

JACOB ZUMA'S LONG WALK TO HUMILIATION | DAVID NIDDRIE
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ISSUE 155

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Silencing the questions about Syria

Why we shouldn't trust the corporate media's demands for regime change

4

I am loath to draw more attention to the kind of idiocy that passes for informed comment nowadays from academics and mainstream journalists. Recently I lambasted Prof Richard Carver, a senior lecturer in human rights and governance at Oxford Brookes University, for his arguments in a letter against BDS, to the London Review of Books, that should have gained him an F for logic in any high school exam. Now we have to endure Brian Whitaker, the Guardian's former Middle East editor, using every ploy in the misdirection and circular logic playbook to discredit those who commit thought crimes on Syria, by raising questions both about what is really happening there and about whether we can trust the corporate media consensus banging the regime-change drum.

Whitaker's arguments and assumptions may be preposterous but, like Carver's, they are to be found everywhere in the mainstream – they have become so commonplace through repetition that they have gained a kind of implicit credibility. So let's unpack what Whitaker and his ilk are claiming.

Whitaker's latest outburst is directed against the impudence of a handful of British academics, including experts in the study of propaganda, in setting up a panel – the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media – to “provide a source of reliable, informed and timely analysis for journalists, publics and policymakers” on Syria. The researchers include Tim Hayward of Edinburgh University and Piers Robinson of Sheffield University. So what are Whitaker's objections to this working group? Let's run through them, with my interjections.

Whitaker: “They dispute almost all mainstream narratives of the Syrian conflict, especially regarding the use of chemical weapons and the role of the White Helmets search-and-rescue organisation. They are critical of western governments, western media and various humanitarian groups but show little interest in applying critical judgment to Russia's role in the conflict or to the controversial writings of several journalists who happen to share their views.”

Western governments and western corporate media have promoted a common narrative on Syria. It has been difficult for outsiders to be sure of what is going on, given that Syria has long been a closed society, a trend only reinforced by the last seven years of a vicious civil-cum-proxy war, and the presence of brutal ISIS and al Qaeda militias.

Long before the current fighting, western governments and Israel expressed a strong interest in overthrowing the government of Bashar Assad. In fact, their desire to be rid of Assad dates to at least the start of the “war on terror” they launched after 9/11, as I documented in my book, *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations*.

Very few corporate journalists have been on the ground in Syria. (Paradoxically, those who have are effectively embedded in areas dominated by al Qaeda-type groups, which western governments are supporting directly and through Gulf intermediaries.) Most of these journalists are relying on information provided by western governments, or from groups with strong, vested interests in Assad's overthrow.

JONATHAN COOK



Blown out government tank on the streets of Aleppo.

Photo: Voice of America News

Should we take this media coverage on trust, as many of us did the lies promoted about Iraq and later Libya by the same western governments and corporate media? Or should we be far more wary this time, especially as those earlier regime-change operations spread more chaos, suffering and weapons across the Middle East, and fuelled a migrant crisis now empowering the far-right across much of Europe?

Whitaker and his ilk are saying we should not. Or more disingenuously, Whitaker is saying that the working group, rather than invest its energies in this supremely important research, should concentrate its limited resources on studying Russian propaganda on Syria. In other words, the researchers should duplicate the sterling efforts of Whitaker's colleagues in daily attributing the superpowers of a James Bond villain to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Here's a counter-proposal: how about we leave well-funded western governments and media corporations to impugn Putin at every turn and on every pretext, while we allow the working group to check whether there is a large (larger?) mote in the west's eye?

Whitaker: *"The worrying part, though, especially in the light of their stated intention to seek 'research funding', is their claim to be engaging in 'rigorous academic analysis' of media reporting on Syria."*

Is this really so worrying? Why not allow a handful of academics to seek funds to try to untangle the

highly veiled aid – money and arms – that western governments have been pumping into a war tearing apart Syria? Why not encourage the working group to discern more clearly the largely covert ties between western security services and groups like the White Helmets "search-and-rescue service?" One would think supposedly adversarial journalists would be all in favour of efforts to dig up information about western involvement and collusion in Syria.

Whitaker: *"But while members of the group are generally very critical of mainstream media in the west, a handful of western journalists – all of them controversial figures – escape similar scrutiny. Instead, their work is lauded and recommended."*

More of Whitaker's circular logic. Of course, the few independent journalists (independent of corporate interests) who are on the ground in Syria are "controversial" – they are cast as "controversial" by western governments and corporate journalists precisely because they question the consensual narrative of those same governments and journalists. Duh!

Further, these "controversial" journalists are not being "lauded." Rather, their counter-narratives are being highlighted by those with open minds, like those in the working group. Without efforts to draw attention to these independent journalists' work, their reporting would most likely disappear without trace – precisely the outcome, one senses, Whitaker and his friends would very much prefer.

JONATHAN COOK

It is not the critical thinkers on Syria who are demanding that only one side of the narrative is heard; it is western governments and supposedly “liberal” journalists like Whitaker and the Guardian’s George Monbiot. They think they can divine the truth through . . . the corporate media, which is promoting narratives either crafted in western capitals or derived from ties to groups like the White Helmets located in jihadist-controlled areas.

Again, why should the working group waste its finite energies scrutinising these independent journalists when they are being scrutinised – and vilified – non-stop by journalists like Whitaker and by big-budget newspapers like the Guardian?

In any case, if official western narratives truly withstand the working group’s scrutiny, then the claims and findings of these independent journalists will be discredited in the process. These two opposed narratives cannot be equally true, after all.

Whitaker: *The two favourites, though, are Eva Bartlett and Vanessa Beeley – ‘independent’ journalists who are frequent contributors to the Russian propaganda channel, RT. Bartlett and Beeley also have an enthusiastic following on ‘alternative’ and conspiracy theory websites though elsewhere they are widely dismissed as propagandists.*

“Widely dismissed” by . . . yes, that’s right, Whitaker’s friends in the corporate media! More circular logic. Independent journalists like Bartlett and Beeley are on RT because Whitaker’s chums at British propaganda outlets – like the Guardian and BBC – do not give, and have never given, them a hearing. The Guardian even denied them a right of reply after its US-based technology writer Olivia Solon (whose resume does not mention that she was ever in Syria) was awarded a prominent slot in the paper to smear them as Kremlin propagandists, without addressing their arguments or evidence.

Whitaker: *“[Bartlett and Beeley’s] activities are part of the overall media battle regarding Syria and any ‘rigorous academic analysis’ of the coverage should be scrutinising their work rather than promoting it unquestioningly.”*

There is no “media battle.” That’s like talking of a “war” between Israel, one of the most powerful armies in the world, and the lightly armed Palestin-

ian resistance group Hamas – something the western corporate media do all the time, of course.

Instead there is an unchallenged western media narrative on Syria, one in favour of more war, and more suffering, until what seems like an unrealisable goal of overthrowing Assad is achieved. On the other side are small oases of scepticism and critical thinking, mostly on the margins of social media, Whitaker wants snuffed out.

The working group’s job is not to help him in that task. It is to test whether or how much of the official western narrative is rooted in truth.

Returning to his “concerns” about RT, Whitaker concludes that the station’s key goal: “is to cast doubt on rational but unwelcome explanations by advancing multiple alternative ‘theories’ – ideas that may be based on nothing more than speculation or green-ink articles on obscure websites.

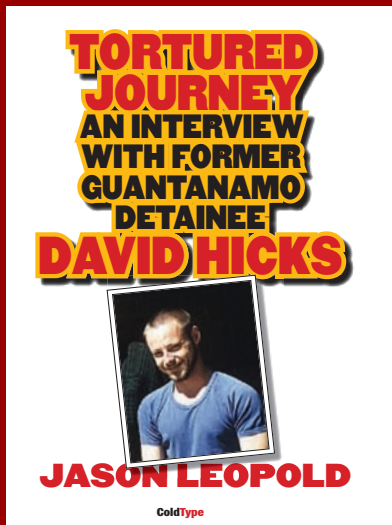
But it precisely isn’t such “green-ink” articles that chip away at the credibility of an official western consensus. It is the transparently authoritarian instincts of a political and media elite – and of supposedly “liberal” journalists like Whitaker and Monbiot – to silence all debate, all doubt, all counter-evidence.

Because at heart he is an authoritarian courtier, Whitaker would like us to believe that only crackpots and conspiracy theorists promote these counter-narratives. He would prefer that, in the silence he hopes to impose, readers will never be exposed to the experts who raise doubts about the official western narrative on Syria.

That is, the same silence that was imposed 15 years ago, when his former newspaper the Guardian and the rest of the western corporate media ignored and dismissed United Nations weapons experts like Scott Ritter and Hans Blix. Their warnings that Iraq’s supposed WMD really were non-existent and were being used as a pretext to wage a disastrous colonial war went unheard.

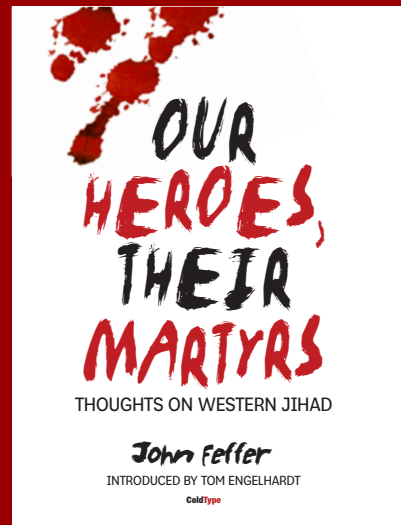
Let’s not allow Whitaker and like-minded bully-boys once again to silence such critical voices. **CT**

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DAVID NIDDRIE

Jacob Zuma's long walk to humiliation

How the South African president and his pals robbed the country and cheated the people

It was difficult to feel anything more than exhausted relief when Jacob Zuma began his “my fellow South Africans” televised address after resigning as the country’s president late on Valentine’s Day evening.

The impact of nine Zuma years on the South African economy has been catastrophic: local economists put lost national turnover at around R1-trillion (US\$86-billion) and calculate that, without him, the economy would be 25 percent bigger today. And the gap between the country’s rich and poor, the biggest in the world when he was sworn in, is even wider today. The prospect of narrowing it is zero.

And then there are the tools South Africa needs to repair the damage. Key institutions of state, vital in weeding out the corruption Zuma embedded in the fabric of government, are broken. And the ruling African National Congress (ANC), already wavering when Zuma secured the party leadership in 2007, is unlikely to fully recover.

Zuma narrowly missed extending his de facto leadership of the ANC at its elective conference in December when vote rigging and buying (from branches through to the conference in itself) brought his chosen candidate, ex-wife Noksazana Dlamini-Zuma, within a whisker of the ANC presidency – notwithstanding her glaring lack of popular appeal (the term “charisma bypass” was coined specifically for her).

Desperate manoeuvring by a group of untainted senior police officers managed to prevent the

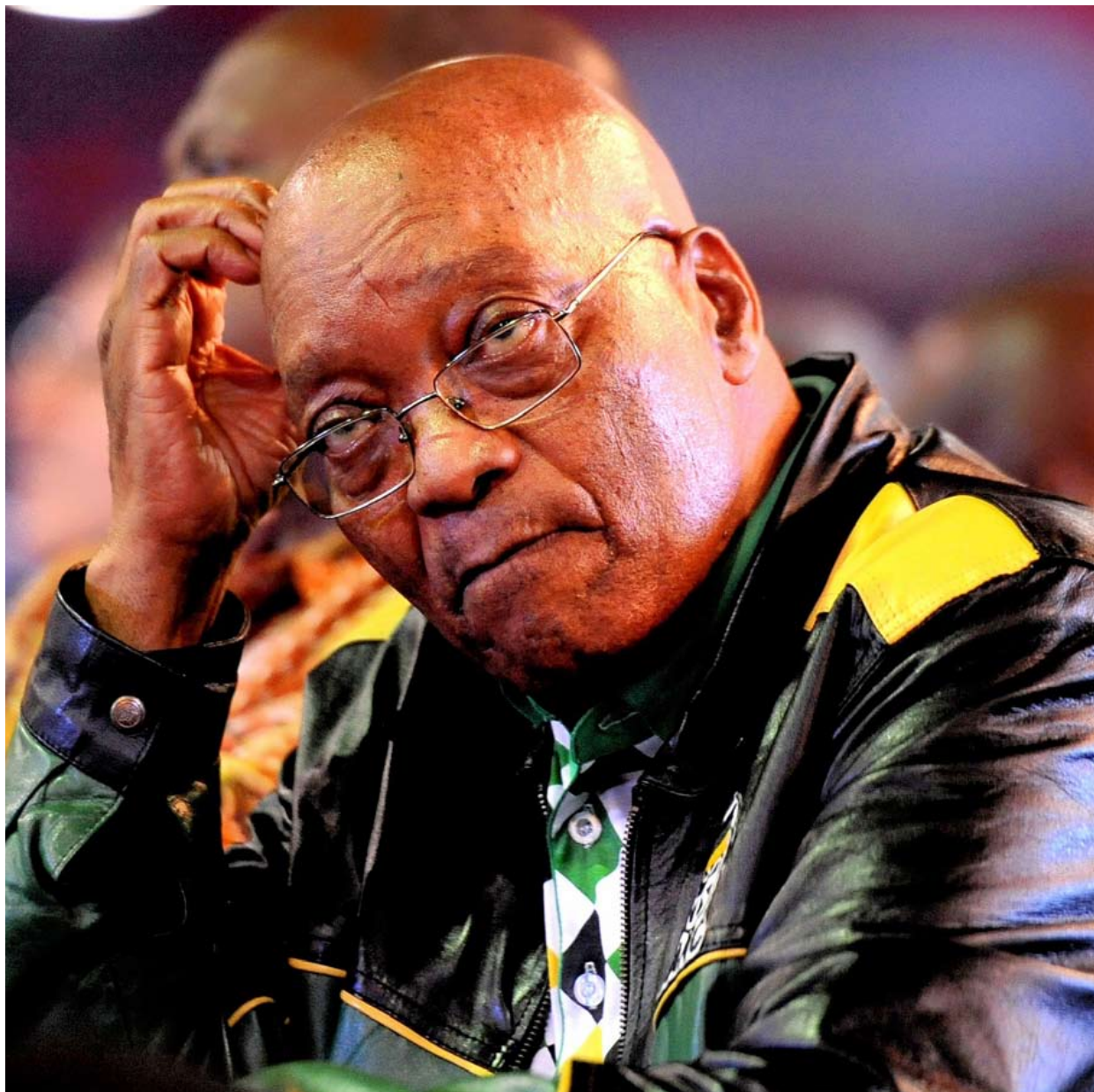
use of R45-million (\$4-million) from the police crime intelligence unit’s undercover-projects budget to buy the additional votes she needed to clinch the presidency.

