

INSIDE: CITY OF 1,000 FORECLOSURES ● TWO-STATE DREAMERS ● CENSORS AT THE MALL ● THE AGONY OF THE WINTER SOLDIERS ● IN TORTURE WE TRUST

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kidnapped... targeted assassinations
... accidentally killed... non-lethal
weapon... blood on their hands...
administrative detention... intifada

THE LANGUAGE OF OCCUPATION

... illegal outposts... revenge...
arch-terrorist... attack... occupied
territories ...racism... security
fences... apartheid **By Yonatan Mendel**

The ColdType READER



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THE LANGUAGE OF OCCUPATION

If you want to be a journalist in Israel, there are some things you'll need to know – such as the right choice of words when you write about the Israel-Palestine conflict, says **Yonatan Mendel**

A year ago I applied for the job of Occupied Territories correspondent at *Ma'ariv*, an Israeli newspaper. I speak Arabic and have taught in Palestinian schools and taken part in many joint Jewish-Palestinian projects. At my interview the boss asked how I could possibly be objective. I had spent too much time with Palestinians; I was bound to be biased in their favour. I didn't get the job. My next interview was with Walla, Israel's most popular website. This time I did get the job and I became Walla's Middle East correspondent. I soon understood what Tamar Liebes, the director of the Smart Institute of Communication at the Hebrew University, meant when she said: 'Journalists and publishers see themselves as actors within the Zionist movement, not as critical outsiders.'

This is not to say that Israeli journalism is not professional. Corruption, social decay and dishonesty are pursued with commendable determination by newspapers, TV and radio. That Israelis heard exactly what former President Katsav did or didn't do with his secretaries

proves that the media are performing their watchdog role, even at the risk of causing national and international embarrassment. Ehud Olmert's shady apartment deal, the business of Ariel Sharon's mysterious Greek island, Benjamin Netanyahu's secret love affair, Yitzhak Rabin's secret American bank account: all of these are freely discussed by the Israeli media.

When it comes to 'security' there is no such freedom. It's 'us' and 'them', the IDF and the 'enemy'; military discourse, which is the only discourse allowed, trumps any other possible narrative. It's not that Israeli journalists are following orders, or a written code: just that they'd rather think well of their security forces.

In most of the articles on the conflict two sides battle it out: the *Israel Defence Forces*, on the one hand, and the *Palestinians*, on the other. When a violent incident is reported, the IDF *confirms* or the army *says* but the Palestinians *claim*: 'The Palestinians *claimed* that a baby was severely injured in IDF shootings.' Is this a fib? 'The Palestinians *claim* that Israeli settlers threatened them': but who

When it comes to 'security' there is no such freedom. It's 'us' and 'them', the IDF and the 'enemy'; military discourse, which is the only discourse allowed, trumps any other possible narrative

The Israeli army never intentionally kills anyone, let alone *murders* them – a state of affairs any other armed organisation would be envious of. Even when a one-ton bomb is dropped onto a dense residential area in Gaza, killing one gunman and 14 innocent civilians, including nine children, it's still not an intentional killing or *murder*: it is a *targeted assassination*

are *the Palestinians*? Did the entire Palestinian people, citizens of Israel, inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, people living in refugee camps in neighbouring Arab states and those living in the diaspora make the claim? Why is it that a serious article is reporting a *claim* made by *the Palestinians*? Why is there so rarely a name, a desk, an organisation or a source of this information? Could it be because that would make it seem more reliable?

When *the Palestinians* aren't making *claims*, their viewpoint is simply not heard. Keshev, the Centre for the Protection of Democracy in Israel, studied the way Israel's leading television channels and newspapers covered Palestinian casualties in a given month – December 2005. They found 48 items covering the deaths of 22 Palestinians. However, in only eight of those accounts was the IDF version followed by a Palestinian reaction; in the other 40 instances the event was reported only from the point of view of the Israeli military.

Another example: in June 2006, four days after the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit was *kidnapped* from the Israeli side of the Gazan *security fence*, Israel, according to the Israeli media, *arrested* some sixty members of Hamas, of whom 30 were elected members of parliament and eight ministers in the Palestinian government. In a well-planned operation Israel captured and jailed the Palestinian minister for Jerusalem, the ministers of finance, education, religious affairs, strategic affairs, domestic affairs, housing and prisons, as well as the mayors of Bethlehem, Jenin and Qalqilya, the head of the Palestinian parliament and one quarter of its members. That these officials were

taken from their beds late at night and transferred to Israeli territory probably to serve (like Gilad Shalit) as future bargaining-chips did not make this operation a kidnapping. Israel never *kidnaps*: it *arrests*.

The Israeli army never intentionally kills anyone, let alone *murders* them – a state of affairs any other armed organisation would be envious of. Even when a one-ton bomb is dropped onto a dense residential area in Gaza, killing one gunman and 14 innocent civilians, including nine children, it's still not an intentional killing or *murder*: it is a *targeted assassination*. An Israeli journalist can say that IDF soldiers *hit* Palestinians, or *killed* them, or *killed them by mistake*, and that Palestinians *were hit*, or *were killed* or even *found their death* (as if they were looking for it), but *murder* is out of the question. The consequence, whatever words are used, has been the death at the hands of the Israeli security forces since the outbreak of the second intifada of 2087 Palestinians who had nothing to do with armed struggle.

Responding to terror

The IDF, as depicted by the Israeli media, has another strange ability: it never *initiates*, *decides* to attack or *launches* an operation. The IDF simply *responds*. It *responds* to the Qassam rockets, *responds* to terror attacks, *responds* to Palestinian violence. This makes everything so much more sensible and civilised: the IDF is forced to fight, to destroy houses, to shoot Palestinians and to kill 4485 of them in seven years, but none of these events is the responsibility of the soldiers. They are facing a nasty enemy, and they *respond* dutifully. The fact that

their actions – curfews, arrests, naval sieges, shootings and killings – are the main cause of the Palestinian reaction does not seem to interest the media. Because Palestinians cannot *respond*, Israeli journalists choose another verb from the lexicon that includes *revenge*, *provoke*, *attack*, *incite*, *throw stones* or *fire Qassams*.

Interviewing Abu-Qusay, the spokesman of Al-Aqsa Brigades in Gaza, in June 2007, I asked him about the rationale for firing Qassam missiles at the Israeli town of Sderot. ‘The army might *respond*,’ I said, not realising that I was already biased. ‘But we are *responding* here,’ Abu-Qusay said. ‘We are not terrorists, we do not want to kill . . . we are resisting Israel’s continual incursions into the West Bank, its attacks, its siege on our waters and its closure on our lands.’ Abu-Qusay’s words were translated into Hebrew, but Israel continued to enter the West Bank every night and Israelis did not find any harm in it. After all it was only a *response*.

At a time when there were many Israeli raids on Gaza I asked my colleagues the following question: ‘If an armed Palestinian crosses the border, enters Israel, drives to Tel Aviv and shoots people in the streets, he will be the terrorist and we will be the victims, right? However, if the IDF crosses the border, drives miles into Gaza, and starts shooting their gunmen, who is the terrorist and who is the *defender*? How come the Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories can never be engaged in self-defence, while the Israeli army is always the *defender*?’ My friend Shay from the graphics department clarified matters for me: ‘If you go to the Gaza Strip and shoot people,

you will be a terrorist. But when the army does it that is an operation to make Israel safer. It’s the implementation of a government decision!’

Blood on whose hands?

Another interesting distinction between us and them came up when Hamas demanded the release of 450 of its prisoners in exchange for Gilad Shalit. Israel announced that it would release prisoners but not those *with blood on their hands*. It is always the Palestinians – never the Israelis – who *have blood on their hands*. This is not to say that Jews cannot kill Arabs but they will not *have blood on their hands*, and if they are arrested they will be released after a few years, not to mention those with blood on their hands who’ve gone on to become prime minister. And we are not only more innocent when we kill but also more susceptible when we are hurt. A regular description of a Qassam missile that hits Sderot will generally look like this: ‘A Qassam fell next to a residential house, three Israelis had slight injuries, and ten others suffered from *shock*.’ One should not make light of these injuries: a missile hitting a house in the middle of the night could indeed cause great shock. However, one should also remember that *shock* is for Jews only. Palestinians are apparently a very tough people.

The IDF, again the envy of all other armies, kills only the most important people. ‘A *high-ranking* member of Hamas was killed’ is almost a chorus in the Israel media. *Low-ranking* members of Hamas have either never been found or never been killed. Shlomi Eldar, a TV correspondent in the Gaza Strip, bravely

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Why tell them what the soldiers do, describing the fear they create, the fact that they come with heavy vehicles and weapons and crush a city's life, creating a greater hatred, sorrow and a desire for revenge?

wrote about this phenomenon in his book *Eyeless in Gaza* (2005). When Riyad Abu Zaid was *assassinated* in 2003, the Israeli press echoed the IDF announcement that the man was the *head of the military wing* of Hamas in Gaza. Eldar, one of Israel's few investigative journalists, discovered that the man was merely a secretary in the movement's prisoner club. 'It was one of many occasions in which Israel "upgraded" a Palestinian activist,' Eldar wrote. 'After every assassination any minor activist is "promoted" to a major one.'

This phenomenon, in which IDF statements are directly translated into media reports – there are no checkpoints between the army and the media – is the result both of a lack of access to information and of the unwillingness of journalists to prove the army wrong or to portray soldiers as criminals. 'The IDF is *acting* in Gaza' (or in Jenin, or in Tulkarm, or in Hebron) is the expression given out by the army and embraced by the media. Why make the listeners' lives harder? Why tell them what the soldiers do, describing the fear they create, the fact that they come with heavy vehicles and weapons and crush a city's life, creating a greater hatred, sorrow and a desire for revenge?

Non-lethal power cuts

In February, as a measure against Qasam militants, Israel decided to stop Gaza's electricity for a few hours a day. Despite the fact that this means, for instance, that electricity will fail to reach hospitals, it was said that 'the Israeli government decided to approve this step, as another *non-lethal weapon*.' Another thing the soldiers do is *clearing* –

khisuf. In regular Hebrew, *khisuf* means to expose something that is hidden, but as used by the IDF it means to clear an area of potential hiding places for Palestinian gunmen. During the last intifada, Israeli D9 bulldozers destroyed thousands of Palestinian houses, uprooted thousands of trees and left behind thousands of smashed greenhouses. It is better to know that the army *cleared* the place than to face the reality that the army destroys Palestinians' possessions, pride and hope.

Another useful word is *crowning* (*keter*), a euphemism for a siege in which anyone who leaves his house risks being shot at. *War zones* are places where Palestinians can be killed even if they are children who don't know they've entered a war zone. Palestinian *children*, by the way, tend to be upgraded to Palestinian *teenagers*, especially when they are *accidentally killed*. More examples: isolated Israeli outposts in the West Bank are called *illegal outposts*, perhaps in contrast to Israeli *settlements* that are apparently legal. *Administrative detention* means jailing people who haven't been put on trial or even formally charged (in April 2003 there were 1119 Palestinians in this situation). The PLO (*Ashraf*) is always referred to by its acronym and never by its full name: Palestine is a word that is almost never used – there is a *Palestinian president* but no *president of Palestine*.

'A society in crisis forges a new vocabulary for itself,' David Grossman wrote in *The Yellow Wind*, 'and gradually, a new language emerges whose words . . . no longer describe reality, but attempt, instead, to conceal it.' This 'new language' was adopted voluntarily by the media,

but if one needs an official set of guidelines it can be found in the Nakdi Report, a paper drafted by the Israeli Broadcasting Authority. First set down in 1972 and since updated three times, the report aimed to ‘clarify some of the professional rules that govern the work of a newspaper’. The prohibition of the term *East Jerusalem* was one of them.

The restrictions aren’t confined to geography. On 20 May 2006, Israel’s most popular television channel, Channel 2, reported ‘another *targeted assassination* in Gaza, an assassination that might ease the firing of Qassams’ (up to 376 people have died in *targeted assassinations*, 150 of them civilians who were not the target of assassinations). Ehud Ya’ari, a well-known Israeli correspondent on Arab affairs, sat in the studio and said: ‘The man who was killed is Muhammad Dahdouh, from Islamic Jihad . . . this is part of the other war, a war to shrink the volume of Qassam activists.’ Neither Ya’ari nor the IDF spokesman bothered to report that four innocent Palestinian civilians were also killed in the operation, and three more severely injured, one a five-year-old girl called Maria, who will remain paralysed from the neck down. This ‘oversight’, revealed by the Israeli journalist Orly Vilnai, only exposed how much we do not know about what we think we know.

Just the facts?

Interestingly, since Hamas took over the Gaza Strip one of the new ‘boo’ words in the Israeli media is *Hamastan*, a word that appears in the ‘hard’ news section, the allegedly sacred part of newspapers that is supposed to give the facts, free from editorialising. The same applies to

movements such as Hamas or Hizbullah, which are described in Hebrew as *organisations* and not as political movements or parties. *Intifada* is never given its Arabic meaning of ‘revolt’; and *Al-Quds*, which when used by Palestinian politicians refers only to ‘the holy places in East Jerusalem’ or ‘East Jerusalem’, is always taken by Israeli correspondents to mean *Jerusalem*, which is effectively to imply a Palestinian determination to take over the entire capital city.

It was curious to watch the newspapers’ responses to the assassination of Imad Moughniyeh in Syria a few weeks ago. Everyone tried to outdo everyone else over what to call him: *arch-terrorist*, *master terrorist* or the *greatest terrorist on earth*. It took the Israeli press a few days to stop celebrating Moughniyeh’s assassins and start doing what it should have done in the first place: ask questions about the consequences of the killing. The journalist Gideon Levy thinks it is an Israeli trend: ‘The chain of “terrorist chieftains” liquidated by Israel, from Ali Salameh and Abu Jihad through Abbas Musawi and Yihyeh Ayash to Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantisi (all “operations” that we celebrated with great pomp and circumstance for one sweet and intoxicating moment), have thus far brought only harsh and painful revenge attacks against Israel and Jews throughout the world.’

Israeli correspondents on Arab affairs must of course speak Arabic – many of them indeed studied it in the security establishment’s schools – and they need to know the history and politics of the Middle East. And they have to be Jews. Strikingly, the Israeli-Jewish media prefer to hire journalists with average Arabic

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rather than native speakers, since they would be Palestinian citizens of Israel. Apparently, Jewish journalists are better equipped than Arab Israelis to explain ‘what Arabs think’, ‘Arab aims’ or ‘what Arabs say’. Maybe this is because the editors know what their audience wants to hear. Or, even more important, what the Israeli audience would rather not hear.

Racism and apartheid

If the words *occupation*, *apartheid* and *racism* (not to mention *Palestinian citizens of Israel*, *bantustans*, *ethnic cleansing* and *Nakba*) are absent from Israeli discourse, Israeli citizens can spend their whole lives without knowing what they have been living with. Take *racism* (*Giz’anut* in Hebrew). If the Israeli parliament legislates that 13 per cent of the country’s lands can be sold only to Jews, then it is a racist parliament. If in 60 years the country has had only one Arab minister, then Israel has had racist governments.

If in 60 years of demonstrations rubber bullets and live ammunition have been used only on Arab demonstrators, then Israel has a racist police. If 75 per cent of Israelis admit that they would refuse to have an Arab neighbour, then it is a racist society. By not acknowledging that Israel is a place where racism shapes relations between Jews and Arabs, Israeli Jews render themselves unable to deal with the problem or even with the reality of their own lives.

The same denial of reality is reflected in the avoidance of the term *apartheid*. Because of its association with white South Africa, Israelis find it very hard to use the word. This is not to say that the

exact same kind of regime prevails in the Occupied Territories today, but a country needn’t have benches ‘for whites only’ in order to be an apartheid state. *Apartheid*, after all, means ‘separation’, and if in the Occupied Territories the settlers have one road and Palestinians need to use alternative roads or tunnels, then it is an apartheid road system. If the separation wall built on thousands of dunams of confiscated West Bank land separates people (including Palestinians on opposite sides of the wall), then it is an apartheid wall. If in the Occupied Territories there are two judicial systems, one for Jewish settlers and the other for Palestinians, then it is an apartheid justice.

And then there are the *Occupied Territories* themselves. Remarkably, there are no *Occupied Territories* in Israel. The term is occasionally used by a leftist politician or columnist, but in the hard news section it doesn’t exist. In the past they were called the *Administered Territories* in order to conceal the actual fact of occupation; they were then called *Judea and Samaria*; but in Israel’s mass media today they’re called *the Territories* (*Ha-Shtachim*). The term helps preserve the notion that the Jews are the victims, the people who act only in self-defence, the moral half of the equation, and the Palestinians are the attackers, the bad guys, the people who fight for no reason. The simplest example explains it: ‘a citizen of *the Territories* was caught smuggling illegal weapons.’ It might make sense for citizens of an *occupied territory* to try to resist the occupier, but it doesn’t make sense if they are just from *the Territories*.

Israeli journalists are not embedded

they haven't been asked to make their audience feel good about Israel's military policy. The restrictions they observe are observed voluntarily, almost unconsciously – which makes their practice all the more dangerous.

Yet a majority of Israelis feel that their media are too left-wing, insufficiently patriotic, not on Israel's side. And the foreign media are worse. During the last intifada, Avraham Hirschson, then the minister of finance, demanded that CNN's broadcasts from Israel be closed down on the grounds of 'biased broadcasting and tendentious programmes that are nothing but a campaign of incitement against Israel'. Israeli demonstrators called for an end to 'CNN's un-

reliable and terror-provoking coverage' in favour of Fox News. Israeli men up to the age of 50 are obliged to do one month's reserve service every year. 'The civilian,' Yigael Yadin, an early Israeli chief of staff, said, 'is a soldier on 11 months' annual leave.' For the Israeli media there is no leave. **CT**

Yonatan Mendel was a correspondent for the Israeli news agency Walla. He is currently at Queens' College, Cambridge working on a PhD that studies the connection between the Arabic language and security in Israel.

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THE AGONY OF THE WINTER SOLDIERS

At last USA soldiers get a chance to speak out against the war in Iraq.
Dahr Jamail reports on the Winter Soldier hearings

"We've heard from the politicians, from the generals, from the media – now it's our turn," said Kelly Dougherty, executive director of Iraq Veterans Against the War

Jason Moon suffers from persistent insomnia as he wrestles with memories of his time in Iraq. "While on our initial convoy into Iraq in early June 2003, we were given a direct order that if any children or civilians got in front of the vehicles in our convoy, we were not to stop, we were not to slow down, we were to keep driving," says the former National Guard and Army Reserve member. "In the event an insurgent attacked us from behind human shields, we were supposed to count. If there were thirty or less civilians we were allowed to fire into the area. If there were over thirty, we were supposed to take fire and send it up the chain of command. These were the rules of engagement. I don't know about you, but if you are getting shot at from a crowd of people, how fast are you going to count, and how accurately?"

Moon is taking part in Winter Soldier. This is public testimony organized by the Iraq Veterans Against the War about the human consequences of failed U.S. policy in the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

The group takes its name from the Winter Soldier testimony by Vietnam Vets, including John Kerry, in 1971, which played a part in turning public opinion against that war.

