

**TANKS ON MAIN STREET | JOHN W. WHITEHEAD
CHRIS HEDGES | WHAT HAPPENED TO CANADA?
SINKING THE PETRODOLLAR | PEPE ESCOBAR**

FEBRUARY 2012

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING

ISSUE 63

**Jack Laursen on the London Olympics, the activists,
Dow Chemicals, and Bhopal's 27 years of suffering**

OLYMPIC SHAME



PLUS: WHERE THE HAITI EARTHQUAKE MONEY DID, AND DID NOT, GO



Cover: young Bhopali girl responds well to treatment at the Bhopal Medical Appeal funded Chingari Clinic in India.
Photo: Jack Laursen

ColdType

FEBRUARY 2012 / ISSUE 63

EDITOR'S NOTE

SEVERAL readers have asked when we were going to start publishing fiction in ColdType. Never, has been our response, until this month when we changed our mind after reading the excellent short story, **Meal** (Pages 42 to 45), by PuzzleMonkey, a South African writer living in the Middle East. This is a prime example of contemporary African fiction, telling a wonderful story of day-to-day existence in a world of poverty and international corruption.

We're also pleased to run novelist Philip Kraske's satirical essay, **Another Day in Socialist Europe** (Pages 61-62), which takes a different look at the same theme, taking a swipe at the knee-jerks in North America who believe that looking after every member of society is a bad, bad thing.

Read both and let us know if we should be carrying more literary content in future.

Tony Sutton, Editor
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|---|---|
| 3. TANKS ON MAIN STREET | <i>John W. Whitehead</i> |
| 6. THE REPRESSION STRENGTHENED US | <i>Chellis Glendinning</i> |
| 8. LET THEM EAT ROLEXES | <i>Bill Berkowitz</i> |
| 11. BIG LIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST | <i>William Blum</i> |
| 14. ON THE ROAD TO SELF-DESTRUCTION | <i>David Michael Green</i> |
| 20. THE WORLD WAR ON DEMOCRACY | <i>John Pilger</i> |
| 24. COVER STORY: LONDON'S OLYMPIC SHAME | <i>Jack Laursen</i> |
| 30. GUESS WHO WON THE IRAQ WAR | <i>Sherwood Ross</i> |
| 33. HOW HAMMAS STOLE ISRAEL'S WAR | <i>Uri Avnery</i> |
| 36. HAITI: WHERE THE MONEY DID, AND DID NOT, GO | <i>Bill Quigley & Amber Ramanauskas</i> |
| 40. HAITI: RAPED SINCE 2004 AND STILL BLEEDING | <i>Glenn Ford</i> |
| 42. MEAL | <i>PuzzleMonkey</i> |
| 45. HURWITT'S EYE | <i>Mark Hurwitt</i> |
| 46. WELCOME TO THE WORLD'S FIRST BUNKER STATE | <i>Jonathan Cook</i> |
| 48. THE SACRIFICIAL CASTLE | <i>George Monbiot</i> |
| 50. COFFINS FOR NATO, CONTRACTS FOR CHINA | <i>Barry Lando</i> |
| 52. SINKING THE PETRODOLLAR | <i>Pepe Escobar</i> |
| 59. WHO'S KILLING IRAN'S SCIENTISTS? | <i>Alan Maas</i> |
| 61. ANOTHER DAY IN SOCIALIST EUROPE | <i>Philip Kraske</i> |
| 63. KILLING IRAQIS MAKES US SAFER, AND OTHER LIES | <i>David Swanson</i> |
| 67. THE INDUSTRY THAT COULDN'T LEARN | <i>Richard C. Bell & Rory O'Connor</i> |
| 71. WHATEVER HAPPENED TO CANADA? | <i>Chris hedges</i> |
| 73. MAKING A FARCE OF AUSTERITY | <i>Michael Meacher</i> |

Tanks on Main Street

John W. Whitehead looks at the disturbing trend towards militarising local police forces in the United States

“If we’re training cops as soldiers, giving them equipment like soldiers, dressing them up as soldiers, when are they going to pick up the mentality of soldiers? If you look at the police department, their creed is to protect and to serve. A soldier’s mission is to engage his enemy in close combat and kill him. Do we want police officers to have that mentality? Of course not.” – Arthur Rizer, former civilian police officer and member of the military

Take a close look at your local police officers, the ones who patrol your neighborhoods and ensure the safety of your roadways. Chances are they look less and less like the benevolent keepers of the peace who patrolled Andy Griffith’s Mayberry and more like inflexible extensions of the military. As journalist Benjamin Carlson points out, “In today’s Mayberry, Andy Griffith and Barney Fife could be using grenade launchers and a tank to keep the peace.” This is largely owing to the increasing arsenal of weapons available to police units, the changing image of the police within communities, and the growing idea that the police can and should use any means necessary to maintain order.

Moreover, as an investigative report by Andrew Becker and G.W. Schulz reveals, in communities large and small across America, local law enforcement are arming themselves to the teeth with weapons previously

only seen on the battlefield. “Many police, including beat cops, now routinely carry assault rifles. Combined with body armor and other apparel, many officers look more and more like combat troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

To our detriment, local police – clad in jackboots, helmets and shields and wielding batons, pepper-spray, stun guns, and assault rifles – have increasingly come to resemble occupying forces in our communities. “Today,” notes Paul Craig Roberts, former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and associate editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, “17,000 local police forces are equipped with such military equipment as Blackhawk helicopters, machine guns, grenade launchers, battering rams, explosives, chemical sprays, body armor, night vision, rappelling gear and armored vehicles. Some have tanks.”

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Private security force?

Yet, appearances to the contrary, the American police force is not supposed to be a branch of the military, nor is it a private security force for the reigning political faction. It is an aggregation of the countless local civilian units that exist for a sole purpose: to serve and protect the citizens of each and every American community.

It is particularly telling that whereas in the past, law enforcement strove to provide

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a sense of security, trust, and comfort, the impression conveyed today is one of power, dominance and inflexible authority. However, this transformation of local police into military units did not happen overnight. It cannot be traced back to a single individual or event. Rather, the evolution has been so subtle that most American citizens were hardly even aware of it taking place. Yet little by little, police authority expanded, one weapon after another was added to the police arsenal, and one exception after another was made to the standards that have historically restrained police authority.

What began with the militarization of the police in the 1980s during the government's war on drugs has snowballed into a full-fledged integration of military weaponry, technology and tactics into police protocol. For example, in 1981, Congress passed the Military Cooperation with Law Enforcement Act, which granted the military the power to help local police forces wage the "war on drugs" by sharing equipment, training, and intelligence. In 1997, Congress approved the 1033 Program, which allowed the Secretary of Defense to transfer surplus military supplies and weapons to local law enforcement agencies without charge – the only thing that local police departments have to pay for is shipping and future maintenance. And police departments aren't just getting boots and medkits – they're receiving assault rifles, mini-tanks, grenade launchers, and remote controlled robots.

Since 1997, more than 17,000 agencies have taken advantage of the 1033 Program, acquiring \$2.6 billion dollars worth of weapons and equipment, and demand is only getting higher. In fact, a record-setting \$500 million worth of equipment was distributed in 2011, twice the amount given away in 2010, and orders for fiscal year 2012 are already up 400 percent.

As Becker and Schulz report, more than \$34 billion in federal government grants made available to local police agencies in the wake of 9/11 "ha[ve] fueled a rapid, broad

transformation of police operations... across the country. More than ever before, police rely on quasi-military tactics and equipment." For example:

If terrorists ever target Fargo, N.D., the local police will be ready. In recent years, they have bought bomb-detection robots, digital communications equipment and Kevlar helmets, like those used by soldiers in foreign wars. For local siege situations requiring real firepower, police there can use a new \$256,643 armored truck, complete with a rotating turret.

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Not keeping track

Moreover, no one can say exactly what has been purchased in total across the country or how it's being used, because the federal government doesn't keep close track. State and local governments don't maintain uniform records. But a review of records from 41 states obtained through open-government requests, and interviews with more than two-dozen current and former police officials and terrorism experts, shows police departments around the US have transformed into small army-like forces.

For example: In Montgomery County, Texas, the sheriff's department owns a \$300,000 pilotless surveillance drone. In Garland County, Ark., known for its pleasant hot springs, a local law enforcement agency acquired four handheld bulletproof protective shields costing \$600 each. In East Baton Rouge, La., it was \$400 ballistic helmets. In Augusta, Maine, with fewer than 20,000 people and where an officer hasn't died from gunfire in the line of duty in more than 125 years, police bought eight \$1,500 tactical vests. And for police in Des Moines, Iowa, it was two \$180,000 bomb robots.

The purchases get even more extravagant the deeper you go. For instance, police in Cobb County, Ga., have an amphibious tank and Richland County, S.C., police have a machine-gun-equipped armored personnel carrier called "The Peacemaker" the likes

of which had previously only been seen in war zones. The 50-person police department in Oxford, Ala., has acquired \$2-3 million worth of equipment in recent years, including M-16s and remote-controlled robots. One popular piece of equipment, the BearCat, a “16,000-pound bulletproof truck equipped with battering rams, gun ports, tear-gas dispensers and radiation detectors” which costs \$237,000, has been sold to over 500 local agencies. Police in Hanceville, Ala., (population 3,000) have acquired \$250,000 worth of equipment. While these so-called “free” surplus military weapons may seem like a windfall for cash-strapped communities, the maintenance costs for such extraneous equipment can quickly skyrocket. For example, police in Tupelo, Miss., spent about \$274,000 over five years servicing a helicopter that flew an average of ten missions per year.

Bring on the drones

In addition to the military equipment acquired by police departments via the 1033 Program, police agencies are also beginning to use drones – pilotless, remote-controlled aircraft that have been used extensively in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan – domestically.

The Federal Aviation Administration has already issued 266 testing permits to local police agencies seeking to employ drone technology. AeroVironment Inc., a manufacturer of drones, intends to sell 18,000 5-pound drones controlled via tablet computer to police departments throughout the country. They are also touting the “Switchblade,” a small, one-use drone, that has the ability to track a person from the air and then fly down to their level and explode. Moreover, some police officials are already

discussing outfitting these spy drones with “nonlethal” weapons. Most recently, police in North Dakota arrested a family of farmers using information acquired by a spy drone.

With violent crime nationwide at a 40-year low, most of this equipment is not only largely unnecessary but is completely incongruous with the security needs of smaller communities. Yet whether or not the use of such sophisticated and overblown militarized equipment is justified, many local police units still feel compelled to put it to use. Hence, the widespread misuse of military equipment by law enforcement is a growing and well-documented problem that has resulted in the deaths of innocent people, nonviolent offenders and police officers. A perfect example of this is the tendency on the part of many communities to employ heavily armed SWAT teams to carry out routine police procedures such as routine search warrants. Consequently, SWAT team raids, which once numbered a few thousand per year in the 1980s, have grown to over 50,000 per year in the 2000s.

As Paul Craig Roberts makes clear in his article, “The Empire Turns Its Guns on the Citizenry,” the government – local law enforcement now being extensions of the federal government – has trained its sights on the American people. We have become the enemy. And if it is true, as the military asserts, that the key to defeating an enemy is having the technological advantage, then “we the people” are at a severe disadvantage. **CT**

John W. Whitehead is a constitutional attorney and founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His new book “The Freedom Wars” (TRI Press) is available online at www.amazon.com. He can be contacted at johnw@rutherford.org

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READ THE BEST OF TOM ENGELHARDT
<http://coldtype.net/tom.html>

The repression strengthened us

Chellis Glendinning writes from Bolivia

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They chased down fleeing *indígenas*, sometimes five officers in full riot gear against a single boy in cotton shorts
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When you go to the bank in Bolivia, you're met by the *Machine Gun*: cadres of soldiers in olive green and combat boots. Make one wrong move – wear sunglasses, talk too loud, the cell phone in your pocket chimes and ... well, let's just say, it's not what you want to do. And yet, oddly, paying the light bill alongside assault rifles has become “normal.”

Such a transit of mind is a testimony to the human ability to adapt, yes? – and I am reminded of a tale that dear friend anthropologist Francis Huxley tells.

It was the 1950s, and he was called to transport a native of the Brazilian Xingu tribe to Sao Paulo for emergency medical treatment. After success with that, they strolled through the streets of the city – for the native man, the first time ever in such a scene. Upon passing a bank heavily guarded by men in military uniform, bearing epaulets, badges, and heavy black boots and carting machine guns – the man turned and asked what this strange display was all about. Grappling for words, Francis reported that this was where the jefe kept his riches. The native man immediately quipped, “Well! He must not be a very good jefe! (chief)”

And so it is here, just over the border from Brazil and sixty years later.

Jefe Evo Morales has – to quote one of Ni-

cole Hollander's “Sylvia” cartoons – “made (himself unpopular.” To tell the truth, he already had accomplished that feat, but the Moxeño-Chimare-Yurakerés march to the capital hammered the final nail in.

On 15 August, some 700 indígenas set out to protest a Brazil-funded intra-continental superhighway the Bolivian state was erecting through their Constitutionally-protected, sovereign eco-reserve, the Territorio Indígena and Parque Nacional Isibro Sécure (TIPNIS) – where the last of the planet's gatherer-hunter cultures thrive, while flora and fauna in danger of extinction make their fragile way. The purpose of the highway: to carry petroleum from Brazil across Bolivia to Chile's ports to be shipped to your cars in the US

The ragtag band walked day and night in flip-flops, and the hearts of Bolivians went out to them in the form of a nationwide drive to send shoes, clothes, food, and medicines.

First the government blocked the road from passage, including the arrival of food and water. Then, on Sunday 25 September, the police attacked the encampment. Bursting in with tear gas, they chased down fleeing *indígenas*, sometimes five officers in full riot gear against a single boy in cotton shorts; with their night sticks they beat them on their backs and chests and heads; they bound their arms, legs, and mouths

with silver duct tape making it almost impossible to breathe; they dragged some 300 dirigente-leaders, women, children, and *ancianos* to waiting trucks and hauled them away to unknown locations. It was claimed that one child died in the violence.

By Monday morning a pall of shock had settled over Bolivia; everyone was glued to a television somewhere – and then the popular response burst forth. All over, including at the Bolivian embassy in New York where Morales was presenting at the United Nations, people took to the streets. And the venting allowed for long pent-up emotions to flow into the public vocabulary.

“*Ya no tiene máscara indígena*”/”Morales can no longer wear his mask of so-called indigenous support,” proclaimed Native social analyst Fernando Untoja. Long-time activist Rafael Quispe trotted out the as-yet unspoken word: “*dictadura*”/”dictatorship.” And ex-government official Alex Contreras termed the actions “*métodos del fascismo*”/”methods of fascism.”

Astoundingly, one marcher was quoted in a 20 October newspaper report, “*La represión nos fortaleció*”/”The repression strengthened us.”

On 19 October what had started, two months before, as a march of 700 had now swelled to 3000. After two months of trekking/camping, trekking/camping; after the sweltering heat of the tropics and the driving sleet of the mountains; after wearing inadequate shoes, too thin jackets, foot sores, injuries, dehydration, diarrhea, and exhaustion; after enduring disregard, insults, and arguments for disqualification spouting from the mouths of government officials: after the official withholding of water and food; and then having endured violent repression – the TIPNIS marchers rounded the last crag before the descent into the capital city.

What lay below, they say, was unexpected.

The streets of La Paz were teeming with supporters from every hamlet and municipi-

ality in Bolivia and beyond! Red flags were blowing in the wind. Green flags. Yellow flags. Wiphala flags. Workers. Taxi drivers. Housekeepers. University students. Mothers with babies. Union leaders. Theater groups. Supporting indigenous groups boasting traditional dress, flutes, and drums. Former government officials who had left the MAS party. The press. International support teams. Trumpets blared. Flutes sang. Mariachi bands blasted accordion music. Placards proclaimed: “TIPNIS=VIDA, EVO=MUERTE,” “EL TIPNIS: NO SE TOCA, CARAJO!” and “¡TIPNIS SOMOS TODOS!” People rushed to meet the marchers, hugged them, kissed them on the lips. Men and women were sobbing in the streets! Whole schools had been liberated to play a role in history, and uniformed children were waving flags, holding up their drawings of tropical flowers, and cheering. Along the boulevards the welcomers flanked the marchers like a thick envelope of protection from potential police action; in some parts the shield extended five times thicker than the march itself.

It was the largest gathering of humanity in the history of Bolivia.

After all his grandstanding about how the state would never, ever, give in – not! the president ventured into the plaza with his phony smile – this after months of bad-mouthing the marchers as dupes of the imperialist state to the north, denying them a meeting, sending para-protestors out to harm them, cutting off food and water, and finally unleashing the military.

Against the very real possibility of his government going under, he gave in. No highway through TIPNIS. As we say in baseball, though, “It’s not over ‘till it’s over.” Now the government is finding ways to backpedal.

But this was a major triumphant event that went unreported in the USA – and I wanted you, for this moment, to bask in the heroism that our human spirit is capable of mustering.

CT

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Chellis Glendinning is the author of five books, including “*When Technology Wounds*”, “*Off the Map: An Expedition Deep into Empire*” and “*The Global Economy and Chiva: A Village Takes on the Global Heroin Trade*”. She lives in Bolivia and may be contacted via www.chellisglendinning.org.

Let them eat Rolexes

Bill Berkowitz reports on a new organisation that projects billionaires as victims

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The JCA is a Dallas, Texas, based nonprofit that aims to counter talk about Wall Street's predilection for ripping off almost everyone. It will blanket the airwaves with messages about how wonderful the wealthy are
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Bernard Marcus is sick and tired of being vilified, and he's not going to take it anymore. Marcus, who is 82, is not a stressed out senior worried about cutbacks in Medicaid and/or Social Security; he's not agonizing over whether to use his resources for food or medicine; his home is not about to be foreclosed on.

Bernard Marcus is a billionaire and the co-founder of Home Depot, and he is a founding member of a new public relations enterprise called the Job Creators Alliance (JCA). The JCA is a Dallas, Texas-based nonprofit that aims to counter Occupy Wall Street-inspired talk about economic inequality, fair taxation, greed and Wall Street's predilection for ripping off almost everyone, by blanketing the nation's airwaves with messages about how wonderful the wealthy are.

Doing his best twenty-first century interpretation of Marie Antoinette, Marcus recently commented about being targeted by the 99%. "Who gives a crap about some imbecile?" he said. "Are you kidding me?" If successful businesspeople don't go public to share their stories and talk about their troubles, "they deserve what they're going to get," Marcus added.

The JCA wants - and more likely expects - Americans to understand that if there is to be any kind of robust economic recovery, JCA members, and folks like them, will be leading the way.

At its website, the outfit explains that it is "a nonprofit, nonpartisan 501(c)3 organization," whose "goal is to defend and preserve the system of free enterprise in the United States for future generations so entrepreneurship can flourish, resulting in job creation."

Its core membership is made up of a "group of retired CEOs and entrepreneurs who are the spokespeople for a marketing campaign to defend and preserve free enterprise. JCA also accepts members who wish to support its mission and goal financially through a tax-deductible donation, joining hundreds of other members who receive our e-newsletter and are kept informed on the job creators issues of the day and on the progress of our marketing campaign."

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Easy access

The group has a speakers bureau, a media booking operation, easy access to such major media sites as the *Wall Street Journal* and Fox News, and, get this ... it is asking for donations from the public to carry out its mission.

Those involved in JCA's project include a number of long-time right-wing partisans: Marcus; John Allison, a director of BB&T Corp. (BBT), the ninth-largest US bank, and a professor at Wake Forest University's business school; Brad Anderson, former CEO of Best Buy; Jim Anthony, CEO and founder of The Cliffs Company, a real estate develop-

ment enterprise; Fred Eshelman, a founder of several pharmaceutical companies, including Pharmaceutical Product Development Inc., and the major funder of the highly partisan conservative organization Rightchange.com; William “Lee” Hanley, chairman of Lexington Management Group, Inc., and a member of the Board of directors of Eagle Publishing, which considers itself “America’s leading source of books, periodicals, and websites with a conservative, free enterprise focus”; Michael Holthouse, founder and president of Paranet, Inc., a computer network services company; Javier Loya, chairman and chief executive of OTC Global Holdings; John Mackey, the anti-health care reform and anti-union co-founder and co-CEO of Whole Foods Market; David Park, managing partner, Austin Capital, LLC; Susan Story, president & CEO, Southern Co. Services; Michael Whalen: CEO, Heart of America Group, “which designs, builds and operates hotels, restaurants and commercial real estate”; Gary Rabine, CEO and founder of the Rabine Group, “a group of small companies serving facilities managers across America, and delivering maintenance and construction services of parking lots and roofs”; Steve Zelnak, chairman of the board of directors and former CEO of Martin Marietta Materials, Inc.; and Fran Tarkenton, former National Football League quarterback and chairman of Tarkenton Financial.

Perhaps JCA’s most active partisan political member is Art Pope, a conservative multimillionaire who is the CEO and chairman of Variety Wholesalers Inc. He has been a major funder of conservative candidates and causes in his home state of North Carolina, and across the country.

“Instead of an attack on the 1 percent, let’s call it an attack on the very productive,” John Allison complained. This attack is destructive . . . It still feels lonely, but the chorus is definitely increased.”

One amazing thing about these folks is that they actually believe they should be treated as American heroes.

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Worse than China or Iran

According to Max Adelson of Bloomberg.com, “The top 1 percent of taxpayers in the US made at least \$343,927 in 2009, the last year data is available, according to the Internal Revenue Service. While average household income increased 62 percent from 1979 through 2007, the top 1 percent’s more than tripled, an October Congressional Budget Office report showed. As a result, the US had greater income inequality in 2007 than China or Iran, according to the Central Intelligence Agency’s World Factbook.”

Adelson also collected a series of quotes from some 1 percenters:

* “Acting like everyone who’s been successful is bad and because you’re rich you’re bad, I don’t understand it” -JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon. (2010 compensation: \$23 million).”

* “If successful businesspeople don’t go public to share their stories and talk about their troubles, they deserve what they’re going to get. Who gives a crap about some imbecile? Are you kidding me?” – Home Depot Inc. (HD) co-founder Bernard Marcus (billionaire)”

* “If I hear a politician use the term ‘paying your fair share’ one more time, I’m going to vomit.” – Tom Golisano, founder of Paychex (billionaire)”

* “I am a fat cat, I’m not ashamed. If you mean by fat cat that I’ve succeeded, yeah, then I’m a fat cat. I stand guilty of being a fat cat.” – Ken Langone, Home Depot co-founder (billionaire)”

* “My taxes are more than a medieval lord would have taken from a serf” – Peter Schiff, CEO Pacific Capital (net worth \$64.7 million)”

* “Capitalists are not the scourge that they are too often made out to be . . . wealthy aren’t a monolithic, selfish and unfeeling lot . . . [they] fill store shelves at Christmas, provide health care to millions.” – Leon Cooperman, hedge-fund manager of Omega (Cooperman can “barely get

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One amazing thing about these folks is that they actually believe they should be treated as American heroes

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All their prattling about being unfairly targeted by the 99% is downright embarrassing
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through the dining room of St. Andrews Country Club in Boca Raton Advisors without being thanked” by fellow 1%-ers).”