As it is, newly-elected president Cyril Ramaphosa is seriously constrained within the ANC by a split down the middle of the 80-member national executive committee, and a similar division among the six elected national office bearers.

Despite the pressure of a constitutional court finding that Zuma had broken his oath of office and the pending reinstatement of more than 700 criminal charges (corruption, money laundering and racketeering), it took Ramaphosa a month of horse trading to win enough support to threaten Zuma with a parliamentary vote of no confidence – and even then the ANC had to go public with the threat before Zuma agreed to quit.

All this brings South Africa back to the state it was in when the Zuma era started, but with most things writ smaller. The new president is a lot richer: Ramaphosa is one of the 20 wealthiest people in Africa – largely by dint of being in the right place at the right time (the right place being, for several years, the boardroom of London-listed Lonmin PLC). But South Africa is a lot poorer. Thanks to Zuma, the country’s ability to borrow is severely constrained, and it is not even achieving the three percent annual jobless growth that happened under his prede-

DAVID NIDDRIE



"MY FELLOW SOUTH AFRICANS": A huge sigh of relief swept the country when Jacob Zuma resigned as president of South Africa after nine years at the helm of the country. Photo: Ayanda Ndamane, ANA

cessor Thabo Mbeki. And, nearly a quarter of a century after the formal end of apartheid, more than half of South Africa's 56-million people remain poor, with a monthly household income of R3,500 (equivalent to about \$10 a day for a family of four).

Ramaphosa will fairly soon purge the most obviously corrupt ministers from his cabinet. But even on this he has had to move with such

caution that South Africa was subjected to its annual Budget speech to parliament being delivered by key Zuma placeman Malusi Gigaba. In a previous ministerial incarnation as Minister of Public Enterprises, Gigaba's purging of the boards of state-owned enterprises (most notably the public broadcaster and power utility) had opened the way for Zuma-endorsed looting.

How did it come to this?

Even before Zuma won the ANC presidency in 2008, he had embarked on his own variant of Rudi Dutschke’s long march through the institutions. Unlike Dutschke, who was the most prominent spokesperson of the German student movement of the 1960s, Zuma’s objective wasn’t revolution, but self-preservation.

From the moment he returned to South Africa from exile in 1990, Zuma had been taking whatever he could get – in the early 1990s, Nelson Mandela secured a grant from ANC sympathisers of about R1-million to bail him out. It didn’t help: a decade later, he was facing more than 700 charges of corruption, money-laundering, racketeering and tax evasion.

By then, to survive, Zuma had to neutralise the threats against him – from police investigators, from intelligence agencies investigating his commercial “friends,” from the National Prosecuting Authority and from the taxman. Early in his first five-year term (2009-2014), Zuma had achieved most of this, although sorting out his problems with the taxman took much longer. But he also triggered the collapse of the South African currency against the dollar, wiped R180-billion permanently off the local stock exchange and triggered a series of ratings downgrades that turned South Africa into a junk status, high risk borrower.

To block the threats against him and subvert the legal system, Zuma filled key units of the police service, the upper ranks of the prosecuting authority, and the revenue service with his willing co-conspirators. Once he’d done that, he spent most of his second term as president looting the South African fiscus: Illegal and improper transactions identified so far indicate he and his henchmen pillaged at least R50-billion (US\$4.3-billion), although the final figure could easily be triple that.

In the ANC itself, Zuma worked tirelessly – backed by the considerable buying power of individuals he’d enabled to loot the public purse – to generate support among local ANC leadership structures. Where they couldn’t secure or



SOLD OUT: President Zuma filled key units of the police, prosecuting authority and revenue service with his willing conspirators. Photo: SA Government Flickr

buy support, they solved the problem by registering ghost branches to send voting fodder, representing no-one, to national ANC gatherings.

Zuma’s long march through the institutions has been told in about a dozen books, but is best captured by Jacques Pauw, still South Africa’s leading investigative journalist, despite his retirement to run a restaurant in a hamlet near Cape Town. His book, **The President’s Keepers** (subtitled *Those keeping Zuma in power and out of prison*) took just three weeks to stake its claim as the second most-read non-fiction work ever in South Africa – just behind Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom*. The first printing sold out in two days, the second within a week.

DAVID NIDDRIE



TOP: Cyril Ramaphosa, the new South African president. ABOVE: Former minister Ronnie Kasrils, author of new book on Zuma. Photos: SA Government.

And, thanks to a hack of the e-book from the publishers' website last November, the number of South Africans to have read it is significantly higher than formal sales indicate.

However, because *The President's Keepers* doesn't focus on Zuma himself, but on those who wrecked the law enforcement system for him, and who used the resulting free-for-all to loot the state coffers, Pauw doesn't examine the "why" of Zuma's mission.

That is left to veteran ANC activist and one-time Zuma underground comrade Ronnie Kasrils' *A Simple Man*, published at the same time. This book offers an explanation of how and why Zuma was able to persuade the ANC's allies, the South African Communist Party and the coun-

try's major trade union federation Cosatu, and virtually the entire left wing of the ANC itself to back Zuma's comeback after Mbeki sacked him as deputy president in 2005.

It is necessary at this point to declare an interest: I played a minor role in *A Simple Man*, being what Kasrils' describes in the preface as an "adviser and discussant on various aspects of the book," and in doing some preliminary editing. I don't agree with every word he wrote, but I'm not entirely neutral.

The book opens with an account of Kasrils and Zuma illegally crossing the Swazi-Mozambique border in the early 1980 – an event that caused Kasrils to begin questioning Zuma's political and personal reliability. These doubts were increasingly shared by other senior members of the ANC military wing, Umkhonto we-Sizwe, specifically Joe Slovo and Chris Hani, who were disquieted by Zuma's tribalism, his misogyny and his abuse of the counter-intelligence system he controlled to marginalise and question the loyalty to the ANC of many of those comrades who had blocked his trajectory to centralising power. Kasrils suggests that Mandela began, by the early 1990s, to share those concerns.

But Kasrils' two major contributions to the Zuma canon are to explain the sly skill with which he managed to persuade so many in the ANC-led alliance to accept that he was a victim of a malicious conspiracy by Mbeki to marginalise him, and that he was committed to returning the ANC to its pre-Mbeki decency. Zuma cast himself as the victim of everything the ANC's left and its communist and trade union partners loathed about Mbeki: his attempt to "modernise" the ANC (imposing top-down decision-making); his autocracy both in the party and in the state; his distaste for its mass membership and enthusiasm for the rapacious "black diamonds" who so adored his drive to the right.

Zuma would revive the "old" ANC, he told them: collective leadership, social democracy and a state-led, Keynesian revival of the econ-

omy. They believed him, won him the ANC presidency in 2008 and, in a general election a year later, swept the Zuma-led ANC to the party's biggest ever majority, 69,7 percent.

By 2016, Zuma had driven its electoral support down to just 54 percent, as urban working class voters stayed away from municipal polls.

However, more useful in the longer term is Kasrils' detailing of what he calls the Faustian Pact on economic policy into which the liberation movement entered with corporate representatives, behind closed doors and without much scrutiny, unlike the largely public political negotiations.

As apartheid's last president and the ANC's main political interlocutor, FW de Klerk, notes smugly in his autobiography: "The National Party's greatest contribution . . . was to promote the adoption of a balanced economic policy framework . . . which would steer a course away from the socialist tendencies which the ANC had espoused." More bluntly, Jonathan Oppenheimer, who represented the Anglo American Corporation team in these talks, asked afterwards: "What's wrong with policy capture, if it's good policy?"

Kasrils argues persuasively that, by allowing itself to be finessed (by several within its own ranks as much as by big business interests), the ANC hobbled itself going into government. And it further restricted itself by agreeing to the "sunset clause" compromise through which the structure – and much of the staffing – of the apartheid era civil service remained intact post-1994.

Without these compromises, and the consequent division within the ANC between free market enthusiasts and social democrats (and those further to the left), Zuma's comeback would have been impossible. And South Africa would today be R1-trillion richer and its economy 25 percent bigger. **CT**

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The President

The word "Zupta" passed into common South African usage within minutes of its coining by an opposition MP in 2016 to perfectly describe Jacob Zuma's relations with his most recent 'sponsors', the utterly corrupt trio of recent Indian immigrant Gupta brothers.

Zuma has had a host of such "sponsors" since returning in 1990 – from the township shebeen owners for whom he used his influence in provincial government to procure trading licences, through the captains of the viciously bent minibus commuter sector, to a string of shady business men in his home base, KwaZulu-Natal.

But, with the Guptas, he found a perfect fit. The brothers arrived in South Africa in 1993 from India's Uttar Pradesh to seek – and find – their fortunes. With Atul Gupta as the family godfather, they initially set up illegally importing computer parts, under the name (stolen from the Indian computer manufacturer) Sahara. But they quickly realised that the political sphere offered vastly better returns, initially bribing provincial government officials to buy their computers.

As they grew, they broadened their commercial horizons, branching into agriculture, mining and even the media – typically securing goodwill by employing the children of elected officials. The son of the premier of the Free State province was among the first beneficiaries of this. But the most productive for the Guptas has been the employment of Zuma's son Duduzane (they employed his twin sister Duduzile at the same time).

Their meeting with Zuma at a business lunch in the early 2000s was love at first sight.

Zuma's needs were great at the time: he had 20 children by three wives (there are now four), one ex-wife and a fifth who had committed suicide a few years earlier, plus several extra-marital relationships which bore children (and for which he had to pay the tribally traditional "inhlawulo" – damages).

Zuma opened many government doors for the

and the Zupta Factor



TRUST ME, I'M A MEDIA MOGUL: Ajay and Atul Gupta, after the 2013 launch of ANN7. Photo: Umsebenzi

family, leaning on politicians and senior civil servants to bypass the tender systems to grant them contracts and licences. They reciprocated generously, supporting his comeback campaign after Thabo Mbeki fired him as deputy president in 2005.

Zuma's election as president in 2009 demonstrated the value of the relationship: the billions poured in. The brothers bought an entire block of the elite Saxonwold Johannesburg suburb to construct the "Sahara compound," complete with four massive mansions. They also began moving their money to Dubai.

With their man as president, they began identifying candidates for influential government positions. Ultimately, they were able to cut out the middleman almost entirely, identifying and interviewing potential cabinet ministers, then informing Zuma who, in turn, rubber stamped the appointments. Gupta appointees ensured they got mining licences (and, in two cases, leaned so heavily on other mine owners that they sold their mines to the

Guptas, who cashed in on government coal supply contracts), and ensured that thousands of copies of *New Age*, their shoddy daily newspaper, was bought by the state for civil servants to read, while it was lavishly funded through government advertising. Even Naspers, (Africa's biggest company, a near-monopoly in South Africa, and itself no stranger to undue influence in government) was obliged to keep Zuma happy by carrying Africa News Network (AAN), an indescribably awful Gupta news channel on its satellite platform. By 2014 Godfather Atul Gupta was South Africa's seventh richest person, publicly worth R10-billion.

The Zuma family also grew rich – although Zuma never exclusively relied on the Guptas: through loyalists in the state, he siphoned off R230-million of public funds to upgrade his rural homestead into a family compound. And a significant slice of covert Russian contributions to the ANC's 2016 municipal election campaign remains unaccounted for. The quid pro quo was to have been securing Russia the contract in an entirely unnecessary, unaffordable (and now thankfully abandoned) move to nuclear power generation.

But first journalists, then the courts and the Public Protector (the state ombud), and finally the ANC itself began to expose the detail of the Zupta relationship.

By the time Zuma resigned, Atul Gupta had flown out to Dubai (with Duduzane Zuma), bother Ajay had fled to India (probably accompanied by the third brother, Tony).

As the battered criminal justice system grinds in post-Zuma gear, only Ajay Gupta so far faces criminal charges: for looting R220-million from a rural development agricultural project to pay for lavish family wedding. **CT**

David Niddrie

YVES ENGLER

Haiti: The Republic of NGOs

Since the earthquake there have been innumerable stories of NGOs abusing their power or pillaging funds raised for Haitians

Imagine living in a country where the entire social services sector is privatised, run by “charities” that are based in other countries and staffed by foreigners who get to decide whether or not you qualify for assistance.

Welcome to Haiti, the “Republic of NGOs.”

As salacious details about Oxfam officials hiring Haitian girls for sex make headlines, the media has downplayed NGOs lack of accountability to those they purportedly serve. Even less attention has been devoted to the role so-called non-governmental organisations have played in undermining the Haitian state and advancing wealthy countries’ interests.

According to a series of news reports, Oxfam UK’s Haiti director hired prostitutes and organised orgies at a charity run villa set up after the devastating 2010 earthquake. Some of the girls may have been as young as 14 and Oxfam representatives traded aid for sex. Oxfam UK leaders tried to keep the issue quiet when it emerged in 2011, which enabled a number of the perpetrators to join other NGOs operating internationally.

