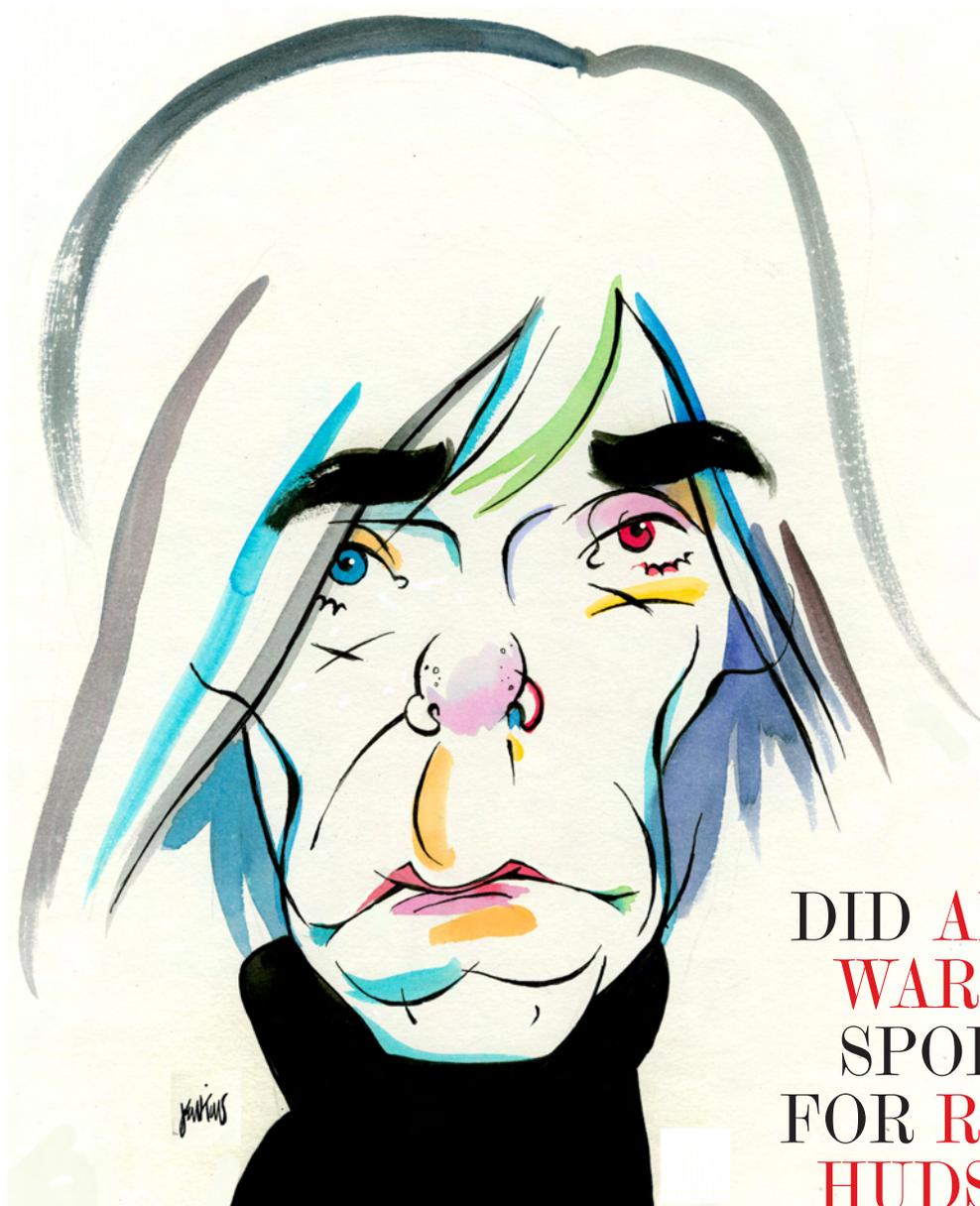


**INSIDE:** THE OTHER SIDE OF EASY RIDER ● REBOOT AMERICA ● GULLIBLE'S TRAVELS ● THE RAPE OF WASHINGTON ● ISRAEL'S RACIST IN CHIEF