"We've heard from the politicians, from the generals, from the media – now it's our turn," said Kelly Dougherty, executive director of Iraq Veterans Against the War. Dougherty, who served in Iraq in 2003 as a military police officer, said, "It's not going to be easy to hear what we have to say. It's not going to be easy for us to tell it. But we believe that the only way this war is going to end is if the American people truly understand what we have done in their name."

When I was reporting from Iraq for eight months on and off between November 2003 and February 2005, Iraqis told me of atrocities U.S. soldiers were committing. The accounts now from soldiers themselves confirm an awful picture.

"An Iraqi was once selling soda out of a motorcycle to soldiers in a waiting convoy," says Moon. "In the side-car was his seven-to-eight-year-old child. When the

man refused to go away, the MP on patrol put him to the ground with a gun to his head and started stripping his vehicle and searching it. They then took the child, picked it up into the air, and threw it full force onto the ground. I didn't see the child get up."

Moon says soldiers devised cruel tricks to play on Iraqi kids. "Whenever we arrived in an area, we did so along with support vehicles with the radios, tractor trailers, bulldozers, and graters," he says. "So we would park those in a circle with yellow police tape around. Iraqis had to stand outside that tape as we stood inside the tape, armed and ready. That was our little base of operations. Soldiers would place a \$20 bill in the sand with a little bit showing and walk over to the other side of the vehicles and wait for a kid to charge under the tape to try to get the bill, which was equal to an average monthly salary there. If some kid was stupid enough to take the bait they would chase him, trying to hit him with the end of their bayonet or the butt of their rifle."

"Kill me a haji today"

Moon says his section sergeant would rally the troops every day in the motor pool with, "I hope I get to kill me a haji today. I hope I get to shoot somebody today."

Moon tells me of a soldier in his tent who used to boast of swerving intentionally to hit the kids that rushed to pick up the food tossed by patrol members and to run over the food so the kids couldn't get it.

"It was a game," Moon said. "When the soldier who had thrown the food asked him why he had done it he said,

'Yeah, I want to hit one of them. I want to kill one of those kids.' "

Moon brought back a video that shows his sergeant declaring, "The difference between an insurgent and an Iraqi civilian is whether they are dead or alive."

Moon explains the thinking: "If you kill a civilian he becomes an insurgent because you retroactively make that person a threat."

Following a long family tradition, Cliff Hicks joined the military at seventeen in 2002 because "we had been attacked, so it seemed like the right time."

He served from October 2003 to August 2004. He admits that he and other soldiers with him have been physically abusive towards Iraqi civilians.

"Hell yeah, that happened," he says. "That was extremely common. My platoon leader, a lieutenant, broke the arm of an old man because he was being difficult."

Hicks tells one story of how he himself beat up an Iraqi detainee.

"One night on a foot patrol in Baghdad, we found a thirty-year-old Iraqi who we were told had an attitude," he says. "He acted like he wanted to fight with us, so we all jumped on him and beat the shit out of him. I zip-stripped him with plastic handcuffs behind his back, dragged him to a pole and tied him to it, guarding him while the rest of my platoon ran into his house to raid it. He was yelling and screaming and talking to the crowd. I'm eighteen years old and alone, guarding this guy in downtown Baghdad late at night. He's talking to this massive crowd behind me. I couldn't get him to shut up...so I just beat the shit out of him. The whole time

"The difference between an insurgent and an Iraqi civilian is whether they are dead or alive."

Moon explains the thinking: "If you kill a civilian he becomes an insurgent because you retroactively make that person a threat"

IRAQ'S OTHER VICTIMS

"I remember one time I saw a really shiny Mercedes. I asked my tank commander, 'Sir, can I crush that car?' He didn't say yes, but he said, 'I didn't see anything.' So I ran over the car"

it freaked me out: He's a prisoner, totally defenseless, you're not supposed to beat up prisoners, but for all I knew this guy was telling his friends to kill me."

Living under daily threat took a psychological toll. "Insane driving was even more common than beating people's asses: 99 percent of the time you drive around in Iraq, and 99 percent of the way you get killed in Iraq is driving your vehicle into something that blows up," Hicks says. "So you're driving, scared to death, pissed off, you have a vehicle commander who's looking at a map, yelling at a radio, being an asshole, and criticizing everything you do. He's freaked out because he doesn't want you to do anything stupid, and you don't want to do anything stupid. Our tanks weigh seventy tons, our Humvees six tons, and we drove as fast as we possibly could."

The urge to demolish

The temptation to misuse their powerful vehicles sometimes got the better of the soldiers. Iraqis "have these stands where they sell kebabs, motor oil, gas, and stuff, and one time we just got off the road and plowed through a whole row of these things," he says. "We would just cruise through, make everybody run away. We would run over empty cars. I remember one time I saw a really shiny Mercedes. I asked my tank commander, 'Sir, can I crush that car?' He didn't say yes, but he said, 'I didn't see anything.' So I ran over the car."

The language barrier also contributed to the abuse, Hicks says. "We didn't have interpreters half the time when I was there," he says. "We couldn't communicate. They are not doing what you need them to do, so you freak out and beat

the crap out of people all the time over there. It happened so much it's not even worthy of note. People are just constantly getting their asses kicked over there, for no reason."

What's going on in Iraq seems to reflect what the psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton calls "atrocious-producing situations." He used this term first in his book *The Nazi Doctors*. In 2004, he wrote an article for *The Nation* applying his insights to the Iraq War and

occupation. "Atrocious-producing situations," he wrote, occur when a power structure sets up an environment where "ordinary people, men or women no better or worse than you or I, can regularly commit atrocities....This kind of atrocious-producing situation...surely occurs to some degrees in all wars, including World War II, our last 'good war.' But a counterinsurgency war in a hostile setting, especially when driven by profound ideological distortions, is particularly prone to sustained atrocity—all the more so when it becomes an occupation."

Moon and Hicks testify to that. Their stories were vetted by Iraq Veterans Against the War, and the dates they served, and the units they served with, all checked out. While their service in Iraq was several years ago, other accounts from soldiers who have been there more recently bear out their experiences.

Hicks confirms reports of illegal detention of innocent Iraqis and willful destruction of their property. "You drive around Baghdad and most of these houses don't have numbers, none of the streets are named, all the houses and streets look the same, and the interpreters, half the time they don't even

know where the hell they are,” he says. “So we’re always raiding the wrong house but you still have to bring in some prisoners. You can’t come back without prisoners. So we just rounded up any fighting-aged male we could find.”

The colonel's revenge

One particular incident stands out in Hicks's mind. “There was a tall apartment complex, the only spot from where people could see over our perimeter,” he recalls. “There would be laundry hanging off the balconies, and people hanging out on the roof for fresh air. The place was full of kids and families. On rare occasions, a fighter would get atop the building and shoot at our passing vehicles. They never really hit anybody. We just knew to be careful when we were over by that part of the wall, and nobody did shit about it until one day a lieutenant colonel was driving down and they shot at his vehicle and he got scared. So he jumped through a bunch of hoops and cut through some red tape and got a C-130 to come out the next night and all but leveled the place. Earlier that evening when I was returning

from a patrol the apartment had been packed full of people.”

Looking back on his time in Iraq, Hicks sees a hopeless situation. “You go out on your first mission and all the Iraqis think you’re a loser, they ignore you, or flip you off, or draw their finger across their throat, yelling obscenities,” he says. “Even though some were nice to us, you quickly lose any trust in them, and you lump them all together. The only way you can stay safe is to assume that outside the wire everybody wants to kill you. You don’t want to be there. And it comes down to, ‘Well fuck, I hate being here and I can’t go home... So I wake up every fucking day and I think, ‘The only reason I’m here is because you fucking people are forcing me to be here. I hate you fucking people, and you hate me, and that’s just how it is.’ And once you get to that place, it’s over.” **CT**

*Dahr Jamail, who spent eight months in Iraq as an independent journalist, is author of **Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches From an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq** (Haymarket Books, 2007).*

“The only reason I’m here is because you fucking people are forcing me to be here. I hate you fucking people, and you hate me, and that’s just how it is”

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CANADA: THE NEW CONQUISTADORES

David Orchard wonders why the Harper government is so keen to keep sending Canadian troops to fight in Afghanistan

Waging war with bombs and guns is not helping women or installing democracy. It is, however, strengthening the Afghan resistance – hence our increasingly shrill cries for more help from NATO

Stephen Harper's government recently decided to prolong Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan. So far, it has spent six years, billions of dollars, 78 young lives (many more wounded) and inflicted unknown casualties on that country.

The terms used to describe our occupation and ongoing war are remarkably similar to those used over a century ago by colonial powers to justify their ruthless wars of colonization. Then, it was the white man's burden to "civilize" the non-whites of the Americas, Africa and Asia. As boy scouts we were taught Kipling's unforgettable prose about the "lesser breeds," but nothing about the real people who paid horrendous costs in death, suffering, destruction and theft of their land and resources.

Today, we are involved in a "mission" in Afghanistan to "improve" the lives of women and children, to install "democracy," to root out corruption and the drug trade. Waging war with bombs and guns is not helping women or installing democracy. It is, however, strengthening the Afghan resistance – hence our in-

creasingly shrill cries for more help from NATO.

The U.S. is involved in a similar "mission" in Iraq. So far, over a million Iraqis – many of them children – have died, some two million have fled the country, another two million are "internally displaced," untold hundreds of thousands wounded in an endless war waged by the world's most advanced military almost entirely against civilians.

The toll of dead, wounded and displaced for Afghanistan is not being published. The deadly effects of radioactive, depleted uranium (DU) ammunition being inflicted on both countries (some originally from Saskatchewan) haven't begun to be tabulated or understood, let alone reported back to us. The idea that bombing the population will improve the lives of women and children could only come from those who have never experienced war.

As for narcotics, in 2001, when the West's attack on Afghanistan began, its opium trade was approaching eradication. Today, Afghanistan produces over 90% of the world's heroin and the U.S. is

proposing mass aerial spraying of pesticides. Those of the writer's generation and older will remember the U.S. onslaught against little Vietnam – the long unspeakable war – which left six million Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians dead, wounded or deformed.

In that extraordinary country one sees miles upon miles of neat graves in the cemeteries, thousands of acres – aerial sprayed with horrific chemicals – still lying waste, craters left from ten million tons of bombs dropped, hand excavated underground tunnels in which the people were forced to live for years on end. An ancient African saying goes, “the axe forgets, but not the tree.” Today, over four million Vietnamese still suffer, many indescribably so, the effects of Agent Orange and other chemicals, and genetic damage is continuing from generation to generation.

In the case of Vietnam, Canada kept its troops out. Over the past decade, however, Canada has bombed Yugoslavia, helped overthrow Jean Bertrand Aristide's democratically elected government in Haiti, is occupying Afghanistan and now, we learn, is getting involved more deeply in the U.S. devastation of Iraq. (Something Stephen Harper and Minister for Public Safety Stockwell Day openly advocated from the beginning of the U.S. “Shock and Awe” assault on that defenceless nation.)

What gives the rich, powerful, white West the right to wage unending, merciless wars against small, largely non-white, Third World countries? (Yugoslavia, where the west invented “humanitarian” bombing was not a Third World country, but according to President Bill Clinton, it needed to accept

the benefits of “globalism.”) The torment of civilians being subjected to the impact of modern weaponry is rarely reported in the West. Canadians, as a matter of policy, are not informed of the number or types of casualties we have inflicted.

The modern concepts of “humanitarian intervention” and the “duty to protect” which seek to override international law and national sovereignty are, in this writer's view, simply 21st century terminology for colonization.

Military assaults against the poverty stricken farmers of Afghanistan and Haiti, and an Iraqi population struggling for its very survival, are part of a long, barbarous tradition going back to slave ships and colonial resource wars. Meanwhile, the agony of millions does not reach our ears or eyes, and Prime Minister Harper is busy working the phones to shore up the U.S.-led war, seeking more troops and helicopters to “finish the job.”

When Canada assisted the British Empire in the Boer War over a century ago, it was Québec that led the opposition. It was again Québec's vocal resistance – and former Prime Minister Chrétien's attention to it – that helped keep Canada's troops out of Iraq. Today, it is up to Canadians who can feel the anguish of the Third World to speak for the voiceless against Canada's new government of would-be conquistadores .CT

*David Orchard is the author of **The Fight for Canada: Four Centuries of Resistance to American Expansionism**. He farms in Saskatchewan and can be reached at el 306-652-7095; email: davidorchard@sasktel.net*

What gives the rich, powerful, white West the right to wage unending, merciless wars against small, largely non-white, Third World countries?

AUSTRALIA'S HIDDEN EMPIRE

John Pilger reports on his country's 'sphere of influence' from the Aboriginal slums of Sydney to East Timor and Afghanistan

That Australia runs its own empire is unmentionable; yet it stretches from the Aboriginal slums of Sydney to the ancient hinterlands of the continent and across the Arafura Sea and the South Pacific

That Canberra runs an imperial network is unmentionable, yet the chain of control stretches from the Aboriginal slums of Sydney to the South Pacific

When the outside world thinks about Australia, it generally turns to venerable clichés of innocence – cricket, leaping marsupials, endless sunshine, no worries. Australian governments actively encourage this. Witness the recent “G’Day USA” campaign, in which Kylie Minogue and Nicole Kidman sought to persuade Americans that, unlike the empire’s problematic outposts, a gormless greeting awaited them Down Under. After all, George W Bush had ordained the previous Australian prime minister, John Howard, “sheriff of Asia”.

That Australia runs its own empire is unmentionable; yet it stretches from the Aboriginal slums of Sydney to the ancient hinterlands of the continent and across the Arafura Sea and the South Pacific. When the new prime minister, Kevin Rudd, apologised to the Aboriginal people on 13 February, he was acknowledging this. As for the apology itself, the

Sydney Morning Herald accurately described it as a “piece of political wreckage” that “the Rudd government has moved quickly to clear away . . . in a way that responds to some of its own supporters’ emotional needs, yet changes nothing. It is a shrewd manoeuvre.”

Like the conquest of the Native Americans, the decimation of Aboriginal Australia laid the foundation of Australia’s empire. The land was taken and many of its people were removed and impoverished or wiped out. For their descendants, untouched by the tsunami of sentimentality that accompanied Rudd’s apology, little has changed. In the Northern Territory’s great expanse known as Utopia, people live without sanitation, running water, rubbish collection, decent housing and decent health. This is typical. In the community of Mulga Bore, the water fountains in the Aboriginal school have run dry and the only water left is contaminated.

Throughout Aboriginal Australia, epidemics of gastroenteritis and rheumatic fever are as common as they were in the slums of 19th-century England. Aborigi-

nal health, says the World Health Organisation, lags almost a hundred years behind that of white Australia. This is the only developed nation on a United Nations “shame list” of countries that have not eradicated trachoma, an entirely preventable disease that blinds Aboriginal children. Sri Lanka has beaten the disease, but not rich Australia. On 25 February, a coroner’s inquiry into the deaths in outback towns of 22 Aboriginal people, some of whom had hanged themselves, found they were trying to escape their “appalling lives”.

Most white Australians rarely see this third world in their own country. What they call here “public intellectuals” prefer to argue over whether the past happened, and to blame its horrors on the present-day victims. Their mantra that Aboriginal infrastructure and welfare spending provide “a black hole for public money” is racist, false and craven. Hundreds of millions of dollars that Australian governments claim they spend are never spent, or end up in projects for white people. It is estimated that the legal action mounted by white interests, including federal and state governments, contesting Aboriginal native title claims alone covers several billion dollars.

Lurid allegations

Smear is commonly deployed as a distraction. In 2006, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s leading current affairs programme, Lateline, broadcast lurid allegations of “sex slavery” among the Mutitjulu Aboriginal people. The source, described as an “anonymous youth worker”, was exposed as a planted federal government official, whose “evidence” was discredited by

the Northern Territory chief minister and police. Lateline never retracted its allegations. Within a year, Prime Minister John Howard had declared a “national emergency” and sent the army, police and “business managers” into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. A commissioned study on Aboriginal children was cited; and “protecting the children” became the media cry – just as it had more than half a century ago when children were kidnapped by white welfare authorities. One of the authors of the study, Pat Anderson, complained: “There is no relationship between the emergency powers and what’s in our report.” His research had concentrated on the effects of slum housing on children. Few now listened to him. Kevin Rudd, as opposition leader, supported the “intervention” and has maintained it as prime minister. Welfare payments are “quarantined” and people controlled and patronised in the colonial way. To justify this, the mostly Murdoch-owned capital-city press has published a relentlessly one-dimensional picture of Aboriginal degradation. No one denies that alcoholism and child abuse exist, as they do in white Australia, but no quarantine operates there.

The Northern Territory is where Aboriginal people have had comprehensive land rights longer than anywhere else, granted almost by accident 30 years ago. The Howard government set about clawing them back. The territory contains extraordinary mineral wealth, including huge deposits of uranium on Aboriginal land. The number of companies licensed to explore for uranium has doubled to 80. Kellogg Brown & Root, a subsidiary of the American giant Hal-

Most white Australians rarely see this third world in their own country. What they call here “public intellectuals” prefer to argue over whether the past happened, and to blame its horrors on the present-day victims

COLONIAL MASTERS 2

Alkatiri demonstrated that he was a genuine nationalist who believed East Timor's resource wealth should be the property of the state, so that the nation did not fall into debt to the World Bank. He also believed that women should have equal opportunity, and that health care and education should be universal

liburton, built the railway from Adelaide to Darwin, which runs adjacent to Olympic Dam, the world's largest low-grade uranium mine. Last year, the Howard government appropriated Aboriginal land near Tennant Creek, where it intends to store the radioactive waste. "The land-grab of Aboriginal tribal land has nothing to do with child sexual abuse," says the internationally acclaimed Australian scientist Helen Caldicott, "but all to do with open slather uranium mining and converting the Northern Territory to a global nuclear dump."

Indonesian invasion

This "top end" of Australia borders the Arafura and Timor Seas, across from the Indonesian archipelago. One of the world's great submarine oil and gas deposits lies off East Timor. In 1975, Australia's then ambassador in Jakarta, Richard Woolcott, who had been tipped off about the coming Indonesian invasion of then Portuguese East Timor, secretly recommended to Canberra that Australia turn a blind eye to it, noting that the seabed riches "could be much more readily negotiated with Indonesia . . . than with [an independent] Timor". Gareth Evans, later foreign minister, described a prize worth "zillions of dollars". He ensured that Australia distinguish itself as one of the few countries to recognise General Suharto's bloody occupation, in which 200,000 East Timorese lost their lives.

When eventually, in 1999, East Timor won its independence, the Howard government set out to manoeuvre the East Timorese out of their proper share of the oil and gas revenue by unilaterally

changing the maritime boundary and withdrawing from World Court jurisdiction in maritime disputes. This would have denied desperately needed revenue to the new country, stricken from its years of brutal occupation. However, East Timor's then prime minister, Mari Alkatiri, leader of the majority Fretilin party, proved more than a match for Canberra and especially its bullying foreign minister, Alexander Downer.

Alkatiri demonstrated that he was a genuine nationalist who believed East Timor's resource wealth should be the property of the state, so that the nation did not fall into debt to the World Bank. He also believed that women should have equal opportunity, and that health care and education should be universal. "I am against rich men feasting behind closed doors," he said. For this, he was caricatured as a communist by his opponents, notably the president, Xanana Gusmão, and the then foreign minister, José Ramos-Horta, both close to the Australian political establishment. When a group of disgruntled soldiers rebelled against Alkatiri's government in 2006, Australia readily accepted an "invitation" to send troops to East Timor. "Australia," wrote Paul Kelly in Murdoch's *Australian*, "is operating as a regional power or a potential hegemon that shapes security and political outcomes. This language is unpalatable to many. Yet it is the reality. It is new, experimental territory for Australia."

