

**INSIDE:** TRUTH AND LIES ● BAD NEWS FROM A TOP SPY ● AND THEN THEY CAME FOR ME ● PAYDAY PARASITES ● HOLLYWOOD'S NEW CENSORS

**ColdType**  
**The READER**

WRITING WORTH READING ● ISSUE 34 ● FEB/MARCH 2009



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# The <sup>ColdType</sup> READER



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## ISSUE 34 | FEBRUARY / MARCH 2009

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- |     |                                           |                                   |
|-----|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 3.  | TRUTH AND LIES                            | Michael I. Niman                  |
| 5.  | HOLLYWOOD'S NEW CENSORS                   | John Pilger                       |
| 7.  | BAD NEWS FROM AMERICA'S TOP SPY           | Chris Hedges                      |
| 10. | INSIDE THE BIOLOGICAL WARFARE CENTRE      | Sherwood Ross                     |
| 19. | NO VICTORS IN THE WAR ON DISSENT          | William John Cox & Colleen Rowley |
| 22. | WHO IS A TERRORIST?                       | Mats Svennson                     |
| 24. | HURWITT'S EYE                             | Mark Hurwitt                      |
| 25. | AND THEN THEY CAME FOR ME                 | Lasantha Wickramatunga            |
| 29. | PAYDAY PARASITES                          | Adam Turl                         |
| 32. | THE SICK PSYCHOLOGY OF ENTITLEMENT        | John Carney                       |
| 34. | THE NEW SURGE OF CEO SELF-SACRIFICE       | Sam Pizzigati                     |
| 36. | CHANGE (IN RHETORIC) WE CAN BELIEVE IN    | William Blum                      |
| 42. | WHY WE NEVER GET THE CHANGE WE NEED       | Tim Buchholz                      |
| 45. | FUTURE SHOCK AT ARMY SCIENCE CONFERENCE   | Nick Turse                        |
| 51. | SHARPEVILLE 1960, GAZA 2009               | Haidar Eid                        |
| 54. | GEORGE MITCHELL AND THE MIDDLE EAST       | Gerry Adams                       |
| 56. | WHY ARE WE STILL IN AFGHANISTAN?          | Norman Solomon                    |
| 58. | LEON PANETTA MAKES NICE                   | Ray McGovern                      |
| 63. | WHO'LL BE THERE WHEN THE FLOOR DROPS OUT? | David Michael Green               |
| 68. | THE PROPAGANDA OF THE VICTOR              | George Monbiot                    |
- 

**COVER:** Policeman lashes out at protesters during a demonstration against the Gaza Massacre outside the Israeli embassy in London in January. In February, press photographers protested outside London's Metropolitan Police headquarters at New Scotland Yard over fears that new anti-terror legislation would make covering demonstrations such as these almost impossible. **Photo:** Jess Hurd, [ReportDigital.co.uk](http://ReportDigital.co.uk)

# Truth and lies

It's not a political ideology or position. Truth is the truth. It's honesty and accuracy, says **Michael I. Niman**

**T**he motto at my local National Public Radio news station, is “Somewhere between the left and the right lies the truth – that’s where you’ll find us.” I’ve always been annoyed by this trite bit of self-aggrandizement. It’s not just because it’s silly. It’s because the truth is the truth. And the truth doesn’t reside between the left and the right. The truth is not a political or economic ideology or position. It’s the truth. It’s honesty and accuracy. Period.

This motto isn’t just some innocent stupidity repeated ad nauseam. It’s dangerous. It subtly sends out a loaded political attack message supporting one position, centrism, while surreptitiously dismissing other positions as lies, and their adherents as liars. The fact that this motto endlessly soldiers on over the years means it is largely unquestioned, save for the complaints of a nitpicking journalism professor. It’s accepted. People don’t think about it and they don’t question it. In his now classic book, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, sociologist James Loewen examines high school American history textbooks and how they whitewash American history – for example, skipping unsavory bits like the cannibalism at Jamestown and the robbing of Indian graves at Plymouth, while rationalizing wars of expansion and sugar-coating anti-native genocide. But the worse crime the high school texts commit, according to

Loewen, is to simplify the dynamic field of history into a series of simple “facts.” There “were 10 million Native Americans at the time of the Columbian invasion” – not 100 million as many anthropologists argue, or two million as historians once claimed, but 10 million. That’s the answer: Memorize it and spit it back on the test.

Under this pedagogy, history ceases to be a discussion or an evolving set of arguments, but a set of simple facts to be memorized – a truth chosen by a textbook editor from a selection of many convincing arguments. The issue here isn’t whether there were a dozen or a billion people living in the Americas at time of conquest – that argument will continue to evolve. The issue is that students are completely unaware that there is an argument. The random truths, like the outright lies that social studies teachers wittingly and unwittingly spread, are deadly because they short circuit inquiry and critical thinking. History becomes a set of facts. The wrong answers become lies because they go against the conventional wisdom.

Let’s look back on some very recent history – the giddy hoopla leading up to the inauguration of Barack Obama. Corporate news outlets broadcast a daily countdown of George W. Bush’s last days in office. Everyone was on board. When inauguration day came, the media trained their cameras on Bush’s helicopter as it evacuated Washing-

**The truth doesn’t reside between the left and the right. The truth is not a political or economic ideology or position. It’s the truth. It’s honesty and accuracy. Period.**

## ONE WORD

**The historic massive 1999 “Battle in Seattle” protests against corporate globalization were covered as a sporting event, devoid of any context – cops swinging clubs against the heads of union members and students who appeared in Seattle for no apparent reason other than to be savagely beaten**

**Dr. Michael I. Niman**, a regular contributor to *ColdType*, is a professor of journalism and media studies at Buffalo State College, New York

ton to the roar of two million revelers. We all supported Barack Obama – always. We all always resisted the Bush agenda. We were all always against the Iraq War. We all knew the economy was a house of cards. We were all always concerned about global warming. We never bought into that WMD story. We never voted for Republicans who promised to make us richer. This is the truth.

This whole celebration, like our NPR station’s conception of the truth, also annoys me. That’s because if the media actually did their job and engaged in critical reporting and fact-checking, back when it actually mattered, we wouldn’t have an Iraq war. If the people who are so giddily celebrating the end of the Bush era actually resisted the Bush agenda, back when their voices were needed, there wouldn’t have been a second Bush term – or a first.

If media outlets like NPR actually made space for critical views on the economy, back when it counted, perhaps balancing their pro-investor programming with labor and sustainability oriented content, we possibly would have sobered up before our economy careened out of control into a black hole. But the corporate media didn’t allow for competing truths to collide into dynamic arguments open to both the left and the right. We just got one point of view, one argument, which ironically is the same right-wing economic policy argument the media is now deriding as flawed. The historic massive 1999 “Battle in Seattle” protests against corporate globalization were covered as a sporting event, devoid of any context – cops swinging clubs against the heads of union members and students who appeared in Seattle for no apparent reason other than to be savagely beaten.

Critical voices can only be celebrated in hindsight after being proven right; they couldn’t be allowed to enter the debate at a time when hearing them was crucial. It turns out the peaceniks were right about the war, the lefties were right about the global economy, and the tree-huggers were right about the environment. Who knew?

That’s another problem with our NPR

station’s notion that “somewhere between the left and the right lies the truth.” There is no left on the radio in our area. So what exactly are they saying? When we talk about the left side of the political spectrum, we’re talking about socialism and radical programs supporting social welfare with communist and democratic-socialist variants. When we speak of the right, we’re generally referring to unfettered capitalism with libertarian and corporate fascist variants.

Our mainstream media doesn’t support outright fascism at this junction in history (though the Hearst media chain supported Hitler in the early 1930 and the *New York Times* and the Associated Press both had a soft spot for Mussolini). Throughout my lifetime, however, it’s been a loyal cheerleader for the corporate capitalist agenda that the new conventional wisdom acknowledges has “suddenly” brought us to the brink of economic and environmental collapse. The mainstream media has made sure to marginalize as “radical” the few critical voices that hang on ghettoized in the “alternative media.” TV and radio is replete with dozens of shows like PBS’s *Nightly Business Report* – news geared toward celebrating the unfettered accumulation of wealth at almost any cost to society by a small minority of privileged investors. There is no regularly scheduled socialist counterpoint. There are no deep ecologists hosting news shows.

While we might never get to hear them, though, we get to hear about them. They’re ecologists, leftist economists, civil libertarians, feminists, humanists, and other assorted outcasts. They’re not to be taken seriously, even though history has proven them reliably prescient. The media dismisses them as radicals and wackos. They live in mysterious places, like “the left,” where the truth never goes.

So let’s get this one simple fact of physics right. Earth to NPR: Listen up! Somewhere between the left and the right lies the center. The truth is the truth. And lies are lies. And only an informed critical thinking population can sort them out. **CT**

# Hollywood's new censors

**John Pilger** on the myths, lies and propaganda put out by the movie industry

**W**hen I returned from the war in Vietnam, I wrote a film script as an antidote to the myth that the war had been an ill-fated noble cause. The producer David Puttnam took the draft to Hollywood and offered it to the major studios, whose responses were favourable – well, almost. Each issued a report card in which the final category, “politics”, included comments such as: “This is real, but are the American people ready for it? Maybe they’ll never be.”

By the late 1970s, Hollywood judged Americans ready for a different kind of Vietnam movie. The first was *The Deer Hunter* which, according to *Time*, “articulates the new patriotism”.

The film celebrated immigrant America, with Robert de Niro as a working class hero (“liberal by instinct”) and the Vietnamese as sub-human Oriental barbarians and idiots, or “gooks”.

The dramatic peak was reached during recurring orgiastic scenes in which GIs were forced to play Russian roulette by their Vietnamese captors. This was made up by the director Michael Cimino, who also made up a story that he had served in Vietnam. “I have this insane feeling that I was there,” he said. “Somehow ... the line between reality and fiction has become blurred.”

*The Deer Hunter* was regarded virtually as documentary by ecstatic critics. “The film that could purge a nation’s guilt!” said the *Daily Mail*. President Jimmy Carter was reportedly moved by its “genuine American message”. Catharsis was at hand. The Vietnam movies became a revisionist popular history of the great crime in Indo-China. That more than four million people had died terribly and unnecessarily and their homeland poisoned to a wasteland was not the concern of these films.

Rather, Vietnam was an “American tragedy”, in which the invader was to be pitied in a blend of false bravado-and-angst: sometimes crude (the Rambo films) and sometimes subtle (Oliver Stone’s *Platoon*). What mattered was the strength of the purgative.

## Creating myths

None of this, of course, was new; it was how Hollywood created the myth of the Wild West, which was harmless enough unless you happened to be a native-American; and how the Second World War has been relentlessly glorified, which may be harmless enough unless you happen to be one of countless innocent human beings, from Serbia to Iraq, whose deaths or dispossession are justified by moralising references to 1939-45. Hollywood’s gooks, its Untermenschen, are essential to this crusade – the

**The Vietnam movies became a revisionist popular history of the great crime in Indo-China.**

**That more than four million people had died terribly and unnecessarily and their homeland poisoned to a wasteland was not the concern of these films**

## SEEING IS BELIEVING?

**“The idea that repeating a song will drive someone over the brink of emotional stability, or cause them to act counter to their own nature, makes music into something like voodoo, which it is not”**

dispatched Somalis in Ridley Scott’s *Black Hawk Down* and the sinister Arabs in movies like *Rendition*, in which the torturing CIA is absolved by Jake Gyllenhaal’s good egg. As Robbie Graham and Mark Alford pointed out in their *New Statesman* enquiry into corporate control of the cinema (2 February), in 167 minutes of Steven Spielberg’s *Munich*, the Palestinian cause is restricted to just two and a half minutes. “Far from being an ‘even-handed cry for peace’, as one critic claimed,” they wrote, “*Munich* is more easily interpreted as a corporate-backed endorsement of Israeli policy.”

With honourable exceptions, film critics rarely question this and identify the true power behind the screen. Obsessed with celebrity actors and vacuous narratives, they are the cinema’s lobby correspondents, its dutiful press corps. Emitting safe snipes and sneers, they promote a deeply political system that dominates most of what we pay to see, knowing not what we are denied.

### **A different war**

Brian de Palma’s 2007 film *Redacted* shows an Iraq the media does not report. He depicts the homicides and gang-rapes that are never prosecuted and are the essence of any colonial conquest. In the *New York Village Voice*, the critic Anthony Kaufman, in abusing the “divisive” De Palma for his “perverse tales of voyeurism and violence”, did his best to taint the film as a kind of heresy and to bury it.

In this way, the “war on terror” – the conquest and subversion of resource rich regions of the world, whose ramifications and oppressions touch all our lives – is almost excluded from the popular cinema. Michael Moore’s outstanding *Fahrenheit 911* was a freak; the notoriety of its distribution ban by the Walt Disney Company helped to force its way into cinemas. My

own 2007 film *The War on Democracy*, which inverted the “war on terror” in Latin America, was distributed in Britain, Australia and other countries but not in the United States. “You will need to make structural and political changes,” said a major New York distributor. “Maybe get a star like Sean Penn to host it – he likes liberal causes – and tame those anti-Bush sequences.”

During the cold war, Hollywood’s state propaganda was unabashed. The classic 1957 dance movie, *Silk Stockings*, was an anti-Soviet diatribe interrupted by the fabulous footwork of Cyd Charisse and Fred Astaire. These days, there are two types of censorship. The first is censorship by introspective dross. Betraying its long tradition of producing gems, escapist Hollywood is consumed by the corporate formula: just make ‘em long and asinine and hope the hype will pay off. Ricky Gervais is his clever comic self in *Ghost Town*, while around him stale, formulaic characters sentimentalise the humour to death.

These are extraordinary times. Vicious colonial wars and political, economic and environmental corruption cry out for a place on the big screen. Yet, try to name one recent film that has dealt with these, honestly and powerfully, let alone satirically.

Censorship by omission is virulent. We need another *Wall Street*, another *Last Hurrah*, another *Dr. Strangelove*. The partisans who tunnel out of their prison in Gaza, bringing in food, clothes, medicines and weapons with which to defend themselves, are no less heroic than the celluloid-honoured POWs and partisans of the 1940s. They and the rest of us deserve the respect of the greatest popular medium. **CT**

*John Pilger’s latest book, Freedom Next Time, is now available in paperback.*

# Bad news from America's top spy

Our business schools and intellectual elite have been exposed as frauds; the age of the West has ended, writes **Chris Hedges**

**W**e have a remarkable ability to create our own monsters. A few decades of meddling in the Middle East with our Israeli doppelgänger and we get Hezbollah, Hamas, al-Qaida, the Iraqi resistance movement and a resurgent Taliban. Now we trash the world economy and destroy the ecosystem and sit back to watch our handiwork.

Hints of our brave new world seeped out recently when Washington's new director of national intelligence, retired Adm. Dennis Blair, testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee. He warned that the deepening economic crisis posed perhaps our gravest threat to stability and national security. It could trigger, he said, a return to the "violent extremism" of the 1920s and 1930s.

It turns out that Wall Street, rather than Islamic jihad, has produced our most dangerous terrorists. You wouldn't know this from the Obama administration, which seems hellbent on draining the blood out of the body politic and transfusing it into the corpse of our financial system.

But by the time Barack Obama is done all we will be left with is a corpse – a corpse and no blood. And then what? We will see accelerated plant and retail closures, inflation, an epidemic of bankruptcies, new rounds of foreclosures, bread lines, un-

employment surpassing the levels of the Great Depression and, as Blair fears, social upheaval.

The United Nations' International Labor Organization estimates that some 50 million workers will lose their jobs worldwide this year.

The collapse has already seen 3.6 million lost jobs in the United States. The International Monetary Fund's prediction for global economic growth in 2009 is 0.5 percent – the worst since World War II. There are 2.3 million properties in the United States that received a default notice or were repossessed last year. And this number is set to rise in 2009, especially as vacant commercial real estate begins to be foreclosed.

## **20,000 banks in trouble**

About 20,000 major global banks collapsed, were sold or were nationalized in 2008. There are an estimated 62,000 U.S. companies expected to shut down this year. Unemployment, when you add people no longer looking for jobs and part-time workers who cannot find full-time employment, is close to 14 percent.

And we have few tools left to dig our way out. The manufacturing sector in the United States has been destroyed by globalization.

Consumers, thanks to credit card companies and easy lines of credit, are \$14 tril-

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**In plain English, something bureaucrats and the military seem incapable of employing, this translates into the imposition of martial law and a de facto government being run out of the Department of Defense**

lion in debt. The government has pledged trillions toward the crisis, most of it borrowed or printed in the form of new money. It is borrowing trillions more to fund our wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. And no one states the obvious: We will never be able to pay these loans back. We are supposed to somehow spend our way out of the crisis and maintain our imperial project on credit. Let our kids worry about it. There is no coherent and realistic plan, one built around our severe limitations, to stanch the bleeding or ameliorate the mounting deprivations we will suffer as citizens. Contrast this with the national security state's strategies to crush potential civil unrest and you get a glimpse of the future. It doesn't look good.

"The primary near-term security concern of the United States is the global economic crisis and its geopolitical implications," Blair told the Senate. "The crisis has been ongoing for over a year, and economists are divided over whether and when we could hit bottom. Some even fear that the recession could further deepen and reach the level of the Great Depression. Of course, all of us recall the dramatic political consequences wrought by the economic turmoil of the 1920s and 1930s in Europe, the instability, and high levels of violent extremism."

### **Social unrest**

The specter of social unrest was raised at the U.S. Army War College in November in a monograph titled "Known Unknowns: Unconventional 'Strategic Shocks' in Defense Strategy Development." The military must be prepared, the document warned, for a "violent, strategic dislocation inside the United States," which could be provoked by "unforeseen economic collapse," "purposeful domestic resistance," "pervasive public health emergencies" or "loss of functioning political and legal order." The "widespread civil violence," the document said, "would force the defense establishment to reorient priorities in extremis to

defend basic domestic order and human security."

"An American government and defense establishment lulled into complacency by a long-secure domestic order would be forced to rapidly divest some or most external security commitments in order to address rapidly expanding human insecurity at home," it went on.

"Under the most extreme circumstances, this might include use of military force against hostile groups inside the United States. Further, DoD [the Department of Defense] would be, by necessity, an essential enabling hub for the continuity of political authority in a multi-state or nationwide civil conflict or disturbance," the document read.

In plain English, something bureaucrats and the military seem incapable of employing, this translates into the imposition of martial law and a de facto government being run out of the Department of Defense. They are considering it. So should you.

Adm. Blair warned the Senate that "roughly a quarter of the countries in the world have already experienced low-level instability such as government changes because of the current slowdown." He noted that the "bulk of anti-state demonstrations" internationally have been seen in Europe and the former Soviet Union, but this did not mean they could not spread to the United States.

He told the senators that the collapse of the global financial system is "likely to produce a wave of economic crises in emerging market nations over the next year." He added that "much of Latin America, former Soviet Union states and sub-Saharan Africa lack sufficient cash reserves, access to international aid or credit, or other coping mechanism."

"When those growth rates go down, my gut tells me that there are going to be problems coming out of that, and we're looking for that," he said. He referred to "statistical modeling" showing that "economic crises increase the risk of regime-threatening in-

stability if they persist over a one to two year period.”

Blair articulated the newest narrative of fear. As the economic unraveling accelerates we will be told it is not the bearded Islamic extremists, although those in power will drag them out of the Halloween closet when they need to give us an exotic shock, but instead the domestic riffraff, environmentalists, anarchists, unions and enraged members of our dispossessed working class who threaten us.

Crime, as it always does in times of turmoil, will grow. Those who oppose the iron fist of the state security apparatus will be lumped together in slick, corporate news reports with the growing criminal underclass.

#### **Intelligence focus**

The committee’s Republican vice chairman, Sen. Christopher Bond of Missouri, not quite knowing what to make of Blair’s testimony, said he was concerned that Blair was making the “conditions in the country” and the global economic crisis “the primary focus of the intelligence community.”

The economic collapse has exposed the stupidity of our collective faith in a free market and the absurdity of an economy based on the goals of endless growth, consumption, borrowing and expansion. The ideology of unlimited growth failed to take into account the massive depletion of the world’s resources, from fossil fuels to clean

water to fish stocks to erosion, as well as overpopulation, global warming and climate change.

The huge international flows of unregulated capital have wrecked the global financial system. An overvalued dollar (which will soon deflate), wild tech, stock and housing financial bubbles, unchecked greed, the decimation of our manufacturing sector, the empowerment of an oligarchic class, the corruption of our political elite, the impoverishment of workers, a bloated military and defense budget and unrestrained credit binges have conspired to bring us down. The financial crisis will soon become a currency crisis. This second shock will threaten our financial viability. We let the market rule. Now we are paying for it.

The corporate thieves, those who insisted they be paid tens of millions of dollars because they were the best and the brightest, have been exposed as con artists. Our elected officials, along with the press, have been exposed as corrupt and spineless corporate lackeys. Our business schools and intellectual elite have been exposed as frauds. The age of the West has ended. Look to China. Laissez-faire capitalism has destroyed itself. It is time to dust off your copies of Marx.

**CT**

*Chris Hedges’s latest book, with Laila Al-Arian, is Collateral Damage: America’s war Against Iraqi Civilians.*

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# Inside the biological warfare centre

Sherwood Ross interviews activist and attorney Barry Kissin about the biological warfare hub at Ft Detrick, Maryland

**More than \$50 billion has been lavished on this effort – an effort critics charge is in violation of the existing treaty against bioweapons development ratified by the United States in 1975**

One legacy of the Bush-Cheney administration is the grandiose expansion of the US's germ warfare research program. This was declared to be necessary because of the September-October 2001 anthrax letters' attacks on Congress and the media – attacks we are now being told came not from the Middle East but from within our own government's facilities. As a result, developmental work is going forward with deadly and loathsome pathogens capable of triggering plagues and epidemics.

Legislation to finance this expansion rolled through Congress after the anthrax attacks killed five people, sickened 17 others, caused more than 10 million Americans to go on very strong antibiotics, and cost hundreds of millions of dollars to clean up. Laboratories at hundreds of universities and corporations have expanded into biological warfare research centers. More than \$50 billion has been lavished on this effort – an effort critics charge is in violation of the existing treaty against bioweapons development ratified by the United States in 1975. So much of the nation's resources have been shifted into germ warfare research that 750 of our most celebrated scientists signed a petition protesting the adverse effect this is having on research into combating naturally occurring diseases.

The Government's admission that the

anthrax attacks came not from the Middle East but from its own biowarfare research facilities signifies the anthrax letters constituted a "false flag" operation designed to whip up public sentiment for the "War On Terror."

One man who saw the expansion of the Government's biological warfare research hub at Ft. Detrick under President Bush as a danger to his community and to the nation was Barry Kissin, a 57-year-old Brooklyn-born attorney who moved to Frederick, Maryland, in 1981. Kissin and his wife, Dr. Malgorzata Schmidt, live just a few miles from the main gate of Ft. Detrick.

Over the past six years, Kissin has become a leading citizen activist in the struggle to halt the expansion of the nation's "biodefense" program. His work evidently came to the attention of the Homeland Security division of the Maryland State Police. The *Washington Post* of October 12, 2008, reported that this Homeland Security division had listed Kissin and 52 others as "terrorists," and that authorities had acknowledged their wrongdoing and had agreed to purge the files.

Kissin, an unsuccessful candidate for Congress in 2006, was in good company. The activists labeled as terrorists included two nuns, a man who challenges military recruiting in high schools, and critics of the Iraq war.

Here is my Question and Answer interview with this passionate opponent of a new biological arms race – a race once shut down by President Richard Nixon only to be stoked anew by the Bush regime.

