

**GODZILLA, WINGNUTS AND WATER** | STACEY WARDE  
**ONCE MORE DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE** | ANN JONES  
**PARIS ATTACK – IS THIS TOTAL WAR?** | BARRY LANDO

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 107

## FACES IN THE CROWD

**Martin Forde** meets  
the fans at the  
Rugby World Cup





**Cover:**

*An All-Blacks fan has his face spray-painted before the Rugby World Cup match between France and New Zealand. Photo: Martin Forde (see Page 20)*

# ColdType

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# The attack on Paris: Is this total war?

Terror hits Paris. Now what happens? asks **Barry Lando**



TV screenshot

**After the attack: Police stand guard, guns ready, in the Paris streets.**

**T**he day after Kurdish forces, with US support, expelled the Islamic State from the town of Sinjar in Northern Iraq; the day after the US triumphantly announced that ISIS executioner “Jihadi” John had been “evaporated” by a missile fired from a US drone – ISIS boasted its own deadly triumph. A force of about seven or eight jihadists, apparently allied to ISIS, carried out a wave

of carnage and terror, virtually paralyzing the capital of France. Striking six different “soft” targets, they murdered approximately 129 people, wounded hundreds more. Those incredibly sanguinary acts will have immediate and long-lasting consequences in France, across Europe, and in the United States itself.

A shaken but defiant President Francois Hollande has declared that ISIS’s at-

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## WHAT NEXT?

**One of the reasons they were bombarding Isis training camps in Syria was that they knew a plot against France was in the works**

tack was an “act of war.” It was “prepared, organized and planned” from the exterior with complicity from people inside France. Among other measures, he has called up more military, closed the borders, and announced a nationwide state of alert. France, he said, will be “pitiless in attacking the barbarians” of ISIS both abroad and at home.

But the fact is that for months now France has been on extra alert – policemen and soldiers with bulletproof vests and automatic rifles patrolling the airports, guarding Jewish schools and synagogues, checking the bags of people entering large department stores and museums. France’s security agencies have been monitoring all forms of communication. They’ve attempted to block would-be jihadists from going to Syria, tried to deal with hundreds, perhaps thousands of others – who have come back. They claimed to have thwarted some potential attacks.

One of the reasons they were bombarding ISIS training camps in Syria was that they knew a plot against France was in the works. As President Hollande said after the attacks, “We know who they are, where they are coming from, who are these terrorists.”

But, despite all that, the ISIS terrorists managed their devastating strike.

Several results are certain:

First – even though the French have now been made fully aware of the bloody consequence of their sending troops to fight jihadists in North Africa and the Middle East – France will certainly increase its military actions against the Islamic state and its allies.

Secondly, there will also be unprecedented surveillance of France’s huge Muslim community, a crackdown against anyone or anything that has a whiff of extremism. Many Muslims may be placed under preventative detention, or expelled; more radical mosques may be shut down, their imams silenced.

Third, there will be a further upsurge in the already soaring strength of the radical right, not only in France, but across Europe. In order not to lose political ground, conservative politicians such as Nicolas Sarkozy will move even further to the right.

Indeed, a public opinion poll published by *Le Figaro* the day before, the horrific attacks, showed that 67 per cent of those French queried would be in favor of a non-elected government of technocrats to solve the country’s problems. An astonishing 40 per cent would be willing to accept a non-elected authoritarian regime. That again was the state of opinion before yesterday’s attacks.

Fourth, many of the French had already been wavering on accepting some of the huge flood of refugees that has rolled into Europe from the Greater Middle East and Africa. Most French now will probably favor slamming the doors shut, or at least greatly limiting the intake. They will also demand that thousands of refugees already here, but not granted political asylum, be immediately deported. The same calls are being voiced across Europe. The effects on the refugees could be catastrophic.

Knowing those consequences, why would ISIS act in the stunning way that it has over the past few weeks – downing a Russian charter flight in Egypt, launching two bloody suicide attacks in Beirut two days ago, carrying out this horrific terrorist attack in Paris?

As far as the attack in Paris is concerned, the simplest answer is to wreak vengeance and sow fear, to bring fully home to the French the bloody consequences of their military interventions in far away Syria and Iraq. The goal is to undermine French resolve, weaken their determination to continue a distant, costly struggle.

The sophistication of the attacks should not be overstated – these were all “soft targets;” the weapons used were suicide belts and Ak-47s. But the few killers were able to



inflict horrific carnage. They recreated for the French the fear and terror that those living in Aleppo, of Baghdad, Kabul, and Damascus, experience every day.

Still, the day after the attacks, with calls from across the political spectrum for total war and the annihilation of ISIS, if anything, the terrorist attacks have only increased French resolve. That's now. A few weeks from now, who knows.

But the prime goal of ISIS and its jihadist allies is to further radicalize the situation in France. They are out to provoke a wave of revulsion, fear, and hatred, to destroy the already frayed relations between France and the country's huge Muslim community, the largest in Europe.

The Twitter feed on the #Paris attacks includes tweets by groups supposedly related to ISIS praising the terrorist killings, but they are far outnumbered by the flow of heartfelt communications from Muslims around the world condemning the attacks. "This is not my form of Islam," they write, or "Killing civilians is prohibited by the Koran." But such expressions on social media and in public are being drowned out by the fear, fury and anger of most of the French and horrified onlookers in Europe.

The moving public processions of "solidarity" that were cobbled together after the attack on Charlie Hebdo last January, were quickly replaced by a mounting wave of distrust, mutual suspicion and outright hate. More and more, there is the tendency to lump all Muslims together as would-be jihadists who secretly cheer on ISIS and

the terrorists, people ready to don suicide vests themselves at the first chance.

It would be marvelous indeed if the Muslim community in France and its leaders could somehow take more of the lead in dealing with the minority Islamic radicals within their own ranks, continue to identify them to the authorities, speak out even more forcefully against them, condemn the more radical schools. Indeed, the great majority of French Muslims have rejected radical Islam for years.

But the more Islamophobia spreads, the more the French government cracks down, the more ISIS and the other radical Muslim groups will achieve their goal. That is, to convince French Muslims that there is no way moderation will work in France, no way they will ever be accepted as full citizens in this country. The only solution is radical Islam, jihad, the way of al-Qaeda and ISIS.

If that happens, then the current Islamic "fifth column" in France could morph from a few hundred or thousand young radicals, to a much more terrifying threat.

Unfortunately, at this time of great national crisis, France has no great potential leader in the wings. No De Gaulle or Clemenceau or Churchill. Just Francois Hollande.

**CT**

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**Barry Lando**, an Emmy-Award winning former 60 Minutes producer, is author of a new novel, *The Watchman's File*, available at Amazon, in soft cover, and as a download for Kindle.

**ISIS are out to provoke a wave of revulsion, fear, and hatred, to destroy the already frayed relations between France and the country's huge Muslim community, the largest in Europe**

*"Madness alone is truly terrifying inasmuch as you cannot placate it either by threats, persuasion or bribes"*

**Trevor Grundy examines the causes, and likely effects, of the terror attack on Nairobi's Westgate Shopping Mall**

Download Issue 78 of **ColdType** and read it at <http://coldtype.net/Assets.13/PDFs/1013.CT78.pdf>



# How to build a crisis

Banks and corporations are being liberated from the rule of law, and are ripping the world apart, writes **George Monbiot**

**Corporations are given the rights of legal persons. Their property rights are enhanced. Those who protest against them are subject to policing and surveillance – the kind that’s more appropriate to dictatorships than democracies**

**W**hat have governments learned from the financial crisis? I could write a column spelling it out. Or I could do the same job with one word: nothing.

Actually, that’s too generous. The lessons learned are counter-lessons, anti-knowledge, new policies that could scarcely be better designed to ensure the crisis recurs, this time with added momentum and fewer remedies. And the financial crisis is just one of the multiple crises – in tax collection, public spending, public health and, above all, ecology – that the same counter-lessons accelerate.

Step back a pace and you see that all these crises arise from the same cause. Players with huge power and global reach are released from democratic restraint. This happens because of a fundamental corruption at the core of politics. In almost every nation the interests of economic elites tend to weigh more heavily with governments than do those of the electorate. Banks, corporations and landowners wield an unaccountable power, which works with a nod and a wink within the political class. Global governance is beginning to look like a never-ending Bilderberg meeting.

As a paper by the law professor Joel Bakan in the Cornell International Law Journal argues, two dire shifts have been happening simultaneously. On one hand

governments have been removing laws that restrict banks and corporations, arguing that globalisation makes states weak and effective legislation impossible. Instead, they say, we should trust those who wield economic power to regulate themselves.

On the other hand, the same governments devise draconian new laws to reinforce elite power. Corporations are given the rights of legal persons. Their property rights are enhanced. Those who protest against them are subject to policing and surveillance – the kind that’s more appropriate to dictatorships than democracies. Oh, state power still exists all right – when it’s wanted.

Many of you will have heard of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). These are supposed to be trade treaties, but they have little to do with trade, and much to do with power. They enhance the power of corporations while reducing the power of parliaments and the rule of law. They could scarcely be better designed to exacerbate and universalise our multiple crises – financial, social and environmental. But something even worse is coming, the result of negotiations conducted, once more, in secret: a Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA), covering North America, the EU, Japan, Australia and many

other nations.

Only through WikiLeaks do we have any idea of what is being planned. It could be used to force nations to accept new financial products and services, to approve the privatisation of public services and to reduce the standards of care and provision. It looks like the greatest international assault on democracy devised in the past two decades. Which is saying quite a lot.

So the self-hating state proclaims that it has no power while destroying its own capacity to legislate.– internationally and at home As if the last financial crisis had not occurred, and as if unaware of what caused it, George Osborne, in his most recent speech to the City of London, told his audience of bankers that “a central demand in our renegotiation is that Europe stops costly and damaging regulation”. David Cameron has boasted of running “the first government in modern history that at the end of its parliamentary term has less regulation in place than there was at the beginning”.

This, in a world of accelerating complexity and booming corporate crime, is pure recklessness. But fear not, they say: economic power no longer needs to be subject to the rule of law. It can regulate itself.

Some of us have long suspected that this is bunkum with bells on. But until now, suspicion is all we’ve had. This month the first global review of self-regulation has been published. It was commissioned by Britain’s Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, but it covers every sector from payday lenders to dog breeders. And it shows that in almost all cases – 82% of the 161 schemes it assessed, voluntary measures have failed.

For instance, when the European Union sought to reduce the number of pedestrians and cyclists killed by vehicles, it could simply have passed a law instructing the vehicle manufacturers to change the way they designed their bumpers and bonnets, at a cost of roughly €30 a car. Instead, it relied on a voluntary agreement with the

industry. The result was a 75% lower level of protection than a law would have delivered.

When the Welsh government introduced a 5p charge for plastic bags, it cut their use by 80% overnight. The Westminster government claimed that self-regulation by the retailers would do the job just as well. The result? A grand reduction of 6%. After seven wasted years, it succumbed last month to the obvious logic, and introduced a charge.

Voluntary schemes designed to prevent the advertising of junk food to children in Spain, to cut greenhouse gases in Canada, to save water in California, to save albatrosses from long-liners in New Zealand, to protect cosmetic surgery patients in the UK, to stop the aggressive marketing of psychiatric medicines in Sweden: fail, fail, fail, fail, fail. What the state could have done with a stroke of the pen cheaply and effectively is left instead to the fumbling efforts of industries that, even when sincere, are fatally undermined by free riders and opportunists.

In several cases, companies begged for new laws to raise standards throughout the industry. For example, those who make plastic silage wrappings for farmers tried to get the UK government to raise the recycling rate, while garden companies wanted regulations to phase out the use of peat. The governments refused. Was this the result of blind ideology or grubby self-interest – or both? The biggest donors to political parties tend to be the worst operators, using their money to keep malpractice legal (consider Enron).

Because the parties they fund bow to their wishes, everyone else is forced to adopt their low standards. I suspect that governments know as well as anyone that law is more efficient and effective than self-regulation, which is why it is not used.

Restraining the electorate, releasing the powerful: this is a perfectly designed formula for a multidimensional crisis. And boy, are we reaping it. **CT**

**The biggest donors to political parties tend to be the worst operators, using their money to keep malpractice legal**

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**George Monbiot's** book “Feral” was recently released in paperback format. This article was originally published at his web site <http://monbiot.com>

# 'Let's bring in our Pentagon spokesman'

Same war, different treatment. **David Edwards** compares the BBC's fawning over the US war machine to its criticism of Russian actions

**The aircraft carrier, USS Carl Vinson, "is a floating town of more than 5,000 souls and 60 fighter aircraft engaged in a costly and complex campaign"**

One of the great Freudian slips of our time was supplied by a Fox News anchor on March 24, 1999, as Nato was preparing to wage war on Yugoslavia: "Let's bring in our Pentagon spokesman – excuse me, our Pentagon correspondent."

For indeed the unwritten rule informing this type of journalism is: If you want to get close to the 'defence' establishment, you better be close to the 'defence' establishment: Ideologically, sympathetically, 'patriotically'.

A near-perfect example of this industry-wide perceptual bias has been supplied this year by BBC diplomatic editor, Mark Urban.

Earlier this month, Urban discussed the Russian bombing campaign in Syria in a piece entitled, Russia's Syria Intervention: One Month In.

This was made fascinating by the fact that, in January, Urban had written a piece on the US bombing campaign in Syria and Iraq, On Board With The Us Air Crews Fighting Islamic State.

So how do these articles compare?

## **"On board with the US air crews fighting Islamic State"**

The title of the piece on US bombing is an obviously positive, propaganda formulation, indicating that Urban was 'on board' and embedded with a US aircraft carrier attacking the bad guys du jour – Islamic State. The title excludes from consider-

ation the possibility that the US, directly and through regional client regimes, has been supporting the Islamic State with weapons, or has other nefarious aims. It is simply waging war on the Official Enemy. This immediately banishes the kind of 'complexity' described by political analyst William Blum: "The mainstream media almost never mentions the proposed Qatar natural-gas pipelines – whose path to Europe Syria has stood in the way of for years – as a reason for much of the hostility toward Syria. The pipelines could dethrone Russia as Europe's dominant source of energy."

The piece features a Top Gun-style photo of a carrier jet waiting to be launched into action. The article begins by humanising the military operation with context and detail. The aircraft carrier, USS Carl Vinson, "is a floating town of more than 5,000 souls and 60 fighter aircraft engaged in a costly and complex campaign." Urban introduces us to Lt Junior Grade 'Sarah', described as "a 29-year-old weapon systems operator or back seater in an F/A-18F fighter" – a bomb aimer in old money (how journalists love to focus on high-tech military jargon).

'Sarah' is gung-ho: "There is a coyness among the crews – in front of us at least – about wanting to appear too keen to take life, but after completing the mission, she said, 'When we do get to employ [drop



bombs] out there it's very exciting.' ”

The article repeatedly stresses the danger facing US carrier air crews rather than the people under their bombs: “Each time it launches one of its jets’ the event is ‘so dramatic and inherently dangerous.”

While Urban makes just one, oblique reference to the risk to civilians – “dropping [a bomb] in error could have terrible consequences” – the danger to US air crews is the major focus, “But whether it drops multiple bombs or none, the effort involved in launching each mission is considerable and fraught with hazards.”

Urban continues in the same vein, “‘Every flight there is a risk out there,’ notes Lt Cdr ‘Mike,’ who at 35 is one of the veteran pilots on board. It starts with being catapulted off the deck, goes through the in-flight fuel top ups, which he notes ‘can be unpleasant,’ flying in close proximity to the tanker in bad weather or at night, and ends with the ‘controlled car crash’ of recovering the jet onto the carrier.

“I watched Lt Cdr Mike’s F/A18F land at night on the Vinson’s deck after a seven-hour mission over Iraq. As the plane came in at what seemed like an impossibly steep angle and at 160 mph, I remembered reading an old carrier pilot’s quip that during such recoveries in the hours of darkness, ‘there are no atheists in the cockpit.’ ”

“Mike, Top Gun pilot that he is,” Urban opines, managed to land ‘flawlessly’ on the carrier.

As well as dangerous, this is uncomfortable work, “Spending five or more hours strapped to an ejector seat, unable to get up or use a toilet, must be a distinctly unpleasant experience at times. The pilots take snacks and ‘piddle packs’ to relieve themselves into.”

Above all, though, it is dangerous, “But of course these discomforts are mundane compared to the dangers of going down over IS-controlled territory, as a Jordanian pilot recently did, or crashing during carrier operations.”

Urban continues discussing the risk – to the bombers, “The crews are all too aware of the risks but are uneasy discussing them with an outsider. ‘It’s not something we like to think about,’ Lt Sarah said about the risks of getting shot down. Clearly though, it informed her decision not to use her name when interviewed.”

