

**INSIDE:** HEALTHCARE APARTHEID ● THE JOY OF PERPETUAL WAR ● THE IRON CHEER OF EMPIRE ● WAR ON TWITTER ● SURPRISED BY DISASTER

# The <sup>ColdType</sup> READER

WRITING WORTH READING ● ISSUE 41 ● NOVEMBER 2009



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**GEORGE MONBIOT MICHAEL I. NIMAN GREG PALAST**  
**JOHN PILGER FRED REED SHERWOOD ROSS**  
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**WHAT'S  
IT ALL  
ABOUT?**

# The <sup>ColdType</sup> READER



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# Surprised by disaster

Want to know why the world's most expensive army can't beat a few angry tribesmen? **Fred Reed** has the answer

**W**hy, you might ask, is the world's hugest, expensivest, most begadgeted military unable to defeat a few thousand angry tribesmen in Afghanistan armed with AKs and RPGs?

Easy: Character. The men running the war are mentally the wrong ones to do it.

Think about this for a moment: Suppose that your boss demanded that, when he entered the room, you leapt spasmodically to your feet, stood rigidly erect with your feet at a forty-five degree angle like a congenitally deformed duck, and stared straight ahead until he gave you permission to relax. You would think, correctly, that he was crazy as a bedbug. If he then required staff to stand in a square so he could inspect their belt buckles, you would either figure he was a gay blade or call for a struggle buggy and some big orderlies. This weird posturing is not normal, nor are those it appeals to.

Suppose you showed up for freshman orientation at Princeton and your professors bellowed at the tops of their voices, three inches from your face, "Your shoes ain't shined good, puke. Get down and give me fifty." (Push-ups, that is, which in the military doesn't mean the better sort of bra.) You would decide that the loon had lost whatever mind he had ever had, and call Domino's for a cheese pizza, double Haldol.

Should you be so unwary as to suggest

the foregoing in print, the response will usually be that militaries need discipline. True, and so do newspapers. However, there is a distinction between discipline and ritualized lunacy. At every publication for which I have worked, the editor was clearly and absolutely in charge. Yet I, seldom senior, could say, "Yeah, Wes, but if we do that, won't thus-and-so bad thing happen?" His decision was law, but he was happy to hear from subordinates, who might know something he didn't. Editors do not require vaguely sadoomasochistic submissiveness.

This hoopla is not of use in combat: The Taliban seem to be doing rather well without it. Do you suppose their commanders check their beds to be sure that a quarter will bounce from their blankets?

Now, what kind of kid wants to go for robot training at West Point or boat school at Annapolis? Statistically these kids are bright, gregarious, "motivated" (a favorite military word), athletic, perhaps Eagle Scouts. Psychologically they want (need?) to live under a regime of rigid conformity and obedience that would appear as absurd as it is if we were not accustomed seeing it among soldiers. That is, they are autoselected not to think for themselves or question decisions from above. They are exactly what universities exist *not* to produce.

The service academies reinforce these unfortunate characteristics. Their school-

**If he then required staff to stand in a square so he could inspect their belt buckles, you would either figure he was a gay blade or call for a struggle buggy and some big orderlies**

## MEN AT WAR

**If the Pentagon tells him to bomb a city he has never heard of and has no reason to bomb, killing people who pose no threat to him, he will. He feels no individual responsibility for atrocious behavior ordered from above**

**Fred Reed** has worked on staff for *Army Times*, *The Washingtonian*, *Soldier of Fortune*, *Federal Computer Week*, and *The Washington Times*. His web site is [www.fredoneverything.net](http://www.fredoneverything.net)

ing consists of four years of learning what to think, not how to think. There are hours of running in formation (“If I die on the Russian front...”), close-order drill, manual of arms. Why? There is no military value in being able to shift your rifle from shoulder to shoulder crisply. Like the endless inspections of everything, all of this participation in the hive inculcates groupishness and a curious sense of safety in conformity.

The effects are remarkable and, from a standpoint of civilization, undesirable. Large authoritarian organizations make easier the compartmentalization of morality. A colonel typically will be a good neighbor, civic-minded, responsible, unlikely to steal your silverware or kick your dog. If the Pentagon tells him to bomb a city he has never heard of and has no reason to bomb, killing people who pose no threat to him, he will. He feels no individual responsibility for atrocious behavior ordered from above. “I was only following orders,” the Nuremberg defense, is the bedrock of military ethics, if any.

Men trained in conformist obedience can work marvels. They just don’t care whether the marvel is good or evil. If you need to handle some vast natural disaster, call on the military. They have the manpower, the aircraft, the medics, the co-operation to get things done now. They will stay on their feet for forty-eight hours without sleep. They take the “mission” (another favorite military word) seriously.

What they do not do particularly well is wage war. Why? Because they have in their minds a view of war that is partly that of offensive linemen – you close with the enemy and destroy him – and partly martial romanticism. They speak of duty, honor, country, bravery, fallen comrades, proving oneself. Military history is rife with silly pageantry, nobility of spirit, glorious charges, and impracticality. Having been trained to think rigidly, they do.

Before Agincourt, there were things the French might profitably have learned about long bows, but didn’t bother because chivalry didn’t concern itself with peasants. It

was the glory of the thing, not whether they were committing suicide. English generals killed 20,000 young Brits in one day at the Somme; they hadn’t compared the ideas in their heads with then-current military reality (such as that infantry charges over long distances against massed machine guns, artillery, and barbed wire are not especially productive, unless you manufacture embalming fluid.) Authoritarian group-think, love of ritual, romanticism, inattention: not a happy brew.

Further, military service encourages an often-catastrophic sense of masculine potency. Running in formation with fifty other men (“lef-rye-lef-rye-lef-rye-layeff...”) or watching a fighter cat-shot from a carrier deck – the thrill is gonadal, appealing to something deep in the male psyche, a challenge flung at life. It is wonderful, but not a sound basis for judgement.

A consequence is a tendency for militaries of the First World to gravely overestimate themselves, and thus underestimate their enemies. As recent examples, the French did not expect those slanty-eyed little zipperheads (*les jaunes*) to win in Viet Nam, nor did the Pentagon have any idea they the US could possibly lose 60,000 dead and the war in that country, Iraq would be a cakewalk, and those louse-infested towelheads in Afghanistan had no hope against American swoosh-kerpows. The US military in particular has a compulsory can-do attitude, with slogans like “The difficult we can do today, the impossible takes a bit longer.” This substitution of morale for comprehension is regularly disastrous.

Having no idea what they are getting into is almost doctrine among professional officers. A major does not become a colonel by saying, “General, the French didn’t do all that well at Dien Bien Phu. Maybe we ought to, you know, do something else. We could invade Vanuatu.”

America’s problem is not that its generals prepare for the last war, but that they don’t prepare for it, and then fight it again the same way.

**CT**

# The iron cheer of empire

Here's why there'll be no free tortillas in the Workhouse Republic, writes **Joe Bageant** from his hideaway in Mexico

Every afternoon when I knock off from writing here in Ajijic, Mexico, after I suck down a Modelo beer and take an hour nap, I step out onto the 400-year-old cobbled street, with its hap-scatter string of vendors lining both sides. All sorts of vendors – vegetable vendors, vendors of tacos, chicharrones, chenille bedspreads and plucked chickens, cigarros, soft drinks, sopa and suet. Merchants whose business address consists of a tiny one room aboratto or a card table in front of their casita.

Tourists seldom venture over to this working class neighborhood on Calle Zaragoza, and the neighborhood merchants' customers are their neighbors. Their goods are the common fare of daily family life in Mexico. Today, at a table less than two blocks away, I purchased a dozen brown eggs, with the idea of making huevos rancheros. The purchase took three quarters of an hour, and included stumbling but cheerful half English/half Spanish conversations with the six vendors between my casita and the table of Gabriel, the old egg and cheese vendor with an artificial leg and wizened smile who assures me that rooster fertilized eggs make a man go all night. "I am too old to care about that," I half say, mostly in that gesturing rudimentary sign language understood everywhere.

"Hawwww," he chortles and says some-

thing I cannot understand. An English speaking bystander, a teenager with a backward baseball cap and dressed in "L.A. sag," translates: "He says his pendejo is as hard as his plastic leg. You still alive! You never too old!"

These vendors are not poor people or peasants. They own homes, drive cars, watch cable television, send their children to college and do most of the things North Americans do. But their jobs are their livelihoods, not their lives, and every transaction is permeated with the ebb and flow of daily neighborhood and family life. "*Is Maria going to graduate after all? Si! But by just by the hair in her nose! Who is going to sell fireworks for the Feast of Saint Andrew?*" (Saint Andrew is the patron saint of Ajijic.)

## Making a living

Behind the plastered brick walls along the street mechanics fix cars, dentists pull teeth and teachers cheer preschoolers on in a chirping Spanish rendition of *Eensy Weensy Spider*. The entire street is busily, but not hectically, engaged in making a living, with most of the people doing so within 50 feet of where they will sleep tonight. But before they sleep they will sit out on the street, or perhaps the tiny neighborhood plaza, gossiping with the same folks who've been their customers all day. The same families into which their children will marry and

**These vendors are not poor people or peasants. They own homes, drive cars, watch cable television, send their children to college and do most of the things North Americans do**

## TAKE IT EASY

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whose sick elders they will burn candles for in the ancient stone church, founded as a Spanish colonial mission to civilize the Huichol Indians, who've since retreated up into the mountains to honor their “god of the opening clouds” in peyote rituals.

Obviously work and commerce have their problems here, just as anywhere else. The peso rises and falls. Cheap Chinese imports crowd out domestic goods. People work hard, especially tradesmen and laborers, but there is a complete lack of obsession and stress that characterizes North American jobs. Which, of course, many Canadians and Americans retired to Ajijic take for laziness.

It may be my bias, or my imagination, or my distaste for toil, but from here America looks like one big workhouse, “under God, indivisible, with time off to shit, shower and shop.” A country whose citizens have been reduced to “human assets” of a vast and relentless economic machine, moving human parts oiled by commodities and kept in motion by the edict, “produce or die.” Where employment and a job dominates all other aspects of life, and the loss of which spells the loss of everything.

Yeah, yeah, I know, them ain't jobs – in America we don't have jobs, we have careers. I've read the national script, and am quite aware that all those human assets writing computer code and advertising copy, or staring at screen monitors in the “human services” industry are “performing meaningful and important work in a positive workplace environment.” *Performing? Is this brain surgery? Or a stage act? If we are performing, then for whom? Exactly who is watching?*

Proof abounds of the unending joy and importance of work and production in our wealth-based economy. Just read the job recruitment ads. Or ask any of the people clinging fearfully by their fingernails to those four remaining jobs in America. But is a job – even the best one – and workplace strivance really everything? Most of us would say, “Well of course not.” But in

a nation that now sends police to break up the tent camps and car camps of homeless unemployed citizens who once belonged to the middle class, it might very well be everything.

In one of those divine moments of synchronicity writers pray for, I just saw reinforcement of the above. Checking my email web browser, one of those annoying ads masquerading as advice, popped up. It reads: “Doing good work is no longer enough! Ten tips to keep from being laid off your job.” Shown is a cheerful young woman at a desk, feeling deliriously safe about her job, judging from her hysterical bug-eyed smile, thanks to “These Ten Tips!” from a commercial jobs agency. When personal employment fears, job terror and insecurity, can be captured and turned into a job for someone else, there's not much room left for the general spirit of commonality, or a sense of a shared commons (such as this Mexican street) of the nation's work-life. Not when any of us could become indigent at a moment's notice.

### **No whiners**

But you won't hear anyone complaining. America doesn't like whiners. A whiner or a cynic is about the worst thing you can be in the land of gunpoint optimism. Foreigners often remark on the upbeat American personality. I assure them that our American corpocracy has its ways of pistol whipping or sedating its human in accordance with the media's projection of the world, and mediated by the financialization of life's every aspect.

Every action and movement is a transaction, some as large as the mortgage, others as small as the purchase of a bus token, or the cost of a cell phone call, gasoline, vehicle maintenance and parking costs for movement within the sprawling asphalt grids we call communities. Even respite from work with its vacation “leisure destinations” put on the credit card, and even the greatest commons of all, nature, has a cost of access, whether it be admission to

national parks or the cost of camping and other “recreational equipment.”

In the background a tabulator relentlessly calculates our bill for the thoroughly transactional and mediated life. Quit paying the bills and you are disappeared. Erased from the screens of a society of watchers watching each other — or watching celebrities, those godlike creatures dwelling on the Olympus of the most watched ... and dreaming of perhaps being watched on Oprah for a few fleeting seconds by even more watchers than already watch us.

### Society of watchers

There is a flickering screen or monitor in front of and between every citizen of the mediated society of watchers. Whether we watch television or other media matters not, we dwell among the watchers in a surveillance society of our peers. We dress appropriately, speak middle class English, not urban street slang or redneck, and look as prosperous as possible, or as hip as possible, or as learned or pious or whatever within our peer groups, and for outsider groups to see. No jokers, smokers or midnight tokers allowed in Mainstream American society and culture, which consists of working, consuming and “appearing to be,” but never purely being.

We flow willingly through the transactional circuitry of the wealth economy like ghosts, optimistic and eerily cheerful, encountering one another through the hierarchical commodity affinity groups we call our peers, people who consume the same things we do, and have the same purchased identity and “lifestyle” we do. Swimmers in a sea of mass produced goods and mass produced identities through consumption of those goods, we strive for uniqueness,

but not very hard, lest we lose the commodities we’ve acquired.

This is stamped deep within our American being by the greater forces of commodity capitalism; we seem to carry it with us wherever we go. We want to experience uniqueness. Thus Americans and Canadians complain that there are now “too many gringos” in Ajijic,” implying that they are different than the rest of their own kind. But the truth is that we are all very commonly issued products of a profit driven workhouse where no human commons is allowable, lest the workers find meaning and joy in each other as human beings, and perhaps become less work driven, less productive and less profitable. Best that their lives remain mediated, disembodied from the great commons of the human spirit, unmoored from the great natural commons binding all living things called Earth ... *images of which will be provided for your delight on The Nature Channel at 9pm to-night. Until then, stay cheerful. Pay your bills on time. Good night!*

Meanwhile, night is falling in Ajijic. Next door a child protests his evening bath. A Chihuahua yips in the casita across the courtyard, the flickering blue light of a television shatters like harmless lightning on the face of a very large old woman fallen asleep in an armchair beneath a hanging tapestry of Christ feeding his lambs.

Which reminds me. Tomorrow morning I must make those huevos rancheros. **CT**

*Joe Bageant is the author of the bestselling **Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War** (Random House, 2007). A selection of his writings and commentary from working class Americans may be found at [www.JoeBageant.com](http://www.JoeBageant.com)*

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# Big bad government is coming to get you

You might not think it possible, but conservatives in America are becoming nuttier by the day, says **David Michael Green**

**No wonder this guy doesn't want to be told to eat his vegetables. One gets the sense that he never was. I think he might also have been absent that day in kindergarten, when they covered that whole sharing concept**

**L**iar, delusional, petrified, hypocritical, idiotic. I often can't decide which of these most accurately describes regressives when I'm listening to their insane rants. Maybe it's all of the above, in some combination or another.

The right in America loves its canned tropes, but perhaps none so much as the 'government is evil' one. Oooooohh! Look out. Big bad government is coming to get you. Here's a recent example, from a regressive fellow living in the South (I know, I know – what a shocker that is!): "I am a grown man. I do not need liberals telling me what to do. If you want to live like slaves to the government in your big cities and left wing states, that's your problem. Keep your mitts off my liberty ...

"Liberalism takes away freedom. Liberalism is inherently controlling over free people. Liberalism seeks to take away freedoms that have been historically rooted and guaranteed.

"I don't need you to tell me to eat my vegetables. I don't need you to tell me to buy health insurance. I don't need you to tell me to use less water when I shower. I don't need you telling me to buy a less gas guzzling vehicle. I don't need you telling me to use mass transit and live in a tiny little European-style apartment rather than the big, sprawling house I want. I don't need you requiring me to build my house with

green materials.

"You really think modern American and European liberalism is about freedom? That's a joke. It is about you deciding how everyone must live. It is a hard fist of tyranny cloaked in a velvet glove."

Wow, eh? The hard fist of tyranny is haunting big cities!!

First of all, let's leave aside any observations our good friends in the field of child psychology might have about the upbringing of someone so devoted to himself that he adamantly reserves the right to sprawling houses, water-wasting showers, and big, gas-guzzling cars, regardless of the impact that might have on the environment we all must share. No wonder this guy doesn't want to be told to eat his vegetables. One gets the sense that he never was. I think he might also have been absent that day in kindergarten, when they covered that whole sharing concept.

And let's also disregard for the moment the logic that has liberalism assaulting "freedoms that have been historically rooted and guaranteed", when of course it was progressives who did the fighting (and sometimes dying) to wrench racial and gender equality away from moss-backed reactionary regressives clutching "historically rooted" oppressions in their conservative little hands (along with their guns, of course). And, I might add, it was progressives who also did



the same to end slavery and even liberate the USA from British imperialism all in opposition to lovely “historically rooted” and even biblically sanctioned traditions.

Finally, let’s also leave aside the “big-city, left-wing state slavery” which I’m surprised to be informed that I’ve been living in. What’s most astonishing is the degree to which the Stalinist government has hidden my chains. They don’t even rattle when I drink my government-approved latte. I hardly notice them as I run to catch my mandatory subway ride to the communist indoctrination movie I’m forced to watch each and every evening. So clever! So insidious!

Hey, and how about those Wall Street slaves, too, working in Manhattan and living in Connecticut, two ultra-lefty big-city bastions of liberalism? Don’t you feel bad for them, enslaved by the government, and forced to make tens of millions of dollars in financial transactions so unregulated by the government that they can crash the entire global economy? That’s some real oppression, pal. And I know they weep for their lost freedom each time they climb in their helicopters for the weekend trip to the Hamptons, where they are forced by the government to live on sprawling mansions and have decadent parties all night long. If only there was an underground railroad to whisk them away to the opulence and freedom of the rural South!

But, let’s leave all that aside for the moment, and just think about this notion that liberalism is the ideology of big oppressive government, and conservatism is the ideology of freedom from government repression. I dunno. Seems just a wee bit dubious if you scratch the surface a little. Ironic, even.

Is the fear of an intrusive big brother the reason why conservatives want the government to regulate women’s reproductive systems, instead of allowing them to handle it themselves?

Is that why conservatives want the government to prevent people living in agony with terminal diseases from choosing to end their own lives?

Is that concern about big government why they want it to decide which substances people can imbibe?

Is that why they want the government to prevent doctors from prescribing medical marijuana to help retching chemotherapy patients stay alive?

Is the conservative commitment to freedom from an all-powerful government the reason why they’ve spent the last decade gutting the Fourth Amendment protection against searches and seizures without a warrant?

Is the commitment to small government the reason our regressive friends favor laws controlling who consenting adults are allowed to sleep with?

Or who they’re allowed to marry?

Or if they can use birth control?

Is this what they meant when they demanded that the Republican Congress pass legislation intervening in Terri Schiavo’s family medical tragedy? Is this the freedom from a repressive nanny-state they had in mind when they applauded George Bush for flying across the country in the middle of the night to sign that bill?

It all seems a little confusing to me. I hear the regressive right talking tough and thumping their chests, all about the big bad government which takes away our liberty, and enslaves us. You know, like the French. Those people who are always out on the streets protesting their government, en masse. Because, as slaves, they’ve been forced to ... protest ... their ... own ... government ... Er, somethin’ like that ...