A mendacious campaign against the "corrupt" Alkatiri was mounted in the Australian media, reminiscent of the coup by media that briefly toppled Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. Like the US soldiers who ignored looters on the streets

of Baghdad, Australian soldiers stood by while armed rioters terrorised people, burned their homes and attacked churches. The rebel leader Alfredo Reinado, a murderous thug trained in Australia, was elevated to folk hero. Under this pressure, the democratically elected Alkatiri was forced from office and East Timor was declared a “failed state” by Australia’s legion of security academics and journalistic parrots concerned with the “arc of instability” to the north, an instability they supported as long as the genocidal Suharto was in charge.

Paradoxically, on 11 February, Ramos-Horta and Gusmão came to grief as they tried to do a deal with Reinado in order to subdue him. His rebels turned on them both, leaving Ramos-Horta critically wounded and Reinado himself dead. From Canberra, Prime Minister Rudd announced the despatch of more Australian military “peacemakers”. In the same week, the World Food Programme disclosed that the children of resource-rich East Timor were slowly starving, with more than 42 per cent of under-fives seriously underweight – a statistic which corresponds to that of Aboriginal children in “failed” communities that also occupy an abundant natural resource.

Blunt instrument

Australia is engaged in the Solomon Is-

lands and Papua New Guinea, where its troops and federal police have dealt with “breakdowns in law and order” that are “depriving Australia of business and investment opportunities”. A former senior Australian intelligence officer calls these “wild societies for which intervention represents a blunt, but necessary instrument”. Australia is also entrenched in Afghanistan and Iraq. Rudd’s electoral promise to withdraw from the “coalition of the willing” does not include almost half of Australia’s troops in Iraq.

At last year’s conference of the American-Australian Leadership Dialogue – an annual event designed to unite the foreign policies of the two countries, but in reality an opportunity for the Australian elite to express its historic servility to great power – Rudd was in unusually oratorical style. “It is time we sang from the world’s rooftops,” he said, “[that] despite Iraq, America is an overwhelming force for good in the world . . . I look forward to more than working with the great American democracy, the arsenal of freedom, in bringing about long-term changes to the planet.” The new sheriff for Asia had spoken. **CT**

*John Pilger’s latest book, **Freedom Next Time**, is now out in paperback. His new movie is **The War on Democracy**. This article was first published in the *New Statesman**

Australia is also entrenched in Afghanistan and Iraq. Rudd’s electoral promise to withdraw from the “coalition of the willing” does not include almost half of Australia’s troops in Iraq

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CITY OF 1,000 FORECLOSURES

Scott Johnson explains why his hometown in California is being battered by the financial crisis

Downtown Stockton went from being notorious as a center of crime and poverty to a place where families went for weekend entertainment. But as it turns out, much of this resurgence was built on sand

For most of 2007, Stockton, Calif., topped all lists of the American cities worst hit by the housing crisis. As of last summer, one out of every 27 homes in Stockton was in foreclosure – an increase of 256 percent over the previous year. The fact that Detroit – a rust-belt city well known for its long-term economic collapse – took the lead in foreclosures late last year only goes to show the depth of the crisis in Stockton.

But the foreclosure crisis in Stockton didn't come out of nowhere. It's only the latest chapter in the roller-coaster ride that the city has been through over the past decade.

I grew up in Stockton and lived there through the mid-1990s. When I left, the city was still struggling to revive after the early '90s recession, and was best known for its incredibly high crime rate. That hasn't changed – in 2005, Stockton had the highest violent crime rate in California, putting it ahead of Oakland, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

What did change, however, was a sense that the city was getting back on

its feet and beginning to move forward.

In the late 1990s, the shopping malls often seemed desolate, with surprisingly few shoppers and storefronts closing faster than they were opening. More recently, though, business and development thrived with the arrival of more big box retailers, as well as a \$500 million downtown revitalization project that included the construction of a new arena for live performances and a new stadium for the minor league baseball team.

Downtown Stockton went from being notorious as a center of crime and poverty to a place where families went for weekend entertainment. But as it turns out, much of this resurgence was built on sand. Stockton's growth was based on the booming housing market, which was partly spurred by relocating Bay Area residents looking for a home they could afford.

Close and cheap

With Stockton within a 90-minute drive of San Francisco – although it takes up to an hour longer during rush hour and bad weather – the city's relatively low

cost of living, combined with the relatively high wages for Bay Area employees, made it seem ideal for relocation.

During the dot-com boom of the late 1990s, people from around the country flocked to the Bay Area to cash in on the new gold rush. But after the bubble burst, the early 2000s saw cities like San Francisco and Oakland shrink in size. Meanwhile, Stockton's population grew by 17 percent, from 243,000 to 285,000.

Considering that the median home price in San Francisco in 2000 was \$566,000, but only \$133,000 in San Joaquin County, where Stockton is located, the attraction was clear. According to Stockton's main newspaper, the *Record*, "By 2001, Stockton real-estate agents reported that eight out of 10 home buyers were coming from the Bay Area."

It's important to note that these Bay Area emigrants weren't necessarily millionaires. On the contrary, they were people who mostly couldn't afford a half-million-dollar mortgage in San Francisco.

For a generation of parents who don't expect to see their children to earn more than they do, home ownership means at least having something to pass on – so for many Bay Area workers, the hot summers of the Central Valley and the exhausting commute were worth it.

An increase in demand for housing due to an influx of higher-income homebuyers, along with an aggressive development plan aimed at attracting new buyers, caused a speculative bubble. By the end of 2006, the median home price in the county had nearly tripled since the beginning of the decade to \$385,000.

According to a study from November

of last year, the average family in San Joaquin County couldn't afford 95 percent of the homes on the market in the county. Home ownership became virtually unattainable for them.

Once prices maxed out and the bubble burst, there was a surge in defaults, and mortgage holders couldn't sell the homes they foreclosed on. Many homebuyers and developers are now thinking twice before getting into this mess, which puts Stockton's future growth plans in jeopardy.

People – and profits

But this is only part of the story. It wasn't only an influx of outsiders that created the housing bubble. The root of the problem in Stockton is the same as everywhere else – people were persuaded to buy homes at inflated prices, reassured by a whole cast of unscrupulous characters that everything would work out.

The realtors, lenders and banks – and the corporate boards that oversaw the whole process and orchestrated massive profit margins out of it – are responsible for this debacle.

A recently retired escrow manager at a title company in Stockton told me how the industry set up new homebuyers for failure. "Almost every single day, I would see a young couple in their late 20s or early 30s who were buying their first home and were in way over their head," she says. "When I went over their contract with them, I would invariably find something they hadn't agreed to, like a variable interest rate or hidden fees that hadn't been explained."

In fact, it wasn't uncommon for a homebuyer to have to unexpectedly

The realtors, lenders and banks – and the corporate boards that oversaw the whole process and orchestrated massive profit margins out of it – are responsible for this debacle

HOMES IN CRISIS

Capitalist crises don't merely create wreckage in their immediate path. They also indirectly affect all sorts of people who never saw them coming.

come up with thousands of dollars in fees in order to close the deal – even when they had been told that no down payment was required for the mortgage.

Some of these were “garbage fees” – which included, for example, the lender charging hundreds of dollars for printing out the paperwork for the contract. But this was trivial compared to the unexpected rise in mortgage payments built into the contracts on variable rate loans.

The former escrow manager told me that when realtors or lenders were called on to explain the full implications of the contracts, they always found a way of convincing buyers that it would work out in their best interest. As she explained, “They would say, ‘Interest rates are going down, the price on your home is going up, your salary is going to increase, so this will all work out. You can trust me.’”

Pressurised into buying

Of course, none of these things about interest rates or rising salaries were actually going to happen. But for a lot of people, they were facing the final obstacle to getting their dream home and were therefore willing to believe the lenders – and in any case, they were already committed to buying and couldn't see how they could back out.

“The problem,” the former escrow manager told me, “was always that it was a Tuesday or a Wednesday, and they had to be out of their apartment on Saturday or Sunday. So they were basically pressured into making a decision at the last minute that they weren't prepared for.”

Once the variable interest rates

started climbing, homebuyers could no longer pay their mortgages and defaults ensued.

Capitalist crises don't merely create wreckage in their immediate path. They also indirectly affect all sorts of people who never saw them coming.

So while the worst hit are people who are losing everything because they are stuck with a skyrocketing monthly mortgage payment, renters are also facing new difficulties. Increased demand is driving up the cost of renting, making it increasingly difficult, even for those with access to vouchers for low-income families, to find an affordable apartment.

There have also been stories about renters being evicted from foreclosed properties – with no power to stop the eviction, they face demands that they move within days, and may struggle to get a refund for paid rent and security deposits.

Beyond this, the growing number of mortgage defaults in places like Stockton are causing an even deeper financial crisis, which is having an effect on the world economy.

The mortgage crisis will, thus, cause the coming recession to be that much worse – and the layoffs and wage cuts that are a product of the economic downturn will lead to further declines in home prices and put a strain on even more households struggling to pay off mortgages.

It is a vicious circle – and the culprit is the capitalist free market system. **CT**

This article originally appeared in the Socialist Worker at <http://socialistworker.com>

WHAT ELSE IS ON?

Tim Buchholz on the demise of democracy in the United States

What happened to the Flower Power of the 70's? Did we use it all up? Drain our reserves already? Or have we given up on our ability to make a difference? And while burning bras and free love may have not done a lot toward ending the Vietnam war, at least large groups of people were getting together and believing that they could make a difference. What happened to that drive in America to do the right thing, and not just when election time, or some national disaster, rolls around? I think it's quite simple. We have lost our faith in our leaders and their desire to listen and respond to our needs. Oh, and we now have "better things" to do.

How did we lose our faith? I think it had a little something to do with money. According to the website opensecrets.org George W. Bush raised \$360 million for his 2004 campaign, and spent \$306 million, which was \$167 million more than he spent in 2002. John Kerry raised \$317 million and spent over \$240 million. That's over half a billion dollars just for one political office, and that is just what

was released publicly. Imagine how many mouths could have been fed with just one attack ad, let alone the 40 we see each day until not so Super Tuesday. And not only is it a waste of money, it also shows that if you want to run, you'd better start with the bank account. It's very difficult to believe that our democracy is really democratic, but instead our elections line up pretty well with our capitalist ideals. It appears he (or she) who spends the most, wins.

And then, once they are elected, how often do they do any of the things they said they would do? With our last election in 2006, the Democrats promised us change (everybody promises change) and an end to the war. (They are still promising that two years later, how do you think that went?) And while Nancy Pelosi's first 100 hours may not have gone the way the Democrats planned (that's legislative hours mind you, as described by Pelosi spokesman Brendan Daly as "when the House convenes, after the one-minutes and before the special orders"—I thought they would be pulling a few all-nighters:), at least they made

It's very difficult to believe that our democracy is really democratic, but instead our elections line up pretty well with our capitalist ideals. It appears he (or she) who spends the most, wins

So I flipped back and listened to them both promise me change and tell why they would do it better, and I remembered why I stopped listening to these speeches. They make a lot of promises, but don't tell you how they're going to do any of it

an effort to follow the calls of the people who elected them. They tried to create a timetable for troop with-drawal and put a cap on war spending, two things they told us we would do if we voted for them. And we all saw what our votes got us, more of the same. Backpedaling, vacations, pork, and filibusters, and as usual, no real change.

So, we stop believing that our votes matter, and until we can end our two party system we will keep fighting for our team, and not for the American people. I think it's probably a safe argument to say that our politicians spend more time getting elected and reelected than they do actually serving their posts. It seems every time I watch a vote on C-SPAN, half of my representatives aren't even there. I wish my job was this understanding. Isn't that what we pay them for, to represent us? Not themselves or their political party at a fundraiser, but to be an experienced stand-in for our voice? If they don't show, will anyone hear us?

Flipping channels

Now to the apathy. Ben Franklin said, "Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. Liberty is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote." We still have the two wolves, but the lambs have found something better to do – Cable. It used to be, if the President was giving a speech, you had to watch it, or read a book, God forbid. It would be on every channel. I thought about this the other night as I was channel surfing and happened upon live coverage of Obama and Hilary as they battled in my home state of Ohio. I flipped right past it, and kept going, trying to

find a good rerun to watch instead. After a few minutes of Maguiver, I remembered it was my civic duty to watch those speeches (even if they didn't write them, this is who I'm electing to speak for me and they can't speak for themselves?).

So I flipped back and listened to them both promise me change and tell why they would do it better, and I remembered why I stopped listening to these speeches. They make a lot of promises, but don't tell you how they're going to do any of it.

Again, this is old hat, but what's changing? I don't have to watch it! So I flipped over to the main channels; we've got Deal or No Deal, some lie detector show (I'd love to get the candidates on that one!), some reality challenge show – nothing for me, thanks. Well, how about a little surfing, on the web of course, this new generation doesn't have to go outside (even baseball hero Reggie Bush tells kids in commercials to log on to the internet to learn how to play). So, I surfed the web, checked my mail, and when that got tiresome, I turned on my PlayStation. There went the night. Then I dragged myself to work in the morning so I could come home and repeat the process.

Are all of these new distractions just the products of a growing global economy, as The Beatles put it, "It's getting better all the time (couldn't get no worse)?" Or is this a highly crafted plan to divert our attention from what really matters? As our Capitalist system keeps unveiling the new must-have products, we find more and more reasons not to pay attention, and we get more and more reasons not to fight back. All of

these luxuries become necessities in our lives, and we begin to think we can't live without them. That's when we become so trapped in our "almost good enough" lifestyle that we don't want to risk losing any of it for a change we don't believe will come anyway. I don't think most of us believe in change anymore, and as long as our Capitalist system keeps us chasing after the next great product that will revolutionize our lives, (and fearing we could lose it all with just one roll of the dice), no real revolution will happen.

So, how do you stop a people from revolting? Take a lesson from the great United States. You have to give them the belief that things are getting better, and that they have a hand in it. You have to show them repeatedly on the news and in your films (you will gener-

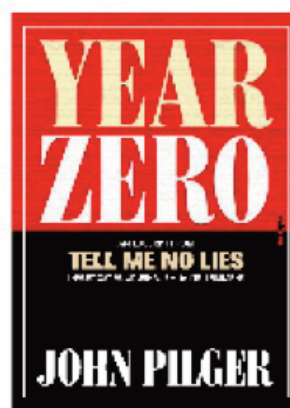
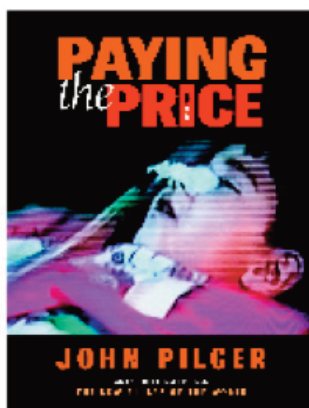
ally own both) how bad it could be if they moved somewhere else. You have to make them believe that they are just a few steps away from achieving their greatest dreams, and that all they have to do is keep on track, go to work, pay their bills, and eventually they will climb out of that whole. And you have to make them live in fear that it all could be taken away in an instant.

I have watched speeches by the top candidates (and Nader, but a vote for a third party is a lost vote, right?) and they all sell it well, but we know it's mostly sweet talk and slander, and we just don't believe what they (or their speech writers) have to say anymore. Instead we think, "Eh, what else is on." **CT**

Tim Buchholz is an activist and freelance writer based in Ohio.

So, how do you stop a people from revolting? Take a lesson from the great United States

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PLUMBING THE DEPTHS

Fred Reed finds reason why the US is NOT a democracy

We have two identical parties which, when elected, do very much the same things. Thus the election determines not policy but only the division of spoils. Nothing really changes

Common delusions notwithstanding, the United States, I submit, is not a democracy — by which is meant a system in which the will of the people prevails. Rather it is a curious mechanism artfully designed to circumvent the will of the people while appearing to be democratic. Several mechanisms accomplish this.

First, we have two identical parties which, when elected, do very much the same things. Thus the election determines not policy but only the division of spoils. Nothing really changes. The Democrats will never seriously reduce military spending, nor the Republicans, entitlements.

Second, the two parties determine on which questions we are allowed to vote. They simply refuse to engage the questions that matter most to many people. If you are against affirmative action, for whom do you vote? If you regard the schools as abominations? If you want to end the president's hobbyist wars?

Third, there is the effect of large jurisdictions. Suppose that you lived in a very

small (and independent) school district and didn't like the curriculum. You could buttonhole the head of the school board, whom you would probably know, and say, "Look, Jack, I really think..." He would listen.

But suppose that you live in a suburban jurisdiction of 300,000. You as an individual mean nothing. To affect policy, you would have to form an organization, canvass for votes, solicit contributions, and place ads in newspapers. This is a fulltime job, prohibitively burdensome.

The larger the jurisdiction, the harder it is to exert influence. Much policy today is set at the state level. Now you need a statewide campaign to change the curriculum. Practically speaking, it isn't practical.

Fourth are impenetrable bureaucracies. A lot of policy is set by making regulations at some department or other, often federal. How do you call the Department of Education to protest a rule which is in fact a policy? The Department has thousands of telephones, few of them listed, all of which will brush

you off. There is nothing the public can do to influence these goiterous, armored, unaccountable centers of power.

Yes, you can write your senator, and get a letter written by computer, “I thank you for your valuable insights, and assure you that I am doing all...”

Fifth is the invisible bureaucracy (which is also impenetrable). A few federal departments get at least a bit of attention from the press, chiefly State and Defense (sic). Most of the government gets no attention at all – HUD, for example. Nobody knows who the Secretary of HUD is, or what the department is doing. Similarly, the textbook publishers have some committee whose name I don’t remember (See? It works) that decides what words can be used in texts, how women and Indians must be portrayed, what can be said about them, and so on. Such a group amounts to an unelected ministry of propaganda and, almost certainly, you have never heard of it.

Illusion of journalism

Sixth, there is the illusion of journalism. The newspapers and networks encourage us to think of them as a vast web of hard-hitting, no-holds-barred, chips-where-they-may inquisitors of government: You can run, but you can’t hide. In fact federal malefactors don’t have to run or hide. The press isn’t really looking.

Most of press coverage is only apparent. Television isn’t journalism, but a service that translates into video stories found in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* (really). Few newspapers have bureaus in Washington; the rest follow the lead of a small number of major outlets. These don’t really cover

things either.

When I was reporting on the military, there were (if memory serves) many hundreds of reporters accredited to the Pentagon, or at least writing about the armed services. It sounds impressive: All those gimlet eyes.

What invariably happened though was that some story would break – a toilet seat alleged to cost too much, or the failure of this or that. All the reporters would chase the toilet seat, fearful that their competitors might get some detail they didn’t. Thus you had one story covered 600 times. In any event the stories were often dishonest and almost always ignorant because reporters, apparently bound by some natural law, are obligate technical illiterates. This includes the reporters for the *Post* and the *Times*.