Amongst the recent reports touted by the JCA are “Why Mandated Health Insurance Is Unfair” by John Goodman, president and CEO of the National Center for Policy Analysis, a conservative think tank; and “Capitalism and the Right to Rise” by Jeb Bush, the former governor of Florida.

Two things should be said about the folks at the Job Creators Alliance and billionaires:

- 1) most JCA members happen to be supporters of a number of charities and civic projects; and
 - 2) Not all high profile businessmen subscribe to the JCA’s philosophy.
- “Rich businesspeople like me don’t create

jobs,” Nick Hanauer, co-founder of aQuantive Inc., an online advertising company he sold to Microsoft Corp. for about \$6 billion, wrote in a Dec. 1 Bloomberg View article. “Let’s tax the rich like we once did and use that money to spur growth.”

Instead of pitching a tent in the public square JCA members are pitching a well-financed hissy fit in public.

Bernard Marcus and his JCA cohorts want for nothing. All their bills get paid (except maybe their fair share of taxes). All their family members are well taken care of. All their prattling about being unfairly targeted by the 99% is downright embarrassing. **CT**

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Bill Berkowitz is a freelance writer covering right-wing groups and movements

A great catastrophe, followed by years of illness, poverty and injustice can overwhelm and crush the human spirit, or can enable ordinary people to discover that they are extraordinary.



For almost 30 years, some of the poorest people on earth, sick, on the edge of hunger, with no allies or political influence, have been fighting for their lives against a multinational corporation that has it all – wealth, power, influence, lawyers, lobbyists and PR people, the ear of presidents and prime ministers - it can buy its way out of and into anything it likes.

The ‘nothing people’ have nothing. Their efforts to obtain medical care and justice in the courts are opposed and obstructed in every possible way by the corporation that gassed their families then poisoned their drinking water. Yet they don’t give up.

From this poorest of communities has come a flowering of art, political wit, law and medicine. They have opened two free award-winning clinics, out of horror bringing healing to 40,000 people, pioneering work that will help others all over the world.

Their tireless, peaceful struggle for justice is a legend and this story will not end until we enter and become part of it.

JOIN THE BHOPALIS

<http://bbhopal.org/donate/>

READ MORE ABOUT BHOPAL AND THE LONDON OLYMPICS IN OUR COVER STORY ON PAGES 24 TO 29

Big lies in the Middle East

William Blum on the heroes of US wars past and present

Iraq. Began with big lies. Ending with big lies. Never forget.

“Most people don’t understand what they have been part of here,” said Command Sgt. Major Ron Kelley as he and other American troops prepared to leave Iraq in mid-December. “We have done a great thing as a nation. We freed a people and gave their country back to them.”

“It is pretty exciting,” said another young American soldier in Iraq. “We are going down in the history books, you might say.” (*Washington Post*, December 18, 2011)

Ah yes, the history books, the multi-volume leather-bound set of “The Greatest Destructions of One Country by Another.” The newest volume can relate, with numerous graphic photos, how the modern, educated, advanced nation of Iraq was reduced to a quasi failed state; how the Americans, beginning in 1991, bombed for 12 years, with one dubious excuse or another; then invaded, then occupied, overthrew the government, tortured without inhibition, killed wantonly, ... how the people of that unhappy land lost everything – their homes, their schools, their electricity, their clean water, their environment, their neighborhoods, their mosques, their archaeology, their jobs, their careers, their professionals, their state-run enterprises, their physical health, their mental health, their health care, their welfare state, their women’s rights, their reli-

gious tolerance, their safety, their security, their children, their parents, their past, their present, their future, their lives ... More than half the population either dead, wounded, traumatized, in prison, internally displaced, or in foreign exile ... The air, soil, water, blood, and genes drenched with depleted uranium ... the most awful birth defects ... unexploded cluster bombs lying anywhere in wait for children to pick them up ... a river of blood running alongside the Euphrates and Tigris ... through a country that may never be put back together again.

“It is a common refrain among war-weary Iraqis that things were better before the US-led invasion in 2003,” reported the *Washington Post* on May 5, 2007.

No matter ... drum roll, please ... Stand tall American GI hero! And don’t even think of ever apologizing or paying any reparations. Iraq is forced by Washington to continue paying reparations to Kuwait for Iraq’s invasion in 1990 (an invasion instigated in no small measure by the United States). And – deep breath here! – Vietnam has been compensating the United States. Since 1997 Hanoi has been paying off about \$145 million in debts left by the defeated South Vietnamese government for American food and infrastructure aid. Thus, Hanoi is reimbursing the United States for part of the cost of the war waged against it. (William Blum, *Rogue State*, p.304) How much will

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**Stand tall
 American GI
 hero! And don’t
 even think of
 ever apologizing
 or paying any
 reparations**

.....
**Does Mr. Obama,
the Peace
Laureate, believe
the words that
come out of his
mouth?**
.....

the United States pay the people of Iraq?
On December 14, at the Fort Bragg, North Carolina military base, Barack Obama stood before an audience of soldiers to speak about the Iraq war. It was a moment in which the president of the United States found it within his heart and soul – as well as within his oft-praised (supposed) intellect – to proclaim:

“This is an extraordinary achievement, nearly nine years in the making. And today, we remember everything that you did to make it possible. ... Years from now, your legacy will endure. In the names of your fallen comrades etched on headstones at Arlington, and the quiet memorials across our country. In the whispered words of admiration as you march in parades, and in the freedom of our children and grandchildren. ... So God bless you all, God bless your families, and God bless the United States of America. ... You have earned your place in history because you sacrificed so much for people you have never met.”

Does Mr. Obama, the Peace Laureate, believe the words that come out of his mouth?

Barack H. Obama believes only in being the President of the United States. It is the only strong belief the man holds.

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**Items of interest from a journal
I've kept for 40 years**

- If the US really believed in 2002-3 that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction why did they send in more than 100,000 troops, who were certain to be annihilated?
- In a letter released August 17, 2006, 21 former generals and high ranking national security officials called on President George W. Bush to reverse course and embrace a new area of negotiation with Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. The group told reporters Bush's "hard line" policies had undermined national security and made America less safe.
- Throughout most of the 20th century, the Catholic Church in Latin America

taught its flocks of the poor that there was no need to do battle with the ruling elite because the poor would get their just rewards in the afterlife.

- The US overthrew the Sandinistas in Nicaragua because the Sandinistas "intended to create a country where there was only a colony before." – Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan writer
- "[George W.] Bush said last week that part of the purpose of the Indonesia trip 'is to make sure that the people who are suspicious of our country understand our motives are pure.'" (*Washington Post*, October 22, 2003)
- "Wars may be aberrant experiences in the lives of most human individuals, but some nations are serial aggressors. American society is unique in having been formed almost wholly by processes of aggression against external and internal Others." – *The Black Commentator*, June 8, 2006
- President Obama should accompany the military people when they inform parents that their child has died in the latest of America's never-ending wars. And maybe ask George W. to come along as well.
- During the Vietnam War some University of Michigan students created a brouhaha when they threatened to napalm a puppy dog on the steps of a campus building. The uproar of indignation at their cruelty was heard nationwide. Of course, when the time came they didn't do it, having successfully made the point that people cared more about napalming a dog than they did about napalming people.
- "It's a lie and an illusion that we have an inefficient government. This government is only inefficient if you think its job is, as stated in the Constitution, 'to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.' These objectives are beyond our government's talents only because they are beyond its intentions." – Michael Ventura

- “Get some new lawyers” - US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook when he told her he was informed that the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 (which Albright championed) was illegal under international law.

- The two countries of the world, along with the United States, which have the greatest national obsession with baseball are two of the main targets of US foreign policy: Venezuela and Cuba.

- The Cuban Five case: This is the first case in American history of alleged spying and espionage without a single page from a secret document. The government never presented any evidence of a stolen official document or any attempt to steal an official document. This is the first spy case without secrets from the government.

- “If a bomb is deliberately dropped on a house or a vehicle on the grounds that a ‘suspected terrorist’ is inside, the resulting deaths of women and children may not be intentional. But neither are they accidental. The proper description is ‘inevitable’. So if an action will inevitably kill innocent people, it is as immoral as a deliberate attack on civilians.” – Howard Zinn

- “The U.N. Security Council voted unanimously Saturday to impose limited sanctions on North Korea for its recent missile tests, and demanded that the reclusive communist nation suspend its ballistic missile program.” (Associated Press, July 15, 2006) ... Internet commentator: “Test some missiles that land harmlessly in the ocean? Unanimous condemnation. Fire some missiles at targets on land, kill hundreds of people, and destroy hundreds of civilian targets including power plants, airports, roads, bridges, TV stations, etc., all in violation of the Geneva Convention? Hey, no problem.”

- For some nine years, American B-52 bombers relentlessly dropped tons of ordnance on a southeast Asian country (Vietnam) that still cultivated rice fields using draft animals.

- “The messianism of American for-

ign policy is a remarkable thing. When Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice speaks it seems like Khrushchev reporting to the party congress: “The whole world is marching triumphantly toward democracy but some rogue states prefer to stay aside from that road, etc. etc.” – Natalia Narochmitskaya, vice chairman of the international affairs committee in the State Duma, the lower house of Russia’s parliament. (Washington Post, April 3, 2006)

- Washington ... Propagandistan

- The bulldozer, driven by an Israeli army soldier on assignment to demolish a home, rolled over Rachel Corrie, who was 23 years old. She had taken a nonviolent position for human rights; she lost her life as a result. But she was rarely praised in the same US media outlets that had gone into raptures over the image of a solitary unarmed man standing in front of Chinese tanks at the time of the Tiananmen Square massacre. – Norman Solomon

- American sovereignty hasn’t faced a legitimate foreign threat to its existence since the British in 1812.

- There are two major patterns in foreign policy: the rule of force or the rule of law. On February 8, 1819 the US decided, after a very long debate in the House, to reject the rule of law in foreign policy. The vote was 100 to 70 against requiring the Congress to approve illegal invasions of other countries or peoples. This pertained to the “Seminole War”, actually the invasion of Florida. Since then every president has had the right to “defend America”, code words for the use of force against whomever he chooses. – Kelly Gelgering

CT

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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.”* Signed copies may be purchased at www.killinghope.org

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“If a bomb is deliberately dropped on a house or a vehicle on the grounds that a ‘suspected terrorist’ is inside, the resulting deaths of women and children may not be intentional. But neither are they accidental?”

On the road to self-destruction

David Michael Green travels to new Hampshire, where he sees a political party on the verge of implosion in the run-up to the US election

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A good hot shower upon our return helped a lot at disinfecting the slime factor, as does a creeping sense of hope I've experienced over the last year or so
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I took a busload of students to New Hampshire last month to observe the Republican primary campaign process up close and personal.

Alright, alright, I know what you must be thinking: "Damn, Green, you sure must be a dedicated professor to do that!" As it happens, you'd be partly right and partly wrong. In fact, the students are great, the trip is fun and a little unpredictable in nice way, and there really still is a wee bit of genuine candidate accountability remaining in the New Hampshire retail politics process.

That said, however, it's absolutely true that the field of GOP candidates is stunning in its sheer capacity for selfishness, dishonesty, and plain old meanness, and that listening to them for too long without wearing noise-cancelling headphones could surely burn off both of your ears.

It's the political equivalent of staring at the sun, and the cult-like gaga-bots one can observe among these audiences seem to have spent quite some time doing just that. If you know just a bit about history, just a bit about context, or just a bit about the dark arts of rhetorical legerdemain, listening to a speech by Rick Santorum or Newt Gingrich or Mitt Romney will leave you wanting to pop up just about every half-sentence and loudly disclaim "That's a lie!", "That's wrong!", or "That's complete bullshit!" It's a truly painful experience in that regard.

Moreover, given that American politics has now been reduced to a 'choice' between two gangs of nearly identical corporate water-carriers, yet still masquerades as a genuine election in a democracy, I feel more than a little complicit in the fleecing of the country just by attending these events and thereby implicitly helping to legitimize this kabuki process. It's not like my individual presence matters a bit, of course. On the other hand, what if no one came, boycotting the entire process as an insult to our intelligence?

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Getting an education

In any case, up we went, and we got ourselves an education. A good hot shower upon our return helped a lot at disinfecting the slime factor, as does a creeping sense of hope I've experienced over the last year or so, reinforced by New Hampshire.

Indeed, reflecting upon the Republican presidential field does, oddly enough, provide one with reason to think things might actually be looking up a bit in America, notwithstanding the fact that one of the sick puppies we heard up there could actually be the next president of the United States.

On reflection after returning from New Hampshire, I see multiple reasons to believe that the GOP – or, since parties can often be quite malleable, let us say the GOP as

we know it today – might be headed toward implosion. What’s more, only some of that opinion is based on wishful thinking...

The most obvious indicator of the current state of the party is given by a quick look at the presidential field. Even Republicans – even, I think, the vast majority of Republicans – are dismayed by the quality of candidates they have to choose from.

You could get several careers worth of stand-up material from the likes of Trump, Bachmann, Palin, Cain, Perry and the rest, but last I checked your party’s leading lights are meant for other purposes than cheap comic fodder. But – too bad for the GOP, and too good for the rest of the planet – they are what they are. And what they are is an endless procession of witless buffoons, shoddy charlatans and societal rejects.

It goes without saying that you could do better in terms of intelligence and integrity just by randomly choosing ten individuals out of the phone book for any given American city. But I’ll go further. I think you could do better by randomly choosing ten individuals from any given sixth grade civics class. Or perhaps even ten crooks from the mellow wings of any given medium security prison.

Nobody epitomizes the scraping of the bottom of the GOP barrel right down through the Earth’s crust better than Newt the Gingrich, until just recently the candidate du jour among desperate Republican voters.

He’s a big beached whale of an alleged humanoid, but it’s still almost unimaginable that anyone could’ve possibly stuffed so much hypocrisy within the confines of a single epidermal sac. One of my favorites concerns Gingrich’s recent lament that he was roughed up unfairly by his competitors in Iowa. If one were to make a list of the most destructive politicians and political operatives of the post-war period, Gingrich would certainly be among the top five, along with Joe McCarthy, Dick Nixon, Lee Atwater and Karl Rove. (Note that for all

its other pathetic qualities, the Democratic Party can at least rightly claim that it does not begin to compete in that particular ugly contest.) It has therefore been amusing in the extreme to see him turn into a whining crybaby as hardball politics, funded by unrestrained corporate money no less, was used to unravel his presidential aspirations once and for all. Golly, it almost seems like Newt has different ethical standards for the practice of politics, depending on whether he is giving or receiving. But that would be disingenuous.

Nevertheless, that story is actually small potatoes when it comes to the competition for first prize among the panoply of Gingrich’s rampant hypocrisies. My favorite has to be the moral finger-wagging of the candidate directed at the rest of us, while he is on his third marriage (not to mention his third religion, about which we also have to be lectured by the candidate). His prior two marriages crashed over his infidelities.

At the same time, of course, that he was impeaching a president of the United States and Leader of the Free World for the heinous crime of – wait for it now – infidelity. That’s a good one alright, although taking almost two million bucks from Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac for his services as an “historian” (Hey, you guys, look over here! I’m a really great political scientist, and I’ll provide my amazing academic wisdom to you for a mere one million!) while simultaneously lambasting these organizations for wrecking the economy surely rings in at a close second place on the Newtonian Hypocrimeter.

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Gingrich Follies

And that’s just for starters. The truth is that, when it comes to the Gingrich Follies, we could go on and on forever here. There are the bald-faced lies, the government shut-downs, the temper tantrums, the money scandals and more.

But enough said. You can get most of what

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Today's Republican Party candidates have to pretend that Bush never happened, and that we've never had a very good and very recent empirical test of what would happen if we followed their identical policy prescriptions
.....

you need to know about the current state of Republican Party politics just by stopping for a second to realize that a month ago this fool was the favored candidate among GOP voters to be the next president of the United States.

Before Rick Santorum, that is, a guy who doesn't have a problem with the government outlawing birth control (no, as a matter of fact, I'm not joking), and who left Congress with no money but somehow miraculously became a millionaire with a couple of years. Now Gingrich came before Santorum, but after Herman Cain – stay with me here – who might have seemed to you a lot like a guy with a severe zipper problem, but of course that critique was just a 'high-tech lynching', don't you know.

And Cain's 15 minutes of fame followed that of one Rick Perry, last seen skipping down the Yellow Brick Road whistling a certain tune about cognitive organs on holiday. And, of course, Perry came after Michelle Bachmann, who...

Well, you get the picture. But not quite. A little historical analysis suggests that the tawdry state of the Party's current leadership choices is less anomalous than Republicans might like to believe. Ronald Reagan (The Name Which Must Be Spoken Every Thirty Seconds By Republicans Everywhere), who, like John Kennedy, was a lot less a great president than a subsequent fabricated religious icon for the party faithful, was at least a strong presidential candidate (though not one who was at all above the use of ugly tactics).

Look at what the party has thrown up since then: Bob Dole, John McCain, and two guys (Whose Name Must Never Be Spoken By Republicans Anytime Anywhere) who go by the oh-so-appropriate appellation of Bush. Even leaving aside the abhorrent politics, these candidates are to national politics what Reagan was to acting: strictly B-rate.

But let's be bold and actually talk about the Bushes, shall we? It's ever so instructive to do so. Bush the Elder was the first victim

of the wholesale sanity purge that has infected the GOP in the Age of Reagan.

He broke the cardinal rule – in truth, the very *raison d'être* – of the party by raising taxes, and so they turned on him and both destroyed and embarrassed him by helping Democrats show him to the door after a single term. That was Poppy. On the other hand, his son, the Boy Wondering, is actually guilty of precisely the opposite sin. Republicans these days can never stop telling you how conservative they are and how much they revere Ronald Reagan. Conservative, conservative, conservative. Reagan, Reagan, Reagan. Which makes for a bit of a mystery (for six seconds at least): If that's true, how come they never, ever, mention the guy who was the most conservative president in American history, who was more Reagan than Reagan, and who happened to have been in office only just the other day? Hmmmm. I wonder why that could be?

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Disastrous Bush

The answer, of course, is that Bush's rodeo clown presidency demonstrates precisely what are the fruits of pursuing conservative (actually, kleptocratic) policies. Those choices were disastrous, and we are only beginning now to even realize how much damage was caused.

So today's Republican Party candidates have to pretend that Bush never happened, and that we've never had a very good and very recent empirical test of what would happen if we followed their identical policy prescriptions.

Someday, of course – perhaps in a decade or two – they will try to give W the same makeover they've given to Reagan, but right now even the otherwise all too idiot-prone American public can't yet be fooled into remembering how much they liked 9/11, Afghanistan, Iraq, Katrina, No Child Left Behind, global warming, global hatred, torture, Constitution shredding, polarized politics, doubling the national debt, massive wealth

concentration, global depression and TARP – all the gifts of a single president.

If I could put the current crop of Republican presidential candidates on the spot and ask them a single question, I would have them rate the Bush presidency and indicate how theirs would be different. They're all slick as an oil spill, of course, so they'd find a way to finesse the question. Surely they'd say that they'd balance the budget, but of course, so did Reagan and so did W. It turns out that trying to do so while cutting taxes, spending more on the military, and without borrowing is ... what did that one guy call it? ... voodoo economics. But here's the central point, even if it requires multiple iterations for Americans to learn it: The so-called conservative policies advocated by the Republican Party today are manifestly disastrous.

They have been precisely so under every president – most definitely including Clinton and Obama – since Reagan, and they will continue to be so in the future. Even KenDoll Romney knows that tax cuts for billionaires, war with Iran, environmental destruction and putting Christ back into Christmas won't revive the country. It's just that he doesn't give a shit. Getting to be president is all he cares about.

Beyond this nightmare of its pathetic leading figures, the GOP is also in trouble demographically. It has painted itself into a narrow corner such that its primary appeal is to pretend pious old white men who are fearful of everything (and thus constantly act as though they are fearless), but most especially afraid of independent women. It's funny to watch these guys rail against Muslim religious fanatics in Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan, without the slightest sense of irony or recognition of who they're looking at in the mirror each morning. No matter. They're finished.

The young generation coming up in America today is far less sexist, far less homophobic, far less racist, far less xenophobic, far less religious, far less conservative and far less Republican than the ones

headed for P.T. Barnum's "This way to the Egress" sign over the next couple of decades. The GOP will face some wrenching choices as it becomes increasingly unelectable with time. Likely there will be a civil war between those who demand ideological purity and those willing to compromise for electability. Quite probably the Romney-versus-the-rest motif we're witnessing in the current cycle is already the opening salvo in that war.

One could argue that Republican Party orthodoxy is already under assault from the Ron Paul campaign. It's truly amazing what Paul is saying on questions such as the astonishingly destructive war on drugs campaign, or American foreign and military policy, which he rightly describes as imperial in nature.

He's far to the left of any namebrand Democrat, let alone compared to the chickenhawk cowardly hypocrites (as he himself accurately calls them) of the GOP, like Bush, Cheney, Gingrich, Romney and all the rest. More importantly, much of what he says on the campaign trail is jarringly truthful for any prominent American politician circa 2012. If only his economic prescriptions weren't so dishonest and just plain bizarre (and if only he didn't have that stinky racist, Bircher, background), I could honestly get excited about Paul, despite even his party affiliation.

Mutant aberration

But Ron Paul is far more a strange mutant aberration in the Republican Party today than the leader of one of the warring camps likely to define the party in the coming decades. That battle will be between (alleged) moderates and hard-liners – between Bush 41 and Bush 43, if you will – and Paul is neither. He is far more a Libertarian than a Republican, but he's also strategically smart.

Millions more people are being exposed to the Republican candidate's radically heterodox and absurdly truthful critiques of American government than would never

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Even KenDoll Romney knows that tax cuts for billionaires, war with Iran, environmental destruction and putting Christ back into Christmas won't revive the country

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The reaction to those Republican candidates criticizing Romney for his career as a vulture capitalist is extremely telling, of course, just as was the Catholic Church putting Galileo under house arrest
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hear them if he was running instead for the Libertarian Party's nomination. In any case, by telling such truths right in the belly of the beast, and by attracting so many votes, Paul makes life that much harder for an already besieged Republican Party.

In addition to its candidates and its demographics, the GOP has another problem, as well: Itself. I'm shocked that anyone else is shocked at what's going on within the party right now as the various candidates scramble for advantage. Of course Gingrich and Perry and the others are saying anything in order to take down the front-running Romney.

What the hell else would you expect from an ideology which has been peddling extreme individualism, unfettered greed, filthy campaign practices, and endless deceit at least since the era of Joe McCarthy? Of course they are eating their young. Why wouldn't they? Because of moral qualms? Concerns about integrity? Putting the needs of the many ahead of the needs of the one? Very funny, people. Very funny.

The reaction to those Republican candidates criticizing Romney for his career as a vulture capitalist is extremely telling, of course, just as was the Catholic Church putting Galileo under house arrest.

In neither case did the offended institution bother asking whether the ideas being floated had any merit to them. No, my friends, neither the Catholic Church nor the Republican Church have any interest in the dissemination of truth.

Quite to the contrary, their interest is precisely the opposite. Hordes of Republican blowhards (pardon the redundancy there) have been savaging Gingrich and Perry for mounting 'Democratic-style class warfare' critiques of Romney, never stopping to actually inquire as to what Bain Capital actually did under his stewardship. Of course, they don't need to ask. They already know. What's critical is that you never do.