Yep, somehow, these kooks have decided that they’re the small government people. And yet when I think about what the right favors with respect to anything involving personal liberties, sexuality, freedom from repressive government intrusion, even the decision to end one’s own life – it’s always just the opposite story. More government intrusion and regulation, in the very most personal aspects of our lives. Hmmm. It just doesn’t seem to make a lot of sense.

Here’s the deal. There are basically two

**Is the conservative commitment to freedom from an all-powerful government the reason why they’ve spent the last decade gutting the Fourth Amendment protection against searches and seizures without a warrant?**

## THE CRAZIES WITHIN?

I don't have a problem with the nanny state keeping kids out of factories, where they used to work twelve-hour shifts. Yes, it's an intrusion on the freedom of the magical marketplace, but I'm okay with that

categories of government interference in people's affairs we can distinguish, the economic and the social.

When it comes to the economic side of the equation, old-fashioned real conservatives always did favor less government. Less taxation, less spending, less regulation and less government ownership of industries. Today's regressives, however, are really just kleptocrats. When Republicans like Ronald Reagan or George W. Bush come to power, they spend far more than Democrats (who aren't terribly liberal, but leave that aside). Reagan tripled the national debt in eight years, and Bush doubled it again, from \$5.5 trillion to \$11 trillion. The only real difference these days is that so-called conservatives use big spending for purposes of funneling money to cronies like Halliburton or Exxon-Mobil, while so-called liberals do a bit less of the same, and maybe throw a bone or two to the middle class every once in a while.

On the social side, however, the conservative trope about theirs being the ideology of freedom is a total joke and an ugly lie. These are the people who want the government in your underpants, who want the government reading your mail without a warrant, who want to control who you sleep with and who you marry, and who even want to force you to live in agony when you just want to crawl off and die. These are the people who stood in the doorways blocking the movements for racial and sexual equality.

I can't really think of freedoms more personal and more crucial than these. And every time I turn around, I see sickening demands from sickened regressives to take these away from all of us. (What they then do themselves, privately, of course, is another matter entirely. Just ask Larry Craig. Or Mark Foley. Or David Vitter. Or Jimmy Swaggart. Or Ted Haggard. Or Mark Sanford. Or ... ) As if that isn't bad enough, then we have to be lectured on how they're protecting us from the big bad nanny state, come to deprive us of the very freedom they are in fact trying to get the big bad state to deprive us of.

Call me crazy, but I don't want my neigh-

bor on the right to have the freedom to build an abattoir on his land, and my neighbor on the left to be able to construct a sulfur processing factory.

Call me nutty, but I don't want parents to be free to deny their children an education, or to prevent them from seeing a doctor when they're seriously ill. I also don't think parents should be able to punish their kids any way they want, and I'd like the government to make sure children aren't harmed and abused. Similarly, I'm just a bit old-fashioned about things like child labor laws. I don't have a problem with the nanny state keeping kids out of factories, where they used to work twelve-hour shifts. Yes, it's an intrusion on the freedom of the magical marketplace, but I'm okay with that.

Indeed, maybe it's the knee-jerk Trotskyism in me, but I like the idea of the government making sure that working conditions are safe for all workers.

I like the government mandating a forty hour work week.

I like the government monitoring my food and drugs for safety.

I like the government requiring that the cars and airplanes I ride in are safe.

I want the government to make sure that industries don't pollute the land and air and water we all share, padding their profits through environmental destruction.

I know, I know. It's weird. But somehow I think that's a better country than the one my regressive friends have in mind.

Speaking of whom ...

Liars? Delusional? Petrified? Hypocritical? Idiomatic?

I guess it is all of the above, after all. Petrified and delusional regressives tell massive lies about supposed freedom that are riddled with idiotic hypocrisy.

I hope they'll forgive me for choosing my big-city, left-wing, European socialist, liberal slavery, radical vision of the good life over theirs.

After all, it goes better with my government-restricted, nanny-state regulated, mandatory latte.

**CT**

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# Cutting through the static

The following six pages feature the introduction and three essays from **Amy Goodman's** latest book, *Breaking The Sound Barrier*

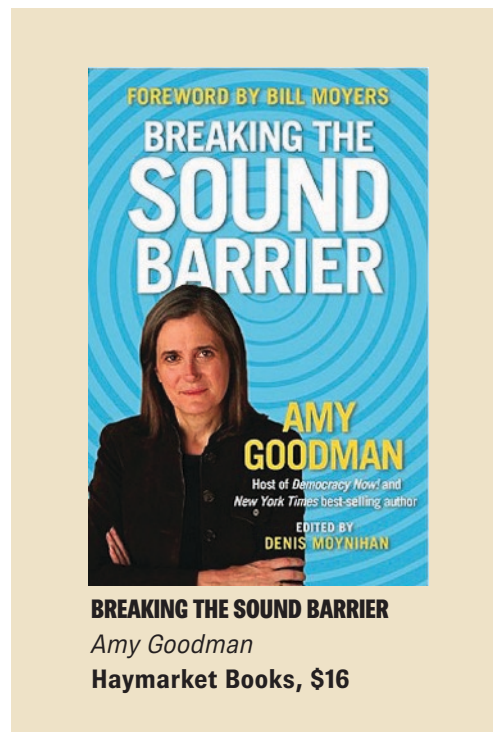
## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Beyond the Nine-Minute Sound barrier

**M**y goal as a journalist is to break the sound barrier, to expand the debate, to cut through the static and bring forth voices that are shut out. It is the responsibility of journalists to go where the silence is, to seek out news and people who are ignored, to accurately and clearly report on the issues – issues that the corporate, for-profit media often distort, if they cover them at all.

What is typically presented as news analysis is, for the most part, a small circle of pundits who know so little about so much, explaining the world to us and getting it so wrong. While they may appear to differ, they are quibbling over how quickly the bombs should be dropped, not asking whether they should be dropped at all.

Unfortunately, as a result, people are increasingly turning away from the news at a time when news media should be providing a forum for discussion – a forum that is honest and open, that weighs all the options, and that includes those deeply affected by US policy around the globe. I am not talking about a fringe minority or the silent majority, but a silenced majority, silenced by the corporate media. The media's job is to be



the exception to the rulers, to hold those in power accountable, to challenge, and to ask the hard questions – to be the public watchdog.

What is typically presented as news analysis is, for the most part, a small circle of pundits who know so little about so much, explaining the world to us and getting it so wrong. While they may appear to differ, they are quibbling over how quickly the bombs should be dropped, not asking whether they should be dropped at all

The media also need to find stories of hope, to tell stories that resonate with people's lives in the real world (not the reel world). The media are going through profound changes. The Internet undermines traditional business models that have enriched for-profit media companies. News-

the exception to the rulers, to hold those in power accountable, to challenge, and to ask the hard questions – to be the public watchdog.

**These large corporations, however, are trying to control the Internet, to restrict the free flow of information, to restore their historical role of for-profit arbiter of what we can and cannot read, watch, or hear**

papers are folding at an alarming rate, like Denver's *Rocky Mountain News*, shuttered after almost 150 years. Others have stopped printing paper editions, moving online, like the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. In fact, most papers are still profitable – just not profitable enough for Wall Street. Shareholders demand a return on investments, attaching no value to the crucial role that journalism plays in society.

Increasingly restless, people are looking for alternative sources of information in this complex world. They are getting savvier at pursuing the news sources they want, when and how they want it – on websites, through audio and video podcasting, on mobile platforms. They critique, share, excerpt, and repost the content they appreciate, adding their insights, running circles around the old networks while building their own trusted online communities. Many contribute reporting, joining the global ranks of the increasingly important citizen (and non-citizen) journalists. All this was enabled because the Internet has been free and unfettered, driven by “net neutrality,” the rules of the Internet that have kept its content and uses equal – that have made web sources like *democracynow.org* as readily available as the sites of the major media corporations. These large corporations, however, are trying to control the Internet, to restrict the free flow of information, to restore their historical role of for-profit arbiter of what we can and cannot read, watch, or hear. Preserving net neutrality will prevent their digital oligopoly, keeping the Internet a level playing field.

Despite the opportunities this new media environment provides, there is still no replacing the historically crucial role played by the seasoned muckraker in our society. How can journalism be supported sustainably? There has been much discussion of “nonprofit” journalism. I! has been practicing nonprofit journalism for 14 years, following the lead of Pacifica Radio, which has been at it for more than 60 years, brought to

you by the audience – not by corporations that profit from war.

Democracy Now! is a national, daily, independent, award-winning news program, pioneering the largest public media collaboration in the United States. We broadcast on Pacifica, NPR, community, and college radio stations; on public access, PBS, and satellite television; and on the Internet at *democracynow.org*. *Democracy Now!*'s podcast is one of the most popular on the web. We shepherd our resources carefully, invest in people, develop and use open source technology, and don't answer to advertisers.

I remember as the bombs were falling on Baghdad in 2003, when we got an e-mail from Radio Skid Row, a Sydney, Australia, community radio station that carries *Democracy Now!* They received a comment from a listener asking, “How is it that the best coverage of the war is coming from the poorest station in Sydney?” This is what independent media is all about: unembedded, investigative, international journalism.

The columns collected here are stories from both the streets and the suites, bringing out voices from all over this increasingly globalized world. Unprecedented changes are affecting everyone, everywhere. I have tried to go beyond the nine-second sound bite to bring you a taste of the whole meal. I see the media as a huge kitchen table that stretches across this globe, one we all sit around to debate and discuss the most critical issues of the day: war and peace, life and death. Anything less than that is a disservice to a democratic society.

2. NOVEMBER 30, 2006

## **The Art of War and Deception**

“**E**very great work of art goes through messy phases while it is in transition. A lump of clay can become a sculpture; blobs of paint become paintings which inspire.”

No, this is not Pablo Picasso speaking, but Major General William B. Caldwell IV, spokesman for the Multinational Force–Iraq, comparing the carnage in Iraq to a work of art in another audacious attempt to paint Iraq as anything other than a catastrophe.

The general's remarks do bring the great artist to mind. Picasso's epic painting *Guernica*, named after the city in Spain, captured the brutality of the bombing of that city during another civil war, the Spanish Civil War.

The painting, almost 30 feet wide, is a globally recognized depiction and artistic condemnation of war. Picasso shows the terror on the faces of people, the frightened animals. He shows the dead, the dying, the dismembered. A tapestry reproduction of it adorns the lobby outside of the United Nations Security Council.

In February 2003, before then–US Secretary of State Colin Powell gave his major push for war at the United Nations – a speech he would later call a “blot” on his record – a blue curtain was drawn across the tapestry so that the image would not be the backdrop for press statements on the coming war. Immediately, posters and banners of Picasso's *Guernica* began appearing at the anti-war demonstrations sweeping the globe.

The attempted control of imagery and propaganda, language and spin has been a high priority of the Bush administration. Yes, the Pentagon forbade photographing the flag-draped coffins of fallen soldiers. But the manipulation goes beyond the war.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed.” If Eisenhower worked for the government today, he would have to revise his statement. Recently, the Bush administration stopped using the words “hunger” or “hungry” when describing the millions of Americans who can't afford to eat. Instead of suffering from hunger, the Agriculture Department now says these people are experiencing “very low food security.”

While the Bush administration has had some success in covering up the truth, it seems like reality is finally beginning to outpace its efforts.

Take, for example, Hurricane Katrina. A side effect of the Bush administration not responding to that disaster in a timely fashion is that when the network reporters went to New Orleans, there were no troops to embed with. What we saw for one of the first times was the network correspondents reporting from the victims' perspective. Day after day, unspun, unfiltered.

Bodies floated across our TV screens. I remember a young woman reporter interviewing a man whose wife's hand had just slipped out of his, as she told him to take care of their children. After telling his story, the man waded into the water in shock with his boy. The reporter started to cry. The reports galvanized the country. Could you imagine if for one week we saw those images in Iraq: babies dead on the ground, women with their legs blown off by cluster bombs, soldiers dead and dying. Americans are a compassionate people. They would say no – war is not an answer to conflict in the twenty-first century.

The debate now in vogue is whether Iraq is in a civil war. Sectarian violence on a mass scale is acknowledged all around: Gone are the harangues that the media are not covering the “positive stories” or the “good news” – there simply is no good news in Iraq. The Iraqi Ministry of Health estimated that 150,000 Iraqis have died since the invasion. An October medical journal article estimated the civilian death toll as somewhere near 655,000.

The US invasion and occupation of Iraq has now lasted longer than the US involvement in World War II. Iraqis suffered the most violent day in the entire war while Americans were celebrating Thanksgiving. Iraq, like Spain in the 1930s, is in a civil war. A civil war started by the US invasion and fueled by the US occupation. The shroud over the UN's *Guernica* tapestry is gone. Now the only shrouds worth noting

**Bodies floated across our TV screens. I remember a young woman reporter interviewing a man whose wife's hand had just slipped out of his, as she told him to take care of their children. After telling his story, the man waded into the water in shock [with his boy. The reporter started to cry**

“I was in terrible pain, and I started to scream. When they started taking pictures, I could see that they were people who were masked. They were dressed in black from head to toe, and they were also wearing surgical gloves”

are those that wrap the victims of the daily slaughter in Iraq.

3. DECEMBER 18, 2007

## Surviving a CIA 'Black Site'

The kidnap and torture program of the Bush administration, with its secret CIA “black site” prisons and “torture taxi” flights on private jets, saw a little light of day this week. I spoke to Mohamed Farag Ahmad Bashmilah in his first broadcast interview. Bashmilah was a victim of the CIA’s so-called extraordinary rendition program, in which people are grabbed from their homes, out of airports, off the streets, and are whisked away, far from the prying eyes of the US Congress, the press, far from the reach of the courts, to countries where cruelty and torture are routine.

Bashmilah is being represented by the American Civil Liberties Union and by the New York University School of Law International Human Rights Clinic in a lawsuit with four other victims of CIA rendition. They are suing not the US government, not the CIA, but a company called Jeppesen Dataplan Inc., a subsidiary of Boeing Corp. A former Jeppesen employee, Sean Belcher, entered an affidavit in support of Bashmilah, reporting that Jeppesen executive Bob Overby bragged, “We do all of the extraordinary rendition flights,” further explaining to staff that he was speaking of “the torture flights,” and that they paid very well.

Through a translator, over the phone from his home in Yemen, Bashmilah described how his ordeal began on October 21, 2003, when he was arrested in Amman, Jordan:

“It was approximately six days, but what I endured there is worth years. They wanted me to confess to having some connections to some individuals of al-Qaeda. They tried

several times to get me to confess, and every time I said no, I would get either a kick, a slap, or a curse. Then they said that if I did not confess, they will bring my wife and rape her in front of me. And out of fear for what would happen to my family, I screamed and I fainted. After I came to, I told them that ‘please, don’t do anything to my family. I would cooperate with you in any way you want.’”

After signing a false confession, he was told he was going to be released. In the process of being led through the Jordanian intelligence facility, he lifted his blindfold.

“I saw another man who had a Western look. He was white and somewhat overweight and had dark glasses on. I realized then that they were probably handing me over to some other agency, because during the interrogations I had with the Jordanians, one of the threats was that if I did not confess, they will hand me over to American intelligence.”

He was prepared for transit

“...stripped completely naked. They started taking pictures from all directions. And they also started to beat me on my sides and also my feet. And then they put me in a position similar to the position of prostration in Muslim prayer, which is similar to the fetal position. And in that position, one of them inserted his finger in my anus very violently. I was in terrible pain, and I started to scream. When they started taking pictures, I could see that they were people who were masked. They were dressed in black from head to toe, and they were also wearing surgical gloves.”

He says he was put in a diaper, had his eyes and ears covered, a bag was put over his head, and he had additional earphones put on his head to block noise. He was then flown to Kabul, Afghanistan, where he was held in solitary confinement for close to six months. He believed he was being held by Americans.

“Some of the interrogators would come to me and interrogate me in the interrogation room, and they would tell me, “You should

calm down and be comforted, because we'll send all this information to Washington." And they would say that in Washington, they will determine whether my answers are truthful or not."

Although kept isolated from other prisoners, he managed to overhear some of them speculating that they were being held at Bagram Air Base. He went on to say that he was kept awake with blaring music and was held in shackles that were removed only for periodic interrogations.

While Bashmilah was being interrogated and tortured, he was also visited by "psychiatrists." "[T]he therapy mainly consisted of trying to look at my thoughts and trying to interpret them for me, in addition to some tranquilizers."

Bashmilah attempted suicide three times, staged a hunger strike that was painfully ended with a feeding tube forced down his nose, and was denied access to a lawyer, to any human rights group, to the International Committee of the Red Cross. In effect, he was disappeared.

On May 5, 2005, he was transferred to a prison in Yemen, where he eventually gained access to his family. Amnesty International got involved. He was released in March 2006 with no charges relating to terrorism.

Mohamed Bashmilah said there were cameras in his cells and interrogation rooms. Perhaps tapes were made of his ordeal. Let's hope that the CIA doesn't destroy these, too.

#### 4. MARCH 24, 2009

## Lessons of the Exxon Valdez

**T**wenty years ago, the Exxon Valdez supertanker spilled at least 11 million gallons of oil into Alaska's pristine Prince William Sound. The consequences of the spill were epic and continue to this day, impacting the environment and the econo-

my. Instead of seeing it as just a pollution story, Riki Ott considers the *Exxon Valdez* disaster to be a fundamental threat to US democracy.

Ott, a marine toxicologist and commercial salmon "fisherma'am" from Cordova, Alaska, opens her book on the disaster, *Not One Drop*, with the words of Albert Einstein: "No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it."

The massive spill stretched 1,200 miles from the accident site, and covered 3,200 miles of shoreline and an incredible 10,000 square miles overall.

Early on March 24, 1989, Ott, who was on the board of the Cordova District Fishermen United, was airborne, surveying the scene:

"[I]t was a surreal scene. It was just drop-dead gorgeous, March, sunrise, pink mountains glistening with the sunrise. And all of a sudden we come on the scene, where there's this red deck of this oil tanker that's three football fields long; flat, calm water, dark blue; and there's this inky-black stain that's just stretching with the tide."

News of the spill went global, and people poured into Valdez, Alaska, to start the cleanup. Sea life was devastated. Ott says up to half a million sea birds died, along with 5,000 sea otters, 300 or so harp seals, and billions of young salmon, fish eggs, and young juvenile fish. The death of the fish eggs created a long-term but delayed impact on the herring and salmon fisheries in Prince William Sound. By 1993, the fisheries had collapsed.

Families lost their livelihoods after taking huge loans to buy boats and expensive fishing permits. While the salmon fishery has improved, the herring have never come back.

This economic disruption is one basis of legal action against Exxon-Mobil, the biggest oil corporation in the world. Complex litigation has dragged on for two decades, and ExxonMobil is winning. There are 22,000 plaintiffs suing ExxonMobil. A jury awarded the plaintiffs \$5 billion in damages, equal to what was, at the time,

**Bashmilah attempted suicide three times, staged a hunger strike that was painfully ended with a feeding tube forced down his nose, and was denied access to a lawyer, to any human rights group, to the International Committee of the Red Cross. In effect, he was disappeared**

**The power of ExxonMobil to battle tens of thousands of citizens has pushed Ott to join a growing number of activists who want to put corporations back in their place by stripping them of their legal status as “persons”**

a year’s worth of Exxon profits. This was cut in half by a US appeals court, then finally lowered to just over \$500 million by the Supreme Court. During the 20 years of court battles, 6,000 of the original plaintiffs have died. ExxonMobil, with its billions in annual profits and armies of lawyers, can tie up the *Valdez* case in the courts for decades, while the injured commercial fishers slowly die off.

The power of ExxonMobil to battle tens of thousands of citizens has pushed Ott to join a growing number of activists who want to put corporations back in their place by stripping them of their legal status as “persons.”