**ROSS: How did you happen to get interested in Ft. Detrick ?**

**KISSIN:** I became a resident of Frederick, MD, home of Ft. Detrick, in 1981. I was aware Ft. Detrick was headquarters for our bio-warfare related programs ever since the first such program commenced in 1943. Before my move to Frederick, I was also conscious of the Silent Vigil that was maintained from July, 1959, until March, 1961, outside Detrick's main gate that stood for the cessation of our bio-warfare program and the conversion of Detrick's scientific facilities into a health research center. This Vigil, conceived by a Quaker named Lawrence Scott, is credited with laying the foundation for the decision by President Nixon in 1969 to terminate our offensive bio-warfare program. Two years later, Nixon came to Detrick and announced he was creating the National Cancer Institute (NCI) there which would utilize (and continues to utilize) former Army bio-warfare buildings, thus "sending a clear message that America could beat its swords into plowshares." I might add that it has since become apparent that the CIA and its "Special Operations Division" at Detrick did not abide by the decision to terminate bio-weapons research. Various bio-warfare related programs continued to function in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

During my formative years, I was very active in the movement against the Viet Nam War. Since then I have been very conscious of the terrible workings of our military-industrial-intelligence complex. Upon moving to Frederick, I quickly became aware of how the Army at Detrick manipulated the local community and local media. Ft. Detrick is the largest employer in Frederick County. Its unassailable position in the community is based on a mixture of mes-

sages about its contributions to the local economy and its patriotic role in defending against the enemy, once Communist, now terrorist.

**ROSS: What steps did the Bush administration take to launch its biological warfare program?**

**KISSIN:** Upon coming into power, the Bush Administration immediately exercised its strong preference for arms race over international arms control. In the realm of bio-warfare, it promptly withdrew from negotiations to strengthen the 1975 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), the international treaty that bans the development of biological weapons. This made the United States practically the only country among 150 signatories to the Treaty opposed to a protocol for international inspections and verification. Thereafter, using the anthrax letters attacks of the fall of 2001 as a central pretext, the Bush Administration launched a massive expansion of our so-called "bio-defense" program, much of it at Ft. Detrick.

**ROSS: Could you briefly describe the nature of the work going forward at Ft. Detrick and the names of agencies involved?**

**KISSIN:** One of the programs at Ft. Detrick is under the auspices of the National Cancer Institute (NCI). My focus of course has been upon bio-warfare related activities, which, since termination of the overtly offensive program, have been conducted by the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID). USAMRIID is a part of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command (USAMRMC) at Ft. Detrick, which also manages activities unrelated to bio-warfare, such as supplying medical materials for use by the Army.

The expansion underway at Ft. Detrick contemplates a "National Inter-agency Bio-defense Campus" (NIBC) which upon completion would occupy 200 acres there. The plan is for the NIBC to be the site of

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a new facility for USAMRIID, designed to measure more than one million square feet (approx. 25 acres of facility space), at a cost of \$1 billion (2005 cost estimate). Construction of two of the new NIBC facilities has already been completed (in 2008) – namely the “National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center” (NBACC) to be operated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which measures 160,000 square feet, and the “Integrated Research Facility” (IRF) to be operated by the National Institute of Health (NIH), which also measures about 160,000 square feet. After the new USAMRIID facility is completed, the plan is to erect another new facility on the NIBC, to be operated by the Department of Agriculture (USDA). And the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has announced that it also wants to join this campus “confederation.”

**ROSS: Please explain what BSL laboratories are and how they are graded. Also, could you describe some of the pathogens government scientists are working on in these labs?**

**KISSIN:** BSL labs are biocontainment facilities designed for research, development, testing and evaluation (RDT&E) activities involving specific pathogens (germs), exposure to which would be hazardous to lab workers as well as the “outside environment.” BSL stands for Bio-Safety Level – the higher the level, the more elaborate the safety and security measures, the more dangerous the germs. BSL-4 is for maximum containment. There are dozens of diseases viewed as potential agents for biological weapons. RDT&E upon diseases such as hepatitis A, B and C, influenza A, Lyme disease, dengue fever and salmonella takes place in BSL-2 labs. Anthrax, West Nile virus, Venezuelan equine encephalitis, Eastern equine encephalitis, SARS, tuberculosis, typhus, *Coxiella burnetii*, Rift Valley fever, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and yellow fever are dealt with in BSL-3 labs. And Bolivian and Argentine hemor-

rhagic fevers, Marburg virus, Ebola virus, Lassa fever, and Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever are dealt with in BSL-4 labs.

The new DHS, NIH and Army facilities at Detrick alone will house approximately 60,000 square feet of BSL-4 laboratory space, specifically designed to accommodate work with germs for which there is neither vaccine nor cure. This amount of space is four times the total amount of BSL-4 space that existed in the entire country as of 2004.

**ROSS: How have you attempted to slow or stop the expansion of these laboratories?**

**KISSIN:** Since 2003, I and others in the community have been participating in proceedings under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) designed to examine the environmental impacts posed by new bio-warfare related facilities at Ft. Detrick. Though NEPA treats as a priority the consideration of public input, our input has essentially been ignored as one facility after the other has been approved. I and others have also been conducting demonstrations in downtown Frederick against the expansion.

**ROSS: In some ways the community’s activism has paid off, has it not?**

**KISSIN:** In August, 2007, for the first time in history, an elected official, a Frederick County Commissioner, publicly expressed concerns about what was going on at Ft. Detrick. This opened a floodgate. Unprecedented columns and editorials in the local newspapers appeared questioning what was going on at Ft. Detrick. And in November, 2007, upon the occasion of a public meeting hosted by the County Commissioners, more than 150 members of the community filled Frederick City Hall to express their many concerns.

Under much pressure, both of Maryland’s U.S. Senators – Barbara Mikulski and Ben Cardin – got behind the demand for a review by the National Academy of

Sciences (NAS) of the public health and environmental hazards posed by the new facilities being built at Ft. Detrick. Though the appropriation for this NAS review was passed by Congress in September, 2008, we continue to wait for the Army to fulfill its obligation to enter into a contract with the NAS for this review.

**ROSS: Are you a member of any citizen groups concerned about research underway at Ft. Detrick ?**

**KISSIN:** Frederick Citizens for Bio-lab Safety; Frederick Progressive Action Coalition (FredPAC); Frederick County Peace Resource Center (PRC). There are also national organizations concerned about our national “biodefense” program, a central part of which is being implemented at Ft. Detrick. A most important example of such an organization was the “Sunshine Project” based in Austin, Texas. This non-profit organization was instrumental in procuring the Congressional hearing in October, 2007, regarding the alarming (if not reckless) proliferation of high-security bio-laboratories in the U.S. Unfortunately, the Sunshine Project has since ceased its operation for lack of funding.

**ROSS: As I understand it, with most of the rest of the world on record as opposed to a new bioweapons arms race, the United States is setting a terrible example by its research at Ft. Detrick.**

**KISSIN:** In 2004, Milton Leitenberg, Senior Research Scholar at the University of Maryland, James Leonard, head of the U.S. delegation that negotiated the international arms control treaty known as the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) that bans the development of bio-weapons, and Richard Spertzel, former deputy Commander of USAMRIID and Senior Biologist on the United Nations inspection team in Iraq, co-authored a commentary containing the following statements:

“The rapidity of elaboration of American biodefense programs, their ambition

and administrative aggressiveness, and the degree to which they push against the prohibitions of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), are startling.... [The Deputy Director of DHS’s NBACC himself] noted that one NBACC objective, the creation of genetically engineered agents, might raise BWC compliance questions... Reportedly, the US intelligence community is under orders to carry out studies.... Surely, the ‘intelligence community’ is the least appropriate place in the US government to ‘carry out’ such work – and the most likely to lack adequate oversight.”

**ROSS: According to some critics, “biodefense” activity at Ft. Detrick will violate Federal criminal law, is that correct?**

**KISSIN:** In 2007, International Law Professor Francis Boyle, who drafted the “Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act of 1989” that criminalizes violations of the BWC, stated:

“The proposed construction and operation of new facilities at Fort Detrick is an integral part of the program that is referred to as ‘Biodefense for the 21st Century’ in Homeland Security Presidential Directive – HSPD-10, released on April 28, 2004. In my expert opinion, said program constitutes clear violations of the [BWC].... [This] so-called ‘biodefense’ program... [has the] unmistakable hallmarks of an offensive weapons program.... In my expert opinion, participants in this so-called ‘biodefense’ program are subject to criminal liability [under the Act that I drafted.]”

**ROSS: Have you been inside Ft. Detrick ?**

**KISSIN:** Numerous times. As an attorney, I have represented before the Magistrate’s Court at Ft. Detrick individuals charged with misdemeanors committed on post. More to the point, I have attended various “community meetings” on post hosted by the Army for the purpose of answering questions about the expansion. Furthermore, on March 5, 2008, I was given

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we now have a clear sign that DOD appears to be shirking its responsibilities and legal obligations to protect the health and welfare of our constituents, particularly... neighbors outside the gate

a three-hour-long tour of the USAMRIID facility by then USAMRIID Commander Colonel George W. Korch, which included an inspection (through windows) of the “biological containment” laboratories [like the ones portrayed in the Dustin Hoffman film, “Outbreak” (1995)].

**ROSS: How many acres does Ft. Detrick cover and what’s it like?**

**KISSIN:** Ft. Detrick comprises 1200 acres, (about 10% of the total land area of the City of Frederick, population 60,000). “Area A” contains all of the buildings for the activities summarized above, as well as a substantial number of recently-constructed single-family homes for Army families, a very large gymnasium, commissary, etc. (Though remarkably it still has places in it that would be easy to penetrate), the perimeter fencing has recently been bolstered, which critics describe as contributing to a militaristic presence in the middle of a densely populated community.

**ROSS: What is going on in “Area B?”**

**KISSIN:** “Area B” is about 400 acres and is separated from “Area A,” and has livestock on it used in testing by USAMRIID. Area B was a landfill site. Though questions were raised beginning in the 1970s about possible leakage from Detrick dumping, it was not until the early 1990’s that monitoring wells were installed that revealed in the ground water the presence of TCE and PCE, both cancer-causing chemicals, at levels between 1,000 and 5,000 times the levels determined to be safe by the EPA. It became clear that the water supplies of nearby residents had been severely contaminated. On July 1, 2003, the local *Frederick News-Post* published a front-page article “Cancer questions: Residents point finger at Detrick,” based on the statements of many of Detrick’s neighbors about the high incidence of cancer in their families.

**ROSS: How have Ft. Detrick authorities and the Army responded?**

**KISSIN:** The clean-up has dragged along ever since the early 1990s. Two thousand metric tons of hazardous waste have been unearthed. In 2003, sanitation crews were shocked to find vials containing live germs. The discarded biological agents included anthrax, *Brucella melitensis*, which causes the virulent flu-like disease brucellosis, and *klebsiella*, a cause of pneumonia. (On May 28, 2003, the *Guardian*, a prominent English newspaper, published an article entitled “US finds evidence of WMD at last – buried in a field in Maryland.”)

**Q: Surely, public officials would raise questions about this situation.**

**KISSIN:** On November 13, 2008, both of Maryland’s U.S. Senators, ordinarily quite protective with respect to Ft. Detrick, stated in a letter to then President-elect Obama: “[W]e write to draw your attention to the Department of Defense’s (DOD) position that it is not subject to the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) authority to administer federal environmental protection statutes. The Department of Defense has been in flagrant and repeated violation of these statutes at installations in Maryland and around the country... [A]dmitting flaws in its characterization of contamination at Ft. Detrick Maryland as well as the handling of the clean-up there, Secretary Davis promised that the Army would not oppose EPA’s decision to list Area B at Fort Detrick Maryland on the National Priorities List. Yet, we now have a clear sign that DOD appears to be shirking its responsibilities and legal obligations to protect the health and welfare of our constituents, particularly... neighbors outside the gate. As recently as November 3, 2008, Secretary Davis wrote to the EPA asking that the Agency refrain from placing Ft. Detrick on the Superfund list in spite of the fact that the site meets all the listing criteria.”

**ROSS: Wow. Have there been any injuries or deaths as a result of the biological research at Ft. Detrick? I understand**

some of its streets are named after fallen employees.

**KISSIN:** In general, secrecy in the name of “national security” has concealed the consequences of biological research at Ft. Detrick. According to the official account, three people have died as the result of contracting diseases being cultivated at Ft. Detrick, all before the overtly offensive program was terminated in 1969. A microbiologist and an electrician died from anthrax, and an animal caretaker died from the Machupo virus. The official account does not acknowledge what has come to light about one of the anthrax cases, namely that, at first, the victim was placed by his personal physician in a Frederick hospital, and that “bronchial pneumonia” was listed on his death certificate.

**ROSS: Sounds like a cover-up.**

**KISSIN:** One must study Pulitzer Prize-winning Seymour Hersh’s seminal work, *Chemical & Biological Warfare: America’s Hidden Arsenal* (Doubleday & Company, 1969) to discover the case of an enlisted laboratory technician at Detrick contracting pneumonic plague. In a memo classified as secret, Detrick officials cautioned that this lab technician was also a life guard at a public swimming pool in the community. But no attempt was made to inform Frederick residents of the danger, or to provide preventative antibiotic treatment. There was also a case of an enlisted man residing off base who contracted meningitis, which can be highly contagious. The Frederick County Health Commissioner was not informed of this case until weeks after it was discovered. Regarding the plague case, this Health Commissioner told Hersh: “I cooperated with [Ft. Detrick officials]. I had an obligation to them – I had a secret clearance. They told me not to report the case [because] we didn’t want to alarm anyone.” Referring to “funny cases” related to Ft. Detrick, this Commissioner also told Hersh about questionable incidents involving ty-

phoid fever and tuberculosis.

Then there was the case of Frank Olson, whose death back in 1953 was attributed by officials to suicide. Largely as the result of ongoing efforts by one of Frank Olson’s sons, Eric, it has come to light that Dr. Olson was actually in charge of the CIA’s “Special Operations” at Ft. Detrick, that he was gradually becoming more and more disturbed by the CIA’s secret programs at Ft. Detrick, and that after he expressed some of his misgivings and shortly before his death, he was given LSD by CIA agents. In 1994, Dr. Olson’s son Eric retained Dr. James Starrs, a noted forensic pathologist at the George Washington University Medical Center, to assemble a team of experts to conduct an exhumation and autopsy on Frank Olson. After months of tests and investigation, Dr. Starrs concluded that the circumstances of Dr. Olson’s death had been deliberately covered up by the CIA, and that his death was the result of “homicide deft, deliberate, and diabolical.” (Dr. Olson’s son Eric has also uncovered documents that establish that Dick Cheney became personally involved in this cover-up – see Eric’s website, [www.frankolsonproject.org](http://www.frankolsonproject.org)).

**ROSS: Are there any other examples of deaths or injuries at Ft. Detrick ?**

**KISSIN:** With regard to injuries resulting from biological research at Ft. Detrick, it is instructive to consider an article written by several medical doctors who work at USAMRIID entitled “Experience in the Medical Management of Potential Laboratory Exposures to Agents of Bioterrorism at USAMRIID” that appeared in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*: Volume 46(8), August 2004, pp. 801-811:

“The large number of exposure incidents reported... serves as a reminder that work in a laboratory of this type is inherently hazardous.... [W]e recognize that work in containment laboratories is inherently hazardous because of the need to work with sharp objects (ie, needles) and

It has come to light that Dr. Olson was actually in charge of the CIA’s “Special Operations” at Ft. Detrick, that he was gradually becoming more and more disturbed by the CIA’s secret programs at Ft. Detrick, and that after he expressed some of his misgivings and shortly before his death, he was given LSD by CIA agents

Spending on so-called “bio-defense” research greatly increased immediately after the anthrax letters.

In the seven fiscal years following the anthrax letters, \$48 billion was spent on “bio-defense”

animals, which can be unpredictable. In addition, personal protective equipment may inadvertently increase the potential for incidents by limiting the field of vision, tactile sensation, and communication.... A laboratory worker was evaluated for a potential ocular exposure to orthopox viruses resulting from a splash of condensate.... [A]ll 17 persons involved in the [anthrax] letter handling were considered at potentially significant risk for exposure due to the readily aerosolizable spores.... The route of exposure [in another case] was probably inhalational as the result of a malfunction (leak) of the filter in the bio-safety cabinet that was subsequently discovered.... As research on the agents of bioterrorism becomes more widespread, an increase in occupational exposures to bioterrorist agents may be expected...

“Much of our knowledge about bio-safety has come from investigations into the mechanisms and activities that caused workers to become infected... However, historically the majority of individuals, over 80% in one report, diagnosed with laboratory-acquired infections, could not identify a known incident or breach in laboratory policy responsible for their infection... There were 77 individuals evaluated for potential exposures to 107 viral agents... [N]o vaccine existed for many of [these] viral agents....” This *Journal* article also refers to instance after instance of the failure of existent vaccines to prevent infection.

The experience of one USAMRIID scientist who accidentally contracted a disease called “glanders” was described in the article as follows: “The individual, after a diagnostic liver biopsy, subsequently went into respiratory failure, necessitating intubation, [followed by] a 6-month course of treatment.” There is explicit acknowledgment in this article of “the risk of introducing communicable illnesses into the community at large.”

Also relevant to this question about death and injuries is the apparent incidence of cancer afflicting neighbors of Ft. Detrick

due to water contamination, as outlined in my answer to a previous question. Also, there is the matter of the anthrax letters of 2001. It bears pointing out that according to the official account, the anthrax in the letters was developed at Ft. Detrick.

**ROSS: Do you know what the budget is for biological research programs?**

**KISSIN:** Spending on so-called “bio-defense” research greatly increased immediately after the anthrax letters. In the seven fiscal years following the anthrax letters, \$48 billion was spent on “bio-defense.” There is another \$9 billion budgeted in fiscal year 2009. Much of this is for the stockpiling of pharmaceuticals – vaccines and remedies such as Cipro for anthrax.

The General Accounting Office and scientists like Richard Ebright of Rutgers University have suggested that the spending on research since 2001 has actually made this country less safe by vastly increasing the number of researchers and labs authorized to handle bacteria and viruses of bioterrorism concern, known as “select agents.” Ebright estimates that the number of labs so engaged has increased 20-fold since 2001. Today, there are about 1,400 public and private labs and about 14,000 scientists known to be involved.

**ROSS: Arms control expert Milton Leitenberg has said there is no evidence of biowarfare capability on the part of any terrorist group. What do you make of that?**

**KISSIN:** I have read two books by Mr. Leitenberg that pertain to the bioterrorism threat, and I have spoken to him several times about his work. Mr. Leitenberg is a conservative academic. In *Assessing the Biological Weapons and Bioterrorism Threat*, Mr. Leitenberg demonstrates that billions of federal expenditures have been appropriated in the absence of virtually any real threat analysis, and that the risk and imminence of the use of biological agents by non-state actors/terrorist organizations

has been “systematically and deliberately exaggerated” by our government. It is noteworthy that this book was published in December, 2005, by none other than the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College. On its title page can be found the following statement: “This publication is a work of the United States Government...”

**ROSS: Turning to the anthrax letters, what is Amerithrax?**

**KISSIN:** Amerithrax is the FBI’s name for its investigation into the anthrax letters attacks of September-October, 2001. This investigation has become a cover-up and a fraud, a systematic and deliberate fraud that now attempts to pin exclusive responsibility for the attacks upon a USAMRIID immunologist named Bruce Ivins. After months of intense harassment by the FBI, Ivins died in July, 2008, it appears by suicide.

**ROSS: Do you believe the anthrax attacks on Congress and the media in 2001 emanated from Ft. Detrick?**

**KISSIN:** The anthrax in the letters was of a particularly pernicious strain called the “Ames strain” of anthrax. After being discovered in a dead cow from Texas in 1981, the Ames strain made its way to Ft. Detrick, where it was originally cultivated as a potential bio-weapon. Bruce Ivins worked with the Ames strain at Ft. Detrick in the course of his efforts to derive an effective vaccine. According to the FBI’s genetic analysis, the anthrax in the letters was of a specific genotype designated RMR-1029. RMR-1029 was created by Bruce Ivins in 1997. Thereafter, Dr. Ivins was called upon to send RMR-1029 to various laboratories, including those at the Army’s Dugway Proving Ground in Utah, as well as those in Ohio owned and operated by the company named Battelle. So, it is likely that the anthrax came from Ft. Detrick. But the attacks “emanated” from either Battelle or Dugway, where the anthrax was converted

from the “wet slurry” form it was in at Detrick to the powdered weaponized form found in the letters addressed to the Senators.

Since the FBI announced that Dr. Ivins was the lone culprit, two articles of mine have been published on the internet that set forth the strong evidence that the real source of the anthrax letters was one of our own secret anthrax weaponization projects being conducted by the CIA and the DIA at Battelle’s labs in Ohio and at the Army’s labs in Utah. “FBI Sweeps Anthrax Under the Rug” can be accessed at <http://rockcreekfreepress.tumblr.com/post/46413512/fbi-sweeps-anthrax-under-the-rug>.

“Amerithrax Hoax” can be accessed at <http://www.opednews.com/articles/AMERITHRAX-HOAX-by-Barry-Kissin-090113-263.html> or at <http://anthraxvaccine.blogspot.com/2009/01/critique-of-chemical-signature.html>.

**ROSS: The anthrax letters had “Death to Israel,” “Death to America” and “Allah is Great” printed in them. This seems like a crude propaganda plant to make the public believe the letters were sent by persons from the Middle East or their sympathizers. I’ve also heard it said the Bush Administration leaked information at the time of the anthrax attacks that the letters came from the Muslim world. What do you make of that?**

**KISSIN:** This aspect of the anthrax letters is what makes the anthrax letters a “false flag” operation. A “false flag” operation is one wherein a country stages an attack made to look like an attack by an enemy, so as to justify an (aggressive) attack upon that enemy. Clearly, elements in the Bush administration and in the media, for as long as they could get away with it, pretended that the anthrax letters came from Iraq. This played an unmistakable role in gathering support for the invasion of Iraq.

**ROSS: What do you believe was the motivation for the anthrax attacks?**

**Since the FBI announced that Dr. Ivins was the lone culprit, two articles of mine have been published on the internet that set forth the strong evidence that the real source of the anthrax letters was one of our own secret anthrax weaponization projects being conducted by the CIA and the DIA at Battelle’s labs in Ohio and at the Army’s labs in Utah**

**No matter the quality of the motivation, the practice is fraudulent, and is directly responsible for the ignored phenomenon that the U.S. spends more on its military than all of the other countries in the world combined**

**KISSIN:** The practice of inventing or exaggerating an attack or a threat in order to stimulate demand for military build-up and war has been in place forever. (The Gulf of Tonkin incident and the fabrication of Iraqi soldiers throwing Kuwaiti babies out of incubators before the first Gulf War are important, relatively recent examples.) In his 1961 Farewell Address, President Eisenhower warned about the “unwarranted influence” and “misplaced power” of the “military-industrial complex.” Before that, General Douglas MacArthur declaimed: “Our country is now geared to an arms economy bred in an artificially induced psychosis of war hysteria and an incessant propaganda of fear.” And before that, General Smedley Butler: “War is a racket. It always has been. It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious.” And while we are at it, let’s also heed James Madison, the primary author of our Constitution: “The means of defense against foreign danger historically have become the instruments of tyranny at home.” And: “If Tyranny and Oppression come to this land, it will be in the guise of fighting a foreign enemy.”

**ROSS: Are you saying the motivation traces back to the profit motive of the military-industrial complex?**

**KISSIN:** For many involved in this practice of inventing/exaggerating threat, this is part of an effort to maximize profits. Others are believers in the need for a military build-up, and justify the invention/exaggeration as necessary to establish priority among competing demands for appropriations. No matter the quality of the motivation, the practice is fraudulent, and is directly responsible for the ignored phenomenon that the U.S. spends more on its military than all of the other countries in the world combined.