**ColdType**  
**The READER**

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**DID ANDY  
WARHOL  
SPOIL IT  
FOR ROCK  
HUDSON?**

# The ColdType READER



**Editor:** Tony Sutton  
([editor@coldtype.net](mailto:editor@coldtype.net))

**Cover:** Tony Jenkins  
([jenkinsdraws.com](http://jenkinsdraws.com))

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# America's stupid healthcare debate

If you want to see a health plan that works, take a trip across the northern border to Canada, urges **Dave Lindorff**

**W**hen President Barack Obama made his recent quick dash up to Ottawa, it's too bad he didn't suffer a gastrointestinal attack, or slip on some ice and twist an ankle or something. If he had, he might have had a chance to do what he should have done anyhow: visit a Canadian health clinic.

Maybe then he would have had his eyes opened to a better idea: government-run health care.

It is a sad commentary on the pinched and strictly censored level of political discourse in this nation that any serious consideration of Canada's successful approach to health care is simply out of bounds in America. It is nothing short of absurd that even though the nation that is closest to the US geographically, culturally, linguistically and economically has, since 1973, had a system of provincially administered single-payer government-run health systems which have kept the country's health costs at about 3/5 of what they are in the US as a percentage of GDP (9.7% vs. 17% for the US), at the same time serving all people and (not surprisingly) achieving better health statistics than the US, no one in Washington has talked about inviting Canadian health authorities down to explain how their system works and whether it might make sense in the United States.

Canadians have complete freedom to choose their physicians. They pay nothing to go to hospital. I interviewed one hospital administrator in Canada who had worked earlier managing a US hospital. He said a whole wing of the facility in the US was devoted to billing and accounting staff, while he had only two people for that job in Canada, "mostly to handle the bills of the occasional American tourist!" (An astonishing 31% of every US health care dollar goes for paperwork – almost one third of the \$7200 per person spent each year on health care in America.)

Interestingly, when I interviewed the CEOs of a number of huge Canadian subsidiaries of US corporations, they universally told me that they were ardent supporters of the Canadian system, and in fact, were involved in lobbying to have it expanded to include long-term care and psychiatric benefits.

## **Propaganda campaign**

There has for years been a huge ongoing propaganda campaign by US health care companies and their lobbies to denigrate Canada's system, but the big truth that they cannot deny is that it is loved by Canadians.

The best evidence of this: Despite years of conservative governments in Canada, and in the various provinces, no political

**When I interviewed the CEOs of a number of huge Canadian subsidiaries of US corporations, they universally told me that they were ardent supporters of the Canadian system**

## BREAK A LEG

**The truth is that every other modern country in the world has long ago figured out that you can't have cost-effective, universal health care unless the government is the paymaster, with prices set by the government**

leader has ever tried to re-privatize health care in Canada. Clearly such an effort would be political suicide, so popular is the system there.

As Canadian resident Joe Sotham explains, "In Canada we complain about wait list length, and the reality is that there is rationing, but everyone gets care and nobody is bankrupted, no HMO clerk stands in the way of treatment. We treat health care like a fundamental right. I took my cat to the vet last year and got a 3-page, \$1,875 bill. My comment was this must be what it's like in the States for people."

Well yeah, Joe, but you'd be hard-pressed to get out of a hospital ER in the US with a bill that small. My wife had an uninsured grad student who had the flu during spring break when the school's infirmary was closed. He went to the ER of Temple University Hospital, got looked at by a nurse practitioner, and was given some aspirin. His bill: \$2,000. That's pretty typical.

### **Include Canadian experts**

Surely, when President Obama assembles his panels to work out some kind of health "reform" package for the out-of-control US health care system, he should include Canadian health experts and ministers into the mix.

