

INSIDE: DON'T POP THAT PILL ● EVEN CRIMINALS NEED
A VACATION ● DEMOLISHING THE NEW BERLIN WALLS
● WHEN PAINT IS NOT ENOUGH ● PACIFYING MOSUL

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PUTTING FIDO ON THE MENU

How better could dogs prove their deep loyalty to us humans than by sacrificing their lives to feed us? There's plenty of room on our plates to accommodate a few slices of Lassie or Rover, says **Jason Miller**

The ColdType READER



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ISSUE 24 | MARCH 2008

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 3. COVER STORY: PUTTING FIDO ON THE MENU | <i>Jason Miller</i> |
| 6. HOW OIL BURST THE AMERICAN BUBBLE | <i>Michael T. Klare</i> |
| 10. DON'T POP THAT PILL! | <i>Stan Cox</i> |
| 16. EEEEE! | <i>Fred Reed</i> |
| 19. JUST DO IT: PEOPLE POWER IN GAZA | <i>Ramzy Baroud</i> |
| 22. A DAY OF RAGE | <i>David Pratt</i> |
| 27. DEMOLISHING THE NEW BERLIN WALLS | <i>John Pilger</i> |
| 31. FROM STALINGRAD TO WINOGRAD | <i>Uri Avnery</i> |
| 35. GIVING ISRAEL A PASS | <i>Barry Lando</i> |
| 40. PACIFYING MOSUL | <i>Felicity Arbuthnot</i> |
| 44. THE WAR AGAINST INTOLERANCE | <i>Chris Hedges</i> |
| 47. MASS PRODUCERS OF DISTORTION | <i>Nick Davis</i> |
| 49. NATO: THE TREATY ON WHEELS | <i>William Blum</i> |
| 55. DEATH OF THE NOBLE IDEA | <i>George Monbiot</i> |
| 58. EVEN CRIMINALS NEED A VACATION | <i>Joe Bageant</i> |
| 61. WHEN PAINT IS NOT ENOUGH | <i>Dave Zirin</i> |
| 63. A BUTT-KICKING FOR GITMO | <i>Lilian Segura</i> |
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PUTTING FIDO ON THE MENU

Jason Miller finds a new use for man's best friend

We pride ourselves on our devotion to the principle of equality, so it's time to put our values where our mouths are, so to speak. Pigs, chickens, cows, and other animals already endure abject suffering so we can consume their flesh, so it is only fair that we include "man's best friend." How could dogs better prove their deep loyalty to us than by sacrificing their lives to feed us?

There is plenty of room on our plates to accommodate a few slices of Lassie. Even here in our resource-hog of a nation people experience hunger. Why not run a hundred million or so Rovers through the meat industrial complex each year? We have no reservations about torturing and slaughtering billions of other sentient beings to satiate our lust for meat. And research has indicated that pigs are actually more intelligent than dogs and thus would be more conscious of their misery. So there can be no valid moral objection.

Our capacity to immunize ourselves from conscience and compassion as we greedily devour the flesh of non-human

animals (who experienced pain beyond the scope of our imaginations so that we might savor their cooked remains) will serve us well if we implement this solution to the problem of world-wide hunger. In fact, some nations already prize dog meat as a delicacy, so we'd be in for a real treat!

Being the good little capitalists that we are, we need to determine the most profitable means to deliver "dog food" to our tables. After all, we are all about the "freedom" to generate profit and protect our sacrosanct property rights. We do manage to slightly conceal our greed and selfishness with a thin veneer of faux compassion – hence our "helping solve world hunger" rationale. Yet we know that ultimately the dogs we butcher will simply be another means to enhance the wealth of the power elite so that the excess can trickle down to the rest of us.

Obviously, the "good folks" running Tyson and Smithfield Foods will need a large infusion of canines to seed the factory farms they will construct to begin mass production and distribution of dog

Why not run a hundred million or so Rovers through the meat industrial complex each year?

It will be essential that McDonald's roll out something along the lines of a *McBark* at the very early stages of this endeavor. Burger King's version might be called the *Whoofer*

meat. A federal law requiring dog owners to sell their pets to these benevolent corporate entities at a fair price, a strident effort to capture strays, and emptying animal shelters will certainly give them the “livestock” they need to ramp up production to please our palates. Since consumers will be the ultimate beneficiaries of this wonderful addition to our culinary choices, it will make sense to use federal tax dollars to subsidize our meat packers’ acquisition of their initial stock AND the construction of the facilities necessary to add such a delicious addition to our menus.

Fast food restaurants, the progenitors and principal beneficiaries of factory farming, need to get on board with our newest source of meat very quickly. It will be essential that McDonald’s roll out something along the lines of a *McBark* at the very early stages of this endeavor. Burger King’s version might be called the *Whoofer*. Branding issues aside, the shock troops of the animal flesh consumption industry will need to divert their formidable resources toward selling consumers on eating their former companions.

Once we have the dogs and factory farms in place, we will need to implement the actual logistics of breeding, raising, and slaughtering our former pets and future meals. Since dogs are intellectually superior to cattle yet slightly inferior to pigs, perhaps we would be wise to model our canine processing system after the pork industry.

We will need to keep large numbers of bitches in a state of near perpetual pregnancy. To keep costs low, we will want to cram as many of these mother dogs into as small a space as possible. They don’t

need to turn around or even move really. As long as we supply them with a cheap source of food (i.e. ground-up waste product from the slaughter house floor – theirs will truly be a “dog-eat-dog world”), water, and heavy doses of antibiotics, they will remain fertile enough to yield substantial numbers of pups and healthy enough to eat later.

Given their intellect, the dogs will probably suffer similar mental disturbances as pigs do in such confined quarters, which means they will become dangerously aggressive and a threat to themselves and others. Hence we will need to remove their teeth. Anesthetizing them would create an unnecessary expense, so we will simply put them in restraints, yank out their choppers, and cauterize them to stop the bleeding and prevent infection.

If our dogs (male and female alike) suffer wounds in their miniscule holding pens while they await their turn to fill our stomachs, we won’t waste time or money tending to them. Pigs suffer through the loss of body parts, broken legs, and ulcerated wounds, so there’s no reason to increase our costs by tending to the injured. A certain percentage of our stock will die, but they will provide fodder for the survivors. The stench emanating from the cankerous sores, feces, urine, and rotting corpses will be immense, but like their brethren pigs who also have highly developed senses of smell, the dogs will simply need to live with the fetid air and pneumonia they develop. As human beings, our desires for meat and profit preclude the possibility of ending the unnecessary suffering we inflict upon sentient creatures.

Once a dog has been appropriately

aged and fattened to maximize taste and profit, we will load it onto a ventilated truck packed with as many dogs as possible without causing significant numbers of deaths by trampling or asphyxiation. Handlers will be trained to beat uncooperative dogs into submission with heavy steel rods. Or for those workers who have “bleeding hearts,” they can humanely stick electric cattle prods into the dogs’ rectums.

Upon arrival at the slaughter facility, the dogs that haven’t frozen to death or died of heat exhaustion, thirst, or suffocation will be man-handled off the truck (to keep them submissive) and forced to the kill floor. “Downers” (dogs too injured or sick to walk) will be dragged to their deaths. Euthanizing dying dogs will be out of the question because then we could not legally sell their flesh for consumption.

Ridiculous animal welfare laws will require that we stun the dogs before we kill them, but there is no legal mandate that we make certain they are unconscious. As with pigs, many dogs will probably remain conscious as they are scalded to death in the tanks that will

soften their skin and remove their fur (or they may feel the searing pain of the blow torch if we opt to go that route to remove their hair).

Other kill options available include chaining their hind legs, suspending them from an overhead conveyor and slitting their throats; snapping their necks (employees with heavy boots can simply stomp on them) and skinning them alive if we determine their pelts have commercial value; or impaling them in the head with a retractable four inch nail.

After our former best friends are dead, bled, gutted, boned, sliced and diced, their tasty flesh will be coming to a supermarket or restaurant near you. Let’s put this plan in motion and make the mythical “man bites dog” story a reality!

Yum, yum, can’t wait; bet you can’t either. **CT**

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HOW OIL BURST THE AMERICAN BUBBLE

Michael T. Klare explains why the energy crisis is having such a devastating effect on the US economy

This left home buyers with two unappealing choices: Take out larger mortgages than they could readily afford . . . or buy cheaper homes far from their places of work, which ensured long commutes, while hoping that the price of gasoline remained relatively low

The economic bubble that lifted the stock market to dizzying heights was sustained as much by cheap oil as by cheap (often fraudulent) mortgages. Likewise, the collapse of the bubble was caused as much by costly (often imported) oil as by record defaults on those improvident mortgages.

Oil, in fact, has played a critical, if little commented upon, role in America's current economic enfeeblement – and it will continue to drain the economy of wealth and vigor for years to come.

The great economic mega-bubble arose in the late 1990s, when oil was cheap, times were good, and millions of middle-class families aspired to realize the “American dream” by buying a three (or more) bedroom house on a decent piece of property in a nice, safe suburb with good schools and various other amenities. The hitch: Few such affordable homes were available for sale – or being built – within easy commuting range of major metropolitan areas or near public transportation. In the Los Angeles metropolitan area, for example,

the median sale price of existing homes rose from \$290,000 in 2002 to \$446,400 in 2004; similar increases were posted in other major cities and in their older, more desirable suburbs.

This left home buyers with two unappealing choices: Take out larger mortgages than they could readily afford, often borrowing from unscrupulous lenders who overlooked their overstretched finances (that is, their “subprime” qualifications); or buy cheaper homes far from their places of work, which ensured long commutes, while hoping that the price of gasoline remained relatively low.

Many first-time home buyers wound up doing both – signing up for crushing mortgages on homes far from their places of work.

The result was metastasizing exurban home developments along the beltways that surround major American cities and along the new feeder roads that now stretched into the distant countryside beyond. In some cases, those new homeowners found themselves 30, 40, even 50 miles or more from the urban centers in which their only hope of em-

ployment lay. Data released by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2004 showed that virtually all of the fastest growing counties in the country – those with growth rates of 10% or more – were located in exurban areas like Loudoun County, Virginia (35 miles west of Washington, D.C.) or Henry County, Georgia (30 miles south of Atlanta).

At the same time, cheap oil and changing consumer tastes – pushed along by relentless advertising campaigns – led many of the same Americans to trade in their smaller, lighter cars for heavy SUVs or pickup trucks, which, of course, meant only one thing – a significant increase in oil consumption. According to the Department of Energy, total petroleum use rose from an average of 17 million barrels per day in 1990 to 21 million barrels in 2004, an increase of 24% – most of it being burned up on American roads.

Let the Good Times Roll (into the exurbs)

In 1998, when the bubble was taking shape, crude oil cost about \$11 a barrel and the United States produced half of the petroleum it consumed; but that was the last year in which the fundamentals were so positive. American reliance on imported petroleum crossed the 50% threshold that very year and has been rising ever since, while the cost of imported oil hit the \$100 per barrel mark this January 2 for the first time, an all-time record (though the price was once briefly higher, as measured in older, less inflated dollars).

When that steady price climb, combined with growing dependence on imported petroleum, was translated into

the new exurban landscape the economic bubble began to shudder. As a start, there was that ever-increasing outflow of dollars needed just to pay for all those barrels of crude and the resulting surge in America's foreign-trade deficit.

Consider this: In 1998, the United States paid approximately \$45 billion for its imported oil; in 2007, that bill is likely to have reached \$400 billion or more. That constitutes the single largest contribution to America's balance-of-payments deficit and a substantial transfer of wealth from the U.S. economy to those of oil-producing nations. This, in turn, helped weaken the value of the dollar in relation to key foreign currencies, especially the euro and the Japanese yen, boosting the cost of other imported foreign goods and so threatening to fuel inflation at home.

Meanwhile, two critical developments kept the cost of oil rising: a dramatic increase in global demand, largely driven by the emergence of China and India as major consuming nations; and a pronounced slowdown in the expansion of global supply, due mainly to a dearth of new discoveries and recurring political disorder in key oil fields already in production. This meant that American energy consumers – including all those long-distance commuters with crippling mortgages and gas-guzzling SUVs – had to compete with newly-affluent Chinese and Indian consumers for access to ever more costly supplies of imported petroleum. Something had to give.

As the oil import bill kept rising, the value of the dollar kept falling, and inflationary pressures kept building, the country's central bankers responded in classic fashion by raising interest rates.

American energy consumers – including all those long-distance commuters with crippling mortgages and gas-guzzling SUVs – had to compete with newly-affluent Chinese and Indian consumer access to ever more costly supplies of imported petroleum

BROKEN DREAMS

When questioned, many indicated that the high cost of gasoline and home-heating fuel had forced them to economize on Christmas gifts, winter vacations, and other indulgences

This naturally resulted in substantially higher monthly payments for homeowners with variable-rate mortgages.

For many families already stretched to the limit, this would prove the final blow. Forced to default on their mortgages, they then precipitated the subprime crisis by, in effect, puncturing the bubble.

Even then, the economy might have had a chance had that crisis not come in tandem with the \$100 barrel of oil. By December, consumers were cutting back on nonessential purchases, producing the most disappointing holiday retail season since 2001. When questioned, many indicated that the high cost of gasoline and home-heating fuel had forced them to economize on Christmas gifts, winter vacations, and other indulgences. “If gasoline prices go up, that means there’s less to spend on everything else,” said David Greenlaw, chief U.S. fixed-income analyst at Morgan Stanley.

The high price of gasoline was bad news for another pillar of the economy as well: the auto industry. While Japanese companies were busy rolling out hybrid vehicles and small, fuel-efficient conventional cars, Detroit stuck doggedly to its now-obsolete business model of producing large SUVs and light trucks, which had, in recent years, been the source of most of its profits.

Once the price of oil went stratospheric, of course, Americans predictably stopped buying the gas guzzlers, signing what looked like an instant death certificate for an improvident industry. In 1999, for example, Ford sold more than 428,000 mid-sized Explorer SUVs; in the first 11 months of 2007, the equivalent number was 126,930 Explorers (and even

that puts a gloss on the corpse, as November was one of the worst months in recent automotive history). An auto industry in decline naturally means that many ancillary industries will be facing contraction, if not disaster.

Popping the bubble

Then came January 2. Although oil retreated from the \$100 mark by the end of that day on the New York Mercantile Exchange, the damage had been done. Stocks on the New York Stock Exchange plummeted, suffering their worst loss on a New Year debut since 1983. Gold, meanwhile, soared to an all-time high – a sure indication of international anxiety about the vigor of the U.S. economy.

Since then, stock market panics have hit major financial centers around the world. Only a dramatic last-minute decision by the Federal Reserve to reduce overnight lending rates by three-quarters of a point before the markets opened on January 22 averted a further, potentially catastrophic slide in stock prices. Many analysts now believe that a recession is inevitable – possibly a long and especially painful one. A few are even mentioning the “D” word, for depression.

Whatever happens, the American economy will eventually emerge from this crisis significantly weaker, largely because of its now-inescapable dependence on imported oil. Over the past decade, this country has squandered approximately one and a half trillion dollars on imported oil, much of which has been poured down the tanks of grotesquely fuel-inefficient vehicles that were conveying drivers on ever lengthening commutes from the exurbs to employment in center cities.

Today, a large share of this money is deposited in so-called sovereign-wealth funds (SWFs). Americans should get used to that phrase. It stands for giant pools of wealth that are under the control of government agencies like the Kuwait Investment Authority and the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority. These SWFs now control approximately \$3 trillion in assets, and, with more petrodollars pouring into the petro-states every day, they are projected to hit the \$12 trillion mark by 2015.

Bargain-basement prices

What are those who control the sovereign-wealth funds doing with all this money? For one thing, buying up choice U.S. assets at bargain-basement prices. In the past few months, Persian Gulf SWFs have acquired a significant stake in a number of prominent American firms, giving them a potential say in the future management of these companies. The Kuwait Investment Authority, for example, recently took a \$12 billion stake in Citigroup and a \$6.5 billion share in Merrill Lynch; the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority acquired a \$7.5 billion stake in Citigroup; and Mubadala Development of Abu Dhabi purchased a \$1.5 billion share in the privately-held Carlyle Group.

These acquisitions are just a small indication of a massive, irreversible shift in wealth and power from the United States to the petro-states of the Middle East and energy-rich Russia. These countries, notes the International Monetary Fund, are believed to have raked in \$750 billion in 2007 and are expected to do even better this year – and each year thereafter. What this means is not just

the continuing enfeeblement of the American economy, but an accompanying decline in global political leverage.

Nothing better captures the debilitating nature of America's dependence on imported oil than President Bush's humiliating recent performance in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He quite literally begged Saudi King Abdullah to increase the kingdom's output of crude oil in order to lower the domestic price of gasoline. "My point to His Majesty is going to be, when consumers have less purchasing power because of high prices of gasoline – in other words, when it affects their families, it could cause this economy to slow down," he told an interviewer before his royal audience. "If the economy slows down, there will be less barrels of [Saudi] oil purchased."

Needless to say, the Saudi leadership dismissed this implied threat for the pathetic bathos it was. The Saudis, indicated Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi, would raise production only "when the market justifies it." With that, they made clear what the whole world now knows: The American bubble has burst – and it was oil that popped it. Thus are those with an "oil addiction" (as President Bush once termed it) forced to grovel before the select few who can supply the needed fix. **CT**

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These acquisitions are just a small indication of a massive, irreversible shift in wealth and power from the United States to the petro-states of the Middle East and energy-rich Russia

DON'T POP THAT PILL

Stan Cox on the ignored risks of our most popular antibiotics

In the bodies of people, cats, rats, and mice, fluoroquinolones not only kill bacteria but also appear to attach to certain brain and nerve receptors, kill tendon cells, and cause other kinds of havoc

The case studies are scattered through the medical journals: a 62-year-old woman with acute psychosis; a 73-year-old man with “severe delirious psychotic features”; a woman of 47 suffering from insomnia and barely able to stand or walk; a 62-year-old woman who ruptures her Achilles tendon; a 64-year-old diabetic woman with life-threatening hypoglycemia.