**ROSS: And is the world’s No. 1 arms merchant as well, plus the U.S. has ringed the globe with 700-800 military**

**installations, all for “defense” of course but, taken together, giving the appearance very much of an aggressive posture, the stance of an imperialist superpower.**

**KISSIN:** The neocons who controlled policy under Bush were of course very closely connected to the “defense” sector of our economy, and the profits made in that sector have of course skyrocketed during the past eight years. What distinguished the neocons in this context was that they did not only rely upon inventing/exaggerating threat, they also explicitly espoused “full-spectrum dominance” for the sake of the ascendance of American empire.

**ROSS: So where do the anthrax letters fit in?**

**KISSIN:** The anthrax letters must be viewed in this historical context. In the case of the anthrax letters, the invention/exaggeration of threat took the perverse form of an inside job. The Bush Administration has had to officially acknowledge that the anthrax letters were an inside job. But in order to minimize the implications of this fact, the official account resorts to the flimsy claim that the insider was a lone nut named Bruce Ivins, peculiarly driven to stimulate demand for his anthrax vaccine.

The obvious cover-up in Amerithrax, which depends on the complicity of not only our FBI and Department of Justice, but also of our mainstream media, demonstrates how economically and politically powerful are our military-industrial-intelligence forces. Remarkably, despite the admission of inside job, the anthrax letters continue to serve their dual purpose of generating profits and of achieving dominance in the ghastly realm of bioweapons. **CT**

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# No victors in the war on dissent

**William John Cox** and **Colleen Rowley** tell how the ‘war on terror’ has spawned an internal ‘war’ in which everyone is the loser. (A similar situation is occurring in Britain where tightened anti-terror laws are being used to oppress innocent citizens)

**A**mong the wars currently being fought by the American government is one in which there can be no winners. Our prior law enforcement experiences warn us that the “war on terrorism” has spawned an internal “war on dissent” in which everyone loses.

The Church Committee unearthed evidence in 1976 that the Vietnam War had provided cover for the domestic infiltration and wiretapping of civil rights and anti-war groups and resulted in legislation and regulations against the worst abuses. However, the history of government repression and spying on those who dissent against its policies and practices seems to be repeating itself.

Following 9-11, the Bush Administration erased or circumvented many of these hard-won legal restraints. Warrantless searches under the PATRIOT Act and illegal electronic surveillance swept up more than terrorist threats as the government increasingly confused dissent, which builds up a free and democratic society, with terrorism, which seeks to tear it down.

The law enforcement response has become increasingly harsh and heavy-handed since the anti-globalization protests in 1999 in Seattle against the World Trade Organization. In November 2003, as many as 40 different law enforcement agencies invaded Miami during meetings relating to the Free

Trade Area of the Americas. Protest groups were infiltrated by the police, the corporate media was “embedded” with law enforcement, and the independent media was suppressed.

The New York City police department used “Miami” tactics in 2004 at the Republican National Convention (RNC) during which hundreds of peaceful demonstrators and innocent bystanders were illegally arrested, fingerprinted, photographed, and subjected to prolonged detention in wire cages before being released without prosecution. Repressive tactics were also used the same year as a counter-terrorism measure at the Democratic National Convention, where Boston police established a designated fenced enclosure topped by razor wire as the “free speech zone.”

## **Robo-cops**

Despite this recent history, the militarized crackdown and persecution of protest at the RNC in September took many by surprise especially in an otherwise progressive city like St. Paul (which pioneered the concept of “community policing”). It was a terrible shock to see the riot-clad Robo-cops lined up two and three rows deep, helmet visors down, their police identification gone or not visible, and their tasers and chemical weapon guns pointed at the various members of the Twin Cities Peacemakers and

**Hundreds of peaceful demonstrators and innocent bystanders were illegally arrested, fingerprinted, photographed, and subjected to prolonged detention in wire cages before being released without prosecution**

**Pressure to produce arrests and convictions justifying the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars in precious tax revenues can result in the elevation of rhetoric into threats and dissent into terrorism.**

other social justice groups who marched on the first day of the RNC.

More than 800 citizens were arrested (including 40 journalists, one of whom was “Democracy Now!” radio host Amy Goodman) and hundreds of peaceful protesters were pepper sprayed, tasered, or otherwise brutalized. Thousands more who conscientiously wished to demonstrate opposition to government policies and the illegal war, were too scared to leave their homes. Not only were they intimidated from marching, but they were prevented from participating in other totally peaceful artistic and music events scheduled in the Twin Cities during the week of the RNC.

More evidence for historians that the “war on terror” has morphed into a “war on dissent” can be found in the recently leaked reports establishing that both the Pentagon’s Northern Command (NORTH-COM) and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency participated in planning RNC convention security and were possibly involved in crowd control strategies.

At the very least, the intimidating presence of armor-clad police officers at political demonstrations is a visible manifestation of the fascist threat. More pernicious would be any unwarranted, secret collection of information on the various social justice, peace, independent media, musical performance, artistic and legal groups in the lead-up to the RNC. We are currently in the process of determining, through freedom of information type requests, if this in fact, occurred here.

Recent revelations of how the Maryland State Police infiltrated nonviolent groups and falsely labeled dozens of pacifists, environmentalists and Catholic Nuns as terrorists highlights the risks of using undercover law enforcement officers and paid informants to spy on domestic groups. Pressure to produce arrests and convictions justifying the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars in precious tax revenues can result in the elevation of rhetoric into threats and dissent into terrorism.

The mind-numbing repetition of the term “anarchists” in recent newspaper coverage of the \$300,000, year-long infiltration of protest groups prior to the convention fails to obscure the great lengths to which law enforcement officials went to prevent “street blockades” and other disruptions in St. Paul. Before the RNC even started, authorities executed pre-emptive raids and “preventive detentions” – controversial concepts originally concocted for the “war on terror” that have no place in our Constitution’s criminal justice system.

Thanks to Minnesota’s version of the PATRIOT Act, the local “war on dissent” has elevated boastful threats to “swarm” the Republican convention and to “shut it down” into charges of conspiracy to riot “in furtherance of terrorism.” However, there is no evidence that any of the so-charged “RNC Eight” ever personally committed acts of violence or damaged property. If they were really ready to “destroy” the City of Saint Paul as alleged, why did they operate so openly? Why was their rhetoric, albeit taunting, for the entire world to see on their website?

### **Secretive**

Real terrorists are usually much more secretive. Think back to the most significant recent cases of actual domestic terrorism in the United States: Oklahoma Federal Building bomber Timothy McVeigh; Olympic Park and abortion clinic bomber Eric Robert Rudolph; Unabomber (for 18 years) Ted Kaczynski; Ft. Detrick military scientist-anthrax killer Bruce Ivins; and the DC sniper terrorist duo. Most of these and other American terrorists operated alone or with one main accomplice. That’s because secrecy is critical to the success of an actual terrorist act. That means, also, that it’s different from protest and even civil disobedience where mass numbers of participants (instead of secrecy) is the key.

The prosecution of the RNC eight flies in the face of what Nobel Peace Prize winner Al Gore recently urged (to heavy applause)

– for young people to engage in “civil disobedience” (he was talking about stopping the construction of coal plants). And only a few days ago, Thomas Friedman bemoaned in his *New York Times* column (with respect to the national economy) that “Our kids should be *so much more radical* than they are today.” (Emphasis added).

Dr. David Harris, a leader of one of the peace marches at the RNC as well as someone who has engaged in civil disobedience, assessed it as follows (in his comment on the Petition to Defend the RNC 8:

“Nonviolent civil disobedience is the logical action for peace loving people who have tried in every way to work within the legal system only to find that those in power refuse to listen to the voices of the oppressed. I do not agree with destruction of other people’s property as a means of expressing opinion, but direct violence against living creatures is a far greater offense. In the case of the RNC protests, by far the greatest perpetrators of violence were law enforcement officials.”

No one could have analyzed this paradox more astutely than Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis when he observed :

“In a government of law, the existence of the government will be imperiled if it fails to observe the law scrupulously. Our government is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or for ill, it teaches the whole people by example. Crime is contagious. If the government becomes a

lawbreaker, it breeds contempt for the law; it invites every man to become a law unto himself; it invites anarchy.”

It is very difficult to believe that anyone in this country – police or citizen – wants to again see the government unleash the over-reactive, repressive and violent tactics of the 1960’s to squelch domestic dissent. Ironically that would be the real recipe for inviting anarchy.

Irrespective of our political views, all of us must be concerned about the current prosecution of young people, who sincerely oppose an illegal war being fought by an unrepresentative government and who believe it’s better to have no government at all rather than one that commits international war crimes. They stand accused of being terrorists because they naively call themselves “anarchists.” In a free society, we all have the duty to stand up and fight against tyranny, and to speak out in defense of others who do. **CT**

*Coleen Rowley is a former legal counsel at the FBI Minneapolis field office. She earned national recognition for helping expose some of the pre 9-11 intelligence failures.*

*William John Cox is a retired supervising prosecutor for the State Bar of California. As a police officer he wrote the Policy Manual of the Los Angeles Police Department and the Role of the Police in America for the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals*

**UAW members average, for example, about \$28 per hour in wages – not the \$70 bandied about in the media. This figure is competitive with the \$24 or so that foreign auto companies pay their American workers**

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# Who is a terrorist?

Some of us still dream of a society where everyone is included. For this, we must be prepared to struggle, writes **Mats Svensson**

**President Bush went to the elections with one single question. Who was best at countering terrorism? Whoever was not for him was against him**

**T**here is a shrinking group of free people, people who believe in a context with everyone's equal worth. This group still dreams about a society where everyone is included and for this, one is prepared to struggle.

The hours are not enough. Daddy Obama tries every night to give Natasha and Malia some of his time. The hours are not enough. That is just the way it is. Part of the job, the assignment. Much has been promised and every promise has to be kept.

I can see how Malia follows dad Obama on TV. Even when he is not at home, he is still present. Malia flips the channel; dad is always there, channel after channel, both short and long segments. Segments about what has been said and even more about what had not been said. CNN does not miss a word, a pause, a look, a handshake.

I can see before me how Malia tries to understand. How she begins to compare what was recently said and what has now become. What did President Bush say and what is dad saying? Which words did Bush choose and which words does dad refrain from using.

Recently, the most important word was terrorism. President Bush went to the elections with one single question. Who was best at countering terrorism? Whoever was not for him was against him. It then be-

came clear who was a friend and who was an enemy. Eight years have passed. Bush's enemy remains while his group of friends has shrunk.

The daughter now hears a different tone, dad's tone. Less of the Wild West and more of a 'we', a 'we' that also includes 'the other'. She, the daughter, feels inside of her that something has changed. I can hear how she finally poses the question to her father, the question we should all ask, the question with four words:

Who is a terrorist?

## **Mandela for breakfast**

I am in South Africa. The year is 2003. Ten years ago President Mandela received the Nobel peace prize. He received it in Oslo but in Washington he was still a terrorist. Every morning I had breakfast at a small restaurant. This morning I am alone. I am reading a recently purchased book with the title, *No Easy Walk to Freedom*. The woman, a white woman who owns the restaurant comes up to me. After many cups of coffee and fried eggs we know each other quite well. The woman asks me what I'm reading and I show her the book, saying that I am trying to understand apartheid. I want to know how it once was.

The woman sits down in front of me. She wants to tell me. She has a need to discuss. She wants me to understand. It

became a long discussion. The most important part that I remember from the discussion over a fried egg, five years ago, is that she said that she had once asked her dad who Mandela was. “He is just a terrorist!” answered her dad, “We don’t mention his name in this house.” The woman posed the question when Mandela had been in jail for 15 years and still had 12 years to go. “For me,” said the woman, “Mandela was therefore the terrorist we were all afraid of. Mandela was evil, evil personified.”

The woman related, “I grew up in an all white neighbourhood, like a small Europe. We never spoke about apartheid, but in church, there were sermons about evil. The name Mandela was never mentioned, but we all knew the evil.”

### **The right to be right**

Who is a terrorist? Who decides that someone is a terrorist? Who is the judge who judges? Who has the right to be right? Daddy Obama will often get these questions. He will often ask himself these questions. Perhaps Malia will be the first to ask him these questions.

In 1990 the whole world watched Mandela become free. But Mandela had always been free. In front of the prison guard, in front of the prosecutor, in front of the judge, Mandela knew that he was the one who was free. Now he took the last step and thereby escaped the burden. Never again would he smash stones into gravel in the strong sunlight, never again would someone lock the door behind him. Three years later, Mandela received the Nobel peace prize. In the USA, it took 19 years before president and Nobel peace prize winner Mandela was removed from the US terrorist list. Yes it is true. He was only removed in 2008 during President Bush’s last year in power.

The powerful in the world are using an invisible scale. A scale that decides who is a terrorist. The scale was used in the trial against Mandela in 1963. The same scale is being used today. The invisible scale is

exhibited and becomes visible for us all. In one bowl one puts the hundreds of destroyed villages, almost 42 years of occupation, the establishment of apartheid, ghettos behind 720 km of separation wall, settlements, home demolitions, checkpoints, stolen land, uprooted and stolen olive trees, bombed UN school, bombed UN head quarters, bombed hospitals, killed children, killed women and men. In the other bowl one puts the resistance, the smuggled and fired rockets, the suicide bombers. One counts all the killed children, women and men.

All crimes are made visible. When one is ready the scale is imbalanced. The small bowl with the smuggled in rockets and suicide bombers weighs more and the judgment falls. The judgment fell on Mandela and the judgment today falls on the women and children in Gaza and on the West Bank.

In 1963, during the Rivonia trial, Mandela was charged with terrorism. By his side stood Ahmed Kathrada, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Andrew Mlangeni, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Motsoaledi, Walter Mkwazi, Denis Goldberg and Lionel Bernstein. Everyone was charged with sabotage and treason. Mandela, a terrorist together with nine of his friends. They knew they could be executed. In front of a white court of law Mandela did not want a defence counsel. Speaking in his own defence, he concluded with:

“During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against White domination, and I have fought against Black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.” For Mandela, to not resist would have been synonymous with unconditional capitulation.

Mandela had to wait until 2008 before

**The judgment fell on Mandela and the judgment today falls on the women and children in Gaza and on the West Bank**

## NAME CALLING

he was removed from the USA terror list. Mandela fought the evil of the time, the oppression of the time. It took almost 50 years before the world finally rallied round him. It was also then that the world finally understood that Mandela had been a free man all along. Confined but free. A freedom that he gave to de Klerk in 1990 and to the USA in 2008. To receive that freedom one first has to want to receive it.

In Israel there are also free people. People who are prepared to give their freedom away since they are free themselves. During the latest war on Gaza, the occupied were

bombed to pieces by the occupying power. Most Israelis backed their government and their soldiers. But not everyone. There was a shrinking group of free people, people who believe in a context with everyone's equal worth. This group still dreams about a society where everyone is included, and for this, one is prepared to struggle. **CT**

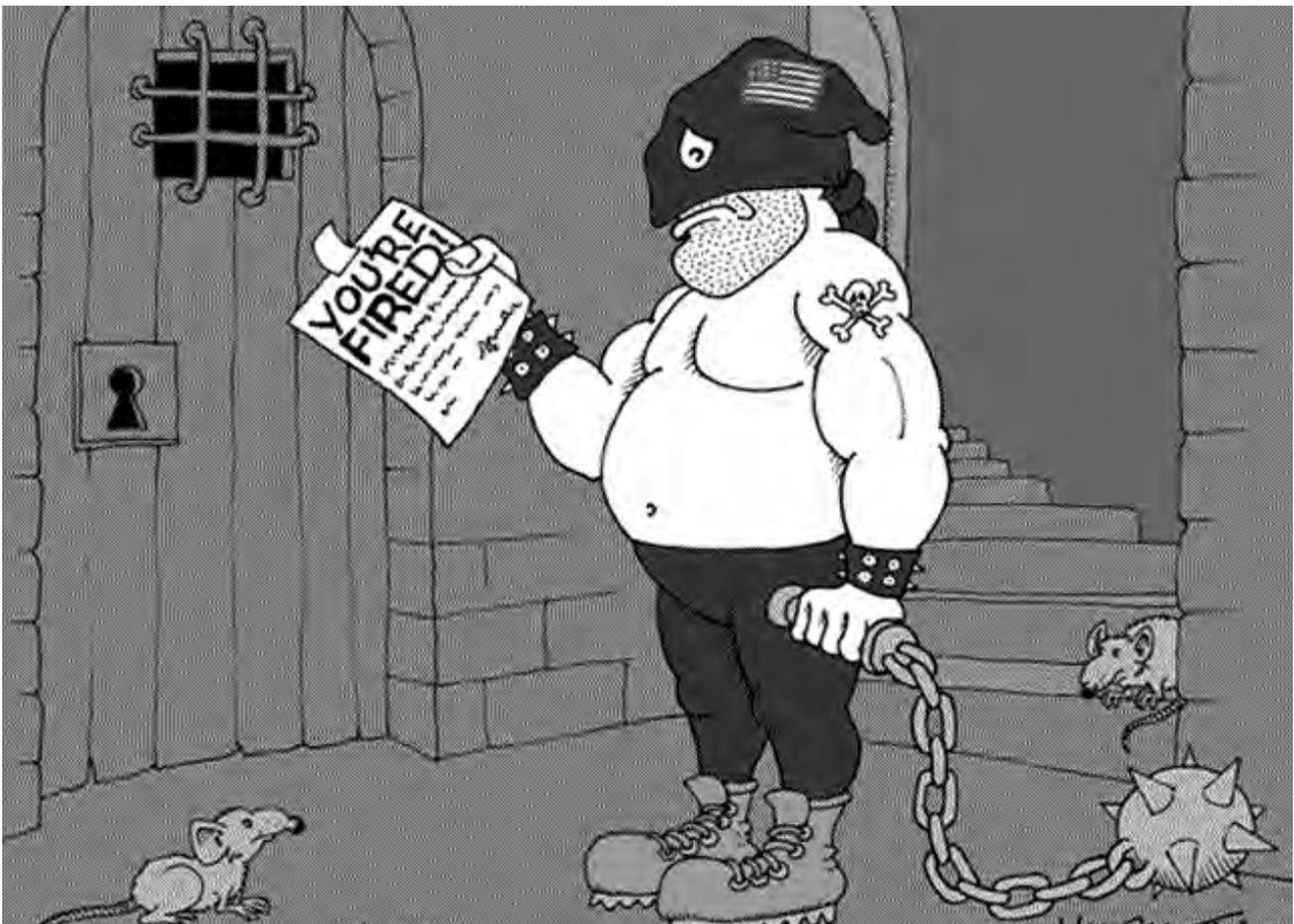
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## HURWITT'S EYE

Mark Hurwitt



## Job layoffs continue to rise after Obama takes office

# And then they came for me . . .

Crusading journalist **Lasantha Wickramatunga**, editor of Sri Lanka's *Sunday Leader* newspaper, was murdered on his way to work on Jan 8. This is his final column, published three days later

**N**o other profession calls on its practitioners to lay down their lives for their art save the armed forces and, in Sri Lanka, journalism. In the course of the past few years, the independent media have increasingly come under attack. Electronic and print-media institutions have been burnt, bombed, sealed and coerced. Countless journalists have been harassed, threatened and killed. It has been my honour to belong to all those categories and now especially the last.

I have been in the business of journalism a good long time. Indeed, 2009 will be *The Sunday Leader's* 15th year. Many things have changed in Sri Lanka during that time, and it does not need me to tell you that the greater part of that change has been for the worse. We find ourselves in the midst of a civil war ruthlessly prosecuted by protagonists whose bloodlust knows no bounds. Terror, whether perpetrated by terrorists or the state, has become the order of the day. Indeed, murder has become the primary tool whereby the state seeks to control the organs of liberty. Today it is the journalists, tomorrow it will be the judges. For neither group have the risks ever been higher or the stakes lower.

Why then do we do it? I often wonder that. After all, I too am a husband, and the father of three wonderful children. I too have responsibilities and obligations that

transcend my profession, be it the law or journalism. Is it worth the risk? Many people tell me it is not. Friends tell me to revert to the bar, and goodness knows it offers a better and safer livelihood. Others, including political leaders on both sides, have at various times sought to induce me to take to politics, going so far as to offer me ministries of my choice. Diplomats, recognising the risk journalists face in Sri Lanka, have offered me safe passage and the right of residence in their countries. Whatever else I may have been stuck for, I have not been stuck for choice.

But there is a calling that is yet above high office, fame, lucre and security. It is the call of conscience.

*The Sunday Leader* has been a controversial newspaper because we say it like we see it: whether it be a spade, a thief or a murderer, we call it by that name. We do not hide behind euphemism. The investigative articles we print are supported by documentary evidence thanks to the public-spiritedness of citizens who at great risk to themselves pass on this material to us. We have exposed scandal after scandal, and never once in these 15 years has anyone proved us wrong or successfully prosecuted us.

The free media serve as a mirror in which the public can see itself sans mascara and styling gel. From us you learn the state of

*The Sunday Leader* has been a controversial newspaper because we say it like we see it: whether it be a spade, a thief or a murderer, we call it by that name. We do not hide behind euphemism

## MY LAST WORDS

**If I seem angry and frustrated, it is only because most of my countrymen – and all of the government – cannot see this writing so plainly on the wall**

your nation, and especially its management by the people you elected to give your children a better future. Sometimes the image you see in that mirror is not a pleasant one. But while you may grumble in the privacy of your armchair, the journalists who hold the mirror up to you do so publicly and at great risk to themselves. That is our calling, and we do not shirk it.

Every newspaper has its angle, and we do not hide the fact that we have ours. Our commitment is to see Sri Lanka as a transparent, secular, liberal democracy. Think about those words, for they each has profound meaning. Transparent because government must be openly accountable to the people and never abuse their trust. Secular because in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society such as ours, secularism offers the only common ground by which we might all be united. Liberal because we recognise that all human beings are created different, and we need to accept others for what they are and not what we would like them to be. And democratic... well, if you need me to explain why that is important, you'd best stop buying this paper.

*The Sunday Leader* has never sought safety by unquestioningly articulating the majority view. Let's face it, that is the way to sell newspapers. On the contrary, as our opinion pieces over the years amply demonstrate, we often voice ideas that many people find distasteful. For example, we have consistently espoused the view that while separatist terrorism must be eradicated, it is more important to address the root causes of terrorism, and urged government to view Sri Lanka's ethnic strife in the context of history and not through the telescope of terrorism. We have also agitated against state terrorism in the so-called war against terror, and made no secret of our horror that Sri Lanka is the only country in the world routinely to bomb its own citizens. For these views we have been labelled traitors, and if this be treachery, we wear that label proudly.

Many people suspect that *The Sunday*

*Leader* has a political agenda: it does not. If we appear more critical of the government than of the opposition it is only because we believe that – pray excuse cricketering argot – there is no point in bowling to the fielding side. Remember that for the few years of our existence in which the UNP was in office, we proved to be the biggest thorn in its flesh, exposing excess and corruption wherever it occurred. Indeed, the steady stream of embarrassing exposés we published may well have served to precipitate the downfall of that government.

Neither should our distaste for the war be interpreted to mean that we support the Tigers. The LTTE are among the most ruthless and bloodthirsty organisations ever to have infested the planet. There is no gain-saying that it must be eradicated. But to do so by violating the rights of Tamil citizens, bombing and shooting them mercilessly, is not only wrong but shames the Sinhalese, whose claim to be custodians of the dhamma is forever called into question by this savagery, much of which is unknown to the public because of censorship.