A 19th-century US Supreme Court decision gave corporations the same status as people, with access to the protections of the Bill of Rights. Ironically, this comes from the Fourteenth Amendment’s “equal protection clause,” adopted to protect freed slaves from oppressive state laws after the Civil War. Corporations were historically chartered by states to conduct their business. States could revoke a corporation’s charter if it broke the law or acted beyond its charter.

Corporations’ “free speech” is interpreted to include making campaign contributions and lobbying Congress. People who break laws can be locked up; when a corporation breaks the law – even behaving criminally

negligently, causing death – rarely are the consequences greater than a fine, which the corporation can write off on its taxes. As Ott put it, “If ‘three strikes and you’re out’ laws can put a person in prison for life, why not a corporation?” So-called tort reform in US law is eroding an individual’s ability to sue corporations and the ability for courts to assess damages that would actually deter corporate wrongdoing.

Ott and others have drafted a “Twenty-Eighth Amendment” to the Constitution that would strip corporations of their personhood, subjecting them to the same oversight that existed for the first 100 years of US history.

With the global economic meltdown and welling public outrage over the excesses of executives at AIG as well as over other bailout beneficiaries, now just might be the time to expand public engagement over the imbalance of power between people and corporations that has undermined our democracy. **CT**

*Amy Goodman is the host of the radio/TV program Democracy Now! - [www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org)  
Her previous books, co-authored with David Goodman, are **The Exception To The Rulers, Standing Up To The Madness, and Static***

Amy Goodman breaks through the corporate media’s lies, sound-bites, and silence in this wide-ranging new collection of articles.

## BREAKING THE SOUND BARRIER

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# Taking flight: memories of diaspora

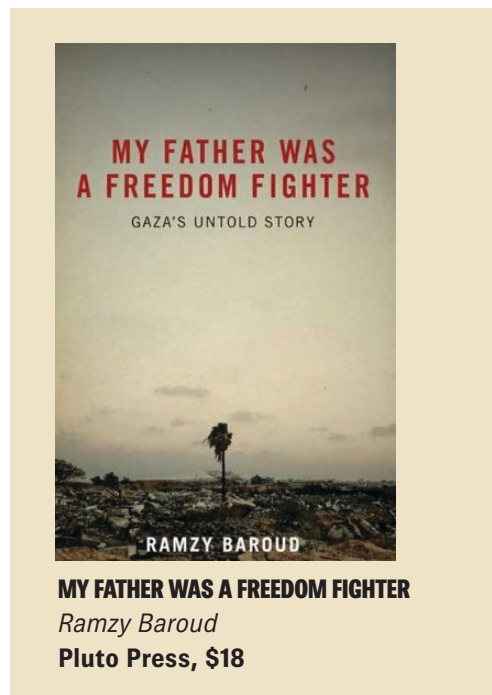
**Ramzy Baroud's** family expected they'd soon return home after being expelled by Zionist militias in 1948. They're still waiting

*The following is an excerpt from Ramzy Baroud's book, **My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story**. The events take place in Baroud's historic home of Beit Daras, one of the nearly 500 Palestinian villages that were destroyed by Zionist militias in 1948. Baroud's father, a very young boy, and his family are fleeing on foot to their new destiny in a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, where they remain to this day*

Spring was one of the most beautiful times of the year in the countryside of Palestine. With everything in full bloom – apricots, almonds, oranges and lemons – the perfume carried itself on the wind for miles. As the villagers embarked on this rite of passage, many captured a long moment to breathe in the fragrance of the fields and orchards, to snatch a large handful of the earth of Beit Daras, wrap it in a small piece of cloth and tuck it away for safe keeping. Deeds and keys were stored safely.

Grandpa Mohammed mounted his faithful donkey with a few of the family's belongings and young daughter Mariam. Ibrahim was in his mother's arms. Ahmed walked alongside his father, and my father, Mohammed, barefoot and confused, trotted behind. It was another trail of tears of sorts.

Neither parent had answers to the chil-



They headed south. That was all they knew. First to Isdud, then to Hamameh, then to Gaza. Everywhere they settled, they were chased with mortars and airplanes and bombs

dren's incessant questions, "Where are we going?"

They headed south. That was all they knew. First to Isdud, then to Hamameh, then to Gaza. Everywhere they settled, they were chased with mortars and airplanes and bombs. As the bombardments progressed and more villages were razed, the roads became more and more populated, some people carrying on with a great sense of urgency, others wandering aimlessly and in a daze.

In a mix of rage and relief, Zeinab swept Mohammed up into her arms, chastising him while smothering him with kisses. For the rest of the journey, Zeinab would never let anyone fall behind

Grandpa Mohammed was a man of faith. He insisted that if the Arabs were to abandon the Palestinians, God would not. Muddied, with bloody feet and empty bellies, the children could hardly argue with their father's wisdom, even as they passed an occasional body in the middle of the road, or a frantic mother running in the opposite direction weeping for her lost children.

"God will take care of us," Grandpa Mohammed encouraged. Yet, there was no one in sight but fleeing refugees, blown up bodies, starved children, and crying women. "What kept Beit Daras standing for a thousand years can always bring it back," he insisted. But the many trucks and numerous donkeys walking the dirt road, loaded with whatever families managed to salvage told of another story.

The number of refugees was growing by the hour. In Beit Daras everyone knew everyone. But not anymore. The number of familiar faces was dwindling. Many died. Many fled elsewhere, and those heading to Gaza were now joined by so many new faces, equally pale and teary, from numerous villages that extended beyond the world of Beit Daras.

Mohammed, the son, was hungry and he was tired. The sun was oppressive and beat down on the back of his neck; trotting behind his mother he stopped under the shade of a tree for just a few moments. It didn't take long for the boy to regain his strength and he ran ahead to catch up with his family. Meanwhile, Zeinab couldn't remember the last time she had seen him, and discovered that Mohammed was no longer behind her. She became hysterical, calling his name and running directionless; a deep seeded pain in her belly warned her of losing her boy forever. She asked everyone whopassed, "Peace be upon you, have you seen my boy, Mohammed?", or "For God's sake, have you seen my son? He is ten years old and he went missing this morning..." But she was one of so many that had become separated from their children. Mothers and fathers would express their

commiseration, others would say nothing, but for a short moment they would share a knowing gaze, and then sadly move on. After an eternity had passed that afternoon, Zeinab spotted her son, gently tugging on the sleeve of another mother, repeating the same supplications as Zeinab, "Peace be upon you, have you seen my mother?" In a mix of rage and relief, Zeinab swept Mohammed up into her arms, chastising him while smothering him with kisses. For the rest of the journey, Zeinab would never let anyone fall behind.

Grandpa Mohammed, though he managed to carve a safe route for his family's future, lost every sense of direction, every element of sanity and control. In a matter of days, he was left with nothing but a donkey and a few old blankets. The family had decided to leave the new blankets at home in Beit Daras, for they would be returning soon and didn't want the new blankets to be dirtied and damaged while they were away. Did Grandpa Mohammed know that Beit Daras was no longer the beloved village he left behind? The houses were blown up, the fields burned. The great mosque was razed with dynamite. The diwans where the mukhtars met to drink coffee with the elders of the village were gone. The elementary school. Al-Massriyyen neighborhood. The small mud-brick home with the dove tower. The citrus orchard that perfumed the village every spring. All had gone.

Still standing, however, were two giant pillars demarcating where the old mosque once stood. Grandpa Mohammed spent much of his youth, resting against the mosques' white-washed walls, seeking God's mercy and blessing. "Allah always comes to the side of the oppressed," he told his family. Mohammed the son was worried about his school and his one textbook, the shattered hopes of an exciting summer, the friends whom he would never see again. **CT**

*Ramzy Baroud's is also author of The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle (Pluto Press, London)*

# The attack on humanitarian law

Did members of the US House of Representatives read the Goldstone report on the fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict before they rejected it? It seems unlikely, says **Stephen Zunes**

In a stunning blow against international law and human rights, the US House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a resolution on November 3 attacking the report of the Upoliticians read the Goldstone report befined Nations Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict. The report was authored by the well-respected South African jurist Richard Goldstone and three other noted authorities on international humanitarian law, who had been widely praised for taking leadership in previous investigations of war crimes in Rwanda, Darfur, the former Yugoslavia, and elsewhere. Since this report documented apparent war crimes by a key US ally, however, Congress has taken the unprecedented action of passing a resolution condemning it. Perhaps most ominously, the resolution also endorses Israel's right to attack Syria and Iran on the grounds that they are "state sponsors of terrorism."

The principal co-sponsors of the resolution (HR 867), which passed on a 344-36 vote, included two powerful Democrats: House Foreign Relations Committee chairman Howard Berman (D-CA) and Middle East subcommittee chairman Gary Ackerman (D-NY). Democratic majority leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) successfully pushed Democrats to support the resolution by a more than 6:1 margin, despite the risk of

alienating the party's liberal pro-human rights base less than a year before critical midterm elections.

The resolution opens with a series of clauses criticizing the original mandate of the UN Human Rights Council, which called for an investigation of possible Israeli war crimes only. This argument is completely moot, however, since Goldstone and his colleagues – to their credit – refused to accept the offer to serve on the mission unless its mandate was changed to one that would investigate possible war crimes by both sides in the conflict.

As a result, the mandate of the mission was thereby broadened. The House resolution doesn't mention this, however, and instead implies that the original mandate remained the basis of the report. In reality, even though the report contained over 70 pages detailing a series of violations of the laws of war by Hamas, including rocket attacks into civilian-populated areas of Israel, torture of Palestinian opponents, and the continued holding of kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, there's no acknowledgement in the 1,600-word resolution that the initial mandate had been superseded or that the report criticizes the conduct of both sides. In fact, despite the report's extensive documentation of Hamas assaults on Israeli towns – which it determined constituted war crimes and possible

**The resolution opens with clauses criticizing the original mandate of the UN Human Rights Council, which called for an investigation of possible Israeli war crimes only. This argument is moot, however, since Goldstone and his colleagues refused to accept the offer to serve on the mission unless its mandate was changed**

## GETTING GOLDSTONE

**ving 80% of the US House of Representatives go on record attacking the integrity of one of the world's most respected and principled defenders of human rights is indicative of just how far to the right the US Congress has now become, even under Democratic leadership**

“crimes against humanity” – the resolution insists that it “makes no mention of the relentless rocket and mortar attacks.”

The Goldstone mission report – totaling 575 pages – contains detailed accounts of deadly Israeli attacks against schools, mosques, private homes, and businesses nowhere near legitimate military targets, which they accurately described as “a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish humiliate and terrorize a civilian population.” In particular, the report cites 11 incidents in which Israeli armed forces engaged in direct attacks against civilians, including cases where people were shot “while they were trying to leave their homes to walk to a safer place, waving white flags.” The House resolution, however, claims that such charges of deliberate Israeli attacks against civilian areas were “sweeping and unsubstantiated.”

Both the report’s conclusions and most of the particular incidents cited were independently documented in detailed empirical investigations released in recent months by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Israeli human rights group B’Tselem, among others. Congressional attacks against the integrity of the Goldstone report, therefore, constitute attacks against the integrity of these reputable human rights groups as well.

### **Equating killing Civilians with self-defense**

In an apparent effort to further discredit the human rights community, the resolution goes on to claim that the report denies Israel’s right to self defense, even though there was absolutely nothing in the report that questioned Israel’s right to use military force. It simply insists that neither Israelis nor Palestinians have the right to attack civilians.

The resolution resolves that the report is “irredeemably biased” against Israel, an ironic charge given that Justice Goldstone, the report’s principal author and defender, is Jewish, a longtime supporter of Israel,

chair of Friends of Hebrew University, president emeritus of the World ORT Jewish school system, and the father of an Israeli citizen.

Goldstone was also a leading opponent of apartheid in his native South Africa and served as Nelson Mandela’s first appointee to the country’s post-apartheid Supreme Court. He was a principal prosecutor in the war crimes tribunals on Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, took a leading role in investigations into corruption in the UN’s “Oil for Food” program in Iraq, and was also part of investigations into Argentina’s complicity in provided sanctuary for Nazi war criminals.

Having 80% of the US House of Representatives go on record attacking the integrity of one of the world’s most respected and principled defenders of human rights is indicative of just how far to the right the US Congress has now become, even under Democratic leadership. In doing so, Congress has served notice to the human rights community that they won’t consider any human rights defenders credible if they dare raise questions about the conduct of a US ally. This may actually be the underlying purpose of the resolution: to jettison any consideration of international humanitarian law from policy debates in Washington. The cost, however, will likely be to further isolate the United States from the rest of the world, just as Obama was beginning to rebuild the trust of other nations.

Indeed, the resolution calls on the Obama administration not only “to oppose unequivocally any endorsement” of the report, but to even oppose unequivocally any “further consideration” of the report in international fora. Instead of debating its merits, therefore, Congress has decided to instead pre-judge its contents and disregard the actual evidence put forward. (It’s doubtful that any of the supporters of the resolution even bothered actually reading the report.) The resolution even goes so far as to claim that Goldstone’s report is part of an effort “to delegitimize the demo-

cratic State of Israel and deny it the right to defend its citizens and its existence can be used to delegitimize other democracies and deny them the same right.” This is demagoguery at its most extreme. In insisting that documenting a given country’s war crimes is tantamount to denying that country’s right to exist and its right to self defense, the resolution is clearly aimed at silencing defenders of international humanitarian law. The fact that the majority of Democrats voted in favor of this resolution underscores that both parties now effectively embrace the neoconservative agenda to delegitimize any serious discussion of international humanitarian law, in relation to conduct by the United States and its allies.

#### License for War?

Having failed in their efforts to convince Washington to launch a war against Syria and Iran, neoconservatives and other hawks in Washington have now successfully mobilized a large bipartisan majority of the House of Representatives to encourage Israel to act as a US surrogate: Following earlier clauses that define Israel’s massive military assault on the civilian infrastructure of the Gaza Strip as a legitimate defense of its citizens and make the exaggerated assertion that Iran and Syria are “sponsors” of Hamas, the final clause in the resolution puts Congress on record supporting “Israel’s right to defend its citizens from violent militant groups and their state sponsors” (emphasis added). This broad bipartisan congressional mandate for a unilateral Israeli attack on Syria and Iran is extremely dangerous, and appears designed to undercut the Obama administration’s efforts to pursue a negotiated path to settling differences with these countries.

There are other clauses in the resolution that take quotes out of context and engage in other misrepresentations to make the case that Goldstone and his colleagues are “irredeemably biased.”

One clause in the resolution attacks the

credibility of mission member Christine Chinkin, an internationally respected British scholar of international law, feminist jurisprudence, alternative dispute resolution, and human rights. The resolution questions her objectivity by claiming that “before joining the mission, [she] had already declared Israel guilty of committing atrocities in Operation Cast Lead by signing a public letter on January 11, 2009, published in the Sunday Times, that called Israel’s actions ‘war crimes.’” In reality, the letter didn’t accuse Israel of “atrocities,” but simply noted that Israel’s attacks against the civilian infrastructure of the Gaza Strip were “not commensurate to the deaths caused by Hamas rocket fire.” The letter also noted that “the blockade of humanitarian relief, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and preventing access to basic necessities such as food and fuel, are prima facie war crimes.” In short, it was a preliminary assessment rather than a case of having “already declared Israel guilty,” as the resolution states.

Furthermore, at the time of the letter – written a full two weeks into the fighting – there had already been a series of preliminary reports from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Committee of the Red Cross documenting probable war crimes by Israeli armed forces, so virtually no one knowledgeable of international humanitarian law could have come to any other conclusion. As a result, Chinkin’s signing of the letter could hardly be considered the kind of ideologically motivated bias that should preclude her participation on an investigative body, particularly since that same letter unequivocally condemned Hamas rocket attacks as well.

The resolution also faults the report for having “repeatedly downplayed or cast doubt upon” claims that Hamas used “human shields” as an attempted deterrence to Israeli attacks. The reason the report challenged those assertions, however, was that there simply wasn’t any solid evidence to support such claims. Detailed investiga-

**There are other clauses in the resolution that take quotes out of context and engage in other misrepresentations to make the case that Goldstone and his colleagues are “irredeemably biased”**

## GETTING GOLDSTONE

**The resolution also fails to mention that while Hamas officials were willing to meet with the mission, Israeli officials refused, even denying them entrance into Israel. The mission had to fly Israeli victims of Hamas attacks to Geneva at UN expense to interview them**

tions by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch regarding such accusations during and subsequent to the fighting also came to same conclusion. As with these previous investigations, the Goldstone report determined that there were occasions when Hamas hadn't taken all necessary precautions to avoid placing civilians in harm's way, but they found no evidence whatsoever that Hamas had consciously used civilians as shields at any point during the three-week conflict.

Despite this, the House resolution makes reference to a supposed "great body of evidence" that Hamas used human shields. The resolution fails to provide a single example to support this claim, however, other than a statement by one Hamas official, which the mission investigated and eventually concluded was without merit. I contacted the Washington offices of more than two dozen co-sponsors of the resolution, requesting such evidence, and none of them were able to provide any. It appears, then, that the sponsors of the resolution simply fabricated this charge in order to protect Israel from any moral or legal responsibilities for the more than 700 civilian deaths. (Interestingly, the report did find extensive evidence – as did Amnesty International – that the Israelis used Palestinians as human shields during their offensive. Israeli soldiers testifying at hearings held by a private group of Israeli soldiers and veterans confirmed a number of such episodes as well. This fact was conveniently left out of the resolution.)

In another example of misleading content, the resolution quotes Goldstone as saying, in relation to the mission's investigation, "If this was a court of law, there would have been nothing proven." However, no such investigation carried out on behalf of the UNHRC has ever claimed to

have obtained evidence beyond a reasonable doubt, the normal criterion for proof in a court of law. This does not, however, buttress the resolution's insistence that the report was therefore "unworthy of further consideration or legitimacy." What the fact-finding mission did find was probable cause for criminal investigations into possible war crimes by both Hamas and the Israeli government. Another spurious claim of bias is the resolution's assertion that "the report usually considered public statements made by Israeli officials not to be credible, while frequently giving uncritical credence to statements taken from what it called the 'Gaza authorities', i.e. the Gaza leadership of Hamas." In reality, the report shows that the mission did investigate such statements and evaluated them based upon the evidence. The resolution also fails to mention that while Hamas officials were willing to meet with the mission, Israeli officials refused, even denying them entrance into Israel. The mission had to fly Israeli victims of Hamas attacks to Geneva at UN expense to interview them. The mission found these Israelis' testimony credible, took them quite seriously, and incorporated them into their findings.

The resolution goes on to claim that the report's observation that the Israeli government has "contributed significantly to a political climate in which dissent with the government and its actions . . . is not tolerated" was erroneous. In reality, it has been well-documented – and has been subjected to extensive debate within Israel – that the right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has interrogated and harassed political activists as well as suppressed criticism and sources of potential criticism of actions by the Israeli military, particularly non-government organizations such as the dissident soldiers' group Breaking the Silence.

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**No accountability**

The House resolution is particularly vehement in its opposition to the report's recommendation that, should Hamas and Israeli authorities fail to engage in credible investigations and bring those responsible for war crimes to justice, the matter should be referred to the International Criminal Court for possible prosecution. The resolution insists this is unnecessary since Israel "has already launched numerous investigations." However, Israeli human rights groups have repeatedly criticized their government's refusal to launch any independent investigations and have documented how the Israeli government has refused to investigate testimonies by soldiers of war crimes. (At this point, the only indictments for misconduct by Israeli forces during the conflict have been against two soldiers who stole credit cards from a Palestinian home.)