There is apparently no space for a discussion of the morality or legality of the US effort, particularly in light of the catastrophic US ‘interventions’ in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere. And by the way, why is it the job of the US to bomb anyone, anywhere in the world without UN approval? And why should we believe the US imperial power is guided by moral motives?

The success of the mission is boldly affirmed, “Those commanding the operations on board are quite sure they are making progress. ‘Absolutely the situation has changed since airstrikes began,’ says Cmdr Mike Langbehn, boss of one of the Hornet squadrons. The days of IS making sweeping gains were over and their progress has been halted, several officers said. ‘They swept through the country, now they’re not,’ commented Capt Thomas.”

By contrast, investigative journalist Patrick Cockburn comments in the *London Review of Books* this month, “the [US] campaign has demonstrably failed to contain IS, which in May captured Ramadi in Iraq and Palmyra in Syria.”

Remarkably, the 10-minute video embedded in Urban’s article is even more one-sided. It opens with a motivational propaganda speech by the carrier’s chaplain on the US mission to “stem the tide of tyranny and hatred.” It continues with a long description of the awesome size and power of the ship and its weapons, includes jokey interviews with the air crew on their superstitions and on how careful they are not to hit civilians, with officers confidently discussing progress made. The commanding officer is quoted as saying his bombers are “working the ISIS tar-

**The 10-minute video embedded in Urban’s article opens with a motivational propaganda speech by the carrier’s chaplain on the US mission to “stem the tide of tyranny and hatred”**

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## PROPAGANDA RULES

**The Russian authorities are openly accused of dishonesty in describing their objectives: They are not, as claimed, targeting the Islamic State – the enemy that Urban’s BBC audience has been trained to unreservedly hate**

get a couple of bodies at a time.” The video concludes with a poignant prayer from the chaplain requesting that the ‘Lord’ protect US forces working so patiently to end human life a couple of corpses at a time.

Urban’s piece on the US bombing campaign, then, is classic ‘patriotic,’ wartime propaganda glorifying ‘our’ courageous fighting men and women – named and humanised for the reader – risking their lives to make the world a safer place. And of course they are winning.

### **‘Russia’s Syria intervention: One month In’**

The title of Urban’s piece on the Russian bombing campaign is coldly factual – there is no indication that he is ‘on board’ with Russian forces. There is no propaganda video, or Top Gun-style picture, just a rather menacing photo of a Russian bomber without visible human occupants.

Unlike the US carrier piece, no attempt is made to describe the dangers, fears and discomforts facing Russian air crews. There are no friendly discussions with Russian pilots and commanders – none are named, interviewed, humanised. There are no quotes from a chaplain saying prayers, or from a commander expressing confidence in final victory. Apart from a couple of comments from Putin, there are no quotes from Russian military sources at all. Urban prefers to reference the opinion of US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter, the ‘independent’ UK website Belingcat and a Free Syrian Army commander, all pro-Western.

In this second piece, the central focus is exactly reversed – the threats facing air crew are not even mentioned, while the previously ignored threats facing civilians, and the costs paid by them, are heavily and repeatedly emphasised. Urban begins sceptically:

“So Russia has rained down destruction, but to what end?”

In the US piece, the focus is on whether the air offensive is ‘working’ and ‘achieving results’, not on ‘destruction;’

Urban cites sources indicating that 90 per

cent of Russian bombs “have been dropped in places held by groups other than the so-called Islamic State (IS).”

The Russian authorities are thus openly accused of dishonesty in describing their objectives: They are not, as claimed, targeting Islamic State – the enemy that Urban’s BBC audience has been trained to unreservedly hate – but are working to “strengthen the Assad regime and its forces,” which the BBC audience has also been taught to hate.

Urban asserts that Russian bombs are also less accurate and therefore a greater threat to civilians, “Typically US ‘precision’ bombs have a circular error probable (the radius around the aiming point in which 50 per cent or more will fall) of eight to 12 metres. With unguided or dumb bombs that increases to 50 to 100 metres.

“Furthermore, the Russians have been dropping cluster munitions that western air forces would shun for their indiscriminate effect.”

Urban does at least mention a figure for civilian casualties of US bombing in this piece – “600 plus non-combatants in Syria and Iraq since August 2014” – but uses it to cast Russian performance in a much darker light, “Using much less accurate weaponry, experts believe the rate at which the Russians are killing innocents is likely to be much higher, and of striking the right aiming points lower.”

Urban adds a deeply damning, unsourced claim, “Rebel groups and NGOs have claimed hundreds of civilian deaths and seven hospitals hit.”

The Russian Defense Ministry, no more reliable than the BBC, has contested these claims. We asked Urban to disclose his sources and to comment on the Russian response, but he repeatedly failed to reply. He adds, “Russian counter-claims that no civilians have been killed and all missions have hit their targets are simply not credible...”

And, “It’s also obvious that their enemy will adapt and returns diminish.”

These deeply sceptical, critical comments

on the Russian mission stand in stark contrast to the earlier unrelieved positivity and blithe acceptance of US military claims, notably the claim that the commanders “are quite sure they are making progress.”

In discussing the Russian attacks, the civilian cost is consistently to the fore, “It may be that [the Russians] are hitting so many targets, that even with less accuracy, they are doing more damage than the Americans... we know that civilians living in the areas where these attacks have been most intense, are fleeing in droves.”

Details are provided, “The UN says 120,000 were displaced from Aleppo, Hama, and Idlib provinces between 5 and 22 October: the places where most Russian strikes have taken place, where Syrian Army ground pushes have happened, and where all these people have fled are one and the same...”

Notice the complete absence of this kind of comment in the earlier piece, which made no reference at all to civilian casualties from US bombing. Urban continues, “At the same time there is a cost, in terms of displaced or killed people.”

The same concern is the focus of the conclusion: Russia “has deployed a military force to Syria swiftly, and it has brought enormous force to bear. But the human cost of this is becoming clearer.”

We can call this ‘journalism’ if we like, but actually it is indistinguishable from state propaganda. Readers might like to consider a couple of questions:

1. Is it conceivable that a BBC journalist would produce an article and video as ‘on

board’ and positive about a Russian bombing campaign as Urban supplied on the US campaign?

2. Have we ever seen a piece from a BBC journalist as openly critical of US government dishonesty in regards to an ongoing military campaign – accusing it of lying about its real intentions and the true costs to civilians, of supporting known enemies – in the way of the second piece on the Russian campaign?

The answers matter because this kind of propaganda – repeated relentlessly across our broadcast media and newspapers – is effective in persuading large numbers of people to support one war after another, without end. After all, how can it be that so many can accept that Britain and the US should go on bombing distant countries year after year, creating unimaginable misery and chaos, much of it swept under the media carpet?

A good deal of the discredit goes to the ‘diplomatic’ and ‘defence’ editors of the BBC, ITV and newspapers – men and women apparently awarded jobs for life, regardless of their performance, with zero accountability (unless they fail to defer to elite interests). Their pro-Western, warmongering bias is often as naked as it is lethal to human life, but our political and media system is so structurally corrupt that it passes without ‘mainstream’ comment. **CT**

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*David Edwards is co-editor of  
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**We can call this  
‘journalism’ if we  
like, but actually it  
is indistinguishable  
from state  
propaganda**

**READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT**  
**at: <http://coldtype.net/joe.html>**

# Defying the poppy fascists

**Eamonn McCann** wonders why the Remembrance Day symbol should be the cause of so much anger and hostility

**There would be murmuring of discontent in these parts if, in the run-up to Gay Pride, guests on *The View* were routinely offered an equal marriage badge before going into the studio**

Readers of the *Daily Mail* are no dozers. Literally within seconds of actress Sienna Miller stepping into shot on BBC's Graham Norton Show a couple of weeks before Remembrance Day, "eagle-eyed viewers" spotted she wasn't wearing a poppy.

The camp Corkonian star was sporting a poppy the size of a dinner plate. His other guests – Bradley Cooper, Maggie Smith and Alex Jennings – all had flowers of more modest proportion affixed to their lapels. But Miller's shimmering pale pink gown was innocent of embellishment.

"There can be no excuse," thundered Conservative MP Gerald Howarth. But maybe Sienna just didn't want her gown ruined by a poppy-pin snagging the material.

She was, of course, offered a poppy. The ritual has become standard practice at the BBC. Wearing the emblem is not a condition for appearance on screen. But the fact that the offer is made puts guests in a position of having to refuse.

This situation doesn't arise with regard to any other commemorative insignia. There would be murmuring of discontent in Britain if, in the run-up to Gay Pride, guests on *The View* were routinely offered an equal marriage badge before going into the studio.



**Sienna Miller: No poppy** Photo: Wikimedia

Last year ITV News presenter Charlene White felt compelled to issue a statement explaining that her decision not to wear a poppy on air didn't imply disrespect for the dead of World War I.

She donated every year to the British Legion, she said. She wore a poppy every Armistice Day, knitted for her by the mother of a friend. She came from a forces family. Her dad and her uncle, both veterans, supported her decision.

She shouldn't have had to volunteer all



this information. And maybe she shouldn't have bothered, given that her explanation did little to staunch the torrent of racist and sexist abuse directed her way on social media.

If Bert Trautmann were still around, would he be invited to pick from a tray of poppies before running onto the field at the Etihad to play for Manchester City?

Trautmann was a former German paratrooper who first went to Britain as a prisoner of war in 1944. He was one of only 90 members of his 1,000-strong regiment to have survived the conflict.

He was to become one of the most popular players in Britain. He broke his neck with 15 minutes to go in the 1956 FA Cup Final at Wembley, but played on (no substitutes in the days of proper football) to help City to a 3-1 victory over Birmingham.

He won't have been offered a poppy, because back then nobody would have been so crass. And, while football has always been about more than sport, the determined deployment of the game in the service of a particular view of history or politics had not yet become standard practice.

### **Aguero's poppy**

Last year a picture of another brilliant City player from a country which had been at war with Britain was published in seemingly every British newspaper: Argentina striker Sergio Aguero wearing a poppy.

Does anybody seriously imagine that Aguero decided for himself to wear the badge because he believed this was the right thing to do? Hardly. He did it because he had been given to understand that this was expected of him. Likewise for Arsenal's Mesut Ozil, the German international son of Turkish immigrants.

These days you are not making a gesture wearing a poppy on a television chat show or a football field. You are making a gesture if you don't.



**War games: British Legion photograph of children wearing 'Future Soldier' T-shirts caused a storm of protest on Twitter.**

Thus it is that West Bromwich Albion's James McClean is deemed to be taking a provocative stance by insisting on making no political statement while playing football.

It's widely pointed out that other Irish footballers in England just wear the poppy and get on with it. And those who have ever seriously pondered the issue will likely have decided that they don't need the hassle.

Professional footballers tend to be young men making good money in a career that they know won't last long. Nobody has a right to demand that they take a position on this, or on anything.

By the same token, nobody has the right to demand that James McClean take a particular view on the wearing of the poppy. He shouldn't have to keep explaining.

Or, at least, not until the footballing authorities and the BBC explain the basis on which they came to the political belief that the embrace of the emblem should be the default position of all proper citizens.

Until then, McClean, too, should be allowed to get on with it. **CT**

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***Eamonn McCann** is a socialist activist and author. based in Derry, Northern Ireland.*

**Professional footballers tend to be young men making good money in a career that they know won't last long. Nobody has a right to demand that they take a position on this, or on anything**



# Living the lazy life – and loving every minute of it

Dell Franklin shares his antidote to hard work

**I'm sick and tired of people like Coach Meyer always ballyhooing hard work and putting down us lazy slackers possessing little of the maniacal initiative he and other fanatical nut case football coaches espouse**

The other morning I was listening to an interview with Urban Meyer, the head football coach at Ohio State, perhaps the best coach in all of college football, and one of the all time greats. When he was asked what was one of the key things he looked for in a recruit, he said he judged them by the condition of their cars, especially the interior, and testified that one of his greatest players owned a car that was “spotless.” The great coach went on to claim that a messy car usually belonged to a person whose life was a mess and probably led to laziness. What the coach really admired in his athletes was their “hard work and working ethic.”

Well, if coach Meyer would have ever seen any of *the* cars I have owned, especially when I was 18 – although I was a pretty damn good athlete – he would have instantly termed me as “downright lazy and a total mess,” and wanted nothing to do with me.

I'm sick and tired of people like Coach Meyer always ballyhooing hard work and putting down lazy slackers, who possess little of the maniacal initiative he and other fanatical, nutcase, football coaches espouse. Every time I hear an athlete or a coach or an actor or a business mogul or anybody who is successful and famous

and rich put his or her success down to hard work, I want to gag. The whole idea of America's dedication pursuing onerous, deadening, toil and whatever glory accompanies it is soul-destroying.

When I was young all I heard from my father and grandparents was how “hard work and a strong work ethic” rewarded you with pride at being useful, along with all the material items that followed. Nobody could outwork my father, who grew up in the Great Depression, where it all came down to, “you had to work harder than the other guy if you didn't want to end up in the poor house starving to death.”

The dreaded poor house never registered in my mind because we always had meat and potatoes on the table and as much milk as we could drink. I was so jet-fueled by this bounty that I was a veritable demon on the athletic fields and gyms of my hometown. In fact, the fathers of Compton, California, seemed to be in perpetual competition over who could work the hardest and prove it by their latest acquisitions – most notably a shiny new car for the wife and a shiny new bike for the kid.

In those pre-hippie days when most youngsters never dreamed of rebelling against the American Dream, I was already



**The author, with Marley, his retriever, who would – until he died – swim half way to Catalina to fetch a ball. He was attacked on three occasions by pit bulls and beat their asses into submission.**

a firm disbeliever, especially when I went to work in dad’s wholesale rubber and shoe business when I was 12. I listened all day to their tales of deals and investments. Worst of all was hearing of their need to work harder than the next guy and their declaration that anybody not up to their standards was a “lazy bum” and an anchor on the system THEY were supporting.

Almost instantly, I had a premonition

that I might end up as one of these so-called lazy bums, for I saw no sense in hard work or the goodies it brought. Nevertheless, to please my demanding, controlling father, I worked fanatically hard when he was looking and made sure never to be late for work.

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Dad employed my uncle Russ, an Irishman married into my mother’s Jewish family of

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## SLACKER'S REVENGE

**Larson set out to show me who was boss by going on unemployment insurance and vowing to outlast me in surviving without having to work after I quit my job at the busiest bar on the beach**

six sisters. Before the war, he had been a successful musician/entertainer but had later proved unemployable in the harsh environment of the real rat-race world. Dad gave him a chance, and immediately declared him a “goddam temperamental prima donna who thinks he’s a prince.” He was shocked that a man could be that lazy. Well, this uncle and I got along just fine, having in common an unquenchable urge to exchange bullshit and total aversion to hard work.

We also hated the nonsensical patter bombarding us from dad’s hard-working shoemaker customers and the salesmen who stalked him offering good deals. Everyone seemed to be competing to be the hardest worker in this world of hard working maniacs.

Just like Coach Urban Meyer, they were too busy to talk about anything but work, and they bored me so much that I fled before I ended up in their world.

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Since I was hell-bent on avoiding this nonsense, I decided that, after completing my army enlistment, I would pursue a livelihood where I could work in short spurts and use the rest of my time loafing about. Bartending fitted this job description, with a back plan of driving a cab, since I’d often seen cabbies reading or doing crossword puzzles in their cars, or standing around bullshitting as they awaited their next fare.

Working in bars was perfect: A busy Happy Hour followed by a dinner time lull during which one could sip a drink and schmooze with others who were happy to make totally meaningless small talk about sports and other useless subjects while accumulating a nice buzz.

What sane person would pick an 8 til 5 slavery gig lasting for 40 years over such a lifestyle, or be so motivated as to work overtime at some white collar grind mill to finish up in a gated community full of nervous wrecks driven to near insanity by

ambition? Not me, that’s for sure.

In this lax milieu, in Manhattan Beach in the 1970’s and early ‘80s, I was privileged to run in the company of people who saw things exactly as I did, and who worked even harder to accomplish less than nothing.

One such cohort was E Randolph Larsen, a lanky basketball player and Stanford grad with a degree in English who preferred waiting tables three nights a week and spending the rest of his time on the beach playing board games with his girlfriend or reading escapist mystery novels, to doing real work. Larsen recognised me immediately as a fellow idler, imbued with laziness and a desire for pure, unadulterated slacking and gaming the system.

He set out to show me who was boss by going on unemployment insurance and vowing to outlast me in surviving without working after I quit my job at the busiest bar in LA after nearly four years semi-toil. E Randolph had saved money from a brief battle in the stock market, while I’d amassed a sizable nest-egg bartending, helped by paying only small rent in a studio cave.