### **Second class citizens**

What is more, a military occupation of the country's north and east will require the Tamil people of those regions to live eternally as second-class citizens, deprived of all self respect. Do not imagine that you can placate them by showering "development" and "reconstruction" on them in the post-war era. The wounds of war will scar them forever, and you will also have an even more bitter and hateful Diaspora to contend with. A problem amenable to a political solution will thus become a festering wound that will yield strife for all eternity. If I seem angry and frustrated, it is only because most of my countrymen – and all of the government – cannot see this writing so plainly on the wall.

It is well known that I was on two occasions brutally assaulted, while on another my house was sprayed with machine-gun fire. Despite the government's sanctimo-

nious assurances, there was never a serious police inquiry into the perpetrators of these attacks, and the attackers were never apprehended. In all these cases, I have reason to believe the attacks were inspired by the government. When finally I am killed, it will be the government that kills me.

The irony in this is that, unknown to most of the public, Mahinda and I have been friends for more than a quarter century. Indeed, I suspect that I am one of the few people remaining who routinely addresses him by his first name and uses the familiar Sinhala address *oya* when talking to him. Although I do not attend the meetings he periodically holds for newspaper editors, hardly a month passes when we do not meet, privately or with a few close friends present, late at night at President's House. There we swap yarns, discuss politics and joke about the good old days. A few remarks to him would therefore be in order here.

Mahinda, when you finally fought your way to the SLFP presidential nomination in 2005, nowhere were you welcomed more warmly than in this column. Indeed, we broke with a decade of tradition by referring to you throughout by your first name. So well known were your commitments to human rights and liberal values that we ushered you in like a breath of fresh air. Then, through an act of folly, you got yourself involved in the Helping Hambantota scandal. It was after a lot of soul-searching that we broke the story, at the same time urging you to return the money. By the time you did so several weeks later, a great blow had been struck to your reputation. It is one you are still trying to live down.

You have told me yourself that you were not greedy for the presidency. You did not have to hanker after it: it fell into your lap. You have told me that your sons are your greatest joy, and that you love spending time with them, leaving your brothers to operate the machinery of state. Now, it is clear to all who will see that that machinery has operated so well that my sons and

daughter do not themselves have a father.

In the wake of my death I know you will make all the usual sanctimonious noises and call upon the police to hold a swift and thorough inquiry. But like all the inquiries you have ordered in the past, nothing will come of this one, too. For truth be told, we both know who will be behind my death, but dare not call his name. Not just my life, but yours too, depends on it.

Sadly, for all the dreams you had for our country in your younger days, in just three years you have reduced it to rubble. In the name of patriotism you have trampled on human rights, nurtured unbridled corruption and squandered public money like no other President before you. Indeed, your conduct has been like a small child suddenly let loose in a toyshop. That analogy is perhaps inapt because no child could have caused so much blood to be spilled on this land as you have, or trampled on the rights of its citizens as you do. Although you are now so drunk with power that you cannot see it, you will come to regret your sons having so rich an inheritance of blood. It can only bring tragedy. As for me, it is with a clear conscience that I go to meet my Maker. I wish, when your time finally comes, you could do the same. I wish.

#### **I bowed to no man**

As for me, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I walked tall and bowed to no man. And I have not travelled this journey alone. Fellow journalists in other branches of the media walked with me: most of them are now dead, imprisoned without trial or exiled in far-off lands. Others walk in the shadow of death that your Presidency has cast on the freedoms for which you once fought so hard. You will never be allowed to forget that my death took place under your watch. As anguished as I know you will be, I also know that you will have no choice but to protect my killers: you will see to it that the guilty one is never convicted. You have no choice. I feel sorry for you, and Shiranthi will have a long time to

**You will never be allowed to forget that my death took place under your watch. As anguished as I know you will be, I also know that you will have no choice but to protect my killers: you will see to it that the guilty one is never convicted. You have no choice**

## MY LAST WORDS

I want my murderer to know that I am not a coward like he is, hiding behind human shields while condemning thousands of innocents to death. What am I among so many? It has long been written that my life would be taken, and by whom. All that remains to be written is when

spend on her knees when next she goes for Confession for it is not just her own sins which she must confess, but those of her extended family that keeps you in office.

As for the readers of *The Sunday Leader*, what can I say but Thank You for supporting our mission. We have espoused unpopular causes, stood up for those too feeble to stand up for themselves, locked horns with the high and mighty so swollen with power that they have forgotten their roots, exposed corruption and the waste of your hard-earned tax rupees, and made sure that whatever the propaganda of the day, you were allowed to hear a contrary view. For this I – and my family – have now paid the price that I have long known I will one day have to pay. I am – and have always been – ready for that. I have done nothing to prevent this outcome: no security, no precautions. I want my murderer to know that I am not a coward like he is, hiding behind human shields while condemning thousands of innocents to death. What am I among so many? It has long been written that my life would be taken, and by whom. All that remains to be written is when.

That *The Sunday Leader* will continue fighting the good fight, too, is written. For I did not fight this fight alone. Many more of us have to be – and will be – killed before The Leader is laid to rest. I hope my assassination will be seen not as a defeat of freedom but an inspiration for those who survive to step up their efforts. Indeed, I hope that it will help galvanise forces that will usher in a new era of human liberty in our beloved motherland. I also hope it will open the eyes of your President to the fact that however many are slaughtered in the name of patriotism, the human spirit will endure and flourish. Not all the Rajapakses combined can kill that.

People often ask me why I take such risks and tell me it is a matter of time before I am bumped off. Of course I know that: it is inevitable. But if we do not speak out now, there will be no one left to speak

for those who cannot, whether they be ethnic minorities, the disadvantaged or the persecuted. An example that has inspired me throughout my career in journalism has been that of the German theologian, Martin Niemöller. In his youth he was an anti-Semite and an admirer of Hitler. As Nazism took hold in Germany, however, he saw Nazism for what it was: it was not just the Jews Hitler sought to extirpate, it was just about anyone with an alternate point of view. Niemöller spoke out, and for his trouble was incarcerated in the Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps from 1937 to 1945, and very nearly executed. While incarcerated, Niemöller wrote a poem that, from the first time I read it in my teenage years, stuck hauntingly in my mind:

*First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.*

*Then they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist.*

*Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.*

*Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.*

If you remember nothing else, remember this: *The Leader* is there for you, be you Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, low-caste, homosexual, dissident or disabled. Its staff will fight on, unbowed and unafraid, with the courage to which you have become accustomed. Do not take that commitment for granted. Let there be no doubt that whatever sacrifices we journalists make, they are not made for our own glory or enrichment: they are made for you. Whether you deserve their sacrifice is another matter. As for me, God knows I tried. **CT**

*Murdered journalist Lasantha Wickramatunga was editor of Sri Lanka's Sunday Leader newspaper, in which this article was originally published*

# Payday parasites

Adam Turl explains how payday loan sharks get away with their rip-offs

*Saint Peter, don't you call me 'cause  
I can't go  
I owe my soul to the company store  
— Merle Travis, "Sixteen Tons"*

**T**he company store that used to prey on coal miners and their families, locking them forever into debt bondage, is mostly gone. But capitalism, always innovative, keeps coming up with new ways to prey on workers and pick their pockets.

The inglorious roots of the now infamous sub-prime mortgage lending “industry” were in storefront moneylenders, known as retail consumer finance offices. Some employed their own repo men to take back consumer goods purchased on defaulted loans. Sometimes, the loan officer and repo man was one and the same person.

In the 1970s, some retail consumer finance offices began to make high-risk mortgage loans. “Respectable” banks and corporations later followed them into this lucrative market. They’re still reeling from the experience.

But the modern version of the storefront moneylender—the payday loan industry—is making more loans than ever.

Payday loans are short-term loans that are paid back quickly—when the next paycheck arrives. The fee for the advance, while

seeming to be relatively modest, adds up to an outrageous rate when calculated on an annual basis, like interest rates are for other loans.

The payday loan sharks are hoping to seize the opportunity presented by the recession, and expand into the suburbs and online. As other routes for credit (credit cards, above-the-board bank loans and mortgages) become harder to come by, payday lenders are set to take up the slack—and rake in the cash.

Workers today are essentially compelled to go into debt. While they aren’t directly forced into debt by their bosses (as was the case with the old-time company stores), they have to resort to the likes of payday loans because paychecks fail to pay the rent and put food on the table.

For example, the Center for Responsible Lending (CRL) estimates that every year, more than 15 million U.S. workers pay nearly \$8 billion to borrow \$50 billion from payday lenders—an astonishing rate of profit for these lenders. Many predict that the recession will only cause these numbers to grow.

The payday loan industry is driven by two engines: the deregulation of consumer finance and the downward pressure on workers’ wages over the last 30 years. Thus, the number of payday loan outlets mushroomed from zero to more than 25,000 in

**Workers today are essentially compelled to go into debt. While they aren’t directly forced into debt by their bosses (as was the case with the old-time company stores), they have to resort to the likes of payday loans because paychecks fail to pay the rent and put food on the table**

**Cheryl Loebig took out six payday loans to buy a new car so she could get to work when her old car died in 2006. She had no other credit options open to her, since health care bills had forced her to declare bankruptcy. Two years later, she still owed \$1,000, although she had paid \$7,000 in fees, while renewing the loans every two weeks**

just 20 years. According to the state of California, the volume of payday lending is 10 times higher than a decade ago.

Payday loan companies differ from the 1960s storefront moneylenders because they tie their loans directly to future paychecks, and charge exorbitant and usurious interest rates that were largely illegal in the 1960s. These payday lenders are akin to “salary-buying” loan sharks in the early 1900s that charged 300 percent interest rates—targeting largely working-class immigrant neighborhoods.

Today’s payday loan companies generally charge around \$20 for every \$100 loaned over a two-week period—amounting to an annual interest rate of over 500 percent. These extortionate rates outdo even the worst of the “salary-buying” loan sharks of the previous century. The CRL estimates that the average payday consumer ends up paying \$800 to borrow \$300.

One of the largest companies, Tennessee-based Check Into Cash, offers one of the “better deals,” with annualized interest rates of “only” 459 percent. (Check Into Cash’s founder is estimated to be worth \$500 million).

The *Los Angeles Times* paraphrased critics, these companies essentially set “debt traps for the working poor,” hooking “them into an endless cycle of repeat borrowing.” The mounting financial pressures facing workers leave them with few options. Once in the grip of these lenders, the pressures only get worse.

As the *Times* reported, Sheryl Loebig took out six payday loans to buy a new car so she could get to work when her old car died in 2006. She had no other credit options open to her, since health care bills had forced her to declare bankruptcy. Two years later, she still owed \$1,000, although she had paid \$7,000 in fees, while renewing the loans every two weeks.

The newspaper also chronicled the struggle of DeQuae Woods, who paid \$1,800 in interest on a \$450 payday loan from the Missouri-based Quick Cash. She

later started a class-action lawsuit against the company alleging that Quick Cash violated Missouri lending laws.

The *Times* also pointed out that borrowers are frequently forced to “roll over or ‘flip’ their loans into new ones, sinking ever deeper into debt.” According to the CRL, some 99 percent of payday loans go to repeat borrowers, and payday loans are “flipped” eight times on average, more than doubling the cost of the loan.

As with past loans of this kind, payday loans disproportionately go to minorities, much like sub-prime housing loans. For example, one study shows that even when income is taken into account, Black neighborhoods in North Carolina have three times as many payday outlets as majority white areas.

### **Politicians rewarded**

In the heady days of the boom, state governments exempted payday loan companies from laws limiting interest rates. Local politicians were rewarded handsomely by the industry. A study by the National Institute of Money in State Politics showed that state-level candidates in California between 1999 and 2006 received more than \$800,000 in contributions from payday corporations.

However, the economic crisis and public opinion are prompting new regulations on payday lenders. For example, New Hampshire, Oregon and Ohio have all passed laws to curtail payday lending.

New Hampshire has capped annual payday loan interest rates at 36 percent, although Advance America—another large payday company—has already announced that it is looking for loopholes in the new law. Oregon has capped interest rates at 36 percent. Washington, D.C., capped rates at 24 percent and Ohio has capped rates at 28 percent. The State of Arkansas is suing 20 payday lenders that violated the state’s 17 percent cap on loan interest.

The U.S. Congress passed a law limiting interest rates on payday loans for members

of the armed forces to 36 percent. In fact, the CRL has noted that one of the main targets of predatory payday loans) has been military personnel. In 2004, the *New York Times* estimated that one-fourth of military households had to resort to payday loans.

The new laws are propelling a rush toward online loan operations with companies hoping to escape state regulations. For example, the Chicago-based CashNetUSA (owned by Cash America International, Inc., a national chain of pawn shops) is hiring dozens of new employees for its online payday loan operation. In September, the state of Illinois fined CashNetUSA \$30,125 for accounting “errors” in the company’s favor.

But while payday loan operations expanding rapidly, parasitic lending has always been endemic to capitalism.

As Karl Marx observed 160 years ago, “No sooner is the exploitation of the labor-

er by the manufacturer, so far, at an end, that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc.”

Today, rising outrage at these lenders has pressured the government into taking at least some action against payday lenders. But the bigger problem is that more and more workers are not being paid enough.

The only way to marginalize the payday loan is good, old-fashioned class struggle. That means organizing to demand higher wages, more benefits and better working conditions.

Because as another old song about coal miners put it, “Us poor folks haven’t got a chance unless we organize.” **CT**

*Adam Tirl is a writer with Socialist Worker. This article was originally published at [www.socialistworker.org](http://www.socialistworker.org)*

**In 2004, the *New York Times* estimated that one-fourth of military households had to resort to payday loans**



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# The sick psychology of entitlement

John Carney ponders corporate greed and its excuses

**Executives would rather risk their firm collapsing due to lack of capital than give up their big paydays**

**T**he news that Merrill Lynch paid out \$15 billion in bonuses is sure to ignite new questions about the wisdom of bailing out Wall Street. Merrill Lynch took \$10 billion from the TARP, allegedly to fill holes in its balance sheet. But instead of using that to repair its financial health, it simply put the money into the pockets of its employees. There is no way to defend this disgusting payout.

But that won't stop Bank of America, which now owns Merrill, from defending the bonuses. And across Wall Street there are lots of people who actually believe that Merrill did the right thing.

How can so many smart people be so dumb?

Easily. There is a sick psychology of entitlement on Wall Street that was created during the bubble years. Many simply cannot believe that they do not deserve huge pay packages. Their brains have not caught up with the idea that they are working in broken institutions that would be unable to pay to keep the lights on if not for the fact that Washington has given them billions of taxpayer dollars.

Of course, smart people are very good at rationalizing their fantasies, especially when the fantasy serves to make them money. There are three rationales they'll offer when pressed on this. Each one is easily skewered.

● "We made money. It was just one part of the firm that lost it all. So we deserve to be paid." Sorry, buddy. That's not the way capitalism works. Ask the guy who just lost his job installing seat belts in GM cars. He was really good at that but since no one is buying those cars, he's out of a job. Being really good at what you do doesn't matter if your firm is broke – and your firm is broke. It's now on taxpayer supported life-support.

● "We didn't use taxpayer money to pay the bonuses." This is the most ridiculous idea ever. Money is fungible. If you use billions to pay bonuses and then need to ask the government for money to stay alive, you are using taxpayer money to fill in the hole you dug by paying the bonuses.

● "We'll lose all the greatest people if we don't pay them." Oh really? Where will they go? Who, exactly, is going to hire them? Also: so what? That's how capitalism works. Failing firms that cannot afford to pay for talent lose that talent to successful firms. That's an important part of market discipline.

● "If we don't pay bonuses when firms take the TARP, they won't take it." This is the most sophisticated argument for huge bonuses. In Germany, this actually happened. As it turns out, executives would rather risk their firm collapsing due to lack of capital than give up their big paydays.

But there's an easy solution to this: throw the bastards out. The boards of every single financial company that turned down bailout bucks with a bonus limit could demand a full accounting of why a bank's executives think it is healthy enough to forego a bailout. And if they aren't satisfied they should just fire the management.

Look. We're not hysterical opponents of paying big bonuses. Actually, I'm on the record as defending huge bonuses from a couple of years ago. If your firm makes money, it can decide how to reward its employees. If it loses money, it can still decide to pay bonuses if it still has cash on hand. But when you pay yourself a bonus with taxpayer money you are simply taking money from someone who earned it and giving it to someone who didn't. If the government hadn't supplied the means for redistributing that money, you'd just be a mugger.

It was only a few months ago that we were being told that Merrill Lynch, among others, desperately needed billions of dol-

lars to survive, that without injections of new capital the financial system would come crashing down around us. If any of this was true, it should have been impossible for Merrill to pay out \$15 billion in bonuses. Even the sharpest critics of the bailout never imagined that it would be used to make wealthy idiots even wealthier.

All of this is a reminder of why it is very, very dangerous to allow the government to rescue firms instead of allowing the market to decide who should survive. Perhaps instead of a bailout, we should have confined the TARP to overseeing the orderly dissolution of failed financial institutions. **CT**

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**Even the sharpest critics of the bailout never imagined that it would be used to make wealthy idiots even wealthier**

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# The new surge of CEO self-sacrifice

Sam Pizzigati explains why CEOs won't feel your pain

**So have we all become just one big economic family, with everyone sharing the sacrifices that hard times demand? Not exactly. The paycheck hits that CEOs have been so proudly announcing turn out, upon closer inspection, to be a lot more pinprick than pain**

**B**eware of CEOs who feel your pain. These days, that's not easy. They seem to be just about everywhere. With the economy in free-fall, CEOs all across the United States have begun waging a veritable empathy offensive. From Wall Street to America's ultimate Main Street – in Peoria, Illinois – top execs are announcing what appear to be painfully deep pay cuts in their own personal compensation.

That's the least we CEOs can do, the message goes, in these most difficult of economic times. You average folks may be hurting, but we're hurting, too.

In Peoria, the CEO of the world's biggest construction equipment company will this year see his total pay drop by up to 50 percent. The company, Caterpillar Inc., announced this executive pay slash in December, along with plans to trim employee wages by up to 15 percent, lay off workers, and subject plants to temporary shutdowns. "We understand these decisions will disrupt the lives of many of our employees and their families," Caterpillar CEO Jim Owens noted apologetically, "and we regret the need to take these steps."

At Citigroup, the flailing global banking giant, top executives are regretting their plans to lay off 52,000 workers so much that they're denying themselves all the 2008 bonus cash they're entitled, by contract, to collect.

"The most senior leaders," Citi CEO Vikram Pandit nobly announced in a new year's memo, "should be affected the most."

Last week, Bank of America CEO Ken Lewis joined the ranks of CEO self-sacrificers. He'll be asking Bank of America's board of directors not to award any bonuses to the bank's top executive team.

"It is only fair," proclaimed Lewis, "that our most senior executives, who have been rewarded in past years when our company and stock price performed, should now share in the pain as performance has lagged."

Overall, notes the corporate consulting firm Watson Wyatt, about half of 264 recently surveyed major U.S. companies say they'll be cutting executive compensation in 2009. Another corporate consulting firm, Equilar, has found that 26 major companies actually filed papers locking in CEO salary cuts in 2008's final weeks.

So have we all become just one big economic family, with everyone sharing the sacrifices that hard times demand? Not exactly. The paycheck hits that CEOs have been so proudly announcing turn out, upon closer inspection, to be a lot more pinprick than pain.

Take, for instance, the 20 percent "salary cut" that FedEx CEO Fred Smith is now swallowing. Or the 25 percent salary dip for Motorola co-CEOs Greg Brown and Sanjay Jha. Or the 33 percent axe to the salary of

Western Digital chief exec John Coyne.

These all seem serious sacrifices. But salary cash only makes up a minor part of CEO pay packages. Top executives take in much more in stock and other incentive awards than they do from straight salary.

Essentially, notes Equilar research manager Alexander Cwirko-Godycki, CEOs who announce “salary cuts” are merely “cutting a portion of the smallest part of the pay package” that comes their way.

And all those bonuses that the top execs in high-finance are giving up? Maybe not such a mammoth sacrifice either. Consider the now bonus-less Citigroup CEO Vikram Pandit. Citi’s share price last year plunged from just under \$30 to just over \$3. The stock is currently trading under \$8. Last January, Citi rewarded CEO Pandit with a grant of 1 million Citi shares. If taxpayer bailout billions help the Citi share price rise just another \$5 in 2009, Pandit’s personal portfolio – from that share grant last year alone – will gain \$5 million.

Situations like Pandit’s abound. The Conference Board, a business research group, last month revealed that CEOs at the largest 10 percent of U.S. corporations are holding stocks and stock options in their companies worth “about 100 times” the value of their annual salary.

In other words, even modest increases in company share prices – and experts expect modest increases as the stock market begins to recover from last year’s record plunge – can translate into huge windfalls for company CEOs.

Some companies are already turbocharging these windfalls. Mike Ullman, the CEO of the J.C. Penney retail chain, last month received a new pay deal that guarantees him \$25 million in cash if the Penney share price rises from its depressed \$20 December level to \$32.75 over the next three years.

The Peoria-based Caterpillar, at first glance, doesn’t seem to be playing by the same CEO pay cut scam playbook. Caterpillar CEO Jim Owens is facing a 50 percent cut in his total pay, not just salary and bonus. But

shed no sympathy for Owens. He’s coming off a 15 percent pay hike in 2007 that brought his total take-home to over \$17.1 million.

Actually, we need to go considerably further back than 2007 to understand the colossal emptiness of Caterpillar’s current share-the-pain rhetoric. In the 1990s, Caterpillar helped lead Corporate America’s assault on the good union jobs that created modern America’s middle class.

Caterpillar prepped for that assault, in the 1980s, by expanding operations overseas to gradually reduce the unionized share of its workforce. Then, in 1991, Caterpillar execs provoked a strike by demanding the right to hire new workers at half the going rate.

In April 1992, five months into the strike, the union’s walkout ended – after Caterpillar threatened to hire permanent replacements for all the strikers. The union would strike again two years later, but no contract would be signed until 1998. By that time, Caterpillar annual profits had soared nearly four-fold and the company’s share price had tripled.

Caterpillar’s CEO at the time, Donald Fites, did quite well, too. Over the course of Caterpillar’s five most bitter years of 1990s labor strife, he collected \$10 million.

Workers, meanwhile, ended up with a contract that allowed Caterpillar to replace retirees with new hires paid 70 percent of the old wage.

Fites himself retired in 1999, but he re-emerged in the news this past November – just a month before Caterpillar’s current CEO announced his personal pay cut – as the latest inductee into the Association of Equipment Manufacturers hall of fame. Fites, noted one tribute at the hall of fame induction, guided Caterpillar “through some very difficult times.”

Those difficult times left Fites with a handsome personal fortune. His CEO successors, in our current “difficult times,” see no reason to settle for anything less. **CT**

*Sam Pizzigati edits Too Much, the online weekly on excess and inequality at [www.toomuchonline.org](http://www.toomuchonline.org)*

**The Conference Board, a business research group, last month revealed that CEOs at the largest 10 percent of U.S. corporations are holding stocks and stock options in their companies worth “about 100 times” the value of their annual salary**

# Change (in rhetoric) we can believe in

**William Blum** has a few suggestions for real change he'd like to see in Barack Obama's US foreign policy

**After many of these bombings in recent years, a spokesperson for the United States or NATO has solemnly declared: "We regret the loss of life." These are the same words used by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) on a number of occasions, but their actions were typically called "terrorist"**

I've said all along that whatever good changes might occur in regard to non-foreign policy issues, such as what's already taken place concerning the environment and abortion, the Obama administration will not produce any significantly worthwhile change in US foreign policy; little done in this area will reduce the level of misery that the American Empire regularly brings down upon humanity. And to the extent that Barack Obama is willing to clearly reveal what he believes about anything controversial, he appears to believe in the empire.