Seventh, and a bit more subtle, is the lack of centers of demographic power in competition with the official government. The Catholic Church, for example, once influentially represented a large part of the population. It has been brought to heel. We are left with government by lobby – the weapons industry, big pharma, AIPAC, the teachers unions – whose representatives pay Congress to do things against the public interest.

Eighth, we are ruled not by a government but by a class. Here the media are crucial. Unless you spend time outside of America, you may not realize to what extent the press is controlled. The press is largely free, yes, but it is also largely owned by a small number of corporations which, in turn, are run by people from the same pool from which are drawn high-level pols and their advisers. They are rich people who know each

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STRANGE DEMOCRACY

Just as trial lawyers don't want intelligent jurors, as they are harder to manipulate, so political parties don't want educated voters

other and have the same interests. It is very nearly correct to say that these people are the government of the United States, and that the federal apparatus merely a useful theatrical manifestation.

Finally, though it may not be deliberate, the schools produce a pitifully ignorant population that can't vote wisely. Just as trial lawyers don't want intelligent jurors, as they are harder to manipulate, so political parties don't want educated voters. The existence of a puzzled mass gawping at Oprah reduces elections to popularity contests modulated by the state of the economy. One party may win, yes, or the other. But a TV-besotted electorate doesn't meddle in matters important to its rulers. It has never heard of them.

To disguise all of this, elections provide the excitement and intellectual content of a football game, without the importance. They allow a sense of Participation. In bars across the land, in high-school gyms become forums, people become heated about what they imagine to be decisions of great import: This candidate or that? It keeps them from feeling left out while denying them power.

It is fraud. In a sense, the candidates

do not even exist. A presidential candidate consists of two speechwriters, a makeup man, a gestures coach, ad agency, two pollsters and an interpreter of focus groups. Depending on his numbers, the handlers may suggest a more fixed stare to crank up his decisiveness quotient for male or Republican voters, or dial in a bit of compassion for a Democratic or female audience. The newspapers will report this calculated transformation. Yet it works. You can fool enough of the people enough of the time.

When people sense this and decline to vote, we cluck like disturbed hens and speak of apathy. Nope. Just common sense. **GT**

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IN TORTURE WE TRUST

Robert Fantina describes the shattering of another illusion

The U.S. Congress recently sent President Bush a bill that would have banned the CIA from using ‘harsh interrogation methods,’ which most of the world sees as torture and which even the military is forbidden to use. Said Mr. Bush: “The bill Congress sent me would take away one of the most valuable tools in the war on terror.”

It is not surprising that the irony of that statement is lost on Mr. Bush. Terrorist tools that he allows the Central Intelligence Agency to use are a ‘valuable tool’ in the war against terror.

The spineless Democratic Congressional leadership duly weighed in with meaningless rhetoric, proving once again that talk is cheap, and it can’t get much cheaper than the pronouncements of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. In vowing to override the presidential veto, a near impossibility considering the numbers and therefore an easy target for taking the moral high ground, Ms. Pelosi said: “In the final analysis, our ability to lead the world will depend not only on our

military might, but on our moral authority.”

This is the same House Speaker who chose to demonstrate ‘moral authority,’ by taking impeachment proceedings ‘off the table,’ thus allowing and enabling Mr. Bush to have complete immunity from his many crimes. This is the same House Speaker who has allowed the Iraq war to continue, and who has no excuse for so doing since she came to power in January of 2007.

Mr. Reid, not to be outdone by Ms. Pelosi’s sputters, added his two cents to the discussion: “Democrats will continue working to reverse the damage President Bush has caused to our standing in the world.”

Reversing the damage

Might not an admission of the ‘mistake’ the U.S. made in invading Iraq, followed by quick retreat from that tortured and occupied nation, help reverse the damage Mr. Bush has caused to the American reputation world-wide? For Mr. Bush, of course, it was no mistake: the Iraqi people are most presumptuous to be-

This is the same House Speaker who chose to demonstrate ‘moral authority,’ by taking impeachment proceedings ‘off the table,’ thus allowing and enabling Mr. Bush to have complete immunity from his many crimes

MORAL AUTHORITY?

Is it at all possible that the Iraqi people might see U.S. soldiers as 'hardened terrorists?' It is U.S. soldiers who break into homes at all hours of the day or night, ransack those homes and drag out any males over the age of 12 as their mothers, wives and sisters scream

lieve that they, and not Mr. Bush and his cronies, have a right to the oil that their nation holds. Convincing the U.S. citizenry, not known for their careful examination of facts when patriotic-sounding platitudes are flying about, that Iraq somehow posed a threat to Grandma and apple pie was not difficult.

It has been somewhat more challenging for Mr. Bush to convince the populace that remaining in Iraq is a good idea, but as has been proven before, most recently in Vietnam, when it comes to war the will of the people is not what Congress or the president feels any need to pay attention to; when the rich are getting richer, why question the methods?

So while polls, including the 2006 elections, indicate that most Americans favor a quick departure from Iraq, Mr. Bush can continue to assure that the riches of that nation flow to wealthy Americans by raising the specter of terrorists invading and occupying the U.S. the way the U.S. has invaded and occupied Iraq. As everyone knows, it's not wrong when the U.S. does it.

And this, apparently, applies to torture as well.

Mr. Bush had this to say: "The procedures in this manual (the military manual that the bill stated were to be followed by the CIA) were designed for use by soldiers questioning lawful combatants captured on the battlefield. They were not intended for intelligence professionals trained to question hardened terrorists."

So Mr. Bush makes the judgment on who is a 'hardened' terrorist and who is a 'lawful combatant.' What he uses to make such decisions is anybody's guess. It must be remembered that, in Mr.

Bush's view, a 15-year-old youth fighting in Afghanistan is a 'hardened terrorist.' Omar Khadr, a Canadian citizen, is now 21-years old and has been rotting in the U.S. sponsored hell of Guantanamo for six years.

'Hardened terrorists'

Is it at all possible that the Iraqi people might see U.S. soldiers as 'hardened terrorists?' It is U.S. soldiers who break into homes at all hours of the day or night, ransack those homes and drag out any males over the age of 12 as their mothers, wives and sisters scream. Prior to the invasion and occupation by U.S. soldiers, Iraqi citizens could rely on the things most U.S. citizens take for granted: electricity, running water, etc. Now these are available in short supply, for limited times during the day, if at all.

Mr. Bush's nonsensical statements appear to be endless. When explaining his veto of this bill, he also said this: "This is no time for Congress to abandon practices that have a proven track record of keeping America safe."

Might not the Iraqi people see how much torture has done to keep America safe (after all, they have Mr. Bush's word for it), and decide to use the same methods to keep their own nation safe? Is it inconceivable that they will begin using the same methods on U.S. soldiers? And what would Mr. Bush's response be to that, one wonders.

But once these practices are sanitized by some expert wordsmithing, they apparently become effective without being wrong. Mr. Bush has assured the nation and the world that the U.S. does not torture; of course not! And the U.S. didn't escalate its participation in the war in

early 2007; it simply 'augmented' it. And such an augmentation was certainly what the U.S. voters indicated they wanted when they went to the polls in 2006: more of the same became a 'new way forward.'

An article from the Associated Press concerning the veto of this bill further fosters this whitewashing: "The military specifically prohibited waterboarding in 2006. The CIA also prohibited the practice in 2006 and says it has not been used since three prisoners encountered it in 2003."

So now we are told that prisoners 'encounter' torture. They are arrested for who knows what reason, and then, perhaps walking from their cell to their one hour of exercise a week, happen upon torture. It is not planned, it is not 'administered,' it is simply encountered, and isn't that their bad luck.

Although the words of Ms. Pelosi and Mr. Reid have nothing behind them, what they say is true: while the U.S. has

never been a moral leader it has been perceived as such, at least by Americans, and that illusion is now shattered forever.

A nation that not only condones torture, but actually practices it, cannot possibly be seen as anything but renegade, to be shunned by all civilized societies except in the context of what kind of danger it might present to the world.

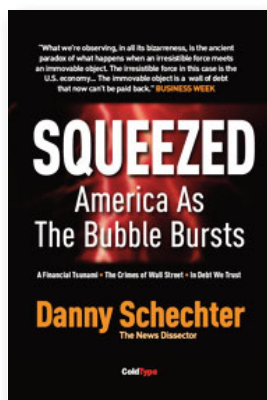
With the U.S.'s floundering economic might, it must now rely more than ever on its military strength. This combination, no moral compass, diminished stature in the world, a strong military and a deteriorating financial base, all add up to a very dangerous mix. Mr. Bush's insistence of the continued use of U.S.-sponsored torture is simply another symptom of this deadly disease. **CT**

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So now we are told that prisoners 'encounter' torture. They are arrested for who knows what reason, and then, perhaps walking from their cell to their one hour of exercise a week, happen upon torture

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LIES, PROPAGANDA, CANCER AND POT

Paul Armentano wonders why the media couldn't be bothered to publish the real facts from a controversial drugs study

Apparently not a scribe among them felt any need to confirm whether Beasley's study – which remained embargoed at the same time it was making worldwide headlines – actually said what was claimed

On Tuesday, January 29 – three days before the publication of a forthcoming study assessing marijuana use and cancer – Reuters News Wire published a story under the headline: “Cannabis Bigger Cancer Risk Than Tobacco.” Mainstream media outlets across the globe immediately followed suit. “Smoking One Joint is Equivalent to 20 Cigarettes, Study Says,” Fox News declared, while Australia’s ABC broadcast network pronounced, “Experts Warn of Cannabis Cancer ‘Epidemic.’”

If those headlines weren’t attention-grabbing enough, one only had to scan the stories’ inflammatory copy – much of which was lifted directly from press statements provided by the study’s lead author in advance of its publication.

“While our study covers a relatively small group, it shows clearly that long-term cannabis smoking increases lung-cancer risk,” chief investigator Richard Beasley declared. Beasley went on to speculate that pot “could already be responsible for one in 20 lung cancers diagnosed in New Zealand” before warning:

“In the near future we may see an ‘epidemic’ of lung cancers connected with this new carcinogen.”

The mainstream press, always on the look out for a good pot scare story, ran blindly with Beasley’s remarks. Apparently not a scribe among them felt any need to confirm whether Beasley’s study – which remained embargoed at the same time it was making worldwide headlines – actually said what was claimed.

It didn’t.

For those who actually bothered to read the study’s full text, which appeared in the *European Respiratory Journal* days after the global feeding frenzy had ended, they would have learned the following. Among the 79 lung cancer subjects who participated in the trial, 70 smoked tobacco. These individuals, not surprisingly, experienced a seven-times greater risk of being diagnosed with lung cancer compared to tobacco-free controls. As for the subjects in the study who reported having used cannabis, they – on average – experienced no statistically significant increased cancer risk

compared to non-using controls.

So how'd the press get the story so wrong? There are several reasons. First, beat writers based their stories on a press release rather than the study itself. Unfortunately, this is a common practice used by the mainstream media when writing about cannabis-related science. More often than not, media outlets strive to publish their reports prior to a study's publication – a desire that all but forces reporters to write about data they have never seen. (Likewise, as a marijuana law reform advocate I'm also frequently asked by the press to comment on studies that are not yet public, though I typically choose not to.)

Second, the media chose to selectively highlight data implicating cannabis's dangers while ignoring data implicating its relative safety. In this case, the study's authors (and, by default, the worldwide press) chose only to emphasize one small subgroup of marijuana smokers (those who reported smoking at least one joint per day for more than ten years). These subjects did in fact, experience an elevated risk of lung cancer compared to non-using controls. (Although contrary to what the press reported, even the study's heaviest pot smokers never experienced an elevated risk comparable to those subjects who reported having "ever used" tobacco.) By contrast, cannabis consumers in the study who reported light or moderate pot use actually experienced a decreased cancer risk compared to non-using controls. (Bottom line, the sample size in all three subgroups is far too small to draw any sound conclusions.)

Finally, the mainstream media failed to employ its own institutional memory.

For example, some 18 months earlier the *Washington Post* and other newspapers around the world reported, "The largest study of its kind has unexpectedly concluded that smoking marijuana, even regularly and heavily, does not lead to lung cancer." That study, performed by researchers at UCLA, assessed the potential association between marijuana smoking and cancer in over 2,200 subjects (versus only 324 in the New Zealand study), and determined that pot smoking was not positively associated with cancers of the lung or upper aerodigestive tract – even among individuals who reported smoking more than 22,000 joints during their lifetime.

No evidence

Prior large-scale population studies have reached similar conclusions. For instance, a NIDA (US National Institute on Drug Abuse) sponsored study of 164 oral cancer patients and 526 controls determined, "The balance of the evidence does not favor the idea that marijuana as commonly used in the community is a causal factor for head, neck or lung cancer in adults" and a 1997 Kaiser Permanente retrospective cohort study of 65,171 men and women in California found that cannabis use was not associated with increased risks of developing tobacco-use related cancers – including lung cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer, colorectal cancer, or melanoma. In fact, even the prestigious National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine says definitively, "There is no conclusive evidence that marijuana causes cancer in humans, including cancers usually related to tobacco use." (Tellingly, when I referred various reporters to these prior studies,

18 months earlier the *Washington Post* and other newspapers around the world reported, "The largest study of its kind has unexpectedly concluded that smoking marijuana, even regularly and heavily, does not lead to lung cancer"

Had the mainstream media even taken the time to consult their own prior marijuana coverage, they would have immediately begun asking the sort of probing questions that the public normally expects them to

I was consistently told that this information was irrelevant because they were assigned to write “only about this study.”)

In short, had the mainstream media even taken the time to consult their own prior marijuana coverage, they would have immediately begun asking the sort of probing questions that the public normally expects them to. Of course, such hard and steadfast rules governing professional journalism seldom apply to the media’s coverage of pot – where political ideology typically trumps accuracy and where slipshod reporting hardly ever even warrants a public retraction. Writing in the journal *Science* nearly 40 years

ago, New York state university sociologist Erich Goode aptly observed: “[T]ests and experiments purporting to demonstrate the ravages of marijuana consumption receive enormous attention from the media, and their findings become accepted as fact by the public. But when careful refutations of such research are published, or when latter findings contradict the original pathological findings, they tend to be ignored or dismissed.”

How little has changed. **CT**

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HOW COULD THEY HAVE KNOWN?

William Blum discusses intelligence, torture and the sanctity of life

Hillary Clinton and many other members of Congress claim that their support of the invasion of Iraq was based on faulty intelligence reports. How could they dispute the research and analysis of all those experts, so well trained and experienced in their fields?

Well, apart from the fact that American intelligence "agencies and their reports were by no means of one opinion (one well-publicized CIA paper, for example, predicted all manner of devastating consequences which could result from an invasion and occupation) ...^[1]

Apart from the fact that there were several public statements, including some on American TV, from Saddam Hussein's deputy prime minister, and other statements made by Iraqi scientists to American media and to American intelligence that Iraq no longer had any weapons of mass destruction ...^[2]

Apart from the fact that UN nuclear inspectors had determined before the war that Iraq did not have a nuclear weapons program ...^[3]

Apart from the fact that Colin Powell,

speaking in February 2001 of US sanctions on Iraq, said: "And frankly they have worked. He [Saddam Hussein] has not developed any significant capability with respect to weapons of mass destruction. He is unable to project conventional power against his neighbors."^[4]

Apart from all that, this question must be asked: What did the millions of Americans who marched against the war before it began know that all those members of Congress didn't know? At a minimum, they knew that nothing the Bush administration had told them came anywhere close to justifying dropping bombs on the innocent people of Iraq. They also knew that nothing the Bush administration had told them could be trusted. All it took to reach this advanced stage of awareness was not being born yesterday.

As I've written before, the same phenomenon attended the Vietnam War. The anti-Vietnam War movement burst out of the starting gate back in August 1964, with hundreds of people demonstrating in New York. Many of these early dissenters took apart and critically

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What the media and American officials don't remind us is that in May 1999, during the US/NATO bombing of Serbia, then part of Yugoslavia, the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was hit by a US missile, causing considerable damage and killing three embassy employees

examined the administration's statements about the war's origin, its current situation, and its rosy picture of the future. They found continuous omission, contradiction, and duplicity, became quickly and wholly cynical, and called for immediate and unconditional withdrawal. This was a state of intellect and principle it took members of Congress and the media – and then only a small minority – until the 1970s to reach. And even then – even today – our political and media elite viewed Vietnam only as a “mistake”; i.e., it was “the wrong way” to fight communism, not that the United States should not be traveling all over the globe to spew violence against anything labeled “communism” in the first place.

Essentially, the only thing these “best and brightest” have learned from Vietnam is that we should not have fought in Vietnam. And I'm afraid that the present generation of “leaders” will learn very little more than that we shouldn't have invaded Iraq.

A Mecca of hypocrisy, a Vatican of double standards

On February 21, following a demonstration against the United States role in Kosovo's declaration of independence, rioters in the Serbian capital of Belgrade broke into the US Embassy and set fire to an office. The attack was called “intolerable” by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice,^[5] and the American Ambassador to the United Nations, Zalmay Khalilzad, said he would ask the UN Security Council to issue a unanimous statement “expressing the council's outrage, condemning the attack, and also reminding the Serb government of its

responsibility to protect diplomatic facilities.”^[6]

This is of course standard language for such situations. But what the media and American officials don't remind us is that in May 1999, during the US/NATO bombing of Serbia, then part of Yugoslavia, the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was hit by a US missile, causing considerable damage and killing three embassy employees. The official Washington story on this – then, and still now – is that it was a mistake. But this is almost certainly a lie. According to a joint investigation of the *Observer* of London and the Politiken newspaper in Denmark, the embassy was bombed because it was being used to transmit electronic communications for the Yugoslav army after the army's regular system was made inoperable by the bombing. The *Observer* was told that the embassy bombing was deliberate by “senior military and intelligence sources in Europe and the US” as well as being “confirmed in detail by three other Nato officers – a flight controller operating in Naples, an intelligence officer monitoring Yugoslav radio traffic from Macedonia and a senior [NATO] headquarters officer in Brussels.”^[7]

Moreover, the *New York Times* reported at the time that the bombing had destroyed the embassy's intelligence-gathering nerve center, and two of the three Chinese killed were intelligence officers. “The highly sensitive nature of the parts of the embassy that were bombed suggests why the Chinese ... insist the bombing was no accident. ... ‘That's exactly why they don't buy our explanation’,” said a Pentagon official.^[8] There were as well several other good reasons

not to buy the story.^[9]

In April 1986, after the French government refused the use of its air space to US warplanes headed for a bombing raid on Libya, the planes were forced to take another, longer route. When they reached Libya they bombed so close to the French embassy that the building was damaged and all communication links knocked out.^[10]

And in April 2003, the US Ambassador to Russia was summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry due to the fact that the residential quarter of Baghdad where the Russian embassy was located was bombed several times by the United States during its invasion of Iraq.^[11] There had been reports that Saddam Hussein was hiding in the embassy.^[12]

So, we can perhaps chalk up the State Department's affirmations about the inviolability of embassies as yet another example of US foreign policy hypocrisy. But I think that there is some satisfaction in that American foreign policy officials, as morally damaged as they must be, are not all so stupid that they don't know they're swimming in a sea of hypocrisy. The *Los Angeles Times* reported in 2004 that "The State Department plans to delay the release of a human rights report that was due out today, partly because of sensitivities over the prison abuse scandal in Iraq, U.S. officials said. One official ... said the release of the report, which describes actions taken by the U.S. government to encourage respect for human rights by other nations, could 'make us look hypocritical'."^[13]

And last year the *Washington Post* informed us that Chester Crocker, former Assistant Secretary of State and current

member of the State Department's Advisory Committee on Democracy Promotion, noted that "we have to be able to cope with the argument that the U.S. is inconsistent and hypocritical in its promotion of democracy around the world. That may be true."^[14]

Like pornography, torture doesn't require a definition. You know it when you see it. Or feel it

With all the media coverage of "waterboarding" and all the congressional questioning of government officials about their views on the subject, I imagine that by now many people think that waterboarding must be the worst kind of torture that the United States has engaged in, and that if waterboarding is in fact not torture then the idiot king is correct when he says: "We don't torture." This is the way myths are born, so let's try and squash this particular one while it's still young.