Since the earthquake, there have been innumerable stories of NGOs abusing their power or pillaging funds raised for Haitians. In an extreme case, the US Red Cross built only six houses with the \$500 million they raised for Haiti after the earthquake.

While impoverished Haitians get short shrift, NGOs respond to the interests of their benefactors. After the UN occupation force brought cholera to Haiti in October 2010, Oxfam and



Unloading food and supplies at the airport in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Photo: Daniel Barker, US Navy

other NGOs defended the Washington-France-Canada instigated MINUSTAH (Mission des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en Haïti). In response to Haitians protesting the UN’s role in the cholera outbreak, Oxfam spokeswoman Julie Schindall, told the Guardian “If the country explodes in violence, then we will not be able to reach the people we need to.” At the same time Médecins Sans Frontières’ head of mission in Port-au-Prince, Stefano Zannini, told Montreal daily La Presse, “Our position is pragmatic: to have learnt the source at the beginning of the epidemic would not have saved more lives. To know today would have no impact either.”

Of course that was nonsense. Confirming the source of the cholera was medically necessary. At the time of these statements UN forces were

still disposing their sewage in a way that put Haitian life at risk. Protesting UN actions was a way to pressure MINUSTAH to stop their reckless sewage disposal and generate the resources needed to deal with a cholera outbreak that left 10,000 dead and one million ill.

Worse than deflecting criticism of the UN's responsibility for the cholera outbreak, NGOs put a progressive face on the invasion/coup that initiated MINUSTAH. Incredibly, many NGOs justified US Marines taking an elected President from his home in the middle of the night and dumping him 10,000 km away in the Central African Republic.

Many NGOs justified US Marines taking Aristide and dumping him 10,000 km away

On March 25, 2004 Oxfam Québec and a half dozen other Canadian government-funded NGOs defended Canada's (military, diplomatic and financial) role in the ouster of thousands of elected officials, including President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Marthe Lapierre of Development and Peace stated: "We're not talking about a situation where a rebel group suddenly orchestrated Aristide's departure. We're talking about a situation where the Aristide government, since 2000, had gradually lost all legitimacy because of involvement in activities such as serious human rights violations and drug trafficking, but also because it was a profoundly undemocratic government."

Oxfam Québec regional director Carlos Arancibia concurred: "I fully agree with the analysis presented by others. It's important to understand that things went off the rails starting in the year 2000, with the election."

(After they lost the May 2000 legislative elections the opposition claimed that the electoral Council should have used a different voting method, which would have forced eight Senate seats to a runoff. Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas party would likely have won the runoff votes, but the

US/Canada backed opposition used the issue to justify boycotting the November 2000 presidential election, which they had zero chance of winning. For its part, Washington used the election dispute to justify blocking aid to the country. Even without the disputed senators, Fanmi Lavalas still had a majority in the senate and even when seven of the eight Lavalas senators resigned the aid embargo and effort to discredit the elections continued.)

At the time of the coup most of Haiti's social services were run by NGOs. A Canadian International Development Agency report stated that by 2004, "non-governmental actors (for-profit and not-for-profit) provided almost 80 percent of [Haiti's] basic services." Amongst other donor countries, the Canadian government channelled its "development assistance" through NGOs to shape the country's politics. According to CIDA, "supporting non-governmental actors contributed to the creation of parallel systems of service delivery. ... In Haiti's case, these actors [NGOs] were used as a way to circumvent the frustration of working with the government ... this contributed to the establishment of parallel systems of service delivery, eroding legitimacy, capacity and will of the state to deliver key services." As intended, funding NGOs weakened the Aristide/René Préval/Aristide governments and strengthened the US/France/Canada's hand.

Highly dependent on western government funding and political support, NGOs broadly advanced their interests.

The Oxfam "sex scandal" should shine a light on the immense, largely unaccountable, power NGOs continue to wield over Haitian affairs. In a decent world it would also be a lesson in how not to use "aid" to undermine democracy. **CT**

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ENRICO BONADIO

The high cost of art

How 21 artists graffitied one man's property, made it famous, sued him when he knocked it down and won \$6.7-million

It's an extraordinary tale with a whiff of Banksy about it, although surprisingly, he was not involved. In a landmark ruling, 21 New York street artists have sued and won US\$6.7-million in damages from the owner of a building who destroyed their graffiti when he had the building demolished.

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Following a three-week trial in November, on February 12, Judge Frederic Block ruled against Jerry Wolkoff, owner of the 5Pointz complex in Queens, conferring the biggest award of \$1.3-million on the building's mastermind-curator, graffiti artist Meres One, real name Jonathan Cohen.

The demolition of the former factory-site-turned-graffiti-mecca began in August 2014. The year before, artists had tried to oppose the warehouse's destruction, but an attempt to win an injunction to prevent the owner from knocking it down was unsuccessful.

In the 1990s, Wolkoff had agreed to allow the derelict factory to be used as a showcase for local graffiti talent. Called the Phun Factory, it was later renamed 5Pointz by Meres One in 2002. Under the artist's watchful eye, it evolved into an "aerosol art centre" and became famous the world over, a huge draw for graffiti aficionados and tourists alike.

In the end, Wolkoff profited from the graffiti and its destruction, when the value of the complex went up from \$40-million to \$200-million



Photo: Nigel Morris, Flickr.com

and permission to build luxury condos was obtained. Destroying 5Pointz, the judge stressed, permitted Wolkoff to realise that value.

Judge Block accepted that 45 artworks at the centre of the case had "recognised stature" and



OUT OF THIS WORLD!: It's easy to see why the 5Pointz building was a top tourist attraction in New York City.

must receive protection under the Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA), a piece of legislation which was introduced in the US in 1990 to protect artists' moral rights – but has rarely been applied in their favour.

The rationale used by the court to confirm these artworks were of merit was crucial. To be considered such, works of art don't need to be mentioned in academic publications or be considered masterpieces, as the expert for the



WORK OF ART: Using the wall as a giant canvas at 5Pointz.

Photo: John Gillespie, Flickr.com, Flickr.com

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property owner had argued. It was enough, the judge said, for the 5Pointz artists to show their professional achievements in terms of residences, teaching positions, fellowships, public and private commissions as well as media coverage and social media presence.

Judge Block also carefully examined Wolkoff's behaviour. The artworks – even those that could be easily removed as they had been placed on plywood panels – were whitewashed prior to demolition without giving artists the 90-day notice required by VARA. And the owner did so, the judge stressed, while conscious of the fact the artists were pursuing a VARA-based legal action. Such behaviour, the judge concluded, was not acceptable.

Such blatant disregard for an important legal provision pushed the judge to award the artists the maximum amount of damages allowable under the law. And although he did not grant the injunction requested by the artists

in 2013, the judge had warned Wolkoff that he would be exposed to potentially high damages if the artworks were finally considered of “recognised stature,” as they were by the February 12 ruling.

The court also took into account that 5Pointz had become an attraction for visitors to New York, with busloads of tourists, schoolchildren and even weddings heading to the site. Also thanks to Meres One's savvy stewardship for more than a decade, not only was the complex painted regularly by talented graffiti artists from all over the world, 5Pointz also attracted movie producers, advertising companies and bands, and was used as a location for the climax for the 2013 film *Now You See Me*.

The judge did not attach much importance to the fact that several artworks at 5Pointz were not meant to be permanent, an argument that had also been relied on by Wolkoff to claim that the pieces could not be protected.

But the court reminded him that VARA protects both permanent and temporary art. This



UNANSWERED PLEA: A huge campaign to save 5Pointz was unsuccessful. Photo: Eden, Janine and Jim, Flickr

is an important provision of the law, especially when all that makes a work transient is the site owner's expressed intention to remove it.

This ruling may well embolden other graffiti artists to sue property owners who destroy artworks without following the correct procedure, even beyond the US.

It may also make owners of buildings whose walls host graffiti more careful. Most important, the huge amount of damages awarded in this case will convince many that ignoring legal provisions and disregarding legitimate graffiti art is not a good idea. Judge Block made clear he awarded the maximum penalty allowable to deter other building owners from behaving in



5POINTZ MASTERMIND: Jonathan Cohen, aka Meres One, won \$1.3m in the court ruling. Thee Erin/Flickr.com

the same disrespectful way as Wolkoff.

Finally, the decision clearly marks the evolution of graffiti and street art, long considered to be temporary or transient artforms. It is now clear that artistic movements such as these aim to become more permanent forms of art, and that they have achieved a status similar to the one traditionally held by works of "fine art."

So the gap between "street art" and "fine art" is narrowing. As 5Pointz curator Meres One put it: "This case will probably change the way art is perceived for generations to come." **CT**

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GEORGE MONBIOT

Resisting resistance

A US-UK trade deal threatens to export the horrors
of US corporate livestock production

It looks like a real zombie apocalypse. Bacteria we thought we had conquered are on the march again, defeating almost all attempts to slaughter them. Having broken through the outer walls, they have reached our last lines of defence. Antibiotic resistance is among the greatest threats to human health.

Infections that were once easy to quash now threaten our lives. Doctors warn that routine procedures, such as caesareans, hip replacements and chemotherapy, could one day become impossible, due to the risk of exposing patients to deadly infection. Already, in the European Union alone, 25,000 people a year are killed by antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Yet our last defences – the rare drugs to which bacteria have not yet become immune – are being squandered with abandon. While most doctors seek to use them precisely and parsimoniously, some livestock farms literally slosh them around: They add them to the feed and water supplied to entire herds of cattle, pigs or poultry: not to treat illness, but to prevent it.

In the 1950s, farmers discovered that small quantities of antibiotics added to feed make animals grow faster. Using antibiotics as growth promoters – low doses routinely applied – is a perfect formula for generating bacterial resistance. Yet many countries continue to permit this reckless practice. The US Food and Drug Administration asks drug companies voluntarily to refrain from labelling antibiotics as growth promoters. But with a nod and a wink, it

suggests they be rebranded for “new therapeutic indications.” Around 75 percent of the antibiotics used in the US are fed to farm animals. Our city is under siege, and we are knocking down our own defences.

The EU and the UK are no paragons. Outrageously, it is still legal in the UK to dose chickens with fluoroquinolones, powerful antibiotics that save many human lives: a practice even the US has banned.

But in other respects, the US, whose corporate livestock production looks more like HG Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau* than anything you’d recognise as farming, makes our methods seem virtuous. Last month, the Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics revealed that the US uses on average roughly five times as many antibiotics per animal as the UK does.

Why? Because the stack ‘em high, sell ‘em low model of farming there, in which vast numbers of animals are reared in appalling conditions in megafarms, cannot be sustained without mass medication. The animals are weaned so young, are so debilitated and so crowded that extreme methods are required to keep them alive and growing. The impacts are not confined to the US: when America sneezes, the world catches antibiotic-resistant salmonella.

There’s an urgent need for a global ban on the mass treatment of livestock with antibiotics, and on any use of the antibiotics of last resort in

farming. Tough as this is for the economics of megafarms, human life is more important. But the opposite is happening. The US government hopes to use trade treaties to break down the resistance of other nations to its farming practices. And the UK is at the top of its list.

The EU bans imports of meat produced by some of the disgusting means developed in the US, such as injecting cattle with growth-promoting hormones, feeding pigs on ractopamine (a drug which raises their weight but can cause their bones to break and their motor functions to degenerate), and washing chicken carcasses with chlorine. This means that the cheapest, nastiest meat, whose production is most dependent on mass medication with antibiotics, is excluded, offering UK farmers a degree of protection. Exposed to full competition with the US model, they would be faced with a choice of replicating its excesses (including the profligate use of antibiotics), or going under.

We should demand that trade negotiations are accountable to people and parliament

Does anyone trust the UK government to maintain EU standards once we leave? I don't. The US government appears to see us as its European beachhead. In November, Trump's commerce secretary Wilbur Ross announced that scrapping the EU food rules that currently apply here would be a "critical component of any trade discussion" with the UK.

In January, the US farm trade negotiator Ted McKinney told the Oxford Farming Conference that he was "sick and tired" of British complaints about US farm standards. Unsurprisingly perhaps: until 2014, he was head of global corporate affairs at the livestock drug company Elanco Animal Health. In this role, he lobbied for lower global standards on the pig drug ractopamine, which his company manufactured.

So who will resist them? Our trade secretary, Liam Fox, was sacked from his former post after mixing corporate interests with the business of the state to an extent that even David Cameron

couldn't tolerate. He has boasted that "we have a low regulation and low taxation environment which is only likely to improve outside the EU." His department has insisted that any trade deal with the US is conducted in secret, without either public scrutiny or parliamentary approval. No prizes for guessing why.

In negotiating with the US, our government, which is desperate for a deal, has neither leverage nor expertise. In the inaugural trade discussions last year, the UK was unable to field a single experienced trade negotiator, while the US had 20. At home, a network of Conservative thinktanks lobbies for the radical deregulation of farming. Our political system, like that of the US, is dominated by big business and big money. From the point of view of the millionaires who funded the Leave campaign, the purpose of Brexit is to allow business to escape from the public protections the EU provides.

So what hope is there of defending ourselves against US farming practices, and their many impacts on human health, including the zombie resurgence of defeated bacteria? Well, as always, hope lies with us. Through massive resistance, led by campaigners in Britain, the people of Europe managed to defeat the noxious Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), despite the vast resources the US, the European Commission and the UK government poured into promoting it.

