-sized cities that America quietly abandoned a few decades ago. By the time I arrived that morning, the parking lot next to the Domino's pizza outlet was already crawling with media figures: reporters, cameramen and TV semi-celebrities. There was no way we'd all fit. So when the chartered bus pulled up across the street from the Domino's outlet, the reporters bum-rushed it like the South Vietnamese trying to get into the last helicopter out of Saigon.

It was an aggressively ugly bus: a belching, decrepit hulk with dented corrugated aluminum siding. The perfect Country Club Assault Vehicle for terrorizing the upper-class plutocrats we were going to visit.

Poor Joe Dinkin was put in charge of the seating arrangement — the minute he stepped off the bus, the reporters nearly tore him limb from limb. He dragged him-

self away from the bus door and down the street; the reporters clung to him like lions pulling down a struggling wildebeest. Joe tried to impose order as the reporters yelled out their organizations and why they had to be on the bus – New York Times, CNN, New York Post, NBC. Poor Joe trembled so badly that all he could manage was to jot down a few chicken scratches on a piece of paper. He quickly lost control, as the reporters turned back to the bus and tried storming it again. Chaos ensued, and eventually the organizers realized that it was between the protesters being on the bus, or the media being on the bus. So one by one, they started pulling protesters off the bus to make room for the media. Eventually we-media types- all got our seats.

“Where are the protesters?”

As we pulled out, one of the reporters shouted, “Where are the protesters on this bus?” The bus erupted in cynical snickering. We hadn’t even set out from Bridgeport for the first big battle of the Class War, and already it was going badly. The bus arrangement mirrored the same elitist structure that was supposedly being challenged: people who mattered were on the bus that mattered; the nobodies were put into miserable minivans that followed behind us.

The charter bus slowly made its way from depressed working-class Bridgeport into Fairfield. It was like the anti-Heart-of-Darkness, a journey from decrepit Bridgeport, up-river into familiarly sterile middle-class suburbia, and then deeper still up-river to the socio-economic headwaters, a hamlet of unattainable luxury and civilization that we could only dream about. We’d gone from shit to champagne. The reporters’ sneering and quipping died down to a hush as we slowly rolled past perfect, gleaming colonial mansions, with their grotesquely-vast front lawns and their perfectly-kept streets.

All of this divine luxury had a strange way of transforming the anger on our bus into something a lot more feckless, like awe

and self-loathing. We didn’t belong here, and we knew it. Somehow it was our fault that we were in the drab bus, and they were in the shiny Lexus SUVs. Hell, the fine residents of Fairfield only see buses like ours on the right lane of I-95 as they zoom to their Manhattan high-rises. What was this ugly beast doing here, in Fairfield, mucking up the view?

The remaining half-dozen protesters who were kept on the bus like protected species also felt this awe. One of the protesters, Mark Dziubek, recently-downsized from a steel rolling mill, told me that even though he’s spent his whole life in nearby Southington, he’d only been through Fairfield once in his life. Dziubek, a burly father of five, was the token white protester remaining on the bus. He was already getting used to this life with the people who count, and didn’t relish the idea of going back to his life.

“I’m thinking that for my retraining, maybe learning to be a photographer,” he told me. “Does it pay?”

I told him absolutely not, that it was an even more doomed-to-poverty profession than print journalism, which was also a guaranteed ticket to an early stroke-from-bitterness. But you could see why Dziubek was impressed, with all the photographers snapping photos of him, the exhilarating sensation of suddenly counting.

The bus stopped and let us out at the corner of Mine Hill Road and Golden Pond Lane. Last out of the bus were the show-down’s two stars, both African-Americans. One was a middle-aged pastor named Mary Huguley, and the other was Asaad Jackson, a 24-year-old ex-boxer-turned-activist sporting dreadlocks down to his beltline. They were going to confront the rich white AIG executive, Douglas Poling. He was the one who took the largest bonus, \$6.4 million. Poling apparently was so unnerved by the scenario that he returned his bonus a day earlier, while Poling’s fellow AIG exec neighbor up the street, James “Jackpot Jimmy” Hass, blubbered to reporters that he

You could see why Dziubek was impressed, with all the photographers snapping photos of him, the exhilarating sensation of suddenly counting

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So here we were: the big Class War showdown. Pastor Mary and Asaad Jackson gave the TV cameramen time to adjust their positions, then the mob moved forward right up to Poling's driveway

had also given back his multimillion-dollar bonus and couldn't people just look into their hearts and show him some mercy.

Huguley and Jackson deliberately and dramatically marched down Golden Pond Lane towards Poling's mansion, while about 50 members of the media elite jostled and swarmed around them like worker bees with the queen. This scene unfolding was every American plutocrat's worst nightmare, once unimaginable, now a reality that could be viewed from Poling's second-story window: Two poor, pissed-off niggers, surrounded by a phalanx of the liberal elite media, marches up to my hard-earned mansion in broad daylight, banging on my front door, demanding a cut of my wealth. On the deepest-fears scale, Willie Horton rates about a two compared to this class-war nightmare.

As we got closer to 177 Golden Pond Lane, we saw some uniformed policemen standing at the edge of the cul-de-sac with three healthy-looking white men in weekend sweatshirts and baseball caps, and two undercover cop cars – sporty SUVs – in the driveway of Poling's neighbor. A regular Fairfield cop car slowly tailed our crowd from behind – just want to make sure nothing happens here, folks.... Two menacing bodyguards patrolled Poling's front yard: a shaven-headed guy in business casual wear with a goatee and shades, who tried giving the impression of a relaxed, experienced veteran; and a gorgeous Latino woman in a Ninja jumpsuit, who paced the lawn like a caged she-lion just begging for one of us lowlifes to stick our hand into her range, where she'd tear it off with some ju-jitsu move. Poling was apparently gone that day-I imagine he was scouting out citizenship opportunities in plutocrat-friendly autocracies like Kazakhstan or Liechtenstein.

So here we were: the big Class War showdown. Pastor Mary and Asaad Jackson gave the TV cameramen time to adjust their positions, then the mob moved forward right up to Poling's driveway. This was it: we were at the North Bridge in Concord,

at Harper's Ferry, at Sproul Plaza with the cop car surrounded... the moment when it could have broken into open warfare, the moment when others crossed the line they could never go back on. It was amazing to think how vulnerable America's elite are: they don't use high walls and security fences and armed goons to guard their wealth, the way they do in so many countries. Instead, they just rely on our sense of shame, something innate that tells us, we don't belong here, we'll be leaving now, sorry... This was the moment to smash that peasant sensibility. Now that we'd smashed through that barrier and found ourselves facing a robber-baron class that only bothered pitching two security goons against 50 or so of us, the Great Class War was about to begin, right here, on Golden Pond Lane.

Blocking the route

The security goons blocked the two African-Americans from delivering a letter they were carrying to Poling. They had been instructed not to confront the bodyguards or anyone, so they didn't. As reporters jostled for the money photo, the security goons started to threaten the rest of us if we so much as crossed over Poling's gutter. They were feeling confident. The tide was turning. And this was the moment when it all fizzled, and the peasants melted back into the villages. We had the gun, and we were in control – but right at that moment, we opened the door and let the Edmund Kemper plutocrats back into the car. The security goons instructed Pastor Mary and Asaad to put their letter into Poling's mailbox. Pastor Mary did. Then she said some sort of prayer, and started walking back. CNN asked what she thought of Poling's house, and she replied that the house was "lovely." And then we walked back to the bus.

What began as the promised opening shots in the Great Class War instead turned out to be something like a field trip for a high school civics class, with everyone learning the importance of being respon-

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sible. The organizer, John Green, deemed it a success, and since then his group has never flirted with anything remotely as incendiary again. By the time we got back, the news was already announcing the end of the Class War: "Outrage Over Bonuses Wanes." Congress backed off from its posturing, news pundits backed off, and we, the people, returned to doing what we do best: getting screwed. Just when we held our fates in our own hands, we went Aiko Koo: unlocked the door and handed the gun to the Kemper-crats. We are nothing

but fleshlights for the plutocrats to work themselves out on whenever they feel like it, and they know we pose as much threat to them as a hunk of soft rubber. **CT**

Mark Ames is the author of book Going Postal: Rage, Murder and Rebellion from Reagan's Workplaces to Clinton's Columbine, an excerpt of which will feature in a future issue of The ColdType Reader. Ames also writes the online column "Backstabber" at Playboy.com, where this essay was originally published.

Just when we held our fates in our own hands, we went Aiko Koo: unlocked the door and handed the gun to the Kemper-crats

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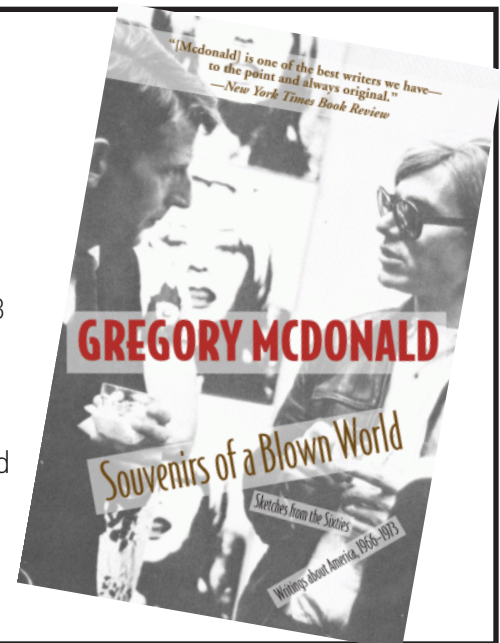
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The fallacy of the left-wing media

David Edwards examines the not-so-liberal tendencies of the BBC and other ‘national treasures’ of British journalism

‘Is it accurate to describe the corporate media as servile to concentrated power? Or, as a key component of the state-corporate system, is media propaganda best described as a form of self-service?’

It is a mistake to imagine that media corporations are impervious to all complaints and criticism. In fact, senior editors and managers are only too happy to accept that their journalists tend to be ‘anti-American,’ ‘anti-Israel,’ ‘anti-Western,’ indeed utterly rotten with left-wing bias.

In June 2007, an internal BBC report revealed that Auntie Beeb had long been perpetrating high media crimes, including: “institutional left-wing bias” and “being anti-American”. (‘Lambasting for the “trendy Left-wing bias” of BBC bosses,’ Daily Mail, June 18, 2007)

Former BBC political editor, Andrew Marr, applied his forensic journalistic skills, noting that the BBC was comprised of “an abnormally large proportion of younger people, of people in ethnic minorities and almost certainly of gay people, compared with the population at large”. This, he deduced, “creates an innate liberal bias”. (Nicole Martin, ‘BBC viewers angered by its “innate liberal bias”,’ Daily Telegraph, June 19, 2007)

On the other hand, despite the fact that the media system is made up of corporations that are deeply dependent on corporate advertisers (for revenue) and official government sources (for subsidised news), other possibilities are unthinkable. If one were crazy enough, one might ask,

for example: ‘Is it accurate to describe the corporate media as servile to concentrated power? Or, as a key component of the state-corporate system, is media propaganda best described as a form of self-service?’

Such contemplations are beyond the pale right across the supposed media ‘spectrum’. Ironically, then, the popularity of what might be termed the Left-Wing Fallacy of media performance is a result precisely of a massive right-wing bias – the Left-Wing Fallacy is the only critique the media are willing to tolerate.

National treasures

There are several good reasons why the media are keen to accept that they are biased to the left. First, the overwhelming preponderance of right-wing flak machines – ‘centre-left’ parties and governments, business front groups and powerful ‘religious’ organisations – persuades media executives that they really are too left-leaning. There is just far less flak criticising journalists from the left, and this flak is far less damaging.

Also, those on the money- and power-grubbing right have always been keen to associate themselves with the popular ethical positions of socialism. Hitler described himself as a “National Socialist”, after all, while Stalin headed an alliance of “socialist” republics. The modern media’s far-right

militants – the likes of Christopher Hitchens, David Aaronovitch and Nick Cohen – all declare themselves to be of the left.

Channel 4 Newsreader Jon Snow typically describes himself as “a pinko liberal hack”. (Quoted, Decca Aitkenhead, ‘That’s Snow business,’ Daily Mail, October 10, 2004)

Decca Aitkenhead noted in the Daily Mail that Snow “has achieved a rare status on television – famous as a radical, yet held in universal affection”. (Ibid) Aitkenhead added: “There is a risk of his image... even becoming a little cosy. Surely he doesn’t like the idea of becoming a national treasure, Saint Jon Snow, man of the people...”

In a Guardian article, entitled, ‘The moral anchor,’ Jon Henley commented last month: “Social engagement, and a fine line in self-deprecation, may be two reasons why Snow is so popular; on his way to national treasure status, even.” (Henley, ‘The moral anchor,’ The Guardian, April 28, 2009; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/apr/28/jon-snow-interview-channel-4>)

Arch-Blairite MP and pro-war propagandist Denis MacShane has described Snow as: “the closest we have to a modern-day George Orwell... Snow has managed to combine a moral commitment to criticising the powerful with a scrupulous care not to bend the facts.” (MacShane, ‘A spokesman for the truth,’ The Independent, October 29, 2004) Snow was, MacShane insisted, a “national treasure”.

Owen Gibson noted in the Guardian that Snow had recently “cemented his status as a national treasure”. (Gibson, ‘Interview: Dorothy Byrne,’ The Guardian, March 12, 2007) Katy Guest wrote in the Independent: “With his cuddly iconoclasm and warm intelligence, Jon Snow is in danger of becoming a national treasure.” (Guest, ‘Cheltenham Literary Festival,’ The Independent, October 14, 2004)

In fact the world does not work this way – serious (rather than “cuddly”) criticism of powerful interests is *never* greeted with

“universal affection” earning “national treasure” status. If George Orwell’s name springs to mind as an obvious counter-example, Noam Chomsky is on hand to clarify: “Fame, Fortune, and Respect await those who reveal the crimes of official enemies; those who undertake the vastly more important task of raising a mirror to their own societies can expect quite different treatment. George Orwell is famous for *Animal Farm* and *1984*, which focus on the official enemy. Had he addressed the more interesting and significant question of thought control in relatively free and democratic societies, it would not have been appreciated, and instead of wide acclaim, he would have faced silent dismissal or obloquy.” (Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, Hill and Wang, 1992, p.372)

Snow benefits from wide acclaim because he has devoted much of his life to emphasising the crimes of official enemies. This can be divined even from the fact that he hosts a high-profile mainstream TV news programme – as a rule of thumb, we can be sure that the demonisation of official enemies is a key requirement of all journalists in Snow’s position. It is simply understood.

As the British media exulted in Baghdad’s rapid fall to US tanks on April 9, 2003, Snow interviewed then foreign secretary Jack Straw – one of the key Iraq war conspirators. Straw told Snow that, earlier in the day, he had met with the French foreign minister, who was fiercely opposed to the war. Snow asked wryly: “Did he look chastened?” (Channel 4, April 9, 2003)

In his book, *Shooting History*, Snow described a visit to the United States: “As the plane touched down at Dulles airport in the Virginia wastes beyond Washington, my thoughts were of mistrust for what America had done, of the death squads that flourished under the protection of US-backed military forces, of the dictators like Pinochet whom the Cold War had rendered ‘best friends’. I would expose it all!

“But within twenty-four hours of land-

Snow benefits from wide acclaim because he has devoted much of his life to emphasising the crimes of official enemies

NAME CALLING

Following the war, NATO sources reported that 2,000 people had been killed in Kosovo on all sides in the year prior to bombing – tales of a Holocaust-style Serbian genocide prior to bombing were as fraudulent as tales of deadly Iraqi WMD three years later

ing my mistrust began turning into an improbable and lifelong love affair with ‘candor’ America.” (Snow, *Shooting History*, HarperCollins, 2004, p.212)

Snow wrote of NATO’s attack on Serbia in 1999: “With a million refugees already outside Kosovo and more coming, the pressure was on Blair, Clinton and the other Western leaders to move quickly.

“The point was emphasised when we reached the border the next morning. Straggling along the single-track railway line were unbroken lines of refugees stretching as far as the eye could see. It was like a scene out of *Schindler’s List*.” (p.353)

In fact independent observers reported at the time that the flood of refugees from Kosovo began immediately *after* NATO launched its 78-day blitz. Following the war, NATO sources reported that 2,000 people had been killed in Kosovo on all sides in the year prior to bombing – tales of a Holocaust-style Serbian genocide prior to bombing were as fraudulent as tales of deadly Iraqi WMD three years later. Snow added of British troops in Kosovo: “I have never more wanted a force to go to war. This time I had none of the misgivings that were to dog the Iraq adventure four years later. The sheer mass of humanity in peril had convinced me.” (pp.353-354)

In similar vein, the Times’s foreign editor, Richard Beeston, wrote last month: “[Iranian] President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s extraordinary performance today at the United Nations conference on racism confirmed that Iran’s leader is determined to retain his title as uncrowned king of the world’s awkward squad and speaker of the unspeakable.

“Hugo Chavez might exchange handshakes and gifts with President Obama and other formerly hostile world leaders may now be prepared to open a new chapter with Washington, but Iran by its most recent words and deeds has demonstrated that it is not budging.” (Beeston, ‘Mahmoud Ahmadinejad believes fervently in what he says,’ *The Times*, April 21, 2009;

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6134666.ece)

Notice that the “awkward squad” – Ahmadinejad and Chavez – is *contrasted* with “Washington”. The United States has never been described as a member of “the awkward squad”, or as “hostile”, by any foreign editor in any mainstream national newspaper. One might ask why. After all, we do not live in a police state – we live in an ostensibly free society. No one is holding a gun to the heads of our foreign editors.

Perhaps, then, the evidence is lacking. But how much proof do we need that the United States conspired with Britain to invade Iraq on utterly false pretexts causing the virtual destruction of an entire nation? What worse crimes have Ahmadinejad and Chavez perpetrated to earn themselves membership of the “awkward squad”? What would it take before Britain and America were inducted? The answer is that it could never happen because this kind of media labelling is a function of power, not of rational thought. The technical term: ‘propaganda’.

For our neutral media, ‘we’ are always reasonable, civilised, benign – it is up to ‘them’, the crazies, to reach out to ‘us’ in peace and friendship. Peace will reign when those who are “hostile” renounce their baseless aggression towards ‘us’. The myth of media objectivity obscures the deep mendacity of the mainstream stance: the world is always viewed from ‘here’, and ‘here’ is always high and moral.

Scrupulously unbiased

An Independent leader writes of the BBC’s Middle East editor Jeremy Bowen: “Mr Bowen’s work has always been scrupulously unbiased.” (Leader, ‘Bad judgement,’ *The Independent*, April 16, 2009; <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/leading-articles/leading-article-bad-judgement-1669307.html>)

The comment was made in response to the decision of the BBC Trust’s editorial standards committee to censure Bowen for

breaching the corporation's guidelines on accuracy and impartiality. Adel Darwish, the political editor of The Middle East Magazine Group, commented: "I don't think this will be damaging to him but I think it will increase the polarisation regarding Jeremy Bowen."

"He will be falsely applauded by the left-wing organisations, the Arabs and the anti-American groups. But on the other hand he will be seen as a villain by the pro-Israeli lobby who have a view that the BBC is biased against them." ("Bowen 'breached rules on impartiality'", The Independent, April 16, 2009; <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/tv-radio/bowen-breached-rules-on-impartiality-1669278.html>)

Bowen will indeed be lauded by pro-Palestinian groups and villainised by pro-Israeli groups. The problem is that Darwish has restricted the range of thinkable thought in a way that excludes the truth – that Bowen's reporting consistently reflects exactly this pressure to toe a pro-establishment, pro-Israeli line.

Bowen was censured for a piece he wrote for the BBC website last June under the headline "Six days that changed the Middle East," in which he provided background to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by describing the events of the 1967 Six Day War. He accurately described "Zionism's innate instinct to push out the frontier" and wrote of how Israel showed a "defiance of everyone's interpretation of international law except its own". The BBC's editorial standards committee ruled that even these very mild gestures in the direction of the truth – a truth that is unrecognisably uglier than Bowen described – breached the BBC's rules on accuracy and impartiality. It commented: "Readers might come away from the article thinking that the interpretation offered was the only sensible view of the war. It was not necessary for equal space to be given to the other arguments, but... the existence of alternative theses should have been more clearly signposted."

(<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/tv-radio/bowen-breached-rules-on-impartiality-1669278.html>)

We are to believe that the BBC's internal watchdogs are somehow blind to the lack of "alternative theses" in a mountain of other news reports. Readers will be familiar with (then) BBC political editor Andrew Marr's assertion, on the same night that Jon Snow interviewed Jack Straw, that the rapid fall of Baghdad to US tanks meant that Tony Blair "tonight stands as a larger man and a stronger prime minister as a result." (Marr, BBC 1, News At Ten, April 9, 2003)

This was on the main evening news, in time of war – a war that was bitterly opposed by much of the British population. It was "not necessary for equal space to be given" to other arguments, but Marr might have mentioned that much of the world deemed Tony Blair a war criminal responsible for the supreme war crime – the launching of a war of aggression.