During nightly drinking bouts and sometimes after league hoop games, Larsen and I laughed at the folly of retirement, the sight of old dodderers at 65, finally released from their workload but hardly able to enjoy the fruits of a lifetime of labor that had worn them down.

We agreed that the least amount of work possible and a full schedule of play made for a very pleasant, often amusing and sometimes exciting, young adulthood that could continue for decades. Wanting the supposedly necessary things other mortals coveted, especially kids, was a huge obstacle in our determination to out-lazy any poor bastard who felt he could compete with us. Sleeping in was indispensable to our sanity if we planned to be healthy at seventy, and labouring

under anybody else's authority or supervision was an insult to our intelligence and common sense.

The game plan for our success involved an unwavering schedule of daily events not to be tampered with under any circumstance. So it was coffee and a long breakfast with the *LA Times*, basketball in the afternoon (if we had no league game that night), followed by a big juicy steak and potato at dinner time. That prepared us for a night of boozing and discussing important subjects such as basketball and wooing any available barfly – a title we gave the women we considered god's gift to such creatures as ourselves. We were prepared for a lasting relationship with the proper woman, but only if they conceded to all our wishes and demands, and had no desire to push or motivate us to get off our asses and get a “real” job, make money and amass fortunes.

E Randolph Larson declared victory in our contest when, after I returned penniless from a six-week pub crawl in the British Isles with a bartending pal, I took on a job as waiter at a local bar and grill. He lasted another six months before becoming a fellow waiter at the same joint, The food was good if not great, but the ongoing floor show by the good-time-Charlie waiters drew articles of praise in the local weekly alternative paper, which displayed pictures of E. Randolph and myself with towels neatly placed over our forearms in the style of the stiff French waiters of Paris.

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Over the following years, no matter where I have lived and pretended to be an adult, I have usually been seen during daytime working hours (I'm either unemployed and on unemployment insurance, driving a cab or tending bar at night) lounging in an easy chair, feet propped up, while reading a paper or book or working a crossword or just plain contemplating life and

trying to slow down time.

I'm always dressed in thrift store rags and surrounded by scant yard-sale junk furniture. And I smile and wave to those slobs driving shiny new, unpaid-for, cars as they flicker scornful glances at my paid-for filthy and messy two-decades-old jalopy, a trusty Lab dog at my side, tennis ball in mouth. I have subsisted 70-plus years being mostly lazy and only motivated when it came time to replenish myself with meat and potatoes, while never running out of booze and the celebratory cheap cigar.

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Meanwhile, a nearby radio relays the drone of an interview with coach Urban Meyer, living legend, reiterating his pride in his success, driven by the work ethic instilled in him by his father, detailing all the rewards it has brought. Then I gaze around, contentedly, watching the neighbour's cat trying to snare a hummingbird, hearing a groaning jalopy draw near. It's the town drunk, who's preparing to hurl a milk bone at my dog, waving at me because his horn doesn't work. We'll have a few beers at the bar later.

Meanwhile, Sir E. Randolph Larsen, at this very moment, probably sits pool side at his time share condo along the beach in Puerto Villarta, rum and coke and detective novel close at hand, a lady in the chair beside him, either to share a board game or deliver a massage to the sore spots accumulated from a lifetime of avoiding hard labor. During his visits to the States, he usually stays with friends, who are prepared to cater for his needs in exchange for the good company of a man who has travelled the world, tells excellent war stories, and needs no justification for his existence whatsoever.

**CT**

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*Dell Franklin is a long-time journalist and founder of the Rogue Voice literary magazine. He blogs at <http://dellfranklin.com>*

**Meanwhile Sir E. Randolph Larsen, possibly at this very moment, sits poolside at his time share condo along the beach in Puerto Villarta, a rum and coke and detective novel close at hand, and a lady in the chair beside him**

# Facing the wrath of the New McCarthyites

**Neil Clark** tells how Britain's faux-left political attack dogs have turned on Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn's new communications officer

**As usual, the tactic from the New McCarthyite attack dogs is to take their target's words out of context to try and turn readers against them**

The news that Seumas Milne, anti-war journalist and *Guardian* columnist, has been appointed the new Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn's Executive Director of Strategy and Communications has caused uproar among Britain's McCarthyite pro-imperialist faux-left.

Milne, we're told is a 'terrorism apologist', a 'Stalinist' an 'extremist,' 'apologist for dictators,' 'apologist for murderous dictators,' 'Kremlin/Putin apologist,' and 'facism (sic) apologist.'

His appointment wasn't just 'morally and ethically wrong', it's 'insane' (as is Milne himself). You'd think from reading these attacks that Milne was some kind of wild-eyed, foaming-at-the-mouth madman who needs to be tethered on a leash for public safety. Just about the only very bad thing he hasn't been accused of is being an 'apologist' for Jack the Ripper – though no doubt, Cyril Waugh-Monger is working on that article right now.

Anyone who knows Seumas can only laugh out loud at these ludicrous portrayals of a thoroughly decent and very thoughtful man. As usual, the tactic from the New McCarthyite attack dogs is to take their target's words out of context to try and turn 'middle-of-the-road' readers against them. They did this with Jeremy Corbyn – and now they're doing it with Milne.

So, a man who has condemned the back-

ing by the West and its regional allies of terrorist proxies in Syria, and who wants us to examine the link between western interventionist polices in the Middle East and the rise of groups such as Islamic State, is presented as a 'supporter of terrorism.' Someone who is against illegal wars, which put British soldiers in harm's way, is smeared as someone who supports British troops being killed. A man who says we need to acknowledge the achievements of communism as well as communist crimes is labeled a 'Stalinist.'

And someone who doesn't want a new Cold War with Russia, and who quite correctly blames NATO for the crisis in Ukraine, is denounced as a 'Putin apologist.'

In fact, most of the things that Milne is accused of, could more accurately be applied to his detractors. There is indeed a real Savoy opera topsy-turvy feel to the attacks. Milne is accused of being 'pro-purge' by people who spend much of their time trying to 'purge' – by smears and character assassination – British journalism of dissenting voices, that are actually more in tune with public opinion than they are.

He's called an 'extremist' by cheerleaders of the greatest crime of the 21st century – the illegal Iraq war.

What can be more 'extreme' than supporting – and defending – an illegal war fought on a blatant lie, that Iraq possessed weapons of



mass destruction (WMDs), and that has led to the deaths of up to one million people?

As for it being ‘insane,’ Milne’s appointment as Corbyn’s director of strategy and communications makes very good sense. He’s a top journalist who knows how the media works. His father, Alisdair Milne, was a popular director general of the BBC, before being pushed out by Margaret Thatcher (surely a badge of honor), and Milne has held an associate editorial position at the *Guardian* for a number of years. He is bright, and charming and has exactly the right combination of skills that a modern spin doctor needs.

I have known Seumas for over ten years and wrote for him at the *Guardian* on a regular basis when he was comment editor of the newspaper. The New McCarthyites have been eagerly poring over pieces that he wrote and commissioned in their crude attempts to discredit him.

The fact is that Milne, as comment editor, threw the paper open to a wide range of voices from left and right. Genuine anti-war leftists found a platform that was denied to them in other outlets, but Milne also published articles by conservatives – including American conservatives, such as Charles Krauthammer (so much for the claim that Milne is “a man who never heard an opinion that he didn’t filter”). In fact, the comment pages of the *Guardian* under Milne were probably the most vibrant of any British newspaper at the time, as Conservative MEP Daniel Hannan, hardly an ideological soul mate of Milne’s, acknowledged.

Another conservative commentator, Peter Osborne, has also paid tribute to Milne, noting that unlike those mocking him, he has often been proved right. But the New ‘left-wing’ McCarthyites, unlike Hannan and Osborne, don’t want media diversity and a wide range of views to appear in British newspapers. Their job is to narrow the range of opinions we hear in the mainstream media. Only people they approve of should be published – people with the ‘approved’ pro-war, anti-Russian views on foreign policy.

These people have always had it in for Milne, (his strong support for the Palestinian cause is another reason they hate him), and his new appointment has once again brought them out into the open, fuming with indignation that a man they thought they had successfully branded as a ‘pariah’ has now landed such an important job.

Milne is even being attacked for attending Winchester public school – if you’re a member of the ‘Elite Journos Club’ and support illegal western wars, then your educational background doesn’t come into it, but step out of line, and it’s a case of “hey, he’s a public schoolboy!”

The good news is that the power of the New McCarthyites, as we saw from Jeremy Corbyn’s stunning victory this summer, is on the wane. They were always a tiny group in number, but their message was amplified by the neocon media echo chamber. But the public is no longer listening to these people. They’re sick of their endless warmongering and their double standards: They remember how in 2013 they so desperately wanted us to go to war with a secular Syrian government fighting ISIL.

The sheer nastiness of their ad hominem attacks and their obsessiveness repels more people than it attracts. The more they attacked Corbyn in the summer, the stronger and more popular he became, and it’ll be the same with Seumas Milne.

For the New McCarthyites the problem with Milne is not that he’s likely to be a ‘disaster’ in his new job, but that this clever, eloquent and resilient man is likely to be a great success and increase the chances of a Labour general election victory in 2020. And of course, a victory for a Corbyn-led Labour party in 2020 – on a genuinely democratic socialist platform – is the very last thing the allegedly ‘progressive,’ but, in fact, extremely reactionary pro-war New McCarthyites want.

**CT**

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Follow **Neil Clark** on Twitter @NeilClark66

**For the New McCarthyites the problem with Milne is not that he’s likely to be a ‘disaster’ in his new job, but that this clever, eloquent and resilient man is likely to be a great success and increase the chances of a Labour general election victory in 2020**



Viva la France: Excuse me, I'm on the phone . . .

# Faces in the crowd

**Martin Forde** hits Cardiff for the Rugby World Cup semi-final

**W**hen France battled New Zealand in the Rugby World Cup semi final last month, Cardiff photographer Martin Forde decided to avoid the usual photographic fare of teams of overmuscled men in tight shirts and shorts battling to get the ball over their opponents' line.

Instead, he focused on the action *outside* Cardiff's Millenium Stadium, his target the fans, as they geared

up to cheer on their favourite sporting gladiators.

What did he find? Beautiful girls with delicate facial motifs, men with fearsome face-painting, saucy chick-en hats, and one Frenchman with a bottle of wine already celebrating the inevitable Gallic victory. Bit premature there, Pierre! New Zealand's All Blacks won 62-13, before going on to win the final 34-17 a week later against Australia at Twickenham, London.

**Tony Sutton**



War paint: New Zealand fan closes his eyes as his face is sprayed . . .



Fowl play: Lady, there's a chicken on your head . . .



Confident: New Zealand supporter . . .



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## IN THE FRAME

● See more of Martin Forde's work at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/4dphotoimages>



Be yourself: Tricolor on her cheek, this lady gets ready for the big game . . .

**THE PHOTOGRAPHER**  
*Martin Forde*  
is an amateur  
photographer,  
based in Cardiff,  
South Wales,  
who specialises  
in street  
photography



Dour: Frenchman has premonition of defeat . . .



Over-confident: Preparing for a Gallic victory . . .

# Me for President

A poem by **Philip Kraske**

I've decided to throw my hat in the ring,  
Always on alert to do the New Thing.  
You toss in your cap, your 'stache, or your wig,  
Buy a good suit and play Mr. Big.  
Character is nowhere greatly required,  
The point's to be airy and nicely attired.

Except for Bernie, who's dressed by his wife,  
But has good ideas and wants to fight strife,  
Is willing to damn old Hillary's demon,  
Do it with gusto and both ears steamin',  
Restore the "demo" to our democracy,  
Without the hype or even hypocrisy.

Me, I'll run on the Republican side,  
Since a loss to Bernie I'll gladly abide.  
And over here all the standards are low,  
You needn't have record, good sense, or be pro.  
The thing over here is to have a great gimmick:  
Something the others are hard put to mimic.

Don's got the dough and a mouth big as Maine.  
He's cornered the market on bootstraps and pain.  
Cruz is a Christian and that's hard to beat,

Turns gays-into-fishes for rednecks to eat.  
Ben Carson's a surgeon who wants a flat tax,  
As sure with a scalpel as big budget axe.

Jeb has a surname he's reluctant to use,  
Lest something Bushly his mouth does let ooze.  
Rubio's my rival, the greatest of threats,  
Speaking the Spanish which means that he gets  
The pain of his people, their struggle 'gainst race,  
That smooth "Buenos dias" against all his ace.

But Marco don't know that Spanish I hablo,  
And I can toss verbos like any diablo.  
I haven't slanged Mexies, and with the best  
I'll run against Wash-town and all the rest  
Of the lobbies and gen'ral's and those well-to-do,  
And kick ass in Congress without I.O.U.

So checking the field, my chances look good.  
My fanbase is family and old neighborhood,  
Which places me fourth in voters' intention,  
And lends some weight to my strong contention.  
I'll talk straight and to wealth I'll not pander!  
(But don't vote for me, vote for B. Sander'.) **CT**

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*Philip Kraske lives in Madrid, Spain, where he teaches English on a freelance basis and does some translation.  
His four novels, of varied plots but centring on American politics and society, began to appear in 2009.  
His website is <http://philipkraske.com>*

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# The worst corporate power grab in history

Secret trade tribunals will turn us into corporate slaves if the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement is not defeated, writes **Chris Hedges**

**Citizens will be forced to give up control of their destiny and will be stripped of the ability to protect themselves from corporate predators, safeguard the ecosystem and find redress and justice in our now anemic and often dysfunctional democratic institutions**

The release on November 5 of the 5,544-page text of the Trans-Pacific Partnership – a trade and investment agreement involving 12 countries comprising almost 40 per cent of global output – confirms what even its most apocalyptic critics feared.

“The TPP, along with the WTO [World Trade Organisation] and NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement], is the most brazen corporate power grab in American history,” Ralph Nader told me when I reached him by phone in Washington, D.C. “It allows corporations to bypass our three branches of government to impose enforceable sanctions by secret tribunals. These tribunals can declare our labour, consumer and environmental protections [to be] unlawful, non-tariff barriers subject to fines for noncompliance. The TPP establishes a transnational, autocratic system of enforceable governance in defiance of our domestic laws.”

The TPP is part of a triad of trade agreements that includes the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA). TiSA, by calling for the privatisation of all public services, is a mortal threat to the viability of the US Postal Service, public education and other government-run enterprises and utilities; together these operations make up 80 per cent of the US

economy. The TTIP and TiSA are still in the negotiation phase. They will follow on the heels of the TPP and are likely to go before Congress in 2017.

These three agreements solidify the creeping corporate coup d'état along with the final evisceration of national sovereignty. Citizens will be forced to give up control of their destiny and will be stripped of the ability to protect themselves from corporate predators, safeguard the ecosystem and find redress and justice in our now anemic and often dysfunctional democratic institutions. The agreements – filled with jargon, convoluted technical, trade and financial terms, legalese, fine print and obtuse phrasing – can be summed up in two words: corporate enslavement.

The TPP removes legislative authority from Congress and the White House on a range of issues. Judicial power is often surrendered to three-person trade tribunals in which only corporations are permitted to sue. Workers, environmental and advocacy groups and labour unions are blocked from seeking redress in the proposed tribunals. The rights of corporations become sacrosanct. The rights of citizens are abolished.

The Sierra Club issued a statement after the release of the TPP text saying that the “deal is rife with polluter giveaways that would undermine decades of environmen-



Protesting: July 29, 2015, outside the TPP talks in Maui, Hawaii.

Photo: Sumofus.org

tal progress, threaten our climate, and fail to adequately protect wildlife because big polluters helped write the deal.”

If there is no sustained popular uprising to prevent the passage of the TPP in Congress this spring, we will be shackled by corporate power. Wages will decline. Working conditions will deteriorate. Unemployment will rise. Our few remaining rights will be revoked. The assault on the ecosystem will be accelerated. Banks and global speculation will be beyond oversight or control. Food safety standards and regulations will be jettisoned. Public services ranging from Medicare and Medicaid to the post office and public education will be abolished or dramatically slashed and taken over by for-profit corporations. Prices for basic commodities, including pharmaceuticals, will skyrocket. Social assistance programs will be drastically scaled back or terminated. And countries that have public health care

systems, such as Canada and Australia, that are in the agreement will probably see their public health systems collapse under corporate assault. Corporations will be empowered to hold a wide variety of patents, including over plants and animals, turning basic necessities and the natural world into marketable products. And, just to make sure corporations extract every pound of flesh, any public law interpreted by corporations as impeding projected profit, even a law designed to protect the environment or consumers, will be subject to challenge in an entity called the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) section. The ISDS, bolstered and expanded under the TPP, will see corporations paid massive sums in compensation from offending governments for impeding their “right” to further swell their bank accounts. Corporate profit effectively will replace the common good.