When, near the end of one of those ask-your-doctor commercials, a fast-talking disembodied voice reads off a drug’s side effects, usually over a scene involving fields of waving grass and a puppy dog, it tends to sound like a lot of nasty stuff that’s going to happen to someone else.

But while reading and writing about the pharmaceutical industry over the past couple of years, I started wondering about what life is like for the real people who do experience those side effects. Then last fall, when my own father was prescribed two popular antimicrobial drugs, I didn’t have to wonder any longer.

He, like the people in those published case studies, was a victim of a specific class of antibiotics known as fluoroquinolones. Clinical trials typically find that about 10 percent of people taking these drugs – among the most familiar of which are ciprofloxacin (Cipro) and levofloxacin (Levaquin) – experience psychiatric and central-nervous-system problems.

Because they target bacteria and not our own tissues, antibiotics are often not scrutinized for side effects by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) or manufacturers as carefully as are, say, psychiatric drugs. But in the bodies of people, cats, rats, and mice, fluoroquinolones not only kill bacteria but also appear to attach to certain brain and nerve receptors, kill tendon cells, and cause other kinds of havoc.

Clinical trials conducted over three decades in the process of gaining FDA approval for fluoroquinolones which encompass dozens of antibiotics with ‘flo’ or ‘ox’ in the generic name – show that psychiatric and central-nervous-system problems occurred in more than 10

percent of patients. Such trials, as well as “adverse drug reaction” (ADR) reports that began to be filed by US doctors and patients once the drugs were being marketed, indicate serious reactions in about 1 to 2 percent of cases in which the drugs are administered.

A study of ADRs in Italy, published in 2005, found that among more than 50 types of drugs, fluoroquinolones accounted for 11 percent of all adverse events and were involved in the largest number of serious problems, edging out antidepressants.

“A remarkable safety record”

If even only one person in 100 suffers a grave side effect of such a popular class of drug, that can mean millions of people affected. At their worst, fluoroquinolones can ruin or, potentially, end lives. On the Internet, people who have been “floxed” come together in forums and discussion groups to swap graphic accounts of searing pain, psychosis, blistering skin, kidney and liver damage, muscle-wasting, tendon rupture, hallucinations, insomnia, suicidal thoughts, and panic attacks.

Dr. Jay Cohen, a medical researcher and associate professor at the University of California, San Diego, published a paper on peripheral neuropathy caused by fluoroquinolones in 2001. Since then, he says, “I have received several hundred emails, most of which relate terrible, often catastrophic reactions to Levaquin, and some to Cipro. These reactions are slow to pass, leaving some people disabled for months or years. It is an awful problem.”

Clinical trials and case studies published by doctors in leading medical journals also make it clear that such prob-

lems exist, but in the journals, it’s common to see conclusions like this, from a 2002 paper: “Levofloxacin has been used in more than 200 million prescriptions, with a remarkable safety record.”

In their practices, doctors often appear to blame other factors for damage done by the drugs. Says Cohen, “Unfortunately, many doctors do not know that fluoroquinolones can cause such severe, long-lasting reactions. When a reaction occurs, some doctors deny that it could have been caused by the drug. Doctors order a battery of tests to seek other causes, but the tests usually show nothing.”

In the early 1990s, award-winning journalist Stephen Fried launched his own dogged investigation of fluoroquinolones after his wife Diane suffered long-term damage from a single pill of a variant called ofloxacin (Floxin) that was popular at the time. In his book *Bitter Pills: Inside the Hazardous World of Legal Drugs* (Bantam Books, 1999), Fried describes a 1993 FDA advisory committee meeting he attended, in which government and drug-company officials haggled over possible new warnings to be put on fluoroquinolone labels and inserts. Fried helped FDA researchers make their case, but, he wrote in the book, “The doctors leading the [G.D.] Searle [and Company] delegation said something that almost caused me to have a seizure.”

“As you know,” that doctor told the group, “physicians will not even look at the package insert. If they do, it’s for seconds.”

People who find themselves under assault by bacteria (including the 2 million Americans who get infected each year in

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UNSAFE MEDICINE

The actual anthrax attacks of October 2001 triggered a wave of panic-buying and pill-swallowing, and Cipro's manufacturer Bayer responded by producing 200 million additional doses within two months

hospitals) desperately need antibiotics. And, better late than never, there is a growing awareness that the use of antibiotics must be planned much more rigorously, to curtail the development of resistant bacteria. But the popularity of some of the drugs has as much to do with historical accident as with safety and efficacy.

The huge commercial success of the fluoroquinolones can be traced to 1990 and the first Gulf War, when the US military was concerned that Iraqi forces with whom they were soon to do battle were planning to use anthrax as a bacterial weapon. The armed forces ordered 30 million doses of the fluoroquinolone ciprofloxacin – Cipro – to be administered to troops as a preventative measure. That drug was chosen mainly because it was new, and the Iraqis would not have been expected to have selected an anthrax strain resistant to it.

Although no anthrax attack is known to have been launched in Kuwait or Iraq (and Desert Storm veterans have blamed the side effects of the antibiotic for some of the symptoms of Gulf War Syndrome), Cipro got the reputation as a kind of superdrug, and sales rose through the 90s. The actual anthrax attacks of October 2001 triggered a wave of panic-buying and pill-swallowing, and Cipro's manufacturer Bayer responded by producing 200 million additional doses within two months.

At the time, a shocked David Flockhart, chief of clinical pharmacology at the Indiana University School of Medicine, told the *Los Angeles Times*, "Cipro is basically a big gun whose benefits outweigh its risks in certain circumstances, but the bigger gun you use, the more

damage you can expect as collateral." Of more than 3000 postal employees who took Cipro following the anthrax attacks, 26 percent had problems with their digestive system, and 14 percent reported neurological problems.

Cipro and its newer fluoroquinolone cousins have since become the most frequently prescribed class of antibiotics in the US, accounting for one prescription out of four. By 2003, more than a half-billion prescriptions had been written for Cipro and Levaquin alone. Under contracts then in effect, the Defense Department and Veterans Administration together were dispensing about 9 million doses of fluoroquinolones per year.

Innovation?

The quinolone family of antibiotics grew out of research on anti-malarial drugs, which also carry a heavy load of side effects. One member of that family, a malaria medication called mefloquine (Larium), has become notorious for causing problems that include, according to FDA, "psychiatric symptoms ranging from anxiety, paranoia, and depression to hallucinations and psychotic behavior. On occasions, these symptoms have been reported to continue long after mefloquine has been stopped."

In what passes for innovation in the pharmaceutical industry, companies continue to modify the chemical structure of fluoroquinolones in search of similar, effective antibiotics that can be patented. One recent study warned that members of the newest generation of such drugs, judging from their chemical structures, are even more likely to cause adverse side-effects than are now-popular ones like Cipro and Levaquin. Because the

truly informative testing of drugs occurs not during the FDA approval process but through their use by millions of patients, a lot of people are certain to experience damage from these drugs first-hand.

One victim's story

At 77, my father was a specimen of good health who ate a solid vegetarian diet and would regularly bike 20 or more miles in a day. So it came as a terrible blow when, in October, he had to go in for emergency cardiac artery bypass and valve-replacement surgery. Complications of the surgery kept him hospitalized longer than expected – with two more trips to the operating room – weakened, exhausted, and down to only 125 pounds from his former 155.

A full month after being admitted, he finally seemed to begin recovering. But at that point, he plunged into a terribly weakened state, sleeping little or not at all, his arms and legs in almost constant, uncoordinated motion, unable to walk without falling backward. That went on for almost two weeks, until he made a quick turnaround, regained his ability to walk, and was discharged.

We were all astonished and grateful, but wondered how he had improved so suddenly. Weeks later, when I went back and looked at his 33-page hospital file of doctors' notes, along with the 146-page(!) daily file of medications he'd been given, I saw that his abrupt deterioration had coincided with the start of a course of a fluoroquinolone called moxifloxacin (Avelox), given for suspected pneumonia. The just-as-abrupt improvement occurred a day and a half after his last dose of moxifloxacin. But at the time of his

discharge, we didn't know that; indeed, we'd never heard the term "fluoroquinolone".

When he had been out of the hospital for five days, still fatigued and very shaky but not ill, a physician's assistant decided that he needed an antibiotic prescription in case he might have pneumonia. The drug was Levaquin. He took the first dose that night, and by the following evening, he was going downhill fast. He spent almost all of the next day in bed, too weak to walk or even sit up, spending most of the time with his eyes closed or in a blank stare, making bizarre sounds and gestures.

Unable to get any answers from his doctors, my mother and I, in desperation, stopped giving him the Levaquin. (As a geneticist, I was as aware as anyone of the rule that says never to stop an antibiotic in mid-course, but we were indeed desperate.) Within 36 hours, he had begun improving remarkably but remained very weak for months. His doctor has since concluded that he never had pneumonia.

The label for Levaquin includes information that is typical for fluoroquinolones: "Convulsions and toxic psychoses have been reported in patients receiving quinolones, including levofloxacin. Quinolones may also cause ... tremors, restlessness, anxiety, lightheadedness, dizziness, confusion and hallucinations, paranoia, depression, nightmares, insomnia and, rarely, suicidal thoughts or acts. These reactions may occur following the first dose."

In, 2004 the FDA issued a new warning on fluoroquinolones, stating that treatment should be stopped if patients felt strange neurological symptoms like

When he had been out of the hospital for five days, still fatigued and very shaky but not ill, a physician's assistant decided that he needed an antibiotic prescription in case he might have pneumonia

UNSAFE MEDICINE

By one estimate, 20 million unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions are written in the US every year. As many as 100,000 Americans die annually from reactions to prescription drugs of all kinds

“pain, burning, tingling, numbness, and/or weakness ... in order to prevent the development of an irreversible condition.” In 2005-06, the Illinois Attorney general and the group Public Citizen petitioned the FDA to add a so-called “black box” warning to packages, this one regarding the danger of tendon rupture, a well-documented effect of the drugs. So far, no action has been taken.

Jay Cohen responded to FDA’s addition of the 2004 statement by asking, “The question is, will doctors notice these warnings? Doctors do not reread package inserts or the PDR every time they prescribe the same drug.

Moreover, the package inserts of quinolones are very long, and the information can easily be overlooked. Perhaps the greatest usefulness of the new warnings may be for patients who develop side effects with quinolones and who consult the Physician’s Desk Reference [PDR], or for doctors who consult the PDR after patients complain about side effects.”

In that sense, the warning does its job, but too late for the patient: Once my father was in big trouble, I indeed looked up the fine-print warnings. Among several of his doctors with whom I discussed his experience with fluoroquinolones afterward, none had known that the drugs can have serious effects on the central nervous system – yet none was surprised that they do.

Without the many other drugs he received during surgery and his six-week hospital stay, my father would not have survived. And in seeming to recover from two “floxings” within only a few weeks, my father was luckier than many other patients. However, as he struggled to re-

gain his health, he twice had his recovery reversed (and, it seems, nearly ended altogether) by the side effects of drugs prescribed for an illness that he never actually had.

Tragically, his overmedication is not unusual. Studies of outpatients have consistently shown that more than half the drugs they were taking were not needed. By one estimate, 20 million unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions are written in the US every year. As many as 100,000 Americans die annually from reactions to prescription drugs of all kinds. With a toll like that, the costs of overmedication can’t fully be measured in dollars. (And one study found that only 6 percent of adverse reactions are accurately reported.)

A survey of patients admitted to two hospitals’ emergency departments found that for half of those patients who were taking multiple drugs at the time, it was the pharmaceuticals themselves that had landed them in the emergency room. Another survey of patient charts found that three-fourths of the time, the documents did not accurately list all the drugs being taken.

Higher risks for elderly

The risks of drugs in general are known to be much higher in elderly patients. As what one paper called the nation’s “leading drug consumers”, our older friends and relatives have far too many opportunities for drugs to interact with an existing medical condition or another drug. At any given time, says one study, 78 percent of people over 65 years of age are on medications – and half of that group are regularly taking five or more drugs.

Elderly patients not only take more

drugs; they also have more health problems that can magnify the side effects and often mislead patients and doctors about what ails them. In the words of one researcher, “It is easy to ascribe decline in functional status to worsening disease or old age and not thoroughly investigate the contribution of inappropriate drug therapy.” That’s what happened to my father; until the drug effects became too obvious to ignore, we all assumed he was still suffering aftershocks of surgery.

Another study put its finger on the bigger problem, noting that despite having learned in medical school about systematic approaches to prescribing, “physicians learn how to prescribe in ‘real-world’ settings ... and they are influenced by their peers, pharmaceutical company marketing, healthcare systems, and patient demands and expectations.”

Hazardous interactions

Hazardous drug interactions continue to be a big issue in medicine. Through hard experience, medical administrators have come up with a list of the ten most dangerous drug interactions, and two of those involve fluoroquinolones. But as for actually preventing such problems, there is always more talk than action. Were a proposed drug to be safety-tested not only on its own, but in combinations with other drugs, its sponsoring company would have to shell out many times as much money and spend a lot more development time.

Don’t hold your breath for that. Drug executives are already threatening to stop developing antibiotics altogether, because in the companies’ eyes, they don’t justify the cost of research and test-

ing. That’s because they are usually prescribed only for a matter of days at a time, not for many years like the more profitable lifestyle drugs and treatments for chronic diseases.

Having in their inventories a class of antibiotics that’s so popular among physicians and on which so many chemical variations-on-a-theme are possible, companies are not acknowledging the toll being taken by fluoroquinolones on vulnerable patients. Jay Cohen says, “As far as I can tell, the manufacturers have not lifted a finger to try to help these people, nor have they undertaken research to try to explain these reactions and to develop measures to help patients avoid them.”

He adds that drugs like Levaquin, Cipro, or Avelox “should not be used as first line antibiotics. Other, safer drugs should be tried first. The need for antibiotic therapy with fluoroquinolones should be gauged carefully, and unnecessary use should be avoided.”

Unfortunately, most people don’t learn about the risks of fluoroquinolones or other drugs until, like me, they encounter them first hand and look around for information.

Then they find sites like Cohen’s www.medicationsense.com or the most comprehensive fluoroquinolones victims’ site, www.fqresearch.org. That site is urging that the drugs never be used “unless there is a direct threat to the patient’s life or limb.”

CT

*Stan Cox is a plant breeder and writer in Salina, Kansas and the author of **Sick Planet: Corporate Food and Medicine** (Pluto Press, April, 2008). www.sickplanetbook.com*

Were a proposed drug to be safety-tested not only on its own, but in combinations with other drugs, its sponsoring company would have to shell out many times as much money and spend a lot more development time

EEEEK!

Fred Reed tries to understand US foreign policy

Few of today's PTMs have passed time in Moslem countries. Many do not have passports. The proportion who speak Arabic or Farsi or actually know any Moslems is very low

A malign and poorly understood influence on foreign policy is the Paranoid Truculent Male (although a few females share the ailment). The PTM is a fairly well-defined type, who believes that They Are Out to Get Us. He doesn't much care who They are. If one They fails him, he will find another. These They must be fought to the death. It's us or They.

As a current example, I get email telling me that Moslems hate us and want to enslave us. We must therefore gird our loins and prepare for an apocalyptic conflict that will determine whether Western civilization will survive. A war of peoples approaches, and we must win it.

This of course is transparent nonsense. A week or so ago I spoke with a friend in government service who recently returned from an extended period in Jordan. Perfectly friendly people, he reported. That was my own experience, years back. They knew he was an American, and consequently wanted to talk to him. He traveled by public transportation to Petra and so on. Not the

slightest problem.

The difference between documentable fact and ferocious email was predictable. An unvarying characteristic of the PTM is the belief that his current enemies are implacably evil and united in pursuit of his enslavement. Frequently he hasn't had the most minimal experience of this relentless enemy. Few of today's PTMs have passed time in Moslem countries. Many do not have passports. The proportion who speak Arabic or Farsi or actually know any Moslems is very low. It doesn't matter. PTMs share a specific personality that wants an enemy. They will always find one.

The PTM endows the enemy with near-magical powers. The utter irrationality of this doesn't faze him because he doesn't notice it. Only sub-clinical paranoia can explain the view that Moslems are going to enslave America, or even want to. A reasonable person looking at the Moslem world sees a disunited, industrially backward, technologically primitive group of ramshackle semi-civilizations that couldn't enslave Guatemala.

The same thing happened during the days of the Soviet Union. It was, in fact, a vast, rickety, unstable, and backward empire butting heads with the US in the standard manner of large nations. To the PTM, the USSR was – altogether now – evil, relentlessly focused on our destruction, plotting a nuclear first strike, and desirous of enslaving us. (“Enslaving” is a favorite word of PTMs.) Odd. When I visited the USSR, I liked the people and they liked us. Nations in conflict, yes. Weird obsessive hatred of us, no.

Magical powers

The Soviets too had magical powers, said the PTMs. They were stealing our secrets. They were rapidly catching up with the US in all technologies, and actually ahead in the crucial ones. Their weapons coming off the assembly lines were better than ours, shrieeek! Their tanks were robust, deadly, and practical, not high-tech gizmos like ours.

I had covered American tanks extensively, and knew a lot about Soviet armor. I went to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland to talk to the enlisted men who actually worked with captured Russian tanks. Junk they said. Hard to use, broke down constantly. I knew that Russian armor was at best using microchannel photomultipliers for night-vision instead of thermals. I had spent a lot of time with the M1 Abrams. I knew exactly what would happen if the two fought each other, and it always did.

None of this dented the PTM’s delusional armor. The Russian weapons that I had seen, that the Israelis had faced in ’67 and ’73, were “monkey models,” said the PTMs: primitive versions stripped of

their lethal everything, just to fool us into complacency. (Everything is a conspiracy. No exceptions.) I reflected that the whole Russian economy must have been a monkey model. In Russia the stores had used the abacus. The only computer I saw was the Agat, a bad knock-off of the Apple II, I think it was, with an English operating system. Russia amounted to Mexico, without the consumer goods and technology.