The Obama bubble should already have begun to lose some air with the multiple US bombings of Pakistan within the first few days following the inauguration. The Pentagon briefed the White House of its plans, and the White House had no objection. So bombs away – Barack Obama's first war crime. The dozens of victims were, of course, all bad people, including all the women and children. As with all these bombings, we'll never know the names of all the victims – It's doubtful that even Pakistan knows – or what crimes they had committed to deserve the death penalty. Some poor Pakistani probably earned a nice fee for telling the authorities that so-and-so bad guy lived in that house over there; too bad for all the others who happened to live with the bad guy, assuming of course that

the bad guy himself actually lived in that house over there.

The new White House press secretary, Robert Gibbs, declined to answer questions about the first airstrikes, saying "I'm not going to get into these matters."<sup>1</sup> Where have we heard that before?

After many of these bombings in recent years, a spokesperson for the United States or NATO has solemnly declared: "We regret the loss of life." These are the same words used by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) on a number of occasions, but their actions were typically called "terrorist".

I wish I could be an Obamaniac. I envy their enthusiasm. Here, in the form of an open letter to President Obama, are some of the "changes we can believe in" in foreign policy that would have to occur to win over the non-believers like me.

## **Iran**

Just leave them alone. There is no "Iranian problem". They are a threat to no one. Iran hasn't invaded any other country in centuries. No, President Ahmadinejad did not threaten Israel with any violence. Stop patrolling the waters surrounding Iran with American warships. Stop halting Iranian ships to check for arms shipments to Hamas. (That's generally regarded as an act of war.) Stop using Iranian dissident groups to carry out terrorist attacks inside Iran. Stop kidnapping

Iranian diplomats. Stop the continual spying and recruiting within Iran. And yet, with all that, you can still bring yourself to say: “If countries like Iran are willing to unclench their fist, they will find an extended hand from us.”<sup>2</sup>

Iran has as much right to arm Hamas as the US has to arm Israel. And there is no international law that says that the United States, the UK, Russia, China, Israel, France, Pakistan, and India are entitled to nuclear weapons, but Iran is not. Iran has every reason to feel threatened. Will you continue to provide nuclear technology to India, which has not signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, while threatening Iran, an NPT signatory, with sanctions and warfare?

#### **Russia**

Stop surrounding the country with new NATO members. Stop looking to instigate new “color” revolutions in former Soviet republics and satellites. Stop arming and supporting Georgia in its attempts to block the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the breakaway regions on the border of Russia. And stop the placement of anti-missile systems in Russia’s neighbors, the Czech Republic and Poland, on the absurd grounds that it’s to ward off an Iranian missile attack. It was Czechoslovakia and Poland that the Germans also used to defend their imperialist ambitions – The two countries were being invaded on the grounds that Germans there were being maltreated. The world was told.

“The U.S. government made a big mistake from the breakup of the Soviet Union,” said former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev last year. “At that time the Russian people were really euphoric about America and the U.S. was really number one in the minds of many Russians.” But, he added, the United States moved aggressively to expand NATO and appeared gleeful at Russia’s weakness.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Cuba**

Making it easier to travel there and send remittances is very nice (if, as expected, you

do that), but these things are dwarfed by the need to end the US embargo. In 1999, Cuba filed a suit against the United States for \$181.1 billion in compensation for economic losses and loss of life during the almost forty years of this aggression. The suit held Washington responsible for the death of 3,478 Cubans and the wounding and disabling of 2,099 others. We can now add ten more years to all three figures. The negative, often crippling, effects of the embargo extend into every aspect of Cuban life.

In addition to closing Guantanamo prison, the adjacent US military base established in 1903 by American military force should be closed and the land returned to Cuba.

The Cuban Five, held prisoner in the United States for over 10 years, guilty only of trying to prevent American-based terrorism against Cuba, should be released. Actually there were 10 Cubans arrested; five knew that they could expect no justice in an American court and pled guilty to get shorter sentences.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Iraq**

Freeing the Iraqi people to death ... Nothing short of a complete withdrawal of all US forces, military and contracted, and the closure of all US military bases and detention and torture centers, can promise a genuine end to US involvement and the beginning of meaningful Iraqi sovereignty. To begin immediately. Anything less is just politics and imperialism as usual. In six years of war, the Iraqi people have lost everything of value in their lives. As the Washington Post reported in 2007: “It is a common refrain among war-weary Iraqis that things were better before the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.”<sup>5</sup> The good news is that the Iraqi people have 5,000 years experience in crafting a society to live in. They should be given the opportunity.

#### **Saudi Arabia**

Demand before the world that this government enter the 21st century (or at least the 20th), or the United States has to stop pretending that it gives a damn about hu-

**Iran has as much right to arm Hamas as the US has to arm Israel. And there is no international law that says that the United States, the UK, Russia, China, Israel, France, Pakistan, and India are entitled to nuclear weapons, but Iran is not**

## ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

**And please try not to repeat the nonsense about Venezuela being a dictatorship. It's a freer society than the United States. It has, for example, a genuine opposition daily media, non-existent in the United States. If you doubt that, try naming a single American daily newspaper or TV network that was unequivocally against the US invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Panama, Grenada, and Vietnam. Or even against two of them? How about one?**

man rights, women, homosexuals, religious liberty, and civil liberties. The Bush family had long-standing financial ties to members of the Saudi ruling class. What will be your explanation if you maintain the status quo?

### **Haiti**

Reinstate the exiled Jean Bertrand Aristide to the presidency, which he lost when the United States overthrew him in 2004. To seek forgiveness for our sins, give the people of Haiti lots and lots of money and assistance.

### **Colombia**

Stop giving major military support to a government that for years has been intimately tied to death squads, torture, and drug trafficking; in no other country in the world have so many progressive candidates for public office, unionists, and human-rights activists been murdered. Are you concerned that this is the closest ally the United States has in all of Latin America?

### **Venezuela**

Hugo Chavez may talk too much but he's no threat except to the capitalist system of Venezuela and, by inspiration, elsewhere in Latin America. He has every good historical reason to bad-mouth American foreign policy, including Washington's role in the coup that overthrew him in 2002. If you can't understand why Chavez is not in love with what the United States does all over the world, I can give you a long reading list.

Put an end to support for Chavez's opposition by the Agency for International Development, the National Endowment for Democracy, and other US government agencies. US diplomats should not be meeting with Venezuelans plotting coups against Chavez, nor should they be interfering in elections.

Send Luis Posada from Florida to Venezuela, which has asked for his extradition for his masterminding the bombing of a Cuban airline in 1976, taking 73 lives. Extradite the man, or try him in the US, or stop talk-

ing about the war on terrorism.

And please try not to repeat the nonsense about Venezuela being a dictatorship. It's a freer society than the United States. It has, for example, a genuine opposition daily media, non-existent in the United States. If you doubt that, try naming a single American daily newspaper or TV network that was unequivocally against the US invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Panama, Grenada, and Vietnam. Or even against two of them? How about one? Is there a single one that supports Hamas and/or Hezbollah? A few weeks ago, the *New York Times* published a story concerning a possible Israeli attack upon Iran, and stated: "Several details of the covert effort have been omitted from this account, at the request of senior United States intelligence and administration officials, to avoid harming continuing operations." <sup>6</sup>

Alas, Mr. President, among other disparaging remarks, you've already accused Chavez of being "a force that has interrupted progress in the region." <sup>7</sup> This is a statement so contrary to the facts, even to plain common sense, so hypocritical given Washington's history in Latin America, that I despair of you ever freeing yourself from the ideological shackles that have bound every American president of the past century. It may as well be inscribed in their oath of office – that a president must be antagonistic toward any country that has expressly rejected Washington as the world's savior. You made this remark in an interview with Univision, Venezuela's leading, implacable media critic of the Chavez government. What regional progress could you be referring to, the police state of Colombia?

### **Bolivia**

Stop American diplomats, Peace Corps volunteers, Fulbright scholars, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, from spying and fomenting subversion inside Bolivia. As the first black president of the United States, you could try to cultivate empathy toward, and from, the first indig-

enous president of Bolivia. Congratulate Bolivian president Evo Morales on winning a decisive victory on a recent referendum to approve a new constitution which enshrines the rights of the indigenous people and, for the first time, institutes separation of church and state.

### **Afghanistan**

Perhaps the most miserable people on the planet, with no hope in sight as long as the world's powers continue to bomb, invade, overthrow, occupy, and slaughter in their land. The US Army is planning on throwing 30,000 more young American bodies into the killing fields and is currently building eight new major bases in southern Afghanistan. Is that not insane? If it makes sense to you I suggest that you start the practice of the president accompanying the military people when they inform American parents that their child has died in a place called Afghanistan.

If you pull out from this nightmare, you could also stop bombing Pakistan. Leave even if it results in the awful Taliban returning to power. They at least offer security to the country's wretched, and indications are that the current Taliban are not all fundamentalists.

But first, close Bagram prison and other detention camps, which are worse than Guantanamo.

And stop pretending that the United States gives a damn about the Afghan people and not oil and gas pipelines which can bypass Russia and Iran. The US has been endeavoring to fill the power vacuum in Central Asia created by the Soviet Union's dissolution in order to assert Washington's domination over a region containing the second largest proven reserves of petroleum and natural gas in the world. Is Afghanistan going to be your Iraq?

### **Israel**

The most difficult task for you, but the one that would earn for you the most points. To declare that Israel is no longer the 51st state

of the union would bring down upon your head the wrath of the most powerful lobby in the world and its many wealthy followers, as well as the Christian-fundamentalist Right and much of the media. But if you really want to see peace between Israel and Palestine you must cut off all military aid to Israel, in any form: hardware, software, personnel, money. And stop telling Hamas it has to recognize Israel and renounce violence until you tell Israel that it has to recognize Hamas and renounce violence.

### **North Korea**

Bush called the country part of "the axis of evil", and Kim Jong Il a "pygmy" and "a spoiled child at a dinner table." <sup>8</sup> But you might try to understand where Kim Jong Il is coming from. He sees that UN agencies went into Iraq and disarmed it, and then the United States invaded. The logical conclusion is not to disarm, but to go nuclear.

### **Central America**

Stop interfering in the elections of Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, year after year. The Cold War has ended. And though you can't undo the horror perpetrated by the United States in the region in the 1980s, you can at least be kind to the immigrants in the US who came here trying to escape the long-term consequences of that terrible decade.

### **Vietnam**

In your inauguration speech you spoke proudly of those "who have carried us up the long, rugged path towards prosperity and freedom ... For us, they fought and died, in places like ... Khe Sanh." So it is your studied and sincere opinion that the 58,000 American servicemembers who died in Vietnam, while helping to kill over a million Vietnamese, gave their life for our prosperity and freedom? Would you care to defend that proposition without resort to any platitudes?

You might also consider this: In all the years since the Vietnam War ended, the

**if you really want to see peace between Israel and Palestine you must cut off all military aid to Israel, in any form: hardware, software, personnel, money. And stop telling Hamas it has to recognize Israel and renounce violence until you tell Israel that it has to recognize Hamas and renounce violence**

## ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

**The British are fond of saying that the Empire was won on the playing fields of Eton. Americans can say that the road to Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and Bagram began in the classrooms of the School of the Americas**

three million Vietnamese suffering from diseases and deformities caused by US sprayings of the deadly chemical “Agent Orange” have received from the United States no medical attention, no environmental remediation, no compensation, and no official apology.

### **Kosovo**

Stop supporting the most gangster government in the world, which has specialized in kidnaping, removing human body parts for sale, heavy trafficking in drugs, trafficking in women, various acts of terrorism, and ethnic cleansing of Serbs. This government would not be in power if the Bush administration had not seen them as America’s natural allies. Do you share that view? UN Resolution 1244, adopted in 1999, reaffirmed the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to which Serbia is now the recognized successor state, and established that Kosovo was to remain part of Serbia. Why do we have a huge and permanent military base in that tiny self-declared country?

### **NATO**

From protecting Europe against a [mythical] Soviet invasion to becoming an occupation army in Afghanistan. Put an end to this historical anachronism, what Russian leader Vladimir called “the stinking corpse of the cold war.”<sup>9</sup> You can accomplish this simply by leaving the organization. Without the United States and its never-ending military actions and officially-designated enemies, the organization would not even have the pretense of a purpose, which is all it has left. Members have had to be bullied, threatened and bribed to send armed forces to Afghanistan.

### **School of the Americas**

Latin American countries almost never engage in war with each other, or any other countries. So for what kind of warfare are its military officers being trained by the United

States? To suppress their own people. Close this school (the name has now been changed to protect the guilty) at Ft. Benning, Georgia that the United States has used to prepare two generations of Latin American military officers for careers in overthrowing progressive governments, death squads, torture, holding down dissent, and other charming activities. The British are fond of saying that the Empire was won on the playing fields of Eton. Americans can say that the road to Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and Bagram began in the classrooms of the School of the Americas.

### **Torture**

Your executive orders concerning this matter of utmost importance are great to see, but they still leave something to be desired. They state that the new standards ostensibly putting an end to torture apply to any “armed conflict”. But what if your administration chooses to view future counterterrorism and other operations as not part of an “armed conflict”? And no mention is made of “rendition” – kidnaping a man off the street, throwing him in a car, throwing a hood over his head, stripping off his clothes, placing him in a diaper, shackling him from every angle, and flying him to a foreign torture dungeon.

Why can’t you just say that this and all other American use of proxy torturers is banned? Forever.

It’s not enough to say that you’re against torture or that the United States “does not torture” or “will not torture”. George W. Bush said the same on a regular basis. To show that you’re not George W. Bush you need to investigate those responsible for the use of torture, even if this means prosecuting a small army of Bush administration war criminals.

You aren’t off to a good start by appointing former CIA official John O. Brennan as your top adviser on counterterrorism. Brennan has called “rendition” a “vital tool” and praised the CIA’s interrogation techniques

for providing “lifesaving” intelligence.<sup>10</sup> Whatever were you thinking, Barack?

**Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed al Megrahi**

Free this Libyan man from his prison in Scotland, where he is serving a life sentence after being framed by the United States for the bombing of PanAm flight 103 in December 1988, which took the lives of 270 people over Scotland. Iran was actually behind the bombing – as revenge for the US shooting down an Iranian passenger plane in July, killing 290 – not Libya, which the US accused for political reasons.<sup>11</sup> Nations do not behave any more cynical than that. Megrahi lies in prison now dying of cancer, but still the US and the UK will not free him. It would be too embarrassing to admit to 20 years of shameless lying

Mr. President, there’s a lot more to be undone in our foreign policy if you wish to be taken seriously as a moral leader like Martin Luther King, Jr.: banning the use of depleted uranium, cluster bombs, and other dreadful weapons; joining the International Criminal Court instead of trying to sabotage it; making a number of other long-overdue apologies in addition to the one mentioned re Vietnam; and much more. You’ve got your work cut out for you if you really want to bring some happiness to this sad old world, make America credible and beloved again, stop creating armies of anti-American terrorists, and win over people like me.

And do you realize that you can eliminate all state and federal budget deficits in the United States, provide free health care and free university education to every American,

pay for an unending array of worthwhile social and cultural programs, all just by ending our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, not starting any new ones, and closing down the Pentagon’s 700+ military bases? Think of it as the peace dividend Americans were promised when the Cold War would end some day, but never received. How about you delivering it, Mr. President? It’s not too late.

But you are committed to the empire; and the empire is committed to war. Too bad. **CT**

**Notes**

1. Washington Post, January 24, 2009
2. Interview with al Arabiya TV, January 27, 2009
3. Gorbachev speaking in Florida, South Florida Sun-Sentinel, April 17, 2008
4. <http://www.killinghope.org/bblum6/polpris.htm>
5. Washington Post, May 5, 2007, p.1
6. New York Times, January 11, 2009
7. Washington Post, January 19, 2009
8. Newsweek, May 27, 2002
9. Press Trust of India (news agency), December 21, 2007
10. Washington Post, November 26, 2008
11. <http://www.killinghope.org/bblum6/panam.htm>

*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; Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*  
His website is [www.killinghope.org](http://www.killinghope.org)

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# Why we never get the change we need

Standing up to the government can be a risky business, says **Tim Buchholz**. Consider what happened to Mark Cuban and Elliot Spitzer

**Any bank that can afford to buy another bank doesn't need my tax dollars**

I have a friend who often asks me, “Do you think most people realize how incompetent their leaders are?” Maybe, as Bush said in his final press conference, we “misunderestimate” them. I know it must be very difficult to run a country. I’m not saying I could do it better, although I’d love the chance to try, but it gets very difficult to keep believing that our best interests are really that important to our leaders. Are they really tied to corporate interests, to the not so mighty dollar, more than to the will of the people? I hope not, but it gets harder and harder every day to think otherwise. And when someone finally stands up, it’s amazing to see how quickly they are the ones that fall.

I was reading an article about the bailout, and the author was discussing the lack of transparency in the way the money is being handed out. Obama recently said that the next \$350 billion will come with more transparency, but they promised us that with the initial \$350 billion.

And even though Congress is calling out the banks, demanding to know how our money is being spent, surprise surprise, nothing changes. Reuters reported that the TARP money is being given to “healthy” banks. Do healthy banks need to be bailed out? Wouldn’t you think it would go to the banks that are struggling? Instead, it appears some of those “healthy” banks are

using the money to buy the “unhealthy” ones.

My office banks with Chase, and several weeks ago I was sent to do the daily bank run. While waiting in line I heard the gentleman in front of me talking to the clerk, telling her how Chase is now the largest bank in America, passing CitiGroup.

If you track Chase throughout this financial crisis, they have made some major acquisitions, such as Washington Mutual and the Federal Reserve financed buyout of Bear Sterns, all while being a struggling “healthy” bank and receiving at least \$25 Billion in aid from the bailout. Any bank that can afford to buy another bank doesn’t need my tax dollars. I later found that Chase is only number 2, behind Bank of America after their purchase of Merrill Lynch. So, instead of helping banks begin loaning again, which was the point of the money, the banks are doing “what they wilt.”

## **Tracking the bailout**

So, Mark Cuban, #446 on *Forbe’s* 2008 “The World’s Billionaires” list, started a website called [BailoutSleuth.com](http://BailoutSleuth.com), which will be, according to the website, “tracking the federal government’s \$700 billion plan to rescue troubled banks and financial services companies by using public money to buy distressed assets or inject additional

capital.” The first post was on October 13. Oddly enough, on November 17th, the SEC filed a complaint against Cuban alleging insider trading from 2004. Why did it take 4 years for this case to be filed? And isn’t it a little convenient that it came a month after he started his website?

Then I was surprised to find former New York Governor and Attorney General Elliot Spitzer had written an editorial in the *Washington Post* released on February 14th, 2008 entitled “Predatory Lenders’ Partner in Crime – How the Bush Administration Stopped the States from Stepping In to Help Consumers.” The article starts, “Several years ago, state attorneys general and others involved in consumer protection began to notice a marked increase in a range of predatory lending practices by mortgage lenders.

Some were misrepresenting the terms of loans, making loans without regard to consumers’ ability to repay, making loans with deceptive “teaser” rates that later ballooned astronomically, packing loans with undisclosed charges and fees, or even paying illegal kickbacks. These and other practices, we noticed, were having a devastating effect on home buyers.

In addition, the widespread nature of these practices, if left unchecked, threatened our financial markets. Even though predatory lending was becoming a national problem, the Bush administration looked the other way and did nothing to protect American homeowners. In fact, the government chose instead to align itself with the banks that were victimizing consumers.” He says that, frustrated with the Federal Government, he and the attorney generals of the remaining 49 states put together new rules and regulations at the state level to protect consumers.

“What did the Bush administration do in response?” he asks. “Did it reverse course and decide to take action to halt this burgeoning scourge? As Americans are now painfully aware, with hundreds of thousands of homeowners facing foreclo-

sure and our markets reeling, the answer is a resounding no. Not only did the Bush administration do nothing to protect consumers, it embarked on an aggressive and unprecedented campaign to prevent states from protecting their residents from the very problems to which the federal government was turning a blind eye.” Spitzer says that this was done through, “an obscure federal agency called the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC).”

Spitzer says since the Civil War this agency has been examining national banks books and making sure they were balanced, but in 2003, “during the height of the predatory lending crisis, the OCC invoked a clause from the 1863 National Bank Act to issue formal opinions preempting all state predatory lending laws, thereby rendering them inoperative.

The OCC also promulgated new rules that prevented states from enforcing any of their own consumer protection laws against national banks. The federal government’s actions were so egregious and so unprecedented that all 50 state attorneys general, and all 50 state banking superintendents, actively fought the new rules.” So all the new regulations they had put together became null and void.

### The scandal

I doubt many of us read or remember this article by Spitzer, but I’m sure many of us remember the scandal that came out in the *New York Times* on March 10th. It seems that the day before Spitzer’s article was released he was being investigated for his involvement in a prostitution ring. Two days after the *New York Times* article, and about a month after his article, he announced his resignation.

See what happens when you stand up to the Government? I am not saying that what these men did wasn’t wrong, though after reading the case against Cuban, I think I would have done the same thing he did. And after seeing the pictures of Elliot Spitzer’s friend, I might have done the

**Surely the crimes they were accused of pale in comparison to what they were trying to bring to the light**

## FALLING HEROES

We nearly impeached Clinton for his “antics” in the Oval Office, but Bush got away with taking us to war on false information

same thing on that front too. But, surely the crimes they were accused of pale in comparison to what they were trying to bring to the light.

These cases, along with the Valerie Plame/Scooter Libby case, the recent report that Obama’s new Secretary of the Treasury can’t seem to do his own taxes right, and many more too numerous to count, make it very difficult to believe in the integrity of our government. The sad reality is, it appears the only way to take on the government and win is to have a clean slate yourself, which we all know is a rare case among today’s politicians. The power of the press and public perception seem to be stronger than the power of truth.

### Finding the pork

It reminds me of the second draft of the Bailout Bill, the one that passed Congress. The first bill was just three pages long, the revised bill that finally passed came in around 400. And upon reading all the new perks and pork, I could foresee the headlines in the paper the following day. “Congressman Such and Such voted against the much needed tax break for wooden arrows, designed to level the playing field in our district, but the Congressman’s opponent

in the next election vows to fight for the tax break for the district’s critical industry.” Or the challenger’s campaign ad in the next election, said in a deep voice with scary sounding music playing in the background: “Congressman Such and Such doesn’t support wooden arrows, how can he (or she) support the people of our district? Vote for So and So. I’m So and So and I approved this message.”

Until we are able to find a better crop to pick our politicians from, and remember, we are the pool, I think we need to use a little of our own common sense. “Let him without sin cast the first stone” is a hard line to follow when you are dealing with a bunch of sinners.

We need to evaluate the crimes. We nearly impeached Clinton for his “antics” in the Oval Office, but Bush got away with taking us to war on false information. And as the apparent “mistakes” keep adding up, and my friend keeps telling me how incompetent they are, maybe Bush is right, and we are “misunderestimating” our leaders. Maybe they knew what they were doing all along. **CT**

*Tim Buchholz is a freelance writer living in Ohio*

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# Future shock at army science conference

**Nick Turse** visits the Army's big science and technology show and is not impressed by the eco-explosives, the bleeding bear and the Armani-clad super soldier

**O**n paper, every session looked like gold to me. Technology and the Warfighter. Neuroscience and Its Potential Applications. Lethality Technologies. Autonomous/Unmanned Systems. (Robots!)

But when I got to the luxury hotel in sunny Orlando, Florida, for the 26th Army Science Conference, all that potentially glittered, it often seemed, was nowhere to be found — except, perhaps, in the threads of the unlikeliest of military uniforms.

I expected to hear about nefarious new technologies. To see tomorrow's killing machines in a dazzling exhibit hall. To learn something about the Army's secret plans for the coming decades. To be awed — or disgusted — by a peek at the next 50 years of war-making.

What I stumbled into, however, seemed more like a cross between a dumbed-down academic conference and a weekend wealth expo, paired with an exhibit hall whose contents might not have rivaled those of a regional auto show. I came away knowing less about the next half century of lethal technologies than the last eight years of wheel-spinning, never-winning occupations of foreign lands.