Or consider BBC world affairs editor John Simpson's recent analysis of the British pull-out from Iraq: "The British themselves tend to think of their time in Basra as a failure. The Americans told them bluntly that they were much too soft. They patrolled in berets instead of helmets, and were not allowed to wear sunglasses; they did not want to seem menacing. That worked well, until neighbouring Iran decided to stir up the militias to attack the British." (Simpson, 'UK combat operations end in Iraq,' BBC website, April 30, 2009; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8027797.stm>)

"Alternative theses" involve the obviously criminal nature of the occupation, and the utter catastrophe that has befallen Iraq, including Basra, since the invasion, which "worked well". Another excluded "sensible view" is provided by Chomsky: "Would we have had a debate in 1943 about whether the Allies were really guilty of aiding terrorist partisans in occupied Europe? The absurdity of the whole discussion was highlighted by a marvellous statement by Condi Rice a few days ago. She was asked

Marr might have mentioned that much of the world deemed Tony Blair a war criminal responsible for the supreme war crime – the launching of a war of aggression

NAME CALLING

Was it unbiased to portray the destroyers of Iraq – big business cynics like Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Powell – as political ingénues dreaming of freedom for the world’s oil-producing nations, and then feeling dismayed as the latter made choices discordant with the dreams of US oil giants?

what the solution is in Iraq, and said something like this: ‘It’s obvious. Withdraw all foreign forces and foreign weapons.’ I was waiting to see if one commentator would notice that there happen to be some foreign troops and weapons in Iraq apart from the Iranian ones she was of course referring to. Couldn’t find a hint.” (Chomsky, email to Media Lens, May 24, 2007)

A Media Lens reader made an interesting point in an email to the BBC’s Paul Reynolds regarding his article, ‘UN condemns N Korea rocket launch.’ (Reynolds, April 13, 2009; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/7997336.stm>)

“Dear Paul,

“I refer to the above article and in particular the following paragraph:

“The BBC’s Paul Reynolds says it remains unclear what Pyongyang’s intentions were in launching the rocket. The country may be attempting to develop a useable nuclear weapon and the means to carry it, or it may just be seeking to hold the world’s attention, making concessions which can easily be withdrawn, says our correspondent.’

“Or indeed North Korea may simply have launched a communication satellite!?! Why is this option omitted from your analysis given America and Britain’s track record in ‘intelligence’? Iraq’s non-existent WMDs spring to mind!!”

The email was ignored.

In March, a different reader asked BBC reporter Reeta Chakrabarti why she had claimed that Blair had “passionately believed” that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. After all, an alternative thesis – based on a ton of compelling evidence – is that Blair was lying. Chakrabarti responded:

“I said Mr Blair passionately believed Iraq had wmd because he has consistently said so.” (Forwarded to Media Lens, March 2, 2009)

Hard to believe, but senior BBC journalists and editors consistently present this argument: leading politicians must be sin-

cere because, well, they say so! What possible reasons could they have for saying one thing and believing another?

In January 2006, as Iraq collapsed under the violence and chaos of military occupation, Jeremy Bowen commented: “Thanks to the Americans, Iraq had elections in December 2005. Voting in itself is not a magic formula to make people’s lives better. Just because they cast their ballots the violence won’t stop and the electricity won’t run all day. But voting is the way to create a fairer system, so something better might have started. Under American protection, Iraq’s newly elected politicians now have to show they can build a democracy.” (Bowen, ‘Middle East on the road to change,’ January 2, 2006; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4551726.stm)

He added: “All this does not mean that the dreams that the Bush administration has for the region are coming true... The Americans are discovering that the problem with democracy is that it can produce results that you don’t like. That’s just the way it is.”

Imagine these words being said of any other superpower occupation in history. Was it “scrupulously unbiased” to suggest that post-invasion Iraq was free to seek genuine democracy under “American protection”? Was it unbiased to portray the destroyers of Iraq – big business cynics like Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Powell – as political ingénues dreaming of freedom for the world’s oil-producing nations, and then feeling dismayed as the latter made choices discordant with the dreams of US oil giants? Needless to say, there were no BBC committee rulings on the matter.

Returning to the present, the second finding of the BBC’s editorial standards committee related to a broadcast Bowen had delivered on BBC Radio 4’s *From Our Own Correspondent* in January last year, in which he referred to a contemporary Israeli settlement, Har Homa. Bowen said the US government considered the settlement illegal. He should have said that *even* the

US government considered it illegal. The committee decided the assertion was inadequately sourced: “The Middle East Editor had stated his professional view without qualification or explanation, and that the lack of precision in his language had rendered the statement inaccurate.” (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/tv-radio/bowen-breached-rules-on-impartiality-1669278.html>)

This absurd comment was used as justification for its finding that the report had partially breached accuracy guidelines. Robert Fisk commented in the Independent: “The fact that the BBC Trust uses the Hebrew name for Har Homa – not the original Arab name, Jebel Abu Ghoneim – shows just how far it is now a mouthpiece for the Israeli lobby which so diligently abused Bowen. “Whenever I’m asked by lecture audiences around the world if they should trust the BBC, I tell them to trust [Israeli journalists] Amira [Hass] and Gideon [Levy] more than they should ever believe in the wretched broadcasting station. I’m afraid it’s the same old story. If you allow yourself to bow down before those who wish you to deviate from the truth,

you will stay on your knees forever.” (Fisk, ‘How can you trust the cowardly BBC?’, The Independent, April 16, 2009; <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-how-can-you-trust-the-cowardly-bbc-1669281.html>)

The same can be said of Fisk’s equally “wretched” newspaper – the Independent. Although, as discussed, it arguably does not “bow down” to power for the reason that it is itself a key element of the power that keeps us all on our knees. This is something Fisk will never accept, nor even discuss, in our strange ‘free’ society where the limits to free speech are subtly understood and crudely ignored.

The issue is not complex, not esoteric: in a world dominated by corporate power we rely on media corporations for news about that world. Future generations will surely be aghast that so few people today are able to perceive the perfectly obvious problem, the very clear source of mass control, that this implies. **CT**

David Edwards is co-editor of the British media watchdog Medialens. This essay was first published on its website, medialens.org

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New low for America: Cheney's twisted world

Andy Worthington shows how 'enhanced interrogation techniques' were used to create links between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein

Maj. Burney's testimony provides the first evidence that coercive and illegal techniques were used widely at Guantánamo in an attempt to secure information linking al-Qaeda to Saddam Hussein

Since the recent publication of the Senate Armed Services Committee's report into detainee abuse in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantánamo, much has been made of a footnote containing a comment made by Maj. Paul Burney, a psychiatrist with the Army's 85th Medical Detachment's Combat Stress Control Team, who, with two colleagues, was "hijacked" into providing an advisory role to the Joint Task Force at Guantánamo.

In his testimony to the Senate Committee, Maj. Burney wrote that "a large part of the time we were focused on trying to establish a link between al-Qaeda and Iraq and we were not successful in establishing a link between al-Qaeda and Iraq. The more frustrated people got in not being able to establish that link ... there was more and more pressure to resort to measures that might produce more immediate results."

In an article to follow, I'll look at how Maj. Burney – almost accidentally – assumed a pivotal role in the implementation of torture techniques in the "War on Terror," but for now I'm going to focus on the significance of his comments, which are, of course, profoundly important because they demonstrate that, in contrast to the administration's oft-repeated claims that the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" foiled further terrorist attacks on

the United States, much of the program was actually focused on trying to establish links between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein that would justify the planned invasion of Iraq.

Maj. Burney's testimony provides the first evidence that coercive and illegal techniques were used widely at Guantánamo in an attempt to secure information linking al-Qaeda to Saddam Hussein, but it is not the first time that the Bush administration's attempts to link a real enemy with one that required considerable ingenuity to conjure up have been revealed.

The tortured lie

In case anyone has forgotten, when Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, the head of the Khaldan military training camp in Afghanistan, was captured at the end of 2001 and sent to Egypt to be tortured, he made a false confession that Saddam Hussein had offered to train two al-Qaeda operatives in the use of chemical and biological weapons. Al-Libi later recanted his confession, but not until Secretary of State Colin Powell – to his eternal shame – had used the story in February 2003 in an attempt to persuade the UN to support the invasion of Iraq.

It's wise, I believe, to resuscitate al-Libi's story right now for two particular reasons. The first is because, when he was handed

over to US forces by the Pakistanis, he became the first high-profile captive to be fought over in a tug-of-war between the FBI, which wanted to play by the rules, and the CIA – backed up by the most hawkish figures in the White House and the Pentagon – who didn't.

In an article published in the New Yorker in February 2005, Jane Mayer spoke to Jack Cloonan, a veteran FBI officer, who worked for the agency from 1972 to 2002, who told her that his intention had been to secure evidence from al-Libi that could be used in the cases of two mentally troubled al-Qaeda operatives, Zacarias Moussaoui, a proposed 20th hijacker for the 9/11 attacks, and Richard Reid, the British “Shoe Bomber.”

Crucially, Mayer reported, Cloonan advised his colleagues in Afghanistan to interrogate al-Libi with respect, “and handle this like it was being done right here, in my office in New York.” He added, “I remember talking on a secure line to them. I told them, ‘Do yourself a favor, read the guy his rights. It may be old-fashioned, but this will come out if we don't. It may take ten years, but it will hurt you, and the bureau's reputation, if you don't. Have it stand as a shining example of what we feel is right.’”

However, after reading him his rights, and taking turns in interrogating him with agents from the CIA, Cloonan and his colleagues were dismayed when, in spite of developing what they believed was “a good rapport” with him, the CIA decided that tougher tactics were needed, and rendered him to Egypt.

According to an FBI officer who spoke to Newsweek in 2004, “At the airport the CIA case officer goes up to him and says, ‘You're going to Cairo, you know. Before you get there I'm going to find your mother and I'm going to f*** her.’ So we lost that fight.” Speaking to Mayer, Jack Cloonan added, “At least we got information in ways that wouldn't shock the conscience of the court. And no one will have to seek revenge for

what I did.” He added, “We need to show the world that we can lead, and not just by military might.”

In November 2005, the New York Times reported that a Defense Intelligence Agency report had noted in February 2002, long before al-Libi recanted his confession, that his information was not trustworthy.

As the Times described it, his claims “lacked specific details about the Iraqis involved, the illicit weapons used and the location where the training was to have taken place.”

The report itself stated, “It is possible he does not know any further details; it is more likely this individual is intentionally misleading the debriefers. Ibn al-Shaykh has been undergoing debriefs for several weeks and may be describing scenarios to the debriefers that he knows will retain their interest.”

Had anyone asked Dan Coleman, a colleague of Cloonan's who also had a long history of successfully interrogating terrorist suspects without resorting to the use of torture, it would have been clear that torturing a confession out of al-Libi was a counter-productive exercise.

As Mayer explained, Coleman was “disgusted” when he heard about the false confession, telling her, “It was ridiculous for interrogators to think Libi would have known anything about Iraq. I could have told them that. He ran a training camp. He wouldn't have had anything to do with Iraq. Administration officials were always pushing us to come up with links, but there weren't any. The reason they got bad information is that they beat it out of him. You never get good information from someone that way.”

Critical explanation

This, I believe, provides an absolutely critical explanation of why the Bush administration's torture regime was not only morally repugnant, but also counter-productive, and it's particularly worth noting

According to an FBI officer who spoke to Newsweek in 2004, “At the airport the CIA case officer goes up to him and says, ‘You're going to Cairo, you know. Before you get there I'm going to find your mother and I'm going to f* her.’ So we lost that fight”**

Al-Libi's story is, of course, disturbing enough as evidence of the utter contempt with which the Bush administration's warmongers treated both the truth and the American public

Coleman's comment that "Administration officials were always pushing us to come up with links, but there weren't any." However, I realize that the failure of torture to produce genuine evidence – as opposed to intelligence that, though false, was at least "actionable" – was exactly what was required by those, like Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, "Scooter" Libby and other Iraq obsessives, who wished to betray America doubly, firstly by endorsing the use of torture in defiance of almost universal disapproval from government agencies and military lawyers, and secondly by using it not to prevent terrorist attacks, but to justify an illegal war.

Where are the "ghost prisoners"?

In addition, a second reason for revisiting al-Libi's story emerged two weeks ago, when memos approving the use of torture by the CIA, written by lawyers in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel in 2002 and 2005, were released, because, in one of the memos from 2005, the author, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Steven G. Bradbury, revealed that a total of 94 prisoners had been held in secret CIA custody.

As I noted at the time, what was disturbing about this revelation was not the number of prisoners held, because CIA director Michael Hayden admitted in July 2007 that the CIA had detained fewer than 100 people at secret facilities abroad since 2002, but the insight that this exact figure provides into the supremely secretive world of "extraordinary rendition" and secret prisons that exists beyond the cases of the 14 "high-value detainees" who were transferred to Guantánamo from secret CIA custody in September 2006.

Al-Libi, of course, is one of the 80 prisoners whose whereabouts are unknown. There are rumors that, after he was fully exploited by the administration's own torturers (in Poland and, almost certainly, other locations) and by proxy torturers in Egypt, he was sent back to Libya, to be

dealt with by Colonel Gaddafi. I have no sympathy for al-Libi, as the emir of a camp that, at least in part, trained operatives for terrorist attacks in their home countries (in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East), but if there is ever to be a proper accounting for what took place in the CIA's global network of "extraordinary rendition," secret prisons, and proxy prisons, then al-Libi's whereabouts, along with those of the other 79 men who constitute "America's Disappeared" (as well as all the others rendered directly to third countries instead of to the CIA's secret dungeons), need to be established.

Al-Libi's story is, of course, disturbing enough as evidence of the utter contempt with which the Bush administration's warmongers treated both the truth and the American public, but as David Rose explained in an article in *Vanity Fair* last December, al-Libi was not the only prisoner tortured until he came up with false confessions about links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda.

According to two senior intelligence analysts who spoke to Rose, Abu Zubaydah, the gatekeeper for the Khaldan camp, made a number of false confessions about connections between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, above and beyond one particular claim that was subsequently leaked by the administration: a patently ludicrous scenario in which Osama bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq) were working with Saddam Hussein to destabilize the autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

One of the analysts, who worked at the Pentagon, explained, "The intelligence community was lapping this up, and so was the administration, obviously. Abu Zubaydah was saying Iraq and al-Qaeda had an operational relationship. It was everything the administration hoped it would be."

However, none of the analysts knew that these confessions had been obtained through torture. The Pentagon analyst told Rose, "As soon as I learned that the reports

had come from torture, once my anger had subsided I understood the damage it had done. I was so angry, knowing that the higher-ups in the administration knew he was tortured, and that the information he was giving up was tainted by the torture, and that it became one reason to attack Iraq.” He added, “It seems to me they were using torture to achieve a political objective.”

Waterboarded 83 times

This is the crucial line, of course, and its significance is made all the more pronounced by the realization that, as one of Bradbury’s torture memos also revealed, Zubaydah was subjected to waterboarding (an ancient torture technique that involves controlled drowning) 83 times in August 2002.

The administration persists in claiming that this hideous ordeal produced information that led to the capture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Jose Padilla, but we have known for years that KSM was seized after a walk-in informer ratted on him, and those of us who have been paying attention also know that, in the case of Padilla, the so-called “dirty bomber,” who spent three and a half years in solitary confinement in a US military brig until he lost his mind, there never was an actual “dirty bomb” plot. This was admitted, before his torture even began, by deputy defense secretary Paul Wolfowitz, who stated, in June 2002, a month after Padilla was captured, “I don’t think there was actually a plot beyond some fairly loose talk.”

All this leaves me with the uncomfortable suspicion that what the excessive waterboarding of Abu Zubaydah actually achieved – beyond the “30 percent of the FBI’s time, maybe 50 percent,” that was “spent chasing leads that were bullshit,” as an FBI operative explained to David Rose

– were a few more blatant lies to fuel the monstrous deception that was used to justify the invasion of Iraq.

It remains to be seen if further details emerge to back up Maj. Burney’s story. From my extensive research into the stories of the Guantánamo prisoners, I recall only that one particular prisoner, an Iraqi named Arkan al-Karim, mentioned being questioned about Iraq.

Released in January this year, al-Karim had been imprisoned by the Taliban before being handed over to US forces by Northern Alliance troops, and had been forced to endure the most outrageous barrage of false allegations in Guantánamo, but when he spoke to the review board that finally cleared him for release, he made a point of explaining, “The reason they [the US] brought me to Cuba is not because I did something. They brought me from Taliban prison to get information from me about the Iraqi army before the United States went to Iraq.”

However, even without further proof of specific confessions extracted by the administration in an attempt to justify its actions, the examples provided in the cases of Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi and Abu Zubaydah should be raised every time that Dick Cheney opens his mouth to mention the valuable intelligence that was extracted through torture, and to remind him that, instead of saving Americans from another terror attack, he and his supporters succeeding only in using lies extracted through torture to send more Americans to their deaths than died on September 11, 2001.

CT

Andy Worthington is a British historian, and the author of ‘The Guantánamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America’s Illegal Prison’ (published by Pluto Press). His website is: www.andyworthington.co.uk

All this leaves me with the uncomfortable suspicion that what the excessive waterboarding of Abu Zubaydah actually achieved . . . were a few more blatant lies to fuel the monstrous deception that was used to justify the invasion of Iraq

How torture trapped Colin Powell

Ray McGovern tells how a confession ‘bombshell’ dissuaded the Secretary of State from scrapping allegations about al-Qaeda and Iraq in his 2003 speech to the UN Security Council

Wilkerson’s account underscores how the Bush administration’s reliance on harsh interrogations of al-Qaeda suspects influenced the rush to war with Iraq

Four days before trying to sell the invasion of Iraq to the United Nations, Secretary of State Colin Powell was ready to scrap dubious allegations about Saddam Hussein’s ties to al-Qaeda but was dissuaded by top CIA officials who cited a new “bombshell” that now appears to have been derived from torture, a top Powell aide says.

Retired Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, who was then Powell’s chief of staff, said the key moment occurred on Feb. 1, 2003, as the two men labored at the CIA over Powell’s presentation to the U.N. Security Council set for Feb. 5.

“Powell and I had a one-on-one – no one else even in the room – about his angst over what was a rather dull recounting of several old stories about Al Qaeda-Baghdad ties [in the draft speech],” Wilkerson said. “I agreed with him that what we had was bull---t, and Powell decided to eliminate all mention of terrorist contacts between AQ and Baghdad.

“Within an hour, [CIA Director George] Tenet and [CIA Deputy Director John] McLaughlin dropped a bombshell on the table in the [CIA] director’s Conference Room: a high-level AQ detainee had just revealed under interrogation substantive contacts between AQ and Baghdad, including Iraqis training AQ operatives in the use of chemical and biological weapons.”

Though Tenet and McLaughlin wouldn’t give Powell the identity of the al-Qaeda source, Wilkerson said he now understands that it was Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi, an al-Qaeda operative who later claimed he gave the CIA false information in the face of actual and threatened torture.

Not realizing that the new intelligence was tainted, “Powell changed his mind and this information was included in his UNSC presentation, along with some more general information from the previous text about Baghdad’s terrorist tendencies,” Wilkerson said.

Wilkerson’s account underscores how the Bush administration’s reliance on harsh interrogations of al-Qaeda suspects influenced the rush to war with Iraq, while also pointing out how the need to justify the war gave impetus to the use of torture for extracting information.

Sealing the deal

Powell, whose credibility essentially sealed the deal for war as far as millions of Americans were concerned, also appears to have let himself be manipulated by senior CIA officials who kept him in the dark about crucial details, including the fact that the Defense Intelligence Agency doubted al-Libi’s credibility.

“As you can see, nowhere were we told that the high-level AQ operative had a

name, or that he had been interrogated [in Egypt] with no US personnel present or much earlier rather than just recently (the clear implication of Tenet's breathtaking delivery)," Wilkerson said.

"And not a single dissent was mentioned (later we learned of the DIA dissent) ... All of this was hidden from us – the specific identity, we were informed, due to the desire to protect sources and methods as well as a cooperative foreign intelligence service...."

"As for me in particular, I learned the identity of al-Libi only in 2004 and of the DIA dissent about the same time, of al-Libi's recanting slightly later, and of the entire affair's probably being a Tenet-McLaughlin fabrication – to at least a certain extent – only after I began to put some things together and to receive reinforcement of the 'fabrication' theme from other examples."

Among those other examples, Wilkerson said, was the case of an Iraqi "defector" codenamed Curveball, who supplied false intelligence about mobile labs for making biological and chemical weapons, and various Iraqi walk-ins who spun bogus stories about an Iraqi nuclear weapons program.

Though some of those sources appear to have concocted their tales after being recruited by the pro-invasion exiles of the Iraqi National Congress, al-Libi told his stories – he later claimed – to avoid or stop torture, a central point in the current debate about whether torture saved American lives.

For those of you distracted by the Fawning Corporate Media (FCM) spotlight on "what-did-Pelosi-know-about-torture-and-when-did-she-know-it," please turn off the TV long enough to ponder the case of the recently departed al-Libi, who reportedly died in a Libyan prison, a purported suicide.

The al-Libi case might help you understand why, even though information from torture is notoriously unreliable, President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and the sycophants running U.S.

intelligence ordered it anyway.

In short, if it is untruthful information you are after, torture can work just fine! As the distinguished Senator from South Carolina, Lindsey Graham put it during a Senate hearing on May 13 – with a hat-tip to the Inquisition – "One of the reasons these techniques have been used for about 500 years is that they work."

All you really need to know is what you want the victims to "confess" to and then torture them, or render them abroad to "friendly" intelligence services toward the same end.

Poster child for torture

Al-Libi, born in 1963 in Libya, ran an al-Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan from 1995 to 2000. He was detained in Pakistan on Nov. 11, 2001, and then sent to a U.S. detention facility in Kandahar, Afghanistan. He was deemed a prize catch, since he would know of any Iraqi training of al-Qaeda.

The CIA successfully fought off the FBI for first rights to interrogate al-Libi. FBI's Dan Coleman, who "lost" al-Libi to the CIA (at whose orders, I wonder?), said, "Administration officials were always pushing us to come up with links" between Iraq and al-Qaeda.