Here in capsule form is a sample of some of the acts carried out in recent years by American military forces, their contract employees, and the CIA against detainees in one or another edifice of the sprawling global prison complex maintained by the United States in occupied Iraq, occupied Afghanistan, occupied Cuba, and various other secret prisons occupied by the CIA around the world. It may be torture to read but the point needs to be made. Lest we forget.

Standing or kneeling or forced into contorted, painful positions for many hours ... in leg shackles and handcuffs with eyes, ears and mouth covered, exposed to extremes of heat or cold ... stripped naked, led around with a dog leash ... deprived of sleep, kicked to keep

Many people think that waterboarding must be the worst kind of torture that the United States has engaged in, and that if waterboarding is in fact not torture then the idiot king is correct when he says: "We don't torture"

He had his hands handcuffed behind him and was suspended by his wrists – “His arms were so badly stretched I was surprised they didn’t pop out of their sockets”

them awake for days on end, subjecting them to a 24-hour bombardment of bright lights or blaring noise ... guards staging races of detainees in short leg shackles, violently punishing them if they fall ... withholding painkillers and other medications from the injured ... sensory deprivation, with all human contact cut off ... made to lie naked on a sheet of ice ... fake blood smeared on Muslim men when they are about to pray, telling them that it’s menstrual blood.

The Iraqi general “was put headfirst into a sleeping bag, wrapped with electrical cord and knocked down before the soldiers sat and stood on him. The cause of death was determined to be suffocation.”

Chained to the ceiling, shackled so tightly that the blood flow stops ... shackled to the floor in fetal positions for more than 24 hours at a time, left without food and water, and allowed to defecate on themselves; a detainee found with a pile of hair next to him; he had apparently been literally pulling his own hair out throughout the night ... wrapping a prisoner in an Israeli flag ... use of unmuzzled, growling dogs to frighten, in at least one instance actually biting and severely injuring a detainee ... burn marks on their backs ... detainee left at an Iraqi hospital, comatose, with massive head trauma, burns on the bottoms of his feet caused by electrocution, bruises on his arms ... more than a hundred detainees have died during interrogations ...

The death of two captives in Afghanistan: one from “blunt force injuries to lower extremities complicating coronary artery disease”; an autopsy showed that his legs were so damaged

that amputation would have been necessary; the other captive suffered from a blood clot in the lung that was exacerbated by a “blunt force injury” ...

Kicks to the groin and legs, shoving or slamming detainees into walls and tables, forcing water in their mouths until they could not breathe ... He had his hands handcuffed behind him and was suspended by his wrists – “His arms were so badly stretched I was surprised they didn’t pop out of their sockets.” ... forced to masturbate while being photographed and videotaped ... seven naked Iraqis piled on top of each other in a pyramid ... detainee punched in the chest so hard he almost went into cardiac arrest ... forcing naked male detainees to wear women’s underwear.

The report by General Taguba found that between October and December of 2003 there were numerous instances of “sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses” at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, including breaking chemical lights and pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees, threatening male detainees with rape, sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broom stick, raping female prisoners ...

Eighteen days naked and alone in a cell, often with his hands and feet bound together, frequently beaten ... “He locked his arm under mine and holding the back of my head he beat my head against the doors of the cells” ... his hands and feet were pushed through the metal bars of the cell door and then tied together.

Six weeks after his release, he says he has lost the will to live. He is too ashamed to be seen by his friends and family and has not seen or spoken to his

fiancée. The wedding is off. “I was a man before, but my manhood was taken away. Since this happened to me, I consider myself dead. My life feels over.”

Iraqi prisoners were forced to crawl through broken glass and wear women’s sanitary products ... two drunken interrogators took a female Iraqi prisoner from her cell in the middle of the night and stripped her naked to the waist ... an Iraqi woman in her 70s was harnessed and ridden like a donkey ... detainees were pressed to denounce Islam, or force-fed pork and liquor ...

Jamadi died an hour after his arrival at Abu Ghraib in early November 2003; he had been beaten while in CIA custody and then hung by his wrists, with his arms crossed across his back. US Army guards at the prison then packed his body in ice and posed with the corpse in mocking photographs.

“They forced us to walk like dogs on our hands and knees ... and we had to bark like a dog, and if we didn’t do that they started hitting us hard on our face and chest with no mercy.” ... “Do you believe in anything?” the soldier asked. “I said to him, ‘I believe in Allah.’ So he said, ‘But I believe in torture and I will torture you.’”

Taken out and tied to a post, rubber bullets were fired at them; made to kneel in the sun until they collapsed ... “They tied my hands to my feet behind my back. My left hand to my right foot and my right hand to my left foot. I was lying face down and they were beating me like this” ... inmates kept in wire cages with concrete floors and no protection from the elements.

“They actually said: ‘You have no rights here’. After a while, we stopped

asking for human rights – we wanted animal rights” ... crosses shaved into their scalp or body hair ... dislocated his arms, beat his leg with a bat, crushed his nose, and put an unloaded gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger ... Six Kuwaiti prisoners said they were severely beaten, given electric shocks and sodomized by US forces in Afghanistan ...

The Afghan detainee had been captured in Pakistan along with a group of other Afghans. His connection to al Qaeda or the value of his intelligence was never established before he died. “He was probably associated with people who were associated with al Qaeda,” one US government official said. ... numerous suicide attempts ...

And here’s George W. in 2004: “The world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power. The world is better off because he sits in a prison cell. Because we acted, torture rooms are closed, rape rooms no longer exist.”^[15]

Brian Whitman, spokesman for the US Department of Defense, 2005: “The United States treats all detainees in their custody with dignity and respect.”^[16]

It should be noted that the CIA has been treating (real and alleged) opponents of American imperialism with similar dignity and respect ever since the Agency’s founding.^[17] Police and prisons within the United States have been torturing for even longer.^[18]

Now for the good news: The Bush administration, trying to shore up support for its military-trial procedures, has cabled US embassies with instructions that evidence obtained through torture will not be allowed. But evidence obtained through treatment considered “cruel, inhuman, and degrading” is to be allowed.^[19]

“Do you believe in anything?” the soldier asked. “I said to him, ‘I believe in Allah.’ So he said, ‘But I believe in torture and I will torture you’ ”

A year later, preparing for his next crime against humanity, the invasion of Iraq, Bush, Sr. said: "People say to me: 'How many lives? How many lives can you expend?' Each one is precious"

George Bernard Shaw used three concepts to describe the positions of individuals in Nazi Germany: intelligence, decency, and Naziism. He argued that if a person was intelligent, and a Nazi, he was not decent. If he was decent and a Nazi, he was not intelligent. And if he was decent and intelligent, he was not a Nazi.

I suggest the reader make the obvious substitution: "Bush supporter" in place of "Nazi".

That oh-so-precious world where words have no meaning

In December, 1989, two days after bombing and invading the defenseless people of Panama, killing as many as a few thousand, President George H.W. Bush declared that his "heart goes out to the families of those who have died in Panama".^[20] When a reporter asked him: "Was it really worth it to send people to their death for this? To get [Panamanian leader Manuel] Noriega?", Bush replied: "Every human life is precious, and yet I have to answer, yes, it has been worth it."^[21]

A year later, preparing for his next crime against humanity, the invasion of Iraq, Bush, Sr. said: "People say to me: 'How many lives? How many lives can you expend?' Each one is precious."^[22]

At the end of 2006, with Bush's son now president, White House spokesman Scott Stanzel, commenting about American deaths reaching 3,000 in Iraq, said Bush "believes that every life is precious and grieves for each one that is lost."^[23]

In February 2008, with American deaths about to reach 4,000, and Iraqi deaths as many as a million or more, George W. Bush asserted: "When we lift

our hearts to God, we're all equal in his sight. We're all equally precious. ... In prayer we grow in mercy and compassion. ... When we answer God's call to love a neighbor as ourselves, we enter into a deeper friendship with our fellow man."^[24]

Inspired by such noble – dare I say precious – talk from their leaders, the American military machine likes to hire like-minded warriors. Here is Erik Prince, founder of the military contractor Blackwater, whose employees in Iraq kill people like others flick away a mosquito, in testimony before Congress: "Every life, whether American or Iraqi, is precious."^[25]

CT

NOTES

[1] Central Intelligence Agency, "The Perfect Storm: Planning for Negative Consequences of Invading Iraq," August 13, 2002

[2] Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz in August 2002 told Dan Rather: "We do not possess any nuclear or biological or chemical weapons." (CBS Evening News, August 20, 2002) In December he stated to Ted Koppel: "The fact is that we don't have weapons of mass destruction. We don't have chemical, biological, or nuclear weaponry." (ABC Nightline, December 4, 2002) Gen. Hussein Kamel, former head of Iraq's secret weapons program, and a son-in-law of Saddam Hussein, told the UN in 1995, that Iraq had destroyed its banned missiles and chemical and biological weapons soon after the Persian Gulf War. (Washington Post, March 1, 2003, page 15)

[3] Washington Post, July 11, 2004

[4] State Department press release, February 24, 2001

[5] Washington Post, February 22, 2008

[6] Associated Press, February 21, 2008

[7] The Observer October 17 and Novem-

ber 28, 1999

[8] New York Times, June 25, 1999

[9] see note 7

[10] Associated Press, April 15, 1986, "France Confirms It Denied U.S. Jets Air Space, Says Embassy Damaged"

[11] Interfax news agency (Moscow), April 2, 2003

[12] CBS News, April 9, 2003

[13] Los Angeles Times, May 5, 2004

[14] Washington Post, April 17, 2007, p.2

[15] White House press release, May 3, 2004

[16] Associated Press, February 10, 2005

[17] See the manuals put out by the CIA from the 1950s to the 80s on what they called "interrogation".

[18] See William Blum, *Rogue State*, chapters 4, 5 and 27 for examples and sources for the above

[19] Washington Post, Feb 13, 2008, p.3

[20] New York Times, December 22, 1989, p.17

[21] *Ibid.*, p.16

[22] Los Angeles Times, December 1, 1990, p.1.

[23] Washington Post, January 1, 2007, p.1

[24] National Prayer Breakfast, Washington, DC, February 7, 2008

[25] Testimony before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, October 2, 2007

William Blum is the author of:

Killing Hope: US Military and CIA

Interventions Since World War 2;

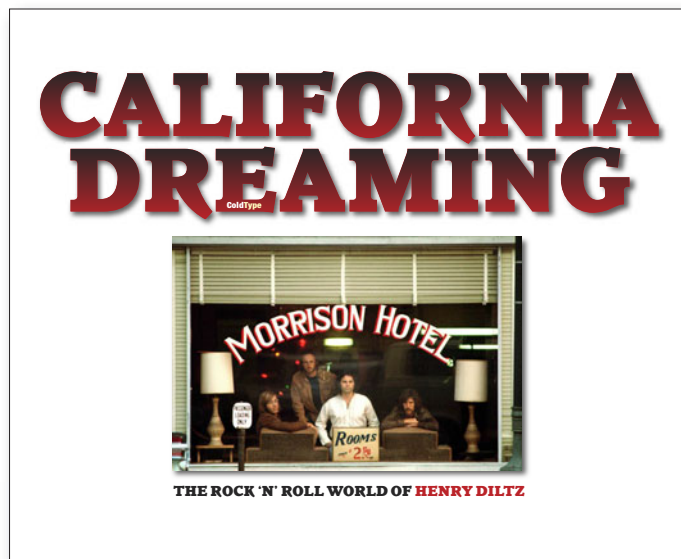
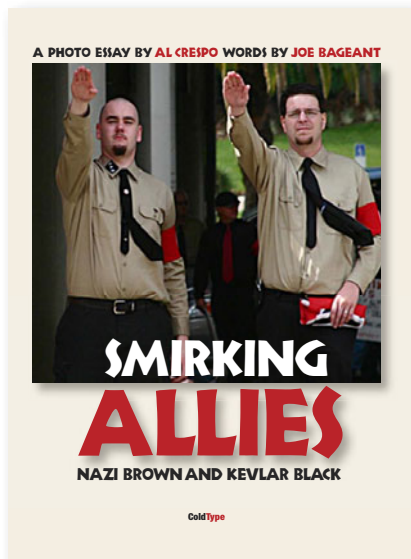
Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower;

West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War

Memoir; and Freeing the World to

Death: Essays on the American Empire

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TWO-STATE DREAMERS

If a one-state solution for Israel and Palestine is impossible, why is Olmert so afraid of it? asks **Jonathan Cook**

Unlike the one-state solution, according to Neumann and Avnery, the means to realising two states are within our grasp: the removal of the half a million Jewish settlers living in the occupied Palestinian territories

If the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the world's most intractable, much the same can be said of the parallel debate about whether its resolution can best be achieved by a single state embracing the two peoples living there or by a division of the land into two separate states, one for Jews and the other for Palestinians.

The central argument of the two-staters is that the one-state idea is impractical and therefore worthless of consideration. Their rallying cry is that it is at least possible to imagine a consensus emerging behind two states, whereas Israelis will never accept a single state. The one-state crowd are painted as inveterate dreamers and time-wasters.

That is the argument advanced by Israel's only serious peace group, Gush Shalom. Here is the view of the group's indefatigable leader, Uri Avnery: "After 120 years of conflict, after a fifth generation was born into this conflict on both sides, to move from total war to total peace in a Single Joint State, with a total renunciation of national independence? This is total illusion."

Given Avnery's high-profile opposition to a single state, many in the international solidarity groups adopt the same position. They have been joined by an influential American intellectual, the philosopher Michael Neumann, who wrote the no-holds-barred book, *The Case against Israel*. He appears to be waging a campaign to discredit the one-state idea, too.

Recently in defence of two states, he wrote: "That Israel would concede a single state is laughable. ... There is no chance at all [Israelis] will accept a single state that gives the Palestinians anything remotely like their rights."

Unlike the one-state solution, according to Neumann and Avnery, the means to realising two states are within our grasp: the removal of the half a million Jewish settlers living in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Both believe that, were Israel to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders, it would be possible to create two real states. "A two-state solution will, indeed, leave Palestinians with a sovereign state, because that's what a two-state solution

means,” argues Neumann. “It doesn’t mean one state and another non-state, and no Palestinian proponent of a two-state solution will settle for less than sovereignty.”

There is something surprisingly naive about arguing that, just because something is called a two-state solution, it will necessarily result in two sovereign states. What are the minimum requirements for a state to qualify as sovereign, and who decides?

True, the various two-state solutions proposed by Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert and George Bush, and supported by most of the international community, would fail according to the two-staters’ chief criterion: these divisions are not premised on the removal of all the settlers.

But an alternative two-state solution requiring Israel’s withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders might still not concede, for example, a Palestinian army – equipped and trained by Iran? – to guard the borders of the West Bank and Gaza. Would that count? And how likely do the campaigners for two real states think it that Israel and the US would grant that kind of sovereignty to a Palestine state?

Importantly, Neumann and Avnery remind us that those with power are the ones who dictate solutions. In which case we can be sure that, when the time is right, Israel and its sponsor, the United States, will impose their own version of the two-state solution and that it will be far from the genuine article advocated by the two-state camp.

But let us return to the main argument: that the creation of two states is inherently more achievable and practical than the establishment of a single state.

Strangely, however, from all the available evidence, this is not how it looks to Israel’s current leaders.

Prime minister Ehud Olmert, for example, has expressed in several speeches the fear that, should the Palestinian population under Israeli rule – both in the occupied territories and inside Israel proper – reach the point where it outnumbers the Jewish population, as demographers expect in the next few years, Israel will be compared to apartheid South Africa. In his words, Israel is facing an imminent and powerful “struggle for one-man-one-vote” along the lines of the anti-apartheid movement.

Olmert’s solution

According to Olmert, without evasive action, political logic is drifting inexorably towards the creation of one state in Israel and Palestine. This was his sentiment as he addressed delegates to the recent Herzliya conference:

“Once we were afraid of the possibility that the reality in Israel would force a bi-national state on us. In 1948, the obstinate policy of all the Arabs, the anti-Israel fanaticism and our strength and the leadership of David Ben-Gurion saved us from such a state. For 60 years, we fought with unparalleled courage in order to avoid living in a reality of bi-nationalism, and in order to ensure that Israel exists as a Jewish and democratic state with a solid Jewish majority. We must act to this end and understand that such a [bi-national] reality is being created, and in a very short while it will be beyond our control.”

Olmert’s energies are therefore consumed with finding an alternative political programme that can be sold to the

We can be sure that, when the time is right, Israel and its sponsor, the United States, will impose their own version of the two-state solution and that it will be far from the genuine article advocated by the two-state camp

It requires only that Israel and the Palestinians appear to divide the land, while in truth the occupation continues and Jewish sovereignty over all of historic Palestine is not only maintained but rubber-stamped by the international community. In other words, the Gazafication of the West Bank

rest of the world. That is the reason he, and Sharon before him, began talking about a Palestinian state. Strangely, however, neither took up the offer of the ideal two-state solution – the kind Avnery and Neumann want – made in 2002. Then Saudi Arabia and the rest Arab world promised Israel peace in return for its withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders. They repeated their offer last year. Israel has steadfastly ignored them.

Instead an alternative version of two states – the bogus two-state solution – has become the default position of Israeli politics. It requires only that Israel and the Palestinians appear to divide the land, while in truth the occupation continues and Jewish sovereignty over all of historic Palestine is not only maintained but rubber-stamped by the international community. In other words, the Gazafication of the West Bank.

When Olmert warns that without two states “Israel is finished”, he is thinking primarily about how to stop the emergence of a single state. So, if the real two-state camp is to be believed, Olmert is a dreamer too, because he fears that a one-state solution is not only achievable but dangerously close at hand. Sharon, it seems, suffered from the same delusion, given that demography was the main impulse for his disengaging from Gaza.

Or maybe both of them understood rather better than Neumann and Avnery what is meant by a Jewish state, and what political conditions are incompatible with it.

In fact, the division of the land demanded by the real two-staters, however equitable, would be the very moment when the struggle for Israel to remain a Jewish state would enter its

most critical and difficult phase. Which is precisely why Israel has blocked any meaningful division of the land so far and will continue to do so.

In the unimaginable event that the Israel were to divide the land, a Jewish state would not be able to live with the consequences of such a division for long. Eventually, the maintenance of an ethnic Israeli state would (and will) prove unsustainable: environmentally, demographically and ultimately physically. Division of the land simply “fast-forwards” the self-destructiveness inherent in a Jewish state.

Let us examine just a few of the consequences for the Jewish state of a genuine two-state solution.