If you didn't know that the Army held its science conference last month — much less that they've been going on biennially since 1957 — you can't be faulted. Only a

handful of reporters were on the premises, most of them with small defense industry publications.

Officially, according to its own publicity handout, the conference was intended “to promote and strategically communicate that the Army is a high-tech force, enable the public to understand what the Army S&T [science and technology] community does to support the Soldier, and enable conference attendees to better appreciate the potential emerging technologies have to provide disruptive capabilities to our Soldiers in the future.”

In reality, it was a junket for Army civilian personnel, enlisted troops, and officers, along with academic researchers from top universities, representatives of defense contractors, a handful of foreign military folks from across the globe, and, for one day, about 100 grade school children. It was a chance for the thousand or so attendees to schmooze and booze, compare notes, and trade business cards.

Don't get me wrong. The military does some striking science and, not surprisingly, some of the high-tech research presented was nothing short of mind-blowing. Who knew you could potentially grow a battery — for a flashlight or a truck — the way a clam grows a shell? Or that memories in mice can be selectively erased? But all too often the talks and panels were mind-

**What I stumbled into, seemed more like a cross between a dumbed-down academic conference and a weekend wealth expo, paired with an exhibit hall whose contents might not have rivaled those of a regional auto show.**

## WAR GAMES

**The only thing less impressive than the press corps on hand for that day's unveiling (two slightly rumpled "defense" reporters and me) was the unveiled itself: an interactive 360-degree, 3D holographic display**

numbing, leaving plenty of time for catered breaks, the downing of overpriced drinks, and a chance to wander through hallways filled with the military/scientific version of those posters you invariably see at high school science fairs, including the one that should have won all awards for pure indecipherability:

"Osteomyelitis Treatment with Nanometer-sized Hydroxyapatite Particles as a Delivery Vehicle for a Ciprofloxacin-bisphosphonate Conjugate; New Fluoroquinolone-bisphosphonate Derivatives Show Similar Binding Affinity to Hydroxyapatite and Improved Antibacterial Activity Against Drug-resistant Pathogens."

Then there was the exhibit hall.

### **A Disembodied head, a cobra, and a bleeding BEAR**

With a military budget approaching a trillion dollars, you'd think at least the exhibits would wow you. No such luck. At the entrance to the "Coquina Ballroom" was no futuristic space tank, but an old Canadian Cougar – a 1970s-vintage general purpose armored vehicle loaned to the U.S. Army by America's northern neighbors for research purposes. The first time I passed it, I was heading for a press-only preview of the latest innovation produced by the Institute for Creative Technologies – an Army-founded and funded center at the University of Southern California set up in 1999 "to build a partnership among the entertainment industry, army and academia with the goal of creating synthetic experiences so compelling that participants react as if they are real."

The only thing less impressive than the press corps on hand for that day's unveiling (two slightly rumpled "defense" reporters and me) was the unveiled itself: an interactive 360-degree, 3D holographic display. Sure, it sounds impressive, but if, back in 1977, you saw that fake Princess Leia hologram in Star Wars, then you're already, in your imagination, light years ahead of what the military has produced. In fact,

if you caught CNN reporter Jessica Yellin appearing by hologram from Chicago in Wolf Blitzer's studio on election night (and you were me), you might have wondered whether you shouldn't have been attending the latest Cable News Science Conference rather than this one.

Basically, what I saw was a man sitting behind a curtain while his head was projected onto a nearby fast-spinning piece of polished metal. In other words, a black-and-white, three-dimensional, disembodied head right out of some campy 1950s sci-fi film "spoke" to us via a perfectly ordinary microphone and speaker set-up. When perfected, claimed ICT, the technology would be used for 3D visual communication, 3D gestures evidently being considered vastly superior to the 2D variant on or off the battlefield.

I walked away convinced that Dick Tracy could have done it a lot better. The only advantage of the current Army system is that it should be fairly cheap to reproduce – now that they know how to do it – since it uses relatively low-tech, off-the-shelf (if modded out) components. Why they need to do it in the first place isn't so clear.

But hope springs eternal... so I headed for the nearby robot exhibits where a pitchman was touting one upcoming battlefield model in a slightly defensive fashion: "It's not the T-1000, but we're workin' on it." He was referring, of course, to the morphing late-model Terminator that tried to take out Arnold Schwarzenegger (aka model T-101) in Terminator 2.

The sparse audience was noticeably underwhelmed, as his robot lacked anything approaching a liquid metal structure or even a Schwarzeneggerian android physique. It was, in fact, a little tracked vehicle resembling a slightly bulked up, if markedly slower, radio-controlled toy car. It certainly looked ready for the battlefield – of my childhood playroom floor, where it could have taken on my Milton Bradley-made programmable, futuristic toy tank, Big Trak.

Another nearby ‘bot was BEAR – the Battlefield Extraction Assist Robot – a four-foot-tall would-be rescue automaton with tank treads. Its claim to fame seems to be that it can rear up to six feet tall, with its tracks becoming legs, and walk. Of course, with its rudimentary teddy bear head, it’s likely to crack up friend and foe alike on any futuristic battlescape.

I’d read about BEAR for years, but had never seen it in person (so to speak). Not only was it remarkably balky, but it bore a disappointing lack of resemblance to the renderings of it on the website of its maker, Vecna Robotics. One of its pitchmen spent a great deal of time kicking very specific objects into a very specific position so BEAR could actually lift them – not exactly a battlefield likelihood – while another gave an apologetic spiel explaining the robot’s many drawbacks, including its low battery life. “Obviously, this couldn’t go on a battlefield,” he said. Soon after, red liquid began to pool on the floor just beneath the BEAR. “It bleeds like a human, too,” one sarcastic conference-goer remarked as the robot hemorrhaged hydraulic fluid.

Strapped into a Cobra helicopter gunship simulator – actually the cockpit of an old chopper best known for its service in Vietnam – I was a BEAR-like bust myself. Pilots, I was assured, can pick up the system within 10 minutes and indeed the woman strapped in when I got there – the self-proclaimed “world’s worst video game player” – had just done a serviceable job of “flying” the Cobra and knocking out three enemy vehicles on its surprisingly low-tech video game screen. Donning a wired-up flight vest that buzzes your body whenever your helicopter is drifting, I took a seat at the controls. My lower brain, the designer assured me, would take over and I’d steer intuitively.

Not a chance. A “virtual wind” caused the copter to drift and I fired way too wide at the enemy tank and the mobile missile launcher, even with the most generous blast-radius imaginable; then I missed an

enemy copter too, which was just getting away when I launched a second rocket that exploded nowhere nearby but somehow caused it to erupt in a fireball anyway. My performance was all too pathetic, given that the simulator struck me as state-of-the-art – circa 1997. Humbled by the chopped-up chopper with Nintendo 64-quality graphics, I wandered off.

On opening night, I found myself walking in the wake of a French General who seemed to be everywhere at the conference, with her aide de camp always in tow. She was drinking red wine (the aide, a Bud) and their path through a sea of pasta, pork, and turkey-gorging corporate suits, federally-funded professors, and military men and women taking advantage of the one-night-only buffet seemed hardly less aimless than mine.

Still, I pressed on, past a giant orb that looked like a gravitationally-challenged weather balloon – actually, a DSCT or Deployable Satellite Communication Terminal portable satellite system – until I stumbled upon the “Future Force Warrior,” accompanied by Jean-Louis (“Dutch”) De-Gay, an Army veteran who serves as a civilian equipment specialist at the U.S. Army Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center.

#### **The Armani-clad super soldier**

Early in the decade, the Army began promoting the idea of the “Future Force Warrior” – then known as the “Objective Force Warrior.” It was touted as a robo-suit with on-board computers, advanced armor, and integrated weapons systems that, when introduced around 2020, would revolutionize land warfare. The jet-black suit was going to transform every soldier into an advanced exoskeleton-clad cyborg. The United States would instantly have an army of high-performance Darth Vaders, not pathetically human, ground-pounding grunts.

Today, the date for fielding the supersoldier suit has been pushed to 2030, while the old mock-up, after so many appearanc-

**Soon after, red liquid began to pool on the floor just beneath the BEAR. “It bleeds like a human, too,” one sarcastic conference-goer remarked as the robot hemorrhaged hydraulic fluid.**

## WAR GAMES

**“There were only four yards left. It’s about \$320 a yard... This is actually an end roll off Armani and we took the last five yards of it that exists. And because it’s Armani, we heated it up and dyed it and changed the colors. It’s kinda like taking a big poop on the hood of a Ferrari”**

es, is starting to show its age. And it’s not even black. The tacky-looking tan outfit proved a mix of glittery, gold-flecked clingy fabric and plastic armor pieces – with a motocross-like helmet that encapsulates the whole head and hides the face behind a visor. It would have been laughed out of the nearest sci-fi convention.

Still, that didn’t stop the Army from, once again, formally unveiling the Future Force Warrior during an afternoon panel discussion, and touting the project as a great leap forward, an “F-16 on legs concept.” In a corridor behind the scenes, the costumed character was awaiting his moment to stride out in front of the audience. From far away, he might have looked almost ready to take on space aliens à la Master Chief from the Halo video games but, close up, he had a nasty case of static cling and needed an attendant to help keep the suit’s stretchy, shimmery fabric from bunching up at the ankles.

“Nobody’s gonna want to take your picture without your helmet on,” DeGay told the Army’s lone costumed character as a woman approached with a digital camera. The poor staff sergeant inside the suit grimaced. He had already taken a day’s punishment – people constantly asking if the suit was too hot (it is!) or uncomfortable (it is!). “I love that everybody asks that. Everybody either asks him that or hits him. That’s the two things that always happen,” DeGay said with a laugh. “You were on the ground 20 minutes and somebody hit ya and it was a woman.”

The super soldier dutifully donned the helmet for the photo. “I’ve gotten a lot of requests,” said DeGay. “Is he available for parties, graduations, bar mitzvahs?” A slightly drunk attendee suddenly began to razz the super-soldier. “How do you feel about the glittery shirt? Does it make you feel tough?”

DeGay promptly interjected that the suit’s sparkly fabric had an absurd backstory. “We were trying to find replacements. We did a fabric search and came to find out

it’s Armani. There were only four yards left. It’s about \$320 a yard... This is actually an end roll off Armani and we took the last five yards of it that exists. And because it’s Armani, we heated it up and dyed it and changed the colors. It’s kinda like taking a big poop on the hood of a Ferrari.”

The picture taken, the Army’s living plastic-clad prop shifted his weight and took off his helmet, while DeGay added a final quip. “At least,” he told the sergeant, “you can say for once in your Army career you wore Armani.”

### Going green

What explosives can do to a human body isn’t pretty. After all, they can turn what once was a foot into an ankle with an unnatural fleshy stump on the end, or a working eye into a useless perpetual wink. When you’ve seen it all up close, it’s hard not to shake your head on first hearing about green explosives, but that’s what the Army’s working on.

Don’t get me wrong. On some level, there is merit in the work. While more people are aware of the deleterious health effects of the depleted uranium (DU) projectiles the U.S. military now regularly uses in its wars, there are many other types of munitions whose chemical components, in addition to their destructive purpose, are dangerous to human health and the environment. Typical would be RDX (Hexahydro-1, 3, 5-trinitro-1, 3, 5-triazine).

Dr. Betsy Rice, a slight scientist who’s worked for the Army for about 20 years, explained with a twang, “We are tasked with trying to find replacements for RDX, a conventional explosive that’s widely used. RDX is a neurotoxin and it’s a major contaminant of training grounds, so there is a great need to replace this with something – an environmentally friendly alternative.” And to that end, the U.S. Army Research Laboratory, where she’s a research chemist in the Weapons and Materials Research Directorate, is striving to create the “most environmentally-friendly explosive product

known to man.”

The would-be green explosive, polynitrogen, is currently too unstable to be used, but her lab is hard at work solving that problem. If you want call it that. Rice doesn't. To her, it's "a really fun project." Fun and green! It was as if the polynitrogen project was going to yield clean, cheap energy, instead of maiming and killing people in an ecologically-friendly way. But nobody seemed to blink and the conference rolled along.

#### **Top grunt: We can't keep up with al-Qaeda**

Through the four days of the Army Science Conference, two obvious elephants – or were they 800-pound gorillas? – inhabited every room, corridor, and common area: the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. People regularly talked about both wars without significantly addressing their impact in terms of science and technology, let alone larger issues.

Post-surge, it was certainly easier for the attendees to discuss the younger of the two conflicts in which many seemed to take pride, even though the ongoing, financially ruinous occupation had led to the deaths of huge numbers of Iraqis. That was, after all, about as close as the highest tech military on the planet could actually come to a success story. The formerly successful war in Afghanistan, now raging into its eighth year, was far more wince-worthy, even though attendees clearly preferred to look upon it as an upcoming challenge – and, of course, testing ground for Army science and technology – not as a longstanding catastrophe.

But as one panel discussion drew to a close, one of the top-ranking enlisted men in the Army, a highly decorated veteran of the Global War on Terror, made a startling admission. He was discussing the typical pack-laden, weapons-toting, up-armored U.S. soldier "goin' up and down the mountains of Afghanistan right now." As he pointed out, that grunt could not haul one

more piece of gear. "Nor is there a soldier," he continued in a burst of candor, "that, currently configured, can keep up with al-Qaeda because we're chasing guys that are armed with AK-47s and tennis shoes."

I asked him later whether it made sense to spend close to \$20,000, the average price today to kit up (as the British might say) a soldier who can't keep up with the insurgents he is meant to track down. Has anyone considered, I asked, going back to the \$1,900 it cost to outfit a less encumbered grunt of the Vietnam War era who could, assuredly, have kept better pace with today's guerillas.

As I learned at this conference, however, questions like these go nowhere in a big hurry. Instead, he backpedaled quickly, declaring that, in Afghanistan, "we're gettin' it done." A colleague of the same rank, and fellow GWOT veteran, quickly jumped in, pointing out that today's bulky body armor has saved a lot of lives. As for today's insurgents, he said, "Yeah, I can't run the mountain with them, but I'll still get them – eventually."

The big-picture lesson seemed to be that current Army technology has made American wars feasible, but interminable. Heavy body armor has helped keep U.S. combat deaths down to a level acceptable to the American public; but, of course, the same bulky gear helps ensure that fast-moving insurgents, who already know the land well, live to fight another day. And, since the enemy is unlikely to be caught on foot, U.S. troops become ever more reliant on air or artillery strikes that are likely to kill civilians in rural Afghanistan and so recruit more insurgents. The scenario suggested is one that's already in operation: an endless cycle of American failure and foreign carnage enabled, implemented, and exacerbated by recent technological innovations.

On paper, advances in Army science and technology research tended to sound scary and look impressive. In practice, as the 26th Army Science Conference showed, seeing is believing. I had expected everything to be

**I asked him later whether it made sense to spend close to \$20,000, the average price today to kit up (as the British might say) a soldier who can't keep up with the insurgents he is meant to track down**

## WAR GAMES

While glossy brochures and programs were festooned with pictures of the black-clad Future Force Warrior, Army robots, and dazzling screen shots of video-game-like simulators, these gilded graphics couldn't obscure the disappointing realities and air of desperation lurking just below the surface of the conference

big, bad, and bellicose; what I found fit better with what we already know about the realities of an over-bloated, over-stressed, over-strained Pentagon. While glossy brochures and programs were festooned with pictures of the black-clad Future Force Warrior, Army robots, and dazzling screen shots of video-game-like simulators, these gilded graphics couldn't obscure the disappointing realities and air of desperation lurking just below the surface of the conference.

So I left Orlando with more questions than answers when it comes to the future of the U.S. Army.

Is there any possibility that holography will really revolutionize Army communications early enough to matter? Or is this just an area where taxpayers are funding needlessly militarized science projects?

Will the mildly absurd dream of an environmentally-safe explosive be realized anytime soon? Will the Army's future consist of battalions of armed Terminators, as many

fear, or will the next generation of robots cost a fortune and bleed out like BEAR?

What does it say about the U.S. Army when its prototype future super-soldier models haute couture from a high-priced, glittery foreign fashion house?

And since Armani's run out of the Army's favorite fabric, does Dolce & Gabbana have a shot? **CT**

*Nick Turse is the associate editor of TomDispatch.com, where this essay was first published. His work has appeared in many publications, including the Los Angeles Times, the Nation, In These Times, and regularly at TomDispatch. A paperback edition of his first book, The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives (Metropolitan Books), an exploration of the new military-corporate complex in America, will be published this spring. His website is NickTurse.com. Research support for this article was provided by the Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute.*

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# UP AGAINST THE WALL MOTHERF\*\*KER

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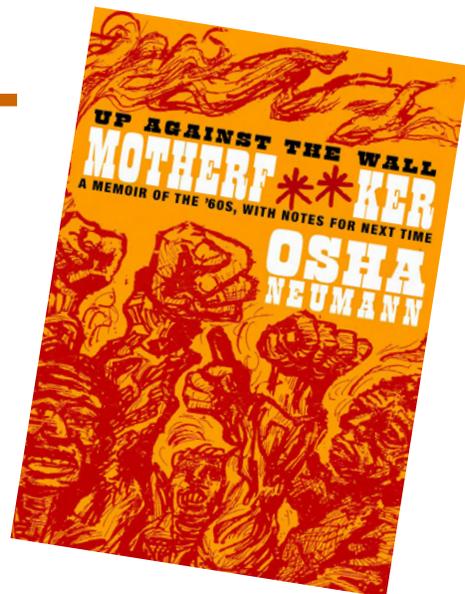
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"After one of my arrests I appeared before a judge who called me 'a cross between Rap Brown and Hitler.' I greeted his summation of my character with a mixture of pride and shame. I felt like a kid whose scary Halloween costume has been more successful than he intended." — From the book



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# Sharpeville, 1960

# Gaza, 2009

**Haidar Eid** compares international response to the recent Gaza massacre to South Africa's Sharpeville massacre of 1960

**T**he 2009 massacre in Gaza will be for international solidarity with Palestine what the Sharpeville massacre was for the international solidarity against apartheid in South Africa. (Wissam Nassar/MaanImages)

"Where can I bring him a father from? Where can I bring him a mother from? You tell me!"

These are the desperate words of Subhi Samuni to Al-Jazeera's Gaza correspondent. Subhi lost 17 members of his immediate family, including the parents of his seven-year-old grandson. Shockingly, even as I write this article, corpses of the Samuni family are still being retrieved from under the rubble – 15 days after the Israeli occupation forces shelled the two houses. The Israeli army locked 120 members of the family in one house for 12 hours before they shelled it.

Subhi's words echo the harsh reality of all Palestinians in Gaza: alone, abandoned, hunted down, brutalized, and, like Subhi's grandson, orphaned. Twenty-two days of savage butchery took the lives of more than 1,300 Palestinians, at least 85 percent of them civilians, including 434 children, 104 women, 16 medics, four journalists, five foreigners, and 105 elderly people.

What can one say to comfort a man who has the harrowing task of having to bury his entire family, including his wife,

his sons, his daughters and his grandchildren? Tell us and we will relay your words to Uncle Subhi because his loss has made our words of condolences meaningless to our ears.

Think also of words you want to say to 70-year-old Rashid Muhammad, whose 44-year-old son Samir was executed with a single bullet to the heart in front of his wife and children. The Israeli army refused to let an ambulance pick up his corpse for 11 days so his family had to wait for the assault to stop before they could bury him. Rashid had the excruciatingly painful experience of looking at, touching, kissing, and then burying the decomposed body of his son. Tell this family how to make sense of their harsh reality – say something to make the children sleep, to ease the anguish in the father's heart, to help the wife understand why her husband had to be taken from her.

### **Phosphorous bombs**

You might prefer to talk to 14-year-old Amira Qirm, whose house in Gaza City was shelled with artillery and phosphorous bombs – bombs which burnt to death three members of her immediate family: her father, her 12-year-old brother, Alaa, and her 11-year-old sister, Ismat. Alone, injured and terrified, Amira crawled 500 meters on her knees to a house close by – it was empty

**The Israeli army refused to let an ambulance pick up his corpse for 11 days so his family had to wait for the assault to stop before they could bury him**

**You can try to comfort 10-year-old Muhammad Samuni who was found lying next to the bodies of his mother and siblings, five days after they were killed**

because the family had fled when the Israeli attack began. She stayed there for four days, surviving only on water, and listening to the sounds of the Israeli killing machine all around her, too afraid to cry out in pain in case the soldiers heard her. When the owner of the house returned to get clothes for his family, he found Amira, weak and close to death. She is now being treated for her injuries in the overcrowded and under-resourced al-Shifa Hospital.

You can try to comfort 10-year-old Muhammad Samuni who was found lying next to the bodies of his mother and siblings, five days after they were killed. He would tell you what he has been telling everyone – that his brother woke suddenly after being asleep for a long time. His brother told him that he was hungry, asked for a tomato to eat and then died. Are there any other 10-year-olds in the world who are asked to carry this experience around with them for the rest of their lives? Of course not – this “privilege” is reserved just for Palestinian children because they were born on the land that Israel wants for itself. But it is these traumatized children who will deny Israel what it wants because their very survival is a challenge to that apartheid state. It is these same children who will surely inherit Palestine: it is their birthright and no assault can change that fact – not today, not ever.

And through it all we were subjected to Tzipi Livni, Israel's foreign minister, adamant in her defense of the world's most “moral” army. “We don't target civilians” she lied. “We don't want the Palestinians to leave Gaza. We just want them to move within Gaza itself!” Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert too had something to say to Palestinians in Gaza: “We are not your enemy. Hamas is your enemy.”

Amira, Muhammad, Rashid, Subhi and the more than 40,000 families whose houses have been demolished know differently. Those people who rushed to the cemetery after it was bombed and found the body parts of their dead relatives exposed to the

elements know differently. They know that they were deliberately targeted because they are Palestinian. All the rest is propaganda to appease the conscience of those with Palestinian blood on their hands – those who are both inside and outside Israel.

For 22 long days and dark nights, Palestinians in Gaza were left alone to face one of the strongest armies in the world – an army that has hundreds of nuclear warheads, thousands of trigger-happy soldiers armed with Merkava tanks, F-16s, Apache helicopters, naval gunships and phosphorous bombs. Twenty-two sleepless nights, 528 hours of constant shelling and shooting, every single minute expecting to be the next victim.

During these 22 days, while morgues overflowed and hospitals struggled to treat the injured, Arab regimes issued tons of statements, condemned and denounced and held one meaningless press conference after another. They even held two summits, the first one convened 19 full days after the assault on Gaza began and the second one the day after Israel had declared a unilateral ceasefire!

### **Cowardise and hypocrisy**

The official Arab position vis-a-vis the Palestinians since 1948, with the exception of the progressive nationalist era (1954-1970) has been a lethal cocktail of cowardice and hypocrisy. Their latest collective failure to break the two-year old Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip and their lack of action to support Palestinians under brutal military assault must be questioned.

Arabs must demand answers from the spineless Arab League because there was no brotherly solidarity shown to Gazans during the Israeli assault. There was no pan-Arabism evident in their platitudes. Some, shockingly, even found it an appropriate time to blame Palestinians for the situation they found themselves in, instead of demanding that Israel stop its merciless assault.

In Gaza today, we wonder how the expressions of support for us in the streets of Arab capitals can be translated into action in the absence of democracy. We wonder whether Arab citizens of despotic regimes can nonviolently change the system. We torment ourselves with trying to discern the means that are currently available for democratic political change. With the ongoing massacre in Gaza, and the construction of an apartheid system in Palestine (in all of historic Palestine, including the areas occupied by Israel in 1967), we know that to survive, we must have the support and solidarity of our Arab brothers and sisters. We saw the Arab people rise to that challenge and stand by us for 22 days but we did not see their leaders behind them.