Meanwhile, at the Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba, Maj. Paul Burney, a psychiatrist sent there in summer 2002, told the Senate, "A large part of the time we were focused on trying to establish a link between al-Qaeda and Iraq and we were not successful.

"The more frustrated people got in not being able to establish that link ... there was more and more pressure to resort to measures that might produce more immediate results."

CIA interrogators elicited some "cooperation" from al-Libi through a combination of rough treatment and threats that he would be turned over to Egyptian intelligence with even greater experience in the torture business.

The al-Libi case might help you understand why, even though information from torture is notoriously unreliable, President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and the sycophants running U.S. intelligence ordered it anyway

According to the CIA cable, al-Libi said his interrogators did not like his responses and “placed him in a small box” for about 17 hours. After he was let out of the box, al-Libi was given a last chance to “tell the truth”

By June 2002, al-Libi had told the CIA that Iraq had “provided” unspecified chemical and biological weapons training for two al-Qaeda operatives, an allegation that soon found its way into other U.S. intelligence reports. Al-Libi’s claim was well received even though the DIA was suspicious.

“He lacks specific details” about the supposed training, the DIA observed. “It is possible he does not know any further details; it is more likely this individual is intentionally misleading the debriefers. Ibn al-Shaykh has been undergoing debriefs for several weeks and may be describing scenarios to the debriefers that he knows will retain their interest.”

Despite his cooperation, al-Libi was still shipped to Egypt where he underwent more abuse, according to a declassified CIA cable from 2004 when al-Libi recanted his earlier statements. The cable reported that al-Libi said Egyptian interrogators wanted information about al-Qaeda’s connections with Iraq, a subject “about which [al-Libi] said he knew nothing and had difficulty even coming up with a story.”

According to the CIA cable, al-Libi said his interrogators did not like his responses and “placed him in a small box” for about 17 hours. After he was let out of the box, al-Libi was given a last chance to “tell the truth.”

When his answers still did not satisfy, al-Libi says he “was knocked over with an arm thrust across his chest and fell on his back” and then was “punched for 15 minutes.” And, as Sen. Graham noted, that stuff really works! For it was then that al-Libi expanded on his tales about collaboration between al-Qaeda and Iraq, adding that three al-Qaeda operatives had gone to Iraq “to learn about nuclear weapons.” Afterwards, he said his treatment improved.

Al-Libi’s stories misinformed Colin Powell’s U.N. speech, which sought to establish a “sinister nexus” between Iraq and al-Qaeda to justify invading Iraq.

Al-Libi recanted his claims in January

2004. That prompted the CIA, a month later, to recall all intelligence reports based on his statements, a fact recorded in a footnote to the report issued by the 9/11 Commission.

Bear in mind that before the attack on Iraq on March 19, 2003, polls showed that some 70 percent Americans believed that Saddam Hussein had operational ties with al-Qaeda and thus was partly responsible for the attacks of 9/11.

Just what the doctor ordered

George Bush relied on al-Libi’s false confession for his crucial speech in Cincinnati on Oct. 7, 2002, just a few days before Congress voted on the Iraq War resolution. Bush declared, “We’ve learned that Iraq has trained al-Qaeda members in bomb making and poisons and deadly gases.”

Colin Powell relied on it for his crucial speech to the U.N. on Feb. 5, 2003. He said: “I can trace the story of a senior terrorist operative telling how Iraq provided training in these [chemical and biological] weapons to al-Qaeda. Fortunately, this operative is now detained, and he has told his story.”

For a while, al-Libi was practically the poster boy for the success of the Cheney/Bush torture regime; that is, until he publicly recanted and explained that he only told his interrogators what he thought would stop the torture.

In his disingenuous memoir, *At the Center of the Storm*, Tenet sought to defend the CIA’s use of the claims made by al-Libi in the run-up to the Iraq war, suggesting that al-Libi’s later recantation may not have been genuine.

“He clearly lied,” Tenet writes in his book. “We just don’t know when. Did he lie when he first said that Al Qaeda members received training in Iraq or did he lie when he said they did not? In my mind, either case might still be true.”

Really; that’s what Tenet writes.

Tenet’s stubborn faith in the CIA’s “product” reflects the reality that he is not a disinterested observer. If there was a CIA

plan to extract a false confession, it's likely he was a key participant.

After all, he devoted 2002-03 to the mission of manufacturing a "slam-dunk" case for invading Iraq in order to please his bosses. He had both the motive and the opportunity to commit this crime.

Well, if al-Libi is now dead – strangely our embassy in Tripoli was unable to find out for sure – this means the world will never hear his own account of the torture he experienced and the story he made up and then recanted.

And we will all be asked to believe he "committed suicide" even though it is apparently true that al-Libi was a devout Muslim and Islam prohibits suicide.

Hafed al-Ghwell, a Libyan-American and a prominent critic of the Gaddafi regime, explained to Newsweek, "This idea of committing suicide in your prison cell is an old story in Libya."

He added that, throughout Gaddafi's 40-year rule, there had been several instances in which political prisoners were reported to have committed suicide, but that "then the families get the bodies back and discover the prisoners had been shot in the back or tortured to death."

Am I suggesting...?

Anatomy of a crime

Commenting on what he called the "Cheney interrogation techniques," Col. Wilkerson, writing for *The Washington Note* on May 13, made the following observations: "...as the administration authorized harsh interrogation in April and May of 2002 – well before the Justice Department had rendered any legal opinion – its principal priority for intelligence was not aimed at pre-empting another terrorist attack on the U.S. but on discovering a smoking gun linking Iraq to al-Qaeda.

"So furious was this effort on one particular detainee, even when the interrogation team had reported to Cheney's office that their detainee 'was compliant' (meaning the team recommended no more torture),

the VP's office ordered them to continue the advanced methods. The detainee had not revealed any al-Qa'ida-Baghdad contacts yet.

"This ceased only after Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, under waterboarding in Egypt, 'revealed' such contacts. Of course later we learned that al-Libi revealed these contacts only to get the torture to stop."

Stung by Wilkerson's criticism of her father, Liz Cheney, who worked in the State Department during the last administration, lashed out at Wilkerson, charging he has made "a cottage industry out of fantasies" about the former Vice President.

All that Ms. Cheney could manage in rebuttal, though, was to point out that al-Libi was not among the three al-Qaeda figures that the U.S. has admitted to waterboarding.

After his article in *The Washington Note*, I asked Col. Wilkerson for a retrospective look at how it could have been that the torture-derived information from al-Libi was not recognized for what it was and thus kept out of Secretary Powell's speech at the UN.

Since al-Libi had been captured over a year before the speech and had been put at the tender mercies of the Egyptian intelligence service, should he and Powell not have suspected that al-Libi had been tortured?

Wilkerson responded by e-mail with the comments cited above regarding Tennen and McLaughlin interrupting Powell's evaluation of the Iraqi WMD intelligence with their new – vaguely sourced – "bombshell."

I asked Col. Wilkerson: "Were there no others from the State Department with you at CIA headquarters on Feb. 1, 2003. Was INR [State's very professional, incorruptible intelligence unit] not represented? He answered:

"When I gathered 'my team' – some were selected for me, such as Will Toby from Bob Joseph's NSC staff and John Hanna from the VP's office – in my office at State to give

All that Ms. Cheney could manage in rebuttal, though, was to point out that al-Libi was not among the three al-Qaeda figures that the U.S. has admitted to waterboarding

After the war began, CIA intrepid analysts, still “leaning forward,” misrepresented a tractor-trailer found in Iraq outfitted with industrial equipment as one of the mobile bio-labs

them an initial briefing and marching orders, I asked Carl [Ford, head of INR] to attend. I wanted Carl – or even more so, one of his deputies whom I knew well and trusted completely, Tom Fingar – to be on ‘my team’.

“Carl stayed after the meeting and I asked him straightforwardly to come with me or to send someone from INR. Carl said that he did not need to come nor to send anyone because he had the Secretary’s ear (he was right on that) and could weigh in at any time he wanted to.

“Moreover, he told me, the Secretary knew very well where INR stood, as did I myself (he was right on that too). As I look back, I believe one of my gravest errors was in not insisting that INR send someone with me.

“Fascinating and completely puzzling at first was the total absence of a Department of Defense representative on my team; however, after 3-4 days and nights I figured out ... DoD was covering its own butt, to an extent, by having no direct fingerprints on the affair – and being directly wired into Cheney’s office, Rumsfeld’s folks knew they were protected by Toby and Hanna.

“When we all arrived at CIA, we were given the NIC [National Intelligence Council] spaces and staff. [But] I could not even get on a computer!! Protests to Tenet and McLaughlin got me perfunctory CIA-blah blah about security clearances, etc. – and me with 7 days and nights to prepare a monumentally important presentation! ... “[It took] 24 hours before George or John acknowledged I could be on a computer.... From there on, it was a madhouse.

“But at the end of the day, had I had an INR rep, had I had better support, had I been more concerned with WHAT I was assembling rather than HOW on earth I would assemble it and present it on time, I’m not sure at all it would have made any difference in the march to war.”

Not the only crime

So there you have it folks, the anatomy of a

crime – one of several such, I might add.

Mention of Carl Ford and Tenet and McLaughlin remind me of another episode that has gone down in the annals of intelligence as almost equally contemptible. This one had to do with CIA’s furious attempt to prove there were mobile biological weapons labs of the kind Curveball had described. Remember, Tenet and McLaughlin had been warned about Curveball long before they let then-Secretary of State Powell shame himself, and the rest of us, by peddling Curveball’s wares at the U.N. Security Council on Feb. 5, 2003.

But the amateur attempts at deception did not stop there. After the war began, CIA intrepid analysts, still “leaning forward,” misrepresented a tractor-trailer found in Iraq outfitted with industrial equipment as one of the mobile bio-labs.

On May 28, 2003, CIA analysts cooked up a fraudulent six-page report claiming that the trailer discovered earlier in May was proof they had been right about Iraq’s “bio-weapons labs.”

They then performed what could be called a “night-time requisition,” getting the only Defense Intelligence Agency analyst sympathetic to their position to provide DIA “coordination,” (which was subsequently withdrawn by DIA).

On May 29, President George W. Bush, visiting Poland, proudly announced on Polish TV, “We have found the weapons of mass destruction.” [For a contemporaneous debunking of the CIA-DIA report, see Consortiumnews.com’s “America’s Matrix.”]

When the State Department’s Intelligence and Research (INR) analysts realized that this was not some kind of Polish joke, they “went ballistic,” according to Carl Ford, who immediately warned Powell there was a problem.

Tenet must have learned of this quickly, for he called Ford on the carpet, literally, the following day. No shrinking violet, Ford held his ground. He told Tenet and McLaughlin, “That report is one of the worst intelligence assessments I’ve ever read.”

This vignette – and several like it – are found in *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War* by Michael Isikoff and David Corn, who say Ford is still angry over the fraudulent paper.

Ford told the authors: “It was clear that they [Tenet and McLaughlin] had been personally involved in the preparation of the report... It wasn’t just that it was wrong. They lied.”

Too bad Carl Ford made the incorrect assumption that he could rely on his cred-

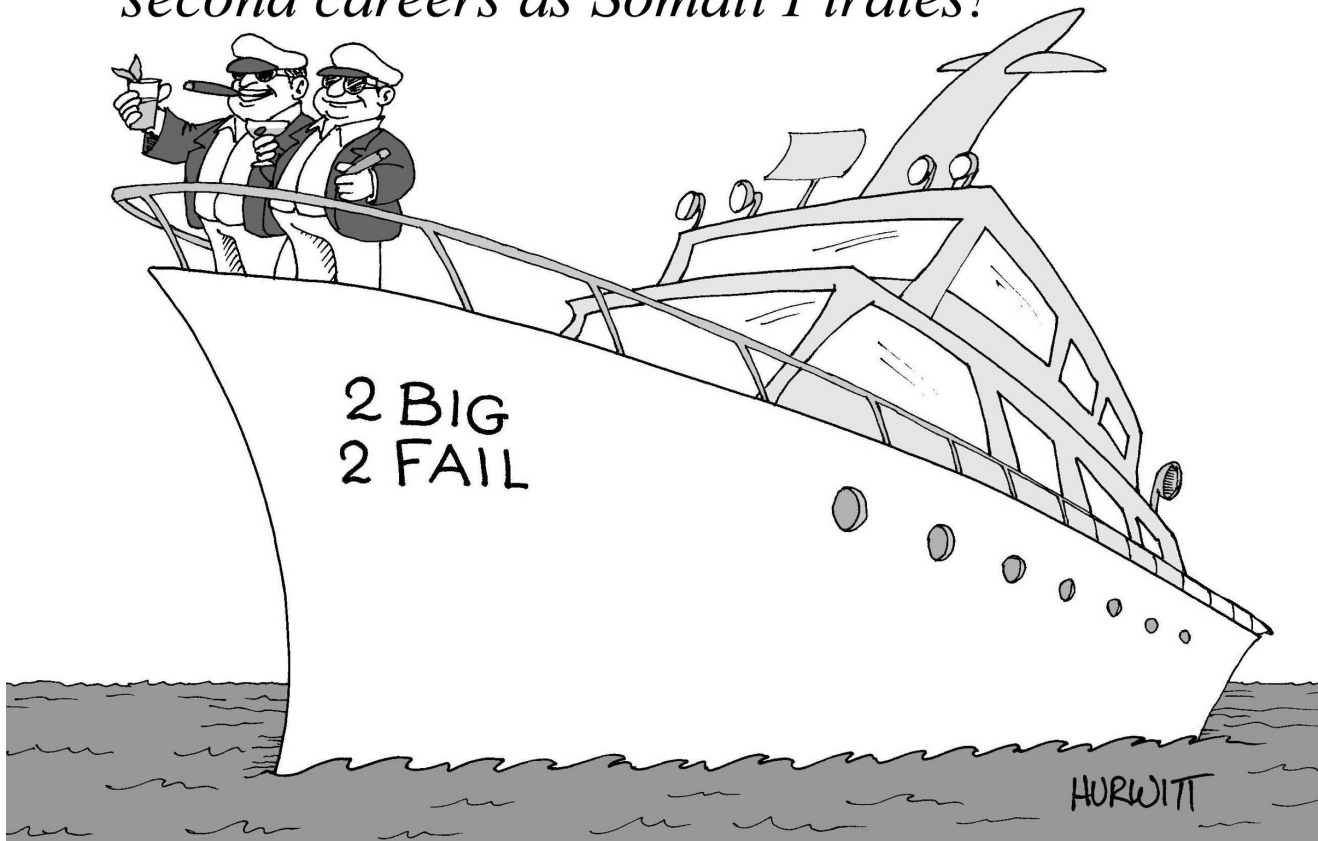
ibility and entrée with Secretary Powell to thwart the likes of Tenet and McLaughlin, as they peddled their meretricious wares at CIA headquarters – with Col. Wilkerson left to twist in the wind, so to speak. **CT**

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Mark Hurwitt

“...And our experience as Corporate CEOs makes us uniquely qualified for second careers as Somali Pirates!”



Cover up and complicity

President Obama's decision not to release Pentagon torture photos is a deliberate suppression of evidence, writes **Bill van Auken**

Obama began by insisting that the images in question “are not particularly sensational.” If this is true, it begs the question of why the government refuses to release them, purportedly for fear that they would provoke attacks on US troops

President Obama's repudiation of his promise to comply with a court order and release Pentagon torture photos marks a qualitative deepening of the cover-up of the crimes carried out under Bush as well as their continuation under the new administration in only slightly altered form. The president's decision amounts to the deliberate suppression of evidence that the US military-intelligence apparatus, at the direction of the White House, carried out systemic torture.

The about-face on the torture photos is of a piece with a series of actions taken by the administration in recent months. These include the Obama Justice Department's attempt to suppress lawsuits challenging extraordinary rendition, torture and illegal domestic spying, all hallmarks of the police-state apparatus erected under Bush in the name of a war on terrorism.

Moreover, according to press reports, the decision on the photos coincides with the administration's finalizing of plans to hold terror suspects indefinitely without charges in the US itself. It was precisely the Bush administration's designation of such detainees as “enemy combatants” – supposedly without the protection of either the Constitution or the Geneva Conventions – that facilitated the use of torture. Now, it appears that this status of legal limbo is going to be continued on US soil, with far-reaching implications for

democratic rights.

Obama's statement justifying his keeping the photos secret is a mixture of political hypocrisy and outright lies.

He began by insisting that the images in question “are not particularly sensational.” If this is true, it begs the question of why the government refuses to release them, purportedly for fear that they would provoke attacks on US troops.

On this score, Obama is lying. It should be recalled that after the exposure of the Abu Ghraib photos in 2004, the Pentagon managed to suppress other images, which were described by then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld as depicting acts “that can only be described as blatantly sadistic, cruel and inhumane.” Republican Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina was more explicit about these photos and videos. “We're talking about rape and murder – and some very serious charges,” he reported at the time.

The Washington Post Thursday quoted an anonymous congressional staff member who said that the images “are more graphic than those that have been made public from Abu Ghraib.” The staff member warned, “When they are released, there will be a major outcry for an investigation.”

Obama further claimed that the photos would not add “to our understanding of what was carried out in the past by a small number of individuals.”

Here the Democratic president embraces the contemptible claim by the Bush White House that the torture carried out at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere was merely the work of a few “bad apples,” a handful of soldiers who have been jailed, cashiered or otherwise punished. This alibi has been thoroughly discredited by the Justice Department memos released last month, which gave pseudo-legal justifications for precisely the abhorrent abuse seen at Abu Ghraib. Senate investigations have also established that these acts of torture were discussed and approved by the top officials in the Bush administration.

Finally, Obama warned that the release of the images would “inflare anti-American opinion” and “put our troops in greater danger.” This concern only makes sense given the Obama administration’s refusal to seriously investigate – much less criminally prosecute – torture and other war crimes carried out under Bush. Thus, instead of being seen as evidence in holding the guilty accountable and making a decisive break with their criminal policies, the photos represent more proof that those responsible – Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, Tenet and others – enjoy impunity, and that the new administration is covering up for torture.

Obama’s action was no doubt influenced by US military commanders, who exercise virtual veto power over political decisions in Washington. His primary concern, however, is not the reaction that the photos would provoke in Iraq and Afghanistan – where daily military atrocities weigh far more than photographic images. Rather, it is their political impact at home.

When Obama complied with another court order last month and released the Bush Justice Department’s so-called torture memos, his aim was to put the issue behind him, coupling the declassification with a blanket guarantee that no one would be prosecuted for torture. Instead, the memos have provoked a bitter internecine struggle within the capitalist state, with the Republican right led by Cheney in alliance with sections of the military-intelligence apparatus taking the

offensive in defending torture and exposing leading Democrats like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi as political accomplices in implementing these methods.

Obama fears that the release of the photos would not only intensify this conflict, but also provoke popular outrage in the US itself along with demands for investigations and prosecutions of former top officials.

This is something the Democratic president is desperate to avoid. He has no interest in defending democratic rights at the expense of a confrontation with the military brass and the CIA. Moreover, Obama is continuing the two wars initiated under the Bush administration, pursuing their original aim of asserting US hegemony over the strategically vital and oil-rich regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. He wants to avoid anything that would discredit these wars in the eyes of the American public, including the exposure of the systemic torture to which they gave rise.

Torture is not incidental to these wars, nor was it merely the preferred policy of the sadists in the Bush White House. It is integral to such colonial-style counterinsurgency campaigns, in which a major aim is to terrorize and intimidate the population. It was employed by the French in Algeria, the British in Kenya, the Belgians in the Congo and the Portuguese in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. The American military is following in their bloody footsteps.

As his administration’s policies are making ever clearer, Obama is a spokesperson for America’s financial oligarchy. Whatever his differences in tactics and style from Bush, this entails political reaction across the board, from bailing out finance capital at the expense of working people, to waging imperialist wars, to defending torture.

None of these issues – the destruction of jobs and living standards, war, torture and the assault on democratic rights – can be confronted outside of a decisive break with the Democrats and the development of a mass independent political movement of the working class committed to the socialist transformation of society.

His primary concern, however, is not the reaction that the photos would provoke in Iraq and Afghanistan – where daily military atrocities weigh far more than photographic images. Rather, it is their political impact at home

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Bush's hypocrisy on war crimes

George W. Bush warned Iraq not to breach the Geneva Conventions, then ignored his own advice, says **Jason Leopold**

“The Geneva Convention is very clear on the rules for treating prisoners. They’re not supposed to be tortured or abused, they’re not supposed to be intimidated, they’re not supposed to be made public displays of humiliation or insult, and we’re going to be in a position to hold those Iraqi officials who are mistreating our prisoners accountable”

In March 2003, after Iraqi troops captured several U.S. soldiers and let them be interviewed on Iraqi TV, senior Bush administration officials expressed outrage over this violation of the Geneva Convention.

“If there is somebody captured,” President George W. Bush told reporters on March 23, 2003, “I expect those people to be treated humanely. If not, the people who mistreat the prisoners will be treated as war criminals.”

No one in the Bush administration, however, acknowledged the extent of their own violations of rules governing humane treatment of enemy combatants. Nor did the U.S. news media offer any context, ignoring the U.S. handling of Afghan War captives at Guantanamo Bay in 2002 and the fact that the U.S. military also had paraded captured Iraqi soldiers before cameras.

During those heady days of “embedded” war correspondents reporting excitedly about Bush’s “shock and awe” invasion, what Americans got to see and hear was how the Iraqi violation of the Geneva Convention – the videotaped interviews – demonstrated the barbarity of the enemy and justified their punishment as war criminals.