All in all, the GOP is in deep trouble, at least over the long haul. I think they know

it, too. They're all standing around at this point waiting for a Reagan to come rescue them. That's not gonna happen, not least of which because even Reagan was never "REAGAN!". Like Bernie Madoff, the Party's lies and schemes are beginning to catch up with it. And as with Madoff, it is the rest of us who will principally pay the price.

The real questions are why this hasn't happened sooner, why the party was able to resuscitate itself relatively unscathed from the disaster of actually governing under its avowed principles this last decade, and why it has a good shot at the White House this year?

Those are, of course, easy questions to answer. If the top ranks of the Republican Party are of a quality that would be considered pathetic anywhere outside of Zimbabwe, the leading lights of the Democrats are equally dismal. You have Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, and then there's... Joe Biden? Harry Reid? Andrew Cuomo? It's quite amazing really. Add up all the prominent Democrats in Congress, in the cabinet and in statehouses, and there isn't a single one - regardless even of their politics - who remotely inspires.

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Political nothingburgers

Moreover, if we're honest about Obama and Clinton, it's patently obvious that they are almost entirely notable for who they physically are, not what they've done or where they stand. Take away his skin tone and her genitalia, and you're left with a pair of two-dimensional cardboard B-rate political nothingburgers.

will record Obama's sole claim to fame as getting elected. No one will ever know what he really stands for, other than maintaining the status quo so that he can comfortably tuck the one percent into bed each night. Her only genuine political commitment in life (at least, that is, before she and her husband were completely coopted by the plutocracy), seems to have been a devotion to

the controversial idea of taking good care of our children. Wow. Now that's bold.

Obama and his party are failures for the same reason the GOP has been failing for so long. They all serve the same master, and I got news for you, pal: It ain't you, me, or the 300 million people in America's 99 per cent. This isn't complicated stuff. You can put away your slide rule. It's simple: If you are governing to advance the interest of predators, and doing so at the expense of the people, the predators will prosper and the people will suffer.

By design. What, you don't like that? No problem, you can simply vote for the other party, the one that's not in office. Just one problem, though. They have exactly the same economic policies as the one that is.

.....
Strange times

We live in the strangest of times. Our politics have hardly ever been more strident, and yet we fight over almost nothing. We have enormous problems facing us, ranging from rampant and structural unemployment to broken empire to climate holocaust, and yet we're consumed with trivia. Our candidate running on the platform of hope and change could not possibly be more beholden to the special interests who have robbed an entire global economy of hope in order to prevent change and fatten their already bulging wallets.

The political party that led the country and the world over the cliff for a decade came back to win a stunning victory just two years later, and is poised to possibly win another one again. The people who created a massive national debt can somehow

plausibly score endless political points complaining about that same debt.

One of the worst things you can be accused of is trying to turn America into a 'European socialist state' at exactly the moment when the true European socialist states are precisely the countries providing the best quality of life, most economic security, and the most stable economies for their citizens of any in the world.

Here at home, we have very clear empirical evidence from two post-war periods – one each of liberal and conservative economic policy prescriptions – of what happens when you go either of those directions, and no one recognizes that the experiment was even conducted. The list goes on. Rod Serling, you're way overdue on the set, baby. Dee dee dee dee, dee dee dee dee...

Hunter Thompson was certainly right. When the going gets weird, the weird turn professional. But we're beyond all that now. America has fielded its All-Century Team when it comes to nutty politics. The good news, though, is that some people are finally starting to wake up to what we're facing, and just who is diddling whom.

That can't be good news for the Geriatric Obfuscating Pathology otherwise known as the Republican Party. **CT**

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David Michael Green is a professor of political science at Hofstra University in New York. He is delighted to receive readers' reactions to his articles (dmg@regressiveantidote.net), but regrets that time constraints do not always allow him to respond. More of his work can be found at his website, www.regressiveantidote.net.

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The world war on democracy

John Pilger on the fight against authoritarianism and tyranny

.....
The government secretly agreed to a demand from Washington that the Chagos archipelago, a British colony, be “swept” and “sanitised” of its 2,500 inhabitants
.....

Lisette Talate died the other day. I remember a wiry, fiercely intelligent woman who masked her grief with a determination that was a presence. She was the embodiment of people’s resistance to the war on democracy. I first glimpsed her in a 1950s Colonial Office film about the Chagos islanders, a tiny creole nation located midway between Africa and Asia in the Indian Ocean.

The camera panned across thriving villages, a church, a school, a hospital, set in a phenomenon of natural beauty and peace. Lisette remembers the producer saying to her and her teenage friends, “Keep smiling girls!”

Sitting in her kitchen in Mauritius many years later, she said, “I didn’t have to be told to smile. I was a happy child, because my roots were deep in the islands, my paradise. My great-grandmother was born there; I made six children there. That’s why they couldn’t legally throw us out of our own homes; they had to terrify us into leaving or force us out. At first, they tried to starve us. The food ships stopped arriving [then] they spread rumours we would be bombed, then they turned on our dogs.”

In the early 1960s, the Labour government of Harold Wilson secretly agreed to a demand from Washington that the Chagos archipelago, a British colony, be “swept” and “sanitised” of its 2,500 inhabitants so

that a military base could be built on the principal island, Diego Garcia. “They knew we were inseparable from our pets,” said Lisette, “When the American soldiers arrived to build the base, they backed their big trucks against the brick shed where we prepared the coconuts; hundreds of our dogs had been rounded up and imprisoned there. Then they gassed them through tubes from the trucks’ exhausts. You could hear them crying.”

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Rusting steamer

Lisette and her family and hundreds of islanders were forced onto a rusting steamer bound for Mauritius, a distance of 2,500 miles. They were made to sleep in the hold on a cargo of fertilizer: bird shit. The weather was rough; everyone was ill; two women miscarried.

Dumped on the docks at Port Louis, Lisette’s youngest children, Jollice and Regis, died within a week of each other. “They died of sadness,” she said. “They had heard all the talk and seen the horror of what had happened to the dogs. They knew they were leaving their home forever. The doctor in Mauritius said he could not treat sadness.”

This act of mass kidnapping was carried out in high secrecy. In one official file, under the heading, “Maintaining the fiction,” the Foreign Office legal adviser exhorts his

colleagues to cover their actions by “re-classifying” the population as “floating” and to “make up the rules as we go along.” Article 7 of the statute of the International Criminal Court says the “deportation or forcible transfer of population” is a crime against humanity. That Britain had committed such a crime - in exchange for a \$14 million discount off an American Polaris nuclear submarine - was not on the agenda of a group of British “defence” correspondents flown to the Chagos by the Ministry of Defence when the US base was completed. “There is nothing in our files,” said a ministry official, “about inhabitants or an evacuation.”

Today, Diego Garcia is crucial to America’s and Britain’s war on democracy. The heaviest bombing of Iraq and Afghanistan was launched from its vast airstrips, beyond which the islanders’ abandoned cemetery and church stand like archaeological ruins. The terraced garden where Lisette laughed for the camera is now a fortress housing the “bunker-busting” bombs carried by bat-shaped B-2 aircraft to targets in two continents; an attack on Iran will start here. As if to complete the emblem of rampant, criminal power, the CIA added a Guantanamo-style prison for its “rendition” victims and called it Camp Justice.

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Ruthless democracy

What was done to Lisette’s paradise has an urgent and universal meaning, for it represents the violent, ruthless nature of a whole system behind its democratic façade, and the scale of our own indoctrination to its messianic assumptions, described by Harold Pinter as a “brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis.”

Longer and bloodier than any war since 1945, waged with demonic weapons, a gangsterism dressed as economic policy and sometimes known as globalization, the war on democracy is unmentionable in Western elite circles. As Pinter wrote, “it never

happened even while it was happening.” Last July, American historian William Blum published his “updated summary of the record of US foreign policy.” Since the Second World War, the US has:

1. Attempted to overthrow more than 50 governments, most of them democratically elected.
2. Attempted to suppress a populist or national movement in 20 countries.
3. Grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries.
4. Dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries.
5. Attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders.

In total, the United States has carried out one or more of these actions in 69 countries. In almost all cases, Britain has been a collaborator. The “enemy” changes in name - from communism to Islamism - but mostly it is the rise of democracy independent of Western power or a society occupying strategically useful territory, deemed expendable, like the Chagos Islands.

The sheer scale of suffering, let alone criminality, is little known in the West, despite the presence of the world’s most advanced communications, nominally freest journalism and most admired academy. That the most numerous victims of terrorism - Western terrorism - are Muslims is unsayable, if it is known. That half a million Iraqi infants died in the 1990s as a result of the embargo imposed by Britain and America is of no interest. That extreme jihadism, which led to 9/11, was nurtured as a weapon of Western policy (“Operation Cyclone”) is known to specialists, but otherwise suppressed.

While popular culture in Britain and America immerses the Second World War in an ethical bath for the victors, the holocausts arising from Anglo-American dominance of resource-rich regions are consigned to oblivion.

Under the Indonesian tyrant Suharto, anointed “our man” by Thatcher, more

.....
The sheer scale of suffering, let alone criminality, is little known in the West, despite the presence of the world’s most advanced communications, nominally freest journalism and most admired academy

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Israel, the exemplar of US violence and lawlessness by proxy, has just received its annual pocket money of \$3 billion together with Obama's permission to steal more Palestinian land
.....

than a million people were slaughtered. Described by the CIA as “the worst mass murder of the second half of the 20th century,” the estimate does not include a third of the population of East Timor, who were starved or murdered with Western connivance, British fighter bombers and machine guns.

These true stories are told in declassified files in the Public Record Office, yet represent an entire dimension of politics and the exercise of power excluded from public consideration.

This has been achieved by a regime of noncoercive information control, from the evangelical mantra of consumer advertising to sound bites on BBC news and, now, the ephemera of social media.

It is as if writers as watchdogs are extinct, or in thrall to a sociopathic zeitgeist, convinced they are too clever to be duped. Witness the stampede of sycophants eager to deify Christopher Hitchens, a war lover who longed to be allowed to justify the crimes of rapacious power.

“For almost the first time in two centuries,” wrote Terry Eagleton, “there is no eminent British poet, playwright or novelist prepared to question the foundations of the Western way of life.”

No Orwell warns that we do not need to live in a totalitarian society to be corrupted by totalitarianism. No Shelley speaks for the poor; no Blake proffers a vision; no Wilde reminds us that “disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man’s original virtue.” And, grievously, no Pinter rages at the war machine, as in “American Football”:

*Hallelujah.
Praise the Lord for all good things ...
We blew their balls into shards of dust,
Into shards of fucking dust ...*

Into shards of fucking dust go all the lives blown there by Barack Obama, the Hopey Changey of Western violence.

Whenever one of Obama’s drones wipes out an entire family in a faraway tribal region of Pakistan, or Somalia, or Yemen, the American controllers in front of their computer-game screens type in “Bugsplat.” Obama likes drones and has joked about them with journalists. One of his first actions as president was to order a wave of Predator drone attacks on Pakistan that killed 74 people. He has since killed thousands, mostly civilians; drones fire Hellfire missiles that suck the air out of the lungs of children and leave body parts festooned across scrubland.

Remember the tear-stained headlines when Brand Obama was elected: “momentous, spine-tingling”: *the Guardian* UK. “The American future,” wrote Simon Schama, “is all vision, numinous, unformed, light-headed ...” The *San Francisco Chronicle’s* columnist saw a spiritual “lightworker [who can] usher in a new way of being on the planet.” Beyond the drivel, as the great whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg had predicted, a military coup was taking place in Washington, and Obama was their man.

Having seduced the anti-war movement into virtual silence, he has given America’s corrupt military officer class unprecedented powers of state and engagement. These include the prospect of wars in Africa and opportunities for provocations against China, America’s largest creditor and new “enemy” in Asia.

.....
Encircled with missiles

Under Obama, the old source of official paranoia Russia, has been encircled with ballistic missiles and the Russian opposition infiltrated. Military and CIA assassination teams have been assigned to 120 countries; long-planned attacks on Syria and Iran beckon a world war. Israel, the exemplar of US violence and lawlessness by proxy, has just received its annual pocket money of \$3 billion together with Obama’s permission to steal more Palestinian land.

Obama's most "historic" achievement is to bring the war on democracy home to America. On New Year's Eve, he signed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), a law that grants the Pentagon the legal right to kidnap both foreigners and US citizens and indefinitely detain, interrogate and torture, or even kill them. They need only "associate" with those "belligerent" to the United States. There will be no protection of law, no trial, no legal representation. This is the first explicit legislation to abolish habeas corpus (the right to due process of law) and effectively repeal the Bill of Rights of 1789.

On 5 January, in an extraordinary speech at the Pentagon, Obama said the military would not only be ready to "secure territory and populations" overseas, but to fight in the "homeland" and provide "support to the civil authorities." In other words, US troops will be deployed on the streets of American cities when the inevitable civil unrest takes hold.

America is now a land of epidemic poverty and barbaric prisons: the consequence of a "market" extremism which, under Obama, has prompted the transfer of \$14 trillion in public money to criminal enterprises in Wall Street.

The victims are mostly young jobless, homeless, incarcerated African-Americans, betrayed by the first black president. The historic corollary of a perpetual war state, this is not fascism, not yet, but neither is it democracy in any recognizable form, regardless of the placebo politics that will consume the news until November.

The presidential campaign, says the *Washington Post*, will "feature a clash of philosophies rooted in distinctly different views of the economy."

This is patently false. The circumscribed task of journalism on both sides of the Atlantic is to create the pretence of political choice where there is none.

The same shadow is across Britain and much of Europe, where social democracy,

an article of faith two generations ago, has fallen to the central bank dictators.

In David Cameron's "big society," the theft of 84 billion pounds in jobs and services even exceeds the amount of tax "legally" avoid by piratical corporations. Blame rests not with the far right, but a cowardly, liberal political culture that has allowed this to happen, which, wrote Hywel Williams in the wake of the attacks on 9/11, "can itself be a form of self righteous fanaticism." Tony Blair is one such fanatic.

In its managerial indifference to the freedoms that it claims to hold dear, bourgeois Blairite Britain has created a surveillance state with 3,000 new criminal offenses and laws: more than for the whole of the previous century.

The police clearly believe they have an impunity to kill. At the demand of the CIA, cases like that of Binyam Mohamed, an innocent British resident tortured and then held for five years in Guantanamo Bay, will be dealt with in secret courts in Britain "in order to protect the intelligence agencies" - the torturers.

This invisible state allowed the Blair government to fight the Chagos islanders as they rose from their despair in exile and demanded justice in the streets of Port Louis and London. "Only when you take direct action, face to face, even break laws, are you ever noticed," said Lisette. "And the smaller you are, the greater your example to others." Such an eloquent answer to those who still ask, "What can I do?"

I last saw Lisette's tiny figure standing in driving rain alongside her comrades outside the Houses of Parliament. What struck me was the enduring courage of their resistance. It is this refusal to give up that rotten power fears, above all, knowing it is the seed beneath the snow.

CT

John Pilger recently received the top prize in the annual awards, presented in London, of the British Grierson Trust for his documentary films

In David Cameron's "big society," the theft of 84 billion pounds in jobs and services even exceeds the amount of tax "legally" avoid by piratical corporations

London's Olympic shame

Jack Laursen thinks it's a scandal that Dow Chemicals should be allowed to be a sponsor at the 'greenest' Olympics. Here's why

.....
120,000 or more are still living with agonizing chronic health problems caused by 27 years of ground-water and soil pollution; a result of dumped toxic waste contaminating communities around the factory
.....

A stone's throw from the abandoned Union Carbide complex in Bhopal is an oasis of calm and healing. The Sambhavna Clinic, which is funded by the UK-based Bhopal Medical Appeal (BMA) charity, is the only facility in Bhopal that offers effective and free healthcare to the thousands who still live in the toxic shadow of the world's most infamous pesticide factory.

In the crowded waiting room of the clinic, where patients look out onto lush herb gardens and a pond filled with turtles and fish, there is a message carved into a large wooden beam that reads: "A heart-felt thank you to the thousands of British people who made this clinic a reality..."

For Brits – who often visit the clinic while traveling through India – it's impossible to read this sign without feeling somewhat patriotic and proud. The BMA is a small charity based in Brighton and through the kind support of their donors – who are, as the sign states, mostly British – are able to help Indian doctors and therapists save lives every day.

Campaigners for justice in Bhopal are outraged that Britain would undermine this excellent charitable work by engaging in what they say is a ludicrously ill-advised Olympic sponsorship agreement with one of the world's most unethical and controversial companies. The Olympic organizing

committee, LOCOG, and its chairman, Lord Sebastian Coe, are on track to insult a billion Indians by embracing the Dow Chemical company as an official London 2012 sponsor.

It is estimated that between 9,000 and 15,000 Bhopalis were killed within three days of the initial gas-leak in 1984. The first incident, caused by cost-cutting measures and a dramatic decline in safety standards implemented by Carbide's American management, is infamous. Less well known is the fact that 120,000 or more people are still living with agonizing chronic health problems caused by 27 years of ground-water and soil pollution; a result of dumped toxic waste contaminating communities around the factory.

Union Carbide is now part of the Dow Chemical Company, but neither company has admitted responsibility for this mess.

.....
A global toxic hotspot

Total deaths are now estimated at around 25,000 and *still* rising. Greenpeace and the Indian Centre for Science & Environment say the area around the factory is so saturated with dumped toxins and heavy metals that they have labeled Bhopal a global toxic hotspot and the disaster is ranked alongside Chernobyl as one of the world's most terrible industrial catastrophes. Campaigners



Union carbide, now a fully owned subsidiary of the Dow Chemical Company, never cleaned up their pesticide facility in Bhopal. Instead, they abandoned India as the toxins spread into the soil and ground-water. UCC are still wanted on criminal charges of culpable homicide and the Indian courts have said that the Dow Chemical Company is essentially harboring 'fugitives from justice.'



A woman in Bhopal washes her clothes with water from pumps that have been found to be heavily contaminated with toxic chemicals and heavy metals.

and their lawyers argue that this unresolved legacy of pain has now become the property of Dow.

In recent months, heightened media attention of this issue in the UK and India has caused outrage and it's becoming increasingly clear that it's not a legacy Brits want their Olympics to be associated with.

Dow Chemicals have launched an expensive and enthusiastic campaign of damage-limitation in the face of overwhelming negative public opinion about this issue, continually stating in the press that the company never owned or operated the factory in Bhopal.

Although correct, activists and Bhopal survivors argue this fact is irrelevant. Dow acquired Union Carbide in a lucrative takeover in 2001 and has legally inherited their liabilities as well as their assets. Campaigners state that Dow have essentially admitted this liability themselves by paying off other

outstanding lawsuits against Union Carbide, settling with former UCC asbestos workers in Texas for billions of dollars. However, Dow has consistently argued that it isn't liable for Bhopal, without offering any satisfactory reasons why.

.....
Other crimes

Other activists have joined the debate, arguing that even if the thousands of dead and dying in Bhopal were not the issue here; Dow Chemicals would still have to answer for other crimes, such as their awful environmental record and the heart-breaking legacy of Agent Orange and Napalm in southeast Asia. Dow became a major provider of Agent Orange to the US military when many other companies ceased production in the face of overwhelmingly negative public opinion. They have, however, alongside the Monsanto company, continually avoided any kind of



legal liability for the destruction.

The Dow Chemical company claims to be a responsible global corporate citizen, committed to environmental sustainability, but critics claim they are behaving like a rogue corporation that cannot be held accountable to national or international law.

The company is also accused of harbouring fugitives from justice, as Union Carbide executives are still wanted on criminal charges of culpable homicide in India.

The Dow subsidiary Union Carbide has created, via its negligent waste disposal methods, a new tragedy in Bhopal that has slowly developed over time. Neither company has paid a single dollar for this ongoing environmental damage and as Dow now operates Union Carbide as a full subsidiary, the liability belongs to them.

They *must* clean up Bhopal.

By arranging and endorsing Dow's involvement with London 2012, campaigners

argue that Lord Sebastian Coe and LOCOG have demonstrated their complete ignorance of the situation in Bhopal – and indeed their own policies on ethical and sustainable sponsors.

The Bhopal Medical Appeal was joined in London recently by supporters of the 200 days Left to Dump Dow! campaign, including Barry Gardiner, Labour MP for Brent North and Chairman of the Labour Friends of India organisation. He issued, via TV cameras, a passionate challenge to Lord Coe to drink with him a glass of Bhopal's contaminated water so he could better understand the toxic legacy of Union Carbide and Dow Chemicals.

“If he doesn't dare do this, then he should kick Dow out of the Olympics. They have no place in what has been billed as the greenest and most sustainable Olympics ever; it can't have Dow Chemicals associated with it.”

Dow has dismissed Bhopal activists as

Children play in water full of Mercury and Carbon Tetrachloride. When asked by the reporter if they knew how dangerous the water was, they said that local officials and police had told them it was safe.



A young child, enduring significant pain, is treated for water-exposure related illnesses at the Chingari Therapy Centre in Bhopal.

‘small and noisy groups’ but Barry Gardiner and the Bhopal Medical Appeal are not alone. 17,000 members of the public have joined them in expressing outrage at this sponsorship via the Change.org petition to drop Dow.

Hundreds of organisations and personalities have also signed a declaration condemning Dow’s relationship with LOCOG and London 2012. So far they include Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Pesticide Action Network, Agent Orange Action Network, Noam Chomsky, Martin Sheen, Raghu Rai and Antony Gormley among others.

.....
Branding rights dropped

Recently, Dow agreed to drop all branding rights to the plastic wrap it’s sponsoring for the London Olympic stadium, in the apparent hope it could avoid further criticism. In response, the Bhopal Medical Appeal said:

“We’re not letting the Dow Chemical company slip into the shadows on this one, and we’re not letting LOCOG ignore the issue either. Our stance is that Dow Chemicals must be held accountable for the suffering in Bhopal – they bought the Union Carbide Corporation, knowing there were outstanding criminal charges against it and, whether they like it or not, they acquired the liability...”

The BMA also criticised Dow’s failure to act on the pollution in India left behind by Union Carbide:

“Thousands continue to live with chronic illnesses in Bhopal and many die while Dow splash their money around on lucrative sponsorship deals – it’s a disgrace. By allowing this deal to go ahead, Mayor Johnson and Lord Coe have demonstrated that they’re happy to accept Dow Chemical’s PR bluster but without a complete process of due diligence. A simple internet search would have revealed not only the criminal charges



against Union Carbide but also that the Dow Chemical Company themselves are a named respondent in two Indian court cases pertaining to the Bhopal disaster.”

Campaigners continue to protest against Dow Chemicals’ involvement with London 2012 and the company seems reluctant to step down from the sponsorship role in case it’s interpreted as an admission of guilt. With a powerful opposition movement growing – including motions in the UK and Scottish parliament, mass media coverage and a petition that has attracted thousands of signatures – it’s becoming clear that whatever happens in this fight, this has been a spectacular PR disaster for the Dow Chemical company.

LATE NEWS: The London 2012 Olympic Games were embroiled in further controversy on January 25 when Meredith Alexander, a Sustainability Commissioner and Ethics Adviser for the games, resigned live

on the BBC’s flagship news program Newsnight. In an interview with Jeremy Paxman she announced that her position at the Commission for a Sustainable London 2012 (CSL) was no longer tenable in light of the LOCOG’s continued relationship with and defence of the Dow Chemical Company.