The primary motivation for the resolution appears to have been to block any consideration of its recommendation that those guilty of war crimes be held accountable. Since the ICC has never indicted anyone from a country which had a fair and comprehensive internal investigation of

war crimes and prosecuted those believed responsible, the goal of Congress appears to be that of protecting war criminals from prosecution.

As a result, the passage of this resolution isn't simply about the alleged clout of AIPAC or just another example of long-standing congressional support for Israeli militarism.

This resolution constitutes nothing less than a formal bipartisan rejection of international humanitarian law. US support for human rights and international law has always been uneven, but never has Congress gone on record by such an overwhelming margin to discredit these universal principles so categorically. This is George W. Bush's foreign policy legacy, which – through this resolution – the Democrats, no less than their Republican counterparts, have now eagerly embraced. **CT**

*Stephen Zunes, a Foreign Policy in Focus senior analyst, is a professor of politics and chair of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of San Francisco.*

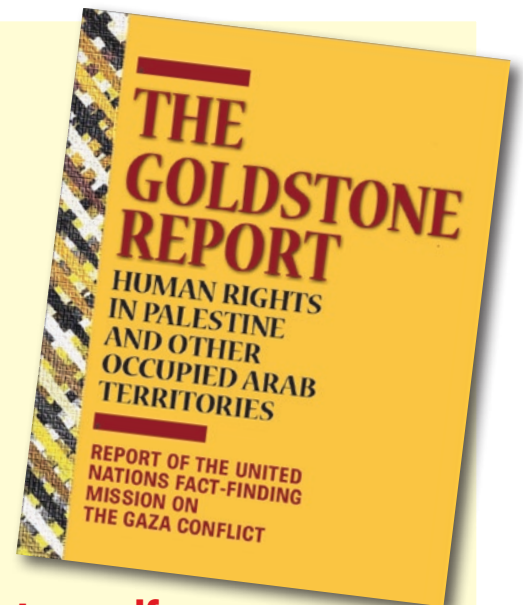
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**Since the ICC has never indicted anyone from a country which had a fair and comprehensive internal investigation of war crimes and prosecuted those believed responsible, the goal of Congress appears to be that of protecting war criminals from prosecution**

## READ THE **GOLDSTONE REPORT**

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# Self-defence stories from Gaza

**Paul J. Balles** views Israel's disinformation that its attack on Gaza was defensive against the background of the horrendous injuries which it deliberately inflicted on Gaza's civilian population.\*

**Amira Qirm lay on a hospital bed with her right leg in plaster, and held together by a line of steel pins dug deep into her skin. For several days after her operation Amira, 15, was unable to speak, and even now talks only in a low whisper**

**A**ccording to Amnesty International, some 1,400 Palestinians were killed in the 22-day Israeli offensive between December 27, 2008 and January 17, 2009, which agrees broadly with Palestinian figures. More than 900 of these were civilians, including 300 children and 115 women.

Two-year-old Amal Abed Rabbo, one of the 300 children casualties, died in an Israeli attack outside her house in the village of Izbit Abed Rabbo, Gaza, on 7 January 2009.

The UN Human Rights Council's Goldstone report called Israel's military assault on Gaza "a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorize a civilian population, radically diminish its local economic capacity both to work and to provide for itself, and to force upon it an ever-increasing sense of dependency and vulnerability".

Gabriela Shalev, the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, quickly rejected the report, saying it failed to take into account that the operation was in "self-defence".

Amira Qirm lay on a hospital bed with her right leg in plaster, and held together by a line of steel pins dug deep into her skin. For several days after her operation Amira, 15, was unable to speak, and even now talks only in a low whisper.

Amira watched her father die in the

street outside their home in Gaza, then heard another shell land and kill her brother Ala'a, 14, and her sister Ismat, 16; and then she spent three days alone, injured and semi-conscious, trying to stay alive in a neighbour's abandoned house.

Israel's argument: the war was a response to Palestinian rocket fire and therefore an act of self-defence.

Muhammad Balousha, aged two, waited constantly by the door listening carefully to the sounds around him, hoping to recognize the sounds of his five sisters coming home. He does not know that, when on that one night they said goodnight and went to sleep, it was forever.

On the Israeli side 13 died in this conflict, three of them civilians. In total in the past eight years, 20 people in Israel have died from rocket and mortar attacks launched by militants in Gaza.

Abdul Rahim Abu Halima, 14, was killed when a white phosphorous artillery shell hit his home on January 4. He died with two of his brothers, Zayed, eight, and Hamza, six, his sister Shahed, who was 15 months old, and their father Saadallah, 45.

Anne Bayefsky, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, writes in *The Jerusalem Post* that the charges of human rights violations are just more of "that same old bash-Israel agenda".

A boy from the Abu Halima family lost



his father, three brothers and an infant sister in a horrific fire after an Israeli phosphorus shell hit the house.

Israeli Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi has difficulty believing the soldiers' testimonies that they intentionally harmed Palestinian civilians, because the Israel Defence Force is a "moral army".

A Palestinian ambulance arrives with a patient who is barely 10-years-old and his head is wrapped in a bandage and he is unconscious and on manual ventilation. He was shot in the head by Israeli sniper fire.

Prime Minister Netanyahu says Israeli forces were exercising their right to self-defence.

Neurosurgeon Dr Ahmed Yaha cata-

logued horrific injuries such as babies being shot in the head, babies with broken spines due to being thrown by shell blasts. People burned to the bone by white phosphorus, nail bombs causing brutal injuries and a new phenomena, micro-pellets, that leave no entry wound but cause fatal internal injuries.

In self-defence?

CT

*Paul J. Balles is a retired American university professor and freelance writer who has lived in the Middle East for many years. For more information, see [www.pballes.com](http://www.pballes.com).*

*\*Descriptive images of the Gaza children are from Eman Mohammed's diary*

**Israeli Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi has difficulty believing the soldiers' testimonies that they intentionally harmed Palestinian civilians, because the Israel Defence Force is a "moral army"**

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# The war at home

John Pilger points out parallels between recent British government attacks on postal workers and the assault on miners 25 years ago

Unmatched since Margaret Thatcher's transfer of public wealth to a new gross elite, the sale, or theft, will include the Channel Tunnel rail link, bridges, the student loan bank, school playing fields, libraries and public housing estates

The postal workers' struggle is as vital for democracy as any national event in recent years. The campaign against them is part of a historic shift from the last vestiges of political democracy in Britain to a corporate world of insecurity and war. If the privateers running the Post Office are allowed to win, the regression that now touches all lives bar the wealthy will quicken its pace. A third of British children now live in low-income or impoverished families. One in five young people is denied hope of a decent job or education.

And now the Brown government is to mount a "fire sale" of public assets and services worth £16bn. Unmatched since Margaret Thatcher's transfer of public wealth to a new gross elite, the sale, or theft, will include the Channel Tunnel rail link, bridges, the student loan bank, school playing fields, libraries and public housing estates. The plunder of the National Health Service and public education is already under way.

The common thread is adherence to the demands of an opulent, sub-criminal minority exposed by the 2008 collapse of Wall Street and of the City of London, now rescued with hundreds of billions in public money and still unregulated with a single stringent condition imposed by the government. Goldman Sachs, which enjoys a personal connection with the Prime Minister,

is to give employees record average individual pay and bonus packages of £500,000. The *Financial Times* now offers a service called How to Spend It.

None of this is accountable to the public, whose view was expressed at the last election in 2005: New Labour won with the support of barely a fifth of the British adult population. For every five people who voted Labour, eight did not vote at all. This was not apathy, as the media pretend, but a strike by the public – like the postal workers are today on strike. The issues are broadly the same: the bullying and hypocrisy of contagious, undemocratic power.

## Two deliveries a day

Since coming to office, New Labour has done its best to destroy the Post Office as a highly productive public institution valued with affection by the British people. Not long ago, you posted a letter anywhere in the country and it reached its destination the following morning. There were two deliveries a day, and collections on Sundays. The best of Britain, which is ordinary life premised on a sense of community, could be found at a local post office, from the Highlands to the Pennines to the inner cities, where pensions, income support, child benefit and incapacity benefit were drawn, and the elderly, the awkward, the inarticulate and the harried were treated humanely.

At my local post office in south London, if an elderly person failed to turn up on pension day, he or she would get a visit from the postmistress, Smita Patel, often with groceries. She did this for almost 20 years until the government closed down this “lifeline of human contact”, as the local Labour MP called it, along with more than 150 other local London branches. The Post Office executives who faced the anger of our community at a local church – unknown to us, the decision had already been taken – were not even aware that the Patels made a profit. What mattered was ideology; the branch had to go. Mention of public service brought puzzlement to their faces.

**Half the price**

The postal workers, having this year doubled annual profits to £321m, have had to listen to specious lectures from Peter Mandelson, a twice-disgraced figure risen from the murk of New Labour, about “urgent modernisation”.

The truth is, the Royal Mail offers a quality service at half the price of its privatised rivals Deutsche Post and TNT. In dealing with new technology, postal workers have sought only consultation about their working lives and the right not to be abused – like the postal worker who was spat upon by her manager, then sacked while he was promoted; and the postman with 17 years’ service and not a single complaint to his name who was sacked on the spot for failing to wear his cycle helmet. Watch the near frenzy with which your postie now delivers. A middle-aged man has to run much of his route in order to keep to a preordained and unrealistic time. If he fails, he is disciplined

and kept in his place by the fear that thousands of jobs are at the whim of managers.

Communication Workers Union negotiators describe intransigent executives with a hidden agenda – just as the National Coal Board masked Thatcher’s strictly political goal of destroying the miners’ union.

The collaborative journalists’ role is unchanged, too. Mark Lawson, who pontificates about middlebrow cultural matters for the BBC and the Guardian and receives many times the remuneration of a postal worker, dispensed a Sun-style diatribe on 10 October. Waffling about the triumph of email and how the postal service was a “bystander” to the internet when, in fact, it has proven itself a commercial beneficiary, Lawson wrote: “The outcome [of the strike] will decide whether Billy Hayes of the CWU will, like [Arthur] Scargill, be remembered as someone who presided over the destruction of the industry he was meant to represent.”

The record is clear that Scargill and the miners were fighting against the wholesale destruction of an industry that was long planned for ideological reasons. The miners’ enemies included the most subversive, brutal and sinister forces of the British state, aided by journalists – as Lawson’s Guardian colleague Seumas Milne documents in his landmark work, *The Enemy Within*. Postal workers deserve the support of all honest, decent people, who are reminded that they may be next on the list if they remain silent. **CT**

*John Pilger received the Sydney Peace Prize on November 5. His latest book, **Freedom Next Time**, is now available in paperback*

**Watch the near frenzy with which your postie now delivers. A middle-aged man has to run much of his route in order to keep to a preordained and unrealistic time**

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# The S-Word and Dr Kervorkian's accountant

**Greg Palast** says the solution to America's healthcare crisis is simple: Eliminate insurance companies from the industry

**The government builds hospitals, hires doctors and, when you need the service, you just go and get it. It's kind of like the fire department. When your house is on fire, you don't call your fire insurance company, you call THE FIRE DEPARTMENT. We care first about the service, not the payment.**

**T**ell me where it hurts, Mr. President. What's killing you, Barack, is what's killing us all: an evil germ called "Medical Loss Ratio."

"Medical Loss Ratio" [MLR] is the fancy term used by health insurance companies for their slice, their take-out, their pound of flesh, their gross - very gross - profit.

The "MLR" is the difference between what you pay an insurance company and what that insurer pays out to doctors, hospitals and pharmacists for your medical care.

I've totted it up from the raw stats: The "MLR," insurance companies' margins, is about to top - holy mama! - a quarter trillion dollars a year. That's \$2.7 trillion over the next decade.

Until the 1990's, insurers skimmed only about a nickel on the dollar for their "service," Wendell Potter told me. Potter is the CIGNA insurance company PR man who came in from the cold to tell us about what goes down inside the health insurance gold mine. Today, Potter notes (and I've checked his accuracy), porky operators like AIG have kicked up their Loss Ratio by nearly 500 percent.

The industries' slice is growing to nearly a quarter of your insurance bill. All of it just paperwork and profiteering.

President Obama is never going to pull the insurance company piggies from

a trough this big, especially when the industry has made room for Congressional snouts.

The only solution to Loss Ratio piggery is to kill the pigs: eliminate health insurers from the health industry entirely.

We can't cure our ills, as our president has attempted, by attacking the problem ass-backwards. No, Mr. Obama, we don't need HEALTH INSURANCE for everyone, we need HEALTH CARE for everyone. There's a giant difference. Instead of concentrating on PAYMENT, we need to focus solely on providing the health SERVICE.

From my London days writing for the *Guardian*, I can tell you the British do NOT have national health insurance. They have a National Health Service.

The government builds hospitals, hires doctors and, when you need the service, you just go and get it. It's kind of like the fire department. When your house is on fire, you don't call your fire insurance company, you call THE FIRE DEPARTMENT. We care first about the service, not the payment.

The British government hires the doctors, like firemen, and Brits use them, like firemen, as they need them.

It works. My mother-in-law, a nurse, on a visit to England, was stunned at the speed, quality and absence of mad paperwork to fix her broken arm.

But, you might say, that's, that's SOCIALISM! Well, yes, it is. And I'm not afraid to use the S-word: Socialized Medicine. Just like America's Socialized Fire Departments. (Fun fact: socialized, i.e. publicly funded, fire departments were 'invented' by the revolutionary Ben Franklin.)

And Yes We Can get socialized medicine passed into law.

Really. It's simple: we sneak it in with the kids.

### Johnson's lesson

We can learn from Lyndon Johnson's sale of Socialist Medicare. Johnson knew that no one could argue that Granny could do without a doctor. Can the "Pro-Life" Republicans now tell us that pregnant moms and children ages 0 to 3 should be denied care? Therefore, to the Medicare program for those 65-or-older, we simply add "Kiddie Care," for those from Negative 9 months through age 3.

But instead of the wallet-busting Medicare system, in which doctors and hospitals are paid for each suture, bag of blood and pat on the head, Kiddie Care will be provided by Kiddie Care Service salaried doctors.

How do we get doctors (who now AVERAGE \$240,575 a year) to take well-paid, but not pig-paid, posts? We grab'm while they're young. We pay doctors the full cost of their medical education; and we treat them as humans during internship, not as in the current system where interns are treated as medi-slaves. In return for the public paying for their medical education, the public gets the young doctors' ten-year commitment to work for the health service at a reasonable salary. That's not my invention. The free-education idea for staffing a national health service had long ago been proposed by that wily old dog Ted Kennedy. (Damn, we miss him.)

Once the first wave of three-year-olds is about to turn four and their families face having to buy them health insurance, these millions of parents will become an unstoppable

army of lobbyists screaming for the extension of Kiddie Care to age four, then to age five, then to age six and so on. Get it?

Yes, Mr. Limbaugh, I am another bleeding heart trying to sneak socialized medicine into America. Yes, I am trying to rid us of the "free-market" insurers who are causing the bleeding. Health insurers are as useful to our health care system as a bicycle is useful to a goldfish.

There ain't no such thing as a "free market" in medical care, as there is a free market in food. You can eat peanut butter instead of dining at Maxime's. But you can't tell the surgeon, "No thanks, I can't afford a new kidney this week - I'll just have a broken arm."

A free-market for-profit insurance system means that, when you need a new pancreas, your fate is left to an insurance company computer programmed by Franz Kafka, Dr. Kevorkian and his accountant. It's you versus the Medical Loss Ratio. Good luck.

In olden days, doctors would attach leeches to suck a patient's blood. Today, we have insurance companies' Medical Loss Ratio. Both can kill you. If Obama and America want to end this sickness in the body politic, start with Dr. Kennedy's sure-fire cure: a national health service for kids - and get rid of the bloodsuckers.

### I Quit: A Personal Note

I learned of the Kiddie Care solution during my brief and ill-starred tenure at the Center for Hospital Administration Studies at the University of Chicago "Billings" Hospital. I couldn't make up that name. Years later, they hired Michelle Obama as their vice president for community affairs.

In my time, three decades ago, "Billings" handled the affairs of that poor community by shipping the uninsured, sometimes bleeding, to poor-folks hospitals. One wounded patient died on the poverty shuttle.

I quit, and swore that one day I'd write about it. I just did.

**All over Kabul, men are tensely holding AK-47s; some are pointing machine guns from flatbed trucks. But the really big guns, of course, are being wielded from Washington**

**Greg Palast** is author of the *New York Times* bestseller, **The Best Democracy Money Can Buy**. His investigations for BBC TV and *Democracy Now!* can be seen by subscribing to Palast's reports at [GregPalast.com](http://GregPalast.com)

**CT**

# The next phase of healthcare apartheid

Healthcare reform has degenerated into a sick joke at the expense of the nation's most needy people, writes **Norman Solomon**

**Not long ago, we were told that the Obama administration was aiming for a public option that could provide coverage to one out of every four Americans. Now the figure is around one out of every fifty**

In Washington, “healthcare reform” has degenerated into a sick joke. At this point, only spinners who’ve succumbed to their own vertigo could use the word “robust” to describe the public option in the healthcare bill that the House Democratic leadership has sent to the floor.

“A main argument was that a public plan would save people money,” the *New York Times* has noted. But the insurance industry — claiming to want a level playing field — has gotten the Obama administration to bulldoze the plan. “After House Democratic leaders unveiled their health care bill [on October 29], the Congressional Budget Office said the public plan would cost more than private plans and only 6 million people would sign up.”

At its best, “the public option” was a weak remedy for the disastrous ailments of the healthcare system in the United States. But whatever virtues the public option may have offered were stripped from the bill en route to the House floor.

What remains is a Rube Goldberg contraption that will launch this country into a new phase of healthcare apartheid.

People who scrape together enough money to buy health insurance will discover that they’re riding in the back of the nation’s healthcare bus. The most “affordable” policies will be the ones with the highest deductibles and the worst coverage.

We’re hearing that large numbers of lower-income Americans will be provided with Medicaid coverage in the next decade. Translation: If funding holds up, they’ll get to hang onto a bottom rung of the healthcare ladder. Many will not be able to get the medical help they need, from primary care providers or specialists.

Not long ago, we were told that the Obama administration was aiming for a public option that could provide coverage to one out of every four Americans. Now the figure is around one out of every fifty.

Not long ago, the idea was that taxpayer-funded subsidies were to be used only for the public option. But now the entire concept has been hijacked by and for the private insurance industry. As House Speaker Nancy Pelosi put it on October 8, private insurance companies “are going to get 50 million new consumers, many of them subsidized by the taxpayers.”

Pelosi was making the argument that the least the insurance industry could do, in return, would be to accept a higher level of taxation. But her comment was a telling acknowledgment that all the “public option” proposals now provide a massive funnel from the US Treasury to the insurance conglomerates. The individual mandate is a monumental giveaway to private insurance firms.

The specter of “healthcare reform” that

requires individuals to stretch their personal finances for often-abysmal insurance coverage is the worst of all worlds – government intrusion for corporate benefit without any guarantees of decent health coverage.

In effect, the individual-mandate requirement tells people that obtaining health coverage is ultimately their own responsibility – and the quality of the coverage is beside the point. In essence, when it comes to guaranteeing quality healthcare for all, the gist of the policy is: “Let’s not, and say we did.”

The predictable result is reinforcement of vast – and often deadly – inequities in access to healthcare.

With Washington making such a corporate mess of “healthcare reform,” the best way to get what we need – healthcare for all as a human right – will be to enact single-payer healthcare in one state after another.

But the House Democratic leadership has not been content to serve up a grimly pathetic “healthcare reform” bill. Speaker Pelosi has used her political leverage to

quash Congressman Dennis Kucinich’s amendment – approved months ago by the Education and Labor Committee – that would grant waivers so that states could create their own single-payer system. Pelosi removed the Kucinich amendment from the House bill.