An unvarying part of the PTM’s mental furniture is the belief that enemies within bore away at the national fabric. (Does one bore at fabric? I won’t take responsibility for my metaphors. The little voices give them to me.) Spies multiply like nits. Secret saboteurs await their chance. We must be afraid of everything. The world is a dark and perilous place, and They are everywhere. We must Suspect.

Thus Commies were lurking under rocks, penetrating every aspect of American society. Today of course it’s terrorists. We must tighten security, multiply surveillance, read email, suspect secret messages in photos, search all and sundry. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance, say the PTMs (eternal lunacy might be closer). It doesn’t occur to them that excessive vigilance ends liberty, because they don’t about liberty. They want war with the hated enemy.

The notion that the enemy is demonically evil and magically powerful justifies any countermeasures, certainly including nuclear war, which latter appeals to the PTM’s adrenals. They believe they are practicing realism. The usual argument is that the enemy – Russia, the Moslems, soon China – has a huge population and therefore can afford to lose

I had covered American tanks extensively, and knew a lot about Soviet armor. I went to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland to talk to the enlisted men who actually worked with captured Russian tanks. Junk they said. Hard to use, broke down constantly

BE VERY AFRAID

Hey, scare the public, take up a collection, and blow hell out of the demons twisting in the inner shadow

several hundred million people in a nuclear exchange (which sounds like Christmas presents). The stupidity is patent, but the PTM allows nothing to compromise his delusion. Since the enemy is determined to destroy us, we must be willing to kill those hundreds of million.

The tendency to see life as conflict with a merciless opponent engenders another favorite preoccupation of the PTM, that We Have Grown Soft. Yes. Americans no longer chop cordwood of a morning, don't hunt bears.

The rude strength that made the country great is sapped by suburban life. We are become a nation of metrosexuals. Awake, America! Before it is too late! Gird those loins.

PTMs can be highly intelligent, and their barely subdermal hostility – the largest component in their makeup, along with a total lack of empathy – gives them a lot of horsepower. Questions of morality do not interest them: Greater things are at stake. We must fight! Thus one often finds them at the

levers of power.

It can be difficult to distinguish the true PDM from the merely conscienceless without talking to them. Still, Curtis LeMay was a prime example, perfectly willing to burn a hundred thousand civilian alive in a night. Ariel Sharon fits. So do a lot of the neocons who run the US. And so America, with no military enemies, raises the military budget relentlessly and finds ways to use it. Few in the military are PTMs, but the Pentagon embraces them to justify get more money, and the weapons contractors milk them like cows. Hey, scare the public, take up a collection, and blow hell out of the demons twisting in the inner shadow. **CT**

Fred Reed has worked on staff for Army Times, The Washingtonian, Soldier of Fortune, Federal Computer Week, and The Washington Times. He has worked as a police writer, technology editor, military specialist, and authority on mercenary soldiers. Fred's web site is <http://fredoneverything.net>

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JUST DO IT: PEOPLE POWER IN GAZA

Ramzy Baroud on the bravery of resistance

In a radio interview before the US invasion of Iraq, David Barsamian asked Noam Chomsky what ordinary Americans could do to stop the war. Chomsky answered, “In some parts of the world people never ask, ‘what can we do?’ They simply do it.”

For someone who was born and raised in a refugee camp in Gaza, Chomsky’s seemingly oblique response required no further elucidation.

When Gazens recently stormed the strip’s sealed border with Egypt, Chomsky’s comment returned to mind, along with memories of the still relevant – and haunting – past.

In 1989, the Bureej refugee camp was experiencing a strict military curfew, as punishment for the killing of one Israeli soldier. The soldier’s car had broken down in front of the camp while he was on his way home to a Jewish settlement. Bureej had previously lost hundreds of its people to the Israeli army and killing the soldier was an unsurprising act of retaliation.

In the weeks that followed, scores of Palestinians in Bureej were murdered

and hundreds of homes were demolished. The killing spree generated little media coverage in Israel.

I lived with my family in an adjacent refugee camp, Nuseirat, at the time. Characterised by extreme poverty, it was a natural home for much of the Palestinian resistance movement. Our house was located a few feet away from what was known as the ‘Graveyard of the Martyrs’. It was an area of high elevation that the local children often used to watch the movement of Israeli tanks as they began their daily incursion into the camp. We whistled or yelled every time we spotted the soldiers, and used sign language to communicate as we hid behind the simple graves.

Although watching, yelling and whistling were the only means of response at our disposal, they were far from safe. My friends Ala, Raed, Wael and others were all killed in these daily encounters.

During Bureej’s most lethal curfew yet, the sound of explosions coming from the doomed camp reached us at Nuseirat. The people of my camp became

Although watching, yelling and whistling were the only means of response at our disposal, they were far from safe. My friends Ala, Raed, Wael and others were all killed in these daily encounters

BROKEN BORDERS

Israeli soldiers stood dumbfounded before the chanting multitudes. While many marchers were wounded, only one was killed. The soldiers eventually retreated to their barricades

engulfed in endless discussions which were neither factional nor theoretical. People were being brutally murdered, injured or impoverished, while the Red Cross was blocked access to the camp. Something had to be done.

And all of a sudden it was. Not as a result of any polemic endorsed by intellectuals or 'action calls' initiated at conferences, but as an unstructured, spur-of-the-moment act undertaken by a few women in my refugee camp. They simply started a march into Bureej, and were soon joined by other women, children and men. Within an hour, thousands of refugees made their way into the besieged neighbouring camp. "What's the worst they could do?" a neighbour asked, trying to collect his courage before joining the march. "The soldiers will not be able to kill more than a hundred before we overpower them."

Israeli soldiers stood dumbfounded before the chanting multitudes. While many marchers were wounded, only one was killed. The soldiers eventually retreated to their barricades. UN vehicles and Red Cross ambulances sheltered themselves amidst the crowd and together they broke the siege.

Disbelief, then joy

I still remember the scene of Bureej residents first opening the shutters of their windows, then carefully cracking their doors, stepping out of their homes in a state of disbelief breaking into joy. My memory – of the chants, the tears, the dead being rushed to be buried, the wounded hauled on the many hands that came to the rescue, the strangers sharing food and good wishes – reaffirms the event as one of the greatest

acts of human solidarity I have witnessed.

The scene was to be repeated time and again, during the first and Second Palestinian Uprising: ordinary people carrying out what seemed like ordinary acts in response to extraordinary injustice. The father who lost his son to free Bureej told the crowd: "I am happy that my son died so that many more could live." Later that day, our refugee camp fell under a most strict military curfew, to relive Bureej's recent nightmare. We were neither surprised nor regretful. We had known the right thing to do and "we simply did it."

Now Palestinian women, once more, have led Palestinian civil society in a most meaningful and rewarding way. Just when Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak was being congratulated for successfully starving Palestinians in Gaza into submission, ordinary women led a march to break the tight siege imposed on Gaza.

On Tuesday, January 22, they descended on the Gaza-Egypt border and what followed was a moment of pride and shame: pride for those ever-dignified people refusing to surrender, and shame that the so-called international community allowed the humiliation of an entire people to the extent that forced hungry mothers to brave batons, tear gas and military police in order to perform such basic acts as buying food, medicine and milk.

The next day, the courage of these women inspired the same audacity that the original batch of women in my refugee camp inspired nearly 20 years ago. Nearly half of the Gaza Strip population crossed the border in a collective

push for mere survival. And when people march in unison, there is no worldly force, however deadly, that can block their way.

This “largest jailbreak in history”, as one commentator described it, will be carved in Palestinian and world memory for years to come. In some circles it will be endlessly analysed, but for Palestinians in Gaza, it is beyond rationalization: it simply had to be done.

Armies can be defeated, but human spirit cannot be subdued. Gaza’s act of collective courage is one of the greatest acts of civil disobedience of our time, akin to civil rights marches in America during the 1960’s, South Africa’s anti-Apartheid struggle, and more recently

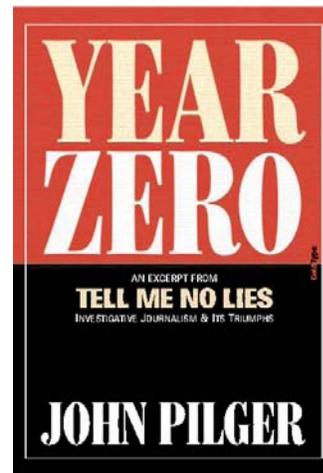
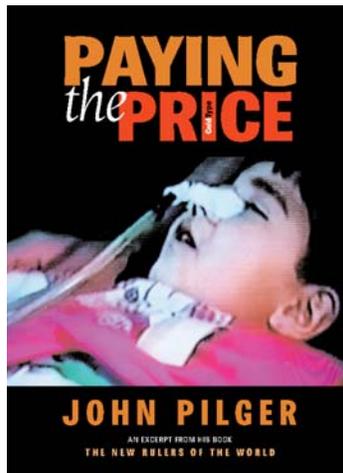
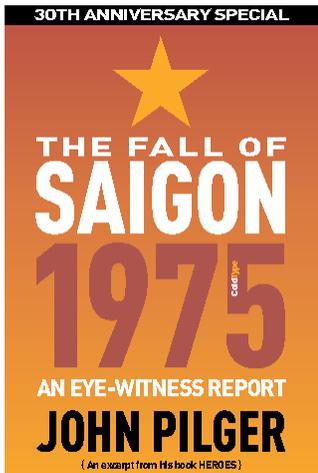
the protests in Burma.

Palestinian people have succeeded where politics and thousands of international appeals have failed. They took matters into their own hands and they prevailed. While this is hardly the end of Gaza’s suffering, it’s a reminder that people’s power to act is just too significant to be overlooked.

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

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A DAY OF RAGE

David Pratt dodges the Israeli bullets in Palestine

One youngster stinking of petrol from Molotov bombs was stuffing a pickle sandwich into his mouth

*This is an excerpt from David Pratt's latest book, **Intifada: Palestine and Israel – The Long Day of Rage***

'God gave us the stone, it has God's will in it. It's all we have. The stone has awakened the Arab world from the leaders to the laymen. This is only the beginning.' – Mohammed Mahmoud Abu Fodeh, 22-year-old Palestinian activist

City Inn Junction, Ramallah, May 2001 – It's a strange feeling being shot at. It was much later before I thought about just how close the bullet had come. So close I could hear its buzz as it sped past. So close I felt its heat as it grazed the bridge of my nose. So close that the Palestinian driver of the ambulance into which it slammed, was able to bend down and pick-up the rubber-coated metal shell and hold it to his face before staring at me incredulously. Lucky, very lucky, his look said. I turned to a colleague and suggested it was time for a Coke and chicken sandwich at Salah's place. He

agreed, and we scurried across some waste ground as another fusillade of bullets cracked against the surrounding buildings. Within minutes the cries of 'Allah o Akbar!' (God is Great), the acrid smell of burning tyres and the wail of ambulances ferrying wounded from the fireblackened street were behind us.

A 'day of rage' the Palestinians call it. 'Though sometimes it feels like the past years have been one long day of rage. This no longer seems like an uprising, just all-out war. Low intensity maybe, but a war nonetheless.

The usual motley mix of journalists and Palestinian shebab – the foot soldiers of this war – had gathered at Salah's. One youngster stinking of petrol from Molotov bombs was stuffing a pickle sandwich into his mouth. He was wearing a green Islamic headscarf with a Hamas flag tied round his neck like a cape; anywhere else, you'd take him for a football fan. Every day, boys like him dice with death, running the gauntlet of Israeli bullets and tear gas.

'The usual?' enquired Salah, in an American twang picked up during his

stay in Pennsylvania. ‘You been gassed today? I’ve got some more eau de cologne, if you’re going back to the barricades.’

These days the shebab prefer cologne-soaked hankies to the traditional onions to alleviate the effects of tear gas. At a lunch table strewn with cameras and lenses, two Canadian photographers and another reporter, ‘George the Greek,’ were thirstily downing cans of Sprite, having likewise taken time out from snapping the bedlam on Ramallah’s frontline.

One of the Canadians was sweating profusely under the weight of flak jacket and Kevlar helmet his news agency insisted he wore; their concern no doubt as much to do with avoiding the need to pay compensation should he be wounded, as interest in his personal safety. George the Greek knew what it was like to be hit. As an old MidEast hand once wounded in Beirut, he was busy telling the other younger Canadian to sharpen up his street skills, otherwise it was unlikely he would last longer than the two days he’d been on the West Bank.

What happens if you get stuck that far forward and the stonethrowing stops and a fire fight begins? Simple, you’re screwed, he warned as the newcomer looked on sheepishly.

Even by the usual ‘days of rage’ standards, the last 48 hours had been especially bitter. As with Newton’s third law of motion, so it is with the intifada. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction; a continual cycle of resistance, then repression, then resistance again. No sooner does each side seem to have found its threshold of acceptable vi-

olence and suffering than it hardens into another bloody phase.

The day had started out quietly enough, not in Ramallah but in Jerusalem as the muezzin called the faithful to prayer at al-Aqsa mosque. On the Via Dolorosa a group of tourists moved from church to synagoguc to mosque, never quite sure when to cover their heads or take off their shoes.

As squads of Israeli soldiers started to muster in the narrow alleyways of the old city, the visitors looked on nervously. By the time the hack-pack of BBC and CNN camera crews arrived and strapped on bulletproof vests and helmets, the pilgrims were tugging at their tour guide’s arm asking for reassurance. Much to the disappointment of the pack, only a few rocks were thrown that morning and the usual debate ensued.

‘Ramallah’s always a good bet,’ said one impatient snapper. Another insisted it would ‘go off’ in Hebron that afternoon.

A three-shekel-fifty taxi ride and 20 minutes later we were in Ramallah. No rocks here, either. Act I was over for now and the shebab had vanished. The big boys were now on stage and Act 11 was well under way as Palestinian snipers brought a furious response from the Israelies.

Israeli tanks

The place was like a scene from a movie except it was all too real. On the hillside opposite we watched the Israeli tank turrets swivelling menacingly before unleashing a clatter of heavy 50-calibre machinegun fire at the buildings from which the flat pop of a sniper’s rifle could occasionally be heard.

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EYEWITNESS REPORT

The house was a bomb factory and the man blew himself up, claimed the Israelis: a victim of collaborators and spies, insisted the Palestinians

‘No pictures, no pictures!’ screamed a Palestinian Authority policeman, as one of the snipers appeared from behind a wall. His face was dirty, sweaty and grimacing with pain, his flak jacket hung open where it had taken a bullet, at the very least breaking his ribs or damaging his lungs.

‘Tanzim,’ whispered a reporter crouching next to me against the thickest wall we could find. Bundled into a car, the sniper was gone in seconds. The shadowy armed wing of Fatah, the Tanzim (‘organisation’ in Arabic) regularly engaged the Israeli army in gun battles from inside Ramallah despite superficial attempts by the Palestinian Authority to distance themselves from the group.

Remote control bomb

That night the Israelis struck back, their agents allegedly behind a remote-control bomb killing a Palestinian man and three children in their home. The house was a bomb factory and the man blew himself up, claimed the Israelis: a victim of collaborators and spies, insisted the Palestinians. The only point of consensus was that the man had been a Hamas activist and was wanted by Israeli security. A three-storey building had been reduced to rubble, but our hack-pack was there before the dust settled.

Amid the belongings strewn among mangled steel and concrete were children’s shoes and a photograph of their grandfather. One bystander, realising an ABC TV crew was filming the scene, leaned forward and propped the portrait upright for the cameras, only to be chastised by a furious cameraman, who wanted the scene to ‘be natural’.

Off we all went in search of those who had survived – the man’s wife and fourth child who had been outside the building at the time. At Ramallah hospital a crowd had gathered. The funeral that afternoon, like most here, would become a political rally from which the spiral of killing would receive fresh impetus.

Along with a colleague, I was ushered into what I thought was a meeting with the survivors, only to find myself in the chill of a mortuary looking at the crushed and burned skull of the victim. The hospital orderly pulled back the second freezer drawer and I saw what was left of the first child, I had already seen enough. ‘Don’t you want to take more pictures?’ the puzzled orderly asked, oblivious to any explanation that no newspaper in my country would run such images.

As the shebab peeled off from the funeral procession and headed for the barricades of City Inn junction to wreak revenge that afternoon, George the Greek, the Canadian photographers and assorted cameramen were not far behind.

‘Today I have a passport to heaven,’ declared Qassem, one of the shebab, loading another stone into his slingshot and strolling into full view of Israeli snipers. Instantly a bullet zinged past a few feet away, almost granting him his ticket to martyrdom.

‘Allah o Akbar!’ he shouted defiantly, before launching the rock at the Israeli Jeeps sitting in the rubble-strewn street 50 yards away. Seconds later there was the crack of an M-16 automatic rifle and a teenager rolling a burning tyre towards the vehicles crumpled to the ground after being shot in the face. Barely had he

collapsed when two others rushed to his aid, sweeping him into an ambulance that sped forward on cue from a side-street.

Spurred on by the sight of their fallen comrade, hundreds of young Palestinians who had gathered, surged forward, hurling rocks, Molotovs and insults. It is a ritual of attack and counter-attack, anarchy and respite. For hours I watched as more than 200 shebab took on Israeli soldiers in an unrelenting cat-and-mouse battle.

Here and there, the bravest and most reckless edged towards the Israeli positions, taking cover behind low walls, lampposts, anything that might stop a high-velocity bullet. Some, hiding their faces behind kaffiyeh scarves, openly taunted the Israeli gunners.

Rite of passage

Throwing stones is a rite of passage for the shebab, and suffering wounds at the hands of Israeli soldiers seen as a badge of honour. For the shahid, or martyred, instant recognition of their sacrifice comes when their faces look out hauntingly from posters plastered on cars and buildings. Some shebab turn up because of peer pressure; others are driven by personal grievances against Israel. Often they compete to outdo each other in acts of daring that all too often cost them their lives.