We must resist the government's trade agenda with the same determination. When people voted for Brexit, their urge to take back control was genuine and deeply felt. So let's not hand it either to the US or to British corporations and their stooges in government. For or against Brexit, we should all demand that trade negotiations are accountable to people and parliament, rather than stitched up in private by gruesome lobbyists. Our lives may even depend on it. **CT**

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George Monbiot's latest book, How Did We Get Into This Mess?, is published by Verso. This article was first published in the Guardian. Monbiot's web site is www.monbiot.com

RAJAN MENON

NUCLEAR

INSANITY

Lowering the nuclear threshold and other follies of the US government's Nuclear Posture Review

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If you're having trouble sleeping thanks to, well, you know who . . . you're not alone. But don't despair. A breakthrough remedy has just gone on the market. It has no chemically induced side effects and, best of all, will cost you nothing, thanks to the US Department of Defense. It's the new Nuclear Posture Review, or NPR, among the most soporific documents of our era. Just keeping track of the number of times the phrase "flexible and tailored response" appears in the 75-page document is the equivalent of counting (incinerated) sheep. Be warned, however, that if you really start paying attention to its actual subject matter, rising anxiety will block your journey to the slumber sphere.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimates that the United States devoted \$611-billion to its military machine in 2016. That was more than the defence expenditures of the next nine countries combined, almost three times what runner-up China put out, and 36 percent of total global military spending. Yet reading the NPR you would think the United States is the most vulnerable country on Earth. Threats lurk everywhere and, worse yet, they're multiplying, morphing, becoming ever more ominous. The

more Washington spends on glitzy weaponry, the less secure it turns out to be, which, for any organisation other than the Pentagon, would be considered a terrible return on investment.

The Nuclear Posture Review unwittingly paints Russia, which has an annual military budget of \$69.2-billion (\$10-billion less than what Congress just added to the already staggering 2018 Pentagon budget





in a deal to keep the government open), as the epitome of efficient investment, so numerous, varied, and effective are the “capabilities” it has acquired in the 17 years since Vladimir Putin took the helm. Though similar claims are made about China and North Korea, Putin’s Russia comes across in the NPR as the threat of the century, a country racing ahead of the US in the development of nuclear weaponry. As the Washington

Post’s Glenn Kessler has shown, however, that document only gets away with such a claim by making 2010 the baseline year for its conclusions. That couldn’t be more chronologically convenient because the United States had, by then, completed its latest wave of nuclear modernisation. By contrast, during the decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia’s economy contracted by more than 50 percent, so it

couldn't afford large investments in much of anything back then. Only when oil prices began to skyrocket in this century could it begin to modernise its own nuclear forces.

The Nuclear Posture Review also focuses on Russia's supposed willingness to launch "limited" nuclear strikes to win conventional wars, which, of course, makes the Russians seem particularly insidious. But consider what the latest (December 2014) iteration of Russia's military doctrine actually says about when Moscow might contemplate such a step: "The Russian Federation reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, and also in the case of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy."

Reduced to its bare bones this means that countries that fire weapons of mass destruction at Russia or its allies or threaten the existence of the Russian state itself in a conventional war could face nuclear retaliation. Of course, the United States has no reason to fear a massive defeat in a conventional war – and which country would attack the American homeland with nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons and not expect massive nuclear retaliation?

Naturally, the Nuclear Posture Review also says nothing about the anxieties that the steady eastward advance of NATO – that ultimate symbol of the Cold War – in the post-Soviet years sparked in Russia or how that shaped its military thinking. That process began in the 1990s, when Russian power was in free fall. Eventually, the alliance would reach Russia's border. The NPR also gives no thought to how Russian nuclear policy might reflect that country's abiding sense of military inferiority in relation to the United States. Even to raise such a possibility would, of course, diminish the Russian threat at a time when inflating it has become de rigeur for liberals as well as conservatives and certainly for much of the media.

Russian nuclear weapons are not,

however, the Nuclear Posture Review's main focus. Instead, it makes an elaborate case for a massive expansion and "modernisation" of what's already the world's second largest nuclear arsenal (6,800 warheads versus 7,000 for Russia) so that an American commander-in-chief has a "diverse set of nuclear capabilities that provide... flexibility to tailor the approach to deterring one or more potential adversaries in different circumstances."

They portray Russia and China as wild-eyed gamblers with an affinity for risk-taking

The NPR insists that future presidents must have advanced "low-yield" or "usable" nuclear weapons to wield for limited, selective strikes. The stated goal: to convince adversaries of the foolishness of threatening or, for that matter, launching their own limited strikes against the American nuclear arsenal in hopes of extracting "concessions" from us. This is where Strangelovian logic and nuclear absurdity take over. What state in its right mind would launch such an attack, leaving the bulk of the US strategic nuclear force, some 1,550 deployed warheads, intact? On that, the NPR offers no enlightenment.

You don't have to be an acolyte of the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz or have heard about his concept of "friction" to know that even the best-laid plans in wartime are regularly shredded. Concepts like limited nuclear war and nuclear blackmail may be fun to kick around in war-college seminars. Trying them out in the real world, though, could produce disaster. This ought to be self-evident, but to the authors of the NPR it's not. They portray Russia and China as wild-eyed gamblers with an unbounded affinity for risk-taking.

The document gets even loopier. It seeks to provide the commander-in-chief with nuclear options for repelling non-nuclear attacks against the United States, or even its allies. Presidents, insists the document, require "a range of flexible nuclear capabilities," so that



adversaries will never doubt that “we will defeat non-nuclear attacks.” Here’s the problem, though: were Washington to cross that nuclear Rubicon and launch a “limited” strike during a conventional war, it would enter a true terra incognita. The United States did, of course, drop two nuclear bombs on Japanese cities in August 1945, but that country lacked the means to respond in kind.

However, Russia and China, the principal adversaries the NPR has in mind (though North Korea gets mentioned as well), do have just those means at hand to strike back. So when it comes to using nuclear weapons selectively, its authors quickly find themselves splashing about in a sea of bizarre speculation. They blithely assume that other countries will behave precisely as American military strategists (or an American president) might ideally expect them to and so will interpret the nuclear “message” of a limited strike (and its thousands of casualties) exactly as intended. Even with the aid of game theory, war games, and scenario building – tools beloved by war planners – there’s no way to know where the road marked “nuclear flexibility” actually leads. We’ve never been on it before. There isn’t a map. All that exists are untested assumptions that already look shaky.

These aren’t the only dangerous ideas that lie beneath the NPR’s flexibility trope. Presidents must also, it turns out, have the leeway to reach into the nuclear arsenal if terrorists detonate a nuclear device on American soil or if conclusive proof exists that another state provided such weaponry (or materials) to the perpetrator or even “enabled” such a group to “obtain nuclear devices.” The NPR also envisions the use of selective nuclear strikes to punish massive cyberattacks on the United States or its allies. To maximise the flexibility needed for initiating selective nuclear salvos in such circumstances, the document recommends that the US “maintain a portion of its nuclear forces alert day-to-day, and retain the option of launching those forces promptly.” Put all this together and you’re looking at a future in which nuclear weapons could be used in stress-induced haste and based on erroneous intelligence and misperception.

So while the NPR’s prose may be sleep inducing, you’re unlikely to nod off once you realize that the Trump-era Pentagon – no matter the NPR’s protests

to the contrary – seeks to lower the nuclear threshold. “Selective,” “limited,” “low yield”: these phrases may sound reassuring, but no one should be misled by the antiseptic terminology and soothing caveats. Even “tactical” nuclear weapons are anything but tactical in any normal sense. The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki might, in terms of explosive power, qualify as “tactical” by today’s standards, but would be similarly devastating if used in an urban area. (We cannot know just how horrific the results would be, but the online tool NUKEMAP calculates that if a 20-kiloton nuclear bomb, comparable to Fat Man, the code name for the bomb dropped on Nagasaki, were used on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, where I live, more than 80,000 people would be killed in short order.) Not to worry, the NPR’s authors say, their proposals are not meant to encourage “nuclear war fighting” and won’t have that effect. On the contrary, increasing presidents’ options for using nuclear weapons will only preserve peace.

Behind the new policies lurks a familiar urge to spend taxpayer dollars profligately

The Obama-era predecessor to Trump’s Nuclear Posture Review contained an entire section entitled “Reducing the Role of US Nuclear Weapons.” It outlined “a narrow set of contingencies in which such weaponry might still play a role in deterring a conventional or CBW [chemical or biological weapons] attack against the United States or its allies and partners.” So long to that.

Behind the new policies to make nuclear weapons more “usable” lurks a familiar urge to spend taxpayer dollars profligately. The Nuclear Posture Review’s version of a spending spree, meant to cover the next three decades and expected, in the end, to cost close to \$2-trillion, covers the works: the full nuclear “triad” – land-based ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ones, and nuclear-armed strategic bombers. Also included are the nuclear command, control, and communication network (NC3) and the plutonium, uranium, and tritium production facilities overseen by the National Nuclear Security Administration.

The upgrade will run the gamut. The 14 Ohio-class nuclear submarines, the sea-based segment

of the triad, are to be replaced by a minimum of 12 advanced Columbia-class boats. The 400 Minuteman III single-warhead, land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, will be retired in favour of the “next-generation” Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent, which, its champions insist, will provide improved propulsion and accuracy – and, needless to say, more “flexibility” and “options.” The current fleet of strategic nuclear bombers, including the workhorse B-52H and the newer B-2A, will be joined and eventually succeeded by the “next-generation” B-21 Raider, a long-range stealth bomber. The B-52’s air-launched cruise missile will be replaced with a new Long Range Stand-Off version of the same. A new B61-12 gravity bomb will take the place of current models by 2020. Nuclear-capable F-35 stealth fighter-bombers will be “forward deployed,” supplanting the F-15E. Two new “low-yield” nuclear weapons, a submarine-launched ballistic missile, and a sea-launched cruise missile will also be added to the arsenal.

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The NPR’s case for three decades of such expenditures rests on the claim that the “flexible and tailored” choices it deems non-negotiable don’t presently exist, though the document itself concedes that they do. I’ll let its authors speak for themselves: “The triad and non-strategic forces, with supporting NC3, provide diversity and flexibility as needed to tailor US strategies for deterrence, assurance, achieving objectives should deterrence fail, and hedging.” For good measure, the NPR then touts the lethality, range, and invulnerability of the existing stock of missiles and bombers.

Buried in the review, then, appears to be an admission that the colossally expensive nuclear modernisation program it deems so urgent isn’t necessary.

The NPR takes great pains to demonstrate that all of the proposed new weaponry, referred to as “the replacement programme to rebuild the triad,” will cost relatively little. Let’s consider this claim in wider perspective.

To obtain Senate ratification of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty he signed with Russia in 2010, the Nobel Prize-winning antinuclear advocate Barack Obama agreed to pour \$1-trillion

over three decades into the “modernisation” of the nuclear triad, and that pledge shaped his 2017 defence budget request. In other words, President Obama left President Trump a costly nuclear legacy, which the latest Nuclear Posture Review fleshes out and expands. There’s no indication that the slightest energy went into figuring out ways to economise on it. A November 2017 Congressional Budget Office report projects that President Trump’s nuclear modernisation plan will cost \$1.2-trillion over three decades, while other estimates put the full price at \$1.7-trillion.

There is a persistent pattern of massive cost overruns for weapons systems

As the government’s annual budget deficit increases – most forecasts expect it to top \$1-trillion next year, thanks in part to the Trump tax reform bill and Congress’s gift to the Pentagon budget that, over the next two years, is likely to total \$1.4-trillion – key domestic programmes will take big hits in the name of belt-tightening. Military spending, of course, will only continue to grow. If you want to get a sense of where we’re heading, just take a look at Trump’s 2019 budget proposal (which projects a cumulative deficit of \$7.1 trillion over the next decade). It urges big cuts in areas ranging from Medicare and Medicaid to the Environmental Protection Agency and Amtrak. By contrast, it champions a Pentagon budget increase of \$80-billion (13.2 percent over 2017) to \$716-billion, with \$24-billion allotted to upgrading the nuclear triad.

And keep in mind that military cost estimates are only likely to rise. There is a persistent pattern of massive cost overruns for weapons systems ordered through the government’s Major Defense Acquisition Program (MDAP). These ballooned from \$295-billion in 2008 to \$468-billion in 2015. Consider just two recent examples: the first of the new Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers, delivered last May after long delays, came in at \$13-billion, an overrun of \$2.3-billion, while the programme to produce the F-35 jet, already the



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RAJAN MENON

most expensive weapons system of all time, could reach \$406.5-billion, a seven percent overrun since the last estimate.

If the Pentagon turns its Nuclear Posture Review into reality, the first president who will have some of those more “flexible” nuclear options at his command will be none other than Donald Trump. We’re talking, of course, about the man who, in his debut speech to the United Nations last September, threatened to “totally destroy” North Korea and later, as the crisis on the Korean peninsula heated up, delighted in boasting on Twitter about the size of his “nuclear button.” He has shown himself to be impulsive, ill informed, impervious to advice, certain about his instincts, and infatuated with demonstrating his toughness, as well as reportedly fascinated by nuclear weapons and keen to see the US build more of them. Should a leader with such traits be given yet more nuclear “flexibility”? The answer is obvious enough, except evidently to the au-

thors of the NPR, who are determined to provide him with more “options” and “flexibility.”

At least three more years of a Donald Trump presidency are on the horizon. Of this we can be sure: other international crises will erupt, and one of them could pit the United States not just against a nuclear-armed North Korea but also against China or Russia. Making it easier for Trump to use nuclear weapons isn’t, as the Nuclear Posture Review would have you believe, a savvy strategic innovation. It’s insanity. **CT**

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BENDIB'S WORLD

Khalil Bendib



KATTE BLACK

Yanks to the rescue!

Time magazine's not-so secret story of how Americans helped Yeltsin win Russia's 1996 presidential election

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Imagine the furore if Izvestia had, in January 2018, run the headline, Rescuing Donald, over a story in which it proudly boasted that a group of crack Russian election-fixers had been sent over to Washington to make sure Donald Trump beat Hillary Clinton. Does anyone imagine it would stop short of impeachment for Trump and maybe even hot war with Russia? Yet 22 years ago Time magazine ran just such a feature on how four Americans and an ex-pat Russian had managed the 1996 Russian presidential election to ensure a win for Boris Yeltsin. And, apparently, that was something to openly boast about.