It makes absolutely no sense to embark on a \$650 billion-to-\$2-trillion project without considering all the available options – including options that have a proven track record of keeping costs down, services available to all, and that delivers

better health outcomes.

The truth is that every other modern country in the world has long ago figured out that you can't have cost-effective, universal health care unless the government is the paymaster, with prices set by the government.

The truth, too, is that no country that has moved to such a single-payer system has later rejected it – a good indication that the people of these countries are satisfied with the results and with what they're getting for what they're paying.

No one would say that about the US health care system, which is failing over 50 million people completely, that is the leading cause of bankruptcy, that is making US companies non-competitive, and that sucks up over 17 percent of GDP while producing life expectancy and infant mortality figures that make some Third World countries look good.

Next time President Obama travels to Canada, Britain, France, Germany or some other country with a single-payer system, we should all wish for him to "break a leg," as they say in the performing arts. He might learn something valuable from the experience.

**CT**

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

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# The insanity of solitary confinement

**Sherwood Ross** on the true cost of housing prisoners in long-term solitary confinement

The United States today is housing tens of thousands of inmates in long-term solitary confinement, a form of numbing mental torture that drives about one-third of them psychotic, induces irrational anger in 90 percent, and ups the likelihood they will commit violent crimes upon release.

“It’s an awful thing, solitary,” US Senator John McCain once wrote of his two years spent in a fifteen by fifteen foot prison cell in Viet Nam. “It crushes your spirit and weakens your resistance more effectively than any other form of mistreatment.” Testimony from other notables that have endured long stretches in solitary have elicited like comments.

Yet, the US today has the dubious distinction of incarcerating “the vast majority of prisoners who are in long-term solitary confinement” around the world, according to an article in the March 30th *New Yorker* magazine. And they make up a growing portion of our 2.3 million inmates, a shameful statistic that ranks America first among all nations. Gawande’s article is titled “Hellhole.”

The first supermax built anywhere was Sydney, Australia’s “Katingal” unit at Long Bay Correctional Centre in 1975. Dubbed the “electronic zoo,” it lasted a brief two years before it was closed down over human rights concerns, according to Wikipedia.

In the 17 years beginning with the construction of the first US “supermax” prison in Marion, Ill., in 1983, 60 such prisons have sprouted – prisons specifically designed for mass solitary confinement, reports Atul Gawande in the *New Yorker*. The Federal Bureau of Prisons euphemistically refers to its solitary cells as “Special Housing Units.” Most of the supermax prisons have been erected by State governments and two-thirds of all states have them.

“The number of prisoners in these facilities has since risen to extraordinary levels,” Gawande writes. “America now holds at least 25,000 inmates in isolation in supermax facilities. An additional 50,000 to 80,000 are kept in restrictive segregation units, many of them in isolation, too, although the government does not release these figures.”

## High cost of incarceration

The Urban Institute found the per cell cost for confining one prisoner in solitary for one year is \$75,000. Taxpayers could put a dozen students through community college for the same bucks and society would get a better return. From every indication, money spent on a supermax is money poorly spent.

Boston psychiatrist Stuart Grassian, who interviewed more than 200 prisoners kept in solitary, concluded that about one

**The per cell cost for confining one prisoner in solitary for one year is \$75,000. Taxpayers could put a dozen students through community college for the same bucks and society would get a better return**

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in three of them had developed acute psychosis with hallucinations.

Prisoners so confined spend their time talking to themselves, pacing back and forth like animals in cages, and blank out mentally. Some beat their heads against the walls until blood flows.

Others lapse into catatonic states, utterly destroyed as functioning human beings. “EEG studies going back to the nineteen-sixties have shown diffuse slowing of brain waves in prisoners after a week or more of solitary confinement,” Gawande writes.