The California legislature has twice passed a strong single-payer bill, both times vetoed by the state’s current execrable governor.

The official position of the California Democratic Party is unequivocally in favor of single-payer healthcare. And yet Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat, did what she could to sabotage the single-payer position of her own party in her own state.

Sickening.

**CT**

*Norman Solomon is co-chair of the national Healthcare NOT Warfare campaign, launched by Progressive Democrats of America. He is the author of a dozen books including **War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.***

*For more information, go to: [www.normansolomon.com](http://www.normansolomon.com)*

**In essence, when it comes to guaranteeing quality healthcare for all, the gist of the policy is: “Let’s not, and say we did”**

**HURWITT’S EYE**

Mark Hurwitt



# Room with a view

So the recession's over? Not according to freelance writer **Dave Lindorff**, who knows a few people – himself included – who are still struggling through grim times

**When I read that housing prices are picking up, or that the stock market is back over 10,000 again, it would be easy to start imagining that things are starting to look up after the worst recession since World War II.**

I'm the first to admit that you can get a little out of touch working as a freelance writer, if you aren't careful. Here I am up in my upstairs garret, surrounded by my books and computer paraphernalia, my phones and two cats, and my sources of information tend to be the piles of newspapers I have delivered, my wife, who works with other human beings at a university, my son, who goes to an urban high school, and, of course, the internet.

When I get out, it's either to do solitary repair work to rescue my barn, or to get a coffee at the local café.

So when I read that housing prices are picking up, or that the stock market is back over 10,000 again, it would be easy to start imagining that things are starting to look up after the worst recession since World War II.

But then, I do have personal evidence that this is hardly the case.

Take my work. *Business Week* magazine, a publication for which I have written for some 17 years, nearly folded and has been sold for a song by McGraw-Hill to Bloomberg, where it will operate as a shadow of its former self. One editor there wrote recently for advice because his wife had been stiffed on a \$3000 writing assignment for some company, and he wanted to know how to pursue the case in small claims court. He said they need that mon-

ey, because his current income is precarious, given the planned staff cuts Bloomberg will be making.

Another publication for which I've written for nearly as long, *Treasury & Risk* magazine, cut my word rate by 22% (and shortened my assignments), effectively giving me a 33% pay cut. Another mainstay publication, which will remain nameless, cut my word rate by 20%, and also cut back on length of assignments, making that an approximately 30% pay cut. Two other publications simply folded, while a fifth cut back on my assigned articles by 80%.

## Grim news

That's pretty grim news if you're me. I mean, I'm better off than the doughty workers at Republic Windows in Chicago, who lost their jobs altogether, and were actually being stiffed out of their last paychecks and vacation pay until they fought back by organizing a sit-down strike and a national campaign against Bank of America, which was refusing to honor a line of credit their runaway employer had with it (despite having just won some \$25 billion in taxpayer backing itself).

But I can hardly complain. The editor at one publication that was cutting me back had her own salary cut 5% and had the matching contribution to her 401(k) plan eliminated. Another editor had it worse



though: she and her colleagues on staff got hit with a 10% pay cut and had their health plan summarily terminated. In its place they got a so-called health savings account plan. But get this; it's not the standard old one where the employer makes a payment into each employee's account from which the employee is expected to pay for medical expenses. In this niggardly scheme or scam (the insurance industry euphemistically calls it "consumer-driven health care!"), the employee has to put the money into the "plan," which is really just a glorified way of saying that the employee has to front the money to pay for medical care. After spending \$3,200 in a year, then there is a major medical plan that will supposedly pay for 80% of expenses at a list of preferred providers. But it gets worse. My editor says she can't just go to any doctor or hospital, pay the cost, and have that payment deducted from her annual \$3,200 responsibility. She can only deduct what the plan provider (Aetna Insurance) decides is a "reasonable" charge – an amount that most physicians or hospitals would laugh at. The reality, then, is that this editor will probably have to pay maybe \$5-6,000 in annual medical bills before she can get anything from the major medical insurance plan on offer.

Now you could argue that I'm just looking at the publishing industry here, which we all know is in grim shape with collapsing ads and readership. But it's more than that.

When I go out to buy building supplies at my local Home Depot for my barn repair and restoration project, the parking lot on a Saturday is not full of cars. In fact, it's easy to get a slot near the exit door to load my lumber. I use the contractor's checkout, because there aren't any contractors, which tells you all you need to know about the state of the housing market where I live in suburban southeastern Pennsylvania.

I know that things are still hard for a lot of people around here, because my credit line was frozen, and I learned from someone at my bank that they were "reassessing" all

their home-equity lines of credit in view of declining property values. I was told I could apply for a new credit line, but it would be at an extortionate rate – this at a time that the effective interest rate is almost 0% at the Federal Reserve. In other words, banks are simply not extending credit these days, which to me says, kiss the idea of economic recovery any time soon goodbye. I got another indication of this when my daughter, a teacher in New York City, called to complain that American Express had jacked the interest rate on her card's unpaid balance from 9% to 34% – a level reminiscent more of a Mafia loan-sharking operation than bank revolving credit loan.

#### Time to mow

Then there's my friend down the street. He's an engineer. He used to be busy all the time designing local buildings with architects and his lawn was perpetually a mess. But these days he's free to mow his lawn and rake the leaves all he wants. Nobody's building things. His wife isn't around much, though, to keep him company. She was a vice president at Wyeth, but lost her job in that company's merger with Pfizer, and has been jobless now for over nine months. Her time is spent on the road searching for a new job in a hugely contracted industry.

The local grocery store, though it seems busy enough (no surprise since nobody's eating out these days, as witness the number of closed restaurants in the area, particularly the chains in the malls), has laid off workers on every shift, probably not because of declining sales, but because they can get away with it – every worker is so worried about the economy that they're willing to accept any lousy conditions, including a speed-up, as long as they are still working. (Look at me, I'm still writing at the same publications, for lower word rates.)

The only guy I see who's doing well these days is my local mechanic. His gas sales may be down, as people cut back because of lower incomes, fewer jobs to commute to, and higher gas prices, but his

**My daughter, a teacher in New York City, called to complain that American Express had jacked the interest rate on her card's unpaid balance from 9% to 34% – a level reminiscent more of a Mafia loan-sharking operation than bank revolving credit loan**

## RECESSION BLUES

**When my son expressed shock that one in four of his “kills” had been civilian, the recruiter said soothingly, “Don’t feel bad. It’s war. That’s really not a bad percentage”**

*Dave Lindorff is a Philadelphia-based journalist and columnist. He is the author of **Marketplace Medicine: The Rise of the For-Profit Hospital Chains** (Bantam Books, 1992) and **The Case for Impeachment** (St. Martin’s, 2006). His work is available at [www.thiscantbe happening.net](http://www.thiscantbe happening.net)*

repair business is going gangbusters. His lot is always full of cars in for repairs these days, because after all, who is going to go out and buy a new one with the job situation so iffy?

So even confined as I am in my little writer’s world here, it’s evident that we’re in a nasty spot.

### **Now the good news**

The only good news lately was a report that the Army is closing down its Army Experience Center in the Frankford Mall in Northeast Philadelphia. Set up a year ago, the Experience Center was a video-game addict’s paradise – a kind of “Pleasure Island” where the mostly male gamers get to engage in ultra realistic mass killing, with trim, muscled sports-shirt wearing recruiters cruising the floor encouraging them with lines like, “You’re a born soldier! That’s the best shooting I’ve seen all day!”

There are even two rooms there with mock-ups of a full-sized armed Humvee and a Blackhawk helicopter gunship cabin, where kids can man realistic M-30 machine guns and shoot at realistic attackers who are shown in a 3D Cinerama video setting. (I brought my 15-year-old son and his friend there for a few hours, and after the three of us had done a heart-pumping run on the Humvee, and shot up everything that jumped out at us, we were complimented by the recruiter, who told us proudly that

we’d only had a 25% error rate. “What’s an error rate?” my son asked. “Only 25% of your targets were civilians,” he replied matter-of-factly. When my son expressed shock that one in four of his “kills” had been civilian, the recruiter said soothingly, “Don’t feel bad. It’s war. That’s really not a bad percentage.”)

Apparently the Experience Center, which was a multi-million-dollar experiment that the Army hoped to expand nationwide, is no longer needed now because, according to the Pentagon, the economic crisis has pushed up recruitment numbers to above annual targets. Jobless kids are fighting to get in the doors at recruiters’ offices. (The determined protests organized by local anti-war groups like Veterans for Peace, by making the Experience Center a national news controversy, may have also led the Army to abandon its Pleasure Island plan to sucker local kids into becoming armed jackasses for the nation’s imperial project in Afghanistan.)

So even the good news isn’t good around here.

But at least I’ve managed to get the barn repaired.

Now maybe I should get some chickens and a goat to go in it. At over \$3.50 a dozen and \$4 a half gallon, the organic eggs and organic milk we buy are both getting pretty pricey on a writer’s budget, and it looks like things aren’t about to get better. **CT**



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# The war on Twitter

**Michael I. Niman** tells how the Feds busted a Twitter tweeter and impounded Curious George and Buffy videos in a terror probe

I couldn't make this stuff up if I tried. This story begins last month at the G-20 economic summit in Pittsburgh, where finance ministers and leaders from the 20 richest nations met to scheme on how to prop up global capitalism for another year. Protesters from around the world came to Pittsburgh to demand economic justice from the G-20. And New York City social worker Elliot Madison came to Pittsburgh to work with the Tin Can Communications Collective a group of anarchist communications activists providing real-time logistical reporting for, as they explain on their Web site, "activists fighting the state and capitalism."

By all accounts, Madison spent his time in Pittsburgh monitoring police calls and using Twitter to report real-time police movements around the G-20 protests. In one contentious tweet, Madison reported on a police order closing a street near the protest and ordering everyone on that street to disperse.

Anyone subsequently on that street would be arrested, whether or not they were informed of the closing. People monitoring the Tin Can tweets or subscribing to Tin Can text messages knew to avoid the closure area and hence avoid arrest by eschewing lawless behavior they otherwise might not have known was lawless. MSNBC and local news organizations also pro-

vided live coverage of the demonstrations.

Madison's tweeting came to an end, however, after the Pennsylvania State Police stormed his hotel room, guns drawn, and, according to the *New York Times*, arrested him for "hindering apprehension or prosecution," "criminal use of a communication facility," and "possession of instruments of crime." The hindering charge stems from the tweet in which he essentially acted as a reporter, reporting real-time news about the police dispersal order and street closure. By reporting on the closure and hence dissuading people from breaking the law, Madison allegedly hindered prosecution; thanks to him, there were no laws broken and no one to prosecute.

One could charge a high school guidance counselor with a similar crime if she convinced a student to forgo illicit drug abuse and hence avoid prosecution as a drug offender.

If the aim of the police was to clear the street, Madison's tweets would appear to be an aid rather than a hindrance. If the police's aim, however, was to arrest as many protestors as possible before President Barack Obama arrived at the summit and thereby undermine the protesters' right to demonstrate, Madison's reporting could derail their plan.

In a legal sense, Madison's arrest is a historic first. If Madison broke the law, so

**One could charge a high school guidance counselor with a similar crime if she convinced a student to forgo illicit drug abuse and hence avoid prosecution as a drug offender**

## TERROR TWEETS

**Like a journalist, Madison's tweets were available to the public, as anyone could subscribe to Tin Can's Twitter site – which, it turns out, was subscribed to and monitored by the police**

has every journalist who ever covered live breaking news involving the police. My local news radio station, for example, reported this morning that state troopers are intensifying enforcement of New York's ban on cell phone use by motorists on the New York Thruway. If Madison is a criminal, so is the reporter who put this story together, and the management of the radio station that aired it. Like Madison's report, this news piece will warn people not to break the law, and hence help them avoid arrest.

Madison, like a “live eye” TV or radio journalist, is reporting ongoing news. Madison's prosecution is a chilling assault on the First Amendment. And like a city beat reporter, Madison legally monitored police communications with a scanner that any hobbyist can pick up at Radio Shack. Also nothing illegal here. And like a journalist, Madison's tweets were available to the public, as anyone could subscribe to Tin Can's Twitter site – which, it turns out, was subscribed to and monitored by the police.

In an ironic twist on this story, the American Civil Liberties Union has launched an investigation into the constitutionality of the street closures and orders for law-abiding protesters to disperse. In retrospect, it appears more likely that it was Madison's accusers, and not Madison, who broke the law in Pittsburgh.

The selective prosecution of Madison appears to have more to do with Tin Can's stated support for the demonstrators than with any true violation of law. Disseminating logistical information to demonstrators (Tin Can also tweeted about workshops and shared meals) is a tradition as old as organized political demonstrations. By charging Madison, Pennsylvania is attempting to criminalize dissent.

Madison was eventually released after posting a \$30,000 bail bond. You could write this off as the actions of a wayward police unit or an overcaffeinated Pennsylvania prosecutor – except one week later the FBI and the Joint Terrorism Task Force stormed Madison's Queens home at 6am,

knocking down his front door with a battering ram and raiding his home with over a dozen officers, guns drawn.

### **Buffy the Vampire Terrorist**

After searching Madison's house for 16 hours, police carted away and impounded a Curious George doll, passports, computers, Buffy the Vampire Slayer DVDs, refrigerator magnets, a needlepoint portrait of Vladimir Lenin, letters, tax records, books, phones, flags, photos, and, according to the New York Post, gas masks, hammers, triangular pieces of metal, some kind of ammo, and about a liquid ounce of mercury.

None of this quite adds up to terrorism. There are house painters, basement cleaners, and military buffs who also have gas masks, for example. They are also now common among journalists who regularly cover political demonstrations, and they're often carried by cautious demonstrators. The need for gas masks at political rallies is an unfortunate reality in a democracy seemingly in decline.

During the G-20 summit, MSNBC cameras caught a police tear gas attack on what appeared to be peaceful protestors. Perhaps Madison should have brought the masks to Pittsburgh. And perhaps he also should have brought ear protection, as police made history by using a sonic weapon whose manufacturer warns that it could cause permanent hearing loss in an effort to disperse demonstrators. While regularly employed in overseas military operations, I believe this was the first time it had been used domestically. Police also sniped the crowd with rubber bullets, a favorite weapon of the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Who knows why someone would have mercury around the house? I recall stories about my dentist giving me a vial of the shiny toxic liquid when I was about six, to reward me for not screaming in the chair. (We lost track of it after my brother spilled it on the carpet and my mom vacuumed it up.) And I don't even want to speculate on what was in those ancient bottles of

photographic chemicals left behind in my deceased grandfather's darkroom. Sure, it's disturbing that there was mercury in Madison's home, but search any home and you're likely to score a weird haul. This is why our constitution protects against unwarranted searches – so the government can't target an individual and then go fishing for a crime. The law also protects people's right to possess items far more dangerous than hammers and heavy metals. There are more guns than people, for example, in the United States. Americans view having this stuff as a sacred right and invading someone's home and seizing their belongings as a form of state terror.

Madison's real crime, it seems, is being a self-proclaimed anarchist, which is no more illegal than being a self-proclaimed Demo-

crat or Lutheran. His tweets were not more informative or subversive than MSNBC's live coverage of the G-20 protests. And they certainly weren't much different than the Twitter chatter posted by the pro-democracy protesters in Iran, whose right to tweet was so voraciously defended by the US State Department. It seems the Pennsylvania State Police, and subsequently the FBI, may have taken a page from Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's play-book. **CT**

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**Madison's real crime, it seems, is being a self-proclaimed anarchist, which is no more illegal than being a self-proclaimed Democrat or Lutheran**

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# The joy of perpetual war

**Jo Comerford** tells how the Pentagon continues to cash in, while everyone else is forced to tighten their belts

**55% of next year's discretionary spending – that is, the spending negotiated by the President and Congress – will go to the military just to keep it chugging along**

**S**o you thought the Pentagon was already big enough? Well, what do you know, especially with the price of the American military slated to grow by at least 25% over the next decade?

So, let's sing the praises of perpetual war. We'd better, since right now every forecast in sight tells us that it's our future.

The tired peace dividend tug boat left the harbor two decades ago, dragging with it laughable hopes for universal health care and decent public education. Now, the mighty USS War Dividend is preparing to set sail. The economic weather reports may be lousy and the seas choppy, but one thing is guaranteed: that won't stop it.

The United States, of course, long ago captured first prize in the global arms race. It now spends as much as the next 14 countries combined, even as the spending of our rogue enemies and former enemies – Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria – much in the headlines for their prospective armaments, makes up a mere 1% of the world military budget. Still, when you're a military superpower focused on big-picture thinking, there's no time to dawdle on the details.

And be reasonable, who could expect the US to fight two wars and maintain more than 700 bases around the world for less than the \$704 billion we'll shell out to

the Pentagon in 2010? But here's what few Americans grasp and you aren't going to read about in your local paper either: according to Department of Defense projections, the baseline military budget – just the bare bones, not those billions in war-fighting extras – is projected to increase by 2.5% each year for the next 10 years. In other words, in the next decade the basic Pentagon budget will grow by at least \$133.1 billion, or 25%.

When it comes to the health of the war dividend in economically bad times, if that's not good news, what is? As anyone at the Pentagon will be quick to tell you, it's a real bargain, a steal, at least compared to the two-term presidency of George W. Bush. Then, that same baseline defense budget grew by an astonishing 38%.

If the message isn't already clear enough, let me summarize: it's time for the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Health and Human Services, Labor, Education, and Veterans Affairs to suck it up. After all, Americans, however unemployed, foreclosed, or unmedicated, will only be truly secure if the Pentagon is exceedingly well fed. According to the Office of Management and Budget, what that actually means is this: 55% of next year's discretionary spending – that is, the spending negotiated by the President and Congress – will go to the military just to

keep it chugging along.

The 14 million American children in poverty, the millions of citizens who will remain without health insurance (even if some version of the Baucus plan is passed), the 7.6 million people who have lost jobs since 2007, all of them will have to take a number. The same is true of the kinds of projects needed to improve the country's disintegrating infrastructure, including the 25% of US drinking water that was given a barely passing "D" by the American Society of Civil Engineers in a 2009 study.

And don't imagine that this is a terrible thing either! There's no shame in paying \$400 for every gallon of gas used in Afghanistan, especially when the Marines alone are reported to consume 800,000 gallons of it each day. After all, the evidence is in: a few whiners aside, Americans want our tax dollars used this way. Otherwise we'd complain, and no one makes much of a fuss about war or the ever-rising numbers of dollars going to it anymore.

\$915.1 billion in total Iraq and Afghanistan war spending to date has been a no-brainer, even if it could, theoretically, have been traded in for the annual salaries of 15 million teachers or 20 million police officers or for 171 million Pell Grants of approximately \$5,350 each for use by American college and university students.

#### **\$1 trillion mark**

Next March, we will collectively reach a landmark in this new version of the American way of life. We will hit the \$1 trillion mark in total Iraq and Afghanistan war spending with untold years of war-making to go. No problem. It's only the proposed nearly \$900 billion for a decade of health care that we fear will do us in.

Nor is it the Pentagon's fault that US states have laws prohibiting them from deficit spending. The 48 governors and state legislatures now struggling with budget deficits should stop complaining and simply be grateful for their ever smaller slices of the federal pie. Between 2001 and

2008, federal grant funding for state and local governments lagged behind the 28% growth of the federal budget by 14%, while military spending outpaced federal budget growth with a 41% increase. There is every reason to believe that this is a trend, not an anomaly, which means that Title 1, Head Start, Community Development Block Grants, and the Children's Health Insurance Program will just have to make do with less. In fact, if you want a true measure of what's important to our nation, think of it this way: if you add together the total 2010 budgets of all those 48 states in deficit, they won't even equal projected US military spending for the same year.