On July 15 1996 Time ran a screaming front page that read, Yanks To The Rescue – The Secret Story Of How American Advisers Helped Yeltsin Win.

The exclusive feature inside left little room for doubt. It was headlined in red Rescuing Boris, and the caption on the header photo of a smiling Yeltsin read: “The secret story of how four US advisors used polls, focus groups, negative ads and all the other techniques of American campaigning to help Boris Yeltsin win.”

The introduction continued the exultant theme: “In the end the Russian people chose – and chose decisively – to reject the past. Voting in the final round of the presidential election last week, they preferred Boris Yeltsin to his communist rival Gennadi Zyuganov by a margin of 13 percentage points. He is far from the



TRIUMPHANT: The cover of Time, July 15, 1996.

ideal democrat or reformer, and his lieutenants Victor Chenomyrdin and Alexander Lebed are already squabbling over power, but Yeltsin is arguably the best hope Russia has for moving toward pluralism and an open economy. By re-electing him, the Russians defied predictions that they might willingly resubmit themselves to communist rule.

“The outcome was by no means inevitable. Last winter Yeltsin’s approval ratings were in the single digits. There are many reasons for his change in fortune, but a crucial one has remained a secret. For four months, a group of American political consultants clandestinely participated in guiding Yeltsin’s campaign, here is the inside story of how these advisors helped Yeltsin achieve the victory that would keep reform in Russia alive.”

The article went on to explain that Yeltsin was deeply unpopular at that time in Russia, polling no more than eight percent, and was widely blamed for the rise of the gangster oligarchs, the collapse of infrastructure and the looting of Russia’s once state-owned natural resources. The Communists were resurgent, taking a lot of new seats in the elections to the Duma in the winter of 1995-’96. The Communist presidential candidate, Gennadi Zyuganov, was poised to ride this wave to victory. If left to their own devices, Time said, the Russians could easily have voted a Red back into the Kremlin.

Obviously this could not be permitted to happen. Time tells us that America needed to keep the Communists out because of the need to keep Russia on track with “reform.” But we now know that “reform” didn’t mean political reform. In fact, the US was more than happy to ignore Yeltsin’s numerous unconstitutional incursions for as long as he was doing their bidding.

What Time means by “reform” is the vastly illegal and ethically barbarous looting of the Russian state and its people that was then being systematically perpetrated by the US, its financial institutions and its own gangster capitalists. A Communist, or even a moderate nationalist, would be a disaster for this lucrative open conduit of virtually free raw materials and knock-down block shares in oil and gas production (and that’s not even getting into the neocon desire to see Russia perennially divided and weakened, if not actually partitioned).

For all these reasons, broadly encompassed under the weasel word “reform,” the US did not want anyone but Yeltsin in the Kremlin in

1996. So, says Time, the Yanks decided to step in and fix things. They sent over a team of five election-managers and image-makers to try to turn Yeltsin’s fortunes around. The men were old hands at this business. Richard Dresner had helped Bill Clinton get elected as governor of Arkansas. George Gorton was a “long-time strategist” for California governor Pete Wilson. Joe Shumate was a “polling expert” and another of Bill Clinton’s election team. Steven More was a PR specialist. Felix Braynin was a Russian expat who didn’t trust Communists.

If left to their own devices, the Russians could have voted a Red back into the Kremlin

They knew their job wasn’t going to be easy. Because for the Russian people Boris Nikolayevich was one step up from poison. 60 percent of the population thought Yeltsin was corrupt. 65 percent thought he had wrecked the economy. In 1996 Stalin was getting more positive approval ratings than Yeltsin. An “early memo” from the group dated March 2 and cited by Time says: “Voters don’t approve of the job Yeltsin is doing, don’t think things will ever get any better and prefer the Communists’ approach.”

They were similarly frank about the solution: “There exists only one very simple strategy for winning: first, becoming the only alternative to the Communists; and the second, making the people see that the Communists must be stopped at all costs.”

So, the five Americans got to work trying to secure the Russian election for their candidate of choice. They ran ad campaigns to promote the (bogus) idea of Yeltsin’s popularity. They ran other ads denigrating the opposition. They fixed his suits and sprayed his hair.

They Americanised the process as much as they could – but not as much as they wanted to. A plan they conceived of Yeltsin entering a conference hall “through a boisterous crowd that would mob him” and delivering a short

KATTE BLACK

15-minute speech “that television viewers might actually sit through” was rejected out of hand. Yeltsin decided instead to enter the hall in the normal Russian way to polite claps from men in suits, and he delivered an hour-long speech that probably made his American handlers groan in despair.

They made sure this rebellion wouldn't happen again by using a “perception analyser” to show Yeltsin's handlers what a turn-off his performance had been. From then on, the Yanks seem to have had things their way, or so Time implies. They proceeded to look into the Russian people's deepest fears and see how they could be used advantageously: “Having helped establish the campaign's major theme, the Americans then set out to modify it. The Americans used their focus group co-ordinator, Alexei Levinson, to determine what exactly Russians most feared about the Communists. Long lines, scarce food and re-nationalisation of property were frequently cited, but mostly people worried about civil war.”

And it worked. Or something did. Whether by dint of hairspray, focus groups, fear porn or something else undeclared, Yeltsin leapt from 2-8 percent popular support to 54.4 percent by the end of the campaign. He won. Russia was saved.

Well, it was saved for the United States, its financial institutions and gangster capitalists anyway. But that's another story.

They looked into the Russian people's fears to see how they could be used advantageously

Just to show how proud America was of interfering in this election, there was even a Hollywood movie made about it in 2003 called Spinning Boris. Now consider the following question:

What's worse?

1) The triumphal bragging about manipulating the election to make sure their man became president in order to continue defrauding and dispossessing and even starving ordinary Russian people, or

2) The insane hypocrisy of – 22 years later – indicting 13 Russians for doing at worst a fragment and shadow of this colossal crime? **CT**

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Katte Black is a journalist and manager of the London-based web site www.offguardian.org where this article was first published.

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Fear was the key. And Russia in the 1990s was a fearful place. All they had to do was convince enough people the Communists were more frightening than the gangsters currently running the show.

“ ‘Stick with Yeltsin and at least you'll have calm' – that was the line we wanted to convey.”

Read the Time magazine article at <https://offgraun.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/201612201405.pdf>

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The spectre of divisiveness

If you've enjoyed the Department of Homeland Security over the past 16 years, you're going to love the war on dissent

Aspectre is haunting Western democracy – the spectre of “divisiveness.” After eight years of peace and prosperity under the glorious reign of Obama the Benevolent, suddenly, we find ourselves besieged on all sides by Russian-sponsored sowers of “discord,” disseminators of “disinformation,” inculcators of “confusion” and “chaos,” and other enemies of our “democratic values.” These devilish instigators of “disunion” and “distrust” are determined to deceive us into doubting “the truth” by exposing us to “divisive ideas” and seducing us with their cynical skepticism into questioning the integrity of our political leaders, our intelligence agencies, and the corporate media, who would never, ever dream of lying to us . . . or so goes the new official narrative being rolled out by the corporatocracy.

It is stupefying to watch as millions of Americans conform their beliefs and behaviour to this official narrative like Inner Party Members in Orwell’s 1984. Apart from the fact that its storyline is simplistic and childish to the point of absurdity, it has only been roughly 16 years since the corporatocracy introduced the beta version of this same official narrative, to which millions of Americans obediently conformed . . . which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands, the destabilisation of the entire Middle East, and the transformation of most Western societies into militarised surveillance states.

As I outlined at length in part one of this essay, the War on Dissent – see *ColdType Issue*

153 – being rolled out currently is an expansion of the “War on Terror” narrative, the storyline of which was equally childish, and simplistic, and blatantly fabricated. Though it is fashionable these days for the politicians and corporate media propagandists who sold the “Saddam has WMDs” story, and the “Iraq is linked to al Qaeda” lie, and the “we’re fighting terrorism in Afghanistan” fairy tale, to regret how they “misinterpreted the intelligence” that led to the “unfortunate blunder” that launched the global corporatocracy’s occupation and restructuring of the Middle East (which continues unabated to date), anyone with half a brain could see what was really going on at the time.

You didn’t have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that the “War on Terror” was not a war on terrorism (the concept is nonsensical on its face), but just the official narrative that would allow the global capitalist ruling classes to (a) employ the United States military to pursue their aims throughout the world with more or less complete impunity, and (b) designate anyone opposing the hegemony of global capitalism a “terrorist.”

Several million of us figured that one out . . . or at least figured out that the US government, the “intelligence community,” and the corporate media were using Americans’ emotional response to the September 11 terrorist attacks to con us into supporting the invasion and destabilisation of the Middle East for reasons

that had nothing to do with terrorism. So we did what Americans are taught to do. We peaceably assembled to petition our government, as did millions of people across the world, and otherwise raised as much ruckus as we could about how folks were being manipulated, and were denounced as “traitors,” “terrorist sympathizers,” and “conspiracy theory nuts” for our efforts . . . and not just by the corporatocracy, also by regular Good Americans.

All these years later, knowing what we know, you might assume that all those Good Americans who rushed out to buy American flags to wave as our troops destroyed a country that posed no threat to us whatsoever (and had nothing to do with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001) because the corporate media and the “intelligence community” told them Saddam was going to nuke Kansas City . . . you might assume that all these Good Americans, ashamed at having been made fools of by a bunch of television talking heads and “papers of record” like *The New York Times* . . . you might think these folks, who, after all, are not complete idiots the corporatocracy can just hoodwink over and over again using more or less the same bag of tricks . . . you might naturally assume that these Good Americans would give us the benefit of the doubt this time, ie, those of us who are challenging the narrative the corporate media has been ramming down our throats since Hillary Clinton lost the election. But, no . . . nothing of the sort. No, this time, we’re not “terrorist sympathizers.” We’re “Putin sympathizers,” “Russian operatives,” or at the very least we’re “useful idiots,” who are helping Russia destroy democracy by “sowing discord,” “disunity,” “division,” and other forms of dissent throughout the West.

This is the essential feature of our new and improved official narrative. The basic storyline has not changed. It’s still “Democracy versus The Terrorists.” The global capitalist ruling classes are simply expanding the already arbitrary and meaningless definition of “terrorism” (or rather, and more broadly, “extremism”). This is a natural, predictable progression, which the ruling classes have been preparing us for. After 16 years of living in fear of “the terrorists”

who “hate us for our freedom,” we are being introduced to a new official enemy. A new, yet familiar official enemy. An official enemy all Good Americans are pre-programmed to hate and fear.

Yes, that’s right, folks, the Rooskies are back, only this time without the Communism. No, this time, their diabolical goal is the destruction of “democracy” itself! Why, exactly, the Rooskies want to destroy democracy is not entirely clear, especially as it would collapse their economy, not to mention precipitate a nuclear war that would wipe out most forms of life on the planet. But, you know, they’re inscrutable, those Rooskies.

According to experts in the corporate media, and our corporate-sponsored representatives in government (and, it goes without saying, the “intelligence community”), the primary weapon the Rooskies are using to destroy democracy, and life on Earth, is this sowing of “divisiveness” and “discord,” and “distrust” of our government and corporate elites, who love us as they love their own children, and who would never try to manipulate us, or treat us like interchangeable commodities, or bankrupt us with their Ponzi schemes, or debt-enslave our families for profit, or any other horrible things like that.

This is the type of mindless hogwash Americans are being pressured to swallow, and in fact are swallowing, millions of them. But then, this is how propaganda works. It doesn’t have to make any sense. In fact, it’s usually more effective if it doesn’t. In profoundly authoritarian cultures such as the contemporary USA, people tend to believe the authorities, particularly when they’re all repeating the same simple message over and over. People want to believe the authorities. They want to because they’ve been conditioned to want to from the time they were children by their parents, teachers, political leaders, the corporate media, television, Hollywood, cultural icons, and more or less every other ideological organ of “normal society.”

This is why, when it’s time to whip up pop-

ular support for a war of aggression (or a war against anyone expressing dissent), all the ruling classes have to do is make up an emotionally-laden narrative with a halfway-believable official enemy and have their “authoritative media sources” repeat it, over and over and over, in a thousand different iterations, each repetition reifying the others, until the narrative becomes the axiomatic “truth,” which no respectable, normal person would ever even think of wanting to question. In fact, once an official narrative has become the axiomatic “truth,” it can be rather dangerous psychologically if these “respectable persons” are confronted with evidence that demonstrates that the official narrative (or, in other words, their “reality”) is based on . . . well, a load of horseshit, as by this time they’ve forgotten it is fiction, and thus genuinely believe the lies they’re telling.

If you’d like to see an example of this in action, take a few minutes and watch what happens to Luke Harding, author of the book *Collusion*, when he is interviewed on RealNews TV <http://therealnews.com/t2/story:20761:Debate:-Where's-the-'Collusion> – by Aaron Mate. What you will witness is Harding melting down as his “collusion” narrative (ie, the premise of his book) falls to pieces under Mate’s questioning, which remains collegial and calm throughout. Clearly, it had never occurred to Harding that anyone would question the “RussiaGate” narrative, and especially not someone else in “the business,” as mainstream journalists are trained to accept and parrot whatever the ruling classes tell them. When he finally realises what is happening, (ie, that his “reality” is melting away like your face in the mirror on a bad acid trip), he calls Mate a “collusion rejectionist,” and abruptly ends the interview.

This is just the kind of thing the corporatocracy wants to eliminate, or relegate to the margins of the Internet. They can’t have journalists like Aaron Mate running around punching holes in their narrative, or at least not where normal Americans can see it. It’s all fine and good to have folks like Hannity and Alex Jones

jabbering about deep state conspiracies, as normal Americans don’t take them seriously, but rational journalists like Mate, if they’re not going to cooperate with the official narrative, well, then they need to be censored, or algorithmically deranked, or otherwise marginalised, and the sooner the better. Which is exactly what the corporatocracy is doing, and what they intend to continue doing until “unity,” “harmony,” and “trust” is restored.