Given the bankruptcy of our political

**Just to make sure corporations extract every pound of flesh, any public law interpreted by corporations as impeding projected profit, even a law designed to protect the environment or consumers, will be subject to challenge**

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## TAKING OVER

**The agreement is the product of six years of work by global capitalists from banks, insurance companies, Goldman Sachs, Monsanto and other corporations**

class – including amoral politicians such as Hillary Clinton, who is denouncing the TPP during the presidential campaign but whose unwavering service to corporate capitalism assures her fealty to her corporate backers – the trade agreement has a good chance of becoming law. And because the Obama administration won fast-track authority, a tactic designed by the Nixon administration to subvert democratic debate, President Obama will be able to sign the agreement before it goes to Congress.

The TPP, because of fast track, bypasses the normal legislative process of public discussion and consideration by congressional committees. The House and the Senate, which have to vote on the TPP bill within 90 days of when it is sent to Congress, are prohibited by the fast-track provision from adding floor amendments or holding more than 20 hours of floor debate. Congress cannot raise concerns about the effects of the TPP on the environment. It can only vote yes or no. It is powerless to modify or change one word.

There will be a mass mobilisation November 14 through 18 in Washington to begin the push to block the TPP. Rising up to stop the TPP is a far, far better investment of our time and energy than engaging in the empty political theatre that passes for a presidential campaign.

“The TPP creates a web of corporate laws that will dominate the global economy,” attorney Kevin Zeese of the group Popular Resistance, which has mounted a long fight against the trade agreement, told me from Baltimore by telephone. “It is a global corporate coup d’état. Corporations will become more powerful than countries. Corporations will force demo-

cratic systems to serve their interests. Civil courts around the world will be replaced with corporate courts or so-called trade tribunals. This is a massive expansion that builds on the worst of NAFTA rather than what Barack Obama promised, which was to get rid of the worst aspects of NAFTA.”

The agreement is the product of six years of work by global capitalists from banks, insurance companies, Goldman Sachs, Monsanto and other corporations.

“It was written by them [the corporations], it is for them, and it will serve them,” Zeese said of the TPP. “It will hurt domestic businesses and small businesses. The buy-American provisions will disappear. Local communities will not be allowed to build buy-local campaigns. The thrust of the agreement is the privatisation and commodification of everything. The agreement has built within it a deep antipathy to state-supported or state-owned enterprises. It gives away what is left of our democracy to the World Trade Organisation.”

The economist David Rosnick, in a report on the TPP by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), estimated that under the trade agreement only the top 10 per cent of US workers would see their wages increase. Rosnick wrote that the real wages of middle-income US workers (from the 35th percentile to the 80th percentile) would decline under the TPP. NAFTA, contributing to a decline in manufacturing jobs (now only 9 per cent of the economy), has forced workers into lower-paying service jobs and resulted in a decline in real wages of between 12 and 17 per cent. The TPP would only accelerate this process, Rosnick concluded.

“This is a continuation of the global race to the bottom,” Dr. Margaret Flowers, also



from Popular Resistance and a candidate for the US Senate, said from Baltimore in a telephone conversation with me. “Corporations are free to move to countries that have the lowest labour standards. This drives down high labour standards here. It means a decimation of industries and unions. It means an accelerated race to the bottom, which we must rise up to stop.”

“In Malaysia, one-third of tech workers are essentially slaves,” Zeese said. “In Vietnam the minimum wage is 35 cents an hour. Once these countries are part of the trade agreement US workers are put in a very difficult position.”

Fifty-one per cent of working Americans now make less than \$30,000 a year, a new study by the Social Security Administration reported. Forty per cent are making less than \$20,000 a year. The federal government considers a family of four living on an income of less than \$24,250 to be in poverty.

“Half of American workers earn essentially the poverty level,” Zeese said. “This agreement only accelerates this trend. I don’t see how American workers are going to cope.”

The assault on the American workforce by NAFTA – which was established under the Clinton administration in 1994 and which at the time promised the creation of 200,000 net jobs a year in the United States – has been devastating. NAFTA has led to a \$181 billion trade deficit with Mexico and Canada and the loss of at least one million US jobs, according to a report by Public Citizen. The flooding of the Mexican market with cheap corn by US agro-businesses drove down the price of Mexican corn and saw one to three million poor Mexican farmers go bankrupt and lose their small farms. Many of them crossed the border into the United States in a desperate effort to find work.

“Obama has misled the public throughout this process,” Dr. Flowers said. “He claimed that environmental groups were

supportive of the agreement because it provided environmental protections, and this has now been proven false. He told us that it would create 650,000 jobs, and this has now been proven false. He calls this a 21st-century trade agreement, but it actually rolls back progress made in Bush-era trade agreements. The most recent model of a 21st-century trade agreement is the Korean free trade agreement. That was supposed to create 140,000 US jobs. But what we saw within a couple years was a loss of about 70,000 jobs and a larger trade deficit with Korea. This agreement [the TPP] is sold to us with the same deceits that were used to sell us NAFTA and other trade agreements.”

The agreement, in essence, becomes global law. Any agreements over carbon emissions by countries made through the United Nations are effectively rendered null and void by the TPP.

“Trade agreements are binding,” Flowers said. “They supersede any of the non-binding agreements made by the United Nations Climate Change Conference that might come out of Paris.”

There is more than enough evidence from past trade agreements to indicate where the TPP – often called “NAFTA on steroids” – will lead. It is part of the inexorable march by corporations to wrest from us the ability to use government to defend the public and to build social and political organisations that promote the common good. Our corporate masters seek to turn the natural world and human beings into malleable commodities that will be used and exploited until exhaustion or collapse. Trade agreements are the tools being used to achieve this subjugation. The only response left is open, sustained and defiant popular revolt. **CT**

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*Chris Hedges’ latest book, “Wages of Rebellion,” has just been released by Amazon Books. this essay was originally published at <http://truthout.org>*

**The flooding of the Mexican market with cheap corn by US agro-businesses drove down the price of Mexican corn and saw one to three million poor Mexican farmers go bankrupt and lose their small farms**



# Stalked – by a pair of shoes

There's a reason they are called 'impulse purchases,' write **Victor Pickard** and **Tim Libert**

**As a society, we often hold news organizations to higher ethical standards. They're not just businesses; they're supposed to provide a vital public service, and they depend on public trust**

**Y**ou may already know that every time you go online, your browsing history could be exposed to numerous advertisers and data brokers who then send you 'targeted' advertisements.

But what about visiting the news websites you trust most? Our current research finds that browsing news-related websites actually exposes you to over twice as much tracking as the rest of the web.

The surprising extent to which news organisations subject readers to third-party tracking deserves closer attention. As a society, we often hold news organisations to higher ethical standards. They're not just businesses; they're supposed to provide a vital public service, and they depend on public trust.

While the ethics of readers unknowingly 'paying' for content with their privacy are certainly questionable, the practice is also indicative of the precarious situation the news industry finds itself in. Meanwhile, the rise of ad-blockers – a hindrance to the business model of news websites – has only further complicated matters.

## **Why the media has turned to online tracking**

Ever been stalked by that pair of shoes you clicked on once but didn't buy?

Here's what's going on: Websites frequently allow third parties (primarily online advertisers) to monitor their readers' activities and interests. These third parties use external servers that often employ what are known as 'trackers,' or pieces of software connected to a 'hidden web' that monitors users' activities.

Ad networks will then show users advertisements deemed 'relevant' based on which websites they have previously visited. That pair of shoes you keep seeing is the hidden web in action: Even if the websites appear totally different on the surface, underneath they may be connected by a vast network of trackers.

And it's this invisible tracking network that the struggling online news industry has turned to.

It's a story that's been told time and again: As consumers and advertisers have migrated to the web, the longstanding revenue model for ad-dependent news organisations has come under considerable strain.

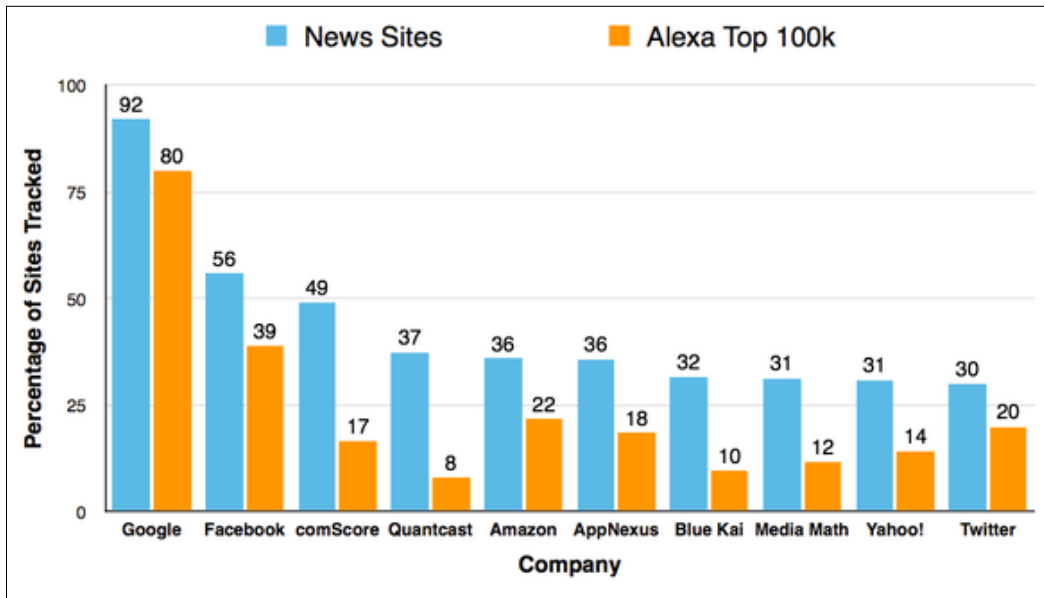
In response, many pub-



**Right: Lolita shoes.**

Photo: Michelle Yao





A chart depicts the percentage of news sites that release information various online trackers.

Advertising and behavioral tracking have become so intertwined that users who want to protect their privacy must also block advertisements

lishers have resorted to various forms of ethically-murky practices to replace dried-up revenue sources. This could mean publishing native advertising or allowing companies to track what pages readers visit – which they’ll then use to create ‘consumer profiles.’

There seems to be a strange silence surrounding the ethics of native advertising, but online tracking has come under increased scrutiny from regulators and civil society groups.

Meanwhile, heated debates about invasive digital advertising and tracking flared up recently when Apple allowed ad-blocking in the newest update to the iOS mobile operating system. Because ad-blocking prevents publishers from gaining income they derive when ads are clicked, the CEO of the Interactive Advertising Bureau claimed that ‘ad blocking is robbery’ that could lead to an ‘internet apocalypse.’

Others have suggested that the industry created its own problems with run-amok advertising. A major factor in this predicament is that advertising and behavioral tracking have become so intertwined that users who want to protect their privacy must also block advertisements.

**Using X-ray software to detect hidden servers**

For our study, we were interested in understanding the extent to which news sites use trackers.

Using Tim Libert’s open-source software platform webXray, we loaded web pages to detect all of the third-party servers that may collect user data. To get a baseline measure of tracking prevalence, we first analyzed Alexa’s top 100,000 websites.

We found that users were exposed to an average of eight external servers on each site. This means that many hidden third parties (again, usually advertisers) may be simultaneously observing an individual’s browsing habits. But even more surprising was our finding that news organisations appear to be among the most active perpetrators of this practice.

Our investigation has revealed that among the 2,000-plus news-related websites identified by Alexa, readers are, on average, connected to more than 19 third-party servers – twice as many as the 100,000 most popular sites.

The outlets facilitating this tracking include the most respected names in the news industry, coast-to-coast. A visitor to the *New*

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## YOU'RE THE TARGET

**While many users may be resigned to the power these companies have over their information, regulators across the world have continued to investigate and penalize them for deceptive and unethical business practices**

*York Times'* home page is potentially connected to a whopping 44 third-party servers, while visitors to the *Los Angeles Times'* website get their browsing history leaked to 32 external servers. And if you're planning on checking the forecast on AccuWeather before heading out, you can expect to be connected to 48 third-party servers. Even visitors to public media outlets are not safe. A visitor to National Public Radio's website will be tracked by Chartbeat, Google, Nielsen Online, Moat and comScore.

In general, we found that marquee media brands are no different from the other 2,000 news sites that we examined. It's a problem that's endemic to the entire internet media sector.

While these findings are preliminary, they're in line with recent research, and we've used an established research methodology to shed light on this practice.

### **Clown car of trackers**

The findings are troubling for a number of reasons. In addition to ethical concerns regarding user consent and privacy rights, excessive tracking is a major cause of news sites' slow load times as readers are forced to wait for multiple trackers to download. Picture a clown car driving into your living room and a nearly endless parade of marketers hopping out and competing with each other to peek over your shoulder while you surf the web.

News websites are taking the internet's average 'creep factor' of privacy invasion and doubling down on it.

Much of this tracking is performed by well-known companies that wield significant presence and power. For example, Google and Facebook have code on 92 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively, of the 2,000-plus news-related sites that we analyzed.

More troubling, even those who use privacy-friendly search engines such as DuckDuckGo and avoid social media aren't spared from the internet giants' tracking,

which often occurs silently on the sites they end up surfing each day. While many users may be resigned to the power these companies have over their information, regulators across the world have continued to investigate and penalize them for deceptive and unethical business practices.

While Google and Facebook don't directly sell user information, we found 67 instances of sites leaking reader information to data brokers Experian and Acxiom. Both of these companies sell personal information on the open market, with little oversight or regulation.

Furthermore, modern big data techniques allow seemingly 'anonymous' data to be used to discriminate against minorities, paired with other information such as email addresses, or even linked back to real names. Although many companies claim not to sell 'personally identifiable information,' this is often based on an antiquated definition of the term unsuited for the big data era.

### **Peeved public**

So why does it matter that news sites engage in this practice?

Well, your news-reading habits can be a reflection of who you are and what you're likely to buy. For example, if you read the business section, you may be more likely to buy luxury goods.

Indeed, companies called data brokers bundle people into consumer 'segments,' with categories ranging from 'Power Elite' and 'American Royalty' all the way down to 'Small Town Shallow Pockets' and 'Urban Survivors.' In the absence of regulation or comprehensive disclosure, it is unclear how web browsing histories make their way into these determinations, but the potential exists.

It should come as no surprise that this practice, as it becomes better understood, doesn't sit well with the public.

Extensive survey research has shown that users are opposed to such invasions

of their privacy. At the same time, they feel like there's nothing they can do to protect themselves.

Publishers that complain about the ethics of ad blockers should also consider the ethics of tracking users and their outsize role in widely reviled annoyances such as increasing page load times, invading privacy, sucking up data on limited plans and imposing distracting animations and sounds on the viewer.

It's doubtful that visitors to news sites are aware of this tracking, and the websites provide few if any clues that it's happening. While modern browsers have implemented a 'Do Not Track' setting, many online advertisers choose to ignore it. Even if users make it clear they wish to be left alone, they are still tracked.

### **Media companies digging their own grave**

When publishers don't give people the tools to opt out of extensive behavioral tracking, they leave readers with only one option to protect their privacy: Install an ad blocker. The problem of ad blocking runs much deeper than getting rid of annoying pop-ups; it strikes at the core business model of digital journalism, which often relies on ad revenue.

Publishers sit at a crossroads. They can continue down the path of overly invasive advertising or they can try to correct course. They can ignore user wishes in an attempt to make slightly more money on 'targeted' ads, or they can respect their visitors' 'Do

Not Track' requests. If news outlets attempt to 'block the blockers,' it will only result in a protracted – and unwinnable – war with readers. Regardless, trying to improve upon a fundamentally deceptive model is not the best lesson to draw from this quandary.

Indeed, there are signs that the industry may continue ethically dubious advertising practices by increasing its focus on native advertising. Some commentators are advocating for newspapers to just develop better advertising – with 'better' too often meaning fewer animations, not greater respect for reader privacy. Others have, once again, called for paywalls or some type of subscription model. And then there are pessimists who question whether any profit-driven, commercial model of digital journalism will ever provide the quality of news and information that a democracy requires.

To be clear, we do not wish for the economic model supporting online journalism to collapse. Democratic society needs journalism, and we recognize that hard news is expensive to produce.

But we can't let commercial imperatives run roughshod over the public's right to privacy. News organisations should be ethical exemplars, not the bad apples among online actors. **CT**

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*Tim Libert is a PhD candidate in communication, University of Pennsylvania; Victor Pickard is associate professor, University of Pennsylvania. This article originally appeared at <http://theconversation.com>*

**When publishers don't give people the tools to opt out of extensive behavioral tracking, they leave readers with only one option to protect their privacy: Install an ad blocker**

# READ THE BEST OF **FRONTLINE**

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







# BLOODLINE

**Nicolas Enriquez** hangs out with teenage members of the Latin Kings gang in Bushwick, Brooklyn



From left: Latin Kings gang members Looney, Chucho, Smokey and Buckets rest in their apartment after a long day at a meeting with other gang members.