Often, prisoners can be confined in solitary for minor infractions of prison rules, such as taking too much time in the shower or associating with a gang member. By denying an inmate social interaction, “the human brain may become as impaired as one that has incurred a traumatic injury,” Gawande points out. After all, he notes, “Human beings are social creatures.” The writer quotes Craig Haney, a psychology professor at the University of California at Santa Cruz allowed to study inmates at California’s Pelican Bay supermax, as finding many prisoners “begin to lose the ability to initiate behavior of any kind – to organize their own lives around activity and purpose. Chronic apathy, lethargy, depression, and despair often result.”

### **Revenge fantasies**

Additionally, many of the solitary inmates become consumed with revenge fantasies.

We need to ask, “What is the cost to society in treasure and blood after their release?” “How many go straight to mental hospitals?” “How many wind up right back in prison?”

There are defenders of the supermax model, however. One inmate wrote the *Denver Post* he was not affected by the boredom and considered the silence “wonderful.” He said, “I still have a relatively

intact mind. It could be infinitely worse.” And in *Forbes* magazine, author Ian Ross (no kin), wrote, “It’s worth considering that the Supermax model – which includes prisoner isolation for 23 out of every 24 hours a day – may be serving as a deterrent to some violent criminals, a kind of brightly lit billboard that advertises the life of rather extreme measures they are facing. There’s no way to quantify that, but it’s not out of the realm of possibility.” (It may be, indeed!)

In June, 2006, after a year-long study, the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America’s Prisons called for an end to long-term isolation of prisoners. It said there were no benefits to the practice beyond 10 days of punishment.

What’s more, Gawande writes, “evidence from a number of studies has shown that supermax conditions – in which prisoners have virtually no social interactions and are given no programmatic support – make it highly likely that they will commit more crimes when they are released.”

The writer says our willingness to confine our own citizens to solitary made it easy to discard the Geneva Conventions prohibiting similar treatment of foreign prisoners of war. “In much the same way that a previous generation of Americans countenanced legalized segregation, ours has countenanced legalized torture. And there is no clearer manifestation of this than our routine use of solitary confinement – on our own people...” Since prolonged solitary is little more than the sadistic crucifixion of thousands of human beings, where, oh where, is the public outrage? **CT**

*Sherwood Ross worked as a reporter for the Chicago Daily News and as a columnist for wire services. He currently operates a public relations company for worthy causes. Reach him at [sherwoodr1@yahoo.com](mailto:sherwoodr1@yahoo.com).*

# The proceeds of crime

The US and British governments have created a private prison industry which preys on human lives, writes **George Monbiot**

**I**t's a staggering case; more staggering still that it has scarcely been mentioned on this side of the ocean. recently, two judges in Pennsylvania were convicted of jailing some 2000 children in exchange for bribes from private prison companies.

Mark Ciavarella and Michael Conahan sent children to jail for offences so trivial that some of them weren't even crimes. A 15 year-old called Hillary Transue got three months for creating a spoof web page ridiculing her school's assistant principal. Mr Ciavarella sent Shane Bly, then 13, to boot camp for trespassing in a vacant building. He gave a 14-year-old, Jamie Quinn, 11 months in prison for slapping a friend during an argument, after the friend slapped her. The judges were paid \$2.6 million by companies belonging to the Mid Atlantic Youth Services Corp for helping to fill its jails. This is what happens when public services are run for profit.

It's an extreme example, but it hints at the wider consequences of the trade in human lives created by private prisons. In the US and the UK they have a powerful incentive to ensure that the number of prisoners keeps rising.

The United States is more corrupt than the UK, but it is also more transparent. There the lobbyists demanding and receiving changes to judicial policy might be ex-

posed, and corrupt officials identified and prosecuted. The UK, with a strong tradition of official secrecy and a weak tradition of scrutiny and investigative journalism, has no such safeguards.

The corrupt judges were paid by the private prisons not only to increase the number of child convicts but also to shut down a competing prison run by the public sector. Taking bribes to bang up kids might be novel; shutting public facilities to help private companies happens – on both sides of the water – all the time.