Water shortage

First, Israel inside its recognised, shrunken borders would face an immediate and very serious water shortage. That is because, in returning the West Bank to the Palestinians, Israel would lose control of the large mountain aquifers that currently supply most of its water, not only to Israel proper but also to the Jewish settlers living illegally in the occupied territories. Israel would no longer be able to steal the water, but would be expected to negotiate for it on the open market.

Given the politics of water in the Middle East that would be no simple matter. However impoverished the new sovereign Palestinian state was, it would lose all legitimacy in the eyes of its own population were it to sell more than a trickle of water to the Israelis.

We can understand why by examining the current water situation. At the moment Israel drains off almost all of

the water provided by the rivers and aquifers inside Israel and in the occupied territories for use by its own population, allowing each Palestinian far less than the minimum amount he or she requires each day, according to the World Health Organisation.

In a stark warning last month, Israel's Water Authority reported that over-drilling has polluted with sea water most of the supply from the coastal aquifer – that is the main fresh water source inside Israel's recognised borders.

Were Palestinians to be allowed a proper water ration from their own mountain aquifer, as well as to build a modern economy, there would not be enough left over to satisfy Israel's first-world thirst. And that is before we consider the extra demand on water resources from all those Palestinians who choose to realise their right to return, not to their homes in Israel, but to the new sovereign Palestinian state.

In addition, for reasons that we will come to, the sovereign Jewish state would have every reason to continue its Judaisation policies, trying to attract as many Jews from the rest of the world as possible, thereby further straining the region's water resources.

The environmental unsustainability of both states seeking to absorb large populations would inevitably result in a regional water crisis. In addition, should Israeli Jews, sensing water shortages, start to leave in significant numbers, Israel would have an even more pressing reason to locate water, by fair means or foul.

It can be expected that in a short time Israel, with the fourth most powerful army in the world, would seek to man-

ufacture reasons for war against its weaker neighbours, particularly the Palestinians but possibly also Lebanon, in a bid to steal their water.

Water shortages would, of course, be a problem facing a single state too. But, at least in one state there would be mechanisms in place to reduce such tensions, to manage population growth and economic development, and to divide water resources equitably.

Military surplus

Second, with the labour-intensive occupation at an end, much of the Jewish state's huge citizen army would become surplus to defence requirements. In addition to the massive social and economic disruptions, the dismantling of the country's military complex would fundamentally change Israel's role in the region, damage its relationship with the only global superpower and sever its financial ties to Diaspora Jews.

Israel would no longer have the laboratories of the occupied territories for testing its military hardware, its battlefield strategies and its booming surveillance and crowd control industries. If Israel chose to fight the Palestinians, it would have to do so in a proper war, even if one between very unequal sides. Doubtless the Palestinians, like Hizbullah, would quickly find regional sponsors to arm and train their army or militias.

The experience and reputation Israel has acquired – at least among the US military – in running an occupation and devising new and supposedly sophisticated ways to control the “Arab mind” would rapidly be lost, and with it Israel's usefulness to the US in managing its own long-term occupation of Iraq.

Israel would no longer have the laboratories of the occupied territories for testing its military hardware, its battlefield strategies and its booming surveillance and crowd control industries

SEARCH FOR PEACE

In order to realise a real two-state vision all the Jewish settlers would probably need to leave the occupied territories and return to Israel, what would be done with the Palestinians with Israeli citizenship?

Also, Israel's vital strategic alliance with the US in dividing the Arab world, over the issue of the occupation and by signing peace treaties with some states and living in a state of permanent war with others, would start to unravel.

With the waning of Israel's special relationship with Washington and the influence of its lobby groups, as well as the loss of billions of dollars in annual subsidies, the Jewish Diaspora would begin to lose interest in Israel. Its money and power ebbing away, Israel might eventually slip into Middle Eastern anonymity, another Jordan. In such circumstances it would rapidly see a large exodus of privileged Ashkenazi Jews, many of whom hold second passports.

Non-Jewish citizens

Third, the Jewish state would not be as Jewish as some might think: currently one in five Israelis is not Jewish but Palestinian. Although in order to realise a real two-state vision all the Jewish settlers would probably need to leave the occupied territories and return to Israel, what would be done with the Palestinians with Israeli citizenship?

These Palestinians have been citizens for six decades and live legally on land that has belonged to their families for many generations. They are also growing in number at a rate faster than the Jewish population, the reason they are popularly referred to in Israel as a "demographic timebomb".

Were these 1.3 million citizens to be removed from Israel by force under a two-state arrangement, it would be a violation of international law by a democratic state on a scale unprecedented in the modern era, and an act of ethnic

cleansing even larger than the 1948 war that established Israel. The question would be: why even bother advocating two states if it has to be achieved on such appalling terms?

Assuming instead that the new Jewish state is supposed to maintain, as Israel currently does, the pretence of being democratic, these citizens would be entitled to continue living on their land and exercising their rights. Inside a Jewish state that had officially ended its conflict with the Palestinians, demands would grow from Palestinian citizens for equal rights and an end to their second-class status.

Most importantly, they would insist on two rights that challenge the very basis of a Jewish state. They would expect the right, backed by international law, to be able to marry Palestinians from outside Israel and bring them to live with them. And they would want a Right of Return for their exiled relatives on a similar basis to the Law of Return for Jews.

Israel's Jewishness would be at stake, even more so than it is today from its Palestinian minority. It can be assumed that Israel's leaders would react with great ferocity to protect the state's Jewishness. Eventually Israel's democratic pretensions would have to be jettisoned and the full-scale ethnic cleansing of Palestinian citizens implemented.

Still, do these arguments against the genuine two-state arrangement win the day for the one-state solution? Would Israel's leaders not put up an equally vicious fight to protect their ethnic privileges by preventing, as they are doing now, the emergence of a single state?

Yes, they would and they will. But

that misses my point. As long as Israel is an ethnic state, it will be forced to deepen the occupation and intensify its ethnic cleansing policies to prevent the emergence of genuine Palestinian political influence – for the reasons I cite above and for many others I don't. In truth, both a one-state and a genuine two-state arrangement are impossible given Israel's determination to remain a Jewish state.

Zionism the obstacle

The obstacle to a solution, then, is not about dividing the land but about Zionism itself, the ideology of ethnic supremacy that is the current orthodoxy in Israel. As long as Israel is a Zionist state, its leaders will allow neither one state nor two real states.

The solution, therefore, reduces to the question of how to defeat Zionism. It just so happens that the best way this can be achieved is by confronting the il-

lusions of the two-state dreamers and explaining why Israel is in permanent bad faith about seeking peace.

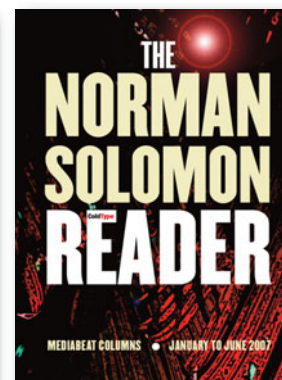
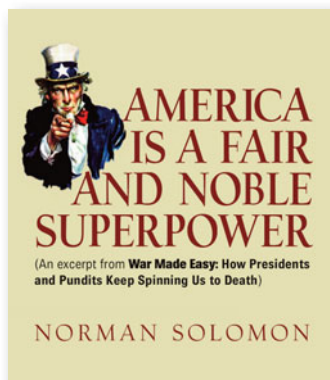
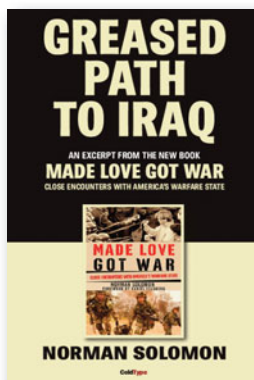
In other words, if we stopped distracting ourselves with the Holy Grail of the two-state solution, we might channel our energies into something more useful: discrediting Israel as a Jewish state, and the ideology of Zionism that upholds it. Eventually the respectable façade of Zionism might crumble.

Without Zionism, the obstacle to creating either one or two states will finally be removed. And if that is the case, then why not also campaign for the solution that will best bring justice to both Israelis and Palestinians? **CT**

*Jonathan Cook is a writer and journalist based in Nazareth, Israel. His new book, **Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East**, is published by Pluto Press. His website is www.jkcook.net*

The obstacle to a solution, is not about dividing the land but about Zionism itself, the ideology of ethnic supremacy that is the current orthodoxy in Israel

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THE WORLD AS IT IS

Chris Hedges looks at the dynamics of power in the Middle East

Those who have empathy do not, as Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Matan Vilnai did, thunder at the Palestinians that they face a shoah, meaning catastrophe or holocaust

War creates a world without empathy. Those who have empathy cannot, as did Palestinian gunman Alaa Hisham Abu Dheim, coldly murder students in a Jerusalem library. Those who have empathy cannot drop tons of iron fragmentation bombs on crowded Palestinian refugee camps in Gaza, killing more than 120 Palestinians in a week, of whom one in five were children and more than half were civilians.

Those who have empathy do not, as Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Matan Vilnai did, thunder at the Palestinians that they face a shoah, meaning catastrophe or holocaust. Those with empathy are unable to rejoice, as many leaders of Hamas did, over slaughter, as if the murder of the other's innocents is justified by the murder of your innocents.

We live in a world, at home and in the Middle East, hardened and distorted by hate. We communicate in the language of fear and violence. Human beings are no longer viewed as human beings. They are no longer endowed in our eyes, or the eyes of those who oppose us, with

human qualities. They do no love, grieve, suffer, laugh or weep. They represent cold abstractions of evil. The death-for-death means we communicate by producing corpses. And we are all guilty, Americans, Palestinians, Iraqis and Israelis. But we are not all guilty equally.

Israel and the United States bear the responsibility for a world that has unleashed twisted killers such as Abu Dheim. It is the decades of repression in Gaza, as well as the callous occupation in Iraq, that has bequeathed to us a new generation of jihadists and gunmen who walk into yeshivas and spray automatic fire at people bent over books. For as the poet W.H. Auden pointed out:

*I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.*

The long, slow drip of collective humiliation and abuse, along with the tiny and large indignities that go into transforming human beings into fanatics, is rarely understood by those on the outside. It

ticks away like a clock until it suddenly explodes in our face. Because we do not know where it came from, it strikes us as incomprehensible, irrational, the product of a demented form of humanity. These killers, however, are not formed by the Quran or Islam or a culture that is morally inferior to our own. They are formed by a 40-year occupation, by the continued expansion of Jewish settlements, by the refusal to allow the return of expelled refugees, by the use of fighter jets to bomb squalid refugee camps and by an Israeli siege of Gaza that has blocked fuel, electricity and essential supplies and created a humanitarian crisis for 1.5 million Palestinians. It is what the Israelis have done to the Palestinians, what we have done to the Iraqis, that has brought us to this impasse. We unleashed this violence and only we can end it.

Radical non-entity

Hamas was a non-entity, a tiny group of radicals who wielded no influence and had little following when in 1988 I first reported from Gaza. But the steady drumbeat of Israeli repression and violence, aided by the corruption and incompetence of Yasser Arafat, led to Hamas' slow rise to supplant Arafat's Fatah party. By 2006 Hamas was elected to power. This election, by all accounts free and fair, saw Jerusalem and Washington begin a covert effort to overthrow Hamas, according to documents obtained by *Vanity Fair* and the *Guardian*. The Fatah leader Muhammad Dahlan was, according to these documents, given cash, weapons and assistance through Egypt and Jordan to start a Palestinian civil war. Hamas stepped in

to thwart the attempted coup. It drove Dahlan and Fatah out of Gaza. The current bifurcation of Palestinian territories, with Hamas in control of Gaza and Fatah in control of the West Bank, began.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, unable to break Hamas with the siege and frustrated by the Palestinians' spontaneous rupture of the barricades that separate the Gaza Strip from Egypt, is trying to pound Gaza into submission. During the past three months of unrelenting Israeli strikes, over 300 Palestinians, most of them civilians, have died in Israeli attacks. The strikes have done nothing, however, to halt the rocket attacks on Israeli towns or end Hamas rule.

Amnesty International, CARE International and Oxfam UK, along with other humanitarian aid groups, in a recent report said that living conditions in Gaza are at their worst point since Israel occupied the strip in 1967. The report estimated that 80 percent of the residents of Gaza are now dependent on food aid, compared with 63 percent two years ago. It noted that unemployment is about 40 percent among the general population and 70 percent in the private sector. The aid groups document power cuts to hospitals of as long as 12 hours a day, 50 million liters of sewage pouring into the sea daily, and water and sewage systems on the brink of collapse. The groups have called on the European Union and the British government to pressure Israel to open border crossings and begin negotiations with Hamas.

Washington and Jerusalem have little interest in a peaceful settlement. They are blinded by their own military

The report estimated that 80 percent of the residents of Gaza are now dependent on food aid, compared with 63 percent two years ago. It noted that unemployment is about 40 percent among the general population and 70 percent in the private sector

SEEKING EMPATHY

Peace eludes us in Palestine, Israel and Iraq not because people do not want peace but because we are governed by moral and intellectual trolls

prowess. They do not grasp that a continuation of violence and a tightening of the siege will spur more desperate and embittered young men and women to acts of vengeance. The only route left is to hear the cries of all the victims, Israeli and Palestinian, to recapture empathy. Hamas' offer to negotiate a truce, an offer backed by 64 percent of Israelis, is the only escape route. There is no option other than finally to give the Palestinians control over their lives and land. It is the only option that will, as well, save us in Iraq. The occupation of Palestinian territory, like the occupation of Iraq, is illegal, increasingly violent and counterproductive.

Oslo strangled

I was in Gaza in 1993 after the Oslo peace accord was signed. It was as if, after years of suffocation, Palestinians and Israelis could breathe. But Oslo, in the hands of former Israeli Prime Ministers Benjamin Netanyahu and Ariel Sharon, was strangled and thwarted. Peace eludes us in Palestine, Israel and Iraq not because people do not want peace but because we are governed by moral and intellectual trolls.

The Palestine Liberation Organization, headed by the Fatah party, was once considered a terrorist organization.

It was illegal for an Israeli to have contact with the PLO. Those Israelis who called for negotiations with the Palestinian group were attacked and vilified. The Israeli government, however, under the pragmatism of Yitzhak Rabin, violated its own ban and began secret negotiations with the PLO. These negotiations led to the Oslo peace agreement. Fatah, today, is touted by Jerusalem and Washington as an ally in the war against Hamas and a partner for peace.

The dynamics of power have changed. They will change again. Hamas is a reality that, however distasteful, is not going to go away. Any peace deal reached without Hamas is doomed to fail. The only question left is how many more people are going to die needlessly in Israel, in Palestine and in Iraq before Israeli and American leaders begin to deal with the world as it is, not as they wish it to be. **CT**

*Chris Hedges, who graduated from Harvard Divinity School and was for nearly two decades a foreign correspondent for the New York Times, is the author of **American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America.***

This essay was originally published at www.TruthDig.com

READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT

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FAKE FACTS ON FARC AND CHAVEZ

Greg Palast digs out the real story about the \$300 million Hugo Chavez supposedly sent to Colombian guerillas

At the beginning of March, Colombia invaded Ecuador, killed a guerrilla chief in the jungle, opened his laptop – and what did the Colombians find? A message to Hugo Chavez that he sent the FARC guerrillas \$300 million – which they’re using to obtain uranium to make a dirty bomb!

That’s what George Bush tells us. And he got that from his buddy, the strange right-wing President of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe.

So: After the fact, Colombia justifies its attempt to provoke a border war as a way to stop the threat of WMDs! Uh, where have we heard that before?

The US press snorted up this line about Chavez’ \$300 million to “terrorists” quicker than the young Bush inhaling Colombia’s powdered export.

What the US press did not do was look at the evidence, the email in the magic laptop. (Presumably, the FARC leader’s last words were, “Listen, my password is . . .”)

I read them. Here is, in translation, the one and only mention of the alleged \$300

million from Chavez:

“... With relation to the 300, which from now on we will call “dossier,” efforts are now going forward at the instructions of the boss to the *cojo* [slang term for ‘cripple’], which I will explain in a separate note. Let’s call the boss Ángel, and the cripple Ernesto.”

Got that? Where is Hugo? Where’s 300 million? And 300 what? Indeed, in context, the note is all about the hostage exchange with the FARC that Chavez was working on at the time (December 23, 2007) at the request of the Colombian government.

Indeed, the entire remainder of the email is all about the mechanism of the hostage exchange. Here’s the next line:

“To receive the three freed ones, Chavez proposes three options: Plan A. Do it to via of a ‘humanitarian caravan’; one that will involve Venezuela, France, the Vatican[?], Switzerland, European Union, democrats [civil society], Argentina, Red Cross, etc.”

As to the 300, I must note that the FARC’s previous prisoner exchange involved 300 prisoners. Is that what the

The US press snorted up this line about Chavez’ \$300 million to “terrorists” quicker than the young Bush inhaling Colombia’s powdered export

FIXING THE FACTS 1

Well, our President may have gotten the facts ass-backward, but Bush knows what he's doing: shoring up his last, faltering ally in South America, Uribe, a desperate man in deep political trouble

'300' refers to? *¿Quien sabe?* Unlike Uribe, Bush and the US press, I won't guess or make up a bizarre story about Chavez mailing checks to the jungle.

To bolster their case, the Colombians claim, with no evidence whatsoever, that the mysterious "Angel" is the code name for Chavez. But in the memo, Chavez goes by the code name ... Chavez.

Well, so what? This is what . . .

Colombia's invasion into Ecuador was a rank violation of international law, condemned by every single Latin member of the Organization of American States. But George Bush just loved it. He called Uribe to back Colombia, against, "the continuing assault by narco-terrorists as well as the provocative maneuvers by the regime in Venezuela."

Well, our President may have gotten the facts ass-backward, but Bush knows what he's doing: shoring up his last, faltering ally in South America, Uribe, a desperate man in deep political trouble.

Uribe claims he is going to bring charges against Chavez before the International Criminal Court. If Uribe goes there in person, I suggest he take a toothbrush: it was just discovered that right-wing death squads held murder-planning sessions at Uribe's ranch. Uribe's associates have been called before the nation's Supreme Court and may face prison.

In other words, it's a good time for a desperate Uribe to use that old politico's wheeze, the threat of war, to drown out accusations of his own criminality. Furthermore, Uribe's attack literally killed negotiations with FARC by killing FARC's negotiator, Raul Reyes. Reyes was in talks with both Ecuador and Chavez about another prisoner ex-

change. Uribe authorized the negotiations. However, Uribe knew, should those talks have succeeded in obtaining the release of those kidnapped by the FARC, credit would have been heaped on Ecuador and Chavez, and discredit heaped on Uribe.

Luckily for a hemisphere on the verge of flames, the President of Ecuador, Raphael Correa, is one of the most level-headed, thoughtful men I've ever encountered.

While moving troops to his border – no chief of state can permit foreign tanks on their sovereign soil – Correa also refuses sanctuary to the FARC. Indeed, Ecuador has routed out 47 FARC bases, a better track record than Colombia's own, corrupt military.

For his cool, peaceable handling of the crisis, I will forgive Correa for apologizing for his calling Bush, "a dimwitted President who has done great damage to his country and the world."

Amateur hour in blue

We can trust Correa to keep the peace South of the Border. But can we trust our Presidents-to-be?

The current man in the Oval Office, George Bush, simply can't help himself: an outlaw invasion by a right-wing death-squad promoter is just fine with him.