Take the situation of Massachusetts, for example. Yankee spirit or not, that state will see a 17.3% decrease in federal grants in 2010 no matter how hard Governor Deval Patrick wrings his hands. True to the American way, Patrick's projected \$5 billion fiscal year 2010 deficit will be his problem and his alone, as is his state's recently-announced \$600 million budget shortfall for 2009. Blame it on declining tax revenue and the economic crisis, on things that are beyond his control. No matter, Patrick will have to make deep cuts to elderly mental health services and disabled home-care programs, and lose large chunks of funding for universal pre-kindergarten, teacher training, gifted and talented programs in the schools, and so much more.

Still, that Commonwealth's politicians are clearly out of step with the country. On October 9, 2009, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino joined with Congressman Barney Frank in calling on President Obama to find extra money for such programs by reducing military spending 25%. President Obama, cover your ears! Menino, who actually believes that a jump in military spending contributed to "significantly raising the federal deficit and lowering our economic security," asked the federal government to be a better partner to Boston by reinvesting in its schools, public housing, transportation, and job-training programs, especially for

**Patrick will have to make deep cuts to elderly mental health services and disabled home-care programs, and lose large chunks of funding for universal pre-kindergarten, teacher training, gifted and talented programs in the schools, and so much more**

## THE PRICE OF WAR

**Don't expect it to voluntarily cut back on major weapons systems without finding others to take their place. If, as a result, our children are less likely to earn high school and college diplomas than we were, that's what prisons and the Marines are for**

young people. Of course, this is delusional, as any Pentagon budgeteer could tell you. This isn't some Head Start playground, after all, it's the battlefield of American life. Tough it out, Menino.

One principle has, by now, come to dominate our American world, even if nobody seems to notice: do whatever it takes to keep federal dollars flowing for weapons systems (and the wars that go with them). And don't count on the Pentagon to lend a hand by having a bake sale any time soon; don't expect it to voluntarily cut back on major weapons systems without finding others to take their place. If, as a result, our children are less likely to earn high school and college diplomas than we were, that's what prisons and the Marines are for.

So let's break a bottle of champagne

— or, if the money comes out of a state budget, Coke — on the bow of the USS War Dividend! And send it off on its next voyage without an iceberg in sight. Let the corks pop. Let the bubbly drown out that Harvard University report indicating that 45,000 deaths last year were due to a lack of health insurance.

Hip hip ...

**CT**

*Jo Comerford is the executive director of the National Priorities Project. Previously, she served as director of programs at the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts and directed the American Friends Service Committee's justice and peace-related community organizing efforts in western Massachusetts. This essay originally appeared at [www.afterdowningstreet.org](http://www.afterdowningstreet.org)*

**"Not since Orwell and Chomsky has perceived reality been so skilfully revealed in the cause of truth." – John Pilger**

# NEWSPEAK in the 21st Century

by David Edwards and David Cromwell

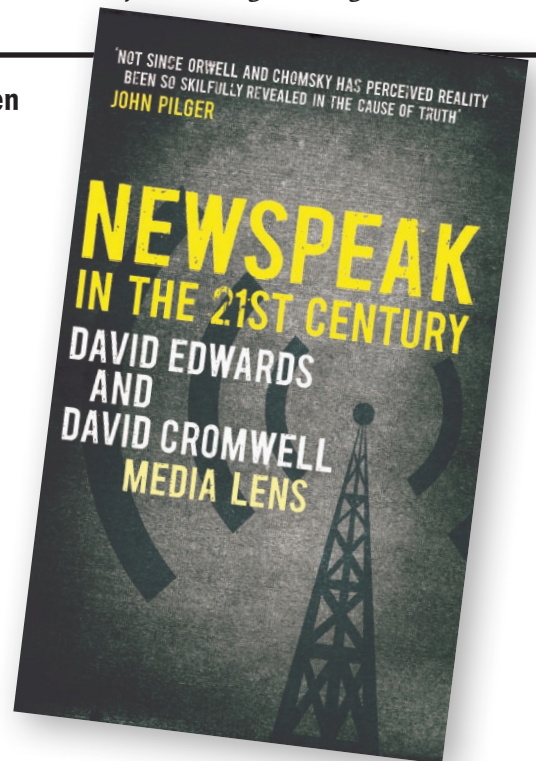
**PUBLISHED BY PLUTO PRESS, SEPTEMBER 2009**

Since 2001, Media Lens has encouraged thousands of readers to challenge the filtered and distorted version of the world provided by major newspapers and broadcasters. The media responses, collected in Newspeak, are an exposé of the arrogance and servility to power of our leading journalists and editors, starring Andrew Marr, Alan Rusbridger, Roger Alton, Jon Snow, Jeremy Bowen and even George Monbiot.

Picking up where the highly acclaimed and successful **Guardians of Power** (2006) left off, Newspeak is packed with forensic media analysis, revealing the lethal bias in "balanced" reporting. Even the "best" UK media - the Guardian, the Independent, Channel 4 News and the BBC - turn

out to be cheerleaders for government, business and war.

Alongside an A-Z of BBC propaganda and chapters on Iraq and climate change, Newspeak focuses on the demonisation of Iran and Venezuela, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the myth of impartial reporting and the dark art of smearing dissidents





# Justice in shades

A damning judgement on British army killings suggests that officials at every level have covered up torture and murder, writes **George Monbiot**

**R**obert Ouko was the Kenyan foreign minister with a fatal tendency to speak his mind. In February 1990 he was bundled into a car which allegedly contained the country's permanent secretary for internal security. His body was found shortly afterwards. His leg had been broken in two places, there was a bullet hole in his head and his corpse had been burnt. The Kenyan police conducted a thorough investigation and came to the obvious conclusion that Dr Ouko had committed suicide. This was the beginning of the cover-up that persists to this day, involving police and officials at every level of government.

I was reminded of Dr Ouko after reading the judgement on the case brought to the High Court in London by Khuder al-Sweady and other Iraqis<sup>1</sup>. They were seeking a public inquiry into the events of May 2004, when, they claim, they or their relatives were taken to a British army camp and tortured or killed. The judges published their findings on October 31 and ordered a proper inquiry. It is the most damning judgement on official collusion and concealment written since Labour came to power. Total coverage in British newspapers so far amounts to one short article in the *Guardian*<sup>2</sup>.

The claimants say that after a battle at a checkpoint in southern Iraq, some of the

survivors, including farmers cowering in nearby fields, were taken by the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment to Camp Abu Naji. Witnesses say that up to 20 prisoners were jumped on while their hands were bound, hit with rocks, had their eyes gouged out and their genitals crushed and mutilated and were then hanged or shot<sup>3</sup>. They claim that the corpses were then handed to their families as battlefield casualties.

The Royal Military Police (RMP) were supposed to have investigated these claims, but as a recent report on their methods by Greater Manchester police shows, they messed it up with panache, appointing unqualified detectives, losing evidence and failing to interview witnesses<sup>4</sup>. The RMP concluded that no one had done anything wrong, that 20 Iraqi corpses and nine live captives were brought to the camp and all were released without further injury. The Ministry of Defence has stuck to that line like a holy creed.

## This isn't Kenya

Reading the High Court judgement, you have to pinch yourself and remember that this isn't Kenya under Daniel arap Moi, but good old Blighty, where the police are impartial, the civil service disinterested and a minister's word is his bond. In a civilised country at least half a dozen senior officials would now be charged with perjury, the

**The RMP concluded that no one had done anything wrong, that 20 Iraqi corpses and nine live captives were brought to the camp and all were released without further injury**

## TORTURING TRUTH

**Thanks to an apparently botched investigation and an army cover-up, only one soldier has been convicted of any crime in relation to his killing, and that was merely inhumane treatment, for which he was jailed for one year**

secretary of state for defence would be facing impeachment hearings and a number of soldiers would be on trial for torture and murder. But in the United Kingdom, where we see only what we choose, the judgement sinks without a ripple. We carry on believing what we have always been told: that unlike other countries, we do things properly here.

The judges found that civil servants working for the Treasury Solicitor had repeatedly lied to the court, claiming that there were no further documents to disclose which might have cast light on the case. They found that the defence secretary, Bob Ainsworth, “consistently and repeatedly failed to comply” with the obligation to disclose the documents the claimants were seeking. He also slapped a Public Interest Immunity (PII) certificate on some of the evidence, preventing it from being revealed to the court. It turns out that he signed this certificate “on a partly false basis”, seeking to suppress facts that were already in the public domain. This abuse, the judges say, has caused the PII process “potentially very serious damage”. Ainsworth’s lack of candour about the evidence meant that he had wasted “the whole of the cost of these proceedings”.

But the judges were harshest about the Royal Military Police. They found that “the RMP investigation in 2004/5 was not thorough and proficient”. It was blocked for five weeks, its procedures were risible, and none of the nine surviving captives was interviewed. Worse was the quality of the evidence presented to the court by Colonel Dudley Giles, who is the deputy head of the military police and was the secretary of state’s principal witness. Giles, they found,

“was overall a most unsatisfactory witness”. The excuse he gave for not disclosing key evidence was “wholly without foundation”, “we are all firmly of the view that he lacked the necessary objectivity, proficiency and reliability”. They suggested that if ever he was presented as a witness for similar purposes again, the court “should approach his evidence with the greatest caution.”

Most important was what the judges found in some of the documents they eventually prised from the grubby hands of the state. They were, the court found, “consistent with the contention that more than nine live detainees” had been taken to the camp. As only nine came out alive, these papers support the claimants’ contention that prisoners were killed there. No wonder the government pretended that the documents didn’t exist.

### **Support victims**

At the Labour party conference last month, the home secretary rightly observed that “social justice means nothing without criminal justice ... We need to support victims and subject perpetrators to the full range of enforcement powers”<sup>5</sup>. But this admirable principle does not extend to military justice, where the army, the military police and the government collude to prevent torturers and murderers from being tried. Friday’s judgement relates to one of several cases of alleged British war crimes in Iraq. Just one - that of the hotel receptionist Baha Mousa who was beaten to death by British soldiers - has so far resulted in a conviction<sup>6</sup>. Thanks to an apparently botched investigation and an army cover-up, only one soldier has been convicted of any crime in relation to his killing, and that

**READ THE BEST OF TOM ENGELHARDT**

<http://coldtype.net/tom.html>

was merely inhumane treatment, for which he was jailed for one year<sup>7</sup>.

Even when soldiers appear to murder people on their own side, the cases are passed to the specialist investigations division of the Keystone Cops. Of the four young recruits who died in suspicious circumstances at the Deepcut training barracks, one had been shot with a bullet to each side of his head and another had five bullet wounds in his chest: the ballistics expert sent to the barracks maintains that four of them were fired from a distance and one at close range<sup>8,9</sup>. After the army destroyed crucial evidence, Surrey police decided that all four had taken their own lives. The ghost of Dr Ouko hovers into view again.

One of the tests of a functioning democracy is the extent to which its public servants are subject to the same laws as everyone else. By this measure the United Kingdom is a failed state. When the army is in the dock, Justice swaps her crown for a bandana, her sword for a Kalashnikov and her blindfold for a pair of dark glasses. The state has tried to cover up the crimes of the armed forces since the Peterloo massacre and long before. Surely in 2009 it can do

better than this?

CT

When the army is in the dock, Justice swaps her crown for a bandana, her sword for a Kalashnikov and her blindfold for a pair of dark glasses

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George Monbiot's latest book is **Bring On The Apocalypse**

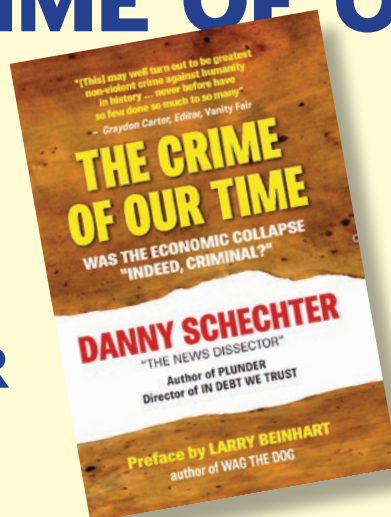
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# Kipling haunts Obama's Afghan war

**Ray McGovern** goes to a meeting in Washington, where he discovers that some things just don't seem to change

**There was a certain poetic justice that President Carter's national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who has chaired RAND's Middle East Advisory Board, was chosen to keynote the proceedings**

**T**he White Man's Burden, a phrase immortalized by English poet Rudyard Kipling as an excuse for European-American imperialism, was front and center on the morning of October 29 at a RAND-sponsored discussion of Afghanistan in the Russell Senate Office Building.

The agenda was top-heavy with RAND speakers, and the thinking was decidedly "inside the box" – so much so, that I found myself repeating a verse from Kipling, who also recognized the dangers of imperialism, to remind me of the real world:

*It is not wise for the Christian white  
To hustle the Asian brown;  
For the Christian riles  
And the Asian smiles  
And weareth the Christian down.  
At the end of the fight  
Lies a tombstone white  
With the name of the late deceased;  
And the epitaph drear,  
A fool lies here,  
Who tried to hustle the East*

With a few notable exceptions, the RAND event offered conventional wisdom to a fare-thee-well. There was a certain poetic justice that President Carter's national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who has chaired RAND's Middle East

Advisory Board, was chosen to keynote the proceedings.

As national security adviser under President Carter, Brzezinski thought it a good idea to mousetrap the Soviets into their own Vietnam debacle by baiting them into invading Afghanistan in 1979, the war which was the precursor to the great-power Afghan quagmire three decades later.

At this discussion, however, Brzezinski disclosed that he had advised the Bush/Cheney administration to invade Afghanistan in 2001, but insisted that he told Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld that the US military should not stay "as an alien force" once American objectives were achieved.

Exuding his customary confidence, Brzezinski first addressed – and ruled out – several "No's," the things that the US must not do:

– Withdrawal is "not in the range of policy options."

The US must not repeat the Soviet experience in going it alone, but rather must "use all our leverage" to make NATO's commitment stick.

–The US should not neglect the need to include "Islamic" groups in the coalition.

Brzezinski offered a much longer litany of "Yeses" – but his list was disappointingly bereft of new ideas. Indeed, it was notable only for his insistence that the US

ought to be more actively engaged in promoting a north-south pipeline through Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean.

He said, for example, that India needs access to the resources of central Asia, an area especially rich in natural gas.

Without batting an eye, Brzezinski noted that within three months the war in Afghanistan will be the “longest war in US history,” and warned that the United States could be “bogged down there for another decade or so.”

At the same time, he argued, the world impact of an early US departure “would be utterly devastating.” Quagmire, anyone?

Questioned about growing opposition to the war, he conceded condescendingly that “public fatigue” is understandable, but expressed confidence that adoption of his recommended policies would be “persuasive” enough to turn public opinion around.

One must give RAND credit for inviting a few outsiders whose remarks came closer to reflecting reality.

Former national intelligence officer for the Middle East, Paul Pillar, and Harvard professor Stephen Walt offered observations that, though eminently sensible, somehow seemed oddly out of step.

Pillar asked if what the US was doing in Afghanistan is enhancing the security of the American people. Are the costs justified, given the amount of change and the “direction of change” in the area that can be realistically expected, he asked?

Even if the US and NATO effort is, as they say, “properly resourced,” large parts of Afghanistan will remain open to the Taliban, and perhaps al Qaeda – not to mention alternative locales like Somalia and Yemen.

And then there are the counterproductive consequences.

It is a given, said Pillar, that sending more troops perceived as occupation forces will – more than any other step – bring more and more recruits to the Taliban. As for the cost, Pillar cited the recent congres-

sional testimony by Stephen Biddle, a defense policy fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Biddle, though supportive of Gen. Stanley Chrystal’s counterinsurgency approach, said it would incur “Iraq-war-scale cost for three to five years.”

Pillar asked if that kind of anticipated cost was worth what he suggested would be “at best, a slight reduction in the danger from terrorism.” This, he said, is the calculation that the President has to make.

### No Alternative?

Stephen Walt picked up on Pillar’s themes, pleading for a realistic assessment of benefits against cost. As for US troop casualties, 850 have already been killed. At a rate of 50 deaths a month, five more years would bring 3,000 dead – not to mention the many thousands more wounded.

And the longer the United States stays, the more it looks like a foreign occupier and the more various Afghan factions are pushed together by giving them a common enemy. Plus, al Qaeda will have a safe haven – in Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, even Europe – no matter the degree of “success” that the US achieves in Afghanistan.

Walt opined that it is the epitome of hubris for the US to take on the monumental task of “social engineering” the 200 million people in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and that the chances of succeeding are “not great.”

Walt also questioned the disproportionate attention in resources directed toward Afghanistan when there is little reason to send more US troops there, except that there are already US troops there.

Moreover, Walt pointed to a particularly significant “opportunity cost” in the drain on President Barack Obama’s time, noting there are lots of other problems – domestic as well as foreign – that crave his attention.

Remarkably, among virtually all the speakers there was broad consensus that Brzezinski’s first No-No would prevail –

**Al Qaeda will have a safe haven – in Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, even Europe – no matter the degree of “success” that the US achieves in Afghanistan**

## INTO THE QUAGMIRE

**Anyways, Obama grew up and went to Harvard, which is a big college somewhere near Maine or Connecticut or one of those teeny-tiny states that nobody can remember on a geography quiz – or at least nobody in my class could remember the capital of except, of course, Anne Marie Smith**

that is, that no US troop withdrawal is in the cards.

Walt put it bluntly, saying the President “painted himself into a corner” last spring and would probably not be able to solve “one of the world’s most intractable problems.”

The Harvard professor predicted that in just a few years the Obama administration will look back with huge regret on how badly it erred.

The Cato Institute’s Christopher Preble took strong issue with the notion that “a country like ours would have no alternative” to escalation. He, too, asked if adding to the US presence in Afghanistan is essential to US national security.

Or, Preble wondered, has the conflict there simply become an interest in itself – “that we must win this war because it is the war we are in.” He, too, gave US policy makers a failing grade on “the cost-benefit test.”

### **RAND and the Establishment**

The biggest surprise for me came in the remarks of well-respected diplomat James Dobbins, director of RAND’s International Security and Defense Policy Center. Dobbins provided no supporting data or reasoning to support what seemed – to me, at least – to be scare tactics.

Addressing the possibility of US departure from Afghanistan, Dobbins predicted a long list of calamities: civil war (as if one isn’t already underway), the involvement not only of Pakistan but of Iran, Russia and China; millions of refugees, widespread disease, negative economic growth, increased extremism and use of Afghanistan for more terrorism.

As for the administration’s public posture, Dobbins pointed to a need to “expand the explanation for our presence in Afghanistan,” so that the rationale will appear more commensurate with an increasing commitment” – read, more troops justified by more rhetorical flourishes.

While Dobbins performed yeoman ser-

vice in securing, for example, Iranian cooperation in originally setting up the Karzai government in Kabul, his experience with Asian insurgencies is paper-thin.

I was painfully reminded of this by his gratuitous remark that “in Vietnam we had neutralized the Viet Cong” and only when the North Vietnamese came into the fray, and the US commitment slackened, did we lose that one.

With that faux history as background, it is less surprising that Dobbins would tout, as he did, the “Powell doctrine” of overwhelming force and advocate for a still deeper US commitment in Afghanistan, to be accompanied by a more persuasive rationale to explain it.

Walt pointed out that, applying the insurgent-to-population ratio Dobbins has used for Bosnia, 600,000 troops would be needed to defeat the insurgents in Afghanistan.

RAND veteran and former US ambassador to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, addressed the public perception problem regarding the Afghan war with unusual candor: “People don’t believe we know what we’re doing.”