## Non-existent prisoners

The *Wall Street Journal* has shown how, as a result of lobbying by the operators, private jails in Mississippi and California are being paid for non-existent prisoners. The prison corporations have been guaranteed a certain number of inmates. If the courts fail to produce enough convicts, they get their money anyway. This outrages taxpayers in both states, which have cut essential public services to raise these funds. But there is a simple means of resolving this problem: you replace ghost inmates with real ones. As the *Journal*, seldom associated with raging anti-capitalism, observes, "prison expansion [has] spawned a new set of vested interests with stakes in keeping prisons full and in building more. ... The result has been a financial and political bazaar, with

**A 15 year-old called Hillary Transue got three months for creating a spoof web page ridiculing her school's assistant principal**

**Unlike civilised nations, the UK has no register of lobbyists; we are not even entitled to know which lobbyists ministers have met**

convicts in stripes as the prize.”

Even as crime declines, law-makers are pressed by their sponsors to increase the rate of imprisonment. The US has, by a very long way, the world’s highest proportion of people behind bars: 756 prisoners per 100,000 people, or just over 1% of the adult population. Similarly wealthy countries have around one-tenth of this rate of imprisonment.

Like most of its really bad ideas, Britain’s last Conservative government imported private jails from the US. As Stephen Nathan, author of a forthcoming book about prison privatisation in the UK, has shown, the notion was promoted by the Select Committee on Home Affairs, which in 1986 visited prisons run by the Corrections Corporation of America. When the corporation told them that private provision in the US improved prison standards and delivered good value for money, the committee members failed to check its claims. They recommended that the government should put the construction and management of prisons out to tender “as an experiment”.

### **British consortium**

Encouraged by the committee’s report, the Corrections Corporation of America set up a consortium in Britain with two Conservative party donors, Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd and John Mowlem & Co, to promote privately financed prisons over here. The first privately-run prison in the UK, Wolds, was opened by the Danish security company Group 4 in 1992. In 1993, before it had had a chance to evaluate this experiment, the government announced that all new prisons would be built and run by private companies.

The Labour party, then in opposition, was outraged. John Prescott promised that “Labour will take back private prisons into public ownership – it is the only safe way forward.” Jack Straw stated that “it is not appropriate for people to profit out of incarceration. This is surely one area where a free market certainly does not exist”. He

too promised to “bring these prisons into proper public control and run them directly as public services.”

But during his first seven weeks in office, Jack Straw renewed one private prison contract and launched two new ones. A year later he announced that all new prisons in England and Wales would be built and run by private companies, under the private finance initiative (PFI). Today the UK has a higher proportion of prisoners in private institutions than the US. This is the only country in Europe whose jails are run on this model.

So has prison privatisation here influenced judicial policy? As we discovered during the recent lobbying scandal in the House of Lords, there’s no way of knowing. Unlike civilised nations, the UK has no register of lobbyists; we are not even entitled to know which lobbyists ministers have met.

But there are some clues. The former home secretary, John Reid, previously in charge of prison provision, has become a consultant to the private prison operator G4S. The government is intending to commission a series of massive Titan jails under PFI. Most experts on prisons expect them to be disastrous, taking inmates further away from their families (which reduces the chances of rehabilitation) and creating vast warrens in which all the social diseases of imprisonment will fester.

Only two groups want them built: ministers and the prison companies: they offer excellent opportunities to rack up profits. And the very nature of PFI, which commits the government to paying for services for 25 or 30 years whether or not they are still required creates a major incentive to ensure that prison numbers don’t fall. The beast must be fed.