#### Side of the oppressor

Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa said, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." The UN, EU, Arab League and the international community by and large have remained silent in the face of atrocities committed by Apartheid Israel. They are therefore on the side of Israel. Hundreds of dead corpses of children and women have failed to convince them to act. This is what every Palestinian knows today – whether on the streets of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank or refugee camps in the Diaspora.

We are, therefore, left with one option; an option that does not wait for the United Nations Security Council, Arab Summits,

or Organization of Islamic Conference to convene: the option of people's power. This remains the only power capable of counteracting the massive power imbalance in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The horror of the racist apartheid regime in South Africa was challenged with a sustained campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions initiated in 1958 and given new urgency in 1960 after the Sharpeville Massacre. This campaign led ultimately to the collapse of white rule in 1994 and the establishment of a multi-racial, democratic state.

Similarly, the Palestinian call for boycott, divestment and sanctions has been gathering momentum since 2005. Gaza 2009, like Sharpeville 1960, cannot be ignored: it demands a response from all who believe in a common humanity. Now is the time to boycott the apartheid Israeli state, to divest and to impose sanctions against it. This is the only way to ensure the creation of a secular, democratic state for all in historic Palestine.

This is the only answer to Uncle Subhi's puzzling questions: it is the only way to give his grandson a future, a life of dignity and equality, a life with both peace and justice, because like all children, he deserves nothing less.

**CT**

*Haidar Eid teaches English literature in Gaza City. He is also a political commentator and activist. This article originally appeared at [electronicintifada.net](http://electronicintifada.net)*

**The horror of the racist apartheid regime in South Africa was challenged with a sustained campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions initiated in 1958 and given new urgency in 1960 after the Sharpeville Massacre**

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# George Mitchell and the Middle East

Sinn Fein president **Gerry Adams** tells of George Mitchell's patient handling of negotiations for the Irish peace agreement and suggests ways the US special envoy might handle the Middle East talks

**When eventually George Mitchell made it to Castle Buildings in Belfast where the negotiations were to take place, the Unionists kept him waiting in a side room for two days while they debated whether he should be allowed into the room**

**I**n the crowds of Washington's Union Station last week, I bumped into George Mitchell. We were both in the city for Barack Obama's inauguration, but at that point there was only speculation that George might be made US special envoy for the Middle East – it wasn't until I returned to Ireland that the appointment was confirmed.

President Obama in his inaugural address signalled a new direction for US foreign policy. The posting of George Mitchell and the referencing of his very significant role in the Irish peace process hint at a more focused engagement by the US in seeking to secure a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinian people.

But as George and I both know from our separate but related experience in Northern Ireland, making peace is a difficult, exhausting and, at times, hugely frustrating process.

George Mitchell had been a very successful and influential Senate majority leader for the Democrats. He was known as someone who could broker a deal between opposing groups.

In January 1995, he became President Clinton's secretary of state on economic initiatives in Ireland and, later that year, he was appointed to chair the International Body on Arms Decommissioning. The report produced by this group in January

1996 contained six broad principles of democracy and non-violence, which became known as the Mitchell Principles.

But it is as the chair of the all-party negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement that George is best known in Ireland and elsewhere. Initially, the Unionists and the British government opposed his appointment. Neither wanted an independent person holding down such a key position.

## **Waiting in a side room**

When eventually George Mitchell made it to Castle Buildings in Belfast where the negotiations were to take place, the Unionists kept him waiting in a side room for two days while they debated whether he should be allowed into the room.

And thereafter, they embarked on a constant campaign of challenging the ground rules and structure of the talks as a way of undermining him.

There was more to come. In late 1996, several London and Dublin newspapers carried headline stories alleging that Martha Pope, George Mitchell's chief aide, was having an affair with one of our senior negotiators, Gerry Kelly. The story was rubbish, but it had been deliberately planted by anonymous "security sources" to damage George Mitchell.

So, between interminable negotiations,

almost weekly crises, dirty-tricks efforts from British securocrats and endless filibustering by the Unionists; not to mention the mindnumbing detail of a peace agreement, George Mitchell had his work cut out.

He patiently plotted a course through all of this. He brought to the process a legislative and judicial experience that saw the negotiations format changed from one of large cumbersome meetings to one of smaller groups of negotiators, usually involving the leader and deputy leader of the parties. This provided for a greater focus on the detail of the issues, and it facilitated a more workable and productive arrangement.

It also suited his particular style of getting things done. George spent a great deal of his time in side meetings with the parties. Throughout these, I found him to be good-natured, humorous and tolerant. It is this experience that will stand him to good stead as he embarks on his journey to the Middle East.

#### Terms of reference

Of course, a lot will depend on the terms of reference he has been given. Ultimately, however, no matter how good he might be, George Mitchell will not produce a negotiated agreement in the Middle East. That is for the Israeli government and the Palestinians. But to have any hope of achieving that goal, the US and the international community have to engage with this issue in a concentrated way and treat the participants on the basis of equality.

In the Irish peace process, the US involvement was generally seen as a good thing. That may not be so in the Middle

East. That could be a complicating factor facing George Mitchell.

Moreover, if any renewed effort in the Middle East to reach an agreement is reduced by either side to a tactical game of winners and losers, in which the object is to use the negotiation process to inflict defeats, then it will not work. It will simply be a repeat of past mistakes and lost opportunities.

In a peace process, the goal must be an inclusive agreement that is acceptable to all sides, is doable, deliverable and sustainable. That means enemies and opponents creating space for each other. It means engaging in real conversations and seeking real solutions. It means accepting that dialogue is crucial and that means recognising the right of the Palestinian people to choose their own leaders, their own representatives.

The Israeli government and other governments have to talk to Hamas.

The recent assault on Gaza is a brutal reminder of the destructive power of war and of the human cost of failure. It is time all of this was brought to an end.

But breaking the cycle of conflict will mean political leaders – Israeli and Palestinian – taking real risks for peace. They will need help and a real and unrelenting international effort to construct a durable peace settlement that provides for two states, but in particular, for a Palestinian state that is sustainable and viable. **CT**

*Gerry Adams is president of Sinn Féin, the Northern Ireland political party. He played a major role in ending the Troubles in Northern Ireland*

**In the Irish peace process, the US involvement was generally seen as a good thing. That may not be so in the Middle East**

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# Why are we still at war in Afghanistan?

The war on terror is a mirage, a holy grail of victory that can never be, writes **Norman Solomon**

**The U.S. war effort in Afghanistan owes itself to the enduring “war on terrorism,” chasing a holy grail of victory that can never be**

**T**he United States began its war in Afghanistan 88 months ago. “The war on terror” has no sunset clause. As a perpetual emotion machine, it offers to avenge what can never heal and to fix grief that is irreparable.

For the crimes against humanity committed on Sept. 11, 2001, countless others are to follow, with huge conceits about technological “sophistication” and moral superiority. But if we scrape away the concrete of media truisms, we may reach substrata where some poets have dug.

W.H. Auden: *“Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return.”*

Stanley Kunitz: *“In a murderous time / the heart breaks and breaks / and lives by breaking.”*

And from 1965, when another faraway war got its jolt of righteous escalation from Washington’s certainty, Richard Farina wrote: *“And death will be our darling and fear will be our name.”* Then as now came the lessons that taught with unfathomable violence once and for all that unauthorized violence must be crushed by superior violence.

The U.S. war effort in Afghanistan owes itself to the enduring “war on terrorism,” chasing a holy grail of victory that can never be. Early into the second year of the Afghanistan war, in November 2002, a retired U.S. Army general, William Odom,

appeared on C-SPAN’s “Washington Journal” program and told viewers: “Terrorism is not an enemy. It cannot be defeated. It’s a tactic. It’s about as sensible to say we declare war on night attacks and expect we’re going to win that war. We’re not going to win the war on terrorism.”

## **Blotting of the horizon**

But the “war on terrorism” rubric – increasingly shortened to the even vaguer “war on terror” – kept holding enormous promise for a warfare state of mind. Early on, the writer Joan Didion saw the blotting of the horizon and said so: “We had seen, most importantly, the insistent use of Sept. 11 to justify the reconception of America’s correct role in the world as one of initiating and waging virtually perpetual war.”

There, in one sentence, an essayist and novelist had captured the essence of a historical moment that vast numbers of journalists had refused to recognize – or, at least, had refused to publicly acknowledge. Didion put to shame the array of self-important and widely lauded journalists at the likes of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, PBS and National Public Radio.

The new U.S. “war on terror” was rhetorically bent on dismissing the concept of peacetime as a fatuous mirage.

Now, in early 2009, we’re entering what

could be called Endless War 2.0, while the new president's escalation of warfare in Afghanistan makes the rounds of the media trade shows, preening the newest applications of technological might and domestic political acquiescence.

#### Narrow discourse

And now, although repression of open debate has greatly dissipated since the first months after 9/11, the narrow range of political discourse on Afghanistan is essential to the Obama administration's reported plan to double U.S. troop deployments in that country within a year.

"This war, if it proliferates over the next decade, could prove worse in one respect than any conflict we have yet experienced," Norman Mailer wrote in his book *Why Are We at War?* six years ago. "It is that we will never know just what we are fighting for. It is not enough to say we are against terrorism. Of course we are. In America, who is not? But terrorism compared to more conventional kinds of war is formless, and it is hard to feel righteous when in combat with a void..."

Anticipating futility and destruction that would be enormous and endless, Mailer told an interviewer in late 2002: "This war is so unbalanced in so many ways, so much power on one side, so much true hatred on the other, so much technology for us, so much potential terrorism on the other, that the damages cannot be estimated. It is bad to enter a war that offers no clear avenue to conclusion. ... There will always be someone left to act as a terrorist."

And there will always be plenty of ra-

tionales for continuing to send out the patrols and launch the missiles and drop the bombs in Afghanistan, just as there have been in Iraq, just as there were in Vietnam and Laos. Those countries, with very different histories, had the misfortune to share a singular enemy, the most powerful military force on the planet.

It may be profoundly true that we are not red states and blue states, that we are the United States of America – but what that really means is still very much up for grabs. Even the greatest rhetoric is just that. And while the clock ticks, the deployment orders are going through channels.

For anyone who believes that the war in Afghanistan makes sense, I recommend the Jan. 30 discussion on "Bill Moyers Journal" with historian Marilyn Young and former Pentagon official Pierre Sprey. A chilling antidote to illusions that fuel the war can be found in the transcript.

<http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/01302009/transcript3.html>

Now, on Capitol Hill and at the White House, convenience masquerades as realism about "the war on terror." Too big to fail. A beast too awesome and immortal not to feed.

And death will be our darling. And fear will be our name. **CT**

*Norman Solomon is the author of War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death, which has been adapted into a documentary film of the same name. For recent TV and radio interviews with him about President Obama and war policies, go to: [www.normansolomon.com](http://www.normansolomon.com)*

**if you're going to be an accomplice to a crime, better it be international war crimes. Perpetrators of war crimes are generally rewarded rather than punished**

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# Leon Panetta makes nice

**Ray McGovern** was present at the Senate Intelligence Committee meeting to confirm Leon Panetta as head of the CIA. He was not impressed by the questions or the answers

Hatch insisted, twice, that Panetta subscribe to the bromide that CIA analysts “were relying on world-wide intelligence at the time,” and that “every major intelligence community” in the world shared the view of U.S. intelligence regarding WMD in Iraq

“I am a creature of Congress,” said Leon Panetta with a broad smile, which was returned by equally wide smiles from members of the Senate intelligence committee meeting to consider his nomination to be director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

I really wish he hadn’t said that. For that sobriquet fits the worst of the worst, so to speak, of former CIA directors – the tarnished Medal of Freedom awardee, George Tenet. He too mastered the art of grinning in Congress.

When nominated to lead the CIA, his distinctive cachet was said to be that, as staff director of the Senate Intelligence Committee, George was “equally popular on both sides of the aisle.” Those of us who had been around a while knew this to be no cachet, but rather the kiss of death for intelligence work. His insatiable need to please his masters famously led George in Dec. 2002 to yell “slam dunk,” when former president George W. Bush asked about evidence of “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq.

That same desire to please, bordering on the obsequious, showed through Panetta’s performance at his nomination hearing over two days Thursday and Friday, Feb 5 and 6. There was little sense that the man who nominated him, Barack Obama, had won a decisive election victory and was de-

termined to exorcise the flock of evil spirits possessing the White House of Bush and Cheney, in whose abuses many of those same Senators had acquiesced.

Obama did set the stage for the hearing by issuing executive orders against torture and other crimes. And, to his credit, Panetta did stand firm in defending the new policies and exposing as a false choice the one between greater security and preserving our nation’s values.

Otherwise, though, the nominee appeared unnecessarily deferential. Worse still, he let a number of familiar lies fly by without challenge.

## “Everyone thought there were WMD”

There was no real need for him to let the unreconstructed partisan Orrin Hatch (R, Utah) browbeat him into supporting one of the familiar canards promoted by the late Bush administration. Hatch insisted, twice, that Panetta subscribe to the bromide that CIA analysts “were relying on world-wide intelligence at the time,” and that “every major intelligence community” in the world shared the view of U.S. intelligence regarding WMD in Iraq.

Can we not, at long last, dispense with this canard? Repeating it does not make it true. And were it to have been true, then how does one explain why Bush and U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair could not get the

U.N. Security Council approval they knew would be required in order to make an attack on Iraq legal.

Those foreign intelligence services that chose to give credibility to the “intelligence” coming from the U.S. and U.K. did so because they had little or no independent evidence of their own, and their governments wished not to alienate Washington. And some intelligence analysts – in the Australian and Danish services, for example – did warn their governments about what the British press ended up calling the “dodgy dossier” of U.S.-U.K. faux intelligence on WMD in Iraq.

At the risk of damning with faint praise, Panetta is clearly twice as bright as the folks he will replace as CIA director. So, it should have been easy – had he been paying closer attention, or had he insisted upon being adequately briefed – to cite the Senate intelligence committee’s own report, released on June 5, 2008, on prewar intelligence on Iraq.

That study, five years in the making, was approved by a vote of 10 to 5, with Sen. Chuck Hagel (R, Nebraska) and Sen. Olympia Snowe (R, Maine) joining the majority. It concluded that the public statements of the highest Bush administration officials on WMD were not supported by the intelligence.

In releasing the report, then-chair Jay Rockefeller (D, West Virginia) stepped out of character and spoke plainly: “In making the case for war, the administration repeatedly presented intelligence as fact, when in reality it was unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent.” And Diane Feinstein (D, CA), who is now committee chair, attached this note to the report: “The results are now in...this administration distorted the intelligence in order to build its case to go to war.”

Thus, it was hardly the case that “everybody” believed there were WMD in Iraq, but rather just those who chose to acquiesce in the distortion of intelligence and those countries that used to trust the

intelligence coming from Washington. It is a safe bet that Feinstein and Rockefeller were disappointed by Panetta’s inability or unwillingness to cite the committee’s own official findings as a way to squelch Hatch. Committee ranking member, Christopher Bond (R, Missouri) met no challenge from Panetta when Bond enlisted another familiar canard: that the Bush-era harsh interrogation programs – described by Bush as an “alternative set of procedures” – helped to prevent future attacks. There is not a shred of evidence to support this claim. On the contrary, there is abundant evidence that those same interrogation programs have been the most effective recruiting tool for al-Qaeda and other terrorists.

Again, Panetta’s ignorance on this key issue, or – more likely – his bending over backwards to be conciliatory, can hardly have impressed committee members.

Replying Thursday to a question from committee chair, Sen. Diane Feinstein, Panetta gave assurance that the CIA would perform no more extraordinary “renditions for torture.” The very suggestion that this might have been the case in the past raised hackles with Sen. Bond, who went off in dogged pursuit. And at Friday’s session, Bond was able to squeeze a retraction out of Panetta, who would not stick to his guns.

**Rendition can be useful**

It took Sen. Levin to adduce on Friday the quintessential example of the “effectiveness” of extraordinary rendition. “When you mistreat or torture people, particularly with waterboarding, then they can give you false information and you can end up taking action on the basis of false information,” said Levin – a little too subtly for the TV audience. With tongue in cheek, Levin referred to the case of Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, an al-Qaeda functionary who was captured and “rendered” to Egypt, where, under torture, he told his interrogators what he knew they wanted to hear.

Levin duly noted that al-Libi’s “false in-

**Christopher Bond (R, Missouri) met no challenge from Panetta when Bond enlisted another familiar canard: that the Bush-era harsh interrogation programs – described by Bush as an “alternative set of procedures” – helped to prevent future attacks**

## IGNORING THE LIES

**A pity that Panetta appeared completely unaware of the case of al-Libi and how the proceeds of his extraordinary rendition and interrogation in Egypt had been used**

formation was part of the reason adduced for going to war.” But then – too much the gentleman to risk causing unpleasantness with Bond and his colleagues on the other side – Levin pretended not to remember whether al-Libi had been tortured.

Al-Libi had been identified by the Defense Intelligence Agency as a likely fabricator months before the Bush administration began to use his statements to “prove” that Iraq had been training al-Qaeda. Without mentioning al-Libi by name, President Bush, Vice President Cheney, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell and other administration officials repeatedly cited information from his interrogation as credible evidence that Iraq was training al-Qaeda members in the use of explosives and chemical weapons.

So, you see, torture can indeed provide the information you may lust after to grease the skids for war. Al-Libi was the poster boy for the Cheney/Bush torture regime; that is, until he publicly recanted and explained that he only told his interrogators the magic words he knew would stop the torture.

A pity that Panetta appeared completely unaware of the case of al-Libi and how the proceeds of his extraordinary rendition and interrogation in Egypt had been used. Or perhaps he was aware, but reluctant to feed Bond’s distemper.

A pity, too, that the nominee did not consult with former intelligence officers like Milt Bearden, a 30-year veteran of CIA’s operations directorate who rose to the most senior managerial ranks. He has written:

“The administration’s claims of [torture] having ‘saved thousands of Americans’ can be dismissed out of hand because credible evidence has never been offered ... It is irresponsible for any administration not to tell a credible story that would convince critics at home and abroad that this torture has served some useful purpose ... this is not just because the old [intelligence] hands overwhelmingly believe that torture doesn’t work – it doesn’t – but also because

they know that torture creates more terrorists and fosters more acts of terror than it could possibly neutralize.”

Bearden argued that if the claims of the Bush White House were true, it ought to stop hiding always behind the all-too-readily-adduced need to protect sources and methods. He noted that in 1986 after the U. S. bombed Libya in retaliation for a Libyan operation that killed U.S. servicemen in Berlin, there was worldwide skepticism and consternation.

The Reagan administration decided it owed the world an explanation and decided it would be worth sacrificing a very sensitive method; namely, the ability to intercept Libyan encoded messages. Ironically, the Libyan message that was made public bragged that the operation had been carried out “without leaving a trace behind.”

### **Prosecution worries**

In his opening remarks Thursday, Sen. Bond expressed concern that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D, CA) has said, as Bond put it, “certain people associated with the interrogation program should be prosecuted.” Bond wondered aloud if Panetta would agree with Pelosi, but then droned on and did not afford him a chance to answer.

But the possibility of prosecution quickly moved front and center in a line of questioning from Sen. Carl Levin (D, Michigan). Here Panetta did some squirming in trying to square a circle.

In an obvious effort to avoid fouling the nest he is about to occupy at CIA, he tried mightily to argue that individuals who were told that torture techniques like waterboarding were legal “ought not to be prosecuted or investigated” for following the guidelines from the attorney general and department of justice.

Pursued by Sen. Bond like a junkyard dog at Friday’s session, Panetta went further, disavowing any intention to “go into the past.” Bond tacked on a gratuitous warning to the effect that, were Panetta to delve into the past, he (Bond) could “not

imagine anything more detrimental to morale at the CIA.”

But Sen. Levin would not let Panetta off the hook. “Can torture be made legal by a legal opinion?” he asked. Panetta replied that, as a lawyer, his view was that those guidelines were “a stretch.”

Levin extracted a commitment from Panetta to cooperate with the committee in looking into past practice. (It remains unclear which promise Panetta intends to keep – the Thursday one to Levin, or the Friday one to Bond.)

The nominee eventually conceded under Levin’s questioning that, as both Obama and newly confirmed Attorney General Eric Holder have emphasized, “no one is above the law.” Panetta added that, for those eventually shown to have deliberately violated the law, “obviously in those cases there should be prosecutions.” But that was Thursday.

Thursday turned out to be a full day of pondering what happens when Mafia-style lawyers are cited by the actual “deciders” on issues like torture. On Amy Goodman’s *Democracy Now*, human rights lawyer Scott Horton noted that both Bush and Cheney have acknowledged on TV their involvement in decisions on torture, justifying their decisions (on waterboarding, for example) thusly: “We talked to the lawyers, and the lawyers told us it was okay.”

Horton noted that the most senior Bush administration official responsible for dealing with the Guantanamo tribunals, Susan Crawford, had concluded that detainee al-Kahtani had in fact been tortured. Since his treatment had been approved by Cheney and Bush, “Both are linked to a case that their own principal agent considers to have been torture,” said Horton.

He and Michael Ratner, president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, stressed that Attorney General Holder thus has “an absolute obligation to begin a criminal investigation,” under Articles 4 and 5 of the Convention Against Torture.

Ratner offered the following as “the best

argument as to why you need criminal prosecutions.” Referring to the prominent photo showing Obama signing the executive orders prohibiting torture, Ratner said all he could think of was that the next president might sign executive orders going the other way. Ratner:

“Our fundamental rights, the right to be free from torture, should not be dependent on the length of the president’s arm. The only real deterrent is prosecution.”

Michael Ratner added that he found it difficult to listen to the president suggesting we have to look forward and not backward, because to him (Ratner) prosecutions are precisely the things needed to look forward. “They tell you why we are not going to have torture in the future.” He and Horton called for the immediate appointment of a special prosecutor who can begin to open investigations; Ratner also noted “the Obama administration is in violation of the Convention Against Torture if it does not commence an investigation.”

Now this is the last thing the James and Kit Bonds of this world wish to see, for then their efforts to muzzle potential whistleblowers would founder on the rocks of subpoena and oath. Meanwhile, though, we can expect the Bush-Cheney apologists to do all they can to intimidate those in the ranks who may be prompted to come forward voluntarily.

#### **On the hunt for whistleblowers**

Sen. Bond has done all he can to put a price on the head of whistleblowers in the intelligence community. On Aug. 2, 2006, for example, he actually suggested that leakers be Guantanamo-ized: “There is nothing like an orange jumpsuit on a deliberate leaker to discourage others from going down that path,” said Bond.