She told *nieuw*, “By coming on air tonight, I’m taking the decision to resign my position and stand up for my principles... I feel that I was part of a body that has been used to legitimize Dow’s involvement in the games.” She said that while Dow Chemicals have an ‘army of PR people’ she hoped that her resignation could bring some attention to the continuing plight of victims in Bhopal. **CT**

Jack Laurensen is a freelance journalist and documentary photographer who often works in India. He founded the Bhopal Now project – www.bhopalnow.org - and now works regularly for the Bhopal Medical Appeal.

Girls in a Union Carbide affected community have no choice but to wash their clothes with water that contains large amounts of heavy metals and toxins.

Guess who won the Iraq war

Sherwood Ross has the answer, which was always a foregone conclusion, despite an abundance of denials

.....
The Iraqi government “gave a little piece of the cake for China and some of the other countries and companies to keep them silent”
.....

Before the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq US and other western oil companies were all but completely shut out of Iraq’s oil market,” industry analyst Antonia Juhasz told Al Jazeera wire service. “But thanks to the invasion and occupation, the companies are now back inside Iraq and producing oil there for the first time since being forced out of the country in 1973.”

“Western producers like BP, Exxon Mobil, and Shell are enjoying their best access to Iraq’s southern oil fields since 1972,” *Business Week* noted in its issue of March 4, 2011. (1972 was the year Saddam Hussein nationalized Iraq’s oil fields.)

Business Week quotes Andy Inglis, BP’s chief executive for exploration and production as saying, “We see this as the beginning of a long-term relationship with Iraq and will continue to look for further opportunities.”

Dr. Abdulhay Yahya Zalloum, an international oil consultant and economist, agrees the western firms have won contracts despite “a lack of transparency and clarity of vision regarding the legal issues.” The Iraqi government “gave a little piece of the cake for China and some of the other countries and companies to keep them silent.”

A group led by BP will receive \$2 billion per year to develop Iraq’s Rumalia field and

a Shell-led group is to get \$913 million per year. An Exxon-led group is to get \$1.6 billion per year, *Bloomberg News* reports. Each calculation is based on the agreed-to per-barrel fee times the maximum production level, Bloomberg explains.

David Bender, a Middle East analyst at Eurasia Group, Washington, D.C., told Bloomberg, “Iraq is one of the most attractive oil markets in the world. The international oil companies may feel that getting in at the beginning improves their long-term prospects.”

The only area of Iraq where oil firms fare better than fee-for-service work is in the northern Kurdish autonomous region (KRG) where businesses including Norway’s DNO International ASA are pumping crude under production-sharing agreements “not recognized by the central government,” Bloomberg reports.

.....
Friend of President Bush

It also turns out Hunt Oil Co., of Dallas, Tex., clinched a separate deal in Sept., 2007, with Iraq Kurdistan Regional Government. Hunt might not have won if its chief officer, Ray Hunt, was not President George W. Bush’s friend and a major fund-raiser. Some folks think, according to a front page *New York Times* report July 3, 2008, the deal “runs

counter to American policy and undercut Iraq's central government." Apparently, Bush didn't think so. Baghdad reportedly is furious over it.

Hunt got this free pass to explore Kurdistan's oil riches in Sept., 2007, when it inked an exploration pact likely to give the firm a share of the boodle of any future gushers. "Hunt would be the first US company to sign such a deal," a State Department official told the *New York Times*.

And according to reporter Jay Price of McClatchy News Service, the Iraqi oil minister, speaking for Baghdad, "called the Hunt deal illegal."

A State Department cable dated Sept. 12, 2007, and made public by Wikileaks, "detailed official warnings from the US government that the contract, regardless of lease location, is legally risky due to unresolved land and oil disputes between Baghdad and the KRG – and that such a contract could further amplify conflicts between the central and regional governments," wrote Ben Lando of the authoritative *Iraq Oil Report*, of Aug. 25, 2011.

Hunt seemingly would not have to press Bush hard for the insider's deal. Juhasz says that ExxonMobil, BP, and Shell aggressively lobbied their governments "to ensure that the invasion would result in an Iraq open to foreign oil companies" and that "they succeeded."

She added that the US and western oil companies and their governments has been lobbying for a new national Iraq Oil Law that would largely privatize the oil market along the lines of the old Production Sharing Agreements – although such PSA's have been rejected in most countries because they provide "far more benefits to the foreign corporation than to the domestic government." Hunt's deal with KRG was of the PSA sort.

"The public is against privatization," Juhasz told al-Jazeera, "which is one reason the (Iraqi Oil Law) has not passed. The contracts are enacting a form of privatisation

without public discourse and essentially at the butt of a gun. These contracts have all been awarded during a foreign military occupation with the largest contracts going to companies from the foreign occupiers' countries. It seems that democracy and equity are the two largest losers in this oil battle."

Note: the Obama regime "continues to pressure Baghdad to pass the Iraq Oil Law" over the wishes of the majority of the Iraqi people.

"Thus far," Juhasz said, "it has required a massive foreign military invasion and occupation to grant the foreign oil companies the access they have thus far garnered." Meanwhile, back at the pump, the boost in oil supplies has not reduced the price of oil being extracted from American motorists. The laws of supply and demand no longer appear to be working.

Rising prices

According to business writer John Egan of *Technorati*, the average price for a gallon of gas last Feb. 26th climbed to \$3.33, compared with \$2.70 the previous year. And wire service Agency France Presse (AFP) reports in the Waynesville, Va., *Augusta Free Press* that "Average US gasoline prices began 2012 just under \$3.28 gal, the highest number ever to mark the beginning of a year and the fifth straight weekly increase in price."

As for the profit-taking of the big oil firms, Egan on Feb. 26, 2011, wrote: "While we're paying more to fill up, the three largest publicly traded oil companies based in the United States have been filling up on profits. Those three companies – ExxonMobil, Chevron and ConocoPhillips – collectively pulled in an eye-popping \$58.3 billion in profits in 2010, according to financial figures announced in January 2011. Mind you, that's profit – the amount of money that companies pocket after covering their expenses."

Gas prices reached the point last year

.....
"While we're paying more to fill up, the three largest publicly traded oil companies based in the United States have been filling up on profits"

OILING THE WHEELS

.....
Oil companies are not simply passive resellers of OPEC production but have reserves of their own which rise in tandem with oil prices
.....

that, according to the *Washington Post* of last April 30th, President Obama “blasted oil companies for enjoying gangbuster profits while pump prices surged to nearly \$4 a gallon this week, and he again urged Congress to end \$4 billion a year in subsidies for the oil and gas industry.”

“When oil companies are making huge profits and you’re struggling at the pump, and we’re scouring the federal budget for spending we can afford to do without, these tax giveaways aren’t right,” Obama said. “They aren’t smart. And we need to end them,” the president added.

.....
Profiting from oil reserves

And Greg Palast points out in his book, “Armed Madhouse” (Plume), the oil majors are not simply passive resellers of OPEC production but have reserves of their own which rise in tandem with oil prices.

“The rise in the price of oil after the first three years of the (Iraq) war boosted the value of the reserves of ExxonMobil Oil alone by just over \$666-billion,” Palast wrote. What’s more, Chevron Oil, “where (Secretary of State) Condoleezza Rice had served as a director, gained a quarter trillion dollars in value.” Iraq’s experience mirrors the prior overthrow in 1953 of the Iranian government by the US Central Intelligence Agency.

This is recounted in “An Enemy of The People” (Doukathsan) by Lawrence Velvel,

dean of the Massachusetts School of Law at Andover. He notes that after CIA Mideast Operations Chief Kermit Roosevelt created a state of anarchy in Iran that toppled the elected government, the US oil companies cashed in.

“Our oil companies – Gulf, Standard of New Jersey, Texaco and Mobil – received a 40 percent share of the new National Iranian Oil Co., and the shah established a tyrannical dictatorship, with the dreaded Savak (secret police) doing dirty work for him,” Velvel writes.

By the way, it may be noted that Iran in 1953 could not be said to have the beginning of any nuclear weapon development as to constitute a threat to Israel or any other country.

So what was the 1953 overthrow of Iran all about if not oil? The pattern that has emerged over the past 60 years is that the Pentagon/CIA have bullied their way into seizing the oil fields of the Middle East, from which Western oil companies just happened to enrich themselves. The history of past events in Iran and Iraq casts a dubious light on the contemporary claims of US politicians today that Iran represents a mortal danger to Israel. The CIA overthrow of Iran and the Pentagon attack on Iraq reveal it’s all about oil.

CT

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Sherwood Ross is a Miami-based public relations consultant who advises colleges, universities, magazine, and businesses.

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How Hamas stole Israel's war

If the wicked enemy declares a truce, there's no excuse to attack Gaza, writes **Uri Avnery**

Is there no limit to the villainy of Hamas? Seems there isn't. Last month, they did something quite unforgivable. They stole a war.

For some weeks now, our almost new Chief of Staff, Benny Gantz, has been announcing at every possible opportunity that a new war against the Gaza Strip is inevitable. Several commanders of the troops around the Strip have been repeating this dire forecast, as have their camp-followers, a.k.a. military commentators.

One of these comforted us. True, Hamas can now hit Tel Aviv with their rockets, but that will not be so terrible, because it will be a short war. Just three or four days. As one of the generals said, it will be much more "hard and painful" (for the Arabs) than Cast Lead I, so it will not last for three weeks, as that did. We shall all stay in our shelters – those of us who have shelters, anyway – for just a few days.

Why is the war inevitable? Because of the terrorism, stupid. Hamas is a terrorist organization, isn't it?

But along comes the supreme Hamas leader, Khaled Mash'al, and declares that Hamas has given up all violent action. From now on it will concentrate on non-violent mass demonstrations, in the spirit of the Arab Spring.

When Hamas forswears terrorism, there is no pretext for an attack on Gaza.

But is a pretext needed? Our army will not let itself be thwarted by the likes of Mash'al. When the army wants a war, it will have a war. This was proved in 1982, when Ariel Sharon attacked Lebanon, despite the fact that the Lebanese border had been absolutely quiet for 11 months. (After the war, the myth was born that it was preceded by daily shooting. Today, almost every Israeli can "remember" the shooting – an astonishing example of the power of suggestion.

Why attack?

Why does the Chief of Staff want to attack?

A cynic might say that every new Chief of Staff needs a war to call his own. But we are not cynics, are we?

Every few days, a solitary rocket is launched from the Gaza Strip into Israel. It rarely hits anything but an empty field. For months, now, no one has been hurt.

The usual sequence is like this: our air force carries out a "targeted liquidation" of Palestinian militants in the strip. The army claims invariably that these specific "terrorists" had intended to attack Israelis. How did the army know of their intentions? Well, our army is a master thought reader.

After the persons have been killed, their organization considers it its duty to avenge their blood by launching a rocket or a mortar shell, or even two or three. This "can-

.....
When Hamas forswears terrorism, there is no pretext for an attack on Gaza
.....

.....
A team of Mossad agents was sent to assassinate Mash'al in the street by spraying his ear with an untraceable poison
.....

not be tolerated” by the army, and so it goes on.

After every such episode, the talk about a war starts again. As American politicians put it in their speeches at AIPAC conferences: “No country can tolerate its citizens being exposed to rockets!”

But of course, the reasons for Cast Lead II are more serious. Hamas is being accepted by the international community. Their Prime Minister, Isma'il Haniyeh, is now traveling around the Arab and Muslim world, after being shut in Gaza – a kind of Strip-arrest – for four years. Now he can cross into Egypt because the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas' parent organization, has become a major player there.

Even worse, Hamas is about to join the PLO and take part in the Palestinian government. High time to do something about it. Attack Gaza, for example. Compel Hamas to become extremist again.

Not content with stealing our war, Mash'al is carrying out a series of more sinister actions.

By joining the PLO, he is committing Hamas to the Oslo agreements and all the other official deals between Israel and the PLO. He has announced that Hamas accepts a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. He has let it be known that Hamas would not contest the Palestinian presidency this year, so that the Fatah candidate – whoever that may be – would be elected practically unopposed and be able to negotiate with Israel.

All this would put the present Israeli government in a difficult position.

Mash'al has some experience in causing trouble for Israel. In 1997, the (first) Netanyahu government decided to get rid of him in Amman. A team of Mossad agents was sent to assassinate him in the street by spraying his ear with an untraceable poison. But instead of doing the decent thing and dying quietly from a mysterious cause, like Yasser Arafat, he let his bodyguard chase the attackers and catch them.

King Hussein, Israel's longstanding friend and ally, was hopping mad. He presented Netanyahu with a choice: either the agents could be tried in Jordan and possibly hanged, or the Mossad would immediately send the secret antidote to save Mash'al. Netanyahu capitulated, and here we have Mash'al, very much alive and kicking.

Another curious outcome of this misadventure: the king demanded that the Hamas founder and leader, the paralyzed Sheik Ahmad Yassin, be released from Israeli prison. Netanyahu obliged, Yassin was released and assassinated by Israel seven years later. When his successor, Abd al-Aziz Rantissi, was assassinated soon after, the path was cleared for Mash'al to become the Hamas chief.

And instead of showing his gratitude, he now confronts us with a dire challenge: non-violent action, indirect peace overtures, the two-state solution.

.....
Longing for a little war

A question: why does our Chief of Staff long for a little war in Gaza, when he could have all the war he desires in Iran? Not just a little operation, but a big war, a very very big war.

Well, he knows that he cannot have it.

Some time ago I did something no experienced commentator ever does. I promised that there would be no Israeli military attack on Iran. (Nor, for that matter, an American one.)

An experienced journalist or politician never makes such a prediction without leaving a loophole for himself. He puts in an inconspicuous “unless”. If his forecast goes awry, he points to that loophole.

I do have some experience – some 60 or so years of it – but I did not leave any loophole. I said No War, and now General Gantz says the same in so many words. No Tehran, just poor little Gaza. Why? Because of that one word: Hormuz.

Not the ancient Persian god Hormuzd,

but the narrow strait that is the entrance and exit of the Persian Gulf, through which 20% of the world's oil (and 35% of the sea-borne oil) flows. My contention was that no sane (or even mildly insane) leader would risk the closing of the strait, because the economic consequences would be catastrophic, even apocalyptic.

It seems that the leaders of Iran were not sure that all the world's leaders read this column, so, just in case, they spelled it out themselves. Last month they conducted conspicuous military maneuvers around the Strait of Hormuz, accompanied by the unequivocal threat to close it.

The US responded with vainglorious counter-threats. The invincible US Navy was ready to open the strait by force, if needed.

How, pray? The mightiest multi-billion aircraft carrier can be easily sunk by a battery of cheap land-to-sea missiles, as well as by small missile-boats.

Let's assume Iran starts to act out its threats. The whole might of the US air force and navy is brought to bear. Iranian ships will be sunk, missile and army installations bombed. Still the Iranian missiles will come in, making passage through the strait impossible.

.....
Boots on the ground

What next? There will be no alternative to "boots on the ground". The US army will have to land on the shore and occupy all

the territory from which missiles can be effectively launched. That would be a major operation. Fierce Iranian resistance must be expected, judging from the experience of the eight-year Iraqi-Iranian war. The oil wells in neighboring Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states will also be hit.

Such a war would go far beyond the dimensions of the American invasions of Iraq or Afghanistan, perhaps even of Vietnam.

Is the bankrupt US up to it? Economically, politically and in terms of morale?

The closing of the strait is the ultimate weapon. I don't believe that the Iranians will use it against the imposition of sanctions, severe as they may be, as they have threatened. Only a military attack would warrant such a response.

If Israel attacks alone – "the most stupid idea I ever heard of," as our former Mossad chief put it – that will make no difference. Iran will consider it an American action, and close the strait. That's why the Obama administration put its foot down, and hand-delivered to Netanyahu and Ehud Barak an unequivocal order to abstain from any military action.

That's where we are now. No war in Iran. Just the prospect of a war in Gaza.

And along comes this evil Mash'al and tries to spoil the chances of that, too. **CT**

.....
Uri Avnery is an Israeli peace activist and a former Knesset member. He is the founder of Gush Shalom, the Israeli peace movement.

.....
The US army will have to land on the shore and occupy all the territory from which missiles can be effectively launched
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Haiti: Where the money did, and did not, go

Bill Quigley & Amber Ramanauskas follow the trail of the cash

.....
Almost none of the money that the general public thought was going to Haiti actually went directly to Haiti
.....

Haiti, a close neighbor of the US with over nine million people, was devastated by earthquake on January 12, 2010. Hundreds of thousands were killed and many more wounded.

The UN estimated international donors gave Haiti over \$1.6 billion in relief aid since the earthquake (about \$155 per Haitian) and over \$2 billion in recovery aid (about \$173 per Haitian) over the last two years.

Yet Haiti looks like the earthquake happened two months ago, not two years. Over half a million people remain homeless in hundreds of informal camps, most of the tons of debris from destroyed buildings still lays where it fell, and cholera, a preventable disease, was introduced into the country and is now an epidemic killing thousands and sickening hundreds of thousands more.

It turns out that almost none of the money that the general public thought was going to Haiti actually went directly to Haiti. The international community chose to bypass the Haitian people, Haitian non-governmental organizations and the government of Haiti. Funds were instead diverted to other governments, international NGOs, and private companies.

Despite this near total lack of control of the money by Haitians, if history is an indication, it is quite likely that the failures will ultimately be blamed on the Haitians themselves in a “blame the victim” reaction.

Haitians ask the same question as many around the world “Where did the money go?”

Here are seven places where the earthquake money did and did not go.

1. The largest single recipient of US earthquake money was the US government. The same holds true for donations by other countries.

Right after the earthquake, the US allocated \$379 million in aid and sent in 5,000 troops. The Associated Press discovered that of the \$379 million in initial US money promised for Haiti, most was not really money going directly, or in some cases even indirectly, to Haiti. They documented in January 2010 that thirty three cents of each of these US dollars for Haiti was actually given directly back to the US to reimburse ourselves for sending in our military. Forty two cents of each dollar went to private and public non-governmental organizations like Save the Children, the UN World Food Program and the Pan American Health Organization. Hardly any went directly to Haitians or their government.

The overall \$1.6 billion allocated for relief by the US was spent much the same way according to an August 2010 report by the US Congressional Research Office: \$655 million was reimbursed to the Department of Defense; \$220 million to Department

of Health and Human Services to provide grants to individual US states to cover services for Haitian evacuees; \$350 million to USAID disaster assistance; \$150 million to the US Department of Agriculture for emergency food assistance; \$15 million to the Department of Homeland Security for immigration fees, and so on.

International assistance followed the same pattern. The UN Special Envoy for Haiti reported that of the \$2.4 billion in humanitarian funding, 34 percent was provided back to the donor's own civil and military entities for disaster response, 28 percent was given to UN agencies and non-governmental agencies (NGOs) for specific UN projects, 26 percent was given to private contractors and other NGOs, 6 percent was provided as in-kind services to recipients, 5 percent to the international and national Red Cross societies, 1 percent was provided to the government of Haiti, four tenths of one percent of the funds went to Haitian NGOs.

2. Only 1 percent of the money went to the Haitian government.

Less than a penny of each dollar of US aid went to the government of Haiti, according to the Associated Press. The same is true with other international donors. The Haitian government was completely bypassed in the relief effort by the US and the international community.

3. Extremely little went to Haitian companies or Haitian non-governmental organizations.

The Center for Economic and Policy Research, the absolute best source for accurate information on this issue, analyzed all the 1490 contracts awarded by the US government after the January 2010 earthquake until April 2011 and found only 23 contracts went to Haitian companies. Overall the US had awarded \$194 million to contractors, \$4.8 million to the 23 Haitian companies, about 2.5 percent of the total. On the other

hand, contractors from the Washington DC area received \$76 million or 39.4 percent of the total. As noted above, the UN documented that only four tenths of one percent of international aid went to Haitian NGOs.

In fact Haitians had a hard time even getting into international aid meetings. Refugees International reported that locals were having a hard time even getting access to the international aid operational meetings inside the UN compound. "Haitian groups are either unaware of the meetings, do not have proper photo-ID passes for entry, or do not have the staff capacity to spend long hours at the compound." Others reported that most of these international aid coordination meetings were not even being translated into Creole, the language of the majority of the people of Haiti!

4. A large percentage of the money went to international aid agencies, and big well connected non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The American Red Cross received over \$486 million in donations for Haiti. It says two-thirds of the money has been contracted to relief and recovery efforts, though specific details are difficult to come by. The CEO of American Red Cross has a salary of over \$500,000 per year.

Look at the \$8.6 million joint contract between the US Agency for International Development (USAID) with the private company CHF for debris removal in Port au Prince. CHF is politically well-connected international development company with annual budget of over \$200 million whose CEO was paid \$451,813 in 2009. CHF's connection to Republicans and Democrats is illustrated by its board secretary, Lauri Fitz-Pegado, a partner with the Livingston Group LLC. The Livingston Group is headed by the former Republican Speaker-designate for the 106th Congress, Bob Livingston, doing lobbying and government relations. Ms. Fitz-Pegado, who apparently works the other side of the aisle, was appointed by

.....
The Haitian government was completely bypassed in the relief effort by the US and the international community

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Less than a month after the quake hit, the US Ambassador Kenneth Merten sent a cable titled “THE GOLD RUSH IS ON” as part of his situation report to Washington
.....

President Clinton to serve in the Department of Commerce and served as a member of the foreign policy expert advisor team on the Obama for President Campaign. CHF “works in Haiti out of two spacious mansions in Port au Prince and maintains a fleet of brand new vehicles” according to *Rolling Stone*.

Rolling Stone, in an excellent article by Janet Reitman, reported on another earthquake contract, a \$1.5 million contract to the NY based consulting firm Dalberg Global Development Advisors. The article found Dalberg’s team “had never lived overseas, didn’t have any disaster experience or background in urban planning... never carried out any program activities on the ground...” and only one of them spoke French. USAID reviewed their work and found that “it became clear that these people may not have even gotten out of their SUVs.”

Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton announced a fundraising venture for Haiti on January 16, 2010. As of October 2011, the fund had received \$54 million in donations. It has partnered with several Haitian and international organizations. Though most of its work appears to be admirable, it has donated \$2 million to the construction of a Haitian \$29 million for-profit luxury hotel.

“The NGOs still have something to respond to about their accountability, because there is a lot of cash out there,” according to Nigel Fisher, the UN’s chief humanitarian officer in Haiti. “What about the \$1.5 to \$2 billion that the Red Cross and NGOs got from ordinary people, and matched by governments? What’s happened to that? And that’s where it’s very difficult to trace those funds.”

5. Some money went to for profit companies whose business is disasters.

Less than a month after the quake hit, the US Ambassador Kenneth Merten sent a cable titled “THE GOLD RUSH IS ON” as part of his situation report to Washington.

In this February 1, 2010 document, made public by The Nation, Haiti Liberte and Wikileaks, Ambassador Merten reported the President of Haiti met with former General Wesley Clark for a sales presentation for a Miami-based company that builds foam core houses.

Capitalizing on the disaster, Lewis Lucke, a high ranking USAID relief coordinator, met twice in his USAID capacity with the Haitian Prime Minister immediately after the quake. He then quit the agency and was hired for \$30,000 a month by a Florida corporation Ashbritt (known already for its big no bid Katrina grants) and a prosperous Haitian partner to lobby for disaster contracts. Locke said “it became clear to us that if it was handled correctly the earthquake represented as much an opportunity as it did a calamity...”