Bush’s fury over the POW interviews echoed across Washington. “It is a blatant violation of the Geneva Convention to humili-

ate and abuse prisoners of war or to harm them in any way,” declared Pentagon spokeswoman Victoria Clarke on March 24.

That same day, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz told the BBC, “The Geneva Convention is very clear on the rules for treating prisoners. They’re not supposed to be tortured or abused, they’re not supposed to be intimidated, they’re not supposed to be made public displays of humiliation or insult, and we’re going to be in a position to hold those Iraqi officials who are mistreating our prisoners accountable, and they’ve got to stop.”

On March 25, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld added, “In recent days, the world has witnessed further evidence of their [Iraqi] brutality and their disregard for the laws of war. Their treatment of coalition POWs is a violation of the Geneva Conventions.”

Hypocrisy exposed

It would take months and years – as documents from Bush’s first term were gradually released to the public – to reveal the extent of the Bush administration’s hypocrisy. For instance, it’s now known that the International Committee of the Red Cross began an investigation of U.S. war crimes in Iraq from the first days of the invasion, interviewing Iraqis captives from March to November 2003.

On Jan. 15, 2004, ICRC president Jakob Kellenberger expressed his concern to Secretary of State Colin Powell about the Bush administration's attitude regarding international law, specifically an op-ed by then-State Department legal adviser William Taft IV in the Financial Times four days earlier. In that op-ed, Taft wrote that there was no law that required the U.S. to afford due process to foreigners captured in the "war on terror."

"American treatment of detainees held at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba is fully consistent with international law and with centuries-old norms for treating individuals captured in wartime," Taft wrote. "We are engaged in a war."

It's unclear what Kellenberger cited in Taft's column, because the recently released minutes of the meeting were heavily redacted. But the conversation segued into Powell asking Kellenberger "where in addition to Afghanistan, did ICRC have problems with notification and access to detainees?"

Powell is quoted as saying "we are confident of our legal position, (referring to legal adviser Taft's op-ed), but we also know the world is watching us."

The next month, the ICRC gave Bush administration officials a confidential report which found that U.S. occupation forces in Iraq often arrested Iraqis without good reason and subjected them to abuse and humiliation that sometimes was "tantamount to torture" in violation of the Geneva Conventions.

Some excessive violence, including the use of live ammunition against detainees, had led to seven deaths, the ICRC report said. "According to the allegations collected by the ICRC, ill-treatment during interrogation was not systematic, except with regard to persons arrested in connection with suspected security offences or deemed to have an 'intelligence' value," the report said.

"In these cases, persons deprived of their liberty under supervision of the Military Intelligence were at high risk of being

subjected to a variety of harsh treatments ranging from insults, threats and humiliations to both physical and psychological coercion, which in some cases was tantamount to torture, in order to force cooperation with their interrogators."

Trickle-down torture

One of the recipients of the ICRC confidential report was Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, the senior U.S. military officer in Iraq, an ICRC official said later. Sanchez had instituted a "dozen interrogation methods beyond" the Army's standard interrogation techniques that comply with the Geneva Conventions, according to a 2004 report by a panel headed by former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger.

Sanchez said he based his decision on "the President's Memorandum" justifying "additional, tougher measures" against detainees, the Schlesinger report said. The memorandum Sanchez was referring to was an order that Bush signed on Feb. 7, 2002, excluding "war on terror" suspects from Geneva Convention protections.

As the ICRC gathered more information about the Bush administration's detention policies, it began to make some of its concerns public. On March 1, 2004, for instance, Gabor Rona, the ICRC's legal adviser, wrote an op-ed also in the Financial Times that took issue with the Bush administration's posture on the Geneva Conventions.

"The US is proceeding with plans to subject prisoners to military commission trials, citing the Geneva Convention provision that prisoners of war be tried by military courts. How can it do so while maintaining that no detainees are entitled to PoW status?" Rona wrote.

"That aside, the US risks throwing into the military-trial pot people whose alleged crimes have no connection with armed conflict, as understood in international humanitarian law. Such people can and should face trial, but not by military courts."

Taft responded with a letter to Kellenberger on March 16, 2004. "Your staff states

"American treatment of detainees held at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba is fully consistent with international law and with centuries-old norms for treating individuals captured in wartime," Taft wrote

“I shared a deep disgust that those prisoners were treated the way they were treated,” Bush said. “Their treatment does not reflect the nature of the American people”

categorically that detainees are entitled to an individualized procedure to challenge the basis of their detention,” Taft wrote. “No citation or support is provided for this assertion. There is, in fact, no such entitlement in the 1949 Geneva Conventions. However, the implication in the article is that the Geneva Conventions do provide such entitlement. This again has the unfortunate effect of misleading the public.”

The Abu Ghraib scandal

The behind-the-scenes dispute over detainee treatment went public in another way in April 2004 when photos were leaked showing U.S. prison guards at Abu Ghraib forcing naked Iraqi detainees into fake sexual positions, intimidating detainees with attacks dogs, committing other abuses, and posing with the corpse of an Iraqi who had died in custody.

After a public scandal erupted, President Bush blamed the Abu Ghraib abuses on low-level prison guards. “I shared a deep disgust that those prisoners were treated the way they were treated,” Bush said. “Their treatment does not reflect the nature of the American people.”

However, Bush’s finger-pointing at a few “bad apples” was soon contradicted when the contents of the February 2004 ICRC report were leaked to the Wall Street Journal in May 2004.

The ICRC findings made clear that the Abu Ghraib abuses were not an isolated case. Nevertheless, 11 enlisted soldiers, who were guards at Abu Ghraib, were convicted in courts martial. Cpl. Charles Graner Jr. received the harshest sentence – 10 years in prison – while Lynndie England, a 22-year-old single mother who was photographed holding an Iraqi on a leash and pointing at a detainee’s penis, was sentenced to three years in prison.

Superior officers were cleared of wrongdoing or received mild reprimands.

But the February 2004 ICRC report on Iraq took on added meaning with the recent disclosure of another ICRC report,

dated Feb. 14, 2007. Based on interviews that the ICRC finally arranged with 14 “high-value” detainees held at secret CIA prisons, the report concluded those prisoners had been subjected to similar humiliating and abusive treatment, including forced nudity and stress positions, as well as the drowning sensation of waterboarding.

The ICRC concluded that the treatment “constituted torture,” a finding that has legal weight because the ICRC is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Geneva Conventions and supervising the treatment of prisoners of war.

Taken together, the two reports suggest that the Bush administration adopted a policy of torture against “high-value” detainees captured in 2002 and that the policy spread to Iraq in 2003 when U.S. forces were grappling with a rising Iraqi insurgency against the American occupation.

In December 2008, a Senate Armed Services Committee report reached a similar conclusion, tracing the U.S. abuse of detainees at Guantanamo Bay and later Abu Ghraib to President Bush’s Feb. 7, 2002, action memorandum that excluded “war on terror” suspects from Geneva Convention protections.

The report said Bush’s memo opened the door to “considering aggressive techniques,” which were then developed with the complicity of then-Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, Bush’s National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and other senior officials. The public record – as it now exists – also makes clear that the Bush administration had a selective view of international law. When it worked to American advantage – as when Iraqis videotaped captured U.S. soldiers in March 2003 – Bush and his aides saw the rules as binding, but not when the laws of war constrained their own behavior.

In other words, international law applied to the other guy, but not to George W. Bush. He surely didn’t mean to implicate himself when he declared “the people who mistreat the prisoners will be treated as war criminals.” **CT**

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The unlamented child victims of war crimes

Michael Haas on the best kept secret of Bush's war crimes

Torture has received the most attention among the many war crimes of the Bush administration. But those who support Bush's pursuit of the "war on terror" have not been impressed by recriminations over torture. Worse than torture are the murders of at least 50 prisoners in Abu Ghraib, Afghanistan, and Guantánamo, but again the hard-hearted are unimpressed when those whom they perceive as terrorists receive illegal extrajudicial capital punishment.

The case for abusing children, however, is more difficult to support. The best kept secret of Bush's war crimes is that thousands of children have been imprisoned, tortured, and otherwise denied rights under the Geneva Conventions and related international agreements. Yet both Congress and the media have strangely failed to identify the very existence of child prisoners as a war crime. In the Islamic world, however, there is no such silence. Indeed, the prophet Mohammed was the first to counsel warriors not to harm innocent children.

The first example of war crimes against children, which are well documented, occurred during the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, when the children's hospital in Kabul was bombed, its patients thereby murdered, contrary to the Red Cross Convention of 1864. Other children were killed as "collateral damage" during the wars in Af-

ghanistan and Iraq, contrary to the Geneva Convention ban on indiscriminate killing in wartime, though numbers of dead are unknown. During spring 2004, during the assault on Falluja, Iraq, some 300 children, including peaceful demonstrators, were killed. Their dead bodies were filmed live on al-Jazeera Television throughout the Arabic-speaking world.

In 2008, the Bush administration reported to the UN-assisted Committee on the Rights of the Child that the United States from 2002 had detained 2,400 children in Iraq and 100 in Afghanistan, though another source claims that the figure for Afghanistan is at least 800 boys, aged 10 to 15, from whom as many as 64 were sent to Guantánamo, of which there were 21 as of May 2008. That month, the Committee upbraided the United States for charging minors with war crimes instead of treating underage persons as victims of war. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's two children, aged 7 and 9, were separately detained to intimidate him to confess.

Brutalized and tortured

While detained, several children have been brutalized and tortured. At Abu Ghraib, American guards videotaped Iraqi male prisoners raping young boys but took no action to stop the offenses. Perhaps the worst incident at Abu Ghraib involved a

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During interrogation at Guantánamo, Omar was shackled to the floor in stress positions until he soiled himself. His bound body was twice used as a mop to wipe his own urine mixed with pine oil after which he was refused a shower and a change of clothing

girl aged 12 or 13 who screamed for help to her brother in an upper cell while stripped naked and beaten. Iraqi journalist Suhaib Badr-Addin al-Baz, who heard the girl's screams, also witnessed an ill 15-year-old who was forced to run up and down Abu Ghraib with two heavy cans of water and beaten whenever he stopped. When he finally collapsed, guards stripped and poured cold water on him. Finally, a hooded man was brought in. When unhooded, the boy realized that the man was his father, who doubtless was being intimidated into confessing something upon sight of his brutalized son.

While General Hamid Zabar was being questioned in Iraq, his interrogators decided to arrest his frail 16-year-old son in order to produce a confession. After soldiers found the boy, he was stripped, drenched with mud and water, and exposed to the cold January night while bound and driven about in the open back of a truck. When presented naked to his father, he was shivering due to hypothermia, clearly needing medical attention.

At least 25 war crimes refer specifically to child prisoners. Among the crimes are the arbitrary transfer out of their home countries, leaving their parents to wonder whether they were dead. When their locations were later revealed, parents were not allowed to contact them, even through the mail. And family members knew nothing of Hassin Bin Attash's extraordinary rendition experience in Jordan or Ahmad Bashir's disappearance for two years in a secret prison.

Children have been incarcerated in the same quarters as adults, contrary to the Geneva Convention. Subjected to solitary confinement, they are denied educational and recreational opportunities. Indeed, one attorney was not allowed to give his client (Omar Khadr) a copy of "Lord of the Rings" or play dominoes with him; another has been forbidden to supply his client (Mohammed Jawad) articles from the Internet. After Captain James Yee left Guantánamo

on September 10, 2003, no Muslim chaplain has ever replaced him, so they have not been provided appropriate religious education.

Meanwhile, the authorities have refused to investigate or prosecute those who have abused children, and there have been no programs established to prevent prison mistreatment or to assist in their resulting post-traumatic stress. They have been denied legal counsel and a statement of reasons for their confinement upon arrival in prison, held far beyond the "speedy trial" requirement under the Geneva Conventions, coerced into confessions that may be false, and denied available exculpatory evidence, including witnesses.

Child soldiers

In 2003, Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao gave a speech on behalf of the need to rehabilitate child soldiers from Burundi, Colombia, El Salvador, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and Uganda. While she spoke, several children were being abused at Guantánamo. The most famous, Mohammed Jawad and Omar Khadr, are still being held for trial at Guantánamo.

Omar Khadr's videotaped plea for his mommy and claims of torture has been seen on television worldwide. While still wounded from battle in Afghanistan, Omar was interrogated many times, sometimes while hooded with dogs barking near him, so he confessed to stop the pain from his wounds.

During interrogation at Guantánamo, Omar was shackled to the floor in stress positions until he soiled himself. His bound body was twice used as a mop to wipe his own urine mixed with pine oil after which he was refused a shower and a change of clothing. He has also been administered a brutal beating while on a hunger strike, threatened with rape, and denied pain medication.

There is some puzzlement over the reason for imprisoning Mohammad Jawad. Is it because, while at an American-run prison

in Afghanistan in 2002, he has claimed that he saw Americans murdering inmates? At Guantánamo, to deprive him of sleep in order to force some sort of confession, he was shifted from one cell to another more than 100 times during two weeks in May 2004, and he remains in solitary confinement today. When he showed up in court in 2008, he was the first to wear leg shackles. During his arraignment, the judge asked him whether he accepted the assigned military defense attorney as his lawyer. After replying in the negative, the judge asked whether he knew another lawyer.

His reply to the Kafkaesque inquiry was “Since I don’t know any lawyer, how can I have them represent me? . . . I should be given freedom so that I can find a lawyer.” His request to hunt for a lawyer was then denied.

The mistreatment of children is something not so funny that has been neglected on the road to investigations of and calls

for prosecution of those responsible for torture. George W. Bush has never been asked about the abuse of children in American-run prisons in the “war on terror.” It is high time for Bush and others to be held accountable for what is arguably the most egregious of all their war crimes—the abuse and death of children, who should never have been arrested in the first place. **CT**

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What about the hacks who sold torture?

Rory O'Connor slams the top journalists who believe it's okay for 'our' torturers to go unpunished

Why Friedman and his ilk fear that prosecuting senior officials who break the law will “rip our country apart” more than their having ignored the law, the Constitution and any conceivable standard of basic morality is best left to him, his shrink and his God

Ever wake up in a funk, just spoiling for a fight? Me too – and when I do (despite my best Buddhist intentions) I invariably reach for the New York Times and turn to the latest column by Tom Friedman, that Op-Ed gift that keeps on giving such deep-rooted and seemingly willful sheer wrong-headedness as to make ire rise, blood boil, and bile taste most foul. What I seek most from opinion columnists is consistency, and Friedman, consistent and persistent in his excuse making for the powerful, never disappoints in this regard.

Thus it was no surprise to find him hailing in a recent column Barack (“Split the baby”) Obama’s “torturous compromise” to expose, but not prosecute, those responsible for violating our Constitution and international law by torturing in our names.

As Friedman accurately noted, “more than 100 detainees died in U.S. custody in Iraq and Afghanistan, with up to 27 of those declared homicides by the military. They were allegedly kicked to death, shot, suffocated or drowned. Look, our people killed detainees, and only a handful of those deaths have resulted in any punishment of U.S. officials.”

Nevertheless, he justified the “Obama compromise” and failure to prosecute by offering two reasons not to go after the evildoers: “the first is that because justice

taken to its logical end here would likely require bringing George W. Bush, Donald Rumsfeld and other senior officials to trial, which would rip our country apart; and the other is that Al Qaeda truly was a unique enemy, and the post-9/11 era a deeply confounding war in a variety of ways.”

Why Friedman and his ilk fear that prosecuting senior officials who break the law will “rip our country apart” more than their having ignored the law, the Constitution and any conceivable standard of basic morality is best left to him, his shrink and his God. But Friedman’s apologia – which recognizes that, “yes, people among us who went over the line may go unpunished” but concludes, “because we still have enemies who respect no lines at all,” Obama is doing his “best” in an “ugly war” by letting the torturers go unpunished – is but the latest in a long line of journalistic defenses of torture by well-paid, prize-winning and access-granted mainstream journalists.

Liberal thoughts on torture

Consider, for example, Newsweek Senior Editor and NBC News correspondent Jonathan Alter, who wrote shortly after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 that: “In this autumn of anger, even a liberal can find his thoughts turning to... torture. OK, not cattle prods or rubber hoses, at least not here in the United States, but something to

jump-start the stalled investigation of the greatest crime in American history. Right now, four key hijacking suspects aren't talking at all. Couldn't we at least subject them to psychological torture, like tapes of dying rabbits or high-decibel rap? (The military has done that in Panama and elsewhere.) How about truth serum, administered with a mandatory IV? Or deportation to Saudi Arabia, land of beheadings? (As the frustrated FBI has been threatening.) Some people still argue that we needn't rethink any of our old assumptions about law enforcement, but they're hopelessly "Sept. 10" – living in a country that no longer exists."

Alter's before-and-after excuse echoed that of US counterterrorism coordinator Cofer Black, who infamously noted, "There was 'before 9/11' and 'after 9/11.' After 9/11 the gloves came off." Alter went on to observe, "Actually, the world hasn't changed as much as we have," and that "judges and lawyers" are left "in a strange moral position. The torture they can't see (or that occurs after deportation) is harder on the person they claim to be concerned about—the detainee – but easier on their consciences. Out of sight, out of mind."

What about the "strange moral position" of the many media figures who countenanced torture, or who now hail the failure to prosecute the torturers out of some misguided fear the country will be "ripped apart?" Such moral concerns present no problem to "realists" such as Alter and Friedman, since "Some torture clearly works."

Of course, "We can't legalize physical torture," Alter opined, as "It's contrary to American values." Still, "we need to keep an open mind" about other torturous measures – "and we'll have to think about transferring some suspects to our less squeamish allies, even if that's hypocritical. Nobody said this was going to be pretty."

Sadly, Alter is not alone among leading journalists and pundits in adopting a more favorable and "modern" assessment of torture. Lest we forget, Mark Bowden, another

acclaimed journalist who is a national correspondent at *The Atlantic*, wrote a feature in the October 2003 edition of that magazine and noted that professional terrorists such as captured Al Qaeda operatives "pose one of the strongest arguments in modern times for the use of torture," and that "A method that produces life-saving information without doing lasting harm to anyone is not just preferable; it appears to be morally sound." Bowden later added, "It may be clear that coercion is sometimes the right choice," and—to be perfectly, one hundred per cent clear, "the Bush Administration has adopted exactly the right posture on the matter. Candor and consistency are not always public virtues. Torture is a crime against humanity, but coercion is an issue that is rightly handled with a wink, or even a touch of hypocrisy; it should be banned but also quietly practiced."

Plenty of company

Alter and Bowden aren't the only MSM journalists to have defended torture or the torturers in the immediate wake of 9/11, and Friedman is but the latest. As the ever-excellent watchdog group FAIR has documented, they have plenty of company.

"No pretensions to legal scholarship attended the pro-torture shoutfest that took place on the McLaughlin Group's November 9 show, where four out of five of the panelists endorsed torture. The Washington Times' Tony Blankley and MSNBC's Laurence O'Donnell joined host John McLaughlin and National Review editor Rich Lowry in approval of torture. Only Newsweek's Eleanor Clift objected. (When Clift asked her co-panelists where they would send suspects for torture, McLaughlin shouted, 'The Filipinos!' while Lowry barked, 'The Turks!')

On October 26 CNN news anchor Paula Zahn pressed Philadelphia police commissioner John Timoney, trying to get him to endorse extra-legal means in the case of terror suspects. When she asked him if 'beatings' might be appropriate, Timoney

What about the "strange moral position" of the many media figures who countenanced torture, or who now hail the failure to prosecute the torturers out of some misguided fear the country will be "ripped apart?"

Hell should reserve a special place for those journalists who abdicated their professional and constitutional duties in exchange for access and exaltation

stood his ground: ‘No. No. This is America, you know.’

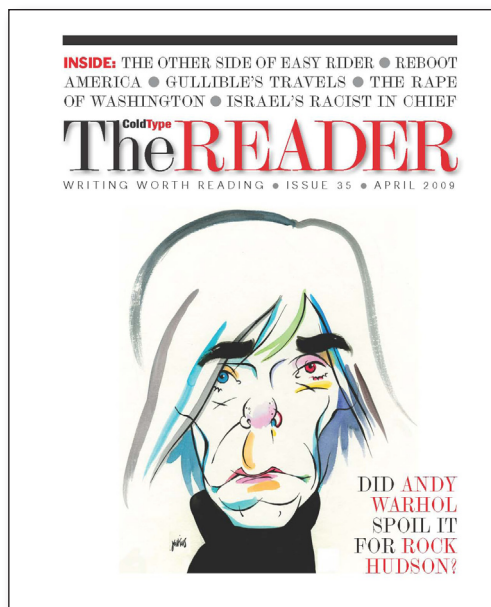
A day later on CNN’s Crossfire (10/27/01), conservative Tucker Carlson was succinct: “Torture is bad. Keep in mind, some things are worse. And under certain circumstances, it may be the lesser of two evils. Because some evils are pretty evil.”

When it comes to America’s torturing, none of us are blameless in our actions, our ignorance or our acquiescence – not the President and other senior officials who allowed, not the President and senior officials who condone it by refusing to prosecute, and certainly not citizens who elected them

and then looked away. Like Jonathan Alter and his ilk, we all preferred to keep our dirty little torture secrets “out of sight, out of mind.” But hell should reserve a special place for those journalists who abdicated their professional and constitutional duties in exchange for access and exaltation – because yes, young Tucker, some evils ARE pretty evil... **CT**

Filmmaker and journalist Rory O’Connor is the author of “Shock Jocks: Hate Speech and Talk Radio” (AlterNet Books, 2008). O’Connor also writes the Media Is A Plural blog.