**Smokey, leader of the southside Latin Kings gang in Brooklyn, New York.**

**W**hen Nicolas Enriquez decided to photograph the lives of teenage members of the Bushwick, Brooklyn, branch of the 35,000-member Latin Kings, one of the largest gangs in the United States, he was aware of the dangers and pitfalls of straying into such a violent society.

So the 20-year-old photojournalism student began his multi-year effort – inspired by the work of one of his teachers at a New York college – by developing a phantom project, *People Living In Their Neighborhoods*, interviewing and photographing residents “as a cover to enable me to hang out around the housing proj-



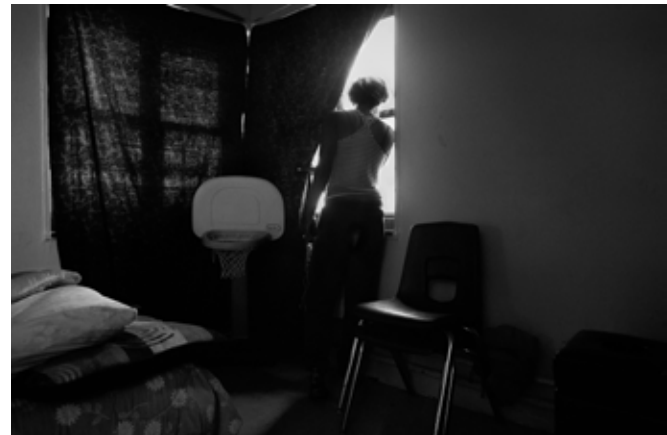
**Democracy in action: The Latin Kings meet at their headquarters.**



**Baby Kirell sleeps at the home of Smokey, leader of the Latin Kings.**



**Lost in a cloud of smoke: Smokey lights up a marijuana joint.**



**Inside looking out. Isis looks for cops.**



**Smokey (left) and Chucho play with one of baby Kirell's toys.**

ects and get to know people connected with the gang. I didn't want to join the Kings, but had to be accepted by their leader Smokey before being allowed to take intimate photographs.

“At first, it was hard for me to understand why anyone would want to be a gang member: few people respect you, you're on the radar of police and other gangs; why would you choose this life style? But I dumped my stereotypes and saw who they really were – the more human side. This didn't change my opinion on their actions, but it did give me an understanding of their decision to pursue the gang life.

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## IN THE FRAME



Family members relax after a birthday party inside Smokey's apartment.

“My photo essay, *The Bloodline* (the title is taken from the name given by the Latin Kings to the New York faction of their gang), explores the intimacy and naivety of teenagers who have been forced by racial, social and economic issues beyond their control to survive in a hostile environment. My photographs draw attention to the happiness, unity and respect they show each other, and to the importance of family and religion in their lives.

“As a Colombian, I am aware of the problems of being Latin American in the USA, and can understand why these teenagers try to overcome those issues by joining a gang, a community that makes them juggle their lives between being a



Teflon shows the table where he has displayed the tools of his trade as a gang member.





Flash chills out. It seems much of the life of the Latin Kings life is devoted to hanging out and smoking.



Buckets (left) and Chucho wait for Smokey to come out of jail after being locked up for possession of a gun and drugs.

regular teenager and surviving as an out-cast in the concrete jungle.

“They were like kids in a boys’ club, having fun, playing around and supporting each other. But then I saw this ‘boys’ club’ being crashed by the pressure under which they lived, and that changed my perspective. I wish nothing but to portray the reality of their lives, the struggle and the lack of attention there is for people living under difficult and violent conditions.”

Enriquez’s empathy for his subjects shines through in this dramatic series of photographs, enabling the viewer to feel the despair – and the joy – in these young lives.

**Tony Sutton**

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## IN THE FRAME



**Karen, mother of Kirell and aunt of Smokey looks at her phone while watching TV inside her Brooklyn apartment.**

### THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Photo: Nicole Craine



*Nicolas Enriquez was born in Cali, Colombia, in 1993. He moved to New York in 2012 to study photojournalism and documentary photography at The International*

*Center of Photography, from which he graduated in 2014. He works as a freelance photographer for the New York Daily News, and his work has been published in the New York Times, American Photography, the Daily Mail and La Corriere Della Sera.*

● Follow him on Twitter and Instagram at @nicoenr12



**Making a buck: Drug dealing to the local community is the main source of income for the gang.**



**Dangerous game: Gang member  
Murder holds a gun that he bought  
on the street for \$250.**



# Chaos, confusion and a desire for independence

**William Blum** finds the underlying problem with US attitudes to Syria

**The United States overthrew the secular governments of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya and is trying to do the same with Syria, thus giving great impetus to the rise of ISIS**

**T**he US, France, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and the Gulf monarchies have all in the recent past supported al Qaeda and/or the Islamic State (ISIS) with arms, money, and/or manpower.

The first example of this was in 1979 when the United States began covert operations in Afghanistan, six months before the Russians arrived, promoting Islamic fundamentalism across the southern tier of the Soviet Union against “godless communism.” All the al-Qaeda/Taliban shit then followed.

The United States has also provided support to Islamic militants in Bosnia, Kosovo, Libya, the Caucasus, and Syria.

The United States overthrew the secular governments of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, and is trying to do the same with Syria, thus giving great impetus to the rise of ISIS. Said Barack Obama in March of this year: “ISIS is a direct outgrowth of al-Qaeda in Iraq that grew out of our invasion. Which is an example of unintended consequences. Which is why we should generally aim before we shoot.”

More than a million refugees from these wars of Washington are currently over-running Europe and North Africa. God bless American exceptionalism.

The Iraqi, Syrian and Turkish Kurds have all fought against ISIS, but Turkey – close US ally and member of NATO – has fought against each of them.

Russia, Iran, Iraq, and Lebanese factions

have each supported the Syrian government in various ways in Damascus’s struggle against ISIS and other terrorist groups, including the (much celebrated but seldom seen) “moderate” ones. For this all four countries have been sharply criticized by Washington.

The United States has bombed ISIS in Syria, but has used the same occasions to damage Syria’s infrastructure and oil-producing capacity. Russia has bombed ISIS in Syria, but has used the same occasions to attack Syria’s other enemies.

The mainstream media almost never mentions the proposed Qatar natural-gas pipelines – whose path to Europe Syria has stood in the way of for years – as a reason for much of the hostility toward Syria. The pipelines could dethrone Russia as Europe’s dominant source of energy.

In Libya, during the beginning of the 2011 civil war, anti-Gaddafi rebels, many of whom were al-Qaeda affiliated militias, were protected by NATO in “no-fly zones.”

US policy in Syria in the years leading up to the 2011 uprising against Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad, which began the whole current mess, was designed to promote sectarianism, which in turn led to civil war with the goal of regime change.

US Secretary of State John Kerry declared on October 22 that in resolving Syria’s civil war the country “should not be broken up, that it must remain secular, and that Syrians

should choose their future leader.” (All of which actually describes Syria under Assad.) Then Kerry said: “One thing stands in the way of being able to rapidly move to implement that, and it’s a person called Assad, Bashar Assad.”

### **Why does the government of the United States hate Syrian president Bashar al-Assad with such passion?**

Is it because, as we’re told, he’s a brutal dictator? But how can that be the reason for the hatred? It would be difficult indeed to name a brutal dictatorship of the second half of the 20th Century or of the 21st century that was not supported by the United States – not only supported, but often put into power and kept in power against the wishes of the population. At present, the list would include Saudi Arabia, Honduras, Indonesia, Egypt, Colombia, Qatar, and Israel.

The United States, I suggest, is hostile to the Syrian government for the same reason it has been hostile to Cuba for more than half a century, and hostile to Venezuela for the past 15 years, and earlier to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and to the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Chile, and so on continuing through the world atlas and history books.

What these governments have had in common can be summarized in a single word: independence ... independence from American foreign policy, to be a client state of Washington, to be continuously hostile to Washington’s Officially Designated Enemies, insufficient respect and zeal for the capitalist way of life.

### **Democratic Socialism**

The candidacy of Bernie Sanders, a democratic socialist, for the US presidency has produced an unprecedented barrage of discussion in the American media about just what is “socialism.” Most of the discussion centres around the question of government ownership and control of the economy versus private ownership and control. This is, of course, a very old question: the meat and potatoes of

the Cold War ideological competition.

What’s markedly different now is that a few centuries of uninhibited free enterprise have finally laid painfully bare the basic anti-social nature of capitalism, forcing many of even the most committed true believers to concede the inherent harm the system brings to the lives of all but the richest.

But regardless of what the intellects of these true believers tell them, they still find it very difficult emotionally to completely cut the umbilical cord to the system they were carefully raised to place the greatest of faith in. Thus, they may finally concede that we have to eliminate, or at least strictly minimize, the role of the profit motive in health care and education and maybe one or two other indispensable social service, but they insist that the government should keep its bureaucratic hands off everything else; they favor as much decentralization as possible.

The most commonly proposed alternative to both government or private control is worker-owned cooperatives or publicly owned enterprises managed by workers and consumer representatives. Sanders has expressed his support for worker-owned cooperatives.

There is much to be said about such systems, but the problem I find is that they will still operate within a capitalist society, which means competition and survival of the fittest, which means that if you can’t sell more than your competitors, if you can’t make a sufficient net profit on your sales, you will likely be forced to go out of business. To prevent such a fate, at some point you may very well be forced to do illegal or immoral things against the public, which means back to the present.

You cannot follow the mass media without being confronted every day with story after story of one corporation or another trying to swindle the public in one way or another; the latest egregious case being that of the much revered Volkswagen, recently revealed to have manipulated the measurement of the car’s pollution emission. The fact is that half

**A few centuries of uninhibited free enterprise have finally laid painfully bare the basic anti-social nature of capitalism, forcing many of even the most committed true believers to concede the inherent harm the system brings to the lives of all but the richest**

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## ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

**Removal of the profit motive will also keep us from drowning in a sea of advertising and my phone ringing several times each day to sell me something I don't need and which may not even exist**

of the company's supervisory board – responsible for monitoring the management and approving important corporate decisions – consists of employee representatives elected by the employees did not prevent this egregious fraud. The company is still obliged to strive to maximize profit and the firm's stock-market value. It's the nature of the corporate beast within a capitalist jungle. Only removal of the profit motive will correct such behavior, and also keep us from drowning in a sea of advertising and my phone ringing several times each day to sell me something I don't need and which may not even exist.

The market. How can we determine the proper value, the proper price, of goods and services without “the magic of the marketplace”? Let's look at something most people have to pay for – rent. Who or what designed this system where in 2015 11.8 million households in the US are paying more than 50 percent of their income to keep a roof over their heads, while rent is considered “affordable” if it totals some 30 percent or less of one's income. What is the sense of this? It causes more hardship than any other expense people are confronted with – all kinds of important needs go unmet because of the obligation to pay a huge amount for rent each month; it is the main cause of homelessness. Who benefits from it other than the landlords? What is magical about that?

Above and beyond any other consideration, there is climate change, survival of the planet, the quality of our lives. What keeps corporations from modifying their behaviour so as to be kinder to our environment? It is of course the good old “bottom line” again. What can we do to convince the corporations to consistently behave like good citizens? Nothing that hasn't already been tried and failed. Except one thing. Unmentionable in a capitalist society. Nationalization. There, I said it. Now I'll be getting letters damning me as an “Old Stalinist.”

But nationalization is not a panacea either, at least for the environment. The greatest single source of environmental damage

in the world is the United States military. And it's already been nationalized. But doing away with private corporations will reduce the drive toward imperialism sufficiently that before long the need for a military will fade away, and we can live like Costa Rica. If you think that would put the United States in danger of attack, please tell me who would attack, and why.

Most Americans, like other developed peoples, worship the capitalism they were raised with. But do they? See the chapter in my book “Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower,” *The United States Invades, Bombs, And Kills For It But Do Americans Really Believe In Free Enterprise?* Written in 2000/2005, the examples given in the chapter may need some updating, but the ideas expressed are as valid as ever.

Nationalization, hand-in-hand with a planned society, would of course not preclude elections. On the contrary, we'd have elections not ruled by money. What a breath of fresh air. Professor Cornel West has suggested that it's become difficult to even imagine what a free and democratic society, without great concentrations of corporate power, would look like, or how it would operate.

### **Who are you going to believe? Me or Dick Cheney?**

I've spent about 30 years compiling the details of the criminal record of US foreign policy into concise lists, and I'm always looking for suitable occasions to present the information to new readers. The new book by Dick Cheney and his adoring daughter is just such an occasion.

“We are, as a matter of empirical fact and undeniable history, the greatest force for good the world has ever known. ... security and freedom for millions of people around the globe have depended on America's military, economic, political, and diplomatic might.” – Dick Cheney and Liz Cheney, “Why the world needs a powerful America.”

Well ... nothing short of a brain and soul transplant would change the *welt anschauung*



of Dr. Strangelove and his carefully-conditioned offspring, but for all of you out there who still live in a world of facts, logic, human rights, and human empathy, here's the ammunition to use if you should happen to find yourself ensnared in the embrace of the likes of the Cheneys (including mother Lynne who once set up a website solely to attack me and seven others for holding a teach-in on September 18, 2001, in which we spoke of US foreign policy as the main provocation of what had happened exactly a week earlier.)

Since the end of World War II, the United States has:

- Attempted to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments, most of which were democratically elected.
- Dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries.
- Attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders.
- Attempted to suppress a populist or nationalist movement in 20 countries.
- Grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries.
- Plus ... although not easily quantified ... more involved in the practice of torture than any other country in the world ... for over a century ... not just performing the actual torture, but teaching it, providing the manuals, and furnishing the equipment.

### **Open Letter to the War Politicians of the World**

Jürgen Todenhöfer is a German journalist and former media manager; from 1972 to 1990 he was a member of parliament for the Christian Democrats (CDU). He was one of Germany's most ardent supporters of the US-sponsored mujahideen and their guerrilla war against the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Several times he traveled to combat zones with Afghan mujahideen groups. After 2001 Todenhöfer became an outspoken critic of the US interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. He has published several books about visits he made to war zones. In recent years he twice interviewed Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, and

in 2015 he was the first German journalist to visit the 'Islamic State'.

### **Dear Presidents and Heads of Governments!**

*Through decades of a policy of war and exploitation you have pushed millions people in the Middle East and Africa into misery. Because of your policies refugees have to flee all over the world. One out of every three refugees in Germany comes from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. From Africa comes one out of five refugees.*

*Your wars are also the cause of global terrorism. Instead of some 100 international terrorists like 15 years ago, we now are faced with more than 100,000 terrorists. Your cynical ruthlessness now strikes back at us like a boomerang.*

*As usual, you do not even consider to really change your policy. You care only about the symptoms. The security situation gets more dangerous and chaotic by the day. More and more wars, waves of terror and refugee crises will determine the future of our planet.*

*Even in Europe, the war will one day knock again at the door. Any businessman that would act like you would be fired or be in prison by now. You are total failures.*

*The peoples of the Middle East and Africa, whose countries you have destroyed and plundered, and the people of Europe, who now accommodate the countless desperate refugees, have to pay a high price for your policies. But you wash your hands of responsibility. You should stand trial in front of the International Criminal Court. And each of your political followers should actually take care of at least 100 refugee families.*

*Basically, the people of the world should rise up and resist you as the warmongers and exploiters you are. As once Gandhi did it – in non-violence, in 'civil disobedience.' We should create new movements and parties. Movements for justice and humanity. Make wars in other countries just as punishable as murder and manslaughter in one's own country. And you who are responsible for war and exploitation, you should go to hell forever. It is enough! Get lost! The world would be much nicer without you.*

– **Jürgen Todenhöfer**

**Here's the ammunition to use if you should happen to find yourself ensnared in the embrace of the likes of the Cheneys**

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**William Blum**  
is the author of *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, *Rogue State: a guide to the World's Only Super Power*, *West-Bloc Dissident: a Cold War Political Memoir*, and *America's Deadliest Export – Democracy: The Truth About US Foreign Policy and Everything Else*

# Wireless, but still under water

Why is no one taking care of our unregulated and undefended ocean-floor cable networks? asks **Nicole Starosielski**

**The cables we all rely on to send everything from email to banking information across the seas remain largely unregulated and undefended**

Recently a *New York Times* article on Russian submarine activity near undersea communications cables dredged up Cold War politics and generated widespread recognition of the submerged systems we all depend upon.