Ashbritt and its Haitian partner were soon granted a \$10 million no bid contract. Lucke said he was instrumental in securing another \$10 million contract from the World Bank and another smaller one from CHF International before their relationship ended.

6. A fair amount of the pledged money has never been actually put up.

The international community decided it was not going to allow the Haiti government to direct the relief and recovery funds and insisted that two institutions be set up to approve plans and spending for the reconstruction funds going to Haiti. The first was the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC) and the second is the Haiti Reconstruction Fund (HRF).

In March 2010, UN countries pledged \$5.3 billion over two years and a total of \$9.9 billion over three years in a conference March 2010. The money was to be deposited with the World Bank and distributed by the IHRC. The IHRC was co-chaired by Bill Clinton and the Haitian Prime Minister. By July 2010, Bill Clinton reported only 10 percent of the pledges had been given

to the IHRC.

7. A lot of the money which was put up has not yet been spent.

Nearly two years after the quake, less than 1 percent of the \$412 million in US funds specifically allocated for infrastructure reconstruction activities in Haiti had been spent by USAID and the US State Department and only 12 percent has even been obligated according to a November 2011 report by the US Government Accountability Office (GAO).

The performance of the two international commissions, the IHRC and the HRF has also been poor. The *Miami Herald* noted that as of July 2011, the \$3.2 billion in projects approved by the IHRC only five had been completed for a total of \$84 million. The Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC), which was severely criticized by Haitians and others from its beginning, has been effectively suspended since its mandate ended at the end of October 2011. The Haiti Reconstruction Fund was set up to work in tandem with the IHRC, so while its partner is suspended, it is not clear how it can move forward.

What to do

The effort so far has not been based a respectful partnership between Haitians and the international community. The actions of the donor countries and the NGOs and international agencies have not been transparent so that Haitians or others can track

the money and see how it has been spent. Without transparency and a respectful partnership the Haitian people cannot hold anyone accountable for what has happened in their country. That has to change.

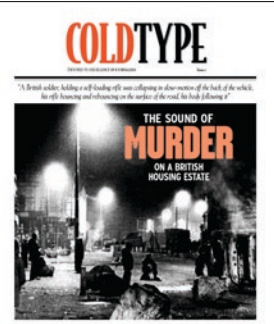
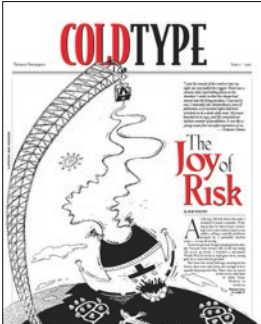
The UN Special Envoy to Haiti suggests the generous instincts of people around the world must be channeled by international actors and institutions in a way that assists in the creation of a “robust public sector and a healthy private sector.” Instead of giving the money to intermediaries, funds should be directed as much as possible to Haitian public and private institutions. A “Haiti First” policy could strengthen public systems, promote accountability, and create jobs and build skills among the Haitian people.

Respect, transparency and accountability are the building blocks for human rights. Haitians deserve to know where the money has gone, what the plans are for the money still left, and to be partners in the decision-making for what is to come.

After all, these are the people who will be solving the problems when the post-earthquake relief money is gone. **CT**

Haitians deserve to know where the money has gone, what the plans are for the money still left

Bill Quigley is a law professor and human rights advocate at Loyola University New Orleans. Bill is a long time Haiti advocate in his work with the Center for Constitutional Rights and the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti. Amber Ramanauskas is a human rights lawyer in NYC. Vladimir Laguerre helped with this article.

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Haiti: Raped since 2004 and still bleeding

Glen Ford reflects on the suffering of a nation at the hands of the international community

.....
Since the earthquake that shook the life out of hundreds of thousands of already deeply wounded people, the United States has flexed every superpower muscle to prolong Haiti's agony
.....

The horrific squandering of Haitian lives and earthquake relief and aid dollars by the occupying powers over the past two years are direct consequences of previous imperial crimes.

Since 2004, Haiti has been methodically stripped of its sovereignty, made into a protectorate of the United Nations, which is merely a front for the United States.

The earthquake of January 2010 was a natural phenomenon that happened to take place while a rape was in progress.

In the American media, Haiti is most often spoken of as a tragedy – when it is actually the scene of horrific crimes, mainly perpetrated by the United States over the span of two centuries. For the past two years, since the earthquake that shook the life out of hundreds of thousands of already deeply wounded people, the United States has flexed every superpower muscle to prolong Haiti's agony.

Half a million people are still homeless, two years after the quake, despite the billions in relief and recovery aid pledged by international donors. Sixty percent of the rubble has yet to be removed from the capital and its suburbs, and 6,000 people have died from a cholera epidemic brought into the country by United Nations troops. The UN has still not seen fit to apologize for being the vector of disease, because the UN is not accountable to the people of Haiti – only

to the United States. The Americans used a huge chunk of their so-called aid money to reimburse themselves for the cost of their military occupation of the country. Dead, dying, sick, starving, homeless Haitians are made to pay for their own imprisonment in their native land, while Washington gloats that it is Haiti's last, best hope, and that the catastrophic earthquake might have been a good thing, a chance for a "new beginning" under Washington's firm guidance.

Millions were spent to choreograph crooked elections that brought to office a government with no power, even less money, and not a shred of dignity – a puppet regime held in absolute disrespect by its American puppeteers.

.....
Outlaw party

Meanwhile, Haiti's most popular political party remains, for all official purposes, an outlaw, effectively banned from civic participation. The Haitian people are not allowed to speak. And this is the heart of the crime, from which all the grand and petty assaults on the Haitian nation, flow.

Last month's anniversary of the killer earthquake is full of morbid statistics on physical destruction, death and disease, but the appalling numbers cannot separate these two years of horror from the crimes that came before: the isolation and armed

extortion of Haiti by United States and Europe following her 1804 victory against French slavery, leaving the Black republic with a debt that was not paid off until the 1940s; the 26 separate invasions of Haiti by the United States from 1849 to 1915, followed by a nearly 20-year occupation that lasted until 1934; and the US overthrow of Haiti's popularly elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide, in 2004, the 200th anniversary of Haiti's independence.

Since 2004, Haiti has been methodically stripped of its sovereignty, made into a protectorate of the United Nations, which is merely a front for the real rulers, the United States and its junior partners, France and Canada.

The earthquake of January 2010 was a natural phenomenon that happened to take place while a rape was in progress. The rapists in Washington take their greatest pleasure in Haiti's degradation. Haiti needs nothing from the United States, except to be left alone, as a free nation in the world, to make friends as it chooses. It is not natural disaster that holds her back, but naked US aggression – because all people have the capacity to rise, unless they are held down by overwhelming force. **CT**

Haiti has been methodically stripped of its sovereignty, made into a protectorate of the United Nations

Glen Ford is executive editor of the Black Agenda Report at www.blackagenda.com, where this commentary was first published.



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Meal

A short story by **Puzzlemonkey**

.....
The black patch eyes its companion, considers fighting, then drops its head under the heat and nuzzles at a scrap of dry grass
.....

In some parts of Africa they call the sun “The Government.” It’s as brutal, and just as hard to get away from.

The heat presses down on a white-haired man as his short, tired steps carry him toward the shop. His shoes are cracked, but the years have buffed them with a dull sheen even as they’ve grown too loose for his feet. The shlofts of dust they throw up sink away as if they too are too weary to rise, and want to stoop like his shoulders under the threadbare jacket. One hand clutches thin ropes that are tied around the necks of a pair of goats. The animals’ heads hang low, mouths open, as they trudge behind him.

Franco, propped against the shop’s wall in the shade, sips from a red and white tin with all the unconquered confidence of youth. Tall and well-built, he has a quick smile that offsets his muscles but matches his tiny, spiky dreads. He sits forward, the fingertips on his free hand raised to the tip of a non-existent hat. “Greetings, Tata Tumba.”

The old man tethers the first goat with snapping jerks that leave it too close to the wooden post. He mumbles a greeting without looking up.

Franco leans back, sipping his Coke. “How was the market, Tata?”

Tumba spits. “One goat. They give you fifty thousand franc for a goat. What can you buy with fifty thousand today?”

Franco shakes his head. Tumba ties the

second goat, the one with a black patch around its eye, to the post. His hand works in sharp, angry snaps, leaving the animal only a few inches to move.

“Must I give my goats away? So I sold only the one goat. I will take my bag of meal and eat my other goats.” He straightens up and wipes sweat from his forehead. “The good Lord alone knows what Angelique will have to say. And you, Franco? How are things with you?”

The second goat pulls against its rope, then wrenches its head against the lack of play. It is too close to the first goat, who jabs a horn at it. The black patch eyes its companion, considers fighting, then drops its head under the heat and nuzzles at a scrap of dry grass poking through a crack in the cement.

Franco grins. “A boy.” He lifts the can in a toast. “Can you believe it? Finally! Healthy too, lungs like a bull’s.”

Tumba smiles. “Well done, young man. God has certainly been kind to you.” He steps into the shop, pulling back his shoulders. Franco sips, sweet and cold winning out against the heat for a moment. Head thrown back under the can, he misses the old man’s muttering.

“Just wait till he stops sucking milk and you have to feed him.”

The cool, floury air inside braces Tumba. He is glad to see that there are only two

other people in the shop. Esau stands behind the counter that runs the length of the small room, splitting it in two. Everything of any value is stacked behind the counter, along with the tins, boxes and packets of normal foodstuff.

An oil drum filled with water stands in front of the counter, a ladle and tin cups dangling from wire hooks around its rim. A faint and elusive water glint dances on the underside of the tin roof.

Another crate holds a jumble of used clothes. Oumo sifts through the torn jeans and new-looking t-shirts, the kids' blouses and workmen's overalls. She is wearing an ankle-length skirt and a long-sleeved blouse that fit her reputation for dressing smartly, even when she is not giving class.

Esau inherited the shop from his grandfather, and the old man had bought it from the original owner, who, depending on who was telling the story, was a Norwegian, a Chinaman or a Jew. The Jew left to join the army in Israel, or, in another version, went to Biafra to sell weapons to both sides of the civil war. The Chinese vanished after persuading the local tax collector to let him keep the money overnight in his shop safe. The Norwegian married two women from Kassawa and went to live there, raising ground nuts and chickens. Or so the story went.

Although Esau is slender, almost sinewy, the years of lifting meal, beans and nuts have built up muscles that gleam nearly as much as his shaven head.

"Three thousand franc for a shirt, four thousand for a dress and six for pants," he says more to Tumba than to Oumo.

She strokes the fabric of a dress, making tut-tut noises, and turns it in her hands.

"I'm cutting my own arm off," Esau continues as Oumo holds the dress out in front of her. She turns it this way and that, trying to get the guinea-fowl print to catch whatever light there is.

"But what can a man do? No one wants to pay for anything any more. Greetings,

Tata. Was the market good today?"

Oumo lowers the dress, and dips her knees just the tiniest bit. "Greetings, Tata." She puts the dress in the crate and carries on hunting through the clothes. A yellow and red dress catches her eye, and she pulls it out.

"Tchaaaa, the market. Give me one month." Tumba glances at Oumo as he takes a handful of notes out of his pocket. "I always thought red is a good colour for a woman in summer."

"Tata...." Esau stares at the old man for a long moment. He opens his mouth, but then turns away towards the shelves.

Tumba counts out a hundred and twenty five thousand franc while Esau hauls a huge bag of ground maize meal onto the counter. The shopkeeper adds smaller paper bags of beans, nuts, dried fish and tins of food in a neat row next to the meal. He picks up a machete to cut a length from a roll of dried fruit.

The dress has narrow straps on the shoulders, and looks tight at the waist. Its long flared skirts breathe sophistication. Oumo stands up straight and holds it at arm's length, turning it and tilting her head to the left, then the right.

Tumba squares the notes. The leathery fingers with their gnarled joints tap the edges, and count the money again.

Esau turns around, blade in one hand and a length of dried fruit in the other. He shuts his eyes and takes a breath. "I'm sorry, Tata...." He looks at the old man. "One month is now two hundred and fifty thousand."

Tumba's head snaps up as if the shopkeeper has struck him. "What?"

"I'm sorry, Tata. It is the government."

Oumo holds the dress against her body and strikes a pose, one foot forward just like the first step into church, holds her head high for a moment, and then looks down at the material. She juts her knee a little forward to push the fabric out and straightens

.....
The leathery fingers with their gnarled joints tap the edges, and count the money again

.....
Tumba's leathery frame is tougher than it looks, and the machete in Esau's hand stops the shopkeeper from getting a proper grip

the pleats with one hand.

"I don't buy my meal from the government."

"No, Tata," says Esau, "it's the world bank who's making them raise - "

"What world bank?"

Oumo looks up at Tumba. "Tata, what do you think of - "

Esau interrupts. "They're forcing the government to cancel the subsi - "

"Do I put my money in this bank?" Tumba waves the hundred thousand.

Oumo looks at the dress again and turns a little to let the yellow weave catch the dusty light.

"No, Tata, but they - "

"Do I put my money in this bank, or do I give it to you?"

"Tata, please."

Oumo nods, folds the dress along its creases and walks to the counter, digging in her bosom.

"Where is this bank, anyway?"

Esau shrugs. "In Paris, I think, but they have men all over the world."

Oumo reaches into her bra and out pulls a balled handkerchief. "No," she says, unwrapping it and picking out coins, "it's in America. Washington. Tata Tumba,"

Tumba smacks his money on the counter and heaves the bag of meal towards him. "If they want my money in Washington let them come here and get it."

Esau grabs the other end of the bag. The men grunt and grit as they pull. Tumba's leathery frame is tougher than it looks, and the machete in Esau's hand stops the shopkeeper from getting a proper grip. Much as Esau's muscles bulge, he barely hauls the bag an inch or so.

Tumba lets go with one hand and pushes the francs towards Esau. The younger man instinctively puts out a hand to stop the notes sliding off the counter, and Tumba yanks the bag towards his side.

Esau lets go of the bag and raises the machete. "Pay half, get half." The blade flashes down into the bag, sending white dust flying.

Tumba shoves the money off the counter. Esau knows it's a feint, but he can't help but look down as the bills scatter at his feet. Tumba snatches the machete, and holds it straight in front of him, waving it slightly from side to side.

Esau lets out a cry and leaps onto the counter, grabbing at the handle of the machete. Tumba pulls away and steps back. He looks to the door, at the bag, and then around the shop. For a moment he thinks about running, but he's done nothing wrong, so why should he? He wants to grab his bag of meal, but he won't get very far weighed down by it and Esau running after him. He wants to scream, hit something, but instead he grabs hold of Oumo.

She drops the dress and screams as Tumba puts the blade against her neck. Coins ping to the floor and roll up against the barrel and under the crates.

Tumba glares at the shopkeeper's meal-covered hands. "Give me my month or you will be the one responsible!"

Franco rushes in but slams to a halt when he sees the machete.

"Tata." Esau edges forward on the counter, raising his massive hands. "Put it down."

Tumba backs away, pulling Oumo with him. "Give me my month!"

Franco takes a step forward but a glance from Tumba stops him. He raises a hand and holds it out to the old man, palm up. "Please, Tata, whatever is wrong, we - "

Oumo cuts him off. "All of you be quiet. Just give the man his - "

"Stay back!" shouts Tumba as Esau tenses to leap.

The blade glints. Tumba presses it against Oumo's throat and she screams. A drop of blood runs onto the blade. She grabs at her throat and pulls away from the old man.

Tumba stares at the machete. A frown notches between his eyes and the fist holding the blade drops to his side.

Esau swears. He jumps down and rips the knife from the old man's hand.

Franco grabs a shirt from the crate and presses it to the cut on Oumo's throat. She waves a finger at the men.

"Shame on you! Grown men! Esau, give the man his month. Is the world bank his fault? Anyway, look how you've cut that bag. And you, Tata...."

Her head shakes. "Ayi." She touches the cut, takes the shirt from Franco and dabs it at her throat. She bends down and reaches for a coin on the floor. Before she gets to it, she straightens up, throws the shirt on the ground and marches out of the door, muttering as she goes.

Franco helps Tumba shoulder the bag of meal, then packs the other food into another bag. Esau picks up the shirt and looks ruefully at the stain before he wipes the

blood off the machete.

#

The dust tugs at the feet of an old man in the late afternoon gloom. Two goats follow him, heads down and tongues out. A small bag hangs tucked into his belt and his shoulders sag under a bag of meal. There is just a hint of a stagger in his steps.

A steady trickle of meal runs from a gash in the bag as he trudges towards the sinking Government.

CT

PuzzleMonkey is perpetually perplexed by the behaviour patterns of the hairless apes, and tries to work through this by writing odd pieces of short and longer fiction. For light relief he shoots and edits video, and has recently started a blog at www.pzmk.co.za

.....
 She throws the shirt on the ground and marches out of the door, muttering as she goes

HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



Welcome to the world's first bunker state

As refugees from Africa flock north, Israel decides there's still only room for Jews in the 'villa in the jungle', writes **Jonathan Cook**

.....
As it did with the Palestinians many years ago, Israel has criminalised these new refugees
.....

The wheel is turning full circle. Last month the Israeli parliament updated a 59-year-old law originally intended to prevent hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees from returning to the homes and lands from which they had been expelled as Israel was established.

The purpose of the draconian 1954 Prevention of Infiltration Law was to lock up any Palestinian who managed to slip past the snipers guarding the new state's borders.

Israel believed only savage punishment and deterrence could ensure it maintained the overwhelming Jewish majority it had recently created through a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Fast-forward six decades and Israel is relying on the infiltration law again, this time to prevent a supposedly new threat to its existence: the arrival each year of several thousand desperate African asylum seekers.

As it did with the Palestinians many years ago, Israel has criminalised these new refugees - in their case, for fleeing persecution, war or economic collapse. Whole families can now be locked up, without a trial, for three years while a deportation order is sought and enforced, and Israelis who offer them assistance risk jail sentences of up to 15 years.

Israel's intention is apparently to put as many of these refugees behind bars as possible, and dissuade others from following in their footsteps.

To cope, officials have approved the building of an enormous detention camp, operated by Israel's prison service, to contain 10,000 of these unwelcome arrivals. That will make it the largest holding facility of its kind in the world - according to Amnesty International, it will be three times bigger than the next largest, in the much more populous, and divine retribution-loving, US state of Texas.

.....
Moral duty

Israeli critics of the law fear their country is failing in its moral duty to help those fleeing persecution, thereby betraying the Jewish people's own experiences of suffering and oppression.

But the Israeli government and the large majority of legislators who backed the law - like their predecessors in the 1950s - have drawn a very different conclusion from history.

The new infiltration law is the latest in a set of policies fortifying Israel's status as the world's first "bunker state"- and one designed to be as ethnically pure as possible. The concept was expressed most famously by an earlier prime minister, Ehud

Barak, now the defence minister, who called Israel “a villa in the jungle”, relegating the country’s neighbours to the status of wild animals.

Barak and his successors have been turning this metaphor into a physical reality, slowly sealing off their state from the rest of the region at astronomical cost, much of it subsidised by US taxpayers. Their ultimate goal is to make Israel so impervious to outside influence that no concessions for peace, such as agreeing to a Palestinian state, need ever be made with the “beasts” around them.

The most tangible expression of this mentality has been a frenzy of wall-building. The best-known are those erected around the Palestinian territories: first Gaza, then the areas of the West Bank Israel is not intending to annex - or, at least, not yet.

The northern border is already one of the most heavily militarised in the world - as Lebanese and Syrian protesters found to great cost last summer when dozens were shot dead and wounded as they approached or stormed the fences there. And Israel has a proposal in the drawer for another wall along the border with Jordan, much of which is already mined.

The only remaining border, the 260km one with Egypt, is currently being closed with another gargantuan wall. The plans were agreed before last year’s Arab revolutions but have gained fresh impetus with the overthrow of Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak.

Missile defense

Israel is not only well advanced on the walls of the bunker; it is also working round the clock on the roof. It has three missile-defence systems in various stages of development, including the revealingly named “Iron Dome”, as well as US Patriot batteries stationed on its soil. The interception systems are supposed to neutralise any combination of short and long-range missile at-

tacks Israel’s neighbours might launch.

But there is a flaw in the design of this shelter, one that is apparent even to its architects. Israel is sealing itself in with some of the very “animals” the villa is supposed to exclude: not only the African refugees, but also 1.5 million “Israeli Arabs”, descendants of the small number of Palestinians who avoided expulsion in 1948.

This has been the chief motive for the steady stream of anti-democratic measures by the government and parliament that is rapidly turning into a torrent. It is also the reason for the Israeli leadership’s new-found demand that the Palestinians recognise Israel’s Jewishness; its obsessions with loyalty; and the growing appeal of population exchange schemes.

In the face of the legislative assault, Israel’s Supreme Court has grown ever more complicit.

Last month, it sullied its reputation by upholding a law that tears apart families by denying tens of thousands of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship the right to live with their Palestinian spouse in Israel - “ethnic cleansing” by other means, as leading Israeli commentator Gideon Levy noted.

Back in the early 1950s, the Israeli army shot dead thousands of unarmed Palestinians as they tried to reclaim property that had been stolen from them. These many years later, Israel appears no less determined to keep non-Jews out of its precious villa.

The bunker state is almost finished, and with it the dream of Israel’s founders is about to be realised. **CT**

Jonathan Cook won the 2011 Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His latest books are “Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East” (Pluto Press) and “Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair” (Zed Books). His website is www.jkcook.net

The northern border is already one of the most heavily militarised in the world - as Lebanese and Syrian protesters found to great cost last summer when dozens were shot dead and wounded as they approached or stormed the fences there

The sacrificial castle

In Britain, as in other nations, there are groups of children who can be abused with impunity, says **George Monbiot**

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A 12-year-old boy with attention deficit disorder was imprisoned for turning over a desk; six years later, he's still inside
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Texas is a largely-Christian state that appears to believe in neither forgiveness nor redemption. Last month the *Guardian* revealed the extent to which it has criminalised its children. Police now patrol the schools, arresting and charging pupils as young as six for breaches of discipline.

Among the villainies for which they have been apprehended are throwing paper aeroplanes, using perfume in class, cheeking the teacher, wearing the wrong clothes and arriving late for school. A 12-year-old boy with attention deficit disorder was imprisoned for turning over a desk; six years later, he's still inside. Children convicted of these enormities – 300,000 such tickets were issued by Texas police in 2010 – acquire a criminal record. This makes them ineligible for federal aid at university and for much subsequent employment.

Yet most of them have committed no recognised crime. As one of the judges who hears their cases explained to the *Guardian*, “if any adult did it it's not going to be a violation.”

On the other hand, no charges have been brought against a Texas judge called William Adams. Last year a video was released which showed him beating the living daylight out of his daughter with a leather belt. The attack was so savage that when I watched it I nearly threw up. Adams can-

not be prosecuted because the beating took place eight years ago. But even if it had happened yesterday, he might not have been charged, as he could have claimed that he was disciplining his child. In both cases the law permits people to do things to children that they could not do to adults.