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The madmen did well

John Pilger on the election branding of Barack Obama which led millions of voters to believe that he opposed Bush's wars

The BBC's American television soap *Mad Men* offers a rare glimpse of the power of corporate advertising. The promotion of smoking half a century ago by the "smart" people of Madison Avenue, who knew the truth, led to countless deaths.

Advertising and its twin, public relations, became a way of deceiving dreamt up by those who had read Freud and applied mass psychology to anything from cigarettes to politics. Just as Marlboro Man was virility itself, so politicians could be branded, packaged and sold.

It is more than 100 days since Barack Obama was elected president of the United States. The "Obama brand" has been named "Advertising Age's marketer of the year for 2008", easily beating Apple computers.

David Fenton of MoveOn.org describes Obama's election campaign as "an institutionalised mass-level automated technological community organising that has never existed before and is a very, very powerful force".

Deploying the internet and a slogan plagiarised from the Latino union organiser César Chávez – "Sí, se puede!" or "Yes, we can" – the mass-level automated technological community marketed its brand to victory in a country desperate to be rid of George W Bush.

No one knew what the new brand actually stood for. So accomplished was the advertising (a record \$75m was spent on television commercials alone) that many Americans actually believed Obama shared their opposition to Bush's wars. In fact, he had repeatedly backed Bush's warmongering and its congressional funding. Many Americans also believed he was the heir to Martin Luther King's legacy of anti-colonialism. Yet if Obama had a theme at all, apart from the vacuous "Change you can believe in", it was the renewal of America as a dominant, avaricious bully. "We will be the most powerful," he often declared.

Courtiers of a rapacious system

Perhaps the Obama brand's most effective advertising was supplied free of charge by those journalists who, as courtiers of a rapacious system, promote shining knights. They depoliticised him, spinning his platitudinous speeches as "adroit literary creations, rich, like those Doric columns, with allusion..." (Charlotte Higgins in the *Guardian*).

The San Francisco Chronicle columnist Mark Morford wrote: "Many spiritually advanced people I know... identify Obama as a Lightworker, that rare kind of attuned being who... can actually help usher in a new way of being on the planet."

In his first 100 days, Obama has excused

Perhaps the Obama brand's most effective advertising was supplied free of charge by those journalists who, as courtiers of a rapacious system, promote shining knights

His national intelligence director, Admiral Dennis Blair, says he believes torture works. One of his senior US intelligence officials in Latin America is accused of covering up the torture of an American nun in Guatemala in 1989; another is a Pinochet apologist.

torture, opposed habeas corpus and demanded more secret government. He has kept Bush's gulag intact and at least 17,000 prisoners beyond the reach of justice. On 24 April, his lawyers won an appeal that ruled Guantanamo Bay prisoners were not "persons", and therefore had no right not to be tortured.

His national intelligence director, Admiral Dennis Blair, says he believes torture works. One of his senior US intelligence officials in Latin America is accused of covering up the torture of an American nun in Guatemala in 1989; another is a Pinochet apologist. As Daniel Ellsberg has pointed out, the US experienced a military coup under Bush, whose secretary of "defence", Robert Gates, along with the same warmaking officials, has been retained by Obama.

Violent assault on innocent

All over the world, America's violent assault on innocent people, directly or by agents, has been stepped up. During the recent massacre in Gaza, reports Seymour Hersh, "the Obama team let it be known that it would not object to the planned resupply of 'smart bombs' and other hi-tech ordnance that was already flowing to Israel" and being used to slaughter mostly women and children.

In Pakistan, the number of civilians killed by US missiles called drones has more than doubled since Obama took office.

In Afghanistan, the US "strategy" of killing Pashtun tribespeople (the "Taliban") has been extended by Obama to give the Pentagon time to build a series of permanent bases right across the devastated country where, says Secretary Gates, the US military will remain indefinitely. Obama's policy, one unchanged since the Cold War, is to intimidate Russia and China, now an imperial rival.

He is proceeding with Bush's provocation of placing missiles on Russia's west-

ern border, justifying it as a counter to Iran, which he accuses, absurdly, of posing "a real threat" to Europe and the US. On 5 April in Prague, he made a speech reported as "anti-nuclear". It was nothing of the kind. Under the Pentagon's Reliable Replacement Warhead programme, the US is building new "tactical" nuclear weapons designed to blur the distinction between nuclear and conventional war.

Perhaps the biggest lie – the equivalent of smoking is good for you – is Obama's announcement that the US is leaving Iraq, the country it has reduced to a river of blood. According to unabashed US army planners, as many as 70,000 troops will remain "for the next 15 to 20 years". On 25 April, his secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, alluded to this.

It is not surprising that the polls are showing that a growing number of Americans believe they have been suckered – especially as the nation's economy has been entrusted to the same fraudsters who destroyed it. Lawrence Summers, Obama's principal economic adviser, is throwing \$3trn at the same banks that paid him more than \$8m last year, including \$135,000 for one speech. Change you can believe in.

Much of the American establishment loathed Bush and Cheney for exposing, and threatening, the onward march of America's "grand design", as Henry Kissinger, war criminal and now Obama adviser, calls it. In advertising terms, Bush was a "brand collapse" whereas Obama, with his toothpaste advertisement smile and righteous clichés, is a godsend.

At a stroke, he has seen off serious domestic dissent to war, and he brings tears to the eyes, from Washington to Whitehall. He is the BBC's man, and CNN's man, and Murdoch's man, and Wall Street's man, and the CIA's man. The Madmen did well. **CT**

John Pilger's latest book, Freedom Next Time, is now available in paperback

The art of abidance

Joe Bageant discovers the joy of staying at home

In gathering material for his next book, Joe Bageant has been traveling the hills of Virginia and West Virginia where he grew up. Below is a short excerpt from his road journal

Driving Shanghai Road on the way to visit my childhood church in Unger Store, Morgan County, West Virginia, I crest the hill just above our old family farm. And spot something that makes me stop and turn off the truck motor, lest the moment be interrupted. Ahead of me in the Sunday morning sun stands an old farmer I've known all my life, Ray Luttrell, meditating on his hayfield. Standing on the very spot by the road where I've seen his late father Harry stand countless times, he is just looking at that hay field, motionless for many minutes.

Before him is his most familiar place on earth, his native ground. And I feel that for a moment at least I once again know that same home ground, again feel the personal sense of eternity in its very "itness." A tableau profoundly exclusive to that place and its people, so specific in its fabric of detail and history that it cannot exist anywhere else on earth.

When you are born and raised in one ancestral place, and, like Ray, accept that you'll probably die there, you know it intimately, specifically and forever. Just as

those before you knew it. All your early memories, all the voices inside your head, they come from there, and you know it and its community in a way other people never will. The geographic arch and trajectory of a life can be so specific as to know its precise beginning and ending spot. Once while squirrel hunting Pap stopped in the woods at a pile of leaf buried stones that had once been a chimney and said, "Right there, right there was where I was born." And all his life he knew exactly where he would be buried. In the cemetery where I am headed, where we may find him today, should we care to dig deep enough, right next to Maw and his children.

Listening to the minister

On this late April morning in 2009 the sun raises steam from the dewy lawn of Greenwood Methodist Church, high on the hillside bend in the road near Unger Store, West Virginia. Inside about fifty people, most of them above that same number in age, listen to the minister, a young woman in her thirties, tell about how the lord does provide. First comes the group recitation: "Be guided by God's word, that you may bear good fruit ..." Then as living proof of that good fruit, farmer Ray Luttrell's fresh faced 10-year-old granddaughter is called up front to be recognized for her recent accomplishment — a prize winning a school

Once while squirrel hunting Pap stopped in the woods at a pile of leaf buried stones that had once been a chimney and said, "Right there, right there was where I was born"

COMING HOME

The past became present, and I found myself looking around me for a girl, certainly an old woman by now, who I'd had a crush on in the little one room school house we attended then

social science essay titled “Why We Are In Iraq.” For that she earned a story and full color picture in the local newspaper, *The Morgan Messenger*.

This is followed by a lilting version of “Easter People Raise Your Voices.” The window tinted rays of colored light flash on the spectacles of the congregation and choir. I count four people not wearing glass, which says something about the aging congregation. Toward the end comes the time when church members express any “Joys and Concerns,” as the moment is called. A tall fellow about seventy stands up, looking firmly into the congregations’ eyes, and in an accent similar to that of many who’ve retired here from Washington D.C., says, “Did you all know that California has passed a law against children using the words mother or father in the public schools? They must now use the word ‘parents.’” And the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) says it will sue any community that observes The National Day of Prayer. Wake up America!”

As background for foreign readers, America has had several National Days of Prayer since the Continental Congress called for the first one in 1775, and has been a national formal observance since Harry Truman signed a bill formalizing it in 1952. Since then America’s most powerful evangelical forces have pretty much commandeered the holiday for their own political purposes, through the National Prayer Committee, focusing on events specifically for the evangelical committee. Hence the ACLU’s objections.

When it comes to waking up America, the little church at Unger Store may not have been the best place for him to start. Only one woman nodded in agreement, and then a bit too fervently, leading me to think she might have been his wife.

Personally I am having serious doubts about California schools outlawing the words mother and father, which sounds too much like far right Internet propaganda. Yet, having known many California gay

and lesbian parent activists, such a ridiculous agenda is not out of the question. And though I grew up observing the National Day of Prayer in the public schools, the observance has soured for me over the years. I’d guess however, that I am the only person in the churchhouse who feels this way.

Several expressions of concern and calls for friendship prayers follow, mostly regarding sick members, people about to undergo cancer surgery, a family that had suffered the death of an elder.

“Anyone have any joys they would like to express?” asks the minister. This elicits the heartfelt testimony of an 82-year-old woman: “I was 40 when I got saved. When I found Christ. So by now I’ve spent more than half my life in His service. It has been a happy life and a better life. And I don’t need anything more in this life than what He has given me. But I would like to ask for one little thing, for Cindy Hill (the pianist) to play ‘Oh How I love Jesus.’ Would you do that Cindy?” And she sat down.

Thoughts of family

While Cindy played “Oh How I love Jesus” I thought about my father, grandparents, uncles and the other family members buried just outside those thick stained glass windows. The past became present, and I found myself looking around me for a girl, certainly an old woman by now, who I’d had a crush on in the little one room school house we attended then. Up front is Ray Luttrell again, this time in a green and gold choir robe. His son Dallas stands beside him in the choir, and in the pew in front of me I see the back of the Luttrell grandchild’s head, the precisely parted white scalp hairline down the middle with its odor of peach scented shampoo.

The Doxology rolls around signaling the end of the service, perhaps for the first time in my life I hate to leave a church. It is so peaceful here. I see what we rarely see anymore – a humble willingness to abide by the forms that have held their society together for generations. Each person an

individual, by but traveling together like a flock of arrows toward a mutual destiny, but always somewhere over home.

Because abidance in the form has been so continuous, it's hard to walk a few steps in any direction here without bumping into a reminder of previous abiders. Folks once here, but now gone. You remember its dead, and in doing so you have access to all they ever did that was right and all that was wrong – what worked or did not work for those people and that community – you know that. Even if you don't know you know it.

In that way, places own us and we belong to places. A community with no memory of its dead is no real community, because it has no human connectivity grounded in time – just interaction. It's merely a location populated by disassociate beings. A community's inherited memory from its dead provides its spiritual and moral animation, its posterity. Simply because we are humans, not aggregations of marketing or employment demographics, and are more than just a bunch of people who happen to be in the same place.

Moving on

Not that most of us have a choice in the matter. We cannot escape most of what was already set in motion before our birth, such as being moved around by larger forces, for necessary employment, or alleged opportunity, or for “quality of life” as measured by consumption (a corporate yardstick if ever there was one). We find ourselves living in an unfamiliar land, ungrounded and psychically uncounseled by our ancestors through the living memory of a native community. Through deeper long term associa-

tion with familiar people's lives and work, their grieving and their joy.

The solution to this void is simple, yet impossible to our minds. Stop moving. Reduce or eliminate mobility. Grow in situ. Send down roots through the pavement and send branches out through the people around us. Teach children the value of same. The fact that this sounds so untenable and absurd is proof of the industrialization of our comprehension and the commoditizing of our aspirations.

We can “think globally.” But for better or worse, we exist locally. And some pain and loss come with existence, regardless of where we choose to exist. Americans in particular find it hard to grasp that there's no “better place” left to run toward, geographically or economically. No new frontier other than the present, upon which we can begin to build a more resonant and meaningful place in the world.

Which is what endures in Ray Luttrell and a few remaining others along Shanghai Road. Watching Ray makes me feel fortunate to be part of a known and knowable human chain of lives lived entirely in a distinct place, even if mine has not been. And I like to believe, vainly perhaps, that as long as they endure, I endure, even as do departed friends and ancestors endure in me. All I can do in testimony is windrow these words like hay, and with providence, they will be as orderly, and make as much earthly sense as make as much sense as Ray's long streaks of clover hay under next June's sun. **CT**

Joe Bageant is the author of the best selling Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's class war (Random House)

We cannot escape most of what was already set in motion before our birth, such as being moved around by larger forces, for necessary employment, or alleged opportunity, or for “quality of life” as measured by consumption (a corporate yardstick if ever there was one)

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JOE BAGEANT**
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American Expression

Danny Schechter tells how credit card companies are resisting government reform measures

Most cardholders know that they will be hurt more unless something changes – many credit cards have gone from a luxury to a necessity to a noose

I was recently advised by American Express, a company whose credit cards I pay in full each and every month, and with whom I have been a paying “member” since 1981, that my credit card limit is being cut. I have become unworthy.

I took it personally until I realized I am but one of millions of card holders who are being dropped or cut back worldwide as the card pushers experience a higher default rate and millions max-out. American Express, by the way, recently reorganized as a “bank holding company” to qualify for a government bailout. AMEX received several billion dollars from that TARP program that we were told was created to get lending going again. Hmm...

As the card companies began to experience the losses and uncertainties that their customers have long experienced, they began operating in a more predatory manner, jacking up fees and putting the collection pressure on. In England, the government mandated that credit card companies give customers more time to pay. In this country, the companies want us to miss those due dates so they can tack on forever escalating late charges and interest payments. These credit card costs have gone UP even as interest rates – the amount they pay for money – goes DOWN.

This has become a major political issue. Consumer’s Union reports: “President

Obama is throwing his support behind major credit card reform, and the House just overwhelmingly passed its bill by a vote of 357 to 70! But the Senate is bitterly divided...The Senate may vote next week on its bill to curb these random rate hikes and fees. But the bank lobby is swarming Washington, claiming if they can’t randomly hike your interest rate, consumers will suffer.”

The credit card companies are squealing that any restrictions on them will hurt the economy, drive prices up, and lead to financial Armageddon or worse. Most cardholders know that they will be hurt more unless something changes – many credit cards have gone from a luxury to a necessity to a noose. Millions have become prisoners of debt, almost as if they are serfs and as if capitalism is going back in time to feudalism.

The average card rate is a whopping 14%, but that can climb easily to over 30%.

The way these companies exploit customers is legendary, and has been tolerated for too long as many media outlets report:

- US News: “The advertised annual percentage rate on 15 Capital One cards increased from an average of 12.45 percent to 17.24 percent.”

- MSNBC: “Citibank, and HSBC, are now raising rates on millions of customers.”

- NPR: “American Express announced it’s offering \$300 payments to a limited number of cardholders who agree to close their ac-

counts.”

- The New Yorker: “These tactics are not going to improve the credit-card industry’s dismal reputation. They’re also not going to help an economy in recession, since reduced credit lines take away an important cushion for consumer spending, and higher interest rates and increased fees are likely to drive more people to default.”

- Wall Street Journal: “How are credit-card issuers reacting to consumers’ attempts to live a more financially responsible lifestyle? They’re threatening to cut their credit cards off if they don’t spend enough.”

- Bloomberg: “About 45 percent of U.S. banks reduced credit limits for new or existing credit-card customers in the fourth quarter of 2008.”

- Miami Herald: “Interest rates are rising, their credit limits are shrinking, new fees are cropping up, the time to pay their bills is decreasing – or their cards have been cut off altogether.”

- New Rules: “Little attention has been given to the \$48 billion in fees that credit card companies extracted from merchants last year. Largely invisible to the public, these fees, which amount to \$427 per household, are ultimately passed on as higher prices to all consumers, whether they use plastic or not. These fees, known as interchange, are set by the credit card processors: Visa, MasterCard, and American Express, which together control 93% of all card transactions in the United States.”

Current credit card company losses may be behind the current round of gouging, but they are nothing new. It is also part of the attempt to resuscitate our speculative economy based on credit and debt. Public debt is at its highest since the 1950s. Deficits are growing along with federal borrowing, even as tax revenues collapse. These trends show that a squeeze on consumers will continue and could get worse.

What’s even worse is that the whole government strategy with its emphasis on trying to get lending going again seems bent on returning us to the status quo ante, a failed

system designed around promoting more and more consumption.

“That’s the root of the credit crisis today and the economic crisis,” argues professor Ben Barber, author of CONSUMED, “The United States today has a gross national product 72% of which is consumption. 72%.... So the question is, how can America have a sustainable capitalism when it depends on selling people stuff they don’t need they don’t want and they can’t afford...”

Barber fears that the Obama economic plan, like the Bush post 9/11 “time to go shopping again” faith-based plan, is “Let’s get people getting those credit cards again. Let’s get people to the mall. Let’s get people spending again.... Unfortunately the new economic team of the new president may be saying somewhat the same thing. Let’s meet this world crisis by getting Americans back to the mall, getting them back to their credit cards, getting them to be able to buy the houses again they still can’t afford.”

Adds Economist Max Wolff: “And a bigger question to me is will we see a structural change or will we go through a long bad recession while we waste our money struggling to rebuild an unsustainable system that should have never been erected in the first place?” So, dear American Express, thank you for your concern about my economic well being, for protecting me from my own financial situation, and for rewarding my loyalty by abandoning your own. Oh, yes, good luck in keeping the company going even as your own bonds are now considered JUNK. Last year you cut 10 percent of your work force with profits off; more recently, thanks to monies from our government and more people living off their cards, you are doing better.

Your last quarter brought in a net income of \$437 million with revenue at \$5.93 billion, an 18 percent drop from \$7.24 billion in the quarter a year ago. Your net charge-offs, a measure of bad loan write-offs, rose to 8.5 percent from 7 percent in the previous quarter. Maybe it was all my card. Perhaps I was the problem. I will soon be gone. **CT**

So, dear American Express, thank you for your concern about my economic well being, for protecting me from my own financial situation, and for rewarding my loyalty by abandoning your own

*MediaChannel
News Dissector
Danny Schechter
made the film In
Debt We Trust
exposing credit card
practices. He is
following up with
a film based on his
book Plunder*

Barbarians at the gate

Why has policing in Britain got so bad?, asks **George Monbiot**

Though the people of this country remain as mild and as peaceful as they have ever been, our MPs have introduced a wider range of repressive measures than at any time since the Second World War

The principal cause of man's unhappiness is that he has learnt to stay quietly in his own room. If our needs are not met, if justice is not done, it is because we are not prepared to leave our homes and agitate for change. Blaise Pascal ("the sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his own room") couldn't have been more wrong.

We do not starve, we are not arbitrarily imprisoned, we may vote, travel and read and write what we wish only because of the political activism of previous generations. Almost all MPs, when pushed, will acknowledge this. Were it not for public protest they wouldn't be MPs.

Yet, though the people of this country remain as mild and as peaceful as they have ever been, our MPs have introduced a wider range of repressive measures than at any time since the Second World War. A long list of laws – the 1997 Protection from Harassment Act, Terrorism Act 2000, Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, the 2005 Serious Crime and Police Act and many others¹ – treat peaceful protesters as if they are stalkers, vandals, thugs and terrorists.

Thousands of harmless, public-spirited people now possess criminal records. This legislation has been enforced by policing which becomes more aggressive and intru-

sive by the month. The police attacks on the G20 protests (which are about to be challenged by a judicial review launched by Climate Camp) are just the latest expression of this rising state violence. Why is it happening?

Before I try to answer this, let me give you an idea of just how weird policing in Britain has become. A few weeks ago, like everyone in mid-Wales, I received a local policing summary from the Dyfed-Powys force.

It contained a section headed Terrorism and Domestic Extremism. "Work undertaken is not solely focussed on the threat from international terrorists. Attention has also been paid to the potential threat that domestic extremists and campaigners can pose." I lodged a freedom of information request to try to discover what this meant. What threat do campaigners pose?

Police reply

I've just been told by the police that they don't intend to reply within the statutory period, or to tell me when they will². I'll complain of course, and (in 2019 or so) I'll let you know the result. But Paul Mobbs of the Free Range Network has found what appears to be an explanation.

Under the heading "Protect[ing] the country from both terrorism and domestic extremism", the Dyfed-Powys Police web-

site repeats the line about domestic extremists and campaigners. “In this context, the Force was praised for its management management of the slaughter of what was felt to be a sacred animal from the Skanda Vale religious community in Carmarthen-shire”³.

You might remember it: this Hindu community tried to prevent Shambo the bull from being culled by the government after he tested positive for TB. His defenders sought a judicial review and launched a petition. When that failed, they sang and prayed. That’s all.

Mobbs has also found a bulletin circulated among Welsh forces at the end of last year, identifying the “new challenges and changes” the police now face. Under “Environmental” just two are listed: congestion charging and “eco-terrorism”⁴. Eco-terrorism is a charge repeatedly levelled against the environment movement, mostly by fossil fuel lobbyists.