Not many people realize that undersea cables transport almost 100 per cent of transoceanic data traffic.

These lines are laid on the very bottom of the ocean floor. They're about as thick as a garden hose and carry the world's internet, phone calls and even TV transmissions between continents at the speed of light. A single cable can carry tens of terabits of information per second.

While researching my book, "The Undersea Network", I realized that the cables we all rely on to send everything from email to banking information across the seas remain largely unregulated and undefended. Although they are laid by only a few companies (including the American company SubCom and the French company Alcatel-Lucent) and often funneled along narrow paths, the ocean's vastness has often provided them protection.

## **Far from wireless**

The fact that we route internet traffic through the ocean – amidst deep sea creatures and hydrothermal vents – runs counter to most people's imaginings of

the internet. Didn't we develop satellites and Wi-Fi to transmit signals through the air? Haven't we moved to the cloud? Undersea cable systems sound like a thing of the past.

The reality is that the cloud is actually under the ocean. Even though they might seem behind the times, fiber-optic cables are actually state-of-the-art global communications technologies. Because they use light to encode information and remain unfettered by weather, cables carry data faster and cheaper than satellites. They crisscross the continents, too – a message from New York to California also travels by fiber-optic cable. These systems are not going to be replaced by aerial communications anytime soon.

## **Vulnerable system?**

The biggest problem with cable systems is not technological – it's human. Because they run underground, underwater and between telephone poles, cable systems populate the same spaces we do. As a result, we accidentally break them all the time. Local construction projects dig up terrestrial lines. Boaters drop anchors on cables. And submarines can pinpoint systems under the sea.

Most of the recent media coverage has been dominated by the question of vulnerability. Are global communications net-

works really at risk of disruption? What would happen if these cables were cut? Do we need to worry about the threat of sabotage from Russian subs or terrorist agents?

The answer to this is not black and white. Any individual cable is always at risk, but likely far more so from boaters and fishermen than any saboteur. Over history, the single largest cause of disruption has been people unintentionally dropping anchors and nets. The International Cable Protection Committee has been working for years to prevent such breaks.

As a result, cables today are covered in steel armor and buried beneath the seafloor at their shore-ends, where the human threat is most concentrated.

This provides some level of protection. In the deep sea, the ocean's inaccessibility largely safeguards cables – they need only to be covered with a thin polyethylene sheath. It's not that it's much more difficult to sever cables in the deep ocean, it's just that the primary forms of interference are less likely to happen. The sea is so big and the cables are so narrow, the probability isn't that high that you'd run across one.

Sabotage has actually been rare in the history of undersea cables. There are certainly occurrences (though none recently), but these are disproportionately publicized. The World War I German raid of the Fanning Island cable station in the Pacific Ocean gets a lot of attention. And there was speculation about sabotage in the cable disruptions outside Alexandria, Egypt, in 2008, which cut 70 per cent of the country's internet, affecting millions. But we hear little about the regular faults that occur, on average, about 200 times each year.

### **Redundancy provides some protection**

The fact is it's incredibly difficult to monitor these lines. Cable companies have been trying to do so for more than a century, since the first telegraph lines were laid in

the 1800s. But the ocean is too vast and the lines simply too long. It would be impossible to stop every vessel that came anywhere near critical communications cables. We'd need to create extremely long, "no-go" zones across the ocean, which itself would profoundly disrupt the economy.

Fewer than 300 cable systems transport almost all transoceanic traffic around the world. And these often run through narrow pressure points where small disruptions can have massive impacts.

Because each cable can carry an extraordinary amount of information, it's not uncommon for an entire country to rely on only a handful of systems. In many places, it would take only a few cable cuts to take out large swathes of the internet. If the right cables were disrupted at the right time, it could disrupt global internet traffic for weeks or even months.

The thing that protects global information traffic is the fact that there's some redundancy built into the system. Because there is more cable capacity than there is traffic, when there is a break, information is automatically rerouted along other cables. Because there are many systems linking to the United States, and a lot of internet infrastructure is located here, a single cable outage is unlikely to cause any noticeable effect for Americans.

Any single cable line has been and will continue to be susceptible to disruption. And the only way around this is to build a more diverse system. But as things are, even though individual companies each look out for their own network, there is no economic incentive or supervisory body to ensure the global system as a whole is resilient. If there's a vulnerability to worry about, this is it. **CT**

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**It's incredibly difficult to monitor these lines. Cable companies have been trying to do so for more than a century, since the first telegraph lines were laid in the 1800s. But the ocean is too vast and the lines simply too long**

# Blair heads for a date with the handcuffs

Pseudo-apologies won't protect the former British prime minister from a date with justice, writes **Felicity Arbuthnot**

**It is now known that Blair and George W. Bush plotted to invade Iraq in April 2002, a year before the onslaught, come what may**

*"I think most people who have dealt with me think I am a pretty straight sort of guy, and I am." (Tony Blair, October 21 2011, BBC.)*

**T**he extent of Tony Blair's duplicitous collusion in the illegal bombing and invasion of Iraq is, it seems, finally coming home to roost.

In what has been dubbed "an apology," Blair even took to CNN in an interview with his pal Fareed Zakaria in an attempt to explain himself. It was, however, no apology, but a weasel-worded damage limitation exercise, as more and more revelations as to his disregard for international law surface. The fault was, he claimed, that "the intelligence we received was wrong," there were "mistakes in planning," and a failure to understand "what would happen once you removed the regime." Rubbish. It is now known that he and George W. Bush plotted to invade Iraq in April 2002, a year before the onslaught, come what may.

He also found it "hard to apologise for removing Saddam." Sorry Mr. Blair, your war was lawless, illegitimate and criminal – in any case, Saddam Hussein was *not* "removed," he was lynched, and his sons and 15-year-old grandson were slaughtered in a hail of US bullets – in a country whose "sovereignty and territorial integrity" was guaranteed by the UN.

Blair brushed off any suggestion of a war crimes trial, making it clear that he would also be happy to trash Syria as he had done Iraq, had he the chance. To this lawyer, legality is clearly inconsequential.

Now Sir Ken Macdonald, UK's Director of Public Prosecutions during the final years of Blair's regime, has weighed in against Blair. (Ironically, Macdonald has his legal practice at London's Matrix Chambers, which he founded with Blair's barrister wife Cherie, who also continues to practise from Matrix Chambers.)

## **Epic deceit**

In a scathing attack, Sir Ken said, "The degree of deceit involved in our decision to go to war on Iraq becomes steadily clearer. This was a foreign policy disgrace of epic proportion." Referring to the CNN interview he dismissed Blair's performance, saying "playing footsie on Sunday morning television does nothing to repair the damage."

He added, "It is now very difficult to avoid the conclusion that Tony Blair engaged in an alarming subterfuge with his partner, George Bush, and went on to mislead and cajole the British people into a deadly war they had made perfectly clear they didn't want, and on a basis that it's increasingly hard to believe even he found truly credible."

Macdonald cited Blair's "sycophancy



towards power,” being unable to resist the “glamour” he attracted in Washington. “In this sense he was weak, and, as we can see, he remains so. Since those sorry days we have frequently heard him repeating the self-regarding mantra that ‘hand on heart, I only did what I thought was right’. But this is a narcissist’s defence, and self-belief is no answer to misjudgment: It is certainly no answer to death.”

Macdonald’s broadside coincides with a report in the *Mail on Sunday* newspaper that, “on the eve of war,” Blair’s Downing Street “descended in to panic” on being told by the attorney general, Lord Goldsmith, that “the conflict could be challenged under international law.” There was “pandemonium,” Blair was “horrified,” and the limited number of ministers and officials who had a copy of the written opinion “were told ‘burn it, destroy it’” alleges the *Mail*.

The “burning” hysteria centred on Lord Goldsmith’s 13-page legal opinion of March 7, 2003 – 20 days before the attack on Iraq. The “pandemonium” related to the fact that with “the date the war was supposed to start already in the diary,” Goldsmith was still saying “it could be challenged under international law.”

### **Former senior figure**

It is not known who gave the order, but the *Mail* said the information came from a former senior figure in Blair’s government. They then “got to work on” Lord Goldsmith, who, 10 days later, changed his mind, saying the war was legal. It started three days later, leading eminent international law, Prof. Philippe Sands to comment memorably: “We went to war on a sheet of A4.”

A spokesman for Tony Blair called the claims of orders to destroy nonsense, and said it would be “quite absurd to think that anyone could destroy such a document.” With what is now known of the lies, dodging and diving related to all to do with Iraq under Blair, the realist would surely re-

spond: “Oh, no, it wouldn’t.”

It’s also worth remembering that, on November 1, in an interview on BBC TV, Blair was asked, “If you had known then that there were no WMDs, would you still have gone on?”

His reply? “I would still have thought it right to remove (Saddam Hussein.)” He continued, “I mean obviously you would have had to use and deploy different arguments about the nature of the threat.” A different set of lies more like.

Perhaps he had forgotten the last line of attorney general Goldsmith’s legal advice of February 12, 2003: “Regime change cannot be the objective of military action.”

So is Charles Anthony Lynton Blair, QC, finally headed for handcuffs and a trial at The Hague? Ian Williams, senior analyst with Foreign Policy in Focus, New York, has a view. He believes, “It’s increasingly serious enough to be worrying to him. And I think Tony Blair is rapidly joining Henry Kissinger and Chilean dictator Salvador Allende and other people around the world.

“Now, he’s got to consult international lawyers as well as travel agents, before he travels anywhere, because there may be a prima facie case for his prosecution either in British courts or foreign courts under universal jurisdiction or with the International Criminal Court, because there is clear evidence now that he waged an illegal war of aggression, violating the United Nations’ charter and was responsible for all of those deaths.”

Justice, inadequate as it might be given the enormity of the crime, may be finally edging closer for the people of Iraq as international justice slowly grinds to its conclusion. **CT**

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**A spokesman for Tony Blair called the claims of orders to destroy nonsense, and said it would be “quite absurd to think that anyone could destroy such a document”**

# A Palestinian call to arms

**Jonathan Cook** tells why the nation is split between the 'rhetoric of armed struggle' and 'disciplined non-violent resistance' to occupation

**During the first intifada of the late 1980s, Palestinians engaged in mass civil disobedience: They refused to cooperate with the military authorities, burnt their ID cards, refused to pay taxes and held strikes**

**B**ehind the headline news of clashes between Palestinian youths and armed Israeli soldiers, Israel has – as ever – been tightening its grip on Palestinians' lives in the occupied territories.

In the first week of November in Hebron, a current flashpoint, 50 embattled families still living in the Tel Rumeida neighbourhood faced a new restriction on movement designed to help free the area for intensified Jewish settlement.

Some of Tel Rumeida's residents could be seen silently queuing at the local checkpoint to register their ID cards. Anyone not from the neighbourhood and not on the military's list will be barred from entering.

Their response differed starkly from the reaction 21 years ago, when residents faced a similar order. Then, the entire neighbourhood refused to register. Israel punished them with a curfew for six months, allowing the families out for a few hours a week to buy food.

How to respond to military orders of this kind stands at the heart of a debate that has revived among Palestinians about the relative merits of armed struggle and non-violent resistance. A poll in the early summer showed 49 per cent of Palestinians aged between 18 and 22 supported an armed uprising. By September, after the first clashes in Jerusalem, that figure had surged to 67 per cent.

The volatility can in part be explained by an inevitable thirst for revenge as Palestinians watch compatriots being killed and maimed by Israeli soldiers. But it also reflects a void of Palestinian leadership and strategy. Instead, Palestinians have been buffeted into polarised camps that, put simply, pit Hamas's rhetoric of armed struggle against the stalled diplomacy of Mahmoud Abbas and his Palestinian Authority.

Non-violence once earned a central place in Palestinian resistance to occupation. During the first intifada of the late 1980s, Palestinians engaged in mass civil disobedience: They refused to cooperate with the military authorities, burnt their ID cards, refused to pay taxes and held strikes.

That approach never entirely ended. Today it finds expression in the weekly protests and marches by villages against Israel's steel and concrete barrier eating away at Palestinians' agricultural lands. These protests remain largely peaceful, even in the face of unceasing army brutality.

But the use of non-violence has been limited to local struggles, waged with the aim of small, isolated victories. It has also invariably coexisted with more violent approaches, from stone-throwing to the current knife attacks.

Much of the blame falls to Abbas, who has appropriated the language of non-violence while failing to harness it to a national

strategy of resistance. Even the PA's support for the villagers' battles against Israel's wall have been less than half-hearted.

In the minds of many Palestinians, non-violence has become tainted by association with Abbas's years of ineffectiveness: his desperate and unsuccessful attempts both to push Israel into peace talks and to cosy up to Washington. The nadir was his declaration of the "sacred" status of the PA's security coordination with Israel.

It has also not helped that prejudicial demands for non-violence are regularly made of Palestinians by outsiders and dishonest brokers such as Washington. Last month US secretary of state John Kerry singled out Palestinians for blame in the latest clashes. "There's no excuse for the violence," he scolded, ignoring decades of Israel's violent suppression of Palestinian efforts at liberation.

Nonetheless, some Palestinian intellectuals are advocating non-violent resistance as they warn against an armed uprising. Palestinians have a right in international law to resist the occupation, even violently, but this group emphasises the futility of violence faced with Israel's military superiority. Theirs is a pragmatic argument.

In an article headlined, *Don't Go Out To Die, Palestine Needs You Alive*, journalist Mohammed Daraghmeh called on Palestinians to "channel the national anger toward mass protest." Reminding Palestinians that the western world created the conflict and must fix it, Daraghmeh warned: "It will not do so if we commit suicide."

Similarly, Palestinian businessman Sam Bahour has coined the term "smart resistance," arguing that all the Palestinian factions should commit to non-violent resistance as a way to national liberation.

Both have drawn on earlier strategies of communal solidarity and collective sacrifice – as demonstrated by Tel Rumeida's inhabitants two decades ago.

One of the architects of the first intifada's non-violent resistance, Mubarak Awad, re-

cently reminded Palestinians that it is no soft option. "It's about using non-violence militantly, like a kind of unarmed warfare," he told an interviewer.

He suggests instead refusing to carry Israeli-issued IDs, defying curfews, blocking roads, planting trees on sites intended for settlement, tearing down fences, staging sit-ins and inviting mass arrests to fill to breaking point Israel's jails.

Such actions require mass participation, mobilising women, children and the elderly – the very groups likely to be excluded by armed struggle.

And, as Awad notes, non-violence also needs a people trained in its techniques and principles. That is why he has translated into Arabic the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

Political organisers and strategists such as Awad have always topped Israel's list for arrest. He was jailed and tortured at the start of the first intifada and later expelled to the US.

The power of disciplined non-violent resistance, he adds, is that it forces on the occupier a heavy burden: to "deal with our willingness to stand up for ourselves with nothing but our bodies and hearts."

It forces Israelis to "choose what kind of people they are;" and creates division and dissent among the oppressor population, weakening its resolve.

It is a challenging message, especially when Israel is so ruthlessly crushing Palestinian hope and dignity. But Awad argues that it is precisely by demonstrating an irrepressible humanity that Palestinians can again discover hope, reclaim their dignity and win freedom. **CT**

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**Jonathan Cook** won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His latest books are *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East* (Pluto Press) and *Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair* (Zed Books). His website is [www.jonathan-cook.net](http://www.jonathan-cook.net)

**Last month US secretary of state John Kerry singled out Palestinians for blame in the latest clashes. "There's no excuse for the violence," he scolded, ignoring decades of Israel's violent suppression of Palestinian efforts at liberation**

# Sorry, JK Rowling, but you're wrong

What is appropriate for South Africa should be appropriate for Palestine, too, even if you find a boycott objectionable, writes **Ramzy Baroud**

**How is one to console the families of more than 2,200 Palestinians killed in the last war; the 400 in the previous war and 1,430 in the one before that, in addition to the tens of thousands of wounded and maimed?**

There is a possibility that you have heard of the famed British author, JK Rowling, writer of the popular Harry Potter fantasy series. While I knew of her books – through my teenage kids – I knew little about the author herself, until recently.

Using generalised, ambiguous terminology that offered little by way of compelling Israel to end its ongoing occupation in Jerusalem and the West Bank, genocide and siege in Gaza and protracted institutional discrimination against Arabs and other minorities in Israel, she argued for “cultural engagement,” instead. “Such engagement,” reads an Oct 22 letter to the *Guardian* newspaper that she signed, along with other personalities, MPs and academics, “builds bridges, nurtures freedom and positive movement for change. We wholly endorse encouraging such a powerful tool for change, rather than boycotting its use.”