‘How can we stop them when they see what happens to their friends?’ a Palestinian mother who lived in a block of flats near the City Inn junction complained to me. ‘They’re angry and upset and want to express themselves. This is their life. No school, no work, just stone-throwing and coming to funerals. There’s

nothing else for them to do.’

Amongst the shebab, many of whom have spent time in Israeli jails for their acts of resistance, there is also the constant fear of informers, spies or those wilfully or innocently seen to be working for the Israelis.

As the riot raged, a Japanese photographer, who had been spotted crossing to the Israeli side between taking pictures of stone-throwers who asked not to be photographed, was bundled off behind a building by a group of angry shebab. Refusing to hand over his film the mood rapidly turned ugly and only the intervention and reassurance of colleagues finally saved the photographer from a severe beating or worse.

‘Can you believe the Israelis call these non-lethal?’ asked 20-year-old Nidal, as he picked up one of the scores of scattered rubber-coated bullets like the one that had narrowly missed me the day before. Part of its thin coating had been stripped away on impact, leaving a ridged, grey metal ball about half an inch in diameter and as heavy as a wrist-watch. Before anyone invented high-tech machine-guns, laser-sighted rifles and tank shells, this was the kind of bullet people used when they wanted to kill each other.

‘I’m sick of fighting them with rocks. Their bullets have taken so many of us now. The Stone Age is over. What we need are guns, then they will really know our will to fight,’ Nidal complained angrily.

A few minutes later, as we advanced cautiously toward some overturned cars marking the forward frontline barricades, a cluster of tear gas grenades bounced over the top of the cars and

Here and there, the bravest and most reckless edged towards the Israeli positions, taking cover behind low walls, lampposts, anything that might stop a high-velocity bullet. Some, hiding their faces behind kaffiyeh scarves, openly taunted the Israeli gunners

EYEWITNESS REPORT

Sometimes it verges on black comedy, like when one group of hungry rioters, stones in one hand and sandwiches in the other, ate and fought at the same time

landed in our midst. Huddled behind the scorched shells of the vehicles, shebab and journalists alike, without gas masks, were left temporarily blinded and retching. Two boys overcome by the gas were stretchered off to the ambulances that sat like delivery vans waiting to be loaded up.

To the outsider there is something absurd about this deadly ritual. Sometimes it verges on black comedy, like when one group of hungry rioters, stones in one hand and sandwiches in the other, ate and fought at the same time. Or, when a local ice cream seller, his vending tray bedecked in Palestinian flags, turned up to offer the shebab other refreshments.

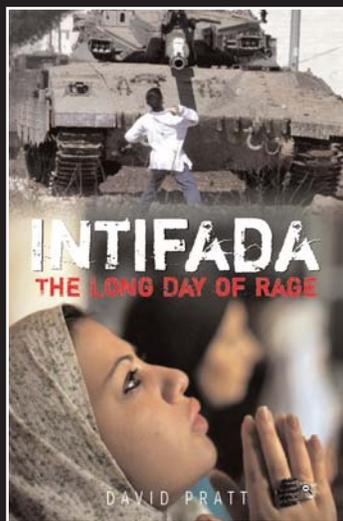
At the end of the day's clashes, we all

head for Salah's Cafe to wash. For Palestinians travelling outside Ramallah and stopped at Israeli checkpoints, sooty faces from burning tyres and dirty hands guarantee arrest on suspicion of rioting. For the hack-pack, it's just an opportunity to make ourselves presentable before heading back to Jerusalem to drink beer and swap tales of derring-do in fashionable cafes. We will all be back tomorrow – the days of rage seem never ending. **CT**

*David Pratt is foreign editor of the Sunday Herald, Scotland's leading national Sunday newspaper. His latest book is **Intifada: Palestine and Israel – The Long Day of Rage***

"This is eyewitness reporting at its best – clear, well-observed, fair. Read it, and you'll understand why most of what you read about Israel and the Palestinians is nonsense"

– Charles Glass, former ABC News Chief Mideast Correspondent



INTIFADA

THE LONG DAY OF RAGE

By David Pratt

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Read a chapter at <http://coldtype.net/Assets.07/Essays/0707.Pratt.Wall.pdf>

DEMOLISHING THE NEW BERLIN WALLS

John Pilger tells how the Palestinian breakout of Gaza offers inspiration to the struggling people of the world

The recent breakout of the people of Gaza provided a heroic spectacle unlike any other since the Warsaw ghetto uprising and the smashing down of the Berlin Wall. Whereas on the occupied West Bank, Ariel Sharon's master plan of walling in the population and stealing their land and resources has all but succeeded, requiring only a Palestinian Vichy to sign it off, the people of Gaza have defied their tormentors, however briefly, and it is a guarantee they will do so again. There is profound symbolism in their achievement, touching lives and hopes all over the world.

"[Sharon's] fate for us," wrote Karma Nabulsi, a Palestinian, "was a Hobbesian vision of an anarchic society: truncated, violent, powerless, destroyed, cowed, ruled by disparate militias, gangs, religious ideologues and extremists, broken up into ethnic and religious tribalism, and co-opted [by] collaborationists. Look to the Iraq of today – that is what he had in store for us and he nearly achieved it."

Israel's and America's experiments in

mass suffering nearly achieved it. There was First Rains, the code name for a terror of sonic booms that came every night and sent Gazan children mad. There was Summer Rains, which showered bombs and missiles on civilians, then extrajudicial executions, and finally a land invasion. Ehud Barak, the current Israeli defence minister, has tried every kind of blockade: the denial of electricity for water and sewage pumps, incubators and dialysis machines and the denial of fuel and food to a population of mostly malnourished children. This has been accompanied by the droning, insincere, incessant voices of western broadcasters and politicians, one merging with the other, platitude upon platitude, tribunes of the "international community" whose response is not to help, but to excuse an indisputably illegal occupation as "disputed" and damn a democratically elected Palestinian Authority as " Hamas militants" who "refuse to recognise Israel's right to exist" when it is Israel that demonstrably refuses to recognise the Palestinians' right to exist.

"What is being hidden from the [Is-

Ehud Barak, the current Israeli defence minister, has tried every kind of blockade: the denial of electricity for water and sewage pumps, incubators and dialysis machines and the denial of fuel and food to a population of mostly malnourished children

NO MORE BARRIERS

In the murdochracies, where most of the world is viewed as useful or expendable, we have little sense of this. The news selection is unremittingly distracting and disabling. The cynicism of an identical group of opportunists laying claim to the White House is given respectability as each of them competes to support the Bush regime's despotic war-making

raeli] public," wrote Uri Avnery, a founder of Gush Shalom, the Israeli peace movement, on 26 January, "is that the launching of the Qassams [rockets from Gaza] could be stopped tomorrow. Several months ago, Hamas proposed a ceasefire. It repeated the offer this week . . . Why doesn't our government jump at this proposal? Simple: to make such a deal, we must speak to Hamas . . . It is more important to boycott Hamas than to put an end to the suffering of Sderot. All the media co-operate with this pretence." Hamas long ago offered Israel a ten-year ceasefire and has since recognised the "reality" of the Jewish state. This is almost never reported in the west.

Soccer star's gesture

The inspiration of the Palestinian breakout from Gaza was dramatically demonstrated by the star Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Aboutreika. Helping his national side to a 3-0 victory over Sudan in the African Nations Cup, he raised his shirt to reveal a T-shirt with the words "Sympathise with Gaza" in English and Arabic. The crowd stood and cheered, and hundreds of thousands of people around the world expressed their support for him and for Gaza. An Egyptian journalist who joined a delegation of sports writers to Fifa to protest against Aboutreika's yellow card said: "It is actions like his that bring many walls down, walls of silence, walls in our minds."

In the murdochracies, where most of the world is viewed as useful or expendable, we have little sense of this. The news selection is unremittingly distracting and disabling. The cynicism of an

identical group of opportunists laying claim to the White House is given respectability as each of them competes to support the Bush regime's despotic war-making. John McCain, almost certainly the Republican nominee for president, wants a "hundred-year war". That the leading Democratic candidates are a woman and a black man is of supreme irrelevance; the fanatical Condoleezza Rice is both female and black. Look into the murky world behind Hillary Clinton and you find the likes of Monsanto, a company that produced Agent Orange, the war chemical that continues to destroy Vietnam. One of Barack Obama's chief whisperers is Zbigniew Brzezinski, architect of Operation Cyclone in Afghanistan, which spawned jihadism, al-Qaeda and 9/11.

This malign circus has been silent on Palestine and Gaza and almost anything that matters, including the following announcement, perhaps the most important of the century: "The first use of nuclear weapons must remain in the quiver of escalation as the ultimate instrument to prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction." Inviting incredulity, these words may require more than one reading. They come from a statement written by five of the west's top military leaders, an American, a Briton, a German, a Frenchman and a Dutchman, who help run the club known as Nato. They are saying the west should nuke countries that have weapons of mass destruction – with the exclusion, that is, of the west's nuclear arsenal. Nuking will be necessary because "the west's values and way of life are under threat".

Where is this threat coming from? "Over there," say the generals.

Where? In “the brutal world”.

On 21 January, on the eve of the Nato announcement, Gordon Brown also out-Orwelled Orwell. He said that “the race for more and bigger stockpiles of nuclear destruction [sic]” is over. The reason he gave was that “the international community” (basically, the west) was facing “serious challenges”. One of these challenges is Iran, which has no nuclear weapons and no programme to build them, according to America’s National Intelligence Estimates. This is in striking contrast to Brown’s Britain, which, in defiance of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, has commissioned an entirely new Trident nuclear arsenal at a cost believed to be as much as £25bn. What Brown was doing was threatening Iran on behalf of the Bush regime, which wants to attack Iran before the end of the presidential year.

Jonathan Schell, author of the seminal *Fate of the Earth*, provides compelling evidence in his recently published *The Seventh Decade: the New Shape of Nuclear Danger* that nuclear war has now moved to the centre of western foreign policy even though the enemy is invented. In response, Russia has begun to restore its vast nuclear arsenal. Robert McNamara, the US defence secretary during the Cuban crisis, describes this as “Apocalypse Soon”. Thus, the wall dismantled by young Germans in 1989 and sold to tourists is being built in the minds of a new generation.

For the Bush and Blair regimes, the invasion of Iraq and the campaigns against Hamas, Iran and Syria are vital in fabricating this new “nuclear threat”. The effect of the Iraq invasion, says a study cited by Noam Chomsky, is a “sev-

enfold increase in the yearly rate of fatal jihadist attacks”.

Behold Nato's instant “brutal world”.

Of course, the highest and oldest wall is that which separates “us” from “them”. This is described today as a great divide of religions or “a clash of civilisations”, which are false concepts, propagated in western scholarship and journalism to provide what Edward Said called “the other” – an identifiable target for fear and hatred that justifies invasion and economic plunder. In fact, the foundations for this wall were laid more than 500 years ago when the privileges of “discovery and conquest” were granted to Christopher Columbus in a world that the then all-powerful pope considered his property, to be disposed of according to his will.

Nothing has changed. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation and now Nato are invested with the same privileges of conquest on behalf of the new papacy in Washington. The goal is what Bill Clinton called the “integration of countries into the global free-market community”, the terms of which, noted the New York Times, “require the United States to get involved in the plumbing and wiring of other nations’ internal affairs more deeply than ever before”.

This modern system of dominance requires sophisticated propaganda that presents its aims as benign, even “promoting democracy in Iraq”, according to BBC executives responsible for responding to sceptical members of the public. That “we” in the west have the unfettered right to exploit the economies and resources of the poor world while main-

For the Bush and Blair regimes, the invasion of Iraq and the campaigns against Hamas, Iran and Syria are vital in fabricating this new “nuclear threat”

NO MORE BARRIERS

Having insinuated their way into public debate, the smears deflect authentic critiques of Chávez's Venezuela and prepare the ground for an assault on it

taining tariff walls and state subsidies is taught as serious scholarship in the economics departments of leading universities. This is neoliberalism – socialism for the rich, capitalism for the poor.

“Rather than acknowledging,” wrote Chalmers Johnson, “that free trade, privatisation and the rest of their policies are ahistorical, self-serving economic nonsense, apologists for neoliberalism have also revived an old 19th-century and neo-Nazi explanation for developmental failure – namely, culture.”

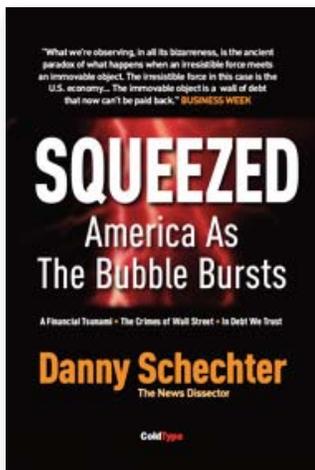
What is rarely discussed is that liberalism as an open-ended, violent ideology is destroying liberalism as a reality. Hatred of Muslims is widely advertised by those claiming the respectability of what they call “the left”. At the same time, opponents of the new papacy are routinely smeared, as seen in the recent fake

charges of narcoterrorism against Hugo Chávez. Having insinuated their way into public debate, the smears deflect authentic critiques of Chávez's Venezuela and prepare the ground for an assault on it.

This is the role that journalism has played in the invasion of Iraq and the great injustice in Palestine. It also represents a wall, on which Aldous Huxley, describing his totalitarian utopia in *Brave New World*, might have written: “Opposition is apostasy. Fatalism is ideal. Silence is preferred.” If the people of Gaza can disobey all three, why can't we? **CT**

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

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FROM STALINGRAD TO WINOGRAD

Uri Avnery assesses the inquiry into Israel's war on Lebanon

For some days, the country looked like the Place de la Concorde in 1793. The entire public sat expectantly facing the guillotine, waiting for the tumbril to bring the marquis, for the marquis to lie down, for the blade to fall on his neck and for a soldier to hold up the bloody, severed head for the amusement of the spectators.

All eyes were fixed on the raised blade of the Winograd commission. The judge sat down before the cameras and read out the report. But the blade did not come down. No reserve soldier raised the bloody, severed head. The head remained in its place. Ehud Olmert is no marquis, and his head remains firmly on his shoulders.

From one end of the country to the other, a deep sigh of disappointment. The reporters and commentators sprang from their seats, like the knitting hags of the Paris square whose marquis has escaped.

The Winograd commission has failed, the commentators exclaimed in outrage. To the many failures of the war, the failure of the commission must now be added. Every experienced politician

knows the axiom: He who chooses the members of a commission determines its conclusions in advance.

That is almost self-evident. After all, the members of the commission are only human. Human beings have attitudes and opinions. These are known in advance to the person who appoints them. He can appoint the members at will. If he appoints tycoons, he can reasonably expect that they will not decide to raise the taxes on the rich. If he appoints leftists instead, the recommendations will be quite different.

Therefore, when the proposed Law of Commissions of Inquiry was debated, we decided that the members of an "official" commission of inquiry should not be appointed by the government, but by the President of the Supreme Court. I was a member of the Knesset at the time and took an active part in the debate. I proposed that not only would the Chief Justice appoint the commission members, but that he – and not the government – would decide on the setting up of an inquiry in the first place. (This was rejected.)

From one end of the country to the other, a deep sigh of disappointment. The reporters and commentators sprang from their seats, like the knitting hags of the Paris square whose marquis has escaped

AVOIDING BLAME

The Winograd commission behaved exactly like an "official" commission, took decisions like one and spoke like one. It raised the guillotine blade, and everybody waited for it to fall on Olmert's neck

That happened seven years before the young Ehud Olmert was first elected to the Knesset. But he understands the law perfectly. When, after Lebanon War II, the appointment of an "official" commission of inquiry was proposed, he objected strenuously. He insisted on a government-appointed inquiry commission. While the members of an official commission are appointed by the Chief Justice, the members of a government commission are appointed by the government itself.

Vive la petite difference.

The appointment of the Winograd commission was greeted by many doubts. But these evaporated completely when the interim report was released last April. It was harsh and uncompromising. It contained very negative remarks about Olmert.

So the public relaxed. The difference between the two kinds of commission was forgotten. The Winograd commission behaved exactly like an "official" commission, took decisions like one and spoke like one. It raised the guillotine blade, and everybody waited for it to fall on Olmert's neck.

And then it became clear that le petite difference was very substantial indeed. The commission appointed by Olmert has now issued a final report that is favorable to Olmert all along the line, especially about the accusation that Olmert had decided on the last-minute "ground operation" and sent soldiers to their deaths to save his personal prestige.

The commission did not lay any personal blame on any politician or general. Here it could base itself on a decision of the Supreme Court, which had expressly forbidden the commission to condemn

anyone personally.

How come? When the Knesset adopted the Commission of Inquiry Law, we paid much attention to Article 15. It prohibits condemning anyone without giving them a fair opportunity to defend themselves. Such a person must be warned in advance and invited to appoint a lawyer, to cross-examine witnesses and to summon witnesses of their own.

That is a long process, and a commission of inquiry is generally in a hurry to finish its report before the subject of its investigation is forgotten. For example, the commission of inquiry that was set up after the Yom Kippur war, under Judge Agranat, just disregarded the article altogether and decided to dismiss the Chief of Staff, the Commander of the Southern Front and other generals, without giving them any advance warning at all.

No blame

The Winograd commission took another path: when the army authorities petitioned the Supreme Court and demanded that the commission respect Article 15, the commission just promised that they would not blame anybody personally.

The commission could, of course, have described Olmert's part in the war in such scathing terms as to force him to resign. It did not do so. On the contrary, it concluded that his decisions were reasonable. The blade did not fall, Olmert was bruised, but still standing.

After the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre, the "official" commission of inquiry chaired by Judge Kahan published an exemplary report which exposed all the facts. But these could have led it to much harsher conclusions than it did actually

reach. Instead of finding that Ariel Sharon and his minions were guilty of “indirect responsibility” for the massacre, it could have decided that they bore direct responsibility. The facts supported such a conclusion. Why did they not do so, and only dismissed Sharon and some officers? I assume that they shrunk back for fear of causing severe damage to the State of Israel.