And this is just the beginning. If you want to get a glimpse of our dystopian future, read this recent piece in *The Atlantic* – <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/02/russia-is-our-adversary/552962/> – by Rep Will Hurd, of Texas, but it conveys the sentiments of the corporate ruling classes and their loyal servants in government, generally. I won’t spoil it for you, but here’s one quote: “To address continued Russian disinformation campaigns, we need to develop a national counter-disinformation strategy. The strategy needs to span the entirety of government and civil society, to enable a coordinated effort to counter the threat that influence operations pose to our democracy. It should implement similar principles to those in the Department of Homeland Security’s Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism, with a focus on truly understanding the threat and developing ways to shut it down.”

The message couldn’t possibly be clearer. If you’ve enjoyed the Department of Homeland Security over the course of these last 16 years, the constant low-level paranoia, the invasive searches, the body scans, the TSA agents groping your kids, the cops and soldiers standing around in public places in body armour with their assault rifles in the “sling-ready” position, the NSA listening in on your phone calls, and all the other features of *The War on Terror* . . . you’re going to love *The War on Dissent*. **CT**

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Me, Bill Moyers and Rachel Maddow

As the Bill Moyers of the world begin to question the media's endless focus on Russiagate, some brave soul at the networks will finally begin to listen

Last week I had a revelation about American liberals and their obsession with the Russiagate story – a revelation that came, oddly enough, courtesy of Bill Moyers.

I have a curious history with Moyers. In the summer of 1967, as a 17-year-old college dropout, I was hired to help plan an experimental branch of the State University of New York at Old Westbury. All the other student planners were high-achieving academics; I was referred to as “Dropout in Residence.” So I spent that magical, hash-scented summer of '67 on the idyllic grounds of the campus-to-be, an impossibly beautiful estate filled with dazzling flower-gardens and stands of rare trees, as luminaries of all kinds dropped by for day-long hang-out sessions – people like WH Auden, Alan Watts, and Joan Baez (who sang to me, alone, for an hour, in front of a roaring fireplace – a once-in-a-lifetime solo concert that I completely ruined for myself by obsessively wondering if I had a shot with her). The other kids were all high-achieving academics; I was the token punk.

Bill Moyers – still famous, back then, as Lyndon Johnson’s press secretary – had been invited to spend a day with us by his close friend, the Old Westbury president, a JFK liberal and former Peace Corps head named Harris Wofford. As ten or 12 of us sat around the mansion-house table after dinner, drinking sherry, Moyers advised us to keep our quasi-revolutionary project very hush-hush, lest the reactionaries “out there” try to shut us down. In retrospect, it was probably very savvy advice – but I’d been waiting for an opening all night. “Why should we listen to you?”

I cheap-shotted him. “You were Lyndon Johnson’s press secretary. You lied for that asshole, and look where it got us.” Not my finest rapier-thrust, I admit, but it was the best I could do at the moment. Poor Wofford choked on his sherry, his gentle face aging ten years in the one second that followed my wise-guy query – but Moyers was pretty unfazed. “Well, I would not agree with your characterisation, but . . .” I forget what he said after that. I was probably on a testosterone high, as well as highs from various other chemicals. But I remember he kept his cool.

In the 50 years since, Moyers has moved well to the left, and I’ve grown to have increasing respect for him. In the corporate media landscape in which he operates, he’s shown genuine courage, prodding what my late mother called “good liberals” to a more daring worldview. But, until recently, he seemed to be enveloped by the MSNBC/Democratic Party mindset on all things Russiagate. So I was astonished when I heard that Moyers, on his Facebook page, had republished a piece I wrote titled *MSNBC: A Trainload of Fools Boggled Down in a Magnetic Field*. (See *ColdType*, Issue 154, mid-Feb 2018, Pages 32-33 – Ed) The thrust of the piece was that MSNBC, and other media, were neglecting to report on the evils around us in favour of nonstop Russia/Mueller yammering.

Bill Moyers co-signing that message? Weird! And believe me, his readers thought so, too. Several of them were sure that his account had been hacked. Others were profoundly hurt, on a personal level, that he had endorsed any putdown of Rachel Maddow, who has assumed high-priestess status among her viewers. But a surprising number of Moyer’s Face-

JOHN ESKOW

book friends were beginning to at least consider the idea that it was all, finally, too much – that America is in dire need of a media that examines its systemic evils, and not only Russians posting “Buff Bernie” memes on the Internet.

It made me realise that most of the people obsessed with Russiagate – including close friends and family – are not my enemies. With dear old Buddhist Alan Watts in mind, I don’t want to spend precious Zen energy hating those people – or being hated by them. So here is my sincere attempt to explain – to Bill Moyer’s disappointed Facebook friends, and to myself – why people like me object so strenuously to month after month of this non-stop Russiagate coverage. And it comes in the form of a question.

What if we had one single week of breathless, in-depth stories about – oh, just to be completely zany, since we’re only spitballing here – how about one single week on American Hunger? It’s really not that crazy; CBS used to do that kind of thing all the time. But let’s update it, MSNBC style. Let’s convene a panel-full of snazzy experts, including (at least) one guy who radiates that cheesy, second-level “James Clapper” kind of gravitas (am I aiming too high? How about third-rate “Malcolm Nance” gravitas?) And since we’re just spitballing, how about investing, let’s say, 1.5 percent of the Russiagate budget, and 1.5 percent of the Russiagate reporter man-hours, and channelling it all into the Breaking News bulletin that one of every five American kids will go to bed hungry tonight? This very fucking night! Let’s make sure that an earnest, attractive news anchor presents that Breaking News Story to our viewers. Let’s have animated panel discussions with the usual motley crew – one of those interchangeable right-wing New York Times columnists, say, and a couple of (possibly) ex-CIA spooks, and what the hell, let’s invite Rob Reiner on, too – he’s passionate even if he doesn’t like, talk that good; and yes, what the hell, let’s invite Joy Behar, let’s invite anyone who can help illuminate the many dark corners of this heartbreaking story – anyone, really, who can help our weary, Mueller-battered minds absorb this one crucial fact: that for every five American kids named Brittany, the poor-white Brittanys in West Virginia and the cornrowed Brittanys of Gary, Indiana, at least one Brittany will lie in bed tonight desperate for food, but probably even more desperate for the world around her to make sense,

for her parents to be able to nurture her – because failing that, nothing makes sense to a kid. And nothing ever will. Let’s talk about upcoming indictments for that crime – for that conspiracy. Let’s cover every conceivable angle of the Brittany Dossier, let’s drag Adam Schiff in front of the camera yet again, but this time to announce that he’s dug up new dirt on the Brittany scandal. “Breaking News: we can now report that Bill Clinton is being investigated for crimes against single mothers, felonies that were committed under the pretence of “ending welfare as we know it” – yes, let MSNBC be in the vanguard, the very first to report that “President Clinton was knowingly, and with malice aforethought, forcing single mothers into prostitution, meth-dealing, crack-dealing, and countless other crimes.”

You see where this could go. We could alternate full-blown Russiagate weeks with a Prison Reform week, a Reparations-for-Slavery week, a week on War Profiteers – believe me, the Russiagate story ain’t going anywhere, Paul Manafort will still be there when we get back.

As for myself, I have absolutely no doubt that Donald Trump, having burned every half-way-sane lender in North America, smuggled tons of money out of Russia, and that he and Donald Junior – who has inherited his father’s venal idiocy, along with his large, pendulous breasts – have committed all manner of creepy felony in doing so. I definitely believe that Donald Trump hired Moscow hookers to act out his pitiful erotic fantasies. What I don’t believe is that Mike Pence will be any better than Donald Trump. What I don’t believe is that the FBI and CIA are benign stewards of American freedom. But I’m willing to be proven wrong about any or all of this. However it all plays out, here’s hoping that as the Bill Moyers of the world begin to question the media’s endless focus on Russiagate, and their reasons for ignoring America’s true injustices, some brave soul at the networks – maybe Rachel Maddow herself – will finally begin to listen. **CT**

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INNOCENT: Levon Brooks, left, and Kennedy Brewer spent years in jail before being exonerated of rape and murder.

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Innocence



ISABELLE ARMANDE

Levon Brooks and **Kennedy Brewer** spent 18 and 15 years in jail for raping and murdering two little girls. They were freed after their case was reopened by the New York-based Innocence Project

LEVON AND KENNEDY: MISSISSIPPI INNOCENCE PROJECT

Photographs by Isabelle Armand

Text by Tucker Carrington

Published by powerHouse Books / US\$39.95

In the early 1990s in a small disadvantaged community in rural Mississippi, Levon Brooks and Kennedy Brewer were convicted, in separate trials, of capital murder. Brooks, despite an alibi, was sentenced to life and was imprisoned for 18 years. A few years later Brewer was convicted and sentenced to death. He spent 15 years in prison.

The prosecution cases had been flimsy; the damning evidence consisting of “scientific” analysis of numerous bite marks found on the bodies of the three-year-old victims, both of whom had been raped and murdered near the homes of the jailed men. However, the technology was flawed – the men were innocent, but both expected to spend the rest of their days in prison for offences they had not committed.

Their nightmare ended in 2008, after intervention by the Innocence Project in New York. Vanessa Potkin, long-time attorney at the project, along with co-founder, Peter Neufeld, spent years investigating the two cases, and discovered a link between them that was substantiated by subsequent DNA testing. The results of that testing led authorities to the real perpetrator, Justin Johnson, another local resident, who confessed to both murders, leading to the release of Brooks and Brewer.

Without the work of the Innocence Project, Potkin, Neufeld, and a host of others, the photographs in Isabella Armand’s work – of lives lost, forgotten, and then regained – would have been impossible. The photographs’ poignance is made all the more powerful as one contemplates their stark, deeply-felt beauty against the haunting realisation that, without the Innocence Project’s intervention, they might never have been able to be made or seen at all.

ISABELLE ARMANDE



Precious, Levon Brook's niece, with her children, Jordan and Aya.



Dinah, Levon Brooks's wife, with her mother Virgie Fulton and sister Mary.



Levon Brooks and his wife Dinah at Berdie's Restaurant.

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The evidence against Brooks and Brewer consisted primarily of bite-mark matching evidence. Lead prosecution expert, Dr Michael West, a dentist who had been named researcher of the year by the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, had testified in both cases that multiple bite marks covered the victims' bodies and matched the defendants' teeth impressions.

However, a group of experts retained by the Innocence Project determined that the marks were not bite marks at all – in fact, bite-mark matching as a forensic discipline has come under serious criticism in recent years and led to the exoneration of multiple other prisoners.

In 2012, photographer Isabelle Armand came

across an article about these two cases. Such a scenario seemed unbelievable: How, why, and where could this happen? How does one cope with wrongful conviction? For the next five years, she spent several weeks each year documenting Brooks, Brewer, their families and their environment.

The book's outstanding photographs, together with essays by Tucker Carrington, director of the George C. Cochran Innocence Project at the University of Mississippi School of Law, challenge popular perceptions about poverty and inequality in the American criminal justice system. They demand that these critical issues are confronted by society before other equally-innocent people are condemned to fester behind bars for crimes they did not commit. **CT**

ISABELLE ARMANDE



Downtown Brooksville, where Kennedy Brewer went to school. It was a lively town then.



Sisters Taresa, Kayla, and Brittney, Kennedy Brewer's nieces.



Kennedy Brewer and his fiancée Omelia at their favourite Sunday spot at the Noxubee River Refuge.

MATT CARR

Fantasy Island

The British people are like passengers sitting on a runaway train helplessly waiting for it to crash into the buffers

Nowadays hardly a day passes without another reminder that the UK has entered a new political dimension in which delusions of grandeur, magical thinking and ideological fantasy have replaced anything that we once thought had any connection to the real world.

These tendencies reach across the political spectrum. You can find them in George Galloway, doing the full UKIP/Churchill thing on Arron Banks's Westmonster website and reminding Europeans that WE saved them during WWII and that "If not for us not a single European politician would hold office anywhere unless as a Quisling collaborator of the German Reich." For the Churchillian war-child Galloway this means that "when I hear a 'schnell' or an 'achtung' from the Junkers (sic) of this world I don't consider it music in my ears."

Let no one spoil this demagogic rant by telling Galloway that Jean-Claude Juncker comes from Luxembourg, not Germany. He already knows that. But for Galloway, anyone who has anything to do with the EU is close enough to Nazis to make no difference, and anyone who says otherwise, like Churchill's opponents, belong to what he calls the gang of appeasers and fifth columnists within the British elite."

Such idiocy, as we have seen for some time now, is not confined to the fringes. Take Boris Johnson's latest fatuous suggestion comparing the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland to a congestion zone between Westminster

and Camden. Never one to resist blowing his own trumpet, Johnson reminded Radio 4 listener, "when I was mayor of London we anaesthetically and invisibly took hundreds of millions of pounds from the accounts of people travelling between those two boroughs without any need for border checks."

Many people have pointed out that it may not be so easy to "anaesthetically and invisibly" bypass Irish history or a conflict that cost 3,000 lives. It's a bleak testament to the current state of things that such points even need to be made, or that a self-aggrandising buffoon like Johnson has any influence on anything at all. But his continued presence in the corridors of power is a symptom of a detachment from reality that only seems to grow wider as the Brexit process slouches incoherently towards political Neverland.

For 18 months, the May government has been asking for things it cannot have, promising things it cannot deliver, bluffing, posturing, and pursuing things that cannot be achieved, even as its own impact assessments predict that the country will be worse off in every single Brexit scenario. Yet when civil servants point out the potential damage that the country is likely to inflict on itself, they are dismissed as traitors, quislings, closet Eurocrats or members of the "pro-European elite."