But, as far as I can discover, there has not been a single recorded instance of a planned attempt to harm people in the cause of environmental protection in the United Kingdom over the past 30 years or more. So what do the police mean by eco-terrorism? It appears to refer to any environmental action more radical than writing letters to your MP.

Domestic extremism

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) now runs three units whose purpose is to tackle another phenomenon it has never defined: domestic extremism. These are the National Extremism Tactical Co-ordination Unit (NETCU), the Welsh Extremism and Counter-Terrorism Unit and the National Public Order Intelligence Unit. Because ACPO is not a public body but a private limited company, the three bodies are exempt from freedom of information laws and other kinds of public accountability, even though they are funded by the Home Office and deploy police officers from regional forces.

So it’s hard to work out exactly what they do, apart from libelling peaceful protesters. I wrote a column in December about the smears published by NETCU, which described villagers in Oxfordshire peacefully seeking to prevent a power company from filling their local lake with fly ash as a “domestic extremist campaign”⁵. It also sought to smear peace campaigners, Greenpeace and Climate Camp with the same charge. NETCU’s site went down on the day my column was published and hasn’t been restored since. But we have only patchy evidence of what else these three unaccountable bodies have been up to.

They appear to have adopted the role once filled by Special Branch’s counter-subversion campaign, which spied on Labour activists, including Jack Straw and Peter Mandelson (sadly the spooks failed to bump them off while there was still time). But as Paul Mobbs points out in his new report on Britain’s secretive police forces, today the police appear to be motivated not by party political bias, but by hostility towards all views which do not reflect the official consensus⁶.

Mobbs proposes that mainstream politics in Britain cannot respond to realities such as global and national inequality, economic collapse, resource depletion and climate change.

Any politics that does not endorse the liberal economic consensus, which challenges the concentration of wealth or power, or which doesn’t accept that growth and consumerism can be sustained indefinitely, is off-limits. Just as the suffragettes were repressed because their ideas – not their actions – presented a threat to the state, the government and the police must suppress a new set of dangerous truths.

By treating protesters as domestic extremists, the state marginalises their concerns: if people are extremists, their views must be extreme. Repression, in a nominal democracy, cannot operate accountably, so the state uses police units which are exempt from public scrutiny.

Today the police appear to be motivated not by party political bias, but by hostility towards all views which do not reflect the official consensus

The police respond as all police forces do; protecting the incasts from the outcasts, keeping the barbarians from the gate. The philosophy of policing has not changed; they just become more violent as the citadel collapses

I am sure Mobbs is right. There is no place for dissenting views in mainstream politics. I was told recently by a Labour back-bencher – a respected MP untainted by the expenses scandal – that “if the door was open just an inch to new ideas, I would stay on. But it has been slammed shut, so I’m resigning at the next election.”

Our grossly unfair electoral system, which responds to the concerns of just a few thousand floating voters and shuts out the minor parties; the vicious crackdown on dissent within parliament by whips and spin doctors; the neoliberalism forced upon governments by corporate power and the Washington Consensus; the terror of the tabloid press: all combine to create a political culture which cannot respond to altered realities without collapsing. What cannot be accomodated must be suppressed.

The police respond as all police forces do; protecting the incasts from the outcasts, keeping the barbarians from the gate. The philosophy of policing has not

changed; they just become more violent as the citadel collapses. **CT**

Notes

1. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/series/a-z-of-legislation>
2. Email received on 6th May 2009. FOI REF: 263/2009.
3. <http://www.dyfed-powys.police.uk/en/publications/policingplan/08-11/6/>
4. All Wales Environmental Scanning Monthly Bulletin November 2008. <http://www.dyfedpowyspoliceauthority.co.uk/documents/EnvironmentalScanning/env-scan-nov-08.pdf>
5. <http://www.monbiot.com/archives/2008/12/23/the-paranoia-squad/>
6. Paul Mobbs, April 2009. Q2. Britain’s Secretive Police Force. The Free Range Network. <http://www.fraw.org.uk/download/ehippies/q02/index.shtml>

George Monbiot’s latest book is Bring On The Acocalypse, Essays on Self-Destruction.

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UP AGAINST THE WALL MOTHERF**KER

A MEMOIR OF THE '60S, WITH NOTES FOR NEXT TIME

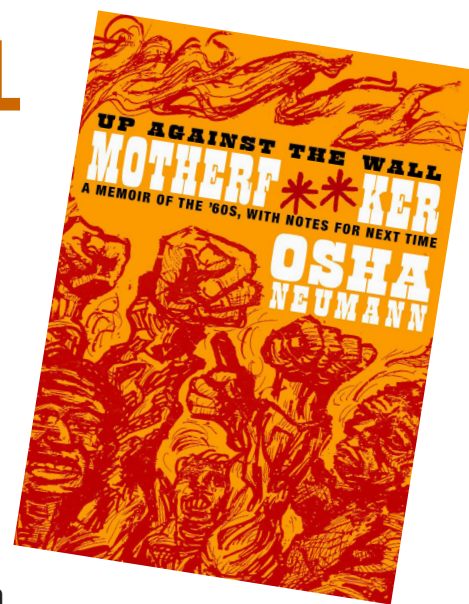
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Some thoughts on torture. And Obama

William Blum writes about the lack of credibility of the last and present US presidents, and offers advice to Hillary Clinton

Okay, at least some things are settled. When George W. Bush said “The United States does not torture”, everyone now knows it was crapaganda. And when Barack Obama, a month into his presidency, said “The United States does not torture”¹, it likewise had all the credibility of a 19th century treaty between the US government and the American Indians.

When Obama and his followers say, as they do repeatedly, that he has “banned torture”, this is a statement they have no right to make.

The executive orders concerning torture leave loopholes, such as being applicable only “in any armed conflict”² What about in a “counter-terrorism” environment? And the new administration has not categorically banned the outsourcing of torture, such as renditions, the sole purpose of which is to kidnap people and send them to a country to be tortured.

Moreover, what do we know of all the CIA secret prisons, the gulag extending from Poland to the island of Diego Garcia? How many of them are still open and abusing and torturing prisoners, keeping them in total isolation and in indefinite detention? Total isolation by itself is torture; not knowing when, if ever, you will be released is torture. And the non-secret prisons? Has Guantanamo ended all its forms of torture?

There’s reason to doubt that.³ And what do we know of what’s happening now in Abu Ghraib and Bagram?

And when Obama says “I don’t believe that anybody is above the law”, and then acts in precisely the opposite fashion, despite overwhelming evidence of criminal torture – such as the recently leaked report of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Bush Justice Department “torture memos” – it’s enough to break the heart of any of his fans who possess more than a minimum of intellect and conscience. It should be noted that a Gallup Poll of April 24/25 showed that 66% of Democrats favored an “investigation into harsh interrogation techniques on terrorism suspects”. If the word “torture” had been used in the question, the figure would undoubtedly have been higher.

Following the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003, President Bush went on TV to warn the people of Iraq: “War crimes will be prosecuted. War criminals will be punished. And it will be no defense to say, I was just following orders.”⁴

“Objectively, the American public is much more responsible for the crimes committed in its name than were the people of Germany for the horrors of the Third Reich. We have far more knowledge, and far greater freedom and opportunity to stop our government’s criminal behavior,” ob-

What do we know of all the CIA secret prisons, the gulag extending from Poland to the island of Diego Garcia? How many of them are still open and abusing and torturing prisoners, keeping them in total isolation and in indefinite detention?

I love that expression “enhanced interrogation”. How did our glorious leaders overlook calling the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki “enhanced explosive devices”?

served James Brooks in the Online Journal in 2007.

On February 10, the Obama Justice Department used the Bush administration’s much-reviled “state secrets” tactic in a move to have a lawsuit dismissed – filed by five detainees against a subsidiary of Boeing aircraft company for arranging rendition flights which led to their torture. “It was as if last month’s inauguration had never occurred”, observed the New York Times.⁵

And when Obama says, as he does repeatedly, “We need to look forward as opposed to looking backwards”, why is it that no one in the media asks him what he thinks of the Nuremberg Tribunal looking backwards in 1946? Or the Church Committee of the US Senate doing the same in 1975 and producing numerous revelations about the criminality of the CIA, FBI, and other government agencies that shocked and opened the eyes of the American people and the world?

We’re now told that Obama and his advisers had recently been fiercely debating the question of what to do about the Bush war criminals, with Obama going one way and then another and then back again, both in private and in his public stands. One might say that he was “tortured”. But civilized societies do not debate torture. Why didn’t the president just do the obvious? The simplest? The right thing? Or at least do what he really believes.

The problem, I’m increasingly afraid, is that the man doesn’t really believe strongly in anything, certainly not in controversial areas. He learned a long time ago how to take positions that avoid controversy, how to express opinions without clearly and firmly taking sides, how to talk eloquently without actually saying anything, how to leave his listeners’ heads filled with stirring clichés, platitudes, and slogans. And it worked. Oh how it worked! What could happen now, as President of the United States, to induce him to change his style?

The president and the Director of the CIA both insist that no one at the CIA who

was relying on the Justice Department’s written legal justification of methods of “enhanced interrogation” should be punished. But the first such approval was dated August 1, 2002, while many young men were arrested in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the previous nine months and subjected to “enhanced interrogation”.

Many were sent to Guantanamo as early as January 2002. And many others were kidnaped and sent to Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and other secret prisons to be tortured beginning in late 2001. So, at least for some months, the torturers were not acting under any formal approval of their methods. But they still will not be punished.

I love that expression “enhanced interrogation”. How did our glorious leaders overlook calling the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki “enhanced explosive devices”?

Lord High Dungeon Master Richard Cheney is upset about the recent release of torture memos. He keeps saying that the Obama administration is suppressing documents that show a more positive picture of the effectiveness of interrogation techniques, which he claims produced very valuable information, prevented certain acts of terrorism, and saved American lives.

Hmmm, why am I skeptical of this? Oh, I know, because if this is what actually happened and there are documents which genuinely and unambiguously showed such results, the beleaguered Bush administration would have leaked them years ago with great fanfare, and the CIA would not have destroyed numerous videos of the torture sessions.

But in any event, that still wouldn’t justify torture. Humankind has aspired for centuries to tame its worst behaviors; ridding itself of the affliction of torture has been high on that list. There is more than one United States law now prohibiting torture, including a 1994 law making it a crime for US citizens to commit torture overseas. This was recently invoked to convict the

son of former Liberian dictator Charles Taylor. There is also the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, ratified in 1949, which states in Article 17: “No physical or mental torture, nor any other form of coercion may be inflicted on prisoners of war to secure from them information of any kind whatever. Prisoners of war who refuse to answer may not be threatened, insulted, or exposed to any unpleasant or disadvantageous treatment of any kind.”

Thus it was that the United States has not called the prisoners of its War on Terror “prisoners of war”. But in 1984, another historic step was taken, by the United Nations, with the drafting of the “Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment” (came into force in 1987, ratified by the United States in 1994). Article 2, section 2 of the Convention states: “No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.”

Such marvelously clear, unequivocal, and principled language, to set a single standard for a world that makes it increasingly difficult for one to feel proud of humanity. We cannot slide back. If today it’s deemed acceptable to torture the person who supposedly has the vital “ticking-bomb” information needed to save lives, tomorrow it will be acceptable to torture him to learn the identities of his alleged co-conspirators. Would we allow slavery to resume for just a short while to serve some “national emergency” or some other “higher purpose”?

If you open the window of torture, even just a crack, the cold air of the Dark Ages will fill the whole room.

“I would personally rather die than have anyone tortured to save my life.” – Craig Murray, former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, who lost his job after he publicly condemned the Uzbek regime in 2003 for its systematic use of torture.⁶

With all the reports concerning torture under the recent Bush administration, some people may be inclined to think that prior to Bush the United States had very little connection to this awful practice. However, in the period of the 1950s through the 1980s, while the CIA did not usually push the button, turn the switch, or pour the water, the Agency ...

- * encouraged its clients in the Third World to use torture;

- * provided the host country the names of the people who wound up as torture victims, in places as bad as Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and Bagram;

- * supplied torture equipment;

- * conducted classes in torture;

- * distributed torture manuals – how-to books;

- * was present when torture was taking place, to observe and evaluate how well its students were doing.⁷

I could really feel sorry for Barack Obama – for his administration is plagued and handicapped by a major recession not of his making – if he had a vision that was thus being thwarted. But he has no vision – not any kind of systemic remaking of the economy, producing a more equitable and more honest society; nor a world at peace, beginning with ending America’s perennial wars; no vision of the fantastic things that could be done with the trillions of dollars that would be saved by putting an end to war without end; nor a vision of a world totally rid of torture; nor an America with national health insurance; nor an environment free of capitalist subversion; nor a campaign to control world population ... he just looks for what will offend the fewest people. He’s a “whatever works” kind of guy. And he wants to be president. But what we need and crave is a leader of vision.

Another jewel in the crown, Miss Hillary

During the presidential campaign much was made of Obama’s stated promises to engage in direct talks with Iran, as op-

No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture”

Would it be unfair to say that she's implying that a reason for talks with Iran is that the US could get more international support when it decides to cripple that country? Is crippling a country the United States is at peace with supposed to be part of the "change" in US foreign policy?

posed to the Bush administration's refusal to speak to the Iranians and threatening to attack them and bomb their nuclear facilities.

This was one more example of the much-vaunted "change" that Obama was going to bring. But, in actuality, it wouldn't be much of a change. Mid-level American officials did in fact occasionally meet with Iranian officials, most notably after the September 11 attacks in 2001 and in mid-2003 after the US invasion of Iraq. These meetings were always in secret.⁸

There were also at least three publicly-announced meetings between the US and Iran in 2007, primarily dealing with the fighting in Iraq.

And now that Obama is in power, what do we find? We find his Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, testifying April 22 before the House Foreign Affairs Committee and stating: "We actually believe that by following the diplomatic path we are on [speaking to Iran], we gain credibility and influence with a number of nations who would have to participate in order to make the sanctions regime as tight and as crippling as we would want it to be."

Would it be unfair to say that she's implying that a reason for talks with Iran is that the US could get more international support when it decides to cripple that country? Is crippling a country the United States is at peace with supposed to be part of the "change" in US foreign policy? Is Iran expected to be enthusiastic about such talks? If the talks collapse, will the United States use that as an excuse for bombing Iran? Or will Israel be given the honor?

Later in the hearing, Clinton declared: "We are deploying new approaches to the threat posed by Iran."

I would love to have been a member of the House committee so I could have had the following exchange with the Secretary of State:

Cong. Blum: Do we plan to impose sanctions on France?

Sec. Clinton: I don't understand, Con-

gressman. Why would we impose sanctions on France?

Cong. Blum: Well, if we impose sanctions on Iran on the mere suspicion of them planning to build nuclear weapons, it seems to me we'd want to impose even stricter sanctions on a country which already possesses such weapons.

Sec. Clinton: But France is an ally.

Cong. Blum: So let's make Iran an ally. We can start with ending our many sanctions against them and calling off our Israeli attack dogs.

Sec. Clinton: But Congressman, Iran is a threat. Surely you don't see France as a threat? What reason would France have to use nuclear weapons against the United States?

Cong. Blum: What reason would Iran have to use nuclear weapons against the United States? Other than an irresistible desire for mass national suicide.

If Congressman Blum had pursued this line of questioning, it might well have culminated in some Orwellian remark by dear Hillary, such as the one she treated us to a few days later when speaking to reporters in Iraq.

As the Washington Post reported it: "Clinton played down the latest burst of violence, telling reporters she saw 'no sign' it would reignite the sectarian warfare that ravaged the country in recent years. She said that the Iraqi government had 'come a long, long way' and that the bombings were 'a signal that the rejectionists fear Iraq is going in the right direction'."⁹

So ... the eruption of violence is a sign of success. In October 2003, President George W. Bush, speaking after many resistance attacks in Iraq had occurred, said: "The more successful we are on the ground, the more these killers will react."¹⁰

And here is Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, speaking in April 2004 about a rise in insurrection and fighting in Iraq over nearly a two-week period: "I would characterize what we're seeing right now as a – as more a symptom of

the success that we're having here in Iraq,' he said ... explaining that the violence indicated there was something to fight against – American progress in building up Iraq.”¹¹

War is Peace ... Freedom is Slavery ... Ignorance is Strength. I distinctly remember when I first read “1984” thinking that it was very well done but of course a great exaggeration, sort of like science fiction.

Clinton was equally profound on May 1, speaking to an assemblage of State Department employees. Discussing Venezuela and Bolivia, she said that the Bush administration “tried to isolate them, tried to support opposition to them, tried to turn them into international pariahs. It didn't work. We are going to see what other approaches might work.”

Oh ... uh ... how about NOT trying to isolate them, NOT supporting their opposition, NOT trying to turn them into international pariahs? How about the National Endowment for Democracy, the Agency for International Development, and the US Embassy NOT trying to subvert their revolutions?

And when she says “It didn't work”, one must ask: Work to what end? To return the two countries to their previous condition of client-states? Perhaps like with Nicaragua, about whom the Secretary of State said improving relations was important to counter Iran's growing influence.

She noted that “the Iranians are building a huge embassy in Managua. You can only imagine what it's for.”¹² I can only imagine what Ms. Clinton imagines it's for. What is the new American Embassy in Iraq – the biggest embassy in the entire history of the world, in the entire universe – What is that for? Another example of Obamachange

that means no change. What is it with American officials? Why are they so insufferably arrogant and hypocritical? **CT**

Notes

1. Washington Post, February 24, 2009
2. See, for example, “Executive Order – Ensuring Lawful Interrogations”, January 22, 2009
3. See The Observer (London), February 8, 2009 for an account of how conditions were still very awful at Guantanamo as of that date.
4. Video of Bush
5. New York Times, February 10, 2009, plus their editorial of the next day. In April, a federal appeals court ruled that the detainees' lawsuit could proceed.
6. Testimony before the International Commission of Inquiry On Crimes Against Humanity Committed by the Bush Administration, session of January 21, 2006, New York City
7. See William Blum, “Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower”, chapter 5.
8. The Independent (London), May 27, 2007
9. Washington Post, April 26, 2009
10. Washington Post, October 28, 2003
11. New York Times, April 16, 2003
12. Associated Press, May 1, 2009

William Blum is the author of:

Killing Hope: US Military and CIA

Interventions Since World War 2;

Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower;

West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir;

Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire

His website is www.killinghope.org

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The disease of permanent war

Chris Hedges on the corporate forces that profit from war and the weak politicians who allow it to happen

We produce sophisticated fighter jets, while Boeing is unable to finish its new commercial plane on schedule . . . We sink money into research and development of weapons systems and neglect renewable energy technologies to fight global warming

The embrace by any society of permanent war is a parasite that devours the heart and soul of a nation. Permanent war extinguishes liberal, democratic movements. It turns culture into nationalist cant. It degrades and corrupts education and the media, and wrecks the economy. The liberal, democratic forces, tasked with maintaining an open society, become impotent. The collapse of liberalism, whether in imperial Russia, the Austro-Hungarian Empire or Weimar Germany, ushers in an age of moral nihilism.

This moral nihilism comes in many colors and hues. It rants and thunders in a variety of slogans, languages and ideologies. It can manifest itself in fascist salutes, communist show trials or Christian crusades. It is, at its core, all the same. It is the crude, terrifying tirade of mediocrities who find their identities and power in the perpetuation of permanent war.

It was a decline into permanent war, not Islam, which killed the liberal, democratic movements in the Arab world, ones that held great promise in the early part of the 20th century in countries such as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iran. It is a state of permanent war that is finishing off the liberal traditions in Israel and the United States.

The moral and intellectual trolls – the Dick Cheneys, the Avigdor Liebermans, the Mahmoud Ahmadinejads – personify

the moral nihilism of perpetual war. They manipulate fear and paranoia. They abolish civil liberties in the name of national security. They crush legitimate dissent. They bilk state treasuries. They stoke racism.

“War,” Randolph Bourne commented acidly, “is the health of the state.”

In “Pentagon Capitalism” Seymour Melman described the defense industry as viral. Defense and military industries in permanent war, he wrote, trash economies. They are able to upend priorities. They redirect government expenditures toward their huge military projects and starve domestic investment in the name of national security. We produce sophisticated fighter jets, while Boeing is unable to finish its new commercial plane on schedule. Our automotive industry goes bankrupt. We sink money into research and development of weapons systems and neglect renewable energy technologies to fight global warming. Universities are flooded with defense-related cash and grants, and struggle to find money for environmental studies. This is the disease of permanent war.

Military spending

Massive military spending in this country, climbing to nearly \$1 trillion a year and consuming half of all discretionary spending, has a profound social cost. Bridges and levees collapse. Schools decay. Domestic

manufacturing declines. Trillions in debts threaten the viability of the currency and the economy. The poor, the mentally ill, the sick and the unemployed are abandoned. Human suffering, including our own, is the price for victory.

Citizens in a state of permanent war are bombarded with the insidious militarized language of power, fear and strength that mask an increasingly brittle reality. The corporations behind the doctrine of permanent war – who have corrupted Leon Trotsky's doctrine of permanent revolution – must keep us afraid.

Fear stops us from objecting to government spending on a bloated military. Fear means we will not ask unpleasant questions of those in power. Fear means that we will be willing to give up our rights and liberties for security. Fear keeps us penned in like domesticated animals.

Melman, who coined the term permanent war economy to characterize the American economy, wrote that since the end of the Second World War, the federal government has spent more than half its tax dollars on past, current and future military operations. It is the largest single sustaining activity of the government. The military-industrial establishment is a very lucrative business. It is gilded corporate welfare. Defense systems are sold before they are produced. Military industries are permitted to charge the federal government for huge cost overruns. Massive profits are always guaranteed.