The author seems disconnected from the reality of life under Israeli Occupation. On the day of writing this article, I spoke to Ismail Abu Aitah, a young man from Gaza who lost both his parents, his brothers, and one of his nephews when Israel blew up their house in the 2014 summer war. He, too, was badly injured, together with almost every surviving member of his family.

“I am sorry Ramzy, I cannot give you exact dates and times to what has befallen

my family,” he messaged me on Skype. “After July 24, 2014, I lost interest in life and stopped paying attention to the passing of time.”

How is one to console Ismail? How is one to console the families of more than 2,200 Palestinians killed in the last war; the 400 in the previous war and 1,430 in the one before that, in addition to the tens of thousands of wounded and maimed? Not forgetting the many killed in the West Bank this October alone, some executed point blank?

For her, even non-violent acts of encountering Israel’s ongoing massacres in Gaza and the military occupation in the West Bank are excessive. “Cultural boycotts singling out Israel are divisive and discriminatory, and will not further peace,” reads the letter to the *Guardian* to which she was a signatory..

Amnesty International said Israel’s violent response to a burgeoning uprising in Occupied Palestine appears to have “ripped up the rulebook and resorted to extreme and unlawful measures.” But with scores of UN resolutions never respected, Geneva Conventions never honoured, and humanitarian laws never valued, Israel has never followed a rulebook, to begin with.

Racism in Israel is so rife that being dark skinned in that country can be a terrifying experience. When a mainstream American newspaper like the *Washington Post* head-

lines a news report with Israeli Government To Refugees: Go Back To Africa Or Go To Prison, this is an indicator that Israel has a serious problem.

If JK Rowling and her letter-writing peers do not see an urgency in standing up for millions of Palestinians who are enduring daily deaths and discrimination (as they have for 67 years), what is their reaction to the violence against Africans and dark-skinned people, who are beaten by mobs, and abused by police and discriminated against by the government itself? Imagine life being 1,000 times worse for people in Palestinian, a nation that is forced to choose between two terrible fates: permanent destitution and exile on the one hand, or a perpetual war and occupation on the other.

“We will be seeking to inform and encourage dialogue about Israel and the Palestinians in the wider cultural and creative community,” JK Rowling’s letter reads. Can those ‘creative’ elites possibly be any more disconnected from reality to the extent that they perceive a nation that stands accused of violating human rights with such impunity for nearly seven decades as one that simply needs a nudge to dialogue?

To expect dialogue with Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who has just dehumanised Palestinians further by accusing them of concocting the Holocaust, is not just impractical, but is the very definition of insanity – seeking dialogue with a belligerent occupier, over and over again, and expecting different results.

Fortunately, JK Rowling’s last-minute intervention and her barely concealed defence of Israel arrives belatedly. A defining moment is imminent, as hundreds of scholars in her own country have just enlisted their support for the academic boycott, to be added to the 100 artists who joined the cultural boycott last February and hundreds of universities and academics in the US who did so last August. These are just a few examples of a massive, non-violent campaign that targets Israeli academic and cultural in-

stitutions – not individuals – who contribute directly, or otherwise, to the injustice that is meted out against Palestinians daily. The scholars from the UK, exceeding 300 and the last to join the boycott campaign, were, like thousands more, guided by the spirit of the struggle against the former apartheid South African government. The latter was overcome largely because of the struggle and steadfastness of the South African people and also aided by morally-guided actions of boycotters all around the world, which included JK Rowling’s country.

Had the famed author achieved her current status during the height of South Africa’s apartheid, would she have issued a similar call, declaring her “support for the launch and aims of Culture for Co-existence,” rather than demanding an end to apartheid, even if it meant severing ties with apartheid government institutions? At this point, the answer is uncertain.

Last February, the letter from the British artistes read, in part: “During South African apartheid, musicians announced they weren’t going to ‘play Sun City.’ Now we are saying, in Tel Aviv, Netanya, Ashkelon or Ariel, we won’t play music, accept awards, attend exhibitions, festivals or conferences, run masterclasses or workshops, until Israel respects international law and ends its colonial oppression of the Palestinians.”

What is appropriate for South Africa should be appropriate for Palestine, too, even if JK Rowling and her respected peers find that too objectionable. **CT**

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**To expect dialogue with Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who has just dehumanised Palestinians further by accusing them of concocting the Holocaust is not just impractical, but is the very definition of insanity**



# Once more down the rabbit hole

**Ann Jones** discusses the tragedy of Afghanistan 'after' the American war

**No longer safe in Kunduz, those women found that they were not safe in the places to which they had fled**

Ten months ago, on December 28, 2014, a ceremony in Kabul officially marked the conclusion of America's very long war in Afghanistan. US president Barack Obama called that day "a milestone for our country." After more than 13 years, he said, "our combat mission in Afghanistan is ending, and the longest war in American history is coming to a responsible conclusion."

That was then. This is now. In between, on September 28, 2015, came another milestone: the Taliban takeover of Kunduz, the capital of the province of the same name in northern Afghanistan, and with a population of about 270,000, the country's fifth-largest city.

A few invaders strolled unopposed to the city centre to raise the white flag of the

Taliban. Others went door to door, searching for Afghan women who worked for women's organisations or the government. They looted homes, offices, and schools, stealing cars and smashing

computers. They destroyed three radio stations run by women. They attacked the offices of the American-led organisation Women for Afghan Women and burned its women's shelter to the ground. They denied reports on Kabul TV stations that they had raped women in the university dormitory and the women's prison, then threatened to kill the reporters who broadcast the stories.

They called the mobile phones of targeted women who had escaped the city and warned them they would be killed if they returned. No longer safe in Kunduz, those women found that they were not safe in the places to which they had fled either. London's *Telegraph* reported that "the lasting legacy of [the Taliban's] invasion may ultimately prove to be the dismantlement of the city's women's rights network."

The next day I got an email from a woman newly assigned to the American Embassy in Afghanistan. Security rules keep her confined behind the walls of the embassy grounds, she said. Still, knowing that Afghan women are not "secure," she is determined to help them. Her plan, admittedly still in the brainstorming stage, calls for "programs that will teach women how to defend themselves in some form or another," because "the best way for women to be safe is for them to know how to keep themselves safe."

I think of all my brave Afghan colleagues who go to work in women's organisations,



**THEY WERE SOLDIERS**  
How the Wounded Return from  
America's Wars: The Untold Story

Ann Jones

Haymarket

\$9.77 (Amazon.com)



**Pondering the future: US Secretary of State John Kerry on an army helicopter following a visit to Afghanistan.**

like those in Kunduz, every day under threat of death. I think of fearless Afghan women across the country – activists, parliamentarians, doctors, teachers, organizers, police officers, actresses, TV presenters, singers, radio broadcasters, journalists, government ministers, provincial officials, candidates for public office – who over the last 10 years have been assassinated one by one, by teams of armed men on motorcycles, or by a bomb attached to the underside of a car, or by masked squads with ropes or Kalashnikovs. These killings have gone on year after year, the names of the dead women remembered and their numbers tallied by Human Rights Watch, while the Afghan government and the Bush or Obama administrations uttered scarcely a word of protest or condolence, and Afghan police failed to arrest a single assassin. George W. Bush famously claimed to have “liberated” Afghan women.

Fourteen years later, with the Taliban again rising, with Washington having sunk tens of billions of dollars into the training and arming of hundreds of thousands of Afghan men to defend their country, it’s now time to offer Afghan women a course in how to defend themselves?

#### **State Department photo**

The *New York Times* recently reprinted maps from the *Long War Journal* illustrating the enclaves the Taliban now occupy, not just in Kunduz city, but throughout the land. They added up to about one-fifth of Afghan territory, and the movement was said to “probably either control or heavily influence about half of the country.” According to the United Nations, the “Taliban insurgency has spread through more of Afghanistan than at any point since 2001,” when it was driven from power.

**George W. Bush famously claimed to have “liberated” Afghan women**

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## WAR WITHOUT END

**The men former President Hamid Karzai referred to as his “angry brothers” are still angry, and in all the long years they have waited for the inevitable departure of the Americans, they have not grown more tolerant**

As if to dramatize the circumstances depicted on the map, the *Times* also reported that reinforcements from the Afghan National Army (ANA) could not immediately travel from their headquarters in the capital, Kabul, to Kunduz because in between lay Baghlan Province, and it, too, was largely in the hands of the Taliban.

For months, the Taliban had been capturing bits and pieces of Kunduz Province, but their attack apparently took the city’s defenders by surprise. Afghan security forces numbering 7,000 scattered or retreated before the advance of a few hundred Taliban fighters. While its commanders tried to figure out what to do in response, American Major General Todd Semonite wrapped up his stint as head of the American mission training the Afghan National Army by congratulating ANA officers at a ceremony at “Resolute Support” headquarters in Kabul.

“You have made phenomenal progress,” he told them, “in budgetary programming, pay, personnel, and force structure systems... improving accountability while finding savings in the budget.” We know what the major general said because the US military itself proudly released his statement to the press, as if it were something other than one more incandescent example of American oblivion to the condition of the country US forces have occupied for 14 years.

Worried, I wrote to Mahbouba Seraj, an old friend in Kabul, with whom I had worked for many years, to ask how she was. She replied at once: “I believe you were reading my mind, feeling my desperation. The situation here is going from bad to worse. No one knows how a group of 500 men can enter a province that is protected with a full military garrison – top generals in command of more than 7,000 police and army troops – and do what they did in Kunduz. They burned, looted, raped, and killed people, and there was no one to put a stop to it. This attack, which nobody saw coming, is yet another mystery of mismanagement, miscommunication, or something much

bigger and more sinister than that.”

Such dark imaginings spring to mind easily when you live with Afghan uncertainty, reassured by the good intentions of strangers while bad stuff goes on all around you. Worse yet, often enough such seemingly paranoid unease proves to be dead on.

After the taking of Kunduz, President Obama was said to be “rethinking” the situation. Within days, he announced that the US force of 9,800 still in Afghanistan – the force he had planned to cut by half this year and reduce to 1,000 by the end of 2016 – would remain in place, perhaps until 2017, until, that is, he has left office and the fallout of this American war in Afghanistan has landed on another president’s shoulders. What happens in the aftermath of Obama’s officially concluded but never ended “good war” will be up to the second lucky winner in a row to inherit one or more leftover, unjustifiable wars.

By the time Obama made this second announcement, the Taliban had finally slipped out of Kunduz. They might have withdrawn right away, having made their point – that they are now capable of taking a major provincial capital garrisoned by the Afghan National Army.

But they chose to stay on for 15 days, long enough to terrify and murder enough citizens to make an indelible impression. Afghans of a certain age remembered in vivid flashbacks what they endured under Taliban rule before the American invasion of 2001. They could see for themselves that the men former president Hamid Karzai referred to as his “angry brothers” are still angry, and, in all the long years they have waited for the inevitable departure of the Americans, they have not grown more tolerant. One woman who narrowly escaped from Kunduz summed it up simply: “They haven’t changed one bit.”

### **In an Afghan state of mind**

A few days later, my friend Mahbouba wrote me again. “For now,” she said, “the light at

the end of the tunnel is President Obama's speech supporting Afghans and his decision to keep troops in Afghanistan."

Like so many Afghans, one day she's desperate, the next she finds a glimmer of light in the gloom. That schizoid zigzag has become a way of life for embattled Afghans like her in this peculiar period "after" America's war that couldn't be won and will not end. In this darkening time, they face the growing strength of the Taliban, the intrusion of followers of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, the emergence of new splinter groups of Afghan ISIS supporters, and even the resurgence of "remnants of al Qaeda." Yes, the very same bunch that President Obama assured us in 2013 could "never again establish a safe haven" in Afghanistan.

All these forces, along with the Afghan National Army, are now contesting control of parts of the country. That army, trained largely by US forces for that staggering price of at least \$65 billion dollars (such costs have now been "classified"), is not exactly the stunning force that's been advertised. John Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghanistan, reported to Congress last March that the US military had "overestimated the size of the Afghan police and army by a significant margin." Factor in US military "accounting errors" and plenty of "ghost" personnel, and the actual size of the Afghan force is anybody's guess. In addition, that force, under pressure since last spring from a fierce, unrelenting Taliban offensive, has been losing an "unsustainable" average of 330 killed and wounded a week (and hemorrhaging a disastrous 4,000 deserters a month).

It still needs the support of US forces, especially Special Operations troops like those who, on October 3rd, "mistakenly" called in deliberate multiple air assaults on a Médecins Sans Frontières hospital at Kunduz, resulting in the largest loss of life (30 dead in addition to many more wounded) the humanitarian organisation has suffered in its 35 years in that country.

### **Dark developments**

Nothing stays steady in Afghanistan. Even promising developments have a way of turning dark. But my friend Mahbouba, tossed between hope and despair, always tries to take in the big picture, even as it shifts its shape before her eyes. A member of the Afghan royal family, she was imprisoned in 1978 as a young university graduate, together with her family, by Soviet-inspired Afghan communists who helped to overthrow the country's first president. Eventually released, she and her family fled to the United States just before the Soviet army invaded in 1979. She became an American citizen, devoted to American-style democracy as she found it at that time.

After American bombs brought down the Taliban government in 2001, she returned to Kabul to work with civil society and international aid organisations for democracy and for women. She coached female members of parliament. She headed the Afghan Women's Network. She ran for parliament herself and failed to be elected only because, in the Afghan version of democracy, autocracy often intervenes. In her case, election officials "mistakenly" did not deliver the ballots that would have allowed her constituents to vote.

Such was the new Afghan "democracy" run by Washington's handpicked warlords. (Lesson still not learned: It's a mistake to think that America's old combat cronies in its distant wars will behave in high office like George Washington.) In this surreal context, where nothing is quite what it is said to be, Mahbouba has worked through the long, long years of war and setbacks of every sort.

Now she writes of the catastrophic taking of Kunduz, "It has already become just another bureaucratic problem: yet another indicator of something or other slightly amiss. The government again has put in place a 'fact-finding committee' with two men in charge, one representing the president [Ashraf Ghani], and the other the country's chief executive officer [Abdullah Abdullah]."

**It's a mistake to think that America's old combat cronies in its distant wars will behave in high office like George Washington**



**It's once again eerily possible to imagine the specter of Russian forces materializing, as in 1979, just across the Amu Darya River on Afghanistan's northern border**

Such bureaucratic duplication is the result of what Mahbouba calls “the two-headed legacy: this divided government with its disparate policies coming to nothing, crippling the country.” That contentious, unequal power-sharing deal was cobbled together just a year ago when Secretary of State John Kerry resolved a bitter presidential campaign between the two men by inventing a new entity, “the National Unity Government,” unknown in the Afghan constitution.

Now, like so many think-tankers and politicians in Washington, the two top officials of this American-made, semi-functional two-headed administration are trying to sort out what happened in Kunduz, or assigning others to do so. Then they may appoint another committee to discover what, if anything, should or could be done. But as many Afghans observe, such weighty matters sent to committee regularly fail to reemerge.

In the meantime, Afghans such as Mahbouba Seraj continue to do their best in terrible circumstances, while worrying about where the next catastrophe may come from. In the last four decades, they've been through a coup d'état that overthrew the last king; three presidential assassinations (one republican, two communists); a Soviet invasion that launched a 10-year CIA proxy war (in conjunction with the Saudis and the Pakistanis) to give the Soviet Union its own “Vietnam;” a ruinous, murderous three-year civil war among multiple factions of America's old allies, the mujahideen, after the Soviets left in defeat; the torture, castration, execution, and public hanging (by the Taliban) of Najibullah, the president the Russians had left in place (and who is now regaining post-mortem popularity); the suffocating five-year rule of the Taliban; an American-led invasion that returned a rogue's gallery of war criminals to power and started a 14-year war now ended officially, but not where it counts – in Afghanistan. No wonder people in that country are always waiting for the next combat boot to drop.

Of that prospect, Mahbouba writes, “The West lost Afghanistan and they know it. Right now, what is happening is a policy of containment, an effort to keep all the problems, failures, crises, and internal fighting within the borders of this country because the world cannot afford to have them spill out.

“Take the panic building right now in Uzbekistan, for example, a country that has no army of its own and is very anxious, perhaps afraid, because of what is happening right across its border with Afghanistan. Everyone knows which one of the world's egomaniacal strongmen may decide to ‘help’ and ‘protect’ the Uzbeks.”

Given recent events in Syria, it's once again eerily possible to imagine the spectre of Russian forces materializing, as in 1979, just across the Amu Darya River on Afghanistan's northern border. To think of it is to be lost in dark memories of that invasion and the terrible proxy war that followed: the Red Army meets the ragtag mujahideen, Ronald Reagan's devoutly religious “freedom fighters,” armed and directed by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan's CIA equivalent, the ISI. Sadly enough, so many decades later, we still live with the sequel to that war, and thanks to America's hapless, misbegotten “nation building” of the post-9/11 years, Afghans have never been able to shake off the military and political “leadership” of Washington's aging warlord cronies, still clinging close to the money tree.