Now I could write much the same about the Winograd commission. The facts exposed by it justify more extreme conclusions. What held them back? One can guess: the five commission members, all pillars of the establishment – two generals, two leading academics, one judge – did not want to topple Olmert, the No. 1 establishment person. Perhaps they feared that his place would be taken by somebody much worse – a worry shared by many others in the country.

As prominent establishment figures, the commission members also shrunk back from touching on two basic questions concerning Lebanon War II: (a) Why it was started at all, and (b) What had caused the shocking deterioration of the army. In its two reports, the commission asserted that the decision to start the war was taken in a hasty and irresponsible manner. The stated war aims were quite unattainable. But the commission did not say what had caused Olmert & Co. – the government of Israel – to make such a decision.

We now know for sure that plans for the war had been prepared a long time before. These were rehearsed only a month before the war and changes were made according to the results. In the end, these plans were not implemented at all. But it is clear that the government and

the army had long been thinking about attacking Hizbullah.

For six years, the Northern border had been completely quiet. Hizbullah did deploy rockets (as it is doing now) but showed then (as now) no inclination to attack Israel.

Negotiating chips

The cross-border incursion in which two Israeli soldiers were captured was an exception. The action was intended to provide negotiating chips for the release of Hizbullah prisoners held in Israel (and perhaps to demonstrate solidarity with Hamas, which had just captured another Israeli soldier in a similar incursion.) Hassan Nasrallah later admitted that this was a grave mistake and would not have been done if he had imagined that it would cause a war. (Olmert, on his part, has not admitted to any mistake.)

As I said right at the beginning, this incident was a pretext for the war, not the reason for it. If so, what was the real reason? The desire of the civilian Olmert for military glory? The dream of the Chief of Staff, Dan Halutz, to prove that the Air Force could win a war alone, by a massive bombardment of the civilian population? The illusion that Hizbullah could be eliminated by one big strike?

When Judge Winograd tried to explain why a part of the report must be kept secret, the words he used attracted no attention: “The security of the state and its foreign relations”. Foreign relations? What foreign relations? Relations with whom? There is only one reasonable answer: relations with the United States.

That could be the crux of the matter: Olmert fulfilled an American wish. President Bush wanted to install his protégé,

This incident was a pretext for the war, not the reason for it. If so, what was the real reason? The desire of the civilian Olmert for military glory? The dream of the Chief of Staff, Dan Halutz, to prove that the Air Force could win a war alone, by a massive bombardment of the civilian population? The illusion that Hizbullah could be eliminated by one big strike?

AVOIDING BLAME

Soldiers who run after stone-throwing children in the alleys of the Qasbah, who hammer at night on the doors of civilians, who use bulldozers to destroy people's homes, and all this for year after year – such soldiers are not competent to fight a modern war

Fouad Siniora, as ruler in Beirut. For that end, Hizbullah, the main Lebanese opposition force, had to be eliminated. Also, Bush wanted to effect a regime change in Syria, one of the main obstacles to American ambitions in the region.

I believe that this is the missing link in Winograd's chain. Olmert could have argued: "I was only obeying orders". But that, of course, is unspeakable.

The other black hole in the report concerns the Israeli army. The report criticizes it murderously. Never before has the army leadership been described in such a way – as a bunch of people without character, talent or competence; generals who are ready to send soldiers to their death in an operation they believe to be condemned to failure, just because they do not dare to stand up to their superiors; generals who do not demand a clear definition of the objectives before going into battle; Generals who do not recognize the fateful faults of their army, and who are themselves responsible – they and their predecessors – for these very faults.

All this is being said now. What has not been said is: how did we get such a leadership? What has caused these faults? The answers can be summed up in two words: the occupation.

I have written dozens of articles about the disastrous effects of the occupation on the army. One cannot employ a whole army for decades as a colonial police force for crushing the resistance of an occupied population, without changing its character. Soldiers who run after stone-throwing children in the alleys of the Qasbah, who hammer at night on the doors of civilians, who use bulldozers to destroy people's homes, and all this for year after year – such soldiers are not

competent to fight a modern war.

Worse: such a colonial army does not attract the best and the brightest. These now go into high-tech and science. The brutal work of the army against civilians and guerrilla fighters disgusts people of conscience and sensitivity, the very ones who are the backbone of a good officers' corps. It blunts the senses of those who remain, or sends them home from the occupied territories traumatized.

In the 40 years of occupation, the Israeli army has lost the kind of officers that led it in the 1948 and 1967 wars, people like Yitzhak Sadeh, Yigal Allon, Yitzhak Rabin, Ezer Weitzman, Matti Peled, Haim Bar-Lev and David Elazar, to mention just a few. Their place has been taken by a mediocre, faceless group, gray but arrogant technicians, people of shallow thinking, colonialist and extreme right-wing attitudes, with an ever increasing percentage of knitted kippa-wearers.

That is the group the report speaks of – but without saying so. It is an occupation army in which a negative natural selection process operates – everyone who does not feel comfortable in this milieu just leaves. As in any army, the atmosphere prevailing at the top – good or bad – trickles down the ranks to the meanest soldier.

This is not an army of Stalingrad fighters defending their country – this is an army of Winograd fighters. An army which no genius can to "repair", as demanded by the commission. Because all the faults stem from the original sin: the occupation. **CT**

Uri Avnery is an Irgun veteran turned Israeli peace activist

GIVING ISRAEL A PASS

An e-mail alert sends **Barry Lando** to the Internet

As I was reading through several news items on the Internet about the appalling situation in Gaza, I received an e-mail alert from my wife. It had been forwarded to her by a Parisian friend who is an expert in Orientalist art; she had received it from a well-known French television actress.

According to the alert, courses in England about the Shoah had just been withdrawn from British schools because they “shocked the Muslim population which denies the existence of the Holocaust.”

The e-mail continued, “This is a frightening portent of the fear that is gripping the world and how easily each country is giving into it.

“Now, more than ever, with Iran, among others, claiming the Holocaust to be ‘a myth,’ it is imperative to make sure the world never forgets. This e-mail is intended to reach 40 million people worldwide!

“Join us and be a link in the memorial chain and help us distribute it around the world.”

My attention was now torn from the plight of the Palestinians in Gaza and shifted to the charge that British schools had just stopped teaching the Holocaust.

My curiosity piqued – I hadn’t heard that news about Britain – I went to Snopes.com, a Web site that examines such charges. The story, it turned out, first appeared in April 2007, not this year; according to the site, the report was also wildly inaccurate.

The truth was that “One history department in a northern UK city stopped teaching about the Holocaust because it wished to avoid confronting anti-Semitic sentiment and Holocaust denial among some Muslim pupils.”

That fact was originally disseminated in a government-sponsored study – a study which was then grossly misreported by a British newspaper to indicate that, rather than in just one history department in the northern UK, Holocaust studies had been terminated across the country.

That error was further magnified by a British group which launched a worldwide alarm on the Internet with the

The truth was that “One history department in a northern UK city stopped teaching about the Holocaust because it wished to avoid confronting anti-Semitic sentiment and Holocaust denial among some Muslim pupils”

Why is it that so many of my fellow Jews have a hair-trigger response to the slightest suggestion that anti-Semites may once again be on the prowl in England or France or Iran – that another Hitler lurks just over the horizon?

headline: “Recently, this week, UK removed The Holocaust from its school curriculum. ...”

The group made an urgent plea for a global “chain of memory” – the same plea that my wife had just forwarded to me. In other words, nine months later it was still careening around the Internet.

In the process the message had become further distorted. In September 2007, someone surmised that the “UK” as in “UK removed The Holocaust from its school curriculum” referred not to a country but to the University of Kentucky. A slight “fix” was made in the message, and a new storm of outrage zapped across the Internet, now targeting a hapless American university.

On Nov. 8, 2007, UK Assistant Provost Richard B. Geissman issued a press release categorically denying that the university had cut Holocaust studies from its curriculum. “The academic administration of the University of Kentucky,” he declared, “would never permit such a grotesque lapse in its commitment to the principle of academic freedom.”

I found that Snopes.com had also investigated another similar flurry: “Human rights groups are raising alarms over a new law passed by the Iranian parliament that would require the country’s Jews and Christians to wear colored badges to identify them and other religious minorities as non-Muslims,” began that e-mail.

The e-mail quoted Rabbi Marvin

Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, as saying, “This is reminiscent of the Holocaust. Iran is moving closer and closer to the ideology of the Nazis.

“Iran’s roughly 25,000 Jews would have to sew a yellow strip of cloth on the front of their clothes, while Christians would wear red badges and Zoroastrians would be forced to wear blue cloth.

“The world should not ignore this,” said Rabbi Hier. “The world ignored Hitler for many years – he was dismissed as a demagogue, they said he’d never come to power – and we were all wrong.”

That story also turned out to be false.

Which is not to say anti-Semitism is no longer a problem in the world. Of course it is. But surely it is not the major threat to humanity that this planet confronts.

Hair-trigger response

The question I raise is this:

Why is it that so many of my fellow Jews have a hair-trigger response to the slightest suggestion that anti-Semites may once again be on the prowl in England or France or Iran – that another Hitler lurks just over the horizon?

Why are they so quick to demand that academics who suggest that Jews wield considerable political influence be banned from speaking, or, better yet, fired? Why so ready to dismiss criticism of Israel from Desmond Tutu or Jimmy

READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT

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

Carter as anti-Semitic garbage? Why so swift to call meetings, launch petitions, take to the streets, bombard their congressmen, demand embargoes, sanctions, pre-emptive strikes, targeted bombings, invasions – whatever it takes to destroy any perceived menace to Jews or the state of Israel, even if it later turns out the threat was a fabrication of someone’s inflamed imagination?

“Well, why not?” comes the reply. “Better to act than to remain silent. Are you saying we have no enemies? That there was no Holocaust? We know how the world stood by as our people were slaughtered by Hitler. If history has taught us anything, it’s that we Jews have to defend ourselves. Never again!”

But never again what? Never again massacres of Jews as the world looks on? Or never again should we Jews, who suffered so horrifically in the Holocaust, never again should we stand silent as innocents are slaughtered or driven from their homes by ethnic cleansing, or entire populations are punished for the actions of a few.

To get to the point, what causes so many Jews to turn ethically deaf and morally blind when the state of Israel itself is concerned?

As Sara Roy, a senior research scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University, asked in an essay, “Why is it virtually mandatory among Jewish intellectuals to oppose racism, repression and injustice almost anywhere in the world and unacceptable – indeed, for some, an act of heresy – to oppose it when Israel is the oppressor, choosing concealment over exposure?”

I continue: Why the refusal to recognize that in 1947 and 1948 Jewish fighters

embarked upon a policy of ethnic cleansing that succeeded in driving tens of thousands of Palestinians from their fields and villages?

This is not a charge made by hate-filled Iranian or Syrian propagandists but one that has been meticulously researched and documented by Israeli historians themselves.

Why the reluctance to speak out when Israeli forces wreaked appalling death and destruction among civilians after they invaded Lebanon in 1982 and again last summer?

Hundreds of Jewish soldiers in Israel refused to take part in the campaigns. Tens of thousands of Israelis took to the streets in protest. Why were major Jewish organizations in the rest of the world so silent?

Why no horrified response to Israeli leaders who measure success these days in body counts and order so-called targeted assassinations with rockets in densely populated civilian areas, knowing that many innocents may be blown apart for every terrorist who is hit? Are the 27 decorated Israeli pilots who refused to take part in such attacks to be considered anti-Semitic by their American cousins?

Why no outcry when Israel launches a brutal blockade – a collective punishment of 1.5 million Palestinian men, women and children – threatening their supplies of fuel, food and medicines?

Talking to Hamas

Israel’s own domestic Jewish critics, far more vociferous than most Jews abroad, point out that there is another way to end the rocket attacks from Gaza against Israeli settlers: Start talking with Hamas.

Why the refusal to recognize that in 1947 and 1948 Jewish fighters embarked upon a policy of ethnic cleansing that succeeded in driving tens of thousands of Palestinians from their fields and villages?

It's as if, because of the horrendous suffering of Jews in the Holocaust, Israel has won the right to ignore international law, to visit mayhem on civilians and terrorist fighters alike in the name of national survival

You wouldn't know it from most of the American media, but Hamas has, in fact, repeatedly offered a cease-fire if Israel will also cease targeted assassinations and attacks on Gaza.

Israel, however, refuses to talk to Hamas. To do so would be to recognize the movement, just as the United States refuses to open unconditional talks with Iran. Instead, the Israeli government continues its bloody dead-end policies.

I was in the course of such reflections when I received the e-mail alert from my wife about the purported end of Holocaust studies in the UK.

Of course, one way of not forgetting the Holocaust would be for the same people who call for a global "chain of memory" to also condemn both Hamas' rocket attacks and Israel's brutal policies, and demand that Israel explore the Hamas offer of a cease-fire. What better option does Israel have?

It's as if, because of the horrendous suffering of Jews in the Holocaust, Israel has won the right to ignore international law, to visit mayhem on civilians and terrorist fighters alike in the name of national survival. It's been given a free pass. Those attacking the country's policies are either hopelessly naive, anti-Semites or self-hating Jews.

That's the position of AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee), the very conservative Washington lobby which claims to represent most American Jews interested in Israel. AIPAC has donned this mantle by default. Surveys indicate that the majority of American Jews hold views more liberal than most Americans. The problem is they no longer feel strongly tied to or concerned about Israel. Many other

Jews, though morally uncomfortable with Israel's policies, have kept silent, not wanting to publicly criticize the Zionist state.

The upshot is that the role of lobbying U.S. policy in the Middle East has been left to organizations whose members do strongly care about Israel, like AIPAC.

AIPAC doesn't dictate single-handedly Washington's Middle Eastern policy, but it is one of the most powerful lobbies in the capital. That's a fact Jews relish discussing among themselves, but are quick to brand an anti-Semitic fabrication if the charge is made publicly.

A few years back I did a report on AIPAC for "60 Minutes" with Mike Wallace. One after another, all the congressional offices I contacted confirmed the tremendous influence that AIPAC wielded, and the fear that could be inspired by an AIPAC threat to target a particular candidate.

Terrified of talking

We were, however, unable to convince a single sitting House member, senator or staff person to talk on the record. Not that they disagreed with the premise. They were just terrified of taking about AIPAC.

That included the late John Chafee, the powerful U.S. senator from Rhode Island, who at the time was being targeted by AIPAC in his re-election campaign. Normally a stalwart supporter of Israel, Chafee had once contravened AIPAC policy by voting to supply an AWACS plane to Saudi Arabia.

When the report was finally aired, it was the target of more irate mail and phone calls from Jewish organizations

across the country than just about any other report I ever did for “60 Minutes.”

There are signs, however, that the situation could be changing, that more Jewish individuals and groups in the United States – as well as in Europe – are willing to criticize Israel’s policies. Groups like Peace Now, activists like Rabbi Michael Lerner in California, journalists and bloggers like Richard Silverstein, who recently forwarded me the Sara Roy essay I’ve quoted above, which says in part:

“... The Jewish community demands unity and conformity: ‘Stand with Israel’ read the banners on synagogues throughout Boston last summer. Unity around what? There is enormous pressure – indeed coercion – within organized American Jewry to present an image of ‘wall to wall unity’ as a local Jewish leader put it. But this unity is an illusion – at its edges a smoldering flame rapidly engulfing its core – for mainstream Jewry does not speak for me or for many other Jews. And where such unity exists, it is hollow built around fear not humanity, on the need to understand reality as it has long been constructed for us – with the Jew as the righteous victim, the innocent incapable of harm.”

A solemn visit to the Holocaust Me-

morial in Jerusalem was de rigueur for President George W. Bush during his recent trip to Israel, just as it is for any other foreign dignitary. Israel uses these ceremonies to convey a message: You see, Mr. President and the world looking in, this is what our people suffered from our enemies. This is why we have the right – indeed the duty – to act in any way we judge necessary to ensure our nation’s survival.

Imagine, instead a different message: This is to put you on notice, Mr. President and the rest of the world. We ask that you join with us in our determination to ensure that such atrocities as we Jews suffered shall never again be visited on any people by any state – including our own.

CT

*Barry M. Lando spent 25 years as an award-winning investigative producer with “60 Minutes.” Author of numerous articles about Iraq, he produced a documentary about Saddam Hussein that has been shown around the world. He lives in Paris. His latest book is **Web of Deceit: The History of Western Complicity in Iraq, From Churchill to Kennedy to George W. Bush.***

This essay originally appeared at www.truthdig.com

This unity is an illusion – at its edges a smoldering flame rapidly engulfing its core – for mainstream Jewry does not speak for me or for many other Jews

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PACIFYING MOSUL

Goebbels's ghost walks tall as Iraq is crushed by the new crusaders' relentless and mighty war machine, says **Felicity Arbuthnot**

In words and deeds, happenings in Iraq are chillingly redolent of Nazi Germany. Neighbourhoods walled in and "cleansed" of Sunnis, others of Shias, Christians and Iraq's richness of minorities ... people who have lived together and intermarried since time immemorial

In the Orwellian world of the United States military, when a killing spree in Mesopotamia is embarked upon, it is called an "Iraq Pacification Operation". There have been hundreds of these (and I'm sure there'll be more to follow).

Each 'pacification' has a name which brings a glimpse into a very strange mindset: "Operation Devil Thrust", "Operation Terminator", "Operation Scorpion Sting", "Operation Sidewinder", "Operation Roaring Tiger", "Operation All American Tiger", "Operation Panther Squeeze", "Operation Warhorse Whirlwind", "Operation Resolute Sword", "Operation Wolverine Feast", "Operation Arrowhead Ripper", "Operations 'Geronimo Strike', 'Rat Trap' and 'Grizzly Forced Entry'". And from a porn show near you: Operations "Squeeze Play", "Triple Play", "Therapist" and "Tombstone Thrust".

Seemingly there are even "insurgent" cows, if "Operation Cowpens" lived up to its name. Al Cow-aeda, maybe?