Humankind cannot bear very much reality, wrote TS Eliot, and Brexiters cannot bear any reality at all that conflicts with their fantasy of

a global buccaneering Britain, freed of EU red tape and the unwanted immigrants that the country depends on, able to smoke in pubs as we surge toward a brave new world that we now know will not be a “Mad Max-style” dystopia.

In fact, a country that allows its politics to be driven by ideological fantasies and straw man constructs is likely to find itself inhabiting a reality that is more dystopian than its opposite, and the right aren’t the only dreamers in Brexittown. On February 26, Jeremy Corbyn once again demonstrated that the left is no less prone to magical thinking than the Rees-Mogg/Nadine Dorries crowd.

Corbyn’s speech was hailed by his fans as a “bold Brexit vision,” because his fan base will never say anything different about anything he says. But despite – or perhaps because of – its attempt to be everything to everyone, his speech was littered with little reminders of why His Majesty’s Opposition have presented very little opposition whatsoever to the Brexit process, and has largely fallen over itself in its desire to wave it through.

There was a leftwing version of the “£350-million for the NHS” pledge in Corbyn’s promise to “use funds returned from Brussels after Brexit to invest in our public services and the jobs of the future, not tax cuts for the richest.” While insisting that there should be “no scapegoating of migrants,” Corbyn once again promised that “Our immigration system will change and freedom of movement will as a statement of fact end when we leave the European Union.”

So migrants won’t be scapegoated, but freedom of movement – one of the great progressive achievements of the European Union – will end in order “To stop employers being able to import cheap agency labour to undercut existing pay and conditions.”

When Corbyn last mentioned this “importation,” it was in relation to the construction industry, which has a skills shortage and where wages are actually rising. But Corbyn clearly believes that immigration is a “bosses’ club” ploy and in Brexit Britain believing is everything. Corbyn

won’t accept a “deal that left Britain as a passive recipient of rules decided elsewhere by others.” even though the EU has made it quite clear that it will not accept cherry-picking deals that allow the UK to continue to enjoy a privileged position without any obligations. Then there is this: “There will be some who will tell you that Brexit is a disaster for this country and some who will tell you that Brexit will create a land of milk and honey. The truth is more down to earth and it’s in our hands. Brexit is what we make of it together, the priorities and choices we make in the negotiations.”

Not really. Because whatever priorities and choices we decide upon, the UK is negotiating within a very limited set of parameters and is almost certain to find itself worse-off than it was before, no matter what is ultimately decided. The tragedy is that neither the government nor the opposition want to admit this. Mesmerised by their own narrow party or personal interests, wide-eyed and prostrate before “the will of the people,” they offer fantasies and pipedreams and demand the impossible in an attempt to square circles that cannot be connected.

Sooner or later, the consequences of this political cowardice and dereliction of duty will become impossible to ignore, and when that happens things may get even uglier than many of us imagine. Because there are historic mistakes that cannot easily be undone, and Brexit is one of them.

For now, it seems, the millions of us who are unwilling passengers on this runaway train can merely sit while it heads towards the buffers, hostages to a political nightmare that we seem incapable of waking up from, shouting out warnings that those who are driving this process seem unable or unwilling to hear, and from the point of view of a writer – and a citizen – that is not a comfortable position to be in at all. **CT**

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***Matt Carr** is a writer, journalist, author, and campaigner, who lives in Derbyshire, England. The author of six books, his next book, *The Savage Frontier: The Pyrenees in History and the Imagination*, is will be published this year. Carr blogs at <http://www.infernalmachine.co.uk/>*

Beware of the merchants of death

America's toxic cult of violence turns deadly – again

We are caught in a vicious cycle. With alarming regularity, the US is being subjected to a spate of violence that terrorises the public, destabilises the country's fragile ecosystem, and gives the government greater justification to crack down, lock down, and institute even more authoritarian policies for the so-called sake of national security without many objections from the citizenry.

Take the school shooting that took place at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, on Valentine's Day: 17 people, students and teachers alike, were killed by Nikolas Cruz, a 19-year-old former student armed with a gas mask, smoke grenades, magazines of ammunition, and an AR-15-style semi-automatic rifle.

This shooting, which is being chalked up to mental illness by the 19-year-old assassin, came months after a series of mass shootings in late 2017, one at a church in Texas and the other at an outdoor country music concert in Las Vegas. In both the Texas and Las Vegas attacks, the shooters were dressed as a soldier or militarised police officer and armed with military-style weapons.

As usual following one of these shootings, there's a vocal outcry for enacting more strident gun control measures, more mental health checks, and heightened school security measures. Also, as usual, in the midst of the finger-pointing, no one is pointing a finger at the American police state or the war-drenched,

violence-imbued, profit-driven military-industrial complex, both of which have made violence America's calling card.

Ask yourself: Why do these mass shootings keep happening? Who are these shooters modelling themselves upon? Where are they finding the inspiration for their weaponry and tactics? Whose stance and techniques are they mirroring?

Mass shootings have taken place at churches, nightclubs, college campuses, military bases, elementary schools, government offices, and concerts. In almost every instance, you can connect the dots back to the military-industrial complex, which continues to dominate, dictate and shape almost every aspect of our lives.

We are a military culture engaged in continuous warfare.

We have been a nation at war for most of our existence.

We are a nation that makes a living from killing through defence contracts, weapons manufacturing and endless wars.

We are being fed a steady diet of violence through our entertainment, news and politics.

All of the military equipment featured in blockbuster movies is provided – at taxpayer expense – in exchange for carefully placed promotional spots.

It's estimated that US military intelligence agencies (including the NSA) have influenced

JOHN W WHITEHEAD

more than 1,800 movies and TV shows. And then there are the growing number of video games, a number of which are engineered by or created for the military, which have accustomed players to interactive war play through military simulations and first-person shooter scenarios.

This is how you acclimate a population to war and cultivate loyalty to a war machine.

Why is the Pentagon (and the CIA and the government at large) so focused on using Hollywood as a propaganda machine? To those who profit from war, it is – as journalist David Sirota recognises – “a ‘product’ to be sold via pop culture products that sanitise war and, in the process, boost recruitment numbers.”

In order to sell war, you have to feed the public’s appetite for entertainment.

Not satisfied with peddling its war propaganda through Hollywood, reality TV shows and embedded journalists whose reports came across as glorified promotional ads for the military, the Pentagon also turned to sports to further advance its agenda, “tying the symbols of sports with the symbols of war.”

The military has been firmly entrenched in the nation’s sports spectacles ever since, having co-opted football, basketball, even NASCAR.

Domestic police forces have become roving extensions of the military – a standing army

This is how you sustain the nation’s appetite for war. No wonder entertainment violence is the hottest selling ticket at the box office.

No wonder the government continues to whet the nation’s appetite for violence and war through paid propaganda programs (seeded throughout sports entertainment, Hollywood blockbusters and video games) – what professor Roger Stahl refers to as “militainment” — that glorify the military and serve as recruiting tools for America’s expanding military empire.



CHILD’S PLAY: AR-15 assault rifle – Photo: GunsHolstersAndGear.com

No wonder Americans from a very young age are being groomed to enlist as foot soldiers – even virtual ones – in America’s Army (coincidentally, that’s also the name of a first person shooter video game produced by the military). Explorer scouts, for example, are one of the most popular recruiting tools for the military and its civilian counterparts (law enforcement, Border Patrol, and the FBI).

No wonder the United States is the number one consumer, exporter and perpetrator of violence and violent weapons in the world. Indeed, the war hawks have turned the American homeland into a quasi-battlefield with military gear, weapons and tactics. Domestic police forces have become roving extensions of the military – a standing army.

So when you talk about the Florida shooting, keep in mind that you’re not dealing with a single shooter scenario. Rather, you’re dealing with a sophisticated, far-reaching war machine that has woven itself into the very fabric of this nation.

You want to stop the gun violence?

Stop the worship of violence that permeates our culture.

Stop glorifying the military industrial complex with flyovers and salutes during sports spectacles.

Stop acting as if there is anything patriotic about military exercises and occupations that

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bomb hospitals and schools.

Stop treating guns and war as entertainment fodder in movies, music, video games, toys, amusement parks, reality TV and more.

Stop distributing weapons of war to the local police and turning them into extensions of the military – weapons that have no business being anywhere but on a battlefield.

Stop falling for the military industrial complex's psychological war games.

Nikolas Cruz may have pulled the trigger that resulted in the mayhem in Parkland, but something else is driving the madness. We've got to do more than react in a knee-jerk fashion.

What we need is a thoughtful, measured, apolitical response to these shootings and the

violence that is plaguing our nation.

As I point out in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, the solution to most problems must start locally, in our homes, in our neighbourhoods, and in our communities. We've got to de-militarise our police and lower the levels of violence here and abroad, whether it's violence we export to other countries, violence we glorify in entertainment, or violence we revel in when it's levelled at our so-called enemies, politically or otherwise.

Our prolonged exposure to the toxic culture of the American police state is deadly. **CT**

*John W Whitehead is a constitutional attorney and founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His new book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* (SelectBooks, 2015) is available at www.amazon.com.*

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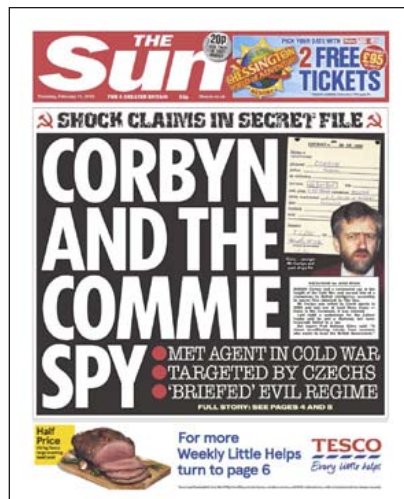


Why the tabloids are after Jeremy Corbyn

Why let the truth get in the way of a good smear campaign?
Ivor Gaber on the UK media's attacks on Labour leader

Following Labour's better than expected election result in 2017, right-wing press hostility to Corbyn briefly died down – only to suddenly flare up again last month, with an almost nostalgic theme. This was summed up in The Sun's front page: "Corbyn and the Commie Spy." The Sun's story was enthusiastically taken up by Britain's right-wing press and, despite overwhelming evidence refuting the claim, it was still at – or near – the top of their news agenda after more than a week.

The smearing of Labour and its leaders as Communist agents has a long and dishonourable history going back to the Daily Mail's notorious Zinoviev letter in 1924. This was a forgery that painted Labour as secret agents of Moscow. In the 1990s, former Labour leader Michael Foot won a large libel settlement from the Sunday Times when it wrongly suggested that he was a KGB "agent of influence." More recently, the Daily



COMMIE SPY: The Sun's front page takes aim at Jeremy Corbyn.

Mail made a sustained and unsuccessful attempt to paint Ed Miliband, Corbyn's predecessor as Labour Party leader, as a far leftist with a communist father "who hated Britain."

Now it's Jeremy Corbyn's turn – and he's a far easier target in many ways because of his long and public record campaigning for left-wing causes.

The attack on Corbyn was apparently based on detailed

evidence from a former Czech spy backed up by files found in the archives of the Czech secret police. Following The Sun's revelations, the rest of the right-wing press weighed in. The Mail's favourite historian, Dominic Sandbrook (who had played a major role in smearing the Milibands), was wheeled out to denounce Corbyn under a headline: "The useful idiot: Jeremy Corbyn's assignations with a secret agent were part of the gullible British Left's love affair with a totalitarian Russian regime that murdered millions."

But the use of the word "gullible" might more aptly applied to Sandbrook and his ilk. Corbyn has had no love for the Soviet Union nor its Eastern bloc allies. As anyone with only a passing knowledge of contemporary British history – and that should include Sandbrook – would know, Corbyn's politics grew out of the "new left", which was determinedly opposed to the Soviet brand of communism.

As Robert Colville, the director of the right-wing Centre for Policy Studies noted in the Daily Telegraph: "He was a socialist not a Communist; Team Trotsky not Team Stalin." And The Times columnist Daniel Finklestein reminded us, in an odd piece apparently about Corbyn's "attachment to the Soviet Union", that in 1988, Corbyn was

publicly calling on Moscow to rehabilitate Trotsky. That's not exactly the action of a potential, or active, spy.

But all this hue and cry turned out to be a red herring. First, because authoritative secret service sources in both Prague and London denounced the Czech informant, Jan Sarkocy, as a liar and fantasist: he falsely claimed to journalists to have organised either, or both, the Live Aid and the Free Mandela concerts in the UK. But even more definitive refutations came from officials working in the Czech and German archives, both categorically denying that there was any evidence in their files that Corbyn was either a spy or even an "asset." It has also been reported recently that

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Corbyn was elsewhere when Sarkocy claims to have been meeting him in London. This might have been the end of the matter but the squashing of the original story has only succeeded in diverting the press to pursue other aspects – in particular the threat to freedom of the press they claim Corbyn might represent when in power. In so doing they have revealed where Corbyn's true offence lies – for not only has the Labour leader flatly denied the stories, he and his deputy Tom Watson have retaliated by turning the spotlight on the right-wing press itself.

In an online video, Corbyn talked about how, "A free press is essential for democracy and we don't want to close it down, we want to open it up ... The gen-

eral election showed the media barons are losing their influence and social media means their bad old habits are becoming less and less relevant. But instead of learning these lessons they're continuing to resort to lies and smears. Their readers – you, all of us – deserve so much better. Well, we've got news for them: change is coming."

This last line was interpreted by the right-wing press to mean that a Corbyn-led Labour government will introduce new restrictions on freedom of the press. This provoked an immediate response. An editorial in *The Sun* went for the jugular: "Controlling the press is a first step towards the one-party state Corbyn's hard-left extremist's dream of." Meanwhile the *Daily Mail* sent the BBC a warning that: "The Corporation's staff should watch out. If this Marxist comes to power he'll be gagging them too."