A Patrick Chappatte cartoon catches the ultimate nightmare of America's second Afghan War in what should, but can't yet be, called its waning days: following road signs pointing the way to “Afghan Pullout,” US soldiers in an armored vehicle drive in a circle, round and round and round and round.

### **Fear of the future**

At the moment, as Mahbouba reports from Kabul, “There is a heavy cloud of mistrust and doubt hanging over this country. No one believes anyone anymore. Rumors and



conspiracy theories are flying everywhere, joined by a fear of the future and the unknown. Young Afghan men, mostly educated, full of energy and ambition, are leaving the country in droves every day. There is no work for them here. No future. The poorer ones don't find the makings of a single meal to feed their families."

Afghan boys and men have long gone to Pakistan or Iran in search of work, but now they set out on a trek thousands of miles long with Europe as their ultimate goal, joining untold numbers of Syrians and Iraqis in a desperate migration the likes of which we have not seen before. Last year, 58,500 Afghans successfully sought asylum in Europe. In the first seven months of this year, 77,700 made their way to Turkey or Europe and applied for asylum. By October, the number had risen to a staggering 120,000. Today, tens of thousands more risk their lives to leave the land that Washington "built."

As yet another generation of potential Afghan leaders flees the once lovely city (the third brain-draining mass migration since the 1980s), the older Kabul disappears from view, dwarfed by mammoth new construction projects: glass-faced office towers, block after block of ornate palatial homes, enormous wedding palaces aglow in multi-colored neon. Here is evidence that, in the course of an endless war, some well-connected men have grown extremely wealthy very fast. And the already immense gap between rich and poor, noted in the Karzai years, continues to widen, as does the distrust of the people in their "democratically elected" government. In these matters, if no others, canny Afghans closely follow the example of their American one per cent counterparts.

The two-headed government seems unconcerned. In fact, Afghans now claim that it has completely set aside its pre-election promises to fight the country's rampant corruption. People joke that President Ghani, who once co-wrote a book called "Fixing Failed States," should get to work on his

memoir, to be titled, so the quipsters say, "Failed Government." Afghans who once viewed former president Hamid Karzai as no more than "the mayor of Kabul," playing second fiddle to US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, now fear that President Ghani stands in a similar relation to the commander of American and coalition forces, US Army General John Campbell.

They say, too, that Ghani has gathered around him a group of men who work for their own ends and give no thought to their country. That, of course, is nothing new in Afghan political life, but after the great hope the new government engendered only one year ago, the letdown feels like a plunge into some abyss. It's clear that where self-interest and corruption flourish, righteous and angry men will rise up. As every Afghan knows, that's how the Taliban first got its start.

Mahbouba ended her latest missive to me this way: "Nothing is certain here. But one thing I can tell you is this: Afghanistan needs leaders worthy of the people. Our soldiers, who are losing their lives all over this country, would never abandon their duties if they had good commanders and honest leaders. Our young men would not leave the country if these old men made way for them. It is our misfortune to be cursed with bad leaders whom we did not choose for ourselves. There are not that many of them in number, but they thrive like cancer in this land." **CT**

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**The already immense gap between rich and poor, noted in the Karzai years, continues to widen, as does the distrust of the people in their "democratically elected" government**

# Getting history wrong

Sandra Bullock's satirical flick about American campaign strategists in Bolivia fails to mention that they worked for the bad guy, writes **Jill Richardson**



**Our Brand Is Crisis**

Warner Bros

**An honest film would also note that to Bolivians, Goni was the bad guy**

**S**andra Bullock's latest film flopped. And it deserved to – but not only because of its inability to entertain.

A comic political drama based on a documentary of the same name, “Our Brand Is Crisis” is a fictionalized retelling of how US political consultants got an unpopular former president re-elected in Bolivia back in 2002. Bullock plays the lead strategist.

The film paints her candidate – “Pedro Gallo,” a character based on real-life former Bolivian president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, or “Goni” – as an out-of-touch, uncharismatic underdog. Among other departures from the 2005 documentary, it fails to mention that he was also an authoritarian autocrat.

Here's some context.

Bolivia has been compared to South Africa for its brutal history of minority white rule. Majority-black South Africa got its first black president in 1994. Bolivia, with a mostly indigenous population, was ruled by whites until 2005.

Bolivia's minority-led government passed laws that swiped farmland from indigenous people and shuffled them into low-paid, hazardous work in mines. Whenever the indigenous majority demanded their rights a little too adamantly, the government sent troops to massacre them.

With the help of his American consultants, Goni – a white establishment candidate – pulled down 22.5 percent of the vote. He narrowly beat the second and third place finishers, who each earned about 21 percent of the vote, to re-claim the presidency of a country in which nearly four out of five voters opposed him.

Clearly, the narrow victory of an unpopular candidate with the help of brilliant campaign consultants is excellent raw material for an exciting film. But a truly honest film would also note that to Bolivians, Goni was the bad guy.

That's not what the new flick seems to show. “We are trying to save people's lives,” Sandra Bullock's character exclaims emphatically. “These are the stakes, and I am not going to stand by and watch as this nation falls apart.”

Save people's lives? Keep the nation from falling apart? That's not what you're doing if you're campaigning for Goni.

In fact, the real-life Goni's second term lasted about a year before he fled amid massive protests over his plan to sell the country's natural gas to rich countries on the cheap.

I've been to Bolivia's capital, La Paz, where Bolivian friends pointed out bullet holes from shots Goni's troops fired on demonstrators. You can still see graffiti demanding that he go to jail for his crimes.

The final confrontation began in September 2003, when five peasants (including an eight-year-old girl) were killed. It didn't end till October, by which time nearly 70 Bolivian civilians had lost their lives at the hands of Goni's troops.

Two years after Goni fled, Bolivia elected Evo Morales, the nation's first indigenous president. Morales, a socialist, is now

-serving his third term in office. While he may be a controversial figure in the United States, who can deny that the Bolivian people have a right to choose their own leader?

Bullock's fictional character was right: People's lives were at stake. She just happened to be on the wrong side.

The lesson of "Our Brand Is Crisis" is an important one: Crafty political consultants employ tricks of the trade to convince voters to elect a candidate who will harm their interests. In Bolivia, people died as a result.

Remember that as the US presidential elections loom. **CT**

**People's lives were at stake. Bullock just happened to be on the wrong side**

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*OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of "Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It." This article originally appeared at OtherWords.org.*

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# Godzilla, wingnuts and water

Living like a hermit, **Stacey Warde** finds time to reflect on life's inanities

**I spend most of my days alone, working in the orchard, a quiet working retreat away from the flow of tourists and the brutish world of politics and wingnuts**

**W**e get lots of European and Asian travelers this time of year, when summer morphs into fall and rain-starved Californians look expectantly to the season's first downpour.

The tourists cruise excruciatingly slowly along winding spectacular Highway 1, the coastal route through Big Sur; hordes of them park along viewpoints, at the cliff's edge, laughing, taking pictures, peering down into the vast sun-burnished Pacific, then hop into their rental cars and RVs to hog the road again.



If you happen to be on the road at the same time, it's an agonizing slog behind a train of tourists who have no clue about pulling over to let others pass, or how bad is our drought or the state of the union.

Invariably, they pass through Cayucos, our little hamlet by the sea. I meet a Japanese man at a coffee shop in town who stops for the sights. "What is, 'Wingnut?'" he asks, pointing at a "we have the right to refuse service" sign behind the counter. I spin my index finger around my ear, "Crazy." I show him how a wingnut works, spinning an imaginary one around my finger. "They're spun tight."

He laughs as though he gets my drift, and nods repeatedly, "Ok, ok, ok," he says, heading quickly for the exit, "Thank you!"

"I might have given him a few more examples," I say to the barista, thinking of a few politicians, gun kooks, mass shooters and deniers of climate change, "but I don't know if he would appreciate them."

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I spend most of my days alone, working in the orchard, a quiet working retreat away from the flow of tourists and the brutish world of politics and wingnuts.

A lone hawk screeches in the gray distance overhead, obscured by the canopy



of avocado trees under which I labor. A large dark avocado, a late ripener, drops heavily, clunking through the leaves and branches above until it plops to the ground with a thud. I'm glad it doesn't drop on my head. It's plump and weighty, and I know how much it hurts to get bonked by one.

The only sound besides the hawk, is the breeze sweeping dry leaves along the ground, and brushing back green leaves in the trees. I stop to listen. The harvest ended several weeks ago, only a few ripe stragglers remain, like the one that just fell, hidden from view from a flush of new growth.

The leaves tremble in succession from one tree to the next, as warm air whooshes through the orchard like a twirling, invisible dancer. More fruit falls in its path. Plop, plop, plop. The season has turned ghostly. It's fall in California, even though most days it still feels hot, dry and summer-hardened.

An abundance of lime-green bulbs, about the shape and size of small pears, grows on the trees, the promise of a new crop, next season's harvest, food for avocado lovers, provided all goes well, no frosts, wind storms, or pestilence, and a winter full of rain.

Another winter without rain, however, will turn this semi-arid region of extreme drought into a desert with devastating crop losses, catastrophic fires, and panic for almost 40 million residents competing with their straws for less and less of the less-than-half-full glass that remains of the state's water.

Days like this, without the shortening and lengthening of shadows, time stands still; it's hard to worry about shortages, difficult people, and lumbering RVs in the bleak white blanket of a thick marine layer, harder still to imagine this place without water, the only way these trees will survive or produce more fruit.

This morning's cloud cover, the first

heavy bit of moisture we've had in weeks, will soon give way to blue sky and sun. Until recently, however, there's been little to no marine layer, unusual for coastal weather, the hot dry easterlies prevail, blowing like a furnace down the mountain passes and through the valleys, raising temperatures to record levels.

"This feels really unnatural. When's it going to finally rain?" I hear people ask.

"Soon, I hope."

Tourists – and some residents – seem to have no clue how dire things are.

Late October, and it's still ungodly hot. Whether it's unnatural I can't say, but the ongoing heat and sun have sucked whatever moisture was left in this drought-stricken land a long time ago, leaving plant and animal parched for precious water. Sightings of coyotes and mountain lions have become more common as they come down from the hills to search for food and water. Dried up reservoirs give the best visual of how bad it is.

Signs posted along rural roads in Paso Robles wine country tell another story, "DRY WELL."

In some places, we're drawing water from the Pleistocene era. But we still must contend with billionaire water smugglers buying up properties in the north county so they can suck up, bottle and ship elsewhere what little of our water is left so they can get rich. I take a long draught from the bottle of well water I carry with me in the field. Like all the other critters, I'm thirsty. I'm lucky to drink from a well that still runs. I refuse to buy FIJI Water.

The sun's intensity frightens rather than warms with its penetrating rays. I've already felt the knife to remove three melanomas, a skin cancer that will kill if left untreated. And these were borne from days of exposure when the sun felt – and probably was – much less intense.

Now, the sun itself cuts, its rays slashing through fiber and filament, making it

**We still must contend with billionaire water smugglers buying up properties in the north county so they can suck up, bottle and ship elsewhere what little of our water is left so they can get rich**

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## THE REAL FIGHT

**Farmers fret as water shortages threaten to destroy field crops and fruit-bearing trees, while rich celebrities sitting pretty in LA and the Bay Area pour tens of thousands of gallons of water on their estate lawns and gardens**

unpleasant to bear more than a few minutes of exposure, as if the sun might actually make an incision and draw blood. I'm lucky to be working in the shadows of an avocado canopy that spreads out over several acres for which, thankfully, there's still enough water to irrigate, and cover enough to stay sheltered from the direct sun.

As we head into the rainy season, all the prognosticators point to a potentially record winter with wetter-than-normal rainfall, fueled by what has been billed as a "Godzilla" El Niño. The above-normal temperatures of the Pacific Ocean will pack our winter storms with a powerful punch, driving a flow of moisture and rain like a machine, dumping buckets as they go, forecasters say. We need the water and the snowpack to lessen the dire state of its lack in the region's worst drought in 1,200 years, according to those who have studied the phenomenon. But even Noah's flood, apparently, won't fix the drought.

Farmers fret as water shortages threaten to destroy field crops and fruit-bearing trees, and land sinks from an overdraft of groundwater in the Central Valley, while rich celebrities sitting pretty in LA and the Bay Area pour tens of thousands of gallons of water on their estate lawns and gardens.

The rationale, presumably, is that they will pay the fines and rate hikes, no big deal, they've got plenty of money. But what happens when there's no more water? What good will their money do then? It's a mindset that never ceases to amaze me, the "la-de-fucking-da" attitude toward precious resources like water.

Before the West's major water projects, many driven by greed, land values in California, where there wasn't any water, were cheap, even beachfront property. But land grabbers like William Mulholland fixed that, securing millions for himself and his friends in one of the state's most ambitious and notoriously crooked water projects to

develop the San Fernando Valley and LA basin. Water wars are nothing new here.

Only the promise and supply of water can keep us alive, let alone wealthy, and from cutting one another's throats.

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For sure, as I might have informed my Japanese friend, we have our share of wingnuts in this country, and, like the rest of the world, they're either politicians or religious or angry young men intent on killing, or scientifically challenged, many with their own radio shows, unable to fathom the potential devastation – extremes in weather, for example – from climate change, and who for no other reason than lack of an educated and critical mind don't know the difference between civil law and religious superstition.

I wonder how so many seemingly intelligent people, Americans especially, because we presumably value a good education, can be so easily fooled by the crooked and the small-minded, giving precious time, energy and money to mean and vicious people and causes.

The GOP, for example, is in disarray, hobbled by the mean and nasty, ultra-right wing rabble, mostly members of the so-called Freedom Caucus in the House of Representatives, attempting to hijack the government, threatening at every turn to shut it down. I don't understand or like this kind of thinking – if you can call it that – from hijackers and so-called "freedom" fighters. But I encounter them almost every day – not only in the news, but in the coffee shops, bars and workplaces here at home.

"How come you have to be such a fucking liberal?" a local farmer and freedom fighter once asked me during a political talk. Not long after that, he cut off my water supply to a field I was tending on his farm. I begged him for water as the heat of summer intensified and the plants began to wilt and fruit was forming but going bad. He refused, the ripening fruit fell

off, and we lost our harvest and all of the income from our hard labor.

I'd rather be a liberal than someone who sabotages another's labour or livelihood on the basis of politics and grudges, unless of course I want to start a revolution, or recklessly meddle in other people's affairs, or become a hater and a fool, of whom we already have plenty. Only the wicked, as I understand, seek to destroy what another has built to provide for himself and his family. Only a fool will try to usurp what is not his to own or possess.

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In many ways, I live and work like a hermit, mostly alone with plenty of – maybe too much – time to think. I like being physically active. It gets my mind off things, and that's a saving grace out here. Still, the mind will play tricks. Maybe the world isn't all quite as bad as I imagine, not as long as the sentient and wise prevail, who nonetheless appear to have been purged from the planet.

The only reliable witnesses to truth in this era are the modern court jesters – Steven Colbert, Jon Stewart, Matt and Trey and now Trevor Noah – the wise clowns and fools on network television, who aren't afraid to mock and laugh at the pretenses and posturing of those who wish to put on a show and wear the emperor's new clothes and get promoted by real fools.

Meanwhile, I'm feeling beat up from my labours, lower back complaints, hips, feet, neck and shoulders and try not to be too discouraged. But an even deeper hurt speaks to me: Where do I belong? Where's my home? What happened to my country?

A lone plane passes overhead, and the wind brushes through the leaves again. Two hawks soar silently above the south-eastern hills, taking updrafts, diving, circling back, climbing, climbing, and circling closer and closer until they clip wings as they swing past each other in the late afternoon breeze, an aerial dance all predicated on food and water.

Through the long rows of trees, in the tunnel of green they form, I try to follow a light path but seem to carry a heavy burden. Imagine living fully present, I think, fully engaged. How would that look? What worries then? What difference would it make? It's all I've got, really, to keep from falling into a pit of despair thinking of how far we've fallen as a "free" nation, where people will as quickly piss in their water as drink it.

I enjoy seeing my hometown through the eyes of tourists who pass through and look with wonder upon the beaches and ocean that surround us, who are curious and wonder, "What is, 'Wingnut'?" They keep it fresh and real.

For the first time since late last winter, I hear the sound of a tree frog in the orchard. They've been so quiet in the dried up creek at home. Last winter they were so loud one had to raise a voice to be heard. If and when they return, the roads will be slick and wet and the road to Big Sur much less traveled, and Godzilla will be pouring down his fury upon us. **CT**

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**An even deeper hurt speaks to me: Where do I belong? Where's my home? What happened to my country?**

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