Perhaps the oddest is: "Operation Suicide Kings". Suicide bombers of course, were unheard of in Iraq until the invasion. The title is no doubt a coinci-

dence in macho "bring 'em on", bragging. None, however, are titles which conjure up the joyously liberated, reveling gratefully, savouring their freedom and democracy.

Having "pacified" Iraqis into the grave, from Abu Ghraib to Falluja, from Ramadi to Tel Afar, with numerous other murderous stop-offs across the land of Abraham, the crusading Christian soldiers are moving onwards to "cleanse" Mosul. That it was the puppet "Prime Minister", Nuri Al Maliki who used the expression is as inconsequential as he is – his orders come from the pacifiers and their masters in Washington.

In words and deeds, happenings in Iraq are chillingly redolent of Nazi Germany. Neighbourhoods walled in and "cleansed" of Sunnis, others of Shias, Christians and Iraq's richness of minorities ... people who have lived together and intermarried since time immemorial.

The distinctions were imposed with the incoming tanks and troops – divide and rule writ large. In Falluja, Goebbels's ghost walks tall. The residents even have their own identifying arm patch to prove

it. And it has certainly been cleansed, in uncountable thousands – exactly how many unknown, since in the words of General Tommy Franks it is not “productive” to count Iraqi deaths.

So how is Mosul to be purified? The most ethnically diverse city in Iraq, consisting of Arabs, Syrians, Kurds, Armenians, Turcomans, Jews, Christians, Yazedi's, Muslims and a trading centre since the sixth century BC. Who will draw the short straw? Their slaughter justified in a search, of course, for “Al Qaeda” with the innocents “a mistake”, “regrettable” or “collateral damage”.

America's military planners have become the modern day equivalent of the child who repeatedly cried “wolf;” they continually justify massacre by crying “Al Qaeda”. In 1935, Major General Smedley Butler, referred to the “racketeering” of the “military gang”. He described his military career as a “muscle man for big business, Wall Street and the bankers”. In Mosul's case, surrounded by and floating on oil, the “muscle” is for Chevron, Shell, Exxon Mobile...

The pastoral Yazedis have already been subject to a cleansing last August, blamed of course on suicide bombers from “Al Qaeda”, who presumably, thoughtfully, left identification amongst their own and others' body parts – similar to the two “Down's syndrome” women, who detonated bombs in two pet markets two weeks ago.

The first great epic fable, Gilgamesh was fashioned and honed in Iraq. It is being bloodily rivalled since 2003.

Perhaps, even more sinister, the world will not hear about the “pacification” of Mosul. Just as internet cables were sev-

ered between the Middle East and Europe, seemingly in four places, during the time of the great escape from besieged Gaza – a modern day flight into Egypt – 25 communication towers have been destroyed in Mosul and the environs, in an “ongoing” sabotage of some sophistication.

Shot in the back

The British sought to pacify Mosul in 1920. The people were less than grateful, killing six officers in 10 days, and later Colonel Gerald Leachman, an officer celebrated for his “travels and feats in eastern deserts”. Leachman, at a loss to understand why Iraqis did not want to be occupied, stated that the only way to deal with them was “wholesale slaughter”. He was, unsurprisingly, shot in the back by his Arab host, which led the British to talk of “Arab treachery”.

Some sanity came from newspaper letter columns, encapsulated by one to the *London Times*: “How much longer are valuable lives going to be sacrificed, in the vain endeavour, to impose upon the Arab population, an elaborate and expensive administration, which they never asked for and do not want?” Within months, however, 500 British were dead and 1,500 injured.

This was the region where Winston Churchill did not “understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour if using poison gas against uncivilised tribes”, he said of people who brought the world astronomy, in a region where saints walked and Nineveh's ancient wonders still stand.

Churchill railed against the “prejudices of those who do not think clearly”,

America's military planners have become the modern day equivalent of the child who repeatedly cried “wolf;” they continually justify massacre by crying “Al Qaeda”

KILLING FOR OIL

"If the people whose right was to be there did not behave", remarked a Wing Commander Gale: "... we will spank their bottoms"

regarding the use of poisons as a "scientific expedient". It was an excellent strategy, in spite of it causing blindness or permanent eye damage: "... kill children and sickly persons especially as the people against whom we intend to use it have no medical knowledge with which to supply antidotes".

This is all an uncanny mirror of current plans and foolishness. The British also drew up a list of weapons: "Phosphorous bombs, war rockets, metal crow's-feet for maiming livestock (an early "Operation Cowpens"?), man-killing shrapnel, liquid fire and delayed-action bombs ... "If the people whose right was to be there did not behave", remarked a Wing Commander Gale: "... we will spank their bottoms."

This was done with bombs and guns. How little has changed – and there are still those alive in the region who remember this previous barbarity. Western invaders are unwelcome and unforgiven. Like America's Nuri Al Maliki: "The king is widely regarded as a British puppet", commented General Haldane.*

Phosphorous and "unusual" and illegal weapons are still being used, with depleted uranium in bombs and bullets leaving its radioactive legacy for four and a half billion years. Troops are also breathing its gene-altering and cancer-causing properties and take it home in dust, on clothes and in kitbags, to affect their families, children – and babies not yet conceived.

**From Sumer to Saddam, Geoff Simons, Macmillan 1994, still unbeatable, detailed reference, ancient and modern.
<http://www.amazon.com/Iraq-Sumer-Saddam-Geoff-Simons/dp/1403917701>*

Before the onslaught on Mosul begins, will soldiers walk as the apricot sun sinks beyond the Tigris and the great black curtain of keening birds, their cries rising heavenwards, yet hanging in the air, dance and swirl past to their secret places of the night? Will they watch the fishermen, in their tiny corraaks, emerge silently from between the reeds, their reflections plumbing the translucent, golden- and tangerine-streaked Tigris?

Cradle of civilisation

Will they reflect that it is the cradle of civilisation they are destroying? Will they stop for a moment, to reflect on what actor David Garrick (1717-1779) referred to as: "That blessed word: Mesopotamia, which ... has the power to make men both laugh and cry"? Will they walk in wonder by Nineveh's winged bulls, these soldiers of God, in the land of so much of His Bible? If they did, they surely would walk away, heads hung low and turn to another career path.

Will they ever encounter the true spirit of Iraq, in those they denigrate as "sand niggers", "hajjis", "ragheads", or as one British soldier wrote: "I hate fucking Arabs."

Their spirit enveloped me in Mosul, after I became dangerously ill. I recovered and noticed there was a distance, almost an embarrassment, from those I knew. Suddenly a dear friend apologised to me: "Madam Felicity, you who love our country, you who care for what is happening to us; we are so sorry. Iraq has made you ill." They were ashamed not to have prevented a recalcitrant Iraq "making me ill". Garrick was right on Mesopotamia's power's over men (and

women.)

Mosul is threatened also with the collapse of the great dam to its north. The US Army Corps of Engineers has said it is in danger of a “catastrophic” breach, which is likely to wipe out much of the city and sweep an estimated half million people before it in a flood which could reach Baghdad. It does not take an engineer to figure that the US chosen method of pacification, bombing with up to 2,000 pound munitions, would almost certainly create vibrations which would breach the dam.

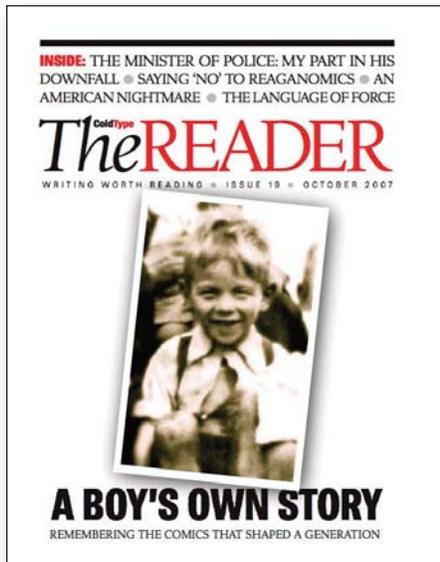
George Bush’s “crusade” would thus

end in a flood of biblical proportions, also sweeping away countless of his own troops on the ground – and with it, the last shred of any reputation he has left – and the loyalty of his armed forces. In this region of Saints, of the Prophet Jonah, perhaps divine intervention will yet prevail. It is sorely needed. **CT**

*Felicity Arbuthnot’s coverage of Iraq was nominated for several awards. She was senior researcher for John Pilger’s award-winning documentary, **Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq***

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THE WAR AGAINST TOLERANCE

Chris Hedges on the antics of Walid, Kamal and Anani, the three stooges of the Christian Right

Bush described the "war on terror" as a war against totalitarian Islamofascism while the Israeli air force was dropping tens of thousands of pounds of iron fragmentation bombs up and down Lebanon, an air campaign that killed 1,300 Lebanese civilians

Walid Shoebat, Kamal Saleem and Zachariah Anani are the three stooges of the Christian right. These self-described former Muslim terrorists are regularly trotted out at Christian colleges – last month they were at the Air Force Academy – to spew racist filth about Islam on behalf of groups such as Focus on the Family. It is a clever tactic. Curly, Larry and Mo, who all say they are born-again Christians, engage in hate speech and assure us it comes from personal experience. They tell their audiences that the only way to deal with one-fifth of the world's population is by converting or eradicating all Muslims.

Their cant is broadcast regularly on Fox News, including the Bill O'Reilly and Neil Cavuto shows, as well as on numerous Christian radio and television programs. Shoebat, who has written a book called *Why We Want to Kill You*, promises in his lectures to explain the numerous similarities between radical Muslims and the Nazis, how "Muslim terrorists" invaded America 30 years ago

and how "perseverance, recruitment and hate" have fueled attacks by Muslims.

These men are frauds, but this is not the point. They are part of a dark and frightening war by the Christian right against tolerance that, in the moment of another catastrophic terrorist attack on American soil, would make it acceptable to target and persecute all Muslims, including the some six million Muslims who live in the United States.

These men stoke these irrational fears. They defend the perpetual war unleashed by the Bush administration and championed by Sen. John McCain. McCain frequently reminds listeners that "the greatest danger facing the world is Islamic terrorism," as does Mike Huckabee, who says that "Islamofascism" is "the greatest threat this country [has] ever faced."

George W. Bush has, in the same vein, assured Americans that terrorists hate us for our freedoms, not, of course, for anything we have done. Bush described the "war on terror" as a war against totalitarian Islamofascism while the Israeli air force was dropping tens of thousands of

pounds of iron fragmentation bombs up and down Lebanon, an air campaign that killed 1,300 Lebanese civilians.

The three men tell lurid tales of being recruited as children into Palestinian terrorist organizations, murdering hundreds of civilians and blowing up a bank in Israel.

Saleem says that as a child he infiltrated Israel to plant bombs via a network of tunnels underneath the Golan Heights, although no incident of this type was ever reported in Israel. He claims he is descended from the “grand wazir” of Islam, a title and a position that do not exist in the Arab world. They assure audiences that the Palestinians are interested not in a peaceful two-state solution but rather the destruction of Israel, the murder of all Jews and the death of America. Shoebat claims he first came to the United States as part of an extremist “sleeper cell.”

“These three jokers are as much former Islamic terrorists as ‘Star Trek’s’ Capt. James T. Kirk was a real Starship captain,” said Mikey Weinstein, the head of the watchdog group The Military Religious Freedom Foundation. The group has challenged Christian proselytizing in the military and denounced the visit by the men to the Air Force Academy.

The speakers include in their talks the superior virtues of Christianity. Saleem, for example, says his world “turned upside down when he was seriously injured in an automobile accident.”

“A Christian man tended to Kamal at the accident scene, making sure he got the medical treatment he needed,” his web site says. “Kamal’s orthopedic surgeon and physical therapist were also Christian men whom over a period of

several months ministered the unconditional love of Jesus Christ to him as he recovered. The love and sacrificial giving of these men caused Kamal to cry out to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob acknowledging his need for the Savior. Kamal has since become a man on a new mission, as an ambassador for the one true and living God, the great I Am, Jehovah God of the Bible.”

Christian chauvinism

This creeping Christian chauvinism has infected our political and social discourse. It was behind the rumor that Barack Obama was a Muslim. Obama reassured followers that he was a Christian.

It apparently did not occur to him, or his questioners, that the proper answer is that there is nothing wrong with being a Muslim, that persons of great moral probity and courage arise in all cultures and all religions, including Islam. Christians have no exclusive lock on virtue. But this kind of understanding often provokes indignant rage.

The public denigration of Islam, and by implication all religious belief systems outside Christianity, is part of the triumphalism that has distorted the country since the 9/11 attacks. It makes dialogue with those outside our “Christian” culture impossible. It implicitly condemns all who do not think as we think and believe as we believe as, at best, inferior and usually morally depraved. It blinds us to our own failings. It makes self-reflection and self-criticism a form of treason. It reduces the world to a cartoonish vision of us and them, good and evil. It turns us into children with bombs.

These three con artists are not the

The three men tell lurid tales of being recruited as children into Palestinian terrorist organizations, murdering hundreds of civilians and blowing up a bank in Israel

CHRISTIAN PROPAGANDA

problem. There is enough scum out there to take their place. Rather, they offer a window into a worldview that is destroying the United States. It has corrupted the Republican Party. It has colored the news media. It has entered into the everyday clichés we use to explain ourselves to ourselves. It is ignorant and racist, but it is also deadly. It grossly perverts the Christian religion. It asks us to kill to purify the Earth. It leaves us threatened not only by the terrorists

who may come from abroad but the ones who are rising from within our midst. **CT**

Chris Hedges, who graduated from Harvard Divinity School and was for nearly two decades a foreign correspondent for The New York Times, is the author of American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America. This essay was originally published at www.truthdig.com

WE MAKE GOOD THINGS BETTER



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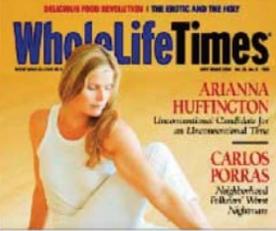
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SPECIAL RATES FOR PROGRESSIVE PUBLICATIONS

MASS PRODUCERS OF DISTORTION

Nick Davies says the media, whose task should be to filter out falsehood, is now a conduit for propaganda and secondhand news

Here's a little example of what I call Flat Earth News. In June 2005, Fleet Street told its readers about a gang of feral child bullies who had attempted to murder a five-year-old boy by hanging him from a tree; the boy had managed to free himself. This story was not true. Indeed, it was obviously not true from the moment it started running. There was the commonsense problem that even a fully grown man with 10 years of SAS training who found himself hanging by the neck would have the greatest difficulty in reaching up and lifting his entire body weight with one hand while using the other to remove the noose. How would a five-year-old boy do it?

More than that, there was the evidence in the story itself. From the first day, the police refused to say the boy had been hanged. The parents and neighbours, who told the press how shocked they were, never claimed to know what had happened. The one and only line on which the whole story was built was a quote from the boy's adult cousin, who said he had told her: "Some

boys and girls have tied a rope around my neck and tried to tie me to a tree." That's "tie me to a tree", not "hang me from a tree".

It was a nasty case of bullying but not an attempted murder. A 12-year-old girl had put a rope around the boy's neck and led him round like a dog, pulling on it hard enough to leave marks on his neck. That was clearly dangerous. But the boy never claimed she had hanged him from a tree. Indeed, he never even claimed that she had tied him to a tree, only that she had tried to. To double check, we spoke to Professor Christopher Milroy, the Home Office pathologist who handled the case. He said: "He had not been hanged. That was not correct and I couldn't understand why the press were insisting that he was."

Nevertheless, the tabloids ran all over it; and TV and the rest of Fleet Street joined in. The London *Evening Standard* called it a lynching; the *Mail*, *Guardian* and *Times* ran headlines which stated boldly that the boy had been hanged; the *Independent* ran a moody feature about fear descending on the boy's es-

Even a fully grown man with 10 years of SAS training who found himself hanging by the neck would have the greatest difficulty in reaching up and lifting his entire body weight with one hand while using the other to remove the noose. How would a five-year-old boy do it?

GETTING THE STORY?

Where once journalists were active gatherers of news, now they have generally become mere passive processors of unchecked, second-hand material, much of it contrived by PR to serve some political or commercial interest. Not journalists, but churnalists

*Nick Davies is the author of the recently-published **Flat Earth News: An Award-winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media***

tate. Sundry columnists joined in with solemn comment about the youth of today and the impact of violence on television.

The ingredients in this little story run routinely through a stream of other small stories, through stories as big as those about the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and then into a flood of media commentary that feeds into government policy and popular understanding – falsehood as profound as the idea that the Earth is flat, widely accepted as true to the point where it can feel like heresy to challenge it.

There never was a time when news media were perfect. Journalists have always worked with too little time and too little certainty; with interference from owners and governments; with laws that intimidate and inhibit the search for truth. But the evidence I found in researching my new book, *Flat Earth News*, suggests our tendency to recycle ignorance is far worse than it was.

2,000 stories surveyed

I commissioned research from specialists at Cardiff University, who surveyed more than 2,000 UK news stories from the four quality dailies (*Times*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Independent*) and the *Daily Mail*. They found two striking things. First, when they tried to trace the origins of their “facts”, they discovered that only 12% of the stories were wholly composed of material researched by reporters. With 8% of the stories, they just couldn’t be sure. The remaining 80%, they found, were wholly, mainly or partially constructed from second-hand material, provided by news agencies and by the public relations industry. Second, when

they looked for evidence that these “facts” had been thoroughly checked, they found this was happening in only 12% of the stories.

The implication of those two findings is truly alarming. Where once journalists were active gatherers of news, now they have generally become mere passive processors of unchecked, second-hand material, much of it contrived by PR to serve some political or commercial interest. Not journalists, but churnalists. An industry whose primary task is to filter out falsehood has become so vulnerable to manipulation that it is now involved in the mass production of falsehood, distortion and propaganda.