Foreign aid is given to countries such as Egypt, which receives some \$3 billion in assistance and is required to buy American weapons with \$1.3 billion of the money. The taxpayers fund the research, development and building of weapons systems and then buy them on behalf of foreign governments. It is a bizarre circular system. It defies the concept of a free-market economy. These weapons systems are soon in need of being updated or replaced. They are hauled, years later, into junkyards where they are left to rust. It is, in economic terms, a dead

end. It sustains nothing but the permanent war economy.

Those who profit from permanent war are not restricted by the economic rules of producing goods, selling them for a profit, then using the profit for further investment and production. They operate, rather, outside of competitive markets. They erase the line between the state and the corporation. They leech away the ability of the nation to manufacture useful products and produce sustainable jobs. Melman used the example of the New York City Transit Authority and its allocation in 2003 of \$3 billion to \$4 billion for new subway cars. New York City asked for bids, and no American companies responded. Melman argued that the industrial base in America was no longer centered on items that maintain, improve, or are used to build the nation's infrastructure. New York City eventually contracted with companies in Japan and Canada to build its subway cars. Melman estimated that such a contract could have generated, directly and indirectly, about 32,000 jobs in the United States. In another instance, of 100 products offered in the 2003 L.L. Bean catalogue, Melman found that 92 were imported and only eight were made in the United States.

Military analysts

The late Sen. J. William Fulbright described the reach of the military-industrial establishment in his 1970 book "The Pentagon Propaganda Machine." Fulbright explained how the Pentagon influenced and shaped public opinion through multimillion-dollar public relations campaigns, Defense Department films, close ties with Hollywood producers, and use of the commercial media. The majority of the military analysts on television are former military officials, many employed as consultants to defense industries, a fact they rarely disclose to the public. Barry R. McCaffrey, a retired four-star Army general and military analyst for NBC News, was, The New York Times reported, at the same time an employee of

Fear stops us from objecting to government spending on a bloated military. Fear means we will not ask unpleasant questions of those in power. Fear means that we will be willing to give up our rights and liberties for security. Fear keeps us penned in like domesticated animals

STATE OF WAR

Dick Cheney may be palpably evil while Obama is merely weak, but to those who seek to keep us in a state of permanent war, it does not matter. They get what they want

Defense Solutions Inc., a consulting firm. He profited, the article noted, from the sale of the weapons systems and expansion of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan he championed over the airwaves.

Our permanent war economy has not been challenged by Obama and the Democratic Party. They support its destructive fury because it funds them. They validate its evil assumptions because to take them on is political suicide. They repeat the narrative of fear because it keeps us dormant. They do this because they have become weaker than the corporate forces that profit from permanent war.

Death of liberalism

The hollowness of our liberal classes, such as the Democrats, empowers the moral nihilists. A state of permanent war means the inevitable death of liberalism. Dick Cheney may be palpably evil while Obama is merely weak, but to those who seek to keep us in a state of permanent war, it does not matter. They get what they want.

Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote “Notes From the Underground” to illustrate what happens to cultures when a liberal class, like ours, becomes sterile, defeated dreamers. The main character in “Notes From the Underground” carries the bankrupt ideas of liberalism to their logical extreme. He becomes the enlightenment ideal. He eschews passion and moral purpose. He is

rational. He prizes realism over sanity, even in the face of self-destruction. These acts of accommodation doom the Underground Man, as it doomed imperial Russia and as it will doom us.

“I never even managed to become anything: neither wicked nor good, neither a scoundrel nor an honest man, neither a hero nor an insect,” the Underground Man wrote. “And now I am living out my life in my corner, taunting myself with the spiteful and utterly futile consolation that it is even impossible for an intelligent man seriously to become anything, and only fools become something.”

We have been drawn into the world of permanent war by these fools. We allow fools to destroy the continuity of life, to tear apart all systems – economic, social, environmental and political – that sustain us. Dostoevsky was not dismayed by evil. He was dismayed by a society that no longer had the moral fortitude to confront the fools. These fools are leading us over the precipice. What will rise up from the ruins will not be something new, but the face of the monster that has, until then, remained hidden behind the facade. **CT**

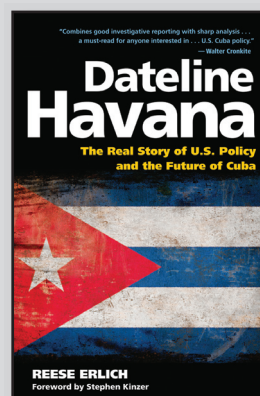
*Chris Hedges, a Pulitzer prize-winning reporter, is a Senior Fellow at the Nation Institute. His latest book is **Collateral Damage: America's War Against Iraqi Civilians**.*

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Hamas, Fatah and flawed language

Deceptive, demonising and immoral language controls the debate about the future of Palestine, writes **Ramzy Baroud**

From a distance, the struggle between Hamas and Fatah appears commonplace, a typical third world country's political scuffle over interpretation of democracy that went out of control, or simply a 'power struggle' between two political rivals vying for international aid and recognition. In fact, the conflict may appear as if it popped out of nowhere and will continue as long as the seemingly power-hungry Palestinians carry on with their self-defeating fight.

Therefore, it's typical to read such deceptive news reports as that of Ibrahim Barzak of the Associated Press: "Hundreds of Palestinian patients have been trapped in the Gaza Strip, unable to travel abroad for crucial treatment for cancer and other diseases, because of political infighting between Gaza's militant Hamas rulers and their Palestinian rivals."

Such sinister terminology as "Gaza's Hamas rulers" – which happened to refer to a democratically elected government – is now in common use, in most Western news agencies, and those who readily recycle their reports.

Barzak makes no mention of the Israeli factor in the decried Palestinian rivalries, and the only reference to the US in his report was that of the "U.S.-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, which controls the West Bank."

Is Barzak serious? Even if we willingly overlook the fact that Palestinian rivalry has little influence on Israel's decision to block the Gaza borders, thus subjugate its inhabitants, and purposely disregarded the US-led international campaign to isolate Gaza and its government, how can one allow such a misreading of so obvious a fact: since when does Abbas "control" the West Bank? What should one make of the Israeli military occupation of several decades, the hundreds of illegal Jewish settlements, the countless checkpoints, 'bypass roads', numerous 'military zones' and the giant Israeli wall, an entire matrix of control, which has been described by many leading international observers as "apartheid"?

True, the situation in Gaza has reached such harrowing levels, that the injustices committed in the West Bank are being relegated as if non-consequential. But the fact is, the Israeli assault on Palestinian freedom, human rights and international law in the West Bank never ceased for a moment, even when thousands of Palestinians in Gaza were being brutally murdered.

But neither the inhumane siege and murder of Gazans, nor the suffocating occupation – with all of its lethal and non-lethal manifestations – of the West Bank seem to awaken the curiosity of many, who foolishly, or cunningly blame the victim for his own misery.

What should one make of the Israeli military occupation of several decades, the hundreds of illegal Jewish settlements, the countless checkpoints, 'bypass roads', numerous 'military zones' and the giant Israeli wall, an entire matrix of control, which has been described by many leading international observers as "apartheid"?

NATION DECEIVED

An unsuspected media consumer would never guess that Hamas was elected democratically, and that a democratic government with a majority in the parliament cannot possibly stage a 'coup' against itself

Ramzy Baroud (*ramzybaroud.net*) is an author and editor of *PalestineChronicle.com*. His work has been published in many newspapers, journals and anthologies around the world. His latest book is, *"The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle"* (Pluto Press, London), and his forthcoming book is, *"My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza The Untold Story"* (Pluto Press, London)

Of course that shouldn't mean that Hamas and Fatah, or any other Palestinian party should be absolved from their own missteps, such as violations of human rights, infringement on freedom of speech or any other aspect of which they possess even if an iota of control. If individuals from Hamas violated human rights in Gaza, then such actions should be recognized, condemned and corrected. The same is true when Abbas' government continues to violate the edicts of democracy in whatever limited jurisdiction it has; that too must be recognized and duly censured. But for the media to make such outrageous claims, whether indirectly blaming Hamas for the deadly Gaza siege – and its consequences – or haphazardly granted Abbas a position of 'control' over the occupied West Bank, is certainly contemptible.

The manipulation of the term "democracy" is also worthy of mentioning. An unsuspected media consumer would never guess that Hamas was elected democratically, and that a democratic government with a majority in the parliament cannot possibly stage a 'coup' against itself.

That same reader would find it hard to believe that the legal term in office of celebrated president of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas has already expired, and its renewal would require re-elections or the consent of the Hamas-dominated parliament. President Abbas, however, is reportedly assembling a new government, which is expected to, again, exclude the majority-party in the parliament. The government, if formed, will likely to be headed by Salam Fayyad, whose international prestige stems solely from the fact that top US officials, including former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have praised him as trustworthy. Fayyad was never elected and is not popular among Palestinians.

More, even if Hamas agrees to Abbas' appointed government, it would be impossible for the parliament to convene and vote, for a large number of elected Palestinian legislators are political prisoners in

Israel. That too seems too trivial a context to mention. When a story is dominated by selective terminology, numbers, names and dates without proper and balanced context, a media consumer is sold nothing but misinformation.

Consider, for example, the report of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), published in late 2008, which ranked and classified 167 countries based on various democratic indicators into four categories: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes. The Palestinian Authority was ranked number 85, digressing from flawed democracy into hybrid regime category. The explanation? According to the report: "The Islamist Hamas movement that won the parliamentary election in early 2006, and Fatah, who hold on to the presidency have failed to bridge their differences. Instead, factional infighting has worsened in recent years, culminating in the takeover of power in the Gaza Strip by Hamas while the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, of Fatah has tried to maintain his grip on the West Bank. Political violence has worsened."

The word, "Israel", was not mentioned. Not once.

Despite the fact that "factional fighting", and failure to "bridge their differences" are largely attributed to external pressures (for example: Israeli and American ultimatums to Abbas, violence against Hamas, and conditional international aid to both), Palestinians are ranked as an independent nation in complete control of its own affairs. Meanwhile, Israel was ranked number 38, merely a "flawed" democracy, perhaps for the sheer fact that it recognizes itself as a "Jewish state" and discriminates against anyone who doesn't fit the criteria.

"If you control the language, you control the debate," it's often said. But when the perception of an entire nation depends on how terms are coined and sentences are constructed, then language takes on other meanings, deceptive, demonizing and immoral.

CT

How many secret prisons in Israel?

Jonathan Cook tells why the UN torture watchdog is demanding access to Israel's top secret 'Facility 1391'

The United Nation's watchdog on torture has criticised Israel for refusing to allow inspections at a secret prison, dubbed by critics as "Israel's Guantanamo Bay", and demanded to know if more such clandestine detention camps are operating. In a report published in mid-May, the Committee Against Torture requested that Israel identify the location of the camp, officially referred to as "Facility 1391", and allow access to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Findings from Israeli human rights groups show that the prison has in the past been used to hold Arab and Muslim prisoners, including Palestinians, and that routine torture and physical abuse were carried out by interrogators.

The UN committee's panel of 10 independent experts also found credible the submissions from Israeli groups that Palestinian detainees are systematically tortured despite the banning of such practices by the Israeli Supreme Court in 1999.

The existence of Facility 1391 came to light in 2002, when Palestinians were detained there for the first time during Israel's reinvasion of the West Bank.

In a submission to the UN committee, Israel denied that any prisoners are currently being held at the site, although it admits that several Lebanese were detained there during the attack on Lebanon in 2006.

The committee expressed concern about an Israeli Supreme Court ruling in 2005 that found it "reasonable" for the state not to investigate suspicions of torture at the prison. The panel is believed to be concerned that without inspections the prison might still be in use or could be revived at short notice.

The Israeli court, the committee wrote, "should ensure that all allegations of torture and ill-treatment by detainees in Facility 1391 be impartially investigated [and] the results made public".

Hamoked, an Israeli human rights organisation, first identified the prison after two Palestinian cousins seized in Nablus in 2002 could not be traced by their families. Israeli officials eventually admitted that the pair were being held at a secret site.

Israel still refuses to identify the precise location of the prison, which is inside Israel and about 100km north of Jerusalem. A few buildings are visible, but most of the prison is built underground.

"We only learnt about the prison because the army made the mistake of putting Palestinians there when they ran out of room in Israel's main prisons," said Dalia Kerstein, the director of Hamoked.

"The real purpose of the camp is to interrogate prisoners from the Arab and Muslim world, who would be difficult to trace because their families are unlikely to contact

Israel still refuses to identify the precise location of the prison, which is inside Israel and about 100km north of Jerusalem. A few buildings are visible, but most of the prison is built underground

LIFTING THE VEIL

Although Palestinians passing through the prison were interrogated by the domestic secret police, the Shin Bet, foreign nationals at the prison fall under the responsibility of a special wing of military intelligence known as Unit 504, whose interrogation methods are believed to be much harsher

Israeli organisations for help.”

Ms Kerstein said the prison site was an even grosser violation of international law than Guantanamo Bay because it had never been inspected and no one knew what took place there.

According to the testimonies of the Palestinian cousins, Mohammed and Bashar Jadallah, they were held in isolation cells measuring two metres square, with black walls, no windows and a light bulb on 24 hours a day. On the rare occasions they were escorted outside, they had to wear blacked-out goggles. When Bashar Jadallah, 50, asked where he was, he was told he was “on the moon”.

According to the testimony of Mohammed Jadallah, 23, he was repeatedly beaten, his shackles tightened, he was tied in painful positions to a chair, he was not allowed to go to the toilet and he was prevented from sleeping, with water thrown on him if he nodded off. Interrogators are also reported to have shown him pictures of family members and threatened to harm them.

Although Palestinians passing through the prison were interrogated by the domestic secret police, the Shin Bet, foreign nationals at the prison fall under the responsibility of a special wing of military intelligence known as Unit 504, whose interrogation methods are believed to be much harsher.

Shortly after the prison came to light, a former inmate – Mustafa Dirani, a leader of the Lebanese Shia group Amal – launched a court case in Israel claiming he had been raped by a guard. Mr Dirani, seized from Lebanon in 1994, was held in Facility 1391 for eight years along with a Hizbollah leader, Sheikh Abdel Karim Obeid. Israel hoped to extract information from the pair in its search for a missing airman, Ron Arad, downed over Lebanon in 1986.

Mr Dirani alleged in court that he had been physically abused by a senior army interrogator known as “Major George”, including an incident when he was sodomised with a baton.

The case was dropped in early 2004 when Mr Dirani was released in a prisoner exchange.

Ms Kerstein said there was no proof that more prisons existed in Israel like Facility 1391, but some of the testimonies collected from former inmates suggested that they had been held at different secret locations.

She said the concern was that Israel might have been one of the countries that received “extraordinary rendition” flights, in which prisoners captured by the United States were smuggled to other countries for torture. “If a democracy allows one of these prisons, who is to say that there are not more?” she said.

The committee examined other suspicions of torture involving Israel. It expressed particular concern about Israel’s failure to investigate more than 600 complaints made by detainees against the Shin Bet since the panel’s last hearings, in 2001.

It also highlighted the pressure put on Gazans who needed to enter Israel for medical treatment to turn informer.

Ishai Menuchin, executive director of Israel’s Public Committee against Torture, said his group had sent several submissions to the committee showing that torture was systematically used against detainees.

“After the court decision in 1999, interrogators simply learnt to be more creative in their techniques,” he said.

He added that, since Israel’s redefinition of Gaza as an “enemy state”, some Palestinians seized there were being held as “illegal combatants” rather than “security detainees”. “In those circumstances, they might qualify for incarceration in secret prisons like Facility 1391.” **CT**

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

Can anyone stop AIPAC?

When will the Jewish community stop being silent about protests against Israel's actions in Gaza?, asks **Medea Benjamin**

While I was being tackled by security guards at Washington's Convention Center during the AIPAC conference for unfurling a banner that asked "What about Gaza?" my heart was aching. I wasn't bothered so much by the burly guards who were yanking my arms behind my back and dragging me – along with 5-foot-5 CODEPINK members – out of the hall. They were doing their job.

What made my heart ache was the hatred I felt from the AIPAC staff who tore up the banner and slammed their hands across my mouth as I tried to yell out: "What about Gaza? What about the children?"

"Shut the f--- up. Shut the f--- up." one staffer yelled, red-faced and sweating as he ran beside me. "This is not the place to be saying that shit. Get the f--- out of here."

What makes my heart ache is thinking about the traumatized children I met on my recent trip to Gaza, and how their suffering is denied by the 6,000 AIPAC conventioners who are living in a bubble – a bubble where Israel is the victim and all critics are anti-Semitic, terrorist lovers or, as in my case, self-hating Jews.

I found it fascinating that AIPAC's executive director Howard Kohr opened the conference admitting that there was now a huge, international campaign against the policies of Israel. He painted a picture

of 30,000 people marching in Spain, Italian trade unionists calling for a boycott of Israeli products, the UN Human Rights Council passing 26 resolutions condemning Israel, an Israeli Apartheid Week that is building a global boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign.

This global movement, he warned, emanates from the Middle East, echoes in the halls of the United Nations and the capitals of Europe, is voiced in meetings of international peace organizations, and is spreading throughout the United States – from the media to town hall meetings, from campuses to city squares. "No longer is this campaign confined to the ravings of the political far left or far right," he lamented, "but increasingly it is entering the American mainstream."

But Kohr failed to explain why there has been such an explosion in this movement, even among the American Jewish community. He didn't tell the attendees that the world was shocked and outraged by Israel's devastating 22-day attack on Gaza that left over 1,300 people dead – mostly women and children. He didn't mention the killing of civilians fleeing their homes, the use of white phosphorous, the bombing of homes, schools, mosques, hospitals, UN buildings, factories. He didn't talk about the continuing, cruel blockade of the Gaza Strip that is keeping desperately needed humanitarian

"Shut the f--- up. Shut the f--- up." one staffer yelled, red-faced and sweating as he ran beside me

SPEAKING OUT

When is it too late to tell AIPAC attendees that more violence and hatred is not the answer? When is it too late to open the hardened hearts of my people, once victims of a terrible holocaust, to realize that by occupying Palestine we have become they evil we deplore?

aid from reaching 1.5 million people and making rebuilding impossible.

There were no seminars at the conference by human rights groups like Amnesty International that are calling for an immediate and comprehensive suspension of arms to Israel. Instead, one after another, U.S. elected officials eager to curry favor with AIPAC pledged continued U.S. financial support for Israel.

Senator Kerry, despite that fact that he was one of only a handful of legislators who visited Gaza, didn't say one word about the massive destruction he witnessed and pledged that as Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he would do everything to ensure that the \$30 billion in military aid to Israel is "delivered in full."

"America will continue our military aid, and Israel will keep its military strength," he insisted. Instead of calling for talks with the democratically elected government of Hamas, Kerry said: "Hamas has already won one election – we cannot allow them to win another." He ended his speech shouting several times in Hebrew, "Am Yisrael Chai – Israel lives!"

Even Vice President Biden, who at least told AIPAC that Israel should freeze new settlement activity, didn't say a word about the ongoing humanitarian crisis caused by Israel's invasion and continued blockade of Gaza.

No U.S. officials, and there were hundreds at the conference, dared echo the call of the United Nations or the world community to lift the siege of Gaza.

Republican Congressman Eric Cantor was one of the most emotional speakers,

portraying Israel as the victim of an evil global movement determined to wipe out Israel and all Jews. Evoking the "shivering, naked victims who were herded into the gas chambers," he wondered when it would become too late to protect Israel. "When is it too late?", he repeated over and over.

Stopping Israel

I wonder the same thing. When is it too late, I wonder, to stop Israel from destroying itself? When is it too late to tell AIPAC attendees that more violence and hatred is not the answer? When is it too late to open the hardened hearts of my people, once victims of a terrible holocaust, to realize that by occupying Palestine we have become they evil we deplore? When is it too late to restore meaning to the Hebrew term "tikkun olam" by truly working to heal the world? When is it too late for the Jews of the world to weep for the children of Gaza, recognizing that they, too, are the children of God?

I couldn't ask my questions at AIPAC. My mouth was muzzled by the sweaty hands of hate-filled staffers demanding that I "shut the f--- up." But despite AIPAC's massive funds and influence, I feel certain that more and more members of the Jewish community will step forward and refuse to be silent. I just pray it is not too late. **CT**

Medea Benjamin (medea@globalexchange.org) is cofounder of Global Exchange (www.globalexchange.org) and CODEPINK: Women for Peace (www.codepinkalert.org). For information on upcoming delegations to Gaza, see www.codepinkalert.org/gaza

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A pin-striped Patriot Act

Dave Zirin on the baseball fan who was kicked out of Yankee Stadium for going to the men's room as the national anthem played

One fine day last August, Bradley Campeau-Laurion just wanted to leave his seat and use the bathroom at the old Yankee Stadium. The 30-year-old New York resident had no idea that nature's call would lead him down a road to perdition where he would be accused of challenging God, country, and the joys of compulsory patriotism at the ballpark.

Under the thirty-six-year watch of George Steinbrenner – and now his offspring – the New York Yankees have always wrapped their fans, like it or not, in red, white and blue bombast. This is the team that so loves God and country that it mandates the singing of two national anthems—Francis Scott Key's 1814 epic, "The Star-Spangled Banner" and Irving Berlin's 1918 anthem, "God Bless America."