And there’s another line of possible evidence. In the two countries whose economies most resemble the UK’s – Germany and France – the prison population has risen quite slowly. France has 96 inmates per 100,000 people, an increase of 14%

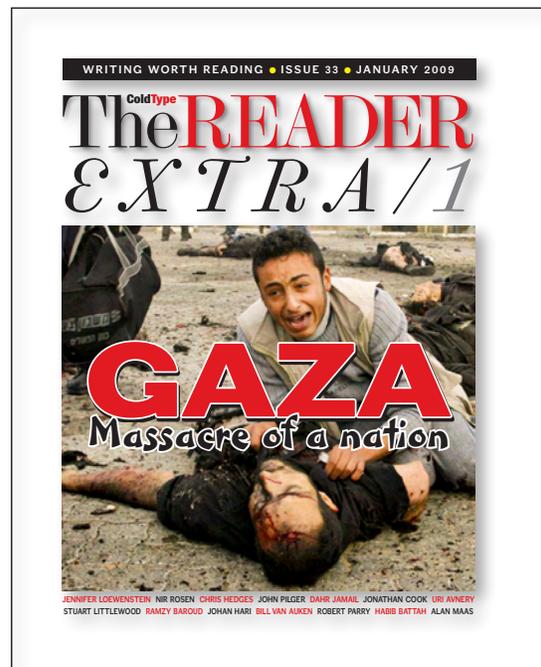
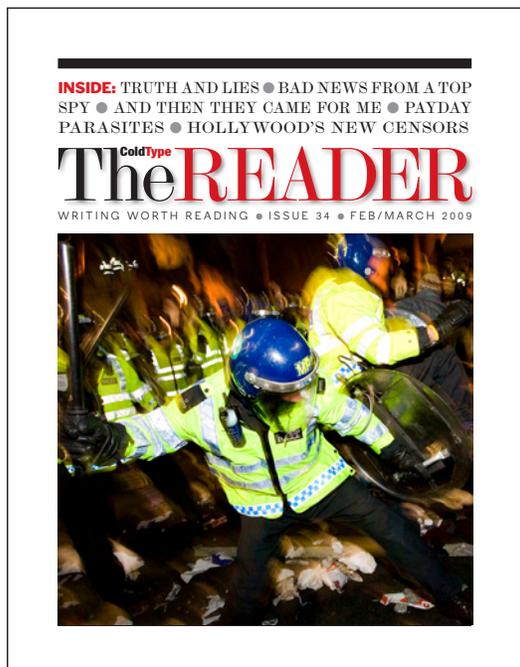
since 1992. Germany has 89 prisoners per 100,000: 25% more than in 1992 but 9% less than in 2001. But the UK now locks up 151 out of every 100,000 inhabitants: 73% more than in 1992 and 20% more than in 2001(15). Yes our politicians have barely come down from the trees, yes we are still governed out of the offices of the *Daily Mail* newspaper, but it would be foolish to dismiss the likely influence of the private pris-

on industry.

This revolting trade in human lives creates a permanent incentive to lock people up; not because prison works; not because it makes us safer, but because it makes money. Privatisation appears to have locked this country into mass imprisonment. **CT**

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

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# Israel's Racist in Chief

The appointment of Avigdor Lieberman as Israel's new foreign minister gives little hope of a viable peace settlement in the Middle East, writes **Chris Hedges**

**Lieberman, a former nightclub bouncer who was a member of the Kach Party, has the personal and political habits of the Islamic goons he opposes**

It was unthinkable, when I was based as a correspondent in Jerusalem two decades ago, that an Israeli politician who openly advocated ethnically cleansing the Palestinians from Israeli-controlled territory, as well as forcing Arabs in Israel to take loyalty oaths or be forcibly relocated to the West Bank, could sit on the Cabinet. The racist tirades of Jewish proto-fascists like Meir Kahane stood outside the law, were vigorously condemned by most Israelis and were prosecuted accordingly. Kahane's repugnant Kach Party, labeled by the United States, Canada and the European Union as a terrorist organization, was outlawed by the Israeli government in 1988 for inciting racism.

Israel has changed. And the racist virus spread by Kahane, whose thugs were charged with the murders and beatings of dozens of unarmed Palestinians and whose members held rallies in Jerusalem where they chanted "Death to Arabs!" has returned to Israel in the figure of Israel's powerful new foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman. Lieberman openly calls for an *araberrein* Israel – an Israel free of Arabs.