But guess who couldn't wait to parrot the Bush line? Hillary Clinton, still explaining that her vote to invade Iraq was not a vote to invade Iraq, issued a statement nearly identical to Bush's, blessing the invasion of Ecuador as Colombia's "right to defend itself." And she added, "Hugo Chávez must stop these provoking actions." Huh?

I assumed that Obama wouldn't jump on this landmine – especially after he was blasted as a foreign policy amateur for suggesting he would invade across Pakistan's border to hunt terrorists. It's embarrassing that Barack repeated Hillary's line nearly verbatim, announcing, "the Colombian government has every right to defend itself."

(I'm sure Hillary's position wasn't influenced by the loan of a campaign jet to her by Frank Giustra. Giustra has given over a hundred million dollars to Bill Clinton projects. Last year, Bill introduced Giustra to Colombia's Uribe. On the spot, Giustra cut a lucrative deal with Uribe for Colombian oil.)

Then there's Mr. War Hero. John McCain weighed in with his own idiocies, announcing that, "Hugo Chavez is establish[ing] a dictatorship," presumably because, unlike George Bush, Chavez counts all the votes in Venezuelan elections.

But now our story gets tricky and icky.

The wise media critic Jeff Cohen told me to watch for the press naming McCain as a foreign policy expert and label-

ing the Democrats as amateurs. Sure enough, the *New York Times* soon called McCain, "a national security pro" on its news pages.

McCain is the "pro" who said the war in Iraq would cost nearly nothing in lives or treasury dollars.

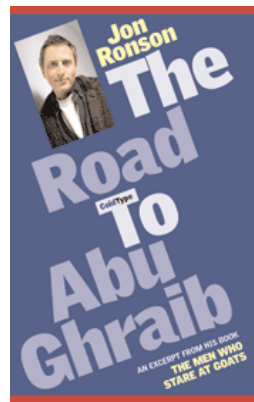
But, on the Colombian invasion of Ecuador, McCain said, "I hope that tensions will be relaxed, President Chavez will remove those troops from the borders – as well as the Ecuadorians – and relations continue to improve between the two."

It's not quite English, but it's definitely not Bush. And weirdly, it's definitely not Obama and Clinton cheerleading Colombia's war on Ecuador.

Democrats, are you listening? The only thing worse than the media attacking Obama and Clinton as amateurs is the Democratic candidates' frightening desire to prove them right. **CT**

*Greg Palast's latest book is **Armed Madhouse: From Baghdad to New Orleans – Sordid Secrets and Strange Tales of a White House Gone Wild***

Then there's Mr. War Hero. John McCain weighed in with his own idiocies, announcing that, "Hugo Chavez is establish[ing] a dictatorship"



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THE CURSE OF THE PATIENT STALKERS

Beware of privatisation schemes cooked up as consumer choice, warns **George Monbiot**

On the strength of this fiction, extended opening hours became government policy. It is a bit like the war with Iraq: the decision to go ahead was made before the evidence materialised

This was surely a victory for the people. We have lost, over the past 20 years, all kinds of public services, but one is due to expand. After heavy bludgeoning by the government, Britain's general practitioners have agreed to open their surgeries late into the evening and on Saturday mornings. As Gordon Brown says, the health service is "too often centred on the needs of the providers rather than those of patients."⁽¹⁾ Now we will have a service better matched to the pattern of our lives.

This, at any rate, is the government's story, and at first sight it is plausible. The truth, as always, is stranger and more complex. It begins with a bare-faced lie.

The government launched its campaign a year ago, with a press release published by the Department of Health. This claimed that a report by the Cabinet Office, published the same day, "reveals that nine out of ten" people polled "said they want public services, such as GP surgeries, that are open some evenings and weekends, even if that means they would sometimes be shut

during the working week."⁽²⁾ This was reported verbatim by the press⁽³⁾, but it was a complete fabrication. I have read the report⁽⁴⁾. It contains no mention of this poll, or anything resembling it. The terms "surgeries", "evening", "weekend" and "working week" do not occur.

But on the strength of this fiction, extended opening hours became government policy. It is a bit like the war with Iraq: the decision to go ahead was made before the evidence materialised. Just as the government was publishing its misleading press release, Ipsos Mori was completing the huge poll – of 2.6 million people – that the same department had commissioned. This, surely, would support its fictitious claim. Who would not welcome longer opening hours?

To the department's intense discomfort, Ipsos Mori found that "the vast majority of patients (84%) say they are satisfied with the hours their GP practice was open during the last six months"⁽⁵⁾. Those who must visit GPs most often are the most relaxed about opening hours: only among 18-34 year olds – the healthiest section of the population –

does the level of unhappiness rise above 20%⁽⁶⁾, and then only by a whisker.

But, like the weapons of mass destruction, if the government said the public demand was there, it had to be. So, Gordon Brown insisted that “people want weekend opening; people want to be able to see their GP in the evenings.”⁽⁷⁾ Yes, some people do, but not very many.

The Confederation of British Industry was also unhappy with the results. It commissioned another survey, again from Ipsos Mori. This received responses from just 1,014 people – one 2,500th of the department’s sample size. It asked a slightly different question: “how easy or difficult was it to get an appointment at a time that was convenient to you?”. Thirty-one percent said they had found it “fairly or very difficult”⁽⁸⁾.

The CBI issued a report claiming that “a commonly heard complaint is that GP practices are not open at weekends, early in the morning or in the evening ... GP services are not responding to clear signals for change from patients”⁽⁹⁾. But it produced no evidence: the survey didn’t ask about opening times. There are plenty of reasons why patients might have found it difficult to get a convenient appointment.

But even if the government is using dodgy figures and has misjudged popular support, what’s wrong with longer opening hours? Strange to relate, quite a lot. In some places, where there are large numbers of commuters who travel far to work, it makes sense. But Gordon Brown wants to impose it on surgeries everywhere.

This means, in effect, transferring resources from children, the old and the very sick to working people, who need

the services least. GPs will have to work shifts, which undermines one of the most important foundations of the NHS: the continuity of care. It is not clear that longer opening times will in reality be much more convenient for working patients: the appointment clerks, specialist nurses, consultants, physiotherapists, dentists, X-ray departments, biochemistry labs, blood sampling services and computer technicians with whom GPs work are not available in the evenings and at weekends⁽¹⁰⁾, so patients might have to come back to complete the consultation. If the government wants a genuine health supermarket, open all hours, it will have to pay much, much more.

So why is it so keen on this reform? Because it assists a quite different agenda. To avoid the political firestorm big business rains on any government that stands in its way, Gordon Brown must make constant concessions. What business wants most is the 40% of the economy controlled by the state. He must find clever and camouflaged means of delivering it that do not prompt us to take to the streets.

This means waging a public relations war against GPs and the other public sector dinosaurs who impede choice and change. It means a thousand small steps towards privatisation. The government is expanding the number of independent sector treatment centres, even though they turn out to be far less efficient than the NHS and leave the taxpayer with major liabilities⁽¹¹⁾. It is opening staggeringly expensive polyclinics, operating seven days a week, which will be run by multinational companies⁽¹²⁾. It will allow the primary care trust in Birmingham to

To avoid the political firestorm big business rains on any government that stands in its way, Gordon Brown must make constant concessions. What business wants most is the 40% of the economy controlled by the state

FIXING THE FACTS 2

GPs say that the government was hoping they would reject its demand for longer opening hours, knowing that the private sector could then step into the breach

shut the city's surgeries and replace them with primary care units franchised to corporations – the promoter of this scheme happily admits to modelling it on McDonalds⁽¹³⁾. It is transferring GPs' surgeries to supermarkets (the first was just opened by Sainsbury's⁽¹⁴⁾) and giving high-street chemists responsibility for diagnosing and treating minor ailments, even though they are not qualified to tell the difference between an ordinary cough and lung cancer. No minister can now discuss the NHS without mentioning "new providers" or "alternative providers", which is their code for private companies, or "choice" and "reform", which means privatisation.

The CBI has produced a long list of complaints about GPs' failure to "rise to the challenge" of the market⁽¹⁵⁾. In truth they are among the most efficient workers in the NHS. One of the reasons why their pay has jumped so quickly is that they have responded more effectively than the government expected to the incentives in their new contract (giving the government a further stick with which to beat them). They are way ahead of the hospitals in their use of information technology. But there is money in primary care, which is why they are now in the firing line. GPs say that the government was hoping they would reject its demand for longer opening hours, knowing that the private sector could then step into the breach.

None of this serves either the customer or the taxpayer. The irony of Brown's reforms is that they are wholly centred on the needs of the providers rather than the patients – as long as the providers are corporations. So don't wait to take to the streets. Little by little, the

privatisation of the NHS is happening already, disguised as a crusade for patient power. **CT**

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George Monbiot's latest book is Heat: How To Stop The Planet From Burning. His new book, Bring On The Apocalypse, is published this month. This essay originally appeared in London's Guardian newspaper.

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THE HARDER THEY COME

Michael I. Niman on New York governor Elliot Spitzer

Despite all the rhetoric and mythologies about equality, freedom, meritocracy, opportunity, and a host of other lies that placate the masses and maintain the social order, the United States is a nation of the rich, by the rich and for the rich

To put the Spitzer prostitution scandal into perspective, let me go back two decades to when I first started teaching college – back when Eliot Spitzer was a young upstart district attorney. I was teaching an alternative media course to, I always suspected, a class that included a number of potheads. I asked my students a question that I told them I didn't actually want them to answer aloud – but just think about the answer: "How many of you have dealt dope?" It wasn't a secret that at least a third of college students smoked marijuana, at least occasionally. Of those students who partake, it's routine to buy a bag of dope and split it among friends or sell some in order to help fund the remainder. Both actions legally constitute dope dealing.

I then cited FBI documents from two decades earlier, released to the public as a result of the Freedom of Information Act. The FBI, the documents show, transgressed from the business of law enforcement to becoming a hit squad for the Nixon administration. And in service to the curmudgeonly president's

agenda, the FBI had gone to battle against the pesky and perpetually anti-war alternative press. The problem for the FBI, however, is that the First Amendment of the US Constitution guarantees that irritating right to freedom of the press. So alternative journalists and other anti-war activists couldn't simply be rounded up and jailed for their views. Hence, according to FBI documents, agents needed to find other reasons to arrest them. One directive from the Albany, New York FBI office stated that "since the use of marijuana and other narcotics is widespread among members of the New Left, you should be alert to opportunities to have them arrested by local authorities on drug charges." This document was dated July, 1968. During the ensuing years, many alternative newspapers suffered staff losses or outright shut down due to marijuana arrests.

I explained to my students that they needed to make a choice in life. They were either going to be journalists or dope dealers. They couldn't be both. I explained that the same rule held for all

other forms of illegal activity. If they were going to be troublemaking, muckraking alternative journalists, then their tax returns had to be impeccably accurate, their cars registered and inspected, their lives legally in order. Let's apply this same simple rule to Eliot Spitzer. He could either be "the Sheriff of Wall Street" or a whoremonger, but he couldn't be both – at least not for long. When Spitzer the whoremonger finally fell from grace last week, he fell hard.

His act of engaging in contractual, if not consensual, sex was clearly less of a sin than, for example, having sex with your own intern. Yet Bill Clinton stayed on as president. Ultimately, Spitzer's transgression wasn't so much that he solicited a prostitute. That's just pathetic. The unforgivable sin is that, with three quarters of his state mired in an Appalachian economy, he paid \$4,300. That's the real sin – the brutal reminder that our populist governor is the son of a real estate mogul, born with the same privileges as George W. Bush. After establishing himself as the Sheriff of Wall Street, seemingly the only politician in the country with the chutzpah to take on corporate arrogance, we gently forgot that his close campaign for attorney general was bankrolled by his dad. The pricetag on Spitzer's scandal reminds us that the governor is out of touch with our world.

In fact, Spitzer seems to have more in common with the Republican sex offender crowd than with garden variety johns. Take Florida State Representative Bob Allen for example. While serving as co-chair of John McCain's Florida campaign last summer, he allegedly solicited a police officer in a public rest room and offered to pay for the privilege of fellating

him. What makes Allen's arrest particularly Republican is that prior to his arrest, he was an outspoken legislative homophobe, crusading against gay folks' rights to adopt children, as well as co-sponsoring an unsuccessful bill to increase penalties for "offenses involving unnatural and lascivious acts."

Then there was Florida Republican Congressman Mark Foley, who had a nasty thing for adolescents. He was chair of the House Caucus on Missing and Exploited Children. And remember Republican Senator Larry Craig of Idaho, who, like Allen, couldn't keep his libido out of public men's rooms. Craig pled guilty to soliciting a police officer in an airport toilet stall. Prior to his arrest, he was an outspoken opponent of gay marriage and cast the deciding vote killing a Senate bill to prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. And of course there was Louisiana's Republican Senator, David Vitter, who like Spitzer, was busted for being a john. In an earlier incarnation, Vitter was an obnoxiously loud critic of Bill Clinton's sexual transgressions, demanding his resignation. Vitter, like Bob Allen, is still in office.

Back to Spitzer. Prior to his outing as a john, he was instrumental in pushing through tougher penalties for both sex workers and commercial sex clients such as himself. As attorney general he was involved in prosecuting prostitution cases dealing with wealthy johns such as himself. It's this hypocrisy that makes his sex life, like the sex lives of gay-hating Republican bathroom-dwellers, a public issue. Spitzer has been outspoken in calling for rules that he seems to feel don't apply equally to him. It's that arrogance – the willingness to ruin other

The fiction of smaller unemployment is kept alive by musical chairs, a trick which is becoming increasingly transparent to many

RISE AND FALL

Why was the Bush Justice Department bugging the telephone of one of their strongest and most outspoken political opponents?

people's lives based on stated convictions he doesn't actually hold – that's unforgivable.

There's something about this whole case, however, that's a lot more disturbing than a simple sex scandal. Spitzer, for all his faults, was the highest-profile semi-progressive politician in the country. He was one of the strongest opponents of the unbridled corporatocracy. That's why they cheered on Wall Street when word spread of his downfall.

We had too much riding on Eliot Spitzer for him to let us down. He was an unimpeachable Ralph Nader sort, who carried the banner of progressive politics right into the governor's mansion. But he couldn't keep his dick in his pants in mixed company. He lost his focus and he let us down.

But the big question, the troubling question that nobody in the mainstream media, not in 8,000-plus articles, wants to ask – is why was the Bush Justice Department bugging the telephone of one of their strongest and most outspoken political opponents? Let's put this surveillance operation into context. In 2003 a group of citizens filed a civil rights case with the FBI concerning an Upstate New York district attorney's office and what appear to have been fraudulent, politically motivated prosecutions. That case is still pending, with no apparent action taken to preserve evidence or actively pursue the investigation. The reason, according to an FBI spoke, is that post-9/11, the FBI's limited resources have been redirected to national security cases. Hence, civil rights cases – which constitute the backbone of our constitutional system of government – have to wait on the back burner indefinitely.

We've also seen the type of cases that the Bush Justice Department is pursuing – high-profile political cases such as the persecution of political artist Steve Kurtz and civil rights lawyer Lynne Stewart.

Now, let's get back to the Spitzer case. What is it about this case that made it such a high priority? Why does it trump damn near every civil rights case in the country? Why was George W. Bush's politicized Justice Department tapping the phone of New York's outspoken, anti-administration governor? How could they justify this as anything other than Big Brother watching and fishing for anything to take his opponents down?

Of course, Spitzer should have been aware that his phone could be tapped. Again, he was crippled by the same arrogance that placed him above the law – here it placed him above all vulnerability. He made himself a target, loaded a gun and handed it to his enemies.

Then there's the hypocrisy thing again. I wrote earlier that Spitzer was a "semi-progressive." By that, I mean he was progressive on certain issues, such as gay rights and reproductive freedom, but quite reactionary on others. One of these others involved wiretaps. Prosecutor Spitzer was a big fan of casting a big net and liberally using wiretaps to spy on citizens. And if the "troopergate" allegations are true, he wasn't above using the state police to spy on his political opponents, such as Republican State Senate Majority Leader, Joe Bruno. It seems that while Spitzer was spying on state level Republicans, the Republican feds were spying on him. What goes around seems to come around. **CT**

Michael I. Niman, a regular ColdType contributor is a professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Buffalo State College

FIDEL CASTRO: SUPERDELEGATE

Greg Grandin looks back on 50 years of the Cuban leader's influence on US elections

“Long ere the second centennial arrives,” Walt Whitman predicted in 1871, “there will be some forty to fifty great States,” among them Cuba. It was a common enough belief. From Thomas Jefferson onward, many Americans thought that, as Secretary of State James Blaine said in 1881, “Cuba must necessarily become American.”

Based on its current population, if the island had become a U.S. state, it would hold about the same weight in deciding American presidential elections as does Ohio. History, of course, took a different turn; yet, over the last five decades, Cuba could still count one superdelegate.

Fidel Castro hasn't been seen in public since July 2006, when a near-fatal stomach illness forced him into semi-retirement. In the U.S., however, he remains a contender, at least in terms of the hold he has on the imagination of candidates running for the White House. Here's a short history of Castro's long run in U.S. presidential politics:

1960: John F. Kennedy, flanking his Re-

publican opponent Vice President Richard Nixon on the right on matters of foreign policy, was the first presidential candidate to brand Fidel Castro an “enemy.” In August 1960, having just accepted the Democratic nomination, JFK told a Miami gathering of American veterans that, for the “first time in our history, an enemy stands at the throat of the United States.” The Cubans, he declared, are our “enemies and will do everything in their power to bring about our downfall.” During the campaign, he repeatedly hammered Nixon on Cuba, demanding that the Eisenhower White House cut off trade to the island and provide aid to “fighters for freedom” to overthrow Castro.

In fact, months before Kennedy's August speech, President Dwight D. Eisenhower had already authorized the funding of a campaign of paramilitary sabotage in Cuba, as well as the training of a small army of Cuban exiles to overthrow Castro. Republicans had no problem with what today goes by the name “regime change,” having already orchestrated two successful coups – in Iran in

Months before Kennedy's August speech, President Dwight D. Eisenhower had already authorized the funding of a campaign of paramilitary sabotage in Cuba, as well as the training of a small army of Cuban exiles to overthrow Castro

THE CUBAN FACTOR

"The United States," Nixon said, "has the power, and Mr. Castro knows it, to throw him out of office any day that we would choose to"

1953 and Guatemala in 1954 – against governments they perceived as hostile to U.S. interests. They just preferred to do it quietly.

As Eisenhower's vice president, Nixon was obligated not to reveal his administration's secret foreign policy plans, so he could only lamely respond to Kennedy's taunts. Cuba, he insisted, was not "lost." Nixon knew that the White House had started training Cuban exiles, and he was probably aware that the CIA was working on a plan to poison Castro's cigars, but the vice president could only barely allude to such knowledge, which just made him sound complacent. "The United States," Nixon said, "has the power, and Mr. Castro knows it, to throw him out of office any day that we would choose to."

Kennedy, of course, won the election. As president, he carried out the Republican invasion plan, the botched Bay of Pigs operation. When that failed, Kennedy authorized "Operation Mongoose," a broad-spectrum covert operation that used sabotage, assassinations, and psychological warfare in hopes of sparking an uprising against Castro. He also imposed a trade embargo on Cuba. A stickler for legality, JFK held off signing the decree cutting off trade with the island until his press secretary, Pierre Salinger, could purchase him a cache of 1,200 Petit Upmann Cuban cigars.