And the Cardiff researchers found one other key statistic that helps to explain why this has happened. For each of the 20 years from 1985, they dug out figures for the editorial staffing levels of all the Fleet Street publications and compared them with the amount of space they were filling. They discovered that the average Fleet Street journalist now is filling three times as much space as he or she was in 1985. In other words, as a crude average, they have only one-third of the time that they used to have to do their jobs. Generally, they don’t find their own stories, or check their content, because they simply don’t have the time.

Add that to all of the traditional limits on journalists’ trying to find the truth, and you can see why the mass media generally are no longer a reliable source of information. **CT**

This essay was first published in the London Guardian newspaper’s Comment Is Free blog at <http://guardian.co.uk/commentisfree>

NATO: THE TREATY ON WHEELS

William Blum thinks it's time to clip the organisation's wings

Have you by chance noticed that NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, has become virtually a country? With more international rights and military power than almost any other country in the world? Yes, the same NATO that we were told was created in 1949 to defend against a Soviet attack in Western Europe, and thus should have gone out of existence in 1991 when the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact expired and explicitly invited NATO to do the same. Other reasons have been suggested for NATO's creation: to help suppress the left in Italy and France if either country's Communist Party came to power through an election, and/or to advance American hegemony by preventing the major European nations from pursuing independent foreign policies. This latter notion has been around a long time. In 2004, the US ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns, stated: "Europeans need to resist creating a united Europe in competition or as a counterweight to the United States."^[1]

The alliance has been kept amongst

the living to serve as a very useful handmaiden of US foreign policy as well as providing American arms and airplane manufacturers with many billions of dollars of guaranteed sales due to the requirement that all NATO members meet a certain minimum warfare capability.

Here's some of what NATO has been up to in recent years as it strives to find a new raison d'être in the post-Cold War era.

It is presently waging war in Afghanistan on behalf of the United States and its illegal 2001 bombing and invasion of that pathetic land. NATO's forces free up US troops and assume much of the responsibility and blame, instead of Washington, for the many bombings which have caused serious civilian casualties and ruination. NATO also conducts raids into Pakistan, the legality of which is as non-existent as what they do in Afghanistan.

The alliance, which began with 15 members, now has 26, in addition to 23 "partner countries" (under the reassuring name of ("Partnership for Peace"). Combined, that's more than one-fourth

NATO's forces free up US troops and assume much of the responsibility and blame, instead of Washington, for the many bombings which have caused serious civilian casualties and ruination. NATO also conducts raids into Pakistan, the legality of which is as non-existent as what they do in Afghanistan

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, NATO gave the United States carte blanche to travel throughout Europe transporting men to be tortured

of the entire United Nations membership, and there are numerous other countries bribed and pressured to work with NATO, such as Jordan which recently sent troops to Afghanistan. Jordan and Qatar have offered to host a NATO-supported regional Security Cooperation Centre. NATO has a training mission in Iraq, and Iraqi military personnel receive training in NATO members' countries. In recent years, almost all members of the alliance and the Partnership for Peace have sent troops to Iraq or Afghanistan or the former Yugoslavia, in each case serving as proxy US-occupation forces. Israel has had talks with the alliance about the deployment of a NATO force in their country. India is scheduled to participate in upcoming NATO war games. The list goes on, as the alliance's outreach keeps reaching out further, holding international conferences to bring together new and potential allies, under names such as the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, and the Mediterranean Dialogue (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia), or expanding military ties with existing international organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates).

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, NATO gave the United States carte blanche to travel throughout Europe transporting men to be tortured.^[2] It's like a refined gentleman's club with some unusual member privileges. NATO also goes around monitoring elections, the latest being in Upper Abkhazia (claimed by Georgia) in January.

The alliance has military bases in Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Nether-

lands, and elsewhere in Europe, and regularly conducts "naval operations in the Mediterranean to actively demonstrate NATO's resolve and solidarity", as NATO puts it. This includes AWAC (Airborne Warning and Control) aircraft patrolling the Mediterranean from above and frequently stopping and boarding ships and boats at sea. "Since the start of the operation," reports NATO, "nearly 79,000 merchant vessels have been monitored (as of 12 April 2006) ... The surveillance operation utilizes ship, aircraft and submarine assets to build a picture of maritime activity in the Area of Operations." The exercise includes "actions aimed at preventing or countering terrorism coming from or conducted at sea and all illegality possibly connected with terrorism, such as human trafficking and smuggling of arms and radioactive substances." NATO is truly Lord of the Mediterranean, unelected, unauthorized, and unsupervised.

NATO, which has ready access to nuclear weapons from several of its members (only with Washington's approval), has joined the United States in its operation to surround Russia. "Look," said Russian president Vladimir Putin about NATO as far back as 2001, "this is a military organization. It's moving towards our border. Why?"^[3] As of December 2007, Moscow's concern had not lessened. The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister lashed out at NATO's steady expansion into former Soviet-dominated eastern Europe, saying the policy "was a leftover from the time of the Cold War".^[4] Finland – which shares a border with Russia of more than 1300 km – is now being considered for membership in NATO.

Ever since it undertook a Washington-instigated 78-day bombing of the former Yugoslavia in 1999, NATO has been operating in the Balkans like a colonial Governor-General. Along with the UN, it's been leading a peacekeeping operation in Kosovo and takes part in the policing of Bosnia, including searching people's homes looking for suspected war criminals wanted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. The triumvirate of NATO, the United States, and the European Union have been supporting Kosovo's plan to unilaterally declare independence from Serbia, thus bypassing the UN Security Council where Serbia's ally, Russia, has a veto. We therefore have the Western powers unilaterally declaring the independence of a part of another country's territory; this because the Kosovo ethnic Albanians are regarded as much more reliably "pro-West" than is Serbia, which has refused to look upon the free market and the privatization of the world known as "globalization" as the *summum bonum*, nor shown proper enthusiasm for an American or NATO military installation upon its soil. Kosovo, however, does have a large US military base on its territory. Any attempt by Serbia to militarily prevent Kosovo from seceding would in all likelihood be met by NATO/US military force. You may wonder what a United States military base is doing in Kosovo. People all over the world wonder the same about their local American bases.

You may also wonder: What force exists to slow down the growth of the Mediterranean Monster? Who can stand up to it? The military elite of the triumvirate take such a question seriously.

What they apparently fear the most is nuclear weapons in the hands of the wrong people; i.e., those who don't recognize the triumvirate's right to dictate to the world. On January 22 the *Guardian* of London reported that the former armed forces chiefs from the US, Britain, Germany, France and the Netherlands had released a manifesto which insists that a "first strike" nuclear option remains an "indispensable instrument" since there is "simply no realistic prospect of a nuclear-free world". The paper had earlier been presented to NATO's secretary general and to the Pentagon. It is likely to be discussed at a NATO summit in Bucharest in April, along with the possible extension of the alliance to include five more former Soviet countries: Croatia, Georgia, Macedonia, Albania and Ukraine.

The five generals who authored the report could have advocated a serious international campaign to begin the process of actually creating a nuclear-free world. Instead, they call for an end to the European Union's "obstruction" of and rivalry with NATO and a shift from consensus decision-taking in NATO bodies to majority voting, meaning an end to national vetoes.

So there you have it. The international military elite are demanding yet more power and autonomy for NATO. Questioning voices in the alliance, in the European Union, or anywhere else should forget their concerns about a nuclear-free world, international law, pre-emptive war, wars of aggression, national sovereignty, and all that other United Nations Charter and human-rights nonsense. We're gonna nuke all those Arab terrorists before they have a chance to

You may wonder what a United States military base is doing in Kosovo. People all over the world wonder the same about their local American bases

Their opposition to war perhaps stems mainly from the large number of American soldiers who've lost their lives, or because the United States is not "winning", or because America's reputation in the world is being soiled, or because a majority of other Americans express their opposition to the war, or because of George W.'s multiple character defects, or because of a number of other reasons you couldn't even guess at

say Allah Akbar.

The arrogance continues, with the manifesto specifying “no role in decision-taking on Nato operations for alliance members who are not taking part in the operations,” calling also for the use of force without UN Security Council authorization when “immediate action is needed to protect large numbers of human beings”. Now who can argue against protecting large numbers of human beings?

The paper also declares that “Nato’s credibility is at stake in Afghanistan” and “NATO is at a juncture and runs the risk of failure.” The German general went so far as to declare that his own country, by insisting upon a non-combat role for its forces in Afghanistan, was contributing to “the dissolution of NATO”. Such immoderate language may be a reflection of the dark cloud which has hovered over the alliance since the end of the Cold War – that NATO has no legitimate reason for existence and that failure in Afghanistan would make this thought more present in the world’s mind. If NATO hadn’t begun to intervene outside of Europe it would have highlighted its uselessness and lack of mission. “Out of area or out of business” it was said.^[5]

Democracy is a beautiful thing, except that part about letting just any old jerk vote.

“The people can have anything they want. The trouble is, they do not want anything. At least they vote that way on election day.” – Eugene Debs, American socialist leader, early 20th century

Why was the primary vote for former

presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich so small when anti-Iraq war sentiment in the United States is supposedly so high, and Kucinich was easily the leading anti-war candidate in the Democratic race, indeed the only genuine one after former Senator Mike Gravel withdrew? Even allowing for his being cut out of several debates, Kucinich’s showing was remarkably poor. In Michigan, on January 15, it was only Kucinich and Clinton running. Clinton got 56% of the vote, the “uncommitted” vote (for candidates who had withdrawn but whose names were still on the ballot) was 39%, and Kucinich received but 4%. And Clinton, remember, has been the leading pro-war hawk of all the Democratic candidates.

I think much of the answer lies in the fact that the majority of the American people – like the majority of people all over the world – aren’t very sophisticated politically, and many of them aren’t against the war for very cerebral reasons. Their opposition perhaps stems mainly from the large number of American soldiers who’ve lost their lives, or because the United States is not “winning”, or because America’s reputation in the world is being soiled, or because a majority of other Americans express their opposition to the war, or because of George W.’s multiple character defects, or because of a number of other reasons you couldn’t even guess at. Not much especially perceptive or learned in this collection.

I think there are all kinds of intelligence in this world: musical, scientific, mathematical, artistic, academic, literary, mechanical, and so on. Then there’s political intelligence, which I would de-

fine as the ability to see through the bullshit which the leaders and politicians of every society, past, present and future, feed their citizens from birth on to win elections and assure continuance of the prevailing ideology.

This is why it's so important for all of us to continue "preaching to the choir" and "preaching to the converted". That's what speakers and writers and other activists are often scoffed at for doing – saying the same old thing to the same old people, just spinning their wheels. But long experience as speaker, writer and activist in the area of foreign policy tells me it just ain't so. From the questions and comments I regularly get from my audiences, via email and in person, and from other people's audiences as well, I can plainly see that there are numerous significant information gaps and misconceptions in the choir's thinking, often leaving them unable to see through the newest government lie or propaganda trick; they're unknowing or forgetful of what happened in the past that illuminates the present; knowing the facts but unable to apply them at the appropriate moment; vulnerable to being led astray by the next person who offers a specious argument that opposes what they currently believe, or think they believe. The choir needs to be frequently reminded and enlightened.

As cynical as others may think they are, the choir is frequently not cynical enough about the power elite's motivations. They underestimate the government's capacity for deceit, clinging to the belief that their government somehow means well; they're moreover insufficiently skilled at reading between the media's lines. And this all applies to how

they view political candidates as well. Try asking "anti-war" supporters of Hillary Clinton if they know what a hawk she is, that – as but one example – she's promised that American forces will not leave Iraq while she's president. (And Obama loves the empire as much as Clinton.) When Ronald Reagan was president, on several occasions polls revealed that many, if not most, people who supported him were actually opposed to many of his specific policies.

In sum, even when the hearts of the chorus may be in the right place, their heads still need working on, on a recurring basis. And in any event, very few people are actually born into the choir; they achieve choir membership only after being preached to, multiple times.

When I speak in public, and when I can mention it in an interview, I raise the question of the motivations of the administration. As long as people believe that our so-called leaders are well-intentioned, the leaders can, and do, get away with murder. Literally.

"How to get people to vote against their interests and to really think against their interests is very clever. It's the cleverest ruling class that I have ever come across in history. It's been 200 years at it. It's superb." – Gore Vidal

Another interesting view of the American electoral system comes from Cuban leader Raúl Castro. He recently noted that the United States pits two identical parties against one another, and joked that a choice between a Republican and Democrat is like choosing between himself and his brother Fidel.

"We could say in Cuba we have two

When Ronald Reagan was president, on several occasions polls revealed that many, if not most, people who supported him were actually opposed to many of his specific policies

ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

If this is what leading American public intellectuals believe and impart to their audiences, is it any wonder that the media can short circuit people's critical faculties altogether?

William Blum is the author of: Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2; Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower; West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir; and Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire

parties: one led by Fidel and one led by Raúl, what would be the difference?" he asked. "That's the same thing that happens in the United States ... both are the same. Fidel is a little taller than me, he has a beard and I don't."^[6]

Speaking of political intelligence ... take a little stroll with Alice through the American wonderland ... just for laughs

"This war [in Iraq] is the most important liberal, revolutionary U.S. democracy-building project since the Marshall Plan. ... it is one of the noblest things this country has ever attempted abroad." – Thomas Friedman, much-acclaimed *New York Times* foreign-affairs analyst, November 2003^[7]

"President Bush has placed human rights at the center of his foreign policy agenda in unprecedented ways." – Michael Gerson, columnist for the *Washington Post*, 2007^[8]

The war in Iraq "is one of the noblest endeavors the United States, or any great power, has ever undertaken." – David Brooks, *New York Times* columnist and National Public Radio (NPR) commentator (2007)^[9]

If this is what leading American public intellectuals believe and impart to their audiences, is it any wonder that the media can short circuit people's critical faculties altogether? It should as well be noted that these three journalists are all with "liberal" media.

And when Hillary Clinton says in the January 31 debate with Barack Obama: "We bombed them [Iraq] for days in 1998 because Saddam Hussein threw out inspectors," and the fact is that the UN withdrew its weapons inspectors because the Clinton administration had made it clear that it was about to start

bombing Iraq ...

Obama didn't correct her. Neither did any of the eminent journalists on the panel, though this particular piece of disinformation has been repeated again and again in the media, and has been corrected again and again by those on the left. Comrades, we have our work cut out for us. The chorus needs us. America needs us. Keep preaching.

Teaching political intelligence

If you're a high school or college teacher, you might want to look at www.teachpeace.com/highschoolkit.htm for teaching aids to impart a progressive outlook on US foreign policy and related issues to your students. **CT**

NOTES

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[2] The Guardian (London), June 7, 2007, article by Stephen Grey, author of "Ghost Plane: The inside story of the CIA Torture Program" (2006)

[3] Associated Press, June 16, 2001

[4] Focus News Agency (Bulgaria) /Agence France-Presse, Dec 26, 2007

[5] Much of the NATO material can be found on NATO's website: <http://www.nato.int/home.htm>. Also see an abundance of material at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopnato/messages>

[6] Associated Press, CNN.com, December 25, 2007

[7] *New York Times*, November 30, 2003

[8] *Washington Post*, September 7, 2007

[9] Mary Eberstadt, ed., "Why I turned Right: Leading Baby Boom Conservatives Chronicle Their Political Journeys" (2007), p.73

DEATH OF THE NOBLE IDEA

George Monbiot finds that big money trumps everything in politics

It is not difficult for Britain's major political parties to move on from their funding scandals: there's a new one every week. Every revelation blots out the memory of its predecessors. Peter Hain's misdemeanours dropped out of the news before we had heard the half of it. I want to drag you back there for a moment, because there's an aspect to this story which was either missed altogether or mentioned only briefly in most reports. It says far more about the rotten state of British politics than Hain's failure to declare his donations.

The new scandal concerns the identity of one of his donors. There is no suggestion of illegality here: it is a moral issue. But it illustrates the abandonment of everything the Labour party once claimed to stand for. It shows us that in any contest between money and principle, the money wins. Hain was not the first beneficiary of Isaac Kaye's munificence. Mr Kaye, who has made tens of millions of pounds from his drugs companies, gave the Labour party a few thousand in both 1997 and 1998, and £100,000 in 1999⁽¹⁾. But Hain had two powerful reasons not to put his hand in this man's pocket.

The first is that the company Kaye used to run, Norton Healthcare, is now subject to the biggest prosecution for alleged fraud ever launched in the United Kingdom. Norton is one of five firms accused of dishonestly fixing the price of drugs sold to the National Health Service. The charges relate to the period 1996-2001, when Kaye was chairman of the company. In 2006, Norton paid the Department of Health £13.5m to settle a civil case concerning the same allegations^(2,3).

Norton Healthcare has been involved in other controversies. In 1998 the Department of Health named it as one of the companies offering "inducements" to doctors and chemists: Norton gave them mountain bikes and Marks and Spencer vouchers if they stocked its products. Labour's health minister said, "it is completely unacceptable for pharmaceutical companies to encourage health professionals to use their products through free gifts and other sweeteners."⁽⁴⁾

In the same year, the government announced that it was giving a Norton plant in London's Docklands £990,000 in the form of "regional selective assistance", whose purpose is to boost employment.

There is no suggestion of illegality here: it is a moral issue. But it illustrates the abandonment of everything the Labour party once claimed to stand for. It shows us that in any contest between money and principle, the money wins

More importantly as far as Hain is concerned, Isaac Kaye has been accused of providing campaign finance for National Party candidates during the apartheid years

This grant, the government claimed, would promote “inward investment in the manufacturing sector”. As *Private Eye* points out, the fund – as its name suggests – is normally used to bring jobs to the regions (which means places other than London)⁽⁵⁾. But there was something even odder: the week before the government announced this funding, Norton’s parent company revealed that it would stop manufacturing in the UK, and would shift the jobs in that sector to Ireland⁽⁶⁾.