At the recent confirmation hearings for Dennis Blair for the post of Director of National Intelligence, Bond pressed the nominee on whether he would try to prosecute leakers of classified information. Blair passed Bond’s test: “If I could ever

**“Our fundamental rights, the right to be free from torture, should not be dependent on the length of the president’s arm. The only real deterrent is prosecution”**

## IGNORING THE LIES

It is a measure of what Washington has become that there is bipartisan consensus on the need to prosecute leakers but not torturer

catch one of those [leakers], it would be very good to prosecute them; we need to make sure that people who leak are held accountable,” said Blair

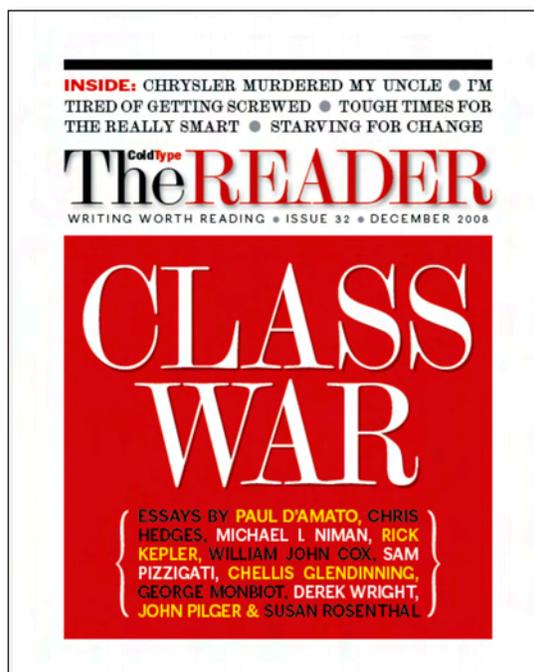
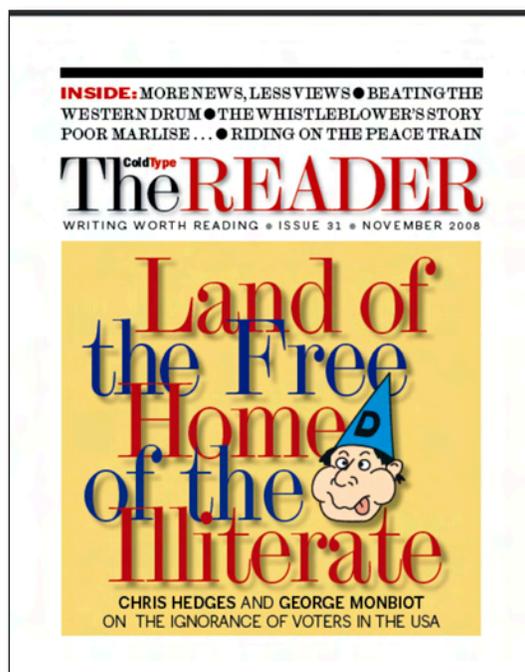
It is a measure of what Washington has become that there is bipartisan consensus on the need to prosecute leakers but not torturers.

Panetta, Blair, and others may wish to consider this: had there been some real teeth in whistleblower protection for members of national security agencies, chances would have increased that some courageous soul would have come forward and exposed the lies that led to catastrophe in

Iraq – and might conceivably have headed it off. Perhaps most would now agree that this kind of person would truly merit a Medal of Freedom – not an orange jumpsuit. **CT**

*Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was an Army infantry/intelligence officer and then a CIA analyst for 27 years, and is now on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS). A shorter version of this article appeared first on Consortiumnews.com.*

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# Who'll be there when the floor drops out

If you care about equality, justice and freedom, there is good reason here, one month into the Obama reign, to be heartbroken already, writes **David Michael Green**

**F**or months now, I've been wondering if Barack Obama would turn out to be another FDR – a bold and progressive figure who was the right match to the crises of his time – or another Bill Clinton – a pathetic sell-out who was the right match for little beyond pursuing his personal eight-year joy-ride at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Now I'm wondering if I haven't been asking the wrong question altogether. Maybe the real mystery is whether Mr. Yes We Can will be another Bill Clinton or, gulp, another George W. Bush.

It's true, Obama has already made a few quasi-progressive decisions, such as removing some of the insanity from American foreign aid for reproductive health and beginning the process to close down Guantánamo. That's well enough, and I give credit where it's due – though I wouldn't exactly describe these as bold moves.

I didn't have high expectations that Obama would turn out to be Eugene Debs, come back from socialist heaven (Stockholm?), and so I can't say that I'm surprised he's not. But I am pretty shocked and disgusted at some of the decisions we've seen so far, including many that Dick Cheney would have little problem praising (in some cases, because Cheney made them originally).

That's just too much. And it's also insulting to progressives who worked hard to put

this guy in office, believing – minimally – that he was a better choice than either another Clinton or anything the Neanderthal Party would drag out. I can't say that I donated a lot of my hours or cash to Obama's campaign, and yet – just the same – I'm already feeling cheap, dirty and used by what I'm seeing.

The cabinet is a starting place. Like many of the terminally hopeful, I've been saying for a while that it doesn't matter so much who goes in the cabinet, it matters who makes the decisions. This is mostly true, with about one-and-a-half caveats. The half-caveat is that a smart cabinet secretary can take advantage of a president who is out to lunch, like Bush and Reagan were. I suspect Obama won't often be accused of that during his presidency, though I'll confess that looking at the rollout of the economic stimulus program, and the rollout of the administration itself, this last month, I am way less impressed with the basic competence of these folks than I expected to be – whatever their politics.

But, the other major caveat is the symbolism of cabinet choices. Why was it necessary to put three Republicans in it? And, so far, not a single confirmed progressive? Cabinet choices are usually as much emblematic as they are truly administrative. We have to assume that real policy decisions come from the White House, and that most fools in the

**I am pretty shocked and disgusted at some of the decisions we've seen so far, including many that Dick Cheney would have little problem praising (in some cases, because Cheney made them originally)**

## PRESIDENTIAL REPORT

**It was bad enough that you've subjected us to Timothy Geithner to run the Treasury and lead your recovery effort. In addition to being a tax cheat and already demonstrably in over his head, this fool is a protégé of both Henry Kissinger and Robert Rubin**

cabinet will at least be able to get through four years of making speeches without completely crashing the department, while their deputy actually runs the show (notable exceptions noted and excepted, of course). So presidents therefore use their cabinet in part to make a statement, pay off some political debts, and placate groups within their coalition. So far, so bad, 'cause the main statement I'm getting from the picks of this yet-another-nominally-Democratic president is "Hard to starboard, matey".

But take a look at some of Obama's policy decisions in his first month in office, and it gets considerably worse from there. Even today, months after the election is done with, Mr. Obama is out on the stump saying things like, "You didn't send us to Washington because you were hoping for more of the same. You sent us there to change things."

That's a big 10-4, good buddy. So how come, then, you keep turning to Wall Street pirates to run your economic program? It was bad enough that you've subjected us to Timothy Geithner to run the Treasury and lead your recovery effort. In addition to being a tax cheat and already demonstrably in over his head, this fool is a protégé of both Henry Kissinger and Robert Rubin. In addition to being part of the brain trust that blew the Lehman Brothers rescue decision, he also presided over the original TARP mass looting of the already stinking corpse of the federal treasury. That would be a pretty impressive resume if one intended to earn his living on his back, wearing a coat and tie. However, I thought we were talking about a Treasury Secretary here?

More to the point, though, this guy is the beginning of this particular ugliness, not the end. Last week, the *New York Times* reported that, "Senior executives at Citigroup's Alternative Investment division ran up hundreds of millions of dollars in losses last year on their esoteric collection of investments, including real estate funds and private highway construction projects – even as they collected seven-figure salaries and bonuses.

Now the Obama administration has turned to that Citigroup division – twice – for high-level advisers." Oh boy.

What a shock, then, that even while Obama was pretending to show a wee flash of anger at corporate predators partying on the public nickel the other week, his administration was busy eviscerating the pathetic limitations on compensation it was barely applying in the first place. By the time you get through reading all the caveats, you realize that the \$500,000 salary limitation applies to almost no one, and means almost nothing when it comes to those it does apply to. But that's only the third best part of this charade, however. The second best is that even these absolutely paper-thin sanctions on the compensation of executives of failed corporations now sucking the federal teat first have to be approved by a vote of shareholders in order to apply. But – and this is my very favorite part – did I mention that the vote is non-binding?

### **Corporate Wonderfland**

It actually gets even worse, yet. Now the AP is reporting that, in the wake of Congress' stimulus legislation (and you know what bloody socialists those folks are!), the Obama team is looking to play extra-super-double-sweet nicey-nice with the pirates from Corporate Wonderfland: "Facing a stricter approach to limiting executive bonuses than it had favored, the Obama administration wants to revise that part of the stimulus package even after it becomes law, White House officials said Sunday". Obama doesn't want compensation restrictions to apply to all banks on the government dole. Rather, CEOs who crashed those companies and are now living off the taxpayers they spent decades deriding from the vaunted perch of the free market ideological soapbox can still take all they want, thank you very much, unless they are among the unlucky infinitesimally few getting "exceptional assistance" from Barack, Inc.

Apparently, there is some concern that Obama will take Congress' bill and just do whatever he wants with it. You know, kinda like what's-his-name just got done doing for eight years. Never fear, though. Barney "The Enforcer" Frank, and his posse of Democrats led by Sheriff Nancy are on the job. Congressman Frank told CBS the other day: "This is not an option. This is not, frankly, the Bush administration, where they're going to issue a signing statement and refuse to enforce it."

Given that, seemingly by his own admission, Democrats in Congress will do nothing to reign in imperial presidents, Congressman Frank neglected to mention exactly what would prevent Obama from doing just what Bad Barney had been allowing Belligerent Bush to do for eight years. Call me cynical, but something tells me that a congressman from Massachusetts saying "This is not an option" isn't going to make the White House tremble in fear, even if they are Democrats there (and only some of them are), and have pretty much long ago gone pro with the whole trembling thing.

### 50 million job losses

Meanwhile, apparently it was young Master Geithner who led the successful battle within the administration not to take away potential third and fourth yachts from the nice men on Wall Street who have caused a global economic holocaust, now reportedly already responsible for 50 million (no, that is not a typo) job losses worldwide. He does make a good point, of course. If you don't pay these people well, how can you attract such fine talent? Imagine how bad this global depression would be if the average S&P 500 CEO compensation in 2007 had been, say, a mere \$12 million, instead of the \$14.2 million it actually was! Boy, we'd really have a bad economy now! And don't you just feel great that Obama is listening to as sharp a mind as Geithner? This is a cat who – in addition to apparently being an arrogant and capricious manager of his

staff – opened his mouth for five minutes the other day and caused the stock market's value to shrink by 4.6 percent. Let's see here... Arrogance, gross incompetence, flack for the overclass...? Golly, could there actually be four Republicans in the cabinet? Do we actually know for sure that this Geithner guy is a Democrat? Would it matter if he was?

As bad as all this is, I wish I could say that my problem with Obama is just that he is yet another president of the wealthy, by the wealthy, and for the wealthy. Unfortunately, there's more. There was ol' Joe Biden, for example, off to Munich for a big security conference, talking about how the Obama administration will continue Ronald Reagan's dream of missile defense, the ultimate defense industry boondoggle. Never mind that, even if it ever worked, and at astronomical costs which wrecked the lives of tens of millions who didn't get education or health-care instead, any terrorist smart enough to build a nuke or determined enough to buy one would also be clever enough to put the thing on a boat and sail it up the Potomac. This is a trillion dollar gift of public funds to the arms industry that just can't seem to get buried. I think Reagan knew that. But why doesn't Obama? Or – far worse – likely he does.

Then there's the undoing of Bush's faith-based initiative, one of the greatest examples of Constitution shredding out there, from a guy who was the acknowledged master. Obama has now issued new executive rules regarding the relationship between church activities and state money, but declined to actually revoke Bush's rule, which allows religious organizations to make hiring decisions based on religion, for jobs funded by you and me. I'm not okay with that, and neither is the Constitution. It's grim enough that we have to endure these assaults when we merely have a reactionary executive and a feeble Congress, especially when the latter is controlled by the alleged opposition party. But must we really put up with more such

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crimes after sweeping the ‘liberals’ into office?

Still, perhaps the most galling example of Obushism occurred last week in a San Francisco courtroom, where a lawyer from the new (or is it?) Justice Department was asked by the presiding judge whether the government’s position might have changed for any particular reason (wink, wink, nod, nod) since the last time the court was last convened to take up this particular case on the question of extraordinary rendition. Bush’s Justice Department had argued that the state secrets doctrine required the court to dismiss the case without even hearing evidence, effectively giving the president the right to do anything to anybody, without judicial protection or remedy of any sort. You know – kinda like the script for a Dick Cheney porno film.

Since candidate Obama had severely criticized such patently and fundamentally unconstitutional concepts, the judges on the Ninth Circuit had good reason to expect that President Obama might reverse the government’s position in this case. They even asked the government’s lawyer a second time, in semi-astonishment, to be sure they were hearing him right. All to no avail. The position of the Obama administration is identical to that of Bush, Cheney, Gonzales and Yoo. The president can order you to be captured, stripped down to diapers, bagged up, tossed on a CIA plane, delivered to Egypt, Bulgaria or Tajikstan, tortured and maybe even killed. All without any scrutiny by anyone.

### **Angry patriots**

Maybe it’s just my weak vision, but when I pulled out my copy of the Constitution and pored over it carefully once again, I couldn’t find any language of that sort anywhere. In fact, it almost seemed like that document, and the Declaration of Independence, were written by a bunch of angry patriots pissed off at exactly such behaviors on the part of the British crown. Could President Obama, the former constitutional law professor, re-

ally be espousing the same civil liberties policies – hardly exceeded in egregiousness – as those of George III and Bush II? I guess I better re-read those documents yet once more.

Especially since another *New York Times* article, under the happy title of “Obama’s War on Terror May Resemble Bush’s in Some Areas”, just noted that, “In little-noticed confirmation testimony recently, Obama nominees endorsed continuing the C.I.A.’s program of transferring prisoners to other countries without legal rights, and indefinitely detaining terrorism suspects without trials even if they were arrested far from a war zone”.

And, just in case the sum of the above still hasn’t depressed you enough, the piece goes on to remind us of how the new administration recently offered its thanks to the British government when a UK court deferred to American pressure in refusing to release information about the torture of a detainee held by the US. Wow.

If this was just another president doing what presidents do, these developments would merely be disappointing. In fact, they are nearly devastating when considered in context. This is the president who follows the one sure to be known as The Great Trampler, and this is the president who heartily criticized his predecessor’s constitutional calamities just months ago on the campaign trail, and this is the president only weeks in office, finally revealing his policies, not just his promises. If you care about equality, justice and freedom, there is good reason here, one month into the Obama reign, to be heartbroken already.

Look, I don’t expect any president to be one hundred percent in agreement with my positions, brilliant as they universally are on all issues. And least of all did I expect that Barack Obama would be a full-blown lefty, though I still think events might push him in that direction, as they did Franklin Roosevelt. But here’s the thing I’m wondering right now, strictly from the perspective of Obama’s own self-interest: Who’s gonna

be there for him when the floor drops out, as it inevitably will at some point? Just who does he think will rally to his support if, for example, a year from now unemployment is up to 15 percent and he has shown no sign of abating this devastating depression?

Will it be the centrist middle class? At some point, they may run well out of patience, their jobs gone, their homes foreclosed upon, their health deteriorating, their hope sagging, and right-wing freaks incessantly screaming in their ears the pounding drumbeat of failed 'liberal' policies. Does he think it will be those very regressives, who one might have expected to be somewhat chastened by their trouncing in two consecutive election cycles? Because when I look at how John McCain and Lindsay Graham and Rush Limbaugh are reacting to the bipartisan olive branch that Obama extended to them, I kinda don't think so. When I see how many Republicans (three) in both houses of the entire Congress voted for his stimulus bill, I kinda don't think so.

Does he think it will be progressives?

Well, I can only speak for myself, but one month in and I'm already feeling burned by this guy. If he continues to cater to the predatory rich in this country, leaving the rest of us holding the bag, and if he continues to shred the Constitution as if he were George Bush's kid brother, and if he is nearly as militaristic as the Strangeloves he just ejected from office, then I really won't care a bit if he gets smashed halfway through his first term. In fact, I might even be happy to see it happen.

So, if it ain't the right and it ain't the center and it ain't the left, just who does Obama think will be there standing with him should his presidency hits the rocks?

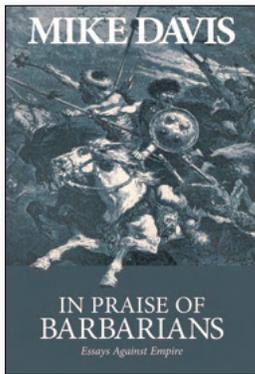
When you take away all those folks, just who does he think will have his back in tough times?

The Aryan Nation?

**CT**

*David Michael Green is a professor of political science at Hofstra University in New York.*

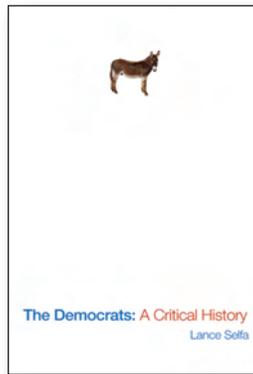
*More of his work can be found at his website, [www.regressiveantidote.net](http://www.regressiveantidote.net)*



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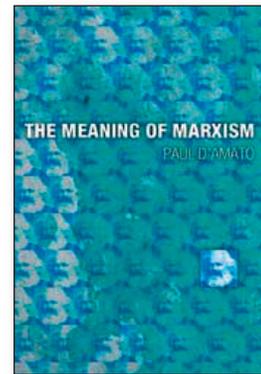
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# The propaganda of the victor

George Monbiot tells how Britain's poor were airbrushed from history

The gardens (really a landscaped deerpark) were a vast playground of crumbling follies and overgrown lakes, of coverts and laurel brakes in which ruined monuments could, like Mayan temples, be discovered by adventurous boy

Is there any other democracy so adept at editing its history? Even Spain, for years notoriously reluctant to get to grips with the legacy of Franco, has begun to acknowledge the past, as the success of Guillermo del Toro's masterpiece *Pan's Labyrinth* shows. The French are aware of every sordid detail of the excesses of both monarchs and revolutionaries. The Germans are pricked by their past every day. In the United States everyone knows about slavery, the civil war and segregation. But in Britain our collective memory has been wiped clean.

Despite the efforts of authors such as Mike Davis, John Newsinger, Mark Curtis, Caroline Elkins and David Anderson<sup>1-6</sup>, our colonial atrocities still leave the national conscience untroubled. We appear to be even less aware of what happened at home.

The National Trust, which is Britain's biggest private landowner and biggest NGO, recently announced that it is creating 1000 allotments – small patches which local people can rent for growing vegetables – on its properties, among them some of its grandest parks and estates<sup>7</sup>. This was universally, and rightly, hailed as a good thing. But no one stopped, as no one ever does, to ask where this land came from.

The National Trust has done more than any other body to open up the country-

side to the British people, and more than any other body to close down our minds. It bears more responsibility than any other body for the sanitised, tea-towel history which dominates the national consciousness. Last year over 100 million visitors explored its properties<sup>8</sup>. They were exposed to a partial and selective view of Britain's past.

Take one of its finest and most famous holdings: Stowe Landscape Gardens. I know them well, for I enjoyed the astonishing unearned privilege of attending the school that's housed there. The gardens (really a landscaped deerpark) were a vast playground of crumbling follies and overgrown lakes, of coverts and laurel brakes in which ruined monuments could, like Mayan temples, be discovered by adventurous boys. Licensed by tolerant teachers, I played swallows and amazons here for five years.

## Beautifully restored

Now the gardens have been beautifully, if starkly, restored by the National Trust. The temples have been cleaned and mended, the thickets cleared, the volunteer woodland felled. They have been returned to the state intended by their authors: the first Viscount Cobham (1675-1749) and his descendants.

When you visit the gardens today, or

read about them on the Trust's website, you will learn about the thirteen phases of the development of the gardens, the creation of the avenues, monuments and temples, the commissions executed by the famous architects and designers who worked here<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup>. But nowhere, as far as I can discover, will you find a word about who lived here before the estate was consolidated in the late 16th Century, or how local people were treated after the gardens were established 150 years later. The Trust, in other words, says nothing about the village cleared to create the deer-park, or the eviction, imprisonment, transportation or execution of those who lived there<sup>11</sup>.

In his book *Whigs and Hunters*, EP Thomson gives us a vignette of what happened here. As constable of Windsor Castle, the first Viscount Cobham had been responsible for enforcing the Black Acts, which created some 50 new capital offences for poaching and resisting the encroachments and enclosures carried out by the ruling class.

He imported this management ethic into his estate at Stowe. "In 1748 two young men ... were caught while raiding his deer-park. According to a firm local tradition, the wives of the men sought an interview at Stowe and begged for their husbands' lives. It seemed that old Cobham, now in his eightieth year, was moved by their tears. He promised that their husbands would be returned to them by a certain day – and so they were, for on that day their corpses were brought to the cottage doors on a cart. Cobham celebrated the occasion by striking statues of the dead men in his park, a deer across their shoulders."<sup>12</sup>

In *Liberty Against the Law*, Christopher Hill tells the story of the redistribution of land and wealth from rural labourers to the landed classes between the 16th and 18th centuries and the rack-renting, eviction and persecution of the poor. For landless labourers, he says, the termination of rights to common land "meant the difference between a viable life and starvation"<sup>13</sup>. Many

died in the famines of the 1590s, 1620s and 1640s<sup>14</sup>. Many more – 80,000 in the early 17th Century according to the historian Peter Clark<sup>15</sup> – became vagabonds whose wandering put them on the wrong side of the law. They were branded, flogged back to their parishes, press-ganged by the navy and the merchant marine or forced into industries whose conditions and wage rates were "little better than slavery".<sup>16</sup>

#### Child slaves

The children of vagabonds and paupers were transported to Virginia, effectively as slaves<sup>17</sup>. Many of them died in transit. There were enclosure riots (attempts to resist the landlords' seizure of the commons) all over the country<sup>18</sup>. Almost all of them failed, and many of the rioters were transported or executed. In the 18th and 19th Centuries, Marion Shoard records in her book *This Land is Our Land*, a further 7 million acres of England – 20% of the total land area – were enclosed by landowners<sup>19</sup>.

Of course there is no single history of the countryside and no single means of interpreting it. Sir Tony Wrigley, for example, emphasises instead the constraints of a local agrarian economy, and sees population growth as the main driver of migration<sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup>. But neither version of the lives of the other 99% is given by the National Trust when you visit its stately homes and grand estates. The story is told solely from the point of view of the landowner. History, to the Trust, is the propaganda of the victor.

In its document *History and Place*, the National Trust maintains that "we can never hope fully to understand the past, but we can at least recognise that history is open to widely different interpretations ... The Trust is ready to explore unfamiliar or uncomfortable history in new ways."<sup>22</sup> And it is true that if you visit one of the workhouses it has lovingly restored, you can relive "the harshness of the nineteenth-century Poor Laws."<sup>23</sup> But when you read what it says about its great estates, you will find no clues as to how those workhouses

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## LAST WORDS

**Allotments have been used as a sop to the dispossessed for at least four centuries. The General Enclosure Act of 1845 took 615,000 acres from the poor and gave them 2,200 acres of allotments in return**

were populated. Perhaps because it doesn't want to scare its visitors away, perhaps because it has absorbed the views of previous landowners, it has airbrushed the poor from history.

Allotments have been used as a sop to the dispossessed for at least four centuries. The General Enclosure Act of 1845 took 615,000 acres from the poor and gave them 2,200 acres of allotments in return<sup>24</sup>. Just because we love and value allotments should not stop us from seeing that they also represent paternalistic tokenism. But I'm not asking the Trust to divide up all its lands and give them back to the people: its management of property on our behalf is liberal and benign. I am asking it to give us back our history. **CT**

*George Monbiot's latest book is Bring On The Acopalypse, Essays on Self-Destruction.*

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2. John Newsinger, 2006. The Blood Never Dried: a people's history of the British empire. Bookmarks, London.
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10. John Tatter, 2007. Stowe Landscape Gardens: A Summary History. <http://faculty.bsc.edu/jtatter/summary.html>

11. Interestingly, Tatter (see above) records that "This early seventeenth-century landscape also included Stowe church and the village of Stowe, to the east." But he doesn't mention the village again. It simply vanishes from the record. In reality, all its buildings were destroyed, except the church.

12. EP Thomson, 1975. Whigs and Hunters, p223. Penguin, London.

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14. *ibid*, p.33.

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20. Tony Wrigley, pers comm. See:

21. EA Wrigley and RS Schofield, 1981. The Population History of England 1541-1871. Edward Arnold, London.

22. The National Trust, no date given. History and Place.

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