For a while after 9/11, "God Bless America" was standard fare in major league ballparks. But while most ball clubs have let the practice slide, the super-patriotic Steinbrenners have ramped up the flag-waving, extending the seventh-inning stretch to include "God Bless America" along with the traditional "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." Sometimes "God Bless..." is performed live by Irish tenor Ronan Tynan, but most often the tune is delivered over stadium loudspeakers via a scratchy vintage recording by the operatic warbler Kate Smith, who

first popularized the song in 1938. But no matter who's singing, the Yankees have been known to cordon off the aisles and put off-duty police officers in place to ensure the multitudes stand at respectful attention. (Fans of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but a long-dead singer and the chains on your bleachers!)

Not only do the Yankees expect fans to stand during the singing of patriotic songs, but during the Bush era they virtually mandated fan support for the Iraq War, all the while extorting tax breaks and other public subsidies from city, state and federal governments to build their new \$1.5 billion cathedral of baseball. (Separation of sports and state anyone?) For the Steinbrenners and the high-rollers who occupy Yankee Stadium's \$2,500 top-shelf seats, this kind of power patriotism wedded to corporate welfare must be sweet as champagne.

But as the global economic meltdown has proven, there ultimately comes a time to put the brakes on corporate execs – to say nothing of mindless patriotism. And while some Yankees fans have grumbled and a few intrepid sports bloggers, like former Deadspin Editor Will Leitch, have raised concerns, it took one man's full bladder to hoist the Yankees organization with its own petard.

All Campeau-Laurion did was try to go to the men's room during the seventh-

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BATHROOM BLUES

Why does America feel compelled to bind sports to patriotic ritual? Why are publicly funded facilities like stadiums used to promote private religious or political beliefs

inning stretch. In swooped two New York Police Department officers working security detail, who reportedly roughed him up and threw him out of the ballpark. Now Campeau-Laurion has filed a civil suit against the the city, the cops and the team for violating his rights.

“New York’s finest have no business arresting someone for trying to go to the bathroom at a politically incorrect moment,” said Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, which is representing Campeau-Laurion in the lawsuit. According to the complaint, Campeau-Laurion drank two beers and took the seventh-inning stretch to mean he could actually go stretch.

“As he walked toward the tunnel leading to the concourse, a uniformed New York City police officer put up his hands and mumbled something to Mr. Campeau-Laurion, “ according to the complaint, blocking his way to the bathroom during the singing of “God Bless America.”

As Campeau-Laurion tried to move past the officer, the policeman grabbed his arm and said, “He’s out” to another officer, who twisted his left arm behind his back, hustling him down the ramp and out of the stadium.

The NYPD tells a different story. “The officers observed a male standing on his seat, cursing, using inappropriate language and acting in a disorderly manner while reeking of alcohol and decided to eject him rather than subject others to his offensive

behavior,” NYPD spokesman Paul Browne said in an e-mail reply to my query. This account strains credulity. If it were standard procedure for the NYPD to kick out every drunken fan from Yankee Stadium, the place would be emptier than a John Ashcroft concert at the Apollo Theatre.

Campeau-Laurion disputes the NYPD account. “Not a word of that is true,” he told Bloomberg News. “The whole incident didn’t occur at my seat. It occurred at my section when I went to use the restroom.”

“I don’t care about ‘God Bless America.’ I don’t believe that’s grounds constitutionally for being dragged out of a baseball game... I simply don’t have any religious beliefs... It devalues patriotism as a whole when you force people to participate in patriotic acts,” he continued. “It devalues the freedom we fought for in the first place.”

This ugly incident raises a series of inconvenient questions: why does America feel compelled to bind sports to patriotic ritual? Why are publicly funded facilities like stadiums used to promote private religious or political beliefs? And given the putrid start of the Yankees’s season, shouldn’t management be more concerned with what’s happening with the players than with the fans? All should stand with Campeau-Laurion until we get some answers. **CT**

Dave Zirin is the author of “A People’s History of Sports in the United States” (The New Press)

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Home of the barricaded, land of the 'fraid

Despite spending twice as much as the rest of the world combined on 'security,' Americans are still paranoid, writes **David Michael Green**, who thinks there are better ways to spend all that cash

There are few statistics as stunning as the following simple, single number: The United States spends two times more on its military than all the other countries of the world, combined.

Yes, that's right. All 200 or so of them. Combined.

According to GlobalSecurity.org, last year, the US dropped about \$625 billion in taxpayer dollars on its military, while all the rest of the world together spent \$500 billion. (The aggregate global figures come from 2004, but have been steady over the prior decade.) However, if you also add in nuclear weapons costs handled separately by the Energy Department, Veterans Affairs, interest on money borrowed to fund previous wars, and the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the total rises to a jaw-dropping one trillion dollars per year.

Think of how astonishing that is.

Imagine if you lived down the street from a guy who insisted that his house had to be two times bigger than all the other houses in the neighborhood, combined. You and your neighbors live in 2,000 square foot houses, but he has to have an 800,000 square foot house. That's one that would be the length of three football fields long, and three football fields wide.

Imagine you and all your fishing buddies tied up next to a guy who had to have a

boat that was twice as big as all of yours combined. You guys have 15 footers. His would be 6,000 feet long, or six Queen Marys, length-to-length.

Imagine that you knew someone who had to spend double on dinner what everyone else dining in a decent restaurant was spending. The average meal for the rest of you costs 25 dollars. This guy insists on spending \$10,000 on one meal, of the same food, prepared by the same chef.

This is an astonishing ratio in so many ways.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about it is that nobody particularly talks about it. It's one thing to say that military spending has now joined Social Security as the third rail of American politics – you touch it, you die. And, of course, now we are treated to the visage of the “liberal” – even “socialist” and “defeatist” “pal of terrorists” – guy in the White House actually increasing military spending, and doing so at a time when the federal budget is hemorrhaging red ink as if it were the Exxon Valdez, drunken captain at the helm and all. But it's actually even worse than that.

Not only can you not seriously discuss cutting military spending in America, you can't even know about this spending ratio relative to the rest of the world, or contemplate what it means. Do you know of any single politician who ever mentions this?

It's one thing to say that military spending has now joined Social Security as the third rail of American politics – you touch it, you die. And, of course, now we are treated to the visage of the “liberal” – even “socialist” and “defeatist” “pal of terrorists” – guy in the White House actually increasing military spending, and doing so at a time when the federal budget is hemorrhaging red ink as if it were the Exxon Valdez

COUNTING THE COST

Right now, we are spending vast sums of money to fight gaggles of angry young men armed with box-cutters, and scraggly mullahs hiding in remote mountainous caves. And they're winning

It's also astonishing because the Cold War is over, the once Nazi-controlled Germany has turned into one of the most pacifist countries in the world, Japan is all about making cars and TVs, and there isn't a serious enemy of the United States anywhere on either the geographical or temporal horizon.

Right now, we are spending vast sums of money to fight gaggles of angry young men armed with box-cutters, and scraggly mullahs hiding in remote mountainous caves. And they're winning.

It is conceivable that China might, maybe, someday, spend something like what the US does on its military. But for what? Right now China spends a tenth of what the US does on its military, and considerably less than that if you count the other items that bring the US total up to a trillion per year.

If it reached parity, what would that permit it that is now impossible, apart from perhaps taking back Taiwan and creating a twentieth century Latin America-style neighborhood it could dominate even more than it does already? Would it allow China to invade the United States, or bend it to Chinese will for fear of a military confrontation? Of course not.

Which is another reason this ratio is so astonishing. Say whatever you want about nuclear weapons from a moral perspective. They have nevertheless changed the dynamic of international politics radically. No state will ever again invade another one which possesses a nuclear arsenal and the means to project it in quantity.

The doctrine of mutually-assured destruction may indeed be mad from a psychological perspective, but it works – at

least apart from situations in which the attacking country's leadership is either so bonkers or so determined on an issue that national suicide isn't a deterrent.

Of course, non-state actors like al Qaeda are a problem, because they provide little target for retaliation, but would spending another \$100 billion on more destroyers or fighter jets solve that problem? Of course not.

This grossly disproportionate ratio of military spending to other countries is also astonishing, and astonishingly obscene, for what it costs this country in missed opportunities. We are by far the richest country in the world – no one is even close. And we have no real enemies. And, as noted, we spend double the entire world combined in order to defend against those non-enemies.

Such thoughtful priorities also entitle our lucky population to have a national healthcare system that is ranked 37th from the top, worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. Isn't that special? Morocco does better than we do. So do Colombia, Chile and Costa Rica. And Dominica.

Does anyone really even know where Dominica is? All those weapons systems don't just purchase for us a lack of security, they also buy a country where 50 million Americans lack health insurance of any kind, and countless others are grossly under-insured (including those who don't know it yet, but will find out fast if they ever get sick).

Infant mortality

In part because of this fine health care system, the United States also ranks 29th

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globally on infant mortality. And the longitudinal trend isn't pretty. We were 12th in the world in 1960, and 23rd in 1990. Now we are tied with Poland and Slovakia. The good news, though, is that we are still by far and away first worldwide on obesity, with 31 percent of the population qualifying for that distinction, over six percent higher than our nearest competitor!

The rest of the world can kick us around all day long, but nobody can ever take that distinction away from us. Oh, and we had almost twice as many plastic surgery procedures as any other country in the world. I guess these figures also partially explain why the richest country in the world, by far, is ranked 47th in the world in terms of life expectancy, below Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jordan and Guam. Cool. Go USA!

Dollars paying for a bloated military are not only not spent on healthcare, they also aren't spent on social development either. The United States had more teen pregnancies per capita than anyone in the world by far – about half-again as many as our nearest competitor.

We have the highest number of prisoners per capita, right up there (but still well ahead of) Russia and Belarus. The US has two million prisoners, about half a million more than China, despite having about one-fifth the Chinese population.

We also have more crimes committed than any other country in the world, about twice the number as the number two country on the list. Oh, and by far the highest divorce rate in the world. I'm pretty sure you won't see this stuff mentioned in the tourist literature.

Expenditures on the military also mean dollars not spent on teaching our kids (especially about comparative national statistics!). The richest country in the world is ranked 39th on education spending as a percent of GDP, below Tunisia, Bolivia, Jamaica and Malawi. As a result, the US shows up as 18th in mathematical literacy, and 15th in reading literacy. Woo-hoo!

Spending on rockets and guns does not

bode well for economic development, either. Despite being in hock for more national debt than any other country in the world – even before recent events – we rank only 16th in broadband access per capita. And, we are a dismal 92nd in the world in terms of the equitable distribution of family income within our society. Cameroon does better. So does Russia, Uzbekistan, Laos and Burkina Faso. Along with most of the rest of the world.

In short, in exchange for the privilege of dwarfing the entire rest of the solar system in military spending, in order to defend ourselves against an enemy we don't have, the United States has purchased a second rate healthcare system, a second rate educational system, and social and economic characteristics within spitting distance of Sub-Saharan Africa.

For all of these reasons, our devotion to military spending is really quite amazing, and really begs the question of what could explain so patently foolish a national policy. Undoubtedly, there are many explanations.

Paranoid nation

To begin with, this would hardly be the first essay ever to note the American propensity toward paranoia. A country twisted enough that it can spend six years fighting a brutal and costly war in Iraq on the basis of 9/11 attacks that Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with is certainly a country capable of outspending the entire rest of the planet on its military, two times over.

What does it say, moreover, about our near-complete failing at the practice of diplomacy, that we feel compelled to sit atop a military arsenal of such outrageous proportions, and to send bombs and military bases, rather than diplomats, as our calling card around the world?

Without question, furthermore, such an obscene military budget is grossly inflated because of sheer greed. It wasn't some long-haired, Birkenstocks-wearing, pipe-smoking, Berkeley professor of French literature,

We also have more crimes committed than any other country in the world, about twice the number as the number two country on the list. Oh, and by far the highest divorce rate in the world

COUNTING THE COST

You don't need to spend a trillion bucks per year in order to protect the United States from attack by another country. The existing stockpile of nuclear warheads more or less guarantees that that will never happen

after all, who warned us of the dangers of the metastasizing military industrial complex. It was Dwight Eisenhower – conservative Republican president, lifetime military man, commander of NATO and hero of World War II.

Eisenhower was right, of course, although it would have been nice had he acted on his wisdom during his two terms, rather than sounding hypocritical warnings about this danger only as he walked out the door. In any case, as in so many other domains – but with an intensity unmatched elsewhere – when it comes to providing military hardware, corporate America has come to see the federal government as little more than a handy centralized collection system, to which it then avails itself. But, of course, everybody is in the act now, with members of Congress from every district in the land fighting to protect their defense dollars, and selfish Americans screaming about deficit spending on Sundays, and then going to work at the local defense boondoggle plant on Mondays.

And there is another explanation, as well. You don't need to spend a trillion bucks per year in order to protect the United States from attack by another country. The existing stockpile of nuclear warheads more or less guarantees that that will never happen.

You also don't need to spend that money in order to fight some sort of conventional war on land or sea, as occurred during World War II. No country comes remotely near the United States in terms of battlefield and naval hardware, and even those who possess significant quantities of such

materiel almost entirely lack the capability of projecting such military power beyond their borders.

Finally, you don't need all that money to fight ragtag bands of terrorists either. On that front, smarts go a lot farther than dollars (not that we would know, of course).

The only thing that such a seemingly bloated military is good for is power projection. If you want to intimidate developing countries into selling you their natural resources at ridiculously low prices, a giant military is the only way to do it. If you want to force weaker countries into joining political alliances they are otherwise not remotely interested in, some good old-fashioned gunboat diplomacy is the way to make that happen.

Or, at least, was. The United States is no longer very much able to shove around other countries like it used to, and yet, even the so-called liberal Obama administration is now seeking to spend even more on the American military than the monsters of the last regime did.

It was one thing – albeit still a stupid bargain – to forgo health, education, and the good life for an empire.

But what Americans should be asking themselves right now is, whether giving away happiness and prosperity in exchange for a non-empire is finally a bridge too far, even for a country so justly famous for its chronic political immaturity. **CT**

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The march of folly, continued

Why, wonders, **Norman Solomon**, does the United States want to repeat the errors it made in waging the war against Vietnam?

To understand what's up with President Obama as he escalates the war in Afghanistan, there may be no better place to look than a book published 25 years ago. "The March of Folly," by historian Barbara Tuchman, is a chilling assessment of how very smart people in power can do very stupid things – how a war effort, ordered from on high, goes from tic to repetition compulsion to obsession – and how we, with undue deference and lethal restraint, pay our respects to the dominant moral torpor to such an extent that mass slaughter becomes normalized in our names.

What happens among policymakers is a "process of self-hypnosis," Tuchman writes. After recounting examples from the Trojan War to the British moves against rebellious American colonists, she devotes the closing chapters of "The March of Folly" to the long arc of the U.S. war in Vietnam. The parallels with the current escalation of the war in Afghanistan are more than uncanny; they speak of deeply rooted patterns.

With clarity facing backward, President Obama can make many wise comments about international affairs while proceeding with actual policies largely unfettered by the wisdom. From the outset of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Tuchman observes, vital lessons were "stated" but "not learned."

As with John Kennedy – another young president whose administration "came into office equipped with brain power" and "more pragmatism than ideology" – Obama's policy adrenaline is now surging to engorge something called counterinsurgency.

"Although the doctrine emphasized political measures, counterinsurgency in practice was military," Tuchman writes, an observation that applies all too well to the emerging Obama enthusiasm for counterinsurgency. And "counterinsurgency in operation did not live up to the high-minded zeal of the theory. All the talk was of 'winning the allegiance' of the people to their government, but a government for which allegiance had to be won by outsiders was not a good gamble."

Military spending

Now, as during the escalation of the Vietnam War – despite all the front-paged articles and news bulletins emphasizing line items for civic aid from Washington – the spending for U.S. warfare in Afghanistan is overwhelmingly military.

Perhaps overeager to assume that the context of bombing campaigns ordered by President Obama is humanitarian purpose, many Americans of antiwar inclinations have yet to come to terms with central realities of the war effort – for instance, the

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WAR CRAZY

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destructive trajectory of the budgeting for the war, which spends 10 dollars toward destruction for every dollar spent on humanitarian programs.

From the top of the current administration – as the U.S. troop deployments in Afghanistan continue to rise along with the American air-strike rates – there is consistent messaging about the need to “stay the course,” even while bypassing such tainted phrases.

The dynamic that Tuchman describes as operative in the first years of the 1960s, while the Vietnam War gained momentum, is no less relevant today: “For the ruler it is easier, once he has entered a policy box, to stay inside. For the lesser official it is better, for the sake of his position, not to make waves, not to press evidence that the chief will find painful to accept. Psychologists call the process of screening out discordant information ‘cognitive dissonance,’ an academic disguise for ‘Don’t confuse me with the facts.’” Along the way, cognitive dissonance “causes alternatives to be ‘deselected since even thinking about them entails conflicts.’”

Such a psycho-political process inside the White House has no use for the report from the Congressional Progressive Caucus that came out of the caucus’s six-part forum on Capitol Hill this spring, “Afghanistan: A Road Map for Progress.”

Souped up and devouring fuel, the war train cannot slow down for the Progressive Caucus report’s recommendation that “an 80-20 ratio (political-military) should be the formula for funding our efforts in the region with oversight by a special inspector general to ensure compliance.” Or that “U.S. troop presence in the region must be oriented toward training and support roles for Afghan security forces and not for U.S.-led counterinsurgency efforts.”

Or that “the immediate cessation of drone attacks should be required.” Or that “all aid dollars should be required to have a majority percentage of dollars tied or guaranteed to local Afghan institutions

and organizations, to ensure countrywide job mapping, assessment and workforce development process to directly benefit the Afghan people.”

The policymakers who are gunning the war train can’t be bothered with such ideas. After all, if the solution is – rhetoric aside – assumed to be largely military, why dilute the potency of the solution? Especially when, as we’re repeatedly made to understand, there’s so much at stake.

During the mid-1960s, while American troops poured into Vietnam, “enormity of the stakes was the new self-hypnosis,” Tuchman comments.

She quotes the wisdom – conventional and self-evident – of New York Times military correspondent Hanson Baldwin, who wrote in 1966 that U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam would bring “political, psychological and military catastrophe,” signaling that the United States “had decided to abdicate as a great power.”

Supremely civilized

Many Americans are eager to think of our nation as supremely civilized even in warfare; the conceits of noble self-restraint have been trumpeted by many a president even while the Pentagon’s carnage apparatus kept spinning into overdrive. “Limited war is not nicer or kinder or more just than all-out war, as its proponents would have it,” Tuchman notes. “It kills with the same finality.”

For a president, with so much military power under his command, frustrations call for more of the same. The seductive allure of counterinsurgency is apt to heighten the appeal of “warnography” for the commander in chief; whatever the earlier resolve to maintain restraint, the ineffectiveness of more violence invites still more – in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

“The American mentality counted on superior might,” Tuchman commented, “but a tank cannot disperse wasps.” In Vietnam, the independent journalist Michael Herr

wrote, the U.S. military's violent capacities were awesome: "Our machine was devastating. And versatile. It could do everything but stop."

And that is true, routinely, of a war-making administration.

The grim and ultimately unhinged process that Barbara Tuchman charts is in evidence with President Obama and his approach to the Afghan war: "In its first stage, mental standstill fixes the principles and boundaries governing a political problem. In the second stage, when dissonances and failing function begin to appear, the initial principles rigidify. This is the period when, if wisdom were operative, re-examination and re-thinking and a change of course are possible, but they are rare as rubies in a backyard. Rigidifying leads to increase of investment and the need to protect egos; policy founded upon error multiplies, never retreats. The greater the investment and the more involved in it the sponsor's ego, the more unacceptable is disengagement."

Dangerous national hubris

A week ago, one out of seven members of the House of Representatives voted against a supplemental appropriations bill providing \$81.3 billion to the Pentagon, mainly for warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan. An opponent of the funding, Congressman John Conyers, pointed out that "the president has not challenged our most pervasive and dangerous national hubris: the foolhardy belief that we can erect the foundations of civil society through the judicious use of our many high-tech instruments of violence."

Conyers continued: "That belief, promoted by the previous administration in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, assumes that the United States possesses the capacity and also has a duty to

determine the fate of nations in the greater Middle East.

"I oppose this supplemental war funding bill because I believe that we are not bound by such a duty. In fact, I believe the policies of empire are counterproductive in our struggle against the forces of radical religious extremism. For example, U.S. strikes from unmanned Predator Drones and other aircraft produced 64 percent of all civilian deaths caused by the U.S., NATO and Afghan forces in 2008. Just this week, U.S. air strikes took another 100 lives, according to Afghan officials on the ground. If it is our goal to strengthen the average Afghan or Pakistani citizen and to weaken the radicals that threaten stability in the region, bombing villages is clearly counterproductive. For every family broken apart by an incident of 'collateral damage,' seeds of hate and enmity are sown against our nation. . . .

"Should we support this measure, we risk dooming our nation to a fate similar to Sisyphus and his boulder: to being trapped in a stalemate of unending frustration and misery, as our mistakes inevitably lead us to the same failed outcomes. Let us step back; let us remember the mistakes and heartbreak of our recent misadventures in the streets of Fallujah and Baghdad. If we honor the ties that bind us to one another, we cannot in good faith send our fellow citizens on this errand of folly. It is still not too late to turn away from this path." **CT**

Norman Solomon is national co-chair of the Healthcare NOT Warfare campaign, organized by Progressive Democrats of America. He is the author of many books including "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death." For more information, go to: www.normansolomon.com

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**FOOD FOR
THOUGHT**

An effigy of a bankers hangs from a traffic light outside the Bank of England during the G20 Meltdown demonstration in the City of London on the eve of the recent London G20 Summit.

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