1964: Castro, who by one recent count has survived more than 600 assassination attempts, never allowed a free vote in Cuba; "The revolution," he once reportedly remarked, "has no time for elections." But he made time for those held in the U.S. In 1964, the Havana daily *Rev-*

olución condemned both President Lyndon Johnson and his Republican challenger Barry Goldwater, writing that the two candidates reflected the "structural degeneration" of American democracy. But in the weeks leading to the election, Castro, fearing Goldwater's "extremism" and convinced that Johnson would pursue a "policy of moderation," stepped up his anti-imperialist, anti-U.S. rhetoric, hoping to spark a backlash in the president's favor. Johnson won in a landslide, without the need for a (back)hand from Fidel.

1968: Decades before Willie Horton, there was Fidel Castro – and France's president, Charles de Gaulle, whose criticism of U.S. policies in Western Europe and its war in Vietnam had earned him the enmity of many Washington opinion-makers. Richard Nixon, this time running as the challenger against Johnson's vice president, Hubert Humphrey, sponsored a TV ad flashing images of those two tribunes of "anti-Americanism," the odd-coupled "axis of evil" of that American moment, while promising that he would restore U.S. authority at home and abroad.

The Vietnam War, and the demonstrations it provoked, dominated popular debate and Cuba played only a small role in the campaign. Still Nixon and his running mate Spiro Agnew knew who to blame for the protests that dogged them. Agnew regularly condemned student antiwar protestors as an "effete corps of impudent snobs" who "have never done a productive thing in their lives." He continued, "They take their tactics from Fidel Castro and their money from Daddy." Agnew used that Castro line

whenever he could as part of his pitch for the blue-collar vote. After invoking Castro to silence protesters at a Florida university event, he even suggested that student dissent was a “disease,” assuring the audience: “When Dick Nixon becomes president of these United States we are going to find that that disease comes under some kind of treatment pretty quickly.”

1972: Impending defeat in Vietnam made talk of cooperation and compromise – not confrontation – the order of the day, as President Nixon ran for reelection on his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger’s dramatic diplomatic openings to Moscow and China. Perhaps afraid that the Kremlin leaders would cut a deal and abandon him, Castro made a number of overtures in the middle of the presidential campaign that caught the White House off guard. There was even talk of Kissinger making a “secret visit to Havana,” as he had earlier that year to Beijing. But Nixon’s powerful right wing, unable to stop the advance of Kissinger-style “appeasers” when it came to the Soviet Union, China, or even Hanoi, was not about to roll over on Cuba. By now, three elections after Kennedy had first outflanked Nixon on Cuba, anti-Castroism had become a veritable obsession on the carnivalesque right where an alliance of Cuban exiles, John Birchers, Young Americans for Freedom, law-and-order anticommunists, Soldier-of-Fortune mercenaries, and CIA spooks held sway.

So even though Nixon studiously ignored Cuba during the campaign, the far-right, including the *National Review*’s William Buckley, began to whisper that

the Democratic nominee George McGovern had actually cut a secret deal with Castro. McGovern dismissed the rumors as the work of a “bitter,” “paranoid,” and “despicable” conservative movement that wouldn’t be happy with any candidate who wasn’t to the “right of Genghis Khan.”

There was, at the time, about as much intelligence establishing a covert relationship between McGovern and Castro as there would be linking al-Qaeda to Saddam Hussein – or Barack Obama to an Islamic madrasa. Yet Nixon did try to oblige. His “plumbers” – the secret team that broke into the Democratic National Headquarters at the infamous Watergate Hotel complex – were largely made up of anti-Castro Cuban exiles. It had been organized by Bay-of-Pigs veteran CIA agent E. Howard Hunt, who said that one of the reasons for the burglary was to look for evidence establishing a connection between Castro and McGovern. Nixon won in a landslide, but Watergate eventually took him down.

1976: Castro played an important role in the Republican primaries in this election. Challenged by Ronald Reagan from the right, Gerald Ford, the House majority leader who had gained the presidency when Nixon resigned, tried to act tough. He flew to Puerto Rico and told Castro to keep his hands off the American colony, but that bizarre demand had nothing on the Gipper. Before he began to criticize Ford on Cuba, Reagan was trailing by double digits in the Florida polls. But by making Castro an issue, the challenger turned the primary into a horse race, losing the state to an incumbent president by just a few points. Rea-

Perhaps afraid that the Kremlin leaders would cut a deal and abandon him, Castro made a number of overtures in the middle of the presidential campaign that caught the White House off guard. There was even talk of Kissinger making a “secret visit to Havana,” as he had earlier that year to Beijing

THE CUBAN FACTOR

As his cabinet was getting settled in the White House, Secretary of State Alexander Haig told his boss, "You just give me the word and I'll turn that fucking island into a parking lot"

gan swept Dade County and its Cuban-American vote, prompting a Ford campaign advisor to comment sardonically that his boss might as well "recognize Cuba immediately."

"The Cuban threat is a geopolitical version of the miracle of the loaves and fishes," noted the *Washington Post* – the gift that keeps giving. Reagan lost his challenge, but would be back as Ford went down to Democratic challenger Jimmy Carter.

1980: Reagan played his Dade-County strategy large: In the Republican primaries, he called for a blockade of Cuba in retaliation for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which made about as much sense as attacking Iraq in response to 9/11. His main opponent, ex-CIA director George H.W. Bush, called Reagan's proposal a "macho thing," pointing out that "Cuba didn't invade Afghanistan." But such a fact-based campaign position was a nonstarter. After Reagan beat Bush 2 to 1 in the Florida primary on his march to the nomination, Bush, signing on to the ticket as vice president, made his peace with Reagan's voodoo-diplomacy. In the election campaign, Castro – perhaps forgetting the reverse psychology he had applied in 1964 – praised President Carter for supplying financial aid to Nicaragua's leftist Sandinistas and called Reagan a "threat to world peace." Reagan, of course, took Florida in the general election and trounced Carter. As his cabinet was getting settled in the White House, Secretary of State Alexander Haig told his boss, "You just give me the word and I'll turn that fucking island into a parking lot." Reagan demurred, choosing to take the far smaller, more

defenseless Caribbean island of Grenada instead – and sparing Cuba for his next and last presidential campaign.

1984: Reagan accused Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale of neither rejecting, nor denouncing Jessie Jackson for – as a candidate for the Democratic nomination – having visited Havana and, according to Reagan, "stood with Fidel Castro and cried: 'Long Live Cuba.' 'Long Live Castro.' 'Long Live Che Guevara.'" (What Reagan didn't say was that Jackson had used the visit to negotiate the release of several political prisoners and that he had also shouted Vivas to the United States, as well as to Martin Luther King, Jr.) "I don't admire Fidel Castro at all," Mondale responded, "but Jesse Jackson is an independent person. I don't control him." In November, Reagan won every state except Minnesota.

1988: Vice President George H.W. Bush invoked the possibility of a nuclear attack from Cuba to justify his support for Reagan's much ridiculed Star Wars anti-missile defense system, but he didn't need Castro to take out the inept Democratic Candidate Michael Dukakis and win the presidency. Ronald and Nancy Reagan's astrologer, Jeanne Dixon, did predict that a crisis in Cuba during Bush's first summer in office would give the new president a chance to move out of Reagan's shadow and "consolidate his nation's confidence."

1992: Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many observers thought the time was finally opportune to normalize relations with Havana. But Florida has

more than 20 votes in the Electoral College, and Miami's Cuban exiles – about 600,000 (out of a state population of just over 800,000) live in crucial Dade County – remained a powerful domestic lobby. Touched by the spirit of JFK, challenger Bill Clinton headed for Miami in April 1992 to excoriate George H.W. Bush for not “dropping the hammer down on Castro and Cuba.” Clinton even endorsed the punitive Cuban Democracy Act, which Bush (finding himself outflanked to his vulnerable right) signed shortly thereafter. Along with subsequent legislation which Clinton as president would back, the Act tightened Washington's long-standing embargo on Cuban trade. This only served to cut Washington out of what would be the island's post-Cold War political and economic opening to the rest of the world. Clinton took 20% of Florida's Cuban-Americans, lost the state to George H.W. Bush, but won the White House.

1996: Clinton, as president, stayed on point against Republican challenger Robert Dole, running to his right on Cuba, though he did admit in a TV debate that “nobody in the world agrees with our policy on Cuba now.” During his first term, Clinton had drawn close to Miami's anti-Castro Cuban lobby, taking political advice from Hillary Clinton's Cuban-immigrant sister-in-law, María Victoria Arias. This time, Florida was his and he doubled his percentage of Cuban-American votes.

2000: In October, by a vote of 86 to 8, the Senate passed legislation easing the embargo, allowing food to be sold to Cuba. Castro criticized the legislation for

being paternalistic and not going far enough in normalizing commercial relations. George W. Bush condemned it. Al Gore refused to comment. Angry at Janet Reno's return of Elián González, the young Cuban refugee rescued by fishermen after most of his companions including his mother drowned trying to make it to the U.S., Florida's Cuban-Americans abandoned the Democratic Party en masse in November. Along with Naderites and Palm Beach Jews-for-Buchanan, Bush got just enough votes to deadlock the election. Castro offered to send observers to oversee a recount.

2004: During a visit to Brazil in October, Secretary of State Colin Powell made an offhand remark that Cuba was no longer a major threat to Latin America. “We don't see everything through the lens of Fidel Castro,” he said. John Kerry thought he saw an opening and pounced. He claimed he found it “shocking that the Bush administration is telling the world that Fidel Castro no longer poses a problem for this hemisphere.” Perhaps after a mere 44 years and 12 presidential elections, the Castro bounce was wearing off. Bush won Florida with a million more votes than he had received four years earlier.

2008: This, his thirteenth, will most likely be Castro's last presidential election. After a photo surfaced indicating that one of Barack Obama's Texas volunteers (who is Cuban-American) had hung a Cuban flag superimposed with an image of Che on a wall behind her desk, the conservative blogosphere right-clicked a collective ah hah! Considering the temptation of Democratic candidates

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THE CUBAN FACTOR

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to call for a hard line against Cuba as a low-cost, high-return way of establishing their national-security creds, the Obama campaign responded with remarkable restraint, simply terming the flag “inappropriate.” Hillary Clinton, looking more like the hapless Kerry than the wily Bill, promptly attacked Obama for saying that he would meet with the ailing revolutionary. “We’re not going to just have our president meet with Fidel Castro,” she said, “I don’t want to be used for propaganda purposes.”

It’s been nearly 50 years since Richard Nixon said that the U.S. could get rid of Fidel Castro whenever it wanted. Castro, of course, is still around, though not for lack of effort on Washington’s part. The Cuban government calculates that some 3,500 Cubans have died over the past five decades as a result of U.S.-supported paramilitary operations against the island. In recent years, Castro’s continued survival, not to mention the disaster in Iraq, may have forced on our policymakers a somewhat more modest appreciation of Washington’s ability to bring about regime change.

Still, the Castro factor has yet to disappear. John McCain recently called on his supporters to sign an online petition

to “stop the dictators of Latin America,” though he didn’t say exactly whom such a petition should be delivered to. It has since been removed from his campaign’s webpage. The dictators in question apparently include Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Evo Morales of Bolivia as well as Castro. “They inspire each other,” McCain told a gathering of Bay of Pigs veterans in Miami’s Little Havana. “They assist each other. They get ideas from each other. It’s very disturbing.”

Last month, Castro announced that he would not seek reelection as Cuba’s president. But that hasn’t stopped him from weighing in on the contest in the U.S., predicting that a Clinton-Obama ticket would be “unbeatable.” “Will Castro’s nod to Hillary and Obama,” ran a Fox News header reporting the endorsement, “help or hurt?” Why won’t the Democrats, asked one of the show’s guests, “call him a dictator?” And so the beat, however faint, goes on. **CT**

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WHERE ARE IRAQIS IN THE IRAQ WAR?

Ramzy Baroud with a question the western media has forgotten

Five years after the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, mainstream media is once more making the topic an object of intense scrutiny. The costs and implications of the war are endlessly covered from all possible angles, with one notable exception – the cost to the Iraqi people themselves.

Through all the special coverage and exclusive reports, very little is said about Iraqi casualties, who are either completely overlooked or hastily mentioned and whose numbers can only be guesstimated. Also conveniently ignored are the millions injured, internally and externally displaced, the victims of rape and kidnappings who will carry physical and psychological scars for the rest of their lives.

We find ourselves stuck in a hopeless paradigm, where it feels necessary to empathise with the sensibilities of the aggressor so as not to sound “unpatriotic”, while remaining blind to the untold anguish of the victims. Some actually feel the need to go so far as to blame the Iraqis for their own misfortune. Both

Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have expressed their wish for Iraqis to take responsibility for the situation in their country, with the former saying, “we cannot win their civil war. There is no military solution.”

It would have been helpful if Clinton had reached her astute conclusion before she voted for the Senate’s 2002 resolution authorising President Bush to attack Iraq. For the sake of argument, let’s overlook both Clinton’s and Obama’s repeated assertions that all options, including military ones, are on the table regarding how to “deal” with Iran’s alleged ambition to acquire nuclear weapons. But to go so far as blaming the ongoing war on the Iraqis’ lack of accountability is a new low for these “anti-war” candidates.

Is it still a secret, five years on, that the war on Iraq was fought for strategic reasons, to maintain a floundering superpower’s control over much of the world’s energy supplies and to sustain the regional supremacy of Israel, the US’s most costly ally anywhere?

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WAR'S HIDDEN COST

"Baghdad has become the most dangerous city in the world, largely as a result of a US policy of pitting various Iraqi ethnic and sectarian groups against one another"

Of course, there are those who prefer to imagine a world in which a well-intentioned superpower would fight with all of its might to enable another smaller, distant nation to enjoy the fruits of liberty, democracy and freedom. But it is nothing short of ridiculous to pretend that Iraqis are capable of controlling the parameters of the ranging conflict, that a puppet government whose election and operation is entirely under the command of the US military is capable of taking charge and assuming responsibilities.

Equally absurd is the insinuation that the civil war in Iraq is an exclusively Iraqi doing, and that the US military has not deliberately planted the seeds of divisions, hoping to reinterpret its role in Iraq from that of the occupier to that of the arbitrator, making sure the "good" guys prevail over the "bad".

Responsibility for genocide

The idea of the US making an immediate exit from Iraq or taking full financial and legal responsibility for the devastation and genocide – yes, genocide – that occurred in the last five years is simply unthinkable from the viewpoint of the corporate US media, which still relates to the war only in terms of American (and never Iraqi) losses.

There are very few commentators who are actually arguing that the reasons for war were entirely self-serving, without an iota of morality behind them. Would Bush employ the same logic he used to justify Saddam Hussein's execution – suggesting this was warranted by the Iraqi president's violence against his own people – when dealing with those responsible for the deaths of over a million Iraqis as a result

of this war?

And indeed Iraqis are dying in numbers that never subside regardless of the media and official hype about the "surge". Just Foreign Policy says the number of dead Iraqis has surpassed one million, while a survey by the British polling agency ORB estimates the number at over 1.2 million. But the plight of Iraqis hardly ends at a death count, since those left behind endure untold suffering: soaring poverty, unemployment rates between 40-70 per cent (governmental estimates), total lack of security in major cities and, according to Oxfam International, four million in need of emergency aid.

"Baghdad has become the most dangerous city in the world, largely as a result of a US policy of pitting various Iraqi ethnic and sectarian groups against one another. Today, Baghdad is a city of walled-off Sunni and Shia ghettos, divided by concrete walls erected by the US military," reports Dahr Jamail, one of the few courageous voices that honestly relayed the horrendous outcomes of the war.

Indeed, there seem to be no promising statistics coming out of Iraq. Even under the previous regime and the debilitating sanctions imposed by the US and the UN, Iraqis were much better off prior to the war. Now, Iraqis are relevant only as pawns of endless US government propaganda. From the viewpoint of Bush, McCain and Cheney, they are the victims of Al-Qaeda, which must be fought at all costs. From the viewpoint of Clinton and Obama, they need to fight their own wars and take responsibility for them, as if Iraqi "irresponsibility" is the main problem.

In yet another “surprise visit” to Iraq by a US official, Vice-President Dick Cheney declared that Iraq was a “successful endeavour”.

Considering the exorbitant contracts granted to selected corporations, the war has indeed succeeded in making a few already rich companies and individuals a lot richer.

Meanwhile, Shlomo Brom, a senior fellow at Tel Aviv University’s Institute for National Security Studies and former head of the Israeli army’s Strategic Planning Division, sees things from a slightly different angle. “Any Iraq will be better than Iraq under Saddam, because the Iraq of Saddam had the ability to

threaten Israel,” he was quoted as saying in the *Christian Science Monitor*.

In considering such skewed logic, one can only hope that Cheney’s successful experiment will end soon, and that Israel’s desire for security is now sated. The people of Iraq cannot tolerate any more “success”. **CT**

The war has indeed succeeded in making a few already rich companies and individuals a lot richer

Ramzy Baroud – www.ramzybaroud.net is an author and editor of *PalestineChronicle.com*. His work has been published in many newspapers and journals worldwide. His latest book is *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People’s Struggle* (Pluto Press, London).

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CENSORS AT THE MALL

Andy Worthington on the banning of Guantanamo signs

In an act of political censorship, the management of the Oracle shopping centre in Reading, near London, England, has demanded that the Lush cosmetics store remove material in its storefront calling for prisoners held without charge in Guantánamo Bay to receive a fair trial.

The Oracle requested that posters featuring Guantánamo prisoners Sami al-Haj and Binyam Mohamed – which relate to a promotion with the legal action charity Reprieve – be removed from the store’s window because the suggestion that they should receive a fair trial contravenes one of the terms of Lush’s lease; namely, that retailers are prohibited from displaying signs which, “in the reasonable opinion of the Landlord,” are of a “distasteful, offensive or political nature.” In a letter to Lush, the Oracle’s management team stated that in making this demand they were “trying to protect [the Oracle] brand.”

Noting that the GAME store was openly advertising Grand Theft Auto IV, Gears of War 2 and Destroy All Humans 3, that the Vue Cinema was showing a series of films “of questionable taste”, including *Diary of the Dead* and *Rambo*, and that Starbucks was allowed to advertise on the Oracle web-



Lush’s Sami al-Haj poster

site for its “social, environmental and economic” causes, Clive Stafford Smith, Reprieve’s Director, said, “Films and games that glorify war and torture are fine, but it’s not okay for Lush to stand up for basic human rights, or for a charity. Reprieve believes that this is a demonstration of censorship with no bearing on any justifiable goal.”

He added, “In the time of the Ancient Greeks, no major political undertaking was embarked upon with-

out consulting the Oracle at Delphi. The management of the Oracle at Reading has failed to demonstrate why a fair trial is either distasteful or political. Yet numerous avowedly political campaigns have been – and continue to be – presented in the centre’s stores. Topshop, for example, has rightfully campaigned for Fair Trade, and Lush itself has campaigned against animal testing and against unnecessary packaging, without attracting criticism from the management. Fair trade is okay, fair trials are not?”

CT

*Andy Worthington is the author of **The Guantánamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America’s Illegal Prison.***

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