Before we start feeling too superior, we should remember that systematic injustice towards children is common to many nations. Consider these cases, all from the past few decades: the theft of babies and forced adoptions in Spain; the teenage girls pressed into slavery into Ireland's Magdalene laundries; the sexual abuse in its industrial schools; similar institutional abuse, also by Catholic priests, in many parts of the world; buggery and beatings in Welsh children's homes; the British children told, wrongly, that they were orphans and exported to Australia, Canada and other Commonwealth countries; the assaults by staff in privately-run child jails. It seems to me that such abuses have three common characteristics.

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Sacrificial caste

The first is that the countries in which they occur appear to possess a sacrificial caste of children, whose rights can be denied and whose interests can be disregarded with impunity. The second is that these countries

have a powerful resistance towards confronting and addressing this injustice: discussing it often amounts to a taboo. (These two traits were chillingly dramatised in Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go*). The third is that systematic abuse becomes widely acknowledged only after determined people – such as Margaret Humphreys (the child migrants) and Alison Taylor (the Welsh care homes) – spend years trying to force it into the open in the face of official denial.

So I want to try once more to begin a discussion about an issue we still refuse to examine: early boarding. It is as British as warm beer, green suburbs and pointless foreign wars. Despite or because of that we won’t talk about it. Those on the right will not defend these children, as they will not criticise private schools. Those on the left won’t defend them, as they see them as privileged and therefore undeserving of concern. But children’s needs are universal; they know no such distinctions.

The UK Boarding Schools website lists 18 schools which take boarders from the age of eight, and 38 which take them from the age of seven. I expect such places have improved over the past 40 years; they could scarcely have got worse. Children are likely to have more contact with home; though one school I phoned last week told me that some of its pupils still see their parents only in the holidays. But the nature of boarding is only one of the forces that can harm these children. The other is the fact of boarding.

In a paper published last year in the *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, Dr Joy Schaverien identifies a set of symptoms common among early boarders that she calls Boarding School Syndrome. Her research suggests that the act of separation, regardless of what might follow it, “can cause profound developmental damage”, as “early rupture with home has a lasting influence on attachment patterns.”

When a child is brought up at home, the family adapts to accommodate it: growing

up involves a constant negotiation between parents and children. But an institution cannot rebuild itself around one child. Instead, the child must adapt to the system. Combined with the sudden and then repeated loss of parents, siblings, pets and toys, this causes the child to shut itself off from the need for intimacy. This can cause major problems in adulthood: depression, an inability to talk about or understand emotions, the urge to escape from or to destroy intimate relationships. These symptoms mostly affect early boarders: those who start when they are older are less likely to be harmed.

It should be obvious that this system could also inflict wider damage. A repressed, traumatised elite, unable to connect emotionally with others, is a danger to society: look at the men who started the First World War.

Deciding the age

Over the past few days, I have phoned the education department, the Boarding Schools Association and the head teachers of several schools to ask them a simple question: how did they decide that seven or eight was an appropriate age for children to start boarding? In every case the answer was the same: they didn’t. This, they all told me, is just the way it has always been done. No inquiry, no committee, no board, no ethics council has, as far as they know, ever examined this question. Very young children are being sent away from home in a complete vacuum of professional advice. Compare this to the ethical agonising over whether or not children should be taken into care and you encounter the class prejudice common to all British governments: the upper classes require no oversight.

So yes, rage against Texas and its monstrosities, and wonder at the cruel, authoritarian system a nominal democracy can produce. But remember that this is not the only place in which governments endorse the damage done to children.

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Compare this to the ethical agonising over whether or not children should be taken into care and you encounter the class prejudice common to all British governments: the upper classes require no oversight

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George Monbiot’s latest book is “Bring On The Apocalypse”. This piece first appeared in London’s Guardian newspaper.

CT

Coffins for US and Nato; contracts for China

Barry Lando on Iran, israel and the US

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It was American engineers who, in the summer of 2010, completed a survey concluding that Afghanistan sits atop one trillion dollars of untapped copper, iron and lithium deposits
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Some bitter ironies in Afghanistan these days: U.S. and French soldiers gunned down by the very Afghan troops they work with. America and its NATO allies, facing huge budget problems themselves, persist in squandering billions in Afghanistan, to defeat Islamic radicals and create a propitious climate for growth and investment. Right now, the largest investments so safe guarded are Chinese.

Another paradox, it was American engineers who, in the summer of 2010, completed a survey concluding that Afghanistan sits atop one trillion dollars of untapped copper, iron and lithium deposits. If it could just get its act together, the country had a promising future. Skeptics immediately claimed that rosy estimate didn't take account Afghanistan's woeful infrastructure: it could cost more to mine those resources than they were worth.

But that's not how the Chinese see it. A few weeks ago, China's National Petroleum Corporation became the first foreign company to be allowed to explore Afghanistan's oil and gas reserves in the Amu Darya Basin. The deal is estimated to be worth more than \$700 million. Some speculate it could ultimately be worth ten times that amount to China.

Even before that deal, however, China was already the largest foreign investor in

Afghanistan. In 2007 Beijing signed a \$3 billion agreement to explore huge copper deposits in Mes Aynak, south of Kabul.

India is the only other country to go after Afghan minerals. Last November a deal was signed giving Indian firms the rights to 1.8 billion tons on iron-ore, one of the largest untapped deposits in Asia.

It's very unlikely that the Chinese [and Indians] would be making such risky bets without the security provided by the U.S. and its allies. After the copper deal was inked, 2,000 US troops were deployed to provide general security in Logar Province where the Mes Aynak mine is located. They also protected the projected routes of the road and railway which will service the huge development. Another 1,500 Afghan National Police, presumably paid and trained by the U.S. and its allies, were sent to guard the mine itself.

In addition, facing restless Muslim groups in their own country, the Chinese are not at all unhappy about the U.S. and Nato taking on Islamic militants in Afghanistan.

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China says no

Yet, all the while, China has consistently refused to contribute to the joint Western military force. They even turned down a request to permit NATO to ship non-lethal supplies via China to Afghanistan.

So why aren't the U.S. and its allies screaming about the situation? Because, if they are to have a face-saving way out of Afghanistan that doesn't disintegrate into chaos, they desperately need China's huge new investments to continue and prosper.

As things now stand, once the income from opium production is deducted, 97% of Afghanistan's GNP comes from foreign aid. A whole new economy is needed.

After China's National Petroleum Council signed its recent oil agreement with Kabul, experts warned that success was far from a sure thing: it could take five to ten years of expensive exploration to see if the oil fields are really worth developing.

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China's foot in the door

But the Chinese are after more than oil and copper. They see each deal as another foot in the door. They are also determined to reap huge potential profits to come from rebuilding Afghanistan's shattered infrastructure and economy, among such projects, a high-speed rail system. In this way, without massive military deployments, China has already become a major player throughout the region. [I've written about China's activities in Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and the Gulf

in other recent blogs]

A particularly insightful comment on China's tactics in Afghanistan followed an article in The Diplomat:

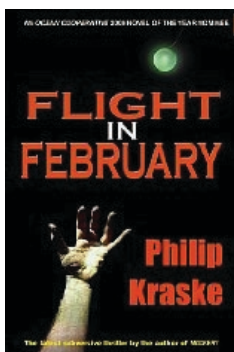
"Achieving a peace agreement is always the number one preference for Chinese government. By nature Chinese are not interested in "beating" other group of people, but are interested in "gaining" concrete benefits. This is due to the Chinese culture and history. In Chinese culture, people believe in "harmony brings wealth". Therefore, when dealing with a dispute, a Chinese normally do not set his goal as completely beating the others, but rather sequence his goals according to priority, and try to achieve the goal with the highest priority first, and so on. Each disputant may achieve some goal upon settlement of the dispute."

Case in point: thanks to the Chinese, the Afghans may benefit from a real high-speed rail system before the United States. **CT**

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Barry Lando is a former producer with 60 Minutes, author of "Web of Deceit-the History of Western Complicity in Iraq from Churchill to Kennedy to G.W. Bush". Writing a novel, "The Watchman's File", about Israel's most ferociously guarded secret. [And it's not the bomb]. Canadian, currently living in Paris.

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Without massive military deployments, China has already become a major player throughout the region

"Kraske's command of plot, dialog and character is staggering. Whatever he puts his pen to, whether essay or fiction, makes for a great read" – ColdType



FLIGHT IN FEBRUARY

Did drug-trafficker Marcus Strenk escape from Minnesota's maximum-security prison during a blizzard – or die trying? Deputy Marshal Henry Scott believes that Strenk found a way past the highly sophisticated security system and made it to freedom. But the search Scott puts into gear is quickly spiked by Alec Barkley, the very FBI agent who had put Strenk in jail – spiked, that is, until Strenk's cheery note from outside arrives at the prison. Barkley puts every available agent on the manhunt. Henry Scott meanwhile examines Barkley's earlier espionage operation against Strenk's Mexican connections – and ends up stepping through the looking glass. (Read the first chapter at <http://www.philipkraske.com/index.php?id=63>)

BUY IT AT AMAZON.COM \$11.55 (PRINT) OR \$6.99 (KINDLE)

Sinking the petrodollar in the Persian Gulf

Pepe Escobar follows the money in the Iran crisis

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The US will have to sanction any third-country banks and companies dealing with Iran's Central Bank, which is meant to cripple that country's oil sales
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Let's start with red lines. Here it is, Washington's ultimate red line, straight from the lion's mouth. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said recently of the Iranians, "Are they trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No. But we know that they're trying to develop a nuclear capability. And that's what concerns us. And our red line to Iran is do not develop a nuclear weapon. That's a red line for us."

How strange, the way those red lines continue to retreat. Once upon a time, the red line for Washington was "enrichment" of uranium. Now, it's evidently an actual nuclear weapon that can be brandished. Keep in mind that, since 2005, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has stressed that his country is not seeking to build a nuclear weapon.

The most recent National Intelligence Estimate on Iran from the US Intelligence Community has similarly stressed that Iran is not, in fact, developing a nuclear weapon (as opposed to the breakout capacity to build one someday).

What if, however, there is no "red line," but something completely different? Call it the petrodollar line.

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Banking on Sanctions?

Let's start here: In December 2011, imper-

vicious to dire consequences for the global economy, the US Congress – under all the usual pressures from the Israel lobby (not that it needs them) – foisted a mandatory sanctions package on the Obama administration (100 to 0 in the Senate and with only 12 "no" votes in the House). Starting in June, the US will have to sanction any third-country banks and companies dealing with Iran's Central Bank, which is meant to cripple that country's oil sales. (Congress did allow for some "exemptions.")

The ultimate target? Regime change – what else? – in Tehran. The proverbial anonymous US official admitted as much in the *Washington Post*, and that paper printed the comment. ("The goal of the US and other sanctions against Iran is regime collapse, a senior US intelligence official said, offering the clearest indication yet that the Obama administration is at least as intent on unseating Iran's government as it is on engaging with it.")

But oops! The newspaper then had to revise the passage to eliminate that embarrassingly on-target quote. Undoubtedly, this "red line" came too close to the truth for comfort.

Former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen believed that only a monster shock-and-awe-style event, totally humiliating the leadership in Tehran, would lead to genuine regime change

– and he was hardly alone. Advocates of actions ranging from air strikes to invasion (whether by the US, Israel, or some combination of the two) have been legion in neocon Washington. (See, for instance, the Brookings Institution’s 2009 report *Which Path to Persia*.)

Yet anyone remotely familiar with Iran knows that such an attack would rally the population behind Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards. In those circumstances, the deep aversion of many Iranians to the military dictatorship of the mullahtariat would matter little.

Besides, even the Iranian opposition supports a peaceful nuclear program. It’s a matter of national pride.

Iranian intellectuals, far more familiar with Persian smoke and mirrors than ideologues in Washington, totally debunk any war scenarios.

They stress that the Tehran regime, adept in the arts of Persian shadow play, has no intention of provoking an attack that could lead to its obliteration. On their part, whether correctly or not, Tehran strategists assume that Washington will prove unable to launch yet one more war in the Greater Middle East, especially one that could lead to staggering collateral damage for the world economy.

In the meantime, Washington’s expectations that a harsh sanctions regime might make the Iranians give ground, if not go down, may prove to be a chimera. Washington spin has been focused on the supposedly disastrous mega-devaluation of the Iranian currency, the rial, in the face of the new sanctions.

Unfortunately for the fans of Iranian economic collapse, Professor Djavad Salehi-Isfahani has laid out in elaborate detail the long-term nature of this process, which Iranian economists have more than welcomed.

After all, it will boost Iran’s non-oil exports and help local industry in competition with cheap Chinese imports. In sum: a

devalued rial stands a reasonable chance of actually reducing unemployment in Iran.

More Connected Than Google

Though few in the US have noticed, Iran is not exactly “isolated,” though Washington might wish it. Pakistani Prime Minister Yusuf Gilani has become a frequent flyer to Tehran. And he’s a Johnny-come-lately compared to Russia’s national security chief Nikolai Patrushev, who only recently warned the Israelis not to push the US to attack Iran. Add in as well US ally and Afghan President Hamid Karzai. At a Loya Jirga (grand council) in late 2011, in front of 2,000 tribal leaders, he stressed that Kabul was planning to get even closer to Tehran.

On that crucial Eurasian chessboard, Pipelineistan, the Iran-Pakistan (IP) natural gas pipeline – much to Washington’s distress – is now a go. Pakistan badly needs energy and its leadership has clearly decided that it’s unwilling to wait forever and a day for Washington’s eternal pet project – the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline – to traverse Talibanistan.

Even Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu recently visited Tehran, though his country’s relationship with Iran has grown ever edgier. After all, energy overrules threats in the region. NATO member Turkey is already involved in covert ops in Syria, allied with hardcore fundamentalist Sunnis in Iraq, and – in a remarkable volte-face in the wake of the Arab Spring(s) – has traded in an Ankara-Tehran-Damascus axis for an Ankara-Riyadh-Doha one. It is even planning on hosting components of Washington’s long-planned missile defense system, targeted at Iran.

All this from a country with a Davutoglu-coined foreign policy of “zero problems with our neighbors.” Still, the needs of Pipelineistan do set the heart racing. Turkey is desperate for access to Iran’s energy resources, and if Iranian natural gas

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A devalued rial stands a reasonable chance of actually reducing unemployment in Iran

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In May 2010, Brazil and Turkey brokered a uranium-swap agreement for Iran that might have cleared the decks on the US-Iranian nuclear imbroglio
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ever reaches Western Europe – something the Europeans are desperately eager for – Turkey will be the privileged transit country. Turkey’s leaders have already signaled their rejection of further US sanctions against Iranian oil.

And speaking of connections, last month there was that spectacular diplomatic coup de théâtre, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s Latin American tour. US right-wingers may harp on a Tehran-Caracas axis of evil – supposedly promoting “terror” across Latin America as a springboard for future attacks on the northern superpower – but back in real life, another kind of truth lurks. All these years later, Washington is still unable to digest the idea that it has lost control over, or even influence in, those two regional powers over which it once exercised unmitigated imperial hegemony.

Add to this the wall of mistrust that has only solidified since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. Mix in a new, mostly sovereign Latin America pushing for integration not only via leftwing governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador but through regional powers Brazil and Argentina. Stir and you get photo ops like Ahmadinejad and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez saluting Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega.

Washington continues to push a vision of a world from which Iran has been radically disconnected. State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland is typical in saying recently, “Iran can remain in international isolation.” As it happens, though, she needs to get her facts straight.

“Isolated” Iran has \$4 billion in joint projects with Venezuela including, crucially, a bank (as with Ecuador, it has dozens of planned projects from building power plants to, once again, banking). That has led the Israel-first crowd in Washington to vociferously demand that sanctions be slapped on Venezuela. Only problem: how would the US pay for its crucial Venezuelan

oil imports then?

Much was made in the US press of the fact that Ahmadinejad did not visit Brazil on this jaunt through Latin America, but diplomatically Tehran and Brasilia remain in sync. When it comes to the nuclear dossier in particular, Brazil’s history leaves its leaders sympathetic. After all, that country developed – and then dropped – a nuclear weapons program. In May 2010, Brazil and Turkey brokered a uranium-swap agreement for Iran that might have cleared the decks on the US-Iranian nuclear imbroglio. It was, however, immediately sabotaged by Washington. A key member of the BRICS, the club of top emerging economies, Brasilia is completely opposed to the US sanctions/embargo strategy.

So Iran may be “isolated” from the United States and Western Europe, but from the BRICS to NAM (the 120 member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement), it has the majority of the global South on its side. And then, of course, there are those staunch Washington allies, Japan and South Korea, now pleading for exemptions from the coming boycott/embargo of Iran’s Central Bank. No wonder, because these unilateral US sanctions are also aimed at Asia. After all, China, India, Japan, and South Korea, together, buy no less than 62% of Iran’s oil exports.

With trademark Asian politesse, Japan’s Finance Minister Jun Azumi let Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner know just what a problem Washington is creating for Tokyo, which relies on Iran for 10% of its oil needs. It is pledging to at least modestly “reduce” that share “as soon as possible” in order to get a Washington exemption from those sanctions, but don’t hold your breath. South Korea has already announced that it will buy 10% of its oil needs from Iran in 2012.

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Silk Road Redux

Most important of all, “isolated” Iran hap-

pens to be a supreme matter of national security for China, which has already rejected the latest Washington sanctions without a blink. Westerners seem to forget that the Middle Kingdom and Persia have been doing business for almost two millennia. (Does “Silk Road” ring a bell?)

The Chinese have already clinched a juicy deal for the development of Iran’s largest oil field, Yadavaran. There’s also the matter of the delivery of Caspian Sea oil from Iran through a pipeline stretching from Kazakhstan to Western China. In fact, Iran already supplies no less than 15% of China’s oil and natural gas. It is now more crucial to China, energy-wise, than the House of Saud is to the US, which imports 11% of its oil from Saudi Arabia.

In fact, China may be the true winner from Washington’s new sanctions, because it is likely to get its oil and gas at a lower price as the Iranians grow ever more dependent on the China market. At this moment, in fact, the two countries are in the middle of a complex negotiation on the pricing of Iranian oil, and the Chinese have actually been ratcheting up the pressure by slightly cutting back on energy purchases. But all this should be concluded by March, at least two months before the latest round of US sanctions go into effect, according to experts in Beijing. In the end, the Chinese will certainly buy much more Iranian gas than oil, but Iran will still remain its third biggest oil supplier, right after Saudi Arabia and Angola.

As for other effects of the new sanctions on China, don’t count on them. Chinese businesses in Iran are building cars, fiber optics networks, and expanding the Tehran subway. Two-way trade is at \$30 billion now and expected to hit \$50 billion in 2015. Chinese businesses will find a way around the banking problems the new sanctions impose.

Russia is, of course, another key supporter of “isolated” Iran. It has opposed stronger sanctions either via the U.N. or

through the Washington-approved package that targets Iran’s Central Bank. In fact, it favors a rollback of the existing U.N. sanctions and has also been at work on an alternative plan that could, at least theoretically, lead to a face-saving nuclear deal for everyone.

On the nuclear front, Tehran has expressed a willingness to compromise with Washington along the lines of the plan Brazil and Turkey suggested and Washington deep-sixed in 2010. Since it is now so much clearer that, for Washington – certainly for Congress – the nuclear issue is secondary to regime change, any new negotiations are bound to prove excruciatingly painful.

This is especially true now that the leaders of the European Union have managed to remove themselves from a future negotiating table by shooting themselves in their Ferragamo-clad feet. In typical fashion, they have meekly followed Washington’s lead in implementing an Iranian oil embargo. As a senior EU official told National Iranian American Council President Trita Parsi, and as EU diplomats have assured me in no uncertain terms, they fear this might prove to be the last step short of outright war.

Meanwhile, a team of International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors has just visited Iran. The IAEA is supervising all things nuclear in Iran, including its new uranium-enrichment plant at Fordow, near the holy city of Qom, with full production starting in June. The IAEA is positive: no bomb-making is involved. Nonetheless, Washington (and the Israelis) continue to act as though it’s only a matter of time – and not much of it at that.

Follow the Money

That Iranian isolation theme only gets weaker when one learns that the country is dumping the dollar in its trade with Russia for rials and rubles – a similar move to ones already made in its trade with China and Ja-

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pan. As for India, an economic powerhouse in the neighborhood, its leaders also refuse to stop buying Iranian oil, a trade that, in the long run, is similarly unlikely to be conducted in dollars. India is already using the yuan with China, as Russia and China have been trading in rubles and yuan for more than a year, as Japan and China are promoting direct trading in yen and yuan. As for Iran and China, all new trade and joint investments will be settled in yuan and rial.

Translation, if any was needed: in the near future, with the Europeans out of the mix, virtually none of Iran's oil will be traded in dollars.

Moreover, three BRICS members (Russia, India, and China) allied with Iran are major holders (and producers) of gold. Their complex trade ties won't be affected by the whims of a US Congress. In fact, when the developing world looks at the profound crisis in the Atlanticist West, what they see is massive US debt, the Fed printing money as if there's no tomorrow, lots of "quantitative easing," and of course the Eurozone shaking to its very foundations.

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Follow the money.

Leave aside, for the moment, the new sanctions on Iran's Central Bank that will go into effect months from now, ignore Iranian threats to close the Strait of Hormuz (especially unlikely given that it's the main way Iran gets its own oil to market), and perhaps one key reason the crisis in the Persian Gulf is mounting involves this move to torpedo the petrodollar as the all-purpose currency of exchange.

It's been spearheaded by Iran and it's bound to translate into an anxious Washington, facing down not only a regional power, but its major strategic competitors China and Russia. No wonder all those carriers are heading for the Persian Gulf right now, though it's the strangest of show-downs – a case of military power being de-

ployed against economic power.

In this context, it's worth remembering that in September 2000 Saddam Hussein abandoned the petrodollar as the currency of payment for Iraq's oil, and moved to the euro. In March 2003, Iraq was invaded and the inevitable regime change occurred. Libya's Muammar Gaddafi proposed a gold dinar both as Africa's common currency and as the currency of payment for his country's energy resources. Another intervention and another regime change followed.

Washington/NATO/Tel Aviv, however, offers a different narrative. Iran's "threats" are at the heart of the present crisis, even if these are, in fact, that country's reaction to non-stop US/Israeli covert war and now, of course, economic war as well. It's those "threats," so the story goes, that are leading to rising oil prices and so fueling the current recession, rather than Wall Street's casino capitalism or massive US and European debts. The cream of the 1% has nothing against high oil prices, not as long as Iran's around to be the fall guy for popular anger.

As energy expert Michael Klare pointed out recently, we are now in a new geo-energy era certain to be extremely turbulent in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere. But consider 2012 the start-up year as well for a possibly massive defection from the dollar as the global currency of choice. As perception is indeed reality, imagine the real world – mostly the global South – doing the necessary math and, little by little, beginning to do business in their own currencies and investing ever less of any surplus in US Treasury bonds.

Of course, the US can always count on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates – which I prefer to call the Gulf Counterrevolution Club (just look at their performances during the Arab Spring). For all practical geopolitical purposes, the Gulf monarchies

are a US satrapy. Their decades-old promise to use only the petrodollar translates into them being an appendage of Pentagon power projection across the Middle East. Centcom, after all, is based in Qatar; the US Fifth Fleet is stationed in Bahrain. In fact, in the immensely energy-wealthy lands that we could label Greater Pipelineistan – and that the Pentagon used to call “the arc of instability” – extending through Iran all the way to Central Asia, the GCC remains key to a dwindling sense of US hegemony.