But the particular discomfort for Mr Hain concerns Kaye’s activities in his previous place of residence. Until 1985 he lived in South Africa, where he was involved in another “gifts for influence” scandal. His drugs company, Alumina, gave cars, televisions, chandeliers, swimming pool equipment, tennis courts, shares and trips abroad to people working in the health sector, including academics who sat on the government’s advisory panels, the head of the Medical Research Council and the minister of health^(7,8,9). When these gifts were exposed, Kaye explained that they were “not an inducement, but in appreciation of their having prescribed drugs marketed by the Alumina group.”⁽¹⁰⁾ The official inquiry into the scandal found that he had “no scruples about applying dishonest or unethical methods.”⁽¹¹⁾

More importantly as far as Hain is concerned, Isaac Kaye has been accused of providing campaign finance for National Party candidates during the apartheid years. Kaye admits to funding the National MP John Erasmus. An article in the *Daily Express*, drawing on an award-winning investigation by the South African journalist Martin Welz, alleges that Kaye seconded one of his company’s executives to campaign for another candidate, Gerrit

Bornman⁽¹²⁾. It also claims he provided cars to help Lapa Munnik, the minister of health and a fierce defender of apartheid, win a by-election. Gerrit Bornman told the *Express* that Kaye had been a “substantial” backer of the National Party. I tried to contact Mr Kaye, but I was told he was unavailable⁽¹³⁾. In the past he has denied funding the National Party and has maintained that his company’s gifts were not intended to win favours⁽¹⁴⁾.

Taking money from Isaac Kaye defaces Peter Hain’s only remaining conviction. When Hain became a Labour cabinet member and was obliged to ditch everything he once believed, he was allowed to keep just one political memento: his admirable record of opposition to the apartheid government. When he moved from South Africa to Britain he became this country’s leading opponent of apartheid. The regime first tried to kill him then tried to fit him up for a bank robbery. He was a brave and remarkable campaigner. But in 2007 he trampled his medals into the mud to get the money he needed.

This is the story of our political system, of most of the world’s political systems. You enter politics with the highest ideals and end up grovelling to multi-millionaires. Campaign finance is not the only reason for the corruption of leftwing political parties. But any system without a cap on individual donations encourages the mass abandonment of political programmes. You need to spend much less time and effort and money to secure thousands of pounds from a rich man than to shake it out of the piggybanks of hundreds of new members. Who can blame you if you adjust your programme to please the millionaires?

The newspapers say that our system is

one of the least corrupt in the world. It's probably true – but so much the worse for the world. The British Labour Party knows that no enormity would persuade the trade unions to disaffiliate. So it can ignore their demands and concentrate on the needs of the multi-millionaires. In 2006 and 2007, 27% of its money came from individual donations of more than £100,000⁽¹⁵⁾. Aside from the largesse of Lord Sainsbury and Lakshmi Mittal, almost all of this is City money, much of it from men who run private equity companies⁽¹⁶⁾. To what extent this influences Labour's failure to tax the super-rich, we will never know – which is, of course, the problem.

Because the Labour Party (thanks to the endless funding scandals) is always on the brink of bankruptcy, Gordon Brown has promised to do something⁽¹⁷⁾. But, in line with recommendations by the Phillips Review of party funding, he proposes to cap donations at £50,000. Witness the democratisation of British politics: even the ordinary millionaire can now participate.

Why should one person be allowed to give the equivalent of 1388 Labour Party membership fees? Brown's formula would preserve Labour's funding link with the trades unions – and the super-rich. I don't mind how it is done; whether, as both the Phillips review and the Power Inquiry recommend^(18,19), the state gives more, or whether the cap is set at £100 and parties must rely on a host of tiny individual gifts. (Who cares if they have less cash with which to bamboozle us?) Just get the big money out of politics. **CT**

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Why should one person be allowed to give the equivalent of 1388 Labour Party membership fees?

George Monbiot's latest book is Heat: How To Stop The Planet From Burning. This column originally appeared in London's Guardian newspaper

EVEN CRIMINALS NEED A VACATION

Joe Bageant ponders crime, punishment and the efficacy of pigs

It's useless to go to our lone village cop at such an hour because, as he is quick to remind us while standing in his doorway in his undershorts, he is off-duty

In the Caribbean, the gears of the machinery of justice somehow never quite seem to engage, probably because they were toothless to begin with, but mostly because nobody knows they are supposed to. Crime and punishment are for the most part, completely unrelated elements here on the Garifuna coast of Belize. Whether something is a crime or not depends more or less upon whom it was committed, whether it is a “white fella,” a tourist, a neighbor or a stranger. And punishment, well, that’s something that happens by the unfettered caprice of sheer fate, an impenetrable mystery in which the police and judicial system somehow play a part, though no one seems quite sure just what part.

Take my buddy Griggs, who was awakened at midnight by the dark form of someone rifling through his bedroom. “Hold it motherfucker!” he yells, switching on the light to find a young man, a local well known in this small seaside village where everyone is well known to everyone else. The young man goes by the nickname of Skankin’, after the stoned groove Caribbean dance style, or Skank

for short. Skank jumps back out the window he came in through and Griggs, a pepper bearded man in his late forties, owner of a small group of rental cabanas and in good enough shape not to be fucked with, is mad as hell. “Get the police!” he yells to his wife, Rhoda.

But it’s useless to go to our lone village cop at such an hour because, as he is quick to remind us while standing in his doorway in his undershorts, he is off-duty. So what you do if you want at least a vocal response from law enforcement is wait until morning and go to the district capital at Dangriga, about 15 miles away. I say vocal response because, for the most part, there is no such thing as active official response to anything here in our completely passive world. For instance, as I write this, a house is burning at the other end of town. No fire department, no heroic neighborhood fire fighting effort. Just a growing crowd of onlookers as word passes through the coconut telegraph and clusters of spectators, some riding two to a bicycle, slowly drift toward the fire, picking up more spectators as they go. The house burns. Then everyone goes home.

Anyway, next day, after a long frustrating effort with the cops in Dangriga, a harangue of the type only Third World residents can grasp, Griggs manages to bully and wheedle the Dangriga police into coming down and taking fingerprints, a new police enterprise here. What the hell, a little ride over to the beach in the police truck would be nice. Maybe get a little fishing in.

Later, after a few implied threats by Griggs' bordering on horsewhipping, the Dangriga police match them up to Skankin, a miracle in itself since it takes perhaps a half hour of attentive effort to accomplish. And finally, after all but death threats on Griggs' part, the police pick up our young man and take him to the police hangout in 'Griga for questioning. The police chief calls Griggs. "OK, we got Skankin. What you wan we do wid him?"

Griggs, a longtime American expatriate, is still under the misimpression that the police should know what to do with a perp, once he is in the hands of law enforcement.

"What the fuck? Ask him what he was doing tiefing (or thieving – everybody succumbs to the local dialect after a while) in my bedroom, goddammit!"

Police chief hangs up, then calls back a few minutes later: "He say he tink it was de cabana rental office."

Griggs: "Office? My ass! Godammit, the lights were out, it was midnight! The fucking room had a bed in it for christ-sake."

Police chief hangs up. A few minutes pass, then he rings back. "He say he not know de office wuz closed."

Griggs, enraged red scalp showing through his thinning buzz cut: "OK then, ask him why the hell he was coming in

through the fucking window instead of the door!"

Police chief: "Hmmmmmmm... Mebbe we shood arres' him."

Griggs: "Maybe? Godammit! Maybe?"

But given that Skankin had not actually stolen anything, he was released, a failed burglary evidently not being a crime here. Shortly afterward though, Skankin was caught red handed and his ass was sent up to Hattieville Prison, one of the worst pissholes in this hemisphere, a relic of the British colonial period so overcrowded that butt fucking is unavoidable, whether standing up or lying down, awake or asleep. Nasty place, Hattieville. Last year in one of its occasional lunges toward efficiency, the government moved to eliminate overcrowding and staff workload. Simple. Execute the prisoners on Hattieville's Death Row. Free up some cots and cut down on the chow bill. Although it sent Amnesty International and a dozen other NGO's from the posher nations into apoplexy, Belizeans generally applauded this direct approach.

While theft here is on the increase, it's still a fairly new thing. Fifty years ago there was no theft in Hopkins because there was nothing to steal. Everybody owned pretty much the same thing, which is to say nothing. A few tools, some bowls, cups, fish nets, dugouts, all those fixtures of a world off the grid. Fishermen fished. Women cooked and swatted at kids. Farmers farmed small plots across the bay, rising at 2:00am to cultivate plantain, rice, arrowroot, cassava, tomatoes, potatoes, corn, citrus, and sailed to Belize City to sell produce for what little cash they needed. Back in the village pigs ran in the street and ate up any trash, most of which was natural such as fish bones and

Griggs, a longtime American expatriate, is still under the misimpression that the police should know what to do with a perp, once he is in the hands of law enforcement

NOTE FROM BELIZE

Today, the well water is undrinkable because the 1,000 residents crap into modern toilets which drain into septic tanks in the sand called soakers, concrete boxes of filth that make the sandy yards of the villagers hotbeds of E. Coli, staph, and one shudders to contemplate what else

coconut husks. And while the pigs were at it, they ate up any human excrement they might run upon, meaning that which was not excreted into the sea, thereby constituting the village's sanitation service. And a fairly efficient one too, according to comparative sanitation studies of now and then. In the old days when you went to shit back in the palmetto scrub you took along a big club because the pigs regarded you as a human fudge dispenser. I've done it. Back in the early seventies. But the water was drinkable and health officials tell me that the pigs were even edible, though you'd never get a white man to test that assertion. What little the pigs did not clean up, the chickens scratched into oblivion or devoured. When I look back I wonder that I never saw any pig shit. I suppose the chickens, bugs and other wild things got that.

Today, the well water is undrinkable because the 1,000 residents crap into modern toilets which drain into septic tanks in the sand called soakers, concrete boxes of filth that make the sandy yards of the villagers hotbeds of E. Coli, staph, and one shudders to contemplate what else. Two days ago I had a couple of tiny sand flea bites on the ankles that I scratched – right now they are infected, big as dimes and oozing. But my original point here was that there was little to steal, things were a little rough around the edges but you could leave your doors unlocked and your bikes in the yard all night, neither of which is advisable today.

Getting back to Griggs and Skankin. Today Griggs was plugging down the Pampers- and beer bottle-littered mud strip that passes for a street in our village, and who should he see but Skankin, lounging around the schoolyard and suck-

ing down beer with a bunch of rough looking characters.

Griggs: "Skankin, what the hell you doin here?"

Skankin: "Vacation, mon. We on vacation frum de prison."

Thanks to world pressure from the NGOs and human rights groups, every worthless criminal asshole from Hopkins, and we have them the same as the rest of the world, was vacationing in his hometown. "It's supposed to be a demonstration of rehabilitation efforts on the government's part," sighed Griggs. All I can think about is my unlocked cabana and the two guitars and computer therein. I headed home to lock up.

Walking toward the south end "bakka-town" where I live, I thought it might be a good idea to mention the Hattieville prisoners to one of the break-in victims of these felons, Big Lilly, who was sitting in a cheap plastic chair in front of her cabana drinking soursop juice and reading "Sports Psychic," which advises us regarding this week's lucky Boledo lottery numbers. Remember, 2008 is a leap year, so read Psalms 115, 72, 91 and 75. Keep your eyes on 25 and 89 and watch out for Ibanyi and Sugar Boys the playoffs.

"Big Lilly," I said, "the prisoners from Hattieville are released and drifting around Hopkins today, including the guy who got caught carrying your TV down the street when the power went out. The prison gave them a vacation."

"Das nice," says Big Lilly. "Everbodee need de vacation now an den." **CT**

*Joe Bageant is the author of **Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War** (Random House Crown).*

WHEN PAINT IS NOT ENOUGH

Dave Zirin joins the NBA circus in New Orleans

In the middle of February the NBA All-Star Game came to New Orleans. If you were one of the thousands to make the trip to the Big Easy and hang out on Bourbon Street, you no doubt saw one kind of NOLA. Like the Green Zone in Iraq, offering salsa lessons and satellite television, this is an area of unreality. But many see economic investment in the tourist center as the path toward economic revival for this remarkable city.

As NBA commissioner David Stern said in May 2006: “The award of NBA All-Star 2008 is our vote of confidence in the progress that is being made in the reopening and rebuilding of New Orleans’ tourism infrastructure. New Orleans will become the basketball capital of the world in February 2008, and demonstrate to a global audience that New Orleans is very much open for business.”

There is no doubt that Stern and Co. were tickled green to do business in the new New Orleans. But as a strategy to rebuild the city, it’s shoveling sand in the ocean. This was seen when the league held an “NBA Cares All-Star Day of

Service.” The event featured players (including LeBron James and Jason Kidd) and 2,500 league employees who spread out all over the city to aid in rebuilding efforts, an operation that also served as a cunning plea for good PR after a year of dirty referees, sexual harassment trials and an All-Star Game in Las Vegas that turned into a full-fledged national controversy.

As self-serving as it may have been, any time players leave the athletic bubble – their own mental Green Zone – it is a positive step, especially when they speak out on the experience. “It’s a great shame,” Steve Nash said after seeing the other New Orleans. “I can’t relate to what these people went through. It’s devastating. To come here and see what little has been done is disappointing. It feels like the city has been forgotten in a lot of ways. This is not what America’s about and we should look at why we failed.”

Nash’s friend Dirk Nowitzki, who was groomed to be an NBA player in Germany from the time he was old enough to tie his own shoes, was simply

Like the Green Zone in Iraq, offering salsa lessons and satellite television, this is an area of unreality. But many see economic investment in the tourist center as the path toward economic revival for this remarkable city

WHOSE CITY?

These four "developments," which 4,500 families call home, are now set to be demolished and replaced by 800 condominiums. This, for all intents and purposes, will end low-income housing in the city. Many of these families haven't even been able to come back since the levees broke, unable to even speak out for their homes

shocked. "I didn't think it was going to be this bad," he said. "I really had no idea. A lot of work needs to be done. This should have been done two years ago. This city needs a lot more help than us painting the walls. But hopefully this will be educational and us being out here will help get the message out. They need all the help they can get."

Nowitzki is right that it will take more than a coat of paint. This is obvious if you take a journey to the B.W. Cooper, C.J. Peete, Lafitte and St. Bernard housing projects. People should see them before they are swallowed whole by the most daring gentrification project this side of Baghdad.

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The demolition reflects a city undergoing a radical reconstruction. For the first time in two decades, the City Council has become somewhat paler. As the *New York Times* recently reported, "In one of the clearest signs yet of Hurricane Katrina's lasting demographic impact, the City Council is about to have a white majority for the first time in over two decades, pointing up again the storm's displacement of thousands of residents, mostly black."

Last December, at a City Council meeting where the politicians voted to destroy the projects, all the simmering rage boiled over. Hundreds gathered to

give testimony and save their homes, but were locked out by police on orders from the Council. As they tried to force their way in, police broke out the pepper spray and Tasers. Then came the SWAT team. The lucky were arrested; others were sent to the hospital. No matter how well-reasoned the argument, a Taser tends to stop the dialogue.

Civil rights lawyer Bill Quigley, one of the many arrested, wrote later: "Some were Tasered, many pepper sprayed and a dozen arrested. Outside the chambers, iron gates were chained and padlocked even before the scheduled start. Only developers and those with special permission from council members were allowed in. Despite dozens of open seats in the council chambers, pleas to be allowed in were ignored. Chants of 'Housing is a human right!' and 'Let us in!' thundered through the concrete breezeway."

Thousands came to New Orleans to celebrate the global popularity of a sport in which the vast majority of players are African-American. Basketball is a game often compared to jazz, with its improvisation and ebb and flow. There is nothing wrong with celebrating the sport in the birthplace of jazz, especially when one All-Star in particular, New Orleans Hornets point guard Chris Paul, plays like Coltrane. But a fresh coat of paint isn't the answer. The people who have roots in this remarkable American city just need to know that they can come home. **CT**

*Dave Zirin's latest book is **Welcome to the Terrordome: The Pain, Politics and Promise of Sports***

A BUTT-KICKING FOR GITMO

Liliana Segura discovers a lighter side to Guantanamo

There's not much room for humor when it comes to Guantanamo, but human rights lawyer Clive Stafford Smith's "Case of the Contraband Underpants," published in the *New Statesman* last fall, had to make you chuckle: "I received a letter from an officer at [Guantanamo] suggesting that I might have smuggled some underwear in to my client, the British resident Shaker Aamer. Apparently Shaker had been 'recently discovered to be wearing Under Armour briefs and a Speedo bathing suit.' It seems he was wearing both contraband items in his cell at Camp Echo, where he has been in total isolation almost continuously since 24 September 2005, with only the flush of his steel toilet for company."

The odd discovery led the attorney on a fact-finding mission, in which he would learn that "Under Armour" underwear is "popular with the US military," making it more than likely that the illicit skivvies were planted by someone in uniform. (The Speedo suit was more mysterious; perhaps, Stafford Smith suggested, "the military could

erect prohibitory signs in each prison cell: 'We don't pee in your swimming pool, so please don't swim in our toilet'")

Now, months later and right in time for London's Fashion Week, Stafford Smith and his UK-based legal charity, Reprieve, have inspired a line of underwear, Gitmo-orange and with the words "Fair Trial My Arse" emblazoned on the butt. Created by famed lingerie designer Agent Provocateur, the underwear has had an auspicious debut: a pair was "discreetly delivered" to Prime Minister Gordon Brown – a Valentine's Day gift from Reprieve and its clients – and another was spotted on the runway as part of the Vivienne Westwood collection at London's Fashion Week.

"Bad taste aside," Stafford Smith explains, "Fair Trial My Arse bears a serious message, particularly given this past week's announcement that the US military plans death-penalty trials in Guantanamo Bay ... We hope the slogan will become a rallying cry for the closure of Guantanamo Bay and the secret prisons that proliferate around the world." **CT**

"We hope the slogan will become a rallying cry for the closure of Guantanamo Bay and the secret prisons that proliferate around the world"

Liliana Segura is an AlterNet staff writer and editor of the Rights & Liberties section. This first appeared at www.alternet.org

**WRITING WORTH
READING FROM
AROUND THE WORLD**

coldtype