There has been a steady decline from the days of the socialist Labor Party, which founded Israel in 1948 and held within its ranks many leaders, such as Yitzhak Rabin, who were serious about peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians. The moral

squalor of Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu and Lieberman reflect the country's degeneration. Labor, like Israel, is a shell of its old self. Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu Party, with 15 seats in the Knesset, is likely to bring down the Netanyahu government the moment his power base is robust enough to move him into the prime minister's office. He is the new face of the Jewish state.

Lieberman, a former nightclub bouncer who was a member of the Kach Party, has the personal and political habits of the Islamic goons he opposes. He was found guilty in 2001 of beating a 12-year-old boy and fined by an Israeli court. He is being investigated for multimillion-dollar fraud and money laundering and is rumored to have close ties with the Russian mafia. He lives, in defiance of international law, in the Jewish settlement of Nokdim on occupied Palestinian land.

Lieberman, as did his mentor Kahane, calls for the eradication of Palestinians from Israel and the territories it occupies. During the massive Israeli bombardment of Gaza in December and January he said that Israel should fight Hamas the way the United States fought the Japanese in World War II. He noted that occupation of Japan was unnecessary to achieve victory, alluding to the dropping of atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. When he assumed his position as foreign minister he announced that

the 2007 Annapolis peace agreement was dead. He said in 2004 that 90 percent of Israel's Palestinian citizens "have no place here. They can take their bundles and get lost." This statement was especially galling since Lieberman, unlike the Palestinian majority who can trace their ancestry in the region back generations, immigrated to Israel in 1978 from Moldova and retains a heavy Russian accent.

Lieberman, from the floor of the Knesset, openly fantasized three years ago about executing the handful of Palestinian Knesset members.

"We requested that in the government guidelines it would say explicitly that all the inciters and collaborators with terrorism that sit in this house should bear the brunt of the penalty for those actions," Lieberman said from the Knesset plenum in May of 2006. "All those who continue to meet freely with Hamas and Hezbollah—who go on monthly visits to Lebanon. Those who declared Israel's Independence Day to be Nakba [Arabic for catastrophe] Day and raised black flags. ...

"World War Two ended with the Nuremberg trials. The heads of the Nazi Party went to be executed – but not just them, also those who collaborated with them. Just like [prime minister of Vichy France during WWII Pierre] Laval was later executed, I hope that this is the fate of the collaborators in this house."

He has suggested bombing Egypt's Aswan Dam, an act that would lead to a massive loss of Egyptian lives. As Ariel Sharon's minister of transportation he offered to bus several hundred Palestinian prisoners to the sea and drown them. He recently told the president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, one of Israel's few Arab allies, to "go to hell." And, along with Netanyahu, he advocates massive airstrikes on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Hamas, the Iranian government and the Taliban have been condemned by Washington for advocating policies that mirror those expressed by Lieberman toward Palestinians. Ahmed Tibi, an Arab deputy in

the Knesset, has called on the international community to boycott Israel as it did Austria when far-right leader Jorg Haider joined that country's government. This seems a fair request. But I expect the hypocrisy and double standards that characterize our relations with the Middle East, along with our obsequious catering to the Israel lobby, to prevail. Racism, as long as it is directed toward Arabs, does little to perturb our conscience or hinder our support of Israel.

The Israeli leadership, following the assassination of Rabin by a Jewish extremist with ties to Kach, never again sought a viable settlement with the Palestinians. Successive Israeli prime ministers talked the language of peace and negotiations largely to placate the international community and Washington while they vigorously expanded Jewish settlements on Palestinian land, seized huge tracts of the West Bank, including most of the aquifers, and imposed a brutal collective punishment on the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza.