If this were an economic rewrite of Edgar Allen Poe’s story, “The Pit and the Pendulum,” Iran would be but one cog in an infernal machine slowly shredding the dollar as the world’s reserve currency. Still, it’s the cog that Washington is now focused on. They have regime change on the brain. All that’s needed is a spark to start the fire (in – one hastens to add – all sorts of directions that are bound to catch Washington off guard).

Remember Operation Northwoods, that 1962 plan drafted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to stage terror operations in the US and blame them on Fidel Castro’s Cuba. (President Kennedy shot the idea down.) Or recall the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, used by President Lyndon Johnson as a justification for widening the Vietnam War. The US accused North Vietnamese torpedo boats of unprovoked attacks on

US ships. Later, it became clear that one of the attacks had never even happened and the president had lied about it.

It’s not at all far-fetched to imagine hardcore Full-Spectrum-Dominance practitioners inside the Pentagon riding a false-flag incident in the Persian Gulf to an attack on Iran (or simply using it to pressure Tehran into a fatal miscalculation). Consider as well the new US military strategy just unveiled by President Obama in which the focus of Washington’s attention is to move from two failed ground wars in the Greater Middle East to the Pacific (and so to China). Iran happens to be right in the middle, in Southwest Asia, with all that oil heading toward an energy-hungry modern Middle Kingdom over waters guarded by the US Navy.

So yes, this larger-than-life psychodrama we call “Iran” may turn out to be as much about China and the US dollar as it is about the politics of the Persian Gulf or Iran’s nonexistent bomb. The question is: What rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Beijing to be born? **CT**

Pepe Escobar is the roving correspondent for Asia Times, a TomDispatch regular, and a political analyst for al-Jazeera and RT. His latest book is Obama Does Globalistan (Nimble Books, 2009). This essay first appeared at www.TomDispatch.com

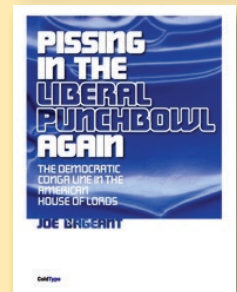
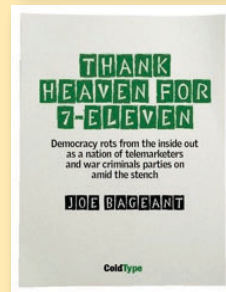
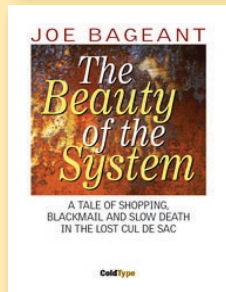
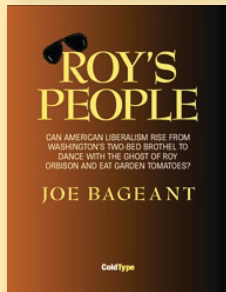
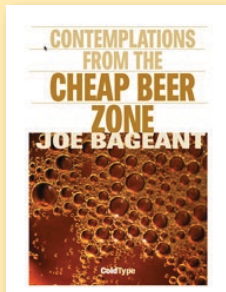
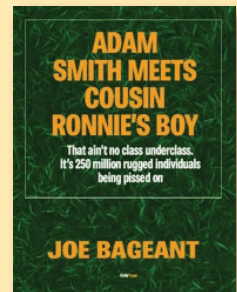
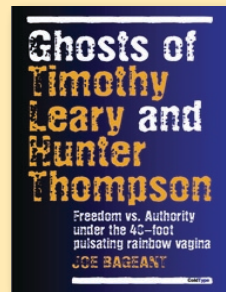
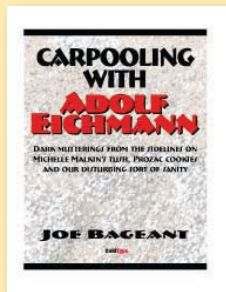
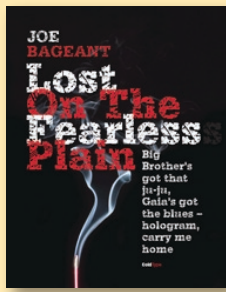
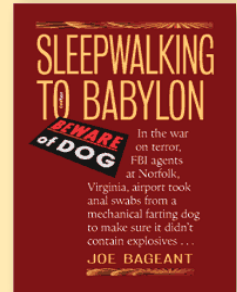
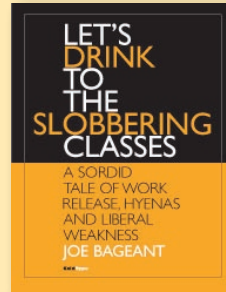
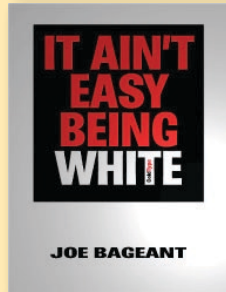
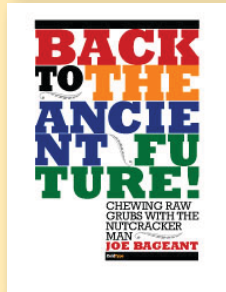
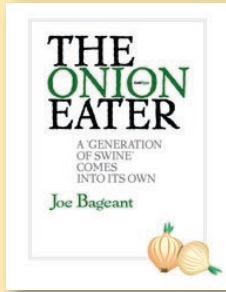
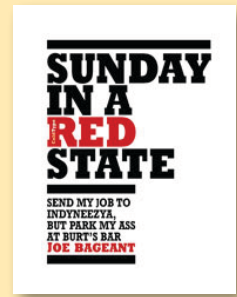
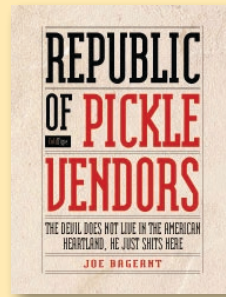
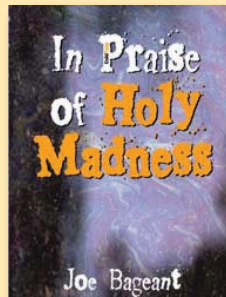
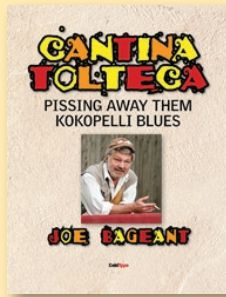
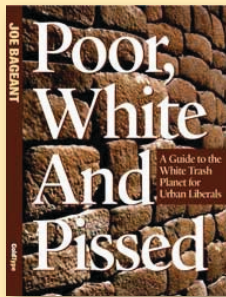
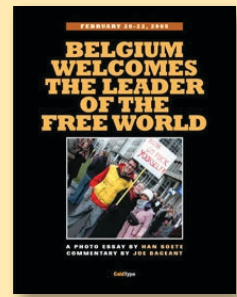
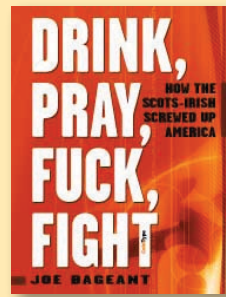
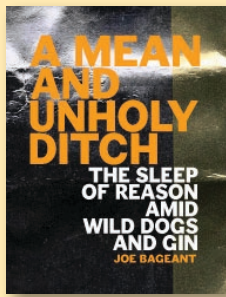
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Who's killing Iran's scientists?

Alan Maas has some thoughts about terrorism – especially ours

Another scientist has been murdered in Iran as part of a terrorist campaign targeting the country's nuclear program.

US officials deny it, but the killings have the fingerprints of Washington and especially its devoted ally Israel all over them. "Does anyone doubt that some combination of the two nations completely obsessed with Iran's nuclear program – Israel and the US – are responsible?" Salon.com's Glenn Greenwald asked rhetorically.

The 32-year-old Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan was killed by a car bomb on January 11, along with his driver. According to witnesses, two men on a motorcycle pulled up alongside Roshan's car and apparently attached a magnetic bomb to it – the device detonated seconds later. According to one report, Roshan, the deputy director of the country's uranium enrichment facility, was on his way to a ceremony to commemorate the second anniversary of the killing of another nuclear physicist, Massoud Ali Mohammadi.

In the two years between the killings of Mohammadi and Roshan, two other Iranian scientists have been assassinated and another injured in what the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* snidely referred to as "mysterious deaths and blasts linked to Iran's nuclear program."

Untargeted explosions – 18 last year, ac-

ording to National Public Radio – at sites allegedly associated with the nuclear program have claimed even more lives. In the most recent, seven people were killed in a blast in December at a steel mill in the city of Yazd.

The murders have been indiscriminate in other ways, too. Mohammadi, for example, was known to be a supporter of Mir Hussein Mousavi, the reformist political leader who ran for president in 2009 against the representative of Iran's ruling conservative elite, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

US denial

For the record, US officials deny that their forces have anything to do with the killings in Iran. But the Israeli government has all but admitted its part.

At the end of July, when he was asked if his country was involved in the assassinations, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak answered "Israel is not responding" – but reporters noted the "smile on his face" as he said it. The German news magazine *Der Spiegel* later quoted an anonymous Israeli intelligence official attributing the murders to the spy agency Mossad.

Less than 24 hours before Roshan's murder, Benny Gantz, chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces, told a committee of Israel's

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In the two years between the killings of Mohammadi and Roshan, two other Iranian scientists have been assassinated and another injured

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Some US political leaders think Washington should be proud to claim involvement in the killings
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Knesset that Iran would face “continuing and growing pressure from the international community and things which take place in an unnatural manner.”

If anyone is tempted to believe that Israel acted alone, against the wishes of the US, they should remember that the CIA is known to have targeted Iranian scientists in the past to recruit them as spies. According to one, Shahram Amiri, US agents kidnapped him in an attempt get him to go along with their plans.

The latest murder comes as tensions have ramped up between Iran and the West.

The US and its allies claim an International Atomic Energy Administration report issued in December contains evidence that Iran’s nuclear program is aimed at building a nuclear weapon. The report doesn’t say this at all – but this served as an excuse for the US and Europe to push new economic sanctions. Iran responded at the end of December with a military display of force and threats that it could close the Strait of Hormuz, the entrance point to the Persian Gulf.

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Crossing the line

US officials say Iran would be crossing a “red line” if, in the future, it attempts to close the shipping lanes. But there hasn’t been anywhere near the same frenzy about an assassination campaign that is underway right now in Iran – and has been for several years.

On the contrary, some US political leaders think Washington should be proud to claim involvement in the killings. Last October, Rick Santorum – now the leading contender among the Republican right for the GOP presidential nomination – declared:

“On occasion, scientists working on the nuclear program in Iran turn up dead. I think that’s a wonderful thing, candidly...I think we should send a very clear mes-

sage that if you are a scientist from Russia, North Korea, or from Iran, and you are going to work on a nuclear program to develop a bomb for Iran, you are not safe.”

Actually, Santorum is refreshingly honest about what is taking place in Iran – a campaign of murder designed to terrorize anyone connected with the country’s nuclear program, in whatever capacity.

But terrorism is one word you won’t find in the mainstream media’s description of the assassinations.

By contrast, when the US Department of Justice announced indictments in a fantastical plot – allegedly masterminded by Iran’s Revolutionary Guard and organized by a failed Texas used-car salesman, with help from a Mexican drug cartel – to murder Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to the US, Attorney General Eric Holder claimed the Feds had foiled “an act of international terrorism.”

The corporate media repeated both his characterization and ludicrous allegations as established facts.

The double standards are glaring – and sickening. As Glenn Greenwald wrote:

“Does anyone have any doubt whatsoever that if Iran were sending hit squads to kill Israeli scientists in Tel Aviv, or was murdering a series of American scientists at Los Alamos (while wounding several of their wives, including, in one instance, shooting them in front of their child’s kindergarten), that those acts would be universally denounced as terrorism, and the only debate would be whether the retaliation should be nuclear, carpet-bombing or invasion?”

As always, terrorism is the most meaningless – and thus most manipulated – term of propaganda; it’s always what They do and never what We do.

CT

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Alan Maas is the editor of Socialist Worker, at whose website - www.socialistworker.org - this was first published.

Another day in socialist Europe

Philip Kraske gives North America the lowdown on the joys of life in Utopia

As Republican candidates for president often note, here in socialist Europe, the government does everything for us. Normally, these savants mention only our health system, our free universities (free, that is, till you have to pay for books and cafeteria lunches and ever-heftier registration fees), huge severance pays, long vacations, and generous retirement benefits (which only become truly generous when you've paid off your mortgage and sold your car).

Actually, they don't know the half of it. The truth is that socialism here does everything for us.

Here where I live, in Madrid, a typical European day goes like this.

It's true that nearly everyone has to turn off their own alarm clock, but after that, social workers with truly hospital-like efficiency run our baths, scrub our backs, make our breakfasts and get us to work on our wonderful European transportation systems.

Once at work, we are sat on chairs fit for The Sun King, our computers blink on in front of us, and we perform what is officially called an Act of Work. Our trials are eased, however, by a tiny meter that runs on the bottom of the screen showing us how much our labors are being taxed and poured into that ever-swelling pouch of plenty, The Public Good.

But the stresses of work don't go on for

long. After a few minutes, a break is called, and we all head for our second coffee and croissant of the day, there to discuss – in the case of Madrid – the successes or failures of the Real Madrid soccer team. The soccer world fascinates us because it is the only real capitalist business in Europe. The players have contracts worthy of NBA players, and – this being socialist Europe – the contracts generally include benefits like a dashing supermodel, since it wouldn't do for our boys to show up at a benefit or an awards ceremony with old hags on their arms.

The supermodel clause

But Europe is not without its discontents, and these now come out. We men grouse about how the supermodel clause violates our sense of European equality. Why doesn't a marketing manager get a supermodel? The women, in return, grouse about how chauvinist the men are and how easily the supermodel problem could be solved: by getting the government to declare all European women ravishing and to offer free plastic surgery to any woman treated with callous inequality by men.

We return to work, but again, not for long. For now a cloud has appeared in our workaday socialist sky. The boss has told us that he needs last month's accounting finished and on his desk by five. Dismayed by

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The boss, duly humbled, murmurs that he merely suggested the five-o'clock deadline. The sky won't fall if he has the results by, say, tomorrow at five?
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such blatant bossliness, we call the union representative to defend us. (We don't really call; there's a button, mandated by the Interior Ministry, under our desks, which presses easily under the thumb, its spring well-worn.)

Within minutes, sped on his way by our excellent bullet trains, the union guy is at our side, listening to our complaint and nodding sadly. He goes and jerks the boss out of his tele-meeting with the London head office, and reads him the Riot Act. The boss, duly humbled, murmurs that he merely suggested the five-o'clock deadline. The sky won't fall if he has the results by, say, tomorrow at five?

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Attack on our dignity

But tomorrow as well is deemed an outrage, an attack on the dignity of the working man, and the latest example of crass capitalism responsible for stress fracture, the breakup of marriages, and migraines. A strike is called.

Out we all march into the street, waving signs furnished to us by – you guessed it – the Labor Ministry. Within minutes we are joined by the workers of neighboring firms. Even many members of management come down and add to the chanting, just for the nostalgia of it all, for it reminds everyone of May '68.

After tedious negotiations, in which management is made to prostrate itself at the feet of the unions and say ten Hail Marxes, an agreement is struck, a government minister (or the king, if it's a monarchy like Spain) comes to shake everyone's hand and grin for the cameras, and we workers file back into the office. Soon, however, this trying day is over, and we flow effortlessly into subways and trains, and are whisked home by the Forces of Public Transport.

There we find our spouses similarly invigorated by interesting workdays, our children enlightened by lessons in dialectical materialism, and dinner our only task and fascination.

Soon the news, brought to us by the government channel, assures us of the excellence of our socialist system. It shows us the latest earthquakes and floods that capitalist governments are incapable of handling, the hopeless government debts that capitalist governments are capable of running up, and puzzling footage of Republican fustian to the effect that Europe is the pit of political iniquity, its people enslaved. Over evening cognac, we page through Rousseau and assure ourselves that this opinion is poorly informed.

Just another day in socialist Europe. **CT**

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Philip Kraske's latest book, Flight in February, is now available from Amazon

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Killing Iraqis makes us safer, and other lies

David Swanson dissects President Obama's State of the Union Address

In the news around the world and even in the United States on Tuesday was the anger among Iraqis at the failure of the United States to hold anyone seriously accountable for the 2005 massacre in Haditha. The story was a useful reminder of how the operations of the US military over the past decade have fueled hostility toward our nation.

President Obama began his State of the Union speech on January 24 by absurdly claiming the exact opposite, asserting that the war on Iraq has made us safer and – I kid you not – “more respected around the world.” He later equated the war on Iraq to World War II, a surefire way to put anything beyond criticism in the United States, provided you can get people to fall for it.

Remember, this is the guy who won the Democratic Primary in 2008 by the simple fact of having not yet been in the Senate in 2003 and thus having avoided voting for the war that he funded to the hilt as a senator beginning in 2005. He had called it a dumb war. Now he says it made us safer. If it was dumb, was he dumber? What is he trying to say?

In the next breath, Obama says “some troops in Afghanistan have begun to come home.” Never mind that there are three times as many US troops in Afghanistan now as when Obama moved into the White House.

The myth is that he's ending wars. Never mind that he was compelled to end the Iraq War, in so far as it has ended, by the treaty that Bush and Maliki created, and which Obama sought every possible way to violate.

Never mind that Iraqi hostility toward US criminals being granted immunity from prosecution was the primary reason that the Iraqi government insisted on the Bush-Maliki withdrawal date. A myth is a myth, and who will question it and still keep their job on US television?

We're number one. Really?

Because the United States dumps record funding into its military – over half of federal discretionary spending – the United States is falling behind other nations in education, energy, infrastructure, health, life expectancy, infant mortality, poverty, retirement security, and happiness. Obama's next breath serves to simply assert the opposite. We're number one. Who will dare to question that?

To fudge the claim, Obama actually says that being number one is right within our grasp if only we would all act more like the military. (Late in the speech he mentions cutting a half a trillion dollars from the military, without mentioning that he means “over 10 years” or \$50 billion per

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Obama had called the war on Iraq a dumb war. Now he says it made us safer. If it was dumb, was he dumber?

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**Nobody to blame
for job losses.
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and if we all act
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.....

year from a budget of over a trillion per year.)

UPDATE: *Contrary to my initial impression, Obama probably was speaking here of his "cuts" to dream budgets that amount to increases. The layers of lies get thick.*

And what a glowing future he describes! Gee, if only we'd had someone who thought that way serving as, say, president, the past few years.

Now he wants to "fight obstruction with action." Just forget about that initial two-year-long pretense that the Senate couldn't get around any filibuster attempts. That would be looking backward.

Obama said that he wants an economy where "everyone plays by the same set of rules." Really? Where's my bailout? Where's my get-out-of-jail-free card? Will we now see prosecutions of financial fraud, busting of trusts, taxation of corporations and billionaires? What brought about this reversal? People are crediting the Occupy movement, of course, but the Occupy movement has demanded – yes, demanded – actions, not words.

Obama says the United States lost jobs because technology made them obsolete. That's his whole explanation of the decline of the past 40 years and of the financial collapse of 2008.

Nothing about union busting. Not a word about military spending. No mention of regressive taxation. Barely a nod to the shredding of financial regulation. Not even room for a bit of blame directed toward a culture of greed. Nope. Technology. That's what it was.

Nobody to blame. Just a bit of bad luck we've had, and if we all act more like the military we'll clear it right up.

Or not quite. There's also the problem of irresponsible home owners: "Mortgages had been sold to people who couldn't afford or understand them." Only after that slanderous dig (which he repeats later as well) did our President mention a deficiency in regulation.

Obama then claims employment is on the rise and, in the same breath, and exactly as if it mattered to us in the same way as employment: "Together, we've agreed to cut the deficit by more than \$2 trillion." Of course, that's more than the entire discretionary budget and what Obama would have said, if he hadn't been so rushed in slapping together this speech without any help whatsoever, was that such cuts would be spread over many years, amounting to much less in each year, but still enough to do a great deal of damage.

Then Obama claimed to have put in place rules that will prevent any new crisis on Wall Street. I've never seen anyone take that claim seriously.

He says the auto bailout involved workers and bosses "settling their differences." Have any workers described it that way?

"Right now, companies get tax breaks for moving jobs and profits overseas. Meanwhile, companies that choose to stay in America get hit with one of the highest tax rates in the world. It makes no sense, and everyone knows it."

That has got to be the slimiest argument for yet more corporate tax cuts I've ever seen dressed up as patriotic common sense.

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Backsliding on trade

Next Obama bragged about corporate trade agreements with Panama, Colombia, and Korea, just the kind of agreements he campaigned against last time.

Then Obama proposed that, instead of developing a great educational system, we just have corporations fund their training for specific jobs. The President then spoke of the importance of a real educational system and admitted that,

"At a time when other countries are doubling down on education, tight budgets have forced states to lay off thousands of teachers."

The solution to this is stunningly bril-

liant, or something. Wait for it:

“So tonight, I call on every state to require that all students stay in high school until they graduate or turn eighteen.”

That ought to do it.

Obama then proposed that Congress not double the interest rates on student loans, and extend the tuition tax credit. And he added this innovative strategy that, again, is simply brilliant, or something:

“So let me put colleges and universities on notice: If you can’t stop tuition from going up, the funding you get from taxpayers will go down.”

Ha! Affordable education, here we come!

Obama then asked for a bill that would allow immigrants “to earn their citizenship.” A hint at how they might do that is found in his list of noble things such immigrants might want to participate in, one of which is “defend this country.” I assume you don’t need me to translate.

Moving on, Obama is proud to say, “Over the last three years, we’ve opened up millions of new acres for oil and gas exploration, and tonight, I’m directing my Administration to open more than 75 percent of our potential offshore oil and gas resources.” Drill, baby, drill!

Obama also wants a major expansion in drilling for natural gas and promises to require that companies disclose the chemicals they use in doing so. Because chemicals can’t kill you if you’re told about them. Transparent fracking! It’s the new Clean coal!

Wind energy is a little footnote, and solar and other clean energies don’t get a mention in the State of the Union, except a request for “clean energy tax credits.” Or so it seems, until the military comes to the rescue again:

“I’m directing my Administration to allow the development of clean energy on enough public land to power three million homes. And I’m proud [watch where the pride comes in] to announce that the

Department of [So-Called] Defense, the world’s largest consumer of energy, will make one of the largest commitments to clean energy in history – with the Navy purchasing enough capacity to power a quarter of a million homes a year.”

The United States military is not just the biggest consumer of energy. It is the biggest spreader of depleted uranium, white phosphorous, and cluster bombs. The United States military has rendered entire landscapes uninhabitable for our species, unless we last as long as the dinosaurs, and this kind of speech doesn’t give me the impression we’ll be around anything like that long.

Repaying the debt

The best bit of rhetoric comes deep in the speech: “Take the money we’re no longer spending at war, use half of it to pay down our debt, and use the rest to do some nation-building right here at home.” That would be a terrific proposal if we had stopped spending money on wars or, even better, if we were to stop spending vastly greater amounts on the military’s permanent existence apart from its wars.

Obama doesn’t mention any numbers or proposals, because he’s talking utter nonsense.