Still, endorsing the Brzezinski No-No dictum, Khalilzad said that “no serious person” would contemplate US withdrawal enabling “extremism” to prevail.

Khalilzad argued for playing to the US strength with a “purchasing power” approach – the United States comes up with the money to pay potential or actual insurgents more than they make fighting for the Taliban. Otherwise, he said the US needed to expand Afghan forces.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin, D-Michigan, also stressed the need for building up Afghan forces, as the administration considers increasing the US troop presence in Afghanistan. Levin spoke of the need for a 400,000-strong Afghan army and police force by 2012, trained by US and NATO specialists.

I am reminded of what former CENTCOM commander, General John Abizaid,

described to the Senate Armed Services Committee three years ago as a “major change” in the Iraq war – namely, new emphasis on training Iraqis.

The final returns are not yet in for Iraq, but in my experience this is almost always an unfruitful exercise, as many of us learned from Vietnam. Been there; done that; should have known that.

Three months after John Kennedy’s death, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara sent President Lyndon Johnson a draft of a major speech McNamara planned to give on defense policy. What follows is a segment of an audiotape of a conversation between the two on Feb. 25, 1964:

**Johnson:** *Your speech is good, but I wonder if you shouldn’t find two minutes to devote to Vietnam.*

**McNamara:** *The problem is what to say about it.*

**Johnson:** *I’ll tell you what to say about it. I would say we have a commitment to Vietnamese freedom. We could pull out there; the dominoes would fall and that part of the world would go to the Communists. ... Nobody really understands what is out there. ... Our purpose is to train [the South Vietnamese] people, and our training’s going good.*

**McNamara:** *All right, sir.*

But the Vietnamese training wasn’t “going good.” Before long, half a million American troops were in Vietnam trying to save South Vietnam’s government.

Almost always, it is a forlorn hope that unwelcome occupation troops can train indigenous soldiers and police to fight against their own brothers and sisters. That the British also seem to have forgotten these lessons, along with some of Kipling’s cautionary poetry about the risks of imperialism, is really no excuse.

If President Obama is depending on the RAND folks and embedded neo-con pundits like the *Washington Post*’s David Ignatius (his column the day after the discussion appeals for more troops “to continue the mission,” as the President and his advisers attempt to figure out what the mis-

sion should be), we are in trouble.

As I sat at the RAND event, I could not help wondering what would be the judgments of my former colleagues in the intelligence community on these key issues? Specifically, what might a National Intelligence Estimate on Prospects for Afghanistan say?

NIEs are the most authoritative genre of analytical product, embodying key judgments on important national security issues. They are coordinated throughout the 16-agency intelligence community and then signed by the Director of National Intelligence in his statutory capacity as chief intelligence adviser to the President.

An NIE can, and should, play an important role.

An estimate on Iran’s nuclear program, given to President George W. Bush in November 2007, helped derail plans by Vice President Dick Cheney and White House adviser Elliott Abrams for war on Iran.

The most senior US military officers had realized what a debacle that would be and insisted that this NIE’s key judgments be made public.

They expected, rightly, that public knowledge that Iran had stopped working on developing a nuclear warhead in 2003 would take the wind out of Cheney’s sails. Bush and Cheney were not pleased; but the NIE helped stop the juggernaut toward war with Iran.

### **There’s Always an NIE, Right?**

As one of the intelligence analysts watching Vietnam in the Sixties and Seventies, I worked on several of the NIEs produced before and during the war. All too many bore this title: “Probable Reactions to Various Courses of Action With Respect to North Vietnam.”

Typical of the kinds of question the President and his advisers wanted addressed: Can we seal off the Ho Chi Minh Trail by bombing it? If the US were to introduce x thousand additional troops into South Vietnam, will Hanoi quit? Okay, how about

**Almost always, it is a forlorn hope that unwelcome occupation troops can train indigenous soldiers and police to fight against their own brothers and sisters. That the British also seem to have forgotten these lessons, along with some of Kipling’s cautionary poetry about the risks of imperialism, is really no excuse**

## INTO THE QUAGMIRE

**After several months of exhaustive analysis, Adams had connected a whole bunch of dots, so to speak, and concluded that there were more than twice as many Vietnamese Communists under arms as the Army had on its books**

xx thousand?

Our answers regularly earned us brickbats from the White House for not being “good team players.” But in those days we labored under a strong ethos dictating that we give it to policymakers straight, without fear or favor.

We had career protection for doing that. And — truth be told — we often took a perverse delight in it.

Our judgments (the unwelcome ones, anyway) were pooh-pooed as negativism; and policymakers, of course, were in no way obliged to take them into account. The point is that they continued to be sought.

Not even Lyndon Johnson, nor Richard Nixon, would be likely to decide on a significant escalation without seeking the best guess of the intelligence community as to how US adversaries would likely react to this or that escalatory step.

Yet, would you believe there is no current National Intelligence Estimate on Afghanistan? Rather, Generals David Petraeus and Stanley Chrystal are running the show, allowing professional intelligence analysts to be mostly straphangers at planning and strategy meetings.

CIA Director Panetta, a self-described “creature of Congress,” is not going to risk putting any senior military noses out of joint by objecting, and neither is his nominal boss, Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair.

And, sad to say, National Security Adviser James Jones, in deferring to the military, is serving President Obama just as poorly as Bush apparatchik Condoleezza Rice served President Bush.

How many “militants” are there in Afghanistan? How many “insurgents?” How do you draw a distinction between a militant and an insurgent? Might these combatants be considered, in many areas of Afghanistan, resistance fighters? What would be the implications of that?

Forty-two years ago, my CIA analyst colleague Sam Adams was sent to Saigon to have it out with the Army intelligence

unit there.

After several months of exhaustive analysis, Adams had connected a whole bunch of dots, so to speak, and concluded that there were more than twice as many Vietnamese Communists under arms as the Army had on its books.

Bewildered at first, Adams quickly learned that Westmoreland had instructed his intelligence staff to falsify intelligence on enemy strength, keeping the numbers low enough to promote an illusion of progress in the war.

After a prolonged knock-down-drag-out fight, then-CIA Director Richard Helms decided to acquiesce in the Army’s arbitrary exclusion from its enemy aggregate total paramilitary and other armed elements numbering up to 300,000.

These categories had been included in previous estimates because they were a key part of the combat force of the Communists. The Adams/CIA best estimate was total Communist strength of 500,000.

However, the doctored estimate went to the President and his advisers in November 1967, just two months before the countrywide Communist offensive at Tet in late January/early February 1968 proved — at great cost — that Adams figures were far more accurate than the Army’s.

### **Day in court**

Years later, when Adams and CBS told the story of this internal battle on “60 Minutes,” Westmoreland sued, giving Adams his day in court, literally. Subpoenaed documents and the testimony of Westmoreland’s own staff in Saigon established the accuracy of Adams’ charges, and Westmoreland withdrew his suit.

Yet, right up until his premature death at age 55, Sam Adams could not dispel the remorse he felt at not having gone public with his findings much earlier. He felt that, had he done so, the entire left half of the Vietnam memorial would not be there, because there would be no names to carve into the granite for those later years of the war.



In recent years, former Defense Department and RAND analyst Daniel Ellsberg also has expressed deep regret that he waited too long; that he did not give the press the “Pentagon Papers” history of the Vietnam War and its many deceptions until 1971.

But it’s important to note that some patriotic truth-tellers, including Ellsberg, did reveal key facts about the war in the late Sixties, as the Johnson administration worked on plans to expand the ground war into Cambodia, Laos and right up to the Chinese border – perhaps even beyond.

In 1967, the beribboned, bemedaled Petraeus – sorry, I mean Westmoreland – addressed a joint session of Congress during which he congratulated himself on the “great progress” being made in the war.

What Congress did not know was that Westmoreland was on the verge of getting President Johnson to agree to sending 206,000 more troops for a widening of the war that threatened to bring China in as an active combatant.

But two key leaks to the *New York Times* helped put the kibosh on that escalation. The first leak revealed the 206,000 escalation figure and the second – by Ellsberg himself – disclosed the suppression of the CIA’s higher count of Vietnamese Communists under arms.

On March 25, 1968, Johnson complained to a small gathering of confidants: “The leaks to the *New York Times* hurt us. ... We have no support for the war. ... I would have given Westy the 206,000 men.”

I believe President Obama wants to make the right decision regarding Afghanistan. For me, his poignant visit to the US Air Force Base at Dover, Delaware, to receive the coffins of 18 Americans recently killed in Afghanistan tells me something of his authenticity and determination to do this one right.

But he is under great military and political pressure to send more troops on what I believe is a fool’s errand. And his national security adviser and intelligence chiefs have, well, chickened out.

### The Vietnam Analogy

One clear lesson is that patriotic truth-telling can prevent wider wars. And so I address this to my erstwhile colleagues and newer analysts in the intelligence community: Those of you working on Afghanistan and Pakistan have your own educated estimates of the prospects for success of various US courses of action. Wait no longer to be asked to write a National Intelligence Estimate.

The President should not be deprived of your views.

Perhaps it was serendipity (or maybe a reward for sitting through the RAND event) but that evening I was privileged to attend the Washington premier of an excellent documentary on Dan Ellsberg – *The Most Dangerous Man in America* – the sobriquet he earned from Henry Kissinger when Ellsberg gave the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times*.

The film contained hard-to-watch footage of the war that took the lives of two-to-three million Vietnamese and 58,000 Americans. But I was happy to see that the film did pick up, from Ellsberg’s book *Secrets*, his decision to begin revealing important facts to the *New York Times* in early 1968, a move that helped prevent a still more dangerous escalation of the war in Vietnam and its widening to adjacent countries.

Think about it, intelligence analysts. Don’t just look at each other. Think more about all those young people from the inner city and towns of less than 10,000 forming the pool from which a de facto poverty draft sends the bulk of US troops off to bear the modern White Man’s Burden.

That is not the America that so many of us believe in. Do something to stop it. **CT**

*Ray McGovern was an Army infantry/ intelligence officer and then a CIA analyst for almost 30 years. He is cofounder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity*

**What Congress did not know was that Westmoreland was on the verge of getting President Johnson to agree to sending 206,000 more troops for a widening of the war that threatened to bring China in as an active combatant**

# And still the torture continues

Barack Obama promised to end the practice of kidnapping people and flying them off to torture, so why is it still happening?, asks **Sherwood Ross**

**Azar alleged he was shackled to an office chair for seven hours, put in an unheated metal shipping container and given only a thin blanket despite near freezing temperature, denied sleep and food for 30 hours, had his ears covered by earphones and blindfolded during his plane ride from Kabul, Afghanistan, to the US**

**E**ven though Barack Obama, the candidate, pledged to end “the practice of shipping away prisoners in the dead of night to be tortured in far-off countries,” his FBI has been rendering kidnap victims to the US. The practice is still kidnapping, however; and it’s still illegal.

Unlucky victim No. 1 was Raymond Azar, 45, flown from Afghanistan to Alexandria, Va., not to a foreign country. The construction manager for Sima International, a Lebanese outfit that did work for the US military, Azar said he was tortured by his abductors. He might just as well have been flown to Egypt under the Bushies.

Interestingly, Azar was never charged as a dangerous terrorist, only with conspiracy to commit bribery for wiring \$106,000 in kickbacks to a US employee’s bank account in hopes of getting \$13 million in unpaid bills okayed.

For this comparatively trivial white collar crime, Azar’s lawyers said when arrested he was stripped naked, hooded, and subjected to a body cavity search. What’s more, according to an article by Scott Horton, writing at Common Dreams, Azar claims a federal agent showed Azar a photo of his wife and four children and told him to confess or else he might “never see them again.” Azar confessed, and pled guilty to conspiracy to commit bribery.

Azar alleged he was shackled to an office chair for seven hours, put in an unheated metal shipping container and given only a thin blanket despite near freezing temperature, denied sleep and food for 30 hours, had his ears covered by earphones and blindfolded during his plane ride from Kabul, Afghanistan, to the US, Horton reported. Court records indicate Azar was shackled at the ankles, waist, and wrists.

“These procedures – particularly the blindfolding and shackling – correspond to standard Bush-era enhanced interrogation techniques, which President Obama declared banned immediately on his arrival in office,” Horton noted.

## **Flak jackets**

The arrest of this manager was made by no fewer than 10 men wearing flak jackets and carrying military style assault weapons, according to legal papers filed by Azar’s lawyers. Maybe they expected him to be toting a wrecking ball.

“Bizarre,” is how Joanne Mariner of Human Rights Watch described the rendition. “He was treated like a high-security terrorist instead of someone accused of a relatively minor white-collar crime,” she told the *Los Angeles Times* on August 22.

Removing Azar from Afghanistan would only be legal with approval of that government but Interior Ministry officials there

said no such approval was requested by the US.

International law professor Philippe Sands of London University is quoted by Horton as terming Azar's allegations "deeply troubling" in that they indicate "clear violations of international norms on due process and detainee treatment."

Under "extraordinary rendition," alleged terror suspects in the past have been abducted by the CIA and flown to be tortured (and/or murdered) to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Morocco, Jordan and Uzbekistan, among other venues. The practice was started in 1996 under President Bill Clinton, who is said to have rendered 80 suspects, and was vastly expanded by President George W. Bush after 9/11.

#### Torture violation

Rendition on its face is a violation of Article 3 of the United Nations Convention Against Torture, ratified by the US in 1994. As Wikipedia notes, "Rendered suspects are denied due process because they are arrested without charges and deprived of legal counsel."

During his appearance before the Senate Intelligence Committee last February, CIA nominee Leon Panetta, now Agency Director, said, "I think renditions where we return individuals to another country where they prosecute them under their laws, I think that is an appropriate use of rendition," the Associated Press reported.

Obama's aides have said they will count on the diplomatic assurances of the other countries not to torture suspects. Amrit Singh, a lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union, said such assurances have "proven completely ineffective in preventing torture."

With some modifications, the Obama administration appears to be carrying forward the ugly practices of the Bush and Clinton imperial presidencies, hardly the "change" for which the American people had hoped. Unless you count "chump change." **CT**

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# Propping up a broken Capitalism

**Shamus Cooke** says that any entity that seriously affects the general public should be owned by the public, not by private interests

**Our economic system is dominated by a tiny crust of super-rich individuals, bailing themselves out with taxpayer money while playing deaf to an exploding social crisis**

**F**ive years ago it would be unthinkable that a harsh critique of capitalism would attract a mass audience. But this is exactly what Michael Moore's new movie, *Capitalism: A Love Story*, has done. The source of Moore's success is his willingness to focus on what the media ignores: the human faces behind unemployment, bankruptcy, foreclosures, evictions, etc., and the faces benefiting from this misery — the corporate-elite sitting atop the financial system.

This reality has quickly educated millions of Americans, who now understand that our economic system is dominated by a tiny crust of super-rich individuals, bailing themselves out with taxpayer money while playing deaf to an exploding social crisis.

To combat these truths, the corporate-elite are planning a pro-capitalist media blitz.

The US Chamber of Commerce is an organization where the biggest US corporations come together to chat, organize, and throw money at politicians. Now, they are launching their "dream big" campaign, with the aim of "...preserving and advancing the American free enterprise system [capitalism]."

This \$100 million campaign — as explained on the Chamber's website — will focus on "national advertising," "grassroots

advocacy," "research and ideas leadership" [think tanks and universities], and "Citizen, Community, and Youth Engagement" — combining "...outreach to governors, mayors, and young audiences..." with "...online social networking" (Facebook).

Aside from saving capitalism, the campaign aims to save "... the 7 million jobs lost to the current recession and create the 13 million new jobs that will be needed over the next decade."

But as Albert Einstein pointed out, "no problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it." No serious economist is predicting that the economy is going to start pumping out jobs, let alone 20 million of them.

## **Praise singers**

The Chamber of Commerce isn't the only entity trying to shore up the profit system. Corporate-oriented pundits and politicians are falling over themselves to sing high praises to our troubled economic system.

Bush gave such a speech shortly after the system crashed, where he admitted that people were beginning to equate the market economy [capitalism] with "...greed, exploitation, and failure." This was wrong, Bush claimed. Instead, regulation was the culprit, a simple, easy-to-fix problem. The giant banks and other mega-corporations — owned and controlled by tiny groups of

ultrarich individuals – could remain in place.

Another rescuer of capitalism is Newsweek Editor and savvy politician, Fareed Zakaria, who wrote a Newsweek article entitled, *The Capitalist Manifesto*. In it, Zakaria explains, “What we are experiencing is not a crisis of capitalism. It is a crisis of finance, of democracy, of globalization and ultimately of ethics.” To further obscure the problem, he concludes that the banks and corporations are not to blame... everybody is: “... there is enough blame to go around and many fixes to make... But at heart, there needs to be a deeper fix within all of us, a simple gut check. If it doesn’t feel right, we shouldn’t be doing it.” (June 13, 2009).

Of course not every defense of capitalism is as ridiculous as Bush’s or Zakaria’s. A more nuanced approach can be heard by both Ariana Huffington and Ron Paul, who both share the same perspective: capitalism did not fail because capitalism did not exist – “corporatism” did.

### Corporate domination

Assuming that Paul and Huffington are defining “corporatism” as an economy dominated by large banks and other corporations, they’re right. They’re wrong to think that “corporatism” and capitalism are mutually exclusive. In fact, capitalism has been dominated by large corporations for over a hundred years, with the advent of the “robber barons” – monopoly corporation owners like Rockefeller, Morgan, Carnegie, Vanderbilt, etc.

At its foundation, however, capitalism hasn’t changed. The system has always produced goods for the purpose of private profit, not people’s need, and the people who profit from capitalism have always

been those who own the wealth, machines and buildings that produce these goods, whether they be cars, computers, or loans.

Although capitalism’s essence remains intact, its appearance has morphed over the years. In the early days, small businesses dominated, alongside small banks. But as transportation and technology developed, the world seemed to get smaller, while more and more goods were being produced.

This created the conditions that led to a capitalist free for all; a relentless battle to out-sell the others on the global marketplace. The big dogs ate the little dogs, and became bigger and bigger dogs – super-corporations that now span the globe, with gigantic facilities producing unimaginable amounts of commodities.

This is the world we live in today. These companies wield absolute power over political and social life: their tremendous wealth enables them to purchase politicians and army generals, while keeping certain topics in Congress “off the table.” This is the reality of capitalism as it exists today, a fact that must be acknowledged by anybody offering a credible solution.

We cannot regulate capitalism to meet our needs when we do not control the system; those who own the banks and corporations do. Real social change will require that this dynamic be smashed, so that socially precious institutions are not the property of any individual or small group. Any entity that seriously affects the general public should be run in the interest of the public, and thus owned by no one. **CT**

*Shamus Cooke is a social service worker, trade unionist, and writer for Workers Action – [www.workerscompass.org](http://www.workerscompass.org)*

**These companies wield absolute power over political and social life: their tremendous wealth enables them to purchase politicians and army generals, while keeping certain topics in Congress “off the table”**

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# Five things the media's hiding about cannabis

**Paul Armentano** on a few things you won't read about in your local newspapers or see on the TV news

**So, is there any truth to the claim that pot smoking is sparking a dramatic rise in mental illness?**

**W**riting in the journal *Science* nearly four decades ago, New York State University sociologist Erich Goode documented the media's complicity in maintaining cannabis prohibition.

He 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 later findings contradict the original pathological findings, they tend to be ignored or dismissed.”

A glimpse of today's mainstream media landscape indicates that little has changed – with news outlets continuing to, at best, underreport the publication of scientific studies that undermine the federal government's longstanding pot propaganda and, at worst, ignore them all together.