Do these papers truly believe that behind the mask of Corbyn sits a devious would-be dictator just waiting to turn the UK into an authoritarian dictatorship? Not likely. What is really fueling their ire – and also accounts for much of their hostility to Miliband – is the fact that both Labour leaders were enthusiastic supporters of the Leveson Inquiry into the ethics of the press.

They both backed its finding that there should be a truly independent press regulator (backed by a Royal Charter) And they both supported the idea of holding a second inquiry: Leveson

II – which was supposed to be investigating links between the media and the police, but has yet to happen. Most heinously of all, in the eyes of Fleet Street, Corbyn supported the much-delayed implementation of Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act, which changes libel law to favour those newspapers recognised by the statutory press regulator recommended by Leveson.

The newspapers' hysteria has got to such a stage that, a day after it was revealed that the Stasi archives hold no files on Corbyn, some papers were still calling on the Labour leader to "release his Stasi files" even though they didn't exist. So what does he do then? He either ignores the calls or doesn't ask for his non-existent files to be released, either way the papers can cry "Gotcha!"

The right-wing press is playing a dangerous game, not because of threat of press regulation, but because through their antics they undermine trust in both politics and the media. As we know from history, this is a far greater threat to democracy than anything that Corbyn might, or might not, have done in the past. Trust is crucial, we undermine it at our peril. **CT**

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*Ivor Gaber is professor of journalism at the University of Sussex. He is co-author, with James Curran and Julian Petley, of the book *Battleground: Culture Wars, The Media And The Left*, that will be published later this year. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com*



WRITING ON THE WALL

Photo: Jennifer Durban, Flickr.com

Big pharma family that gave us the opioid crisis

Sam Pizzigati tells how the drive for profits was more important than the health hazard posed by OxyContin

Pharmaceutical companies, under Arthur Sackler's guidance, began hiring noted doctors to vouch for their products and subsidizing studies that showed how useful their products could be. Sackler's campaigns deluged doctors' offices with attractive promo brochures and filled medical journals with flashy ads.

But Purdue Pharma, the drug company the Sacklers ran, had grander visions, and the company's dreams revolved around exploiting the untapped potential of opioids, synthetic forms of opium that modern

researchers had first started developing in the early 1900s. Doctors had always known that these opioids had a significant pain-killing capacity. Doctors also feared their addictive properties.

Purdue Pharma set out to overcome that fear, with a massive marketing campaign on behalf of OxyContin, the drug company's new take on the opioid called oxycodone, a "chemical cousin of heroin" that can be "up to twice as powerful as morphine." Purdue bankrolled widely circulated research that testified to OxyContin's safety and urged physicians to pre-

scribe the drug for all sorts of conditions.

A sales force that at one point boasted 1,000 reps reinforced that message with countless in-person visits to medical offices. Purdue hired several thousand clinicians on top of that to sing OxyContin's praises at medical conferences. The company even offered doctors "all-expenses-paid trips to pain-management seminars in places like Boca Raton."

The campaign goal: nothing less than changing the prescription habits of America's doctors.

The campaign succeeded. Purdue won FDA approval for OxyContin in 1995. Almost overnight the drug became a phenomenal medical marketplace success, eventually generating \$35-billion in revenue. The FDA examiner who ran the approval process would later come to work for Purdue.

But problems with OxyContin soon surfaced. People were becoming addicted, in part because Purdue made abusing OxyContin so easy. The drug was formulated to release slowly over 12 hours. But users could just crush the pills and get a quick high.

Purdue blamed the early reports of addictions on these abusers. But OxyContin had a much deeper problem. Purdue was marketing the drug's long-lasting, 12-hour relief. In reality, the relief often lasted fewer hours, leaving conscientious users continually craving more of the drug and desperate

to get it.

Purdue would systematically stonewall this reality year after year, lining up political heavy-hitters such as former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani to run interference. Lawsuits against Purdue did start proliferating in the early 2000s. Purdue made them go away, by settling out of court before any incriminating documents revealed in the pretrial discovery process could ever see the light of day. Meanwhile, the death toll mounted. In hard-hit Pike County, Kentucky, nearly 30 percent of local residents either had lost a family member to OxyContin addiction or knew someone outside their family who did.

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The fortune of the various branches of the Sackler clan mounted as well. The combined Sackler clan has become, Forbes calculates, one of America's richest families, with a current net worth at \$13-billion. In 2015, the Sacklers pulled in an estimated \$700-million in income from their Big Pharma interests.

Amid this enormous fortune, the heirs to the original three Brooklyn brothers have fallen out with each other. Some are even feeling remorse. But others are looking for greener pastures abroad. With the domestic market for opioids seemingly saturated, opioid makers like Purdue Pharma are invading foreign markets.

These same companies, led by Purdue Pharma, are continuing to subsidize nonprofit

groups that promote opioid use. Last month, a report from US senator Claire McCaskill detailed how the nation's five largest opioid makers handed over -\$10 million the last five years to 14 of these nonprofits and their affiliated doctors.

Revelations about the incredible extent of corporate opioid irresponsibility continue as well. A congressional committee has just found that "two of the nation's biggest drug distributors shipped 12.3 million doses of powerful opioids to a single pharmacy in a tiny West

Virginia town over an eight-year period."

Behind every great fortune, the French novelist Honoré de Balzac once observed, lurks a crime. Some crimes kill. **CT**

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Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. Among his books on maldistributed income and wealth: *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*. His latest book, *The Case for a Maximum Wage*, will appear this spring.

They'd rather lose their kids than their guns

Canadians don't have a 'right to bear arms.' But in the US, gun culture runs as deeply as race, writes **Rick Salutin**

Response in the US to the latest school massacre (an astounding phrase itself) has been riveting.

It's those kids speaking out. No matter what despair you feel, it's too cruel to give up on those arriving from the future. How does corruption always eventually set in? Is it just age and experience chipping away? Is it the influence of success itself – all that screen time and praise?

But when the gun question is involved, I also find myself asking: are the most vocal opponents of gun control speaking in good faith or bad? Generally, when people voice despicable (to

me) views, I'd prefer thinking they believe what they say, and that they'd pass a lie-detector test for sincerity. So they'd have convinced themselves of the bullshit before passing it to others. There's a tortuous philosophical category covering this called false consciousness.

For the main voices against gun control, though, I don't believe it. They speak in bad faith. They know they're lying as they talk. The evidence against them is simply too strong.

No place on Earth has the gun issues the US has. Australia had one school massacre, brought in controls and, as people kept

saying at CNN's Wednesday Town Hall, it was Never Again. The US could do it. What the gun clique really means is: We'd rather lose our kids than our guns. That's hard for people elsewhere to believe. We'd rather think they're honest but misguided. But the US eludes us. We don't have a "right to bear arms." There, gun culture runs as deeply as race, and they're related, as Michael Moore brilliantly suggested in *Bowling for Columbine*.

The white majority lives in perpetual fear of retaliation. For what? The US began with a continental genocide against Indigenous peoples and never resolved its brutal treatment of slaves brought there in chains. Many Americans carry on with a shudder, looking over their shoulders. Not literally. But they cling in fear to their guns.

There are also doubtless Americans who believe the NRA nostrums – guns don't kill people, people kill people; when guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns, etc. Yet, the simplest common sense refutes this: it's only the US that has these problems; those formulas apply nowhere else, so why would they apply to the US? But what you have to factor in is how provincial the place is.

In the film *Dog Day Afternoon*, one of the hostage-takers, Sal, is asked if there's a special country he'd like to be flown to. He says Wyoming. "Sal," says his partner, "Wyoming's not a country." It's touching and humane. But Sal probably doesn't

even get that there's a difference between a state and a country. He's had a bad education but an American one.

When you learn that you live in the best country in the history of the world, it's a short step to thinking it's the only one. In either case, why would you bother drawing lessons from lesser peoples?

Each time one of these searing events occurs, I find myself hoping, like an idiot, that Americans whose lives have been shattered will draw connections to others in the world whose own lives have been blasted by US acts – and that the effect will be to augment general compassion.

That kids in Florida, for instance, will think of kids in Iraq and Syria after what is now generations of US military interventions.

I felt that way, stupidly, after 9-11. The US, which had never been struck by terror from abroad, would start compre-

hending how it's viewed elsewhere. Why don't Americans ever learn from these things? It's a price they pay for their "exceptionalism" – they have nothing to learn from others.

Sorry for the unrelieved gloom. I prefer to find a glimmer of hope, which would be those kids. I suppose I should add that I lived there for 10 years and loved it. I felt more at home than I ever had in Toronto.

But Freud, who went to the US in 1909 to deliver his "Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis," told his biographer afterwards, "America is the most grandiose experiment the world has seen. But, I am afraid, it is not going to be a success." It's "a mistake," he added. "A gigantic mistake but a mistake."

If there's a shred of hope there, it would be his grim, unflinching humour. **CT**

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Rick Salutin is a Toronto-based activist and author. This article first appeared in the Toronto Star

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Oil giant claims breach of its 'human' rights

Andrea Needham tells how Scottish government lost its fight to stop company's court challenge to fracking ban

Oil giant INEOS has won the right to move forward with challenging the Scottish government for breaching its 'human rights' by banning fracking.

INEOS claims that the 2017 ban conflicts with a statute in the European Convention on Human Rights.

The company wants the ban overturned, and is also apply-

Insights

ing for undisclosed damages.

The 2017 ban came after a consultation attracting over 60,000 responses of which around 99 percent were opposed to fracking. Announcing the ban, Scottish minister for business, innovation and energy, Paul Wheelhouse, said: “Having taken account of the interests of the environment, our economy, public health and the overwhelming majority of public opinion, the decision I am announcing today means fracking cannot and will not take place in Scotland.”

INEOS, however, opposes the ban and on 23 February received a legal judgment allowing it to take its case to judicial review.

50 This was the second victory for INEOS in as many days. The previous day, the company got permission to bring a case against the National Trust, which had refused permission for a seismic survey in Clumber Park in Nottinghamshire. INEOS claims the survey was “routine and necessary.”

The National Trust sees it rather differently: “We have no wish for our land to play any part in extracting gas or oil. We are already seeing the impacts of climate change at many of our places, and we have launched a programme to dramatically cut our own fossil fuel usage at our properties.”

Last November, INEOS was also granted a wide-ranging injunction preventing “persons unknown” from interfering



GETTING OUT THE MESSAGE.

Photo: Matt Brown, flickr.com

with their “lawful activity.”

Anyone breaching the injunction may be “imprisoned, fined or have their assets seized.”

In each of these cases, INEOS essentially mounts the same defence: its right to pursue its business interests. And it presents its activities as not simply neutral, but good for the community.

In its case against the National Trust, INEOS says that: “Legal action has been the last resort and we have used powers which prevent landowners from blocking projects which benefit the wider community and the nation as a whole.”

So now a fossil fuel company has the power to take a democratically elected government to court over its decisions, force a landowner to allow access for test drilling, and threaten peaceful protesters with imprisonment for obstructing its activity. We are facing catastrophic climate change. Yet

companies such as INEOS want to carry on drilling and fracking.

The decision by the Scottish government to ban fracking was based not only on overwhelming public support, but also on overwhelming scientific evidence. If we want to keep global warming to 2C (itself far too high), we need to leave 80 percent of fossil fuels in the ground. It’s already far too late to prevent the worst damage but standing up to INEOS and other fossil fuel companies is vital for the planet and all of us who live on it. **CT**

*Andrea Needham has been involved in campaigns on issues including sanctions on Iraq, the arms trade, East Timor, climate change and roadbuilding, as well as being a freelance writer and occasionally a nurse. Her book, *The Hammer Blow: How Ten Women Disarmed A Warplane*, was published in 2016*

Trump remakes history in his own image

A poem by Philip Kraske

Are we all getting used to President Trump?
Imagine the day's news without his blond frump,
Or his talk of a Wall that keeps out brown men,
Or counting successes on fingers all ten.
It's taken a year to fit our foot to his shoe,
But if it fits, wear it, the saying's quite true.

For all over the place are folks settling down,
Ignoring the madness and going about town,
Repubs are content to cheer his bombast,
Silently wondering how long this can last.
And with Trump now loving the neocons' fun,
The Complex is set for another good run.

Even palace intrigue's declined to humdrum,
Its wandering plot set to soap-opera drum.
Will Jared bite dust? Will the general survive?
It beats Young and Restless and some of it's live.
What sputters the most is the Russia red herring,
Which more and more seems but FBI daring.

The media as well accepts this new order,
Not calling lies lies, but on the line-border.
They're "disputed" or "controversial" facts,
Which dials down somewhat their public impacts.
It ain't the done thing to say Mr. T. fibs:
"Respectable" journalists must bow to His Nibs.

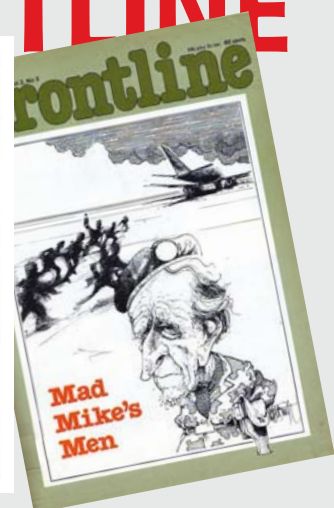
Meanwhile America gets greater and greater,
As we spring out of our cultural crater,
And politics reaches a John Adams level,
Renewing democracy in which we revel,
It's quite a trick that in one year of scrimmage,
Trump is remaking the land in his image. **CT**

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Philip Kraske lives in Madrid, Spain, where he teaches English on a freelance basis and does some translation. His four novels, centring on American politics and society, began to appear in 2009. His website is www.philipkraske.com

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