Obama moves on to claiming he’ll handle oil spills, this the same week that we received documentation of the pressure he exerted to deceive the public about the last big one. He announces a new “Financial Crimes Unit,” not that he hasn’t announced the same thing before, but this time it’s while he works toward an immunity-granting “settlement” with the big banks guilty of mortgage fraud.

Obama wants the payroll tax cut, no matter what it does to Social Security. In fact, he’s “prepared to make more reforms that rein in the long term costs of Medicare and Medicaid, and strengthen Social Security, so long as those programs re-

Obama also wants a major expansion in drilling for natural gas and promises to require that companies disclose the chemicals they use in doing so. Because chemicals can’t kill you if you’re told about them. Transparent fracking! It’s the new Clean coal!

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No end to corporate personhood, no end to money as speech, no ban or limitation on election spending, no public financing, no free air time for candidates, not even the usual call for “disclosure” of who is bribing whom
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main a guarantee of security for seniors.” Of course, “strengthen” here is code for “cut.”

Obama makes these “concessions” on condition that tax cuts for millionaires are allowed to expire. Of course, he put the same condition on earlier concessions and then abandoned it, but we really must stop looking backward. Obama proposes following the “Buffet rule” but does not specify how he would have that done.

“We don’t begrudge financial success in this country,” he lies. “We admire it.” Increasingly, this is just not so. We admire truly worthy accomplishments, whether or not financially successful, and we condemn the stratification of our society into one in which few travel far up or down the income distribution. We resent the expenses imposed on the poor and the unfair advantages bestowed upon the already excessively wealthy. We condemn the hoarding of billions of dollars while others go hungry and homeless. The president is not unaware of this, but he is not speaking to us, is not one of us, and could not possibly care less.

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Public disgust

The President acknowledges public disgust with elected officials who are bought and paid for. “Let’s take some steps to fix that,” he says. And then he gets cute. No end to corporate personhood, no end to money as speech, no ban or limitation on election spending, no public financing, no free air time for candidates, not even the usual call for “disclosure” of who is bribing whom. Nope. President Obama wants a bill to ban insider trading by congress members. That certainly couldn’t hurt, if they would do it, but the idea that it centrally addresses the problem of money in politics is absurd.

Yet, in the context of this speech, to qualify as a truly absurd proposal takes more than most rhetorical nonsense can offer.

Obama closes, in fact, with a real doozie. He claims that wars are ending and threatens war on Iran. You can’t make this stuff up. The Project for the New American Century can. You can’t:

“As the tide of war recedes. . . . America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take no options off the table to achieve that goal. But a peaceful resolution of this issue is still possible . . . if Iran changes course.”

Got that? Unless Iran, which the Secretary of Defense says is not developing a nuclear weapon, ceases developing a nuclear weapon, we’re going to war. But we regret it very much and it will hurt us more than it hurts you.

“America remains the one indispensable nation in world affairs.” That makes the rest of the world – you guessed it – dispensable.

Killing Osama bin Laden is President Obama’s proudest claim, and he uses it in the final words of the State of the Union to bash “politics.” Some of the killers may have been Republicans and others Democrats, he tells us, but they were united in murder. Yet, if the money were cleaned out of politics, if we had a decent communications system, if good candidates could get on ballots and into debates, if votes were publicly counted on paper at each polling place, if – in other words – politics were what we imagine it aspiring to be, then why would we elect people who bash it? And if we wanted someone who intended to unite with Republicans, why wouldn’t we elect a Republican?

And if we weren’t paralyzed by fear and lies, why wouldn’t we want alleged criminals brought to our country and put on trial? After all, we’ve got a lot of courts and we aren’t using them for our own leading criminals. **CT**

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David Swanson’s latest book is When The World Outlawed War. This essay originally appeared at www.warisacrime.org

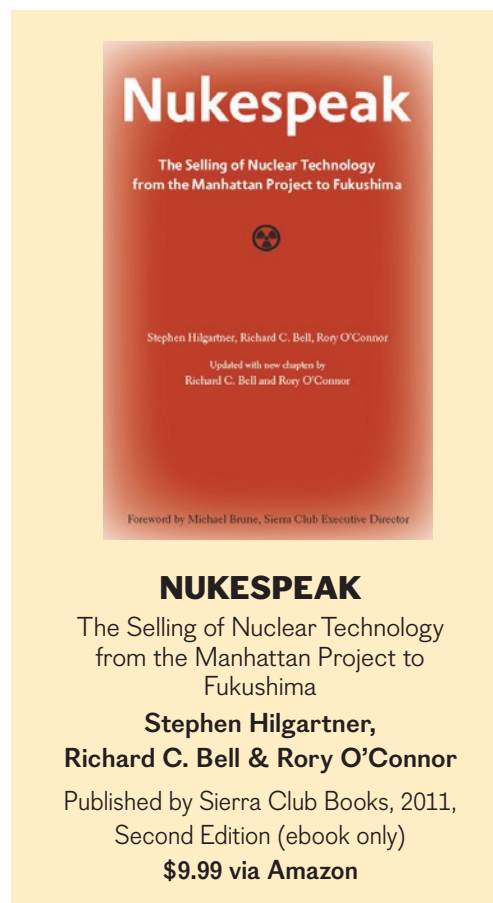
The industry that couldn't learn

An excerpt from *Nukespeak*, by **Richard C. Bell & Rory O'Connor**

This is an excerpt (Pages 265 to 270) from the Second Edition of the book, *Nukespeak: The Selling of Nuclear Technology from the Manhattan Project to Fukushima*, by Stephen Hilgartner, Richard C. Bell & Rory O'Connor

According to the nuclear industry, the United States and the rest of the world have no choice but to build more nuclear plants to meet the world's growing energy needs without increasing greenhouse gases and global warming. But from the 1970s onward, a growing number of outside analysts have argued that a two-pronged energy strategy could deliver the energy services people want (lighting, electronics, industrial motors, etc.) at a lower price than nuclear, while simultaneously reducing the production of greenhouse gases. The two components are increases in the efficient use of electricity, thereby reducing demand, and increasing electricity generation from an array of technologies based on using solar energy, either directly, in the form of photovoltaics, or indirectly, primarily in the form of wind energy.

The godfather of this alternative approach is Amory Lovins, who stunned the world of energy analysts as a young physicist in 1976 with the *Foreign Affairs* article "Energy Strategy: The Road Not Taken." Lovins argued that we should adopt a strat-



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egy combining energy efficiency with solar power to make a transition off nuclear and coal over the next twenty-five to fifty years. Lovins called his approach the "soft energy path," in contrast to the "hard energy" of nuclear and fossil fuels. The article catapult-

Nuclear power is one of the worst investments we can make if our goal is to reduce greenhouse gases as cheaply and quickly as possible

ed Lovins to the forefront of the debate over energy policy.

Lovins has been an implacable critic of the economics of nuclear power, arguing in paper after paper that a soft-energy-path strategy will always be cheaper than providing the equivalent energy services with nuclear-generated electricity. As for global warming, he argues that nuclear power is one of the worst investments we can make if our goal is to reduce greenhouse gases as cheaply and quickly as possible. In an article in the *Weekly Standard* in October 2010, Lovins explained why and how nuclear power was falling farther and farther behind the alternatives:

“Since 2000, as nuclear power’s cost projections have more than tripled, its share of global electricity generation has fallen from 17 percent to 13 percent. That of cogeneration (making electricity together with useful heat in factories or buildings) and renewables (excluding big hydropower projects) rose from 13 percent to 18 percent.

“These bite-sized, modular, quickly built projects – with financial risks, costs, and subsidies generally below nuclear’s and declining – now dominate global power investments. Last year, renewables (wind, water, solar, geothermal), excluding large hydroelectric dams, attracted \$131 billion of private capital and added 52 billion watts. Global nuclear output fell for the past three years, capacity for two.

“This market shift helps protect the climate. Renewables, cogeneration, and efficiency can displace 2 to 20 times more carbon per dollar, 20 to 40 times faster, than new nuclear power – saving trillions of dollars over decades and avoiding vast financial risks.”

In a report on the nuclear industry released in January 2011, the World-watch institute reached similar conclusions:

● Annual **renewable capacity additions have been outpacing nuclear start-ups for 15 years.** In the United States, the share of

renewables in new capacity additions skyrocketed from 2 percent in 2004 to 55 percent in 2009, with no new nuclear capacity added.

● **In 2010, for the first time, worldwide cumulative installed capacity from wind turbines, biomass, waste-to-energy, and solar power surpassed installed nuclear capacity.** Meanwhile, total investment in renewable energy technologies was estimated at \$243 billion in 2010.

● As of April 1, 2011, there were 437 nuclear reactors operating in the world, seven fewer than in 2002. **In 2008, for the first time since the beginning of the nuclear age, no new unit was started up.** Seven new reactors were added in 2009 and 2010, while 11 were shut down during this period.

● In 2009, nuclear power plants generated 2,558 Terawatt-hours of electricity, **about 2 percent less than the previous year.** The industry’s lobby organization headlined “another drop in nuclear generation” – the fourth year in a row. [emphasis in the original]

An Ocean of Subsidies

If nuclear power in the United States is so uneconomic, what keeps the domestic industry afloat? Critics have long argued that the industry benefits from a wide array of subsidies. In February 2010, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) released *Nuclear Power: Still Not Viable without Subsidies*, an authoritative review of the history of nuclear subsidies in the United States, written by Doug Koplow. (UCS was created in the 1970s by scientists concerned about the safety of nuclear reactors.) Koplow showed that the nuclear industry has always enjoyed “a vast array of preferential government subsidies.” Koplow reached the stunning conclusion that these have been so great that they have often exceeded the actual value of the power produced: “This means that buying power on the open market and giving

it away for free would have been less costly than subsidizing the construction and operation of nuclear power plants.”

Koplow also notes that the most important subsidies over the years are also the most difficult to quantify:

“The most important subsidies to the industry do not involve cash payments. Rather, they shift construction-cost and operating risks from investors to taxpayers and ratepayers, burdening taxpayers with an array of risks ranging from cost overruns and defaults to accidents and nuclear waste management. This approach, which has remained remarkably consistent throughout the industry’s history, distorts market choices that would otherwise favor less risky investments. Although it may not involve direct cash payments, such favored treatment is nevertheless a subsidy, with a profound effect on the bottom line for the industry and taxpayers alike.”

Koplow’s study can be read as a tribute to the ingenuity and persistence of nuclear energy lobbyists. No single group ever sat down to produce the list of giveaways that Koplow has unearthed. Nevertheless, the list of goodies grew, as the players discovered new opportunities for squeezing money from unsuspecting taxpayers and utility rate-payers.

Since the 1950s, the nuclear industry has claimed it would only require subsidies for a short time. Koplow quotes from a General Electric ad that ran in the *National Geographic* in 1954:

“We already know the kinds of plants which will be feasible, how they will operate, and we can estimate what their expenses will be. in five years – certainly within 10 – a number of them will be operating at about the same cost as those using coal. They will be privately financed, built without government subsidy.”

Koplow describes subsidies for

- the mining and milling of uranium ore
- the enrichment of the uranium for nu-

clear fuel rods

- the capital costs of building the plants and buying all of the equipment in the plants the use of water to cool the plants
- workers’ education and health protection
- property tax abatements

Koplow acknowledges that some subsidies are difficult to quantify:

- Federal law has capped the liability of nuclear reactor owners for accidents since the passage of the first Price-Anderson Act in 1957. Because the size of the risk was unknown, private insurers were unwilling to offer such insurance. Under the terms of this act, the utilities are responsible up to a certain amount, after which the federal government assumes control.

- Another hidden cost grows out of the link between nuclear power and nuclear weapons proliferation. The combined subsidies for nuclear power have the effect of accelerating the spread of nuclear power, simultaneously worsening the problems of nuclear weapons proliferation. But there is currently no charge on nuclear power generators to deal with this challenge.

- The federal government agreed to be responsible for the final disposal of the radioactive fuel rods from nuclear power plants, taking this potential cost off the hands of the utilities. But the federal government has never come up with a storage site, leaving the utilities with the expense of storing these highly dangerous materials next to the reactors in buildings far less secure than the reactors themselves.

Nuclear Socialism

In effect, the United States and many other countries have created nuclear socialism. in the United States, federal subsidies socialize the risk of building nuclear plants, a risk that private investors have refused to assume. Overseas, almost all the countries building reactors own the utilities outright.

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In a March 17, 2011, article for PBS, Lovins makes the same point:

“In contrast, of the 66 nuclear units worldwide officially listed as “under construction” at the end of 2010, 12 had been so listed for over 20 years, 45 had no official startup date, half were late, all 66 were in centrally planned power systems – 50 of those in just four (China, India, Russia, South Korea) – and zero were free-market purchases.”

In his 2010 *Weekly Standard* article, Lovins notes that the U.S. industry’s lust for subsidies is getting worse, and that even some old-line conservative groups have begun to oppose gigantic federal handouts:

“As nuclear subsidies spiral toward fiscal ruin, brave voices protest from a handful of think tanks: the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, the George C. Marshall Institute, the American Enterprise Institute, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the National Taxpayers Union, Taxpayers for Common Sense. Yet most congressional budget hawks – supposedly sages of circumspection and defenders of free markets – urge more nuclear socialism.”

Lovins proposes that we solve the problem by taking markets seriously and removing subsidies for all industries:

“Here’s a principled alternative: Reverse the energy subsidy arms-race. Don’t add

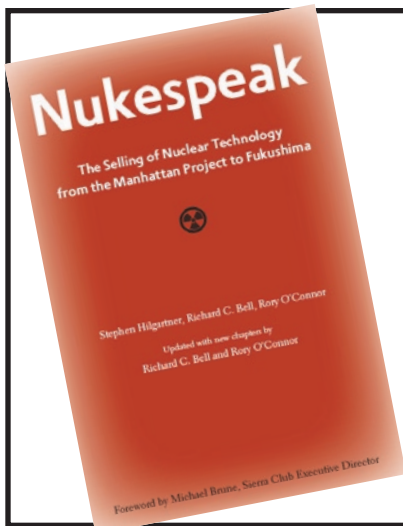
subsidies; subtract them. Take markets seriously. Not just for nuclear and fossil fuels but for all so-called “clean” technologies, head toward zero energy subsidies, free enterprise, risk-based credit pricing, competition on merit, cheaper energy services, greater energy security, and dwindling deficits.”

Who wouldn’t like that? Why don’t we find out?

By proposing to eliminate all subsidies, Lovins avoids a trap that nuclear opponents often fall into, of calling for subsidies for some other source of energy, such as solar or geothermal. The U.S. nuclear industry could never accept Lovins’s tongue-in-cheek proposal. Without the federal support of nuclear socialism, the U.S. nuclear power industry would die off. **CT**

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Richard C. Bell is an author, editor, and political consultant who pioneered the use of online communications and social media in national electoral politics. He lives in Washington, D.C.

Rory O’Connor is the author of “Shock Jocks: Hate Speech & Talk Radio” and the forthcoming “Friends, Followers and the Future: How Social Media is Changing Politics, Threatening Big Brands, and Killing Traditional Media.”



“A well-written and disquieting book, richly detailed and fully documented, a gold mine of example and anecdote.” — New York Times Book Review

NUKESPEAK

The Selling of Nuclear Technology from the Manhattan Project to Fukushima

Stephen Hilgartner, Richard C. Bell & Rory O’Connor

**Published by Sierra Club Books, 2011, Second Edition (ebook only)
\$9.99 via Amazon**

www.nukespeak.org

What happened to Canada?

Chris Hedges tells how corporations have no use for borders in their bid for control of the world and its resources

What happened to Canada? It used to be the country we would flee to if life in the United States became unpalatable. No nuclear weapons. No huge military-industrial complex. Universal health care. Funding for the arts. A good record on the environment.

But that was the old Canada. I was in Montreal on Friday and Saturday and saw the familiar and disturbing tentacles of the security and surveillance state. Canada has withdrawn from the Kyoto Accords so it can dig up the Alberta tar sands in an orgy of environmental degradation. It carried out the largest mass arrests of demonstrators in Canadian history at 2010's G-8 and G-20 meetings, rounding up more than 1,000 people. It sends undercover police into indigenous communities and activist groups and is handing out stiff prison terms to dissenters. And Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper is a diminished version of George W. Bush. He champions the rabid right wing in Israel, bows to the whims of global financiers and is a Christian fundamentalist.

The voices of dissent sound like our own. And the forms of persecution are familiar. This is not an accident. We are fighting the same corporate leviathan.

"I want to tell you that I was arrested because I am seen as a threat," Canadian activist Leah Henderson wrote to fellow dissidents before being sent to Vanier prison in Milton, Ontario, to serve a 10-month sentence. "I want to tell you

that you might be too. I want to tell you that this is something we need to prepare for. I want to tell you that the risk of incarceration alone should not determine our organizing."

"My skills and experience – as a facilitator, as a trainer, as a legal professional and as someone linking different communities and movements – were all targeted in this case, with the state trying to depict me as a 'brain-washer' and as a mastermind of mayhem, violence and destruction," she went on. "During the week of the G8 & G20 summits, the police targeted legal observers, street medics and independent media. It is clear that the skills that make us strong, the alternatives that reduce our reliance on their systems and prefigure a new world, are the very things that they are most afraid of."

The decay of Canada illustrates two things. Corporate power is global, and resistance to it cannot be restricted by national boundaries. Corporations have no regard for nation-states. They assert their power to exploit the land and the people everywhere. They play worker off of worker and nation off of nation. They control the political elites in Ottawa as they do in London, Paris and Washington. This, I suspect, is why the tactics to crush the Occupy movement around the globe have an eerie similarity – infiltrations, surveillance, the denial of public assembly, physical attempts to eradicate encampments, the use of propaganda and the press to demonize the movement, new draco-

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FIGHTING BACK

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nian laws stripping citizens of basic rights, and increasingly harsh terms of incarceration.

Our solidarity should be with activists who march on Tahrir Square in Cairo or set up encampamentos in Madrid. These are our true compatriots. The more we shed ourselves of national identity in this fight, the more we grasp that our true allies may not speak our language or embrace our religious and cultural traditions, the more powerful we will become.

Those who seek to discredit this movement employ the language of nationalism and attempt to make us fearful of the other. Wave the flag. Sing the national anthem. Swell with national hubris. Be vigilant of the hidden terrorist. Canada's Minister of Natural Resources Joe Oliver, responding to the growing opposition to the Keystone XL and the Northern Gateway pipelines, wrote in an open letter that "environmental and other radical groups" were trying to "hijack our regulatory system to achieve their radical ideological agenda." He accused pipeline opponents of receiving funding from foreign special interest groups and said that "if all other avenues have failed, they will take a quintessential American approach: sue everyone and anyone to delay the project even further."

No matter that in both Canada and the United States suing the government to seek redress is the right of every citizen. No matter that the opposition to the Keystone XL and Northern Gateway pipelines has its roots in Canada. No matter that the effort by citizens in the U.S. and in Canada to fight climate change is about self-preservation. The minister, in the pocket of the fossil fuel industry like the energy czars in most of the other industrialized nations, seeks to pit "loyal" Canadians against "disloyal" Canadians. Those with whom we will build this movement of resistance will not in some cases be our own. They may speak Arabic, pray five times a day toward Mecca and be holding off the police thugs in the center of Cairo. Or they may be generously pierced and tattooed and speak Danish or they may be Mandarin-speaking workers battling China's totalitarian capitalism. These are differences that make no difference.

"My country right or wrong," G.K. Chesterton once wrote, is on the same level as "My mother, drunk or sober."

Our most dangerous opponents, in fact, look and speak like us. They hijack familiar and comforting iconography and slogans to paint themselves as true patriots. They claim to love Jesus. But they cynically serve the function a native bureaucracy serves for any foreign colonizer. The British and the French, and earlier the Romans, were masters of this game. They recruited local quislings to carry out policies and repression that were determined in London or Paris or Rome. Popular anger was vented against these personages, and native group vied with native group in battles for scraps of influence. And when one native ruler was overthrown or, more rarely, voted out of power, these imperial machines recruited a new face. The actual centers of power did not change. The pillage continued. Global financiers are the new colonizers. They make the rules. They pull the strings. They offer the illusion of choice in our carnivals of political theater. But corporate power remains constant and unimpeded. Barack Obama serves the same role Herod did in imperial Rome.

This is why the Occupy Wall Street movement is important. It targets the center of power – global financial institutions. It deflects attention from the empty posturing in the legislative and executive offices in Washington or London or Paris. The Occupy movement reminds us that until the corporate superstructure is dismantled it does not matter which member of the native elite is elected or anointed to rule. The Canadian prime minister is as much a servant of corporate power as the American president. And replacing either will not alter corporate domination. As the corporate mechanisms of control become apparent to wider segments of the population, discontent will grow further. So will the force employed by our corporate overlords. It will be a long road for us. But we are not alone. There are struggles and brush fires everywhere. Leah Henderson is not only right. She is my compatriot. **CT**

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Chris Hedges has worked for *The Christian Science Monitor*, *National Public Radio*, *The Dallas Morning News* and *The New York Times*, for which he was a foreign correspondent for 15 years. This essay originally appeared at www.truthdig.org
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Making a farce of austerity

Michael Meacher notes that Britain's poor are being squeezed by cuts while the rich are laughing all the way to the bank

A Land Registry inventory of title deeds, just published, is yet another piece of evidence revealing the hypocrisy of British Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne's "we're all in it together" in austerity.

What it shows is that in just two central London boroughs the ownership of property worth £88.5bn has been transferred offshore to escape payment of stamp duty and inheritance tax.

It is estimated that this costs the Exchequer about £1.7bn a year in tax evaded. Whilst this is concentrated in the richest areas of London, this tax dodge is now spreading to other cities like Manchester, Derby and Leeds.

We are told that money is so tight that the cap on housing benefit and the cutback for families of disabled children must be maintained whilst the super-rich are laughing all the way to their offshore bank.

It's not as though the government didn't know about these wheezes and have been surprised by these latest revelations.

The truth is they've consistently followed a policy of ignoring tax-dodging by rich individuals and big corporations, always preferring to look the other way or, like Nelson, put the telescope to their blind eye.

Dave Hartnett, the head of HMRC, was rumbled letting off Goldman Sachs – the giant vampire squid itself – a huge tax levy

in a secret deal. Vodafone was allowed to walk away with a £6bn tax let-off – why did it require UKUncut to draw this to the nation's attention?

Fewer inspectors

The number of tax inspectors has been reduced, after lobbying from Big Business, by 26% from 99,200 in 2005 to just 73,700 in 2010, and tax collected has correspondingly dropped in the last 3 years from £462bn in 2008 to £436bn in 2010.

This is a case, as everything else with this government (and New Labour as well), of the rich socialising the losses and privatising the gains.

The bankers crash the economy, but keep their bonuses, and the rest of the population picks up the tab.

The super-rich make stratospheric gains in both wealth and income and then don't pay their taxes, and the rest of the population have to pay more tax.

How long is this country going to go on tamely accepting austerity when, if the super-rich were made to pay their due taxes, there need be no austerity at all? **CT**

Michael Meacher is the Labour Party Member of Parliament for Oldham West and royton. This commentary was first published at his web site MichaelMeacher.info

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The bankers crash the economy, but keep their bonuses, and the rest of the population picks up the tab

WRITING WORTH READING

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