Here are five recent stories the mainstream media doesn't want you to know about pot:

## **1. Marijuana Use Is Not Associated With a Rise in Incidences of Schizophrenia**

Over the past few years, the worldwide media, as well as federal officials in the United Kingdom, Canada and the US have earnestly promoted the notion that smoking pot induces mental illness.

Perhaps most notably, in 2007 the MSM reported that cannabis “could boost the risk of developing a psychotic illness later in life by about 40 percent” – a talking point that was also actively promoted by US anti-drug officials.

So, is there any truth to the claim that pot smoking is sparking a dramatic rise in mental illness? Not at all, according to the findings of a study published in July in the journal *Schizophrenia Research*.

Investigators at the Keele University Medical School in Britain compared trends in marijuana use and incidences of schizophrenia in the United Kingdom from 1996 to 2005. Researchers reported that the “incidence and prevalence of schizophrenia and psychoses were either stable or declining” during this period, even the use of cannabis among the general population was rising.

“[T]he expected rise in diagnoses of schizophrenia and psychoses did not occur over a 10-year period,” the authors concluded. “This study does not therefore support the specific causal link between cannabis use and incidence of psychotic disorders. . . . This concurs with other reports indicating that increases in population cannabis use have not been followed by increases in psychotic incidence.”

As of this writing, a handful of news wire reports in Australia, Canada, and the

U.K. have reported on the Keele University study. Notably, no American media outlets covered the story.

## 2. Marijuana Smoke Doesn't Damage the Lungs Like Tobacco

Everyone knows that smoking pot is as damaging, if not more damaging, to the lungs than puffing cigarettes, right?

Wrong, according to a team of New Zealand investigators writing in the *European Respiratory Journal* in August.

Researchers at the University of Otago in New Zealand compared the effects of cannabis and tobacco smoke on lung function in over 1,000 adults.

They reported: “Cumulative cannabis use was associated with higher forced vital capacity [the volume of air that can forcibly be blown out after full inspiration], total lung capacity, functional residual capacity [the volume of air present in the lungs at the end of passive expiration] and residual volume.

“Cannabis was also associated with higher airways resistance but not with forced expiratory volume in one second [the maximum volume of air that can be forcibly blown out in the first second during the FVC test], forced expiratory ratio, or transfer factor. These findings were similar amongst those who did not smoke tobacco. . . . By contrast, tobacco use was associated with lower forced expiratory volume in one second, lower forced expiratory ratio, lower transfer factor and higher static lung volumes, but not with airways resistance.”

They concluded, “Cannabis appears to have different effects on lung function to those of tobacco.”

Predictably, the scientists’ “inconvenient truth” was not reported in a single media outlet.

## 3. Cannabis Use Potentially Protects, Rather Than Harms, the Brain

Does smoking pot kill brain cells? Drinking alcohol most certainly does, and many opponents of marijuana-law reform claim that

marijuana’s adverse effects on the brain are even worse. Are they correct?

Not according to recent findings published this summer in the journal *Neurotoxicology and Teratology*.

Investigators at the University of California at San Diego examined white matter integrity in adolescents with histories of binge drinking and marijuana use. They reported that binge drinkers (defined as boys who consumed five or more drinks in one sitting, or girls who consumed four or more drinks at one time) showed signs of white matter damage in eight regions of the brain.

By contrast, the binge drinkers who also used marijuana experienced less damage in seven out of the eight brain regions.

“Binge drinkers who also use marijuana did not show as consistent a divergence from non-users as did the binge drink-only group,” authors concluded. “[It is] possible that marijuana may have some neuroprotective properties in mitigating alcohol-related oxidative stress or excitotoxic cell death.”

To date, only a handful of US media outlets — almost exclusively college newspapers — have reported the story.

## 4. Marijuana Is a Terminus, Not a ‘Gateway,’ to Hard Drug Use

Alarmist claims that experimenting with cannabis will inevitably lead to the use of other illicit drugs persist in the media despite statistical data indicating that the overwhelming majority of those who try pot never go on to use cocaine or heroin.

Moreover, recent research is emerging that indicates that pot may also suppress one’s desire to use so-called hard drugs.

In June, Paris researchers writing in the journal *Neuropsychopharmacology* concluded that the administration of oral THC in animals suppressed sensitivity to opiate dependence.

Also this summer, investigators at the New York State Psychiatric Institute reported in the *American Journal on Addic-*

**Recent research is emerging that indicates that pot may also suppress one’s desire to use so-called hard drugs**

## STRAIGHT DOPE

**“This negative impact of marijuana scenes is not reversed in the presence of strong anti-marijuana arguments in the ads and is mainly present for the group of adolescents who are often targets of such anti-marijuana ads (i.e., high-risk adolescents),”**

tions that drug-treatment subjects who use cannabis intermittently were more likely to adhere to treatment for opioid dependence.

Although a press release for the former study appeared on the Web site [physorg.com](http://physorg.com) on July 7, neither study ever gained any traction in the mainstream media.

### **5. Government’s Anti-Pot Ads Encourage, Rather Than Discourage, Marijuana Use**

Sure, many of us already knew that the federal government’s \$2 billion ad campaign targeting pot was failing to dissuade viewers from toking up, but who knew it was this bad?

According to a new study posted online in the journal *Health Communication*, survey data published by investigators at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania found that many of the government’s public-service announcements actually encouraged pot use.

Researchers assessed the attitudes of over 600 adolescents, age 12 to 18, after viewing 60 government-funded anti-marijuana television spots.

Specifically, researchers evaluated whether the presence of marijuana-related imagery in the ads

(e.g., the handling of marijuana cigarettes or the depiction of marijuana-smoking behavior) were more likely or less likely to discourage viewers’ use of cannabis.

Messages that depict teens associating with cannabis are “significantly less effective than others,” the researchers found.

“This negative impact of marijuana scenes is not reversed in the presence of strong anti-marijuana arguments in the ads and is mainly present for the group of adolescents who are often targets of such anti-marijuana ads (i.e., high-risk adolescents),” the authors determined. “For this segment of adolescents, including marijuana scenes in anti-marijuana (public-service announcements) may not be a good strategy.”

Needless to say, no outlets in the mainstream media — many of which donated air time to several of the beleaguered ads in question — have yet to report on the story.

**CT**

*Paul Armentano is the deputy director of NORML, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, and is the co-author of the book **Marijuana Is Safer: So Why Are We Driving People to Drink** (2009, Chelsea Green)?*



*Save Vestas, Save the Planet demonstration in support of the occupation at the wind turbine plant at Newport Isle of Wight, England.*

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# Waging war, winning the Nobel Prize

**William Blum** says the Obama administration, like that of George W. Bush, seems to believe the world is a lawless mess awaiting the US – the chief warlord – to solve its problems

*“It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets.” – Voltaire*

**Q**uestion: How many countries do you have to be at war with to be disqualified from receiving the Nobel Peace Prize?

**A**nswer: Five. Barack Obama has waged war against only Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. He’s holding off on Iran until he actually gets the prize.

Somalian civil society and court system are so devastated from decades of war that one wouldn’t expect its citizens to have the means to raise serious legal challenges to Washington’s apparent belief that it can drop bombs on that sad land whenever it appears to serve the empire’s needs. But a group of Pakistanis, calling themselves “Lawyers Front for Defense of the Constitution”, and remembering just enough of their country’s more civilized past, has filed suit before the nation’s High Court to make the federal government stop American drone attacks on countless innocent civilians. The group declared that a Pakistan Army spokesman claimed to have the capability to shoot down the drones, but the government had made a policy decision not to.<sup>1</sup>

The Obama administration, like the Bush administration, behaves like the world is one big lawless Somalia and the United

States is the chief warlord. On October 20 the president again displayed his deep love of peace by honoring some 80 veterans of Vietnam at the White House, after earlier awarding their regiment a Presidential Unit Citation for its “extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry”.<sup>2</sup> War correspondent Michael Herr has honored Vietnam soldiers in his own way: “We took space back quickly, expensively, with total panic and close to maximum brutality. Our machine was devastating. And versatile. It could do everything but stop.”<sup>3</sup>

What would it take for the Obamaniacs to lose any of the stars in their eyes for their dear Nobel Laureate? Perhaps if the president announced that he was donating his prize money to build a monument to the First – “Oh What a Lovely” – World War? The memorial could bear the inscription: “Let us remember that Rudyard Kipling coaxed his young son John into enlisting in this war. John died his first day in combat. Kipling later penned these words:

*“If any question why we died,  
Tell them, because our fathers lied.”*

“The Constitution supposes what the history of all governments demonstrates, that the executive is the branch of power most interested in war, and most prone to it. It has accordingly with studied care vested the question of war in the legislature.” –

**War correspondent Michael Herr has honored Vietnam soldiers in his own way: “We took space back quickly, expensively, with total panic and close to maximum brutality. Our machine was devastating. And versatile. It could do everything but stop”**

## ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

**If machismo explains war, if men love war and fighting so much, why do we have to compel them with conscription on pain of imprisonment? Why do the powers-that-be have to wage advertising campaigns to seduce young people to enlist in the military?**

James Madison, in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, April 2, 1798.

A wise measure, indeed, but one American president after another has dragged the nation into bloody war without the approval of Congress, the American people, international law, or world opinion. Millions marched against the war in Iraq before it began. Millions more voted for Barack Obama in the belief that he shared their repugnance for America's Wars Without End. They had no good reason to believe this — Obama's campaign was filled with repeated warlike threats against Iran and Afghanistan — but they wanted to believe it.

If machismo explains war, if men love war and fighting so much, why do we have to compel them with conscription on pain of imprisonment? Why do the powers-that-be have to wage advertising campaigns to seduce young people to enlist in the military? Why do young men go to extreme lengths to be declared exempt for physical or medical reasons? Why do they flee into exile to avoid the draft? Why do they desert the military in large numbers in the midst of war? Why don't Sweden or Switzerland or Costa Rica have wars? Surely there are many macho men in those countries.

"Join the Army, visit far away places, meet interesting people, and kill them."

War licenses men to take part in what would otherwise be described as psychopathic behavior.

"Sometimes I think it should be a rule of war that you have to see somebody up close and get to know him before you can shoot him." — Colonel Potter, M\*A\*S\*H

"In the struggle of Good against Evil, it's always the people who get killed." — Eduardo Galeano

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, a Taliban leader declared that "God is on our side, and if the world's people try to set fire to Afghanistan, God will protect us and help us." <sup>4</sup>

"I trust God speaks through me. Without that, I couldn't do my job." — George W. Bush, 2004, during the war in Iraq. <sup>5</sup>

"I believe that Christ died for my sins and I am redeemed through him. That is a source of strength and sustenance on a daily basis." — Barack Obama. <sup>6</sup>

Why don't church leaders forbid Catholics from joining the military with the same fervor they tell Catholics to stay away from abortion clinics?

God, war, the World Bank, the IMF, free trade agreements, NATO, the war on terrorism, the war on drugs, "anti-war" candidates, and Nobel Peace Prizes can be seen as simply different instruments for the advancement of US imperialism.

Tom Lehrer, the marvelous political songwriter of the 1950s and 60s, once observed: "Political satire became obsolete when Henry Kissinger was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize." Perhaps each generation has to learn anew what a farce that prize has become, or always was. Its recipients include quite a few individuals who had as much commitment to a peaceful world as the Bush administration had to truth. One example currently in the news: Bernard Kouchner, co-founder of Medecins Sans Frontieres which won the prize in 1998. Kouchner, now France's foreign secretary, has long been urging military action against Iran. Last week he called upon Iran to make a nuclear deal acceptable to the Western powers or else there's no telling what horror Israel might inflict upon the Iranians. Israel "will not tolerate an Iranian bomb," he said. "We know that, all of us." <sup>7</sup> There is a word for such a veiled threat — "extortion", something normally associated with the likes of a Chicago mobster of the 1930s ... "Do like I say and no one gets hurt." Or as Al Capone once said: "Kind words and a machine gun will get you more than kind words alone."

### **The continuing desperate quest to find something good to say about US foreign policy**

Not the crazy, hateful right wing, not racist or disrupting public meetings, not demanding birth certificates ... but the respectable right, holding high positions in academia

and in every administration, Republican or Democrat, members of the highly esteemed Council on Foreign Relations. Here's Joshua Kurlantzick, a "Fellow for Southeast Asia" at CFR, writing in the equally esteemed and respectable Washington Post about how – despite all the scare talk – it wouldn't be so bad if Afghanistan actually turned into another Vietnam because "Vietnam and the United States have become close partners in Southeast Asia, exchanging official visits, building an important trading and strategic relationship and fostering goodwill between governments, businesses and people on both sides. ... America did not win the war there, but over time it has won the peace. ... American war veterans publicly made peace with their old adversaries ... A program [to exchange graduate students and professors] could ensure that the next generation of Afghan leaders sees an image of the United States beyond that of the war." <sup>8</sup> And so on.

On second thought, this is not so much right-wing jingoism as it is ... uh ... y'know ... What's the word? ... Ah yes, "pointless". Just what is the point? Germany and Israel are on excellent terms ... therefore, what point can we make about the Holocaust?

As to America not winning the war in Vietnam, that's worse than pointless. It's wrong. Most people believe that the United States lost the war. But by destroying Vietnam to its core, by poisoning the earth, the water, the air, and the gene pool for generations, the US in fact achieved its primary purpose: it left Vietnam a basket case, preventing the rise of what might have been a good development option for Asia, an alternative to the capitalist model; for the same reason the United States has been at war with Cuba for 50 years, making sure that the Cuban alternative model doesn't look as good as it would if left in peace.

And in all the years since the Vietnam War ended, the millions of Vietnamese suffering from diseases and deformities caused by US sprayings of the deadly chemical "Agent Orange" have received from the United States

no medical care, no environmental remediation, no compensation, and no official apology. That's exactly what the Afghans – their land and/or their bodies permeated with depleted uranium, unexploded cluster bombs, and a witch's brew of other charming chemicals – have to look forward to in Kurlantzick's Brave New World. "If the US relationship with Afghanistan eventually resembles the one we now have with Vietnam, we should be overjoyed," he writes. God Bless America.

One further thought about Afghanistan: The suggestion that the United States could, and should, solve its (self-created) dilemma by simply getting out of that god-forsaken place is dismissed out of hand by the American government and media; even some leftist critics of US policy are reluctant to embrace so bold a step – Who knows what horror may result? But when the Soviet Union was in the process of quitting Afghanistan (during the period of May 1988-February 1989) who in the West insisted that they remain? For any reason. No matter what the consequences of their withdrawal. The reason the Russians could easier leave than the Americans can now is that the Russians were not there for imperialist reasons, such as oil and gas pipelines. Similar to why the US can't leave Iraq.

#### **Washington's eternal "Cuba problem" – the one they can't admit to.**

"Here we go again. I suppose old habits die hard," said US Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, on October 28 before the General Assembly voted on the annual resolution to end the US embargo against Cuba. "The hostile language we have just heard from the Foreign Minister of Cuba," she continued, "seems straight out of the Cold War era and is not conducive to constructive progress." Her 949-word statement contained not a word about the embargo; not very conducive to a constructive solution to the unstated "Cuba problem", the one about Cuba inspiring the Third World, the fear that the socialist virus would spread.

**The suggestion that the United States could, and should, solve its (self-created) dilemma by simply getting out of that god-forsaken place is dismissed out of hand by the American government and media**

## ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

**The sanctions, in numerous ways large and small, make acquiring many kinds of products and services from around the world much more difficult and expensive, often impossible**

Since the early days of the Cuban Revolution assorted anti-communists and capitalist true-believers around the world have been relentless in publicizing the failures, real and alleged, of life in Cuba; each perceived shortcoming is attributed to the perceived shortcomings of socialism – It’s simply a system that can’t work, we are told, given the nature of human beings, particularly in this modern, competitive, globalized, consumer-oriented world.

In response to such criticisms, defenders of Cuban society have regularly pointed out how the numerous draconian sanctions imposed by the United States since 1960 have produced many and varied scarcities and sufferings and are largely responsible for most of the problems pointed out by the critics.

The critics, in turn, say that this is just an excuse, one given by Cuban apologists for every failure of their socialist system. However, it would be very difficult for the critics to prove their point. The United States would have to drop all sanctions and then we’d have to wait long enough for Cuban society to make up for lost time and recover what it was deprived of, and demonstrate what its system can do when not under constant assault by the most powerful force on earth.

In 1999, Cuba filed a suit against the United States for \$181.1 billion in compensation for economic losses and loss of life during the first 39 years of this aggression. The suit held Washington responsible for the death of 3,478 Cubans and the wounding and disabling of 2,099 others. In the ten years since, these figures have of course all increased. The sanctions, in numerous ways large and small, make acquiring many kinds of products and services from around the world much more difficult and expensive, often impossible; frequently, they are things indispensable to Cuban medicine, transportation or industry; simply transferring money internationally has become a major problem for the Cubans, with banks being heavily punished by the United States for

dealing with Havana; or the sanctions mean that Americans and Cubans can’t attend professional conferences in each other’s country.

These examples are but a small sample of the excruciating pain inflicted by Washington upon the body, soul and economy of the Cuban people.

For years American political leaders and media were fond of labeling Cuba an “international pariah”. We don’t hear much of that any more. Perhaps one reason is the annual vote in the General Assembly on the resolution, which reads: “Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba”. This is how the vote has gone:

Year	Votes (Yes-No)	No Votes
1992	59-2	US, Israel
1993	88-4	US, Israel, Albania, Paraguay
1994	101-2	US, Israel, Uzbekistan
1995	117-3	US, Israel, Uzbekistan
1996	138-3	US, Israel, Uzbekistan
1997	143-3	US, Israel
1998	157-2	US, Israel
1999	155-2	US, Israel, Marshall Isles
2000	167-3	US, Israel, Marshall Isles
2001	167-3	US, Israel, Marshall Isles
2002	167-3	US, Israel, Marshall Isles
2003	173-3	US, Israel, Marshall Isles, Palau
2004	179-3	US, Israel, Marshall Isles, Palau
2005	182-4	US, Israel, Marshall Isles, Palau
2006	183-4	US, Israel, Marshall Isles, Palau
2007	184-4	US, Israel, Marshall Isles, Palau
2008	185-3	US, Israel, Palau
2009	187-3	US, Israel, Palau

How it began, from State Department documents: Within a few months of the Cuban revolution of January 1959, the Eisen-

hower administration decided “to adjust all our actions in such a way as to accelerate the development of an opposition in Cuba which would bring about a change in the Cuban Government, resulting in a new government favorable to US interests.”<sup>9</sup>

On April 6, 1960, Lester D. Mallory, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, wrote in an internal memorandum: “The majority of Cubans support Castro ... The only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship. ... every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba.” Mallory proposed “a line of action which ... makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government.”<sup>10</sup> Later that year, the Eisenhower administration instituted the suffocating embargo. **CT**

**Notes**

1. The Nation (Pakistan English-language

- daily newspaper), October 10, 2009
- 2. Washington Post, October 20, 2009
- 3. Michael Herr, “Dispatches” (1991), p.71
- 4. New York Daily News, September 19, 2001
- 5. Washington Post, July 20, 2004, p.15, citing the New Era (Lancaster, PA), from a private meeting of Bush with Amish families on July 9. The White House denied that Bush had said it. (Those Amish folks do lie a lot you know.)
- 6. Washington Post, August 17, 2008
- 7. Daily Telegraph (UK), October 26, 2009
- 8. Washington Post, October 25, 2009
- 9. Department of State, “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Volume VI, Cuba” (1991), p.742
- 10. Ibid., p.885

*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. His website is [www.killinghope.org](http://www.killinghope.org)*

“The majority of Cubans support Castro ... The only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship ... every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba”

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