Palestinians have become, by Israeli design, impoverished, reduced to a level of bare subsistence and dependent on the United Nations for food assistance. They live ringed by Israeli troops in a series of pod-like ghettos in the West Bank and in Gaza, which is a massive, fetid open-air prison. And when these little Bantustans become restive, Israel swiftly turns off the delivery of basic food and supplies or uses F-16 fighter jets or heavy artillery to bomb the squalid concrete hovels.

The public embrace by a senior Israeli official of a policy of ethnic cleansing, however, is ominous. It signals a further evolution of the Israeli state from one that at least paid lip service to equality to one that increasingly resembles the former apartheid regime in South Africa. Racism, once practiced in private and condemned in public, has become to many Israelis acceptable. **CT**

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

**Palestinians have become, by Israeli design, impoverished, reduced to a level of bare subsistence and dependent on the United Nations for food assistance**

# The rape of Washington

When it came to a battle of wills between Israel and the US, it was Obama who blinked first, writes **Uri Avnery**

**Revelations were leaked by the police, several women disclosed lurid details, the ex-President made a plea agreement admitting to lesser offences, he then revoked the deal, the Attorney General procrastinated and now he seems to have made up his mind about the indictmen**

**R**eturning home from a very short visit to London, I found the country in the grip of uncontrollable emotions.

No, it was not about the looming danger of the radical right gaining control. It is now almost certain that the next government will consist of an assorted bunch of settlers, explicit racists and perhaps even outright fascists. But that does not evoke any excitement.

Nor was there much excitement about yet another interrogation of the (still) incumbent Prime Minister in his various corruption affairs. That is hardly news anymore.

All the excitement was about a “press conference” given by the former President of Israel, Moshe Katsav, after the Attorney General announced that he might be indicted for rape.

Katsav, it may be remembered by those who remember such things, was accused by several of his female staff of persistent sexual harassment and at least one case of rape. He had to resign.

An Iranian-born immigrant and a protégé of Menachem Begin, Katsav had made a career based on a kind of affirmative action. Begin believed that, for the sake of integration, promising young immigrants from Oriental countries should be promoted to positions of responsibility. Katsav, a rather

nondescript right-wing politician with all the customary right-wing opinions, became Minister of Tourism and then was elected by the Knesset to the ceremonial post of President, mainly to spite the rival candidate, Shimon Peres. Wags said that the Knesset was reluctant to spoil Peres’ (then) unbroken record of lost elections.

## **Lurid details**

Since his abdication two years ago, the Katsav affair has dragged on and on, almost to the point of farce. Revelations were leaked by the police, several women disclosed lurid details, the ex-President made a plea agreement admitting to lesser offences, he then revoked the deal, the Attorney General procrastinated and now he seems to have made up his mind about the indictment.

So Katsav called a press-conference in his remote home-town, Kiryat Malakhi (the former Arab village of Qastina, now within reach of the Qassams). It was an unprecedented performance. The ex-President spoke solo for nearly three hours, airing his grievances against the police, the Attorney-General, the media, the politicians and almost everybody else. All this was, incredibly, broadcast live on all three of Israel’s TV channels, as if it had been a State of the Union address. Katsav rambled on and on, repeating himself again and again. No

questions were allowed. Respected journalists, hungry for scoops, were evicted if they dared to interrupt.

So when I came back yesterday morning, I found this feat dominating the front pages of all our newspapers. Everything else was banished to the back pages.

Because of this, Charles Freeman got hardly a mention. Yet his affair was a thousand-fold more important than all the sexual activities of our ex-President.

Freeman was called by Barack Obama's newly-appointed Chief of National Intelligence, Admiral Dennis Blair, to the post of Chairman of the National Intelligence Council. In this position, he would have been in charge of the National Intelligence Estimates (NIE), summarizing the reports of all the 16 US intelligence agencies, which employ some 100,000 people at an annual cost of 50 billion dollars, and composing the estimates that are put before the President.

In Israel, this is the job of the Directorate of Military Intelligence, and the officer in charge has a huge influence on government policy. In October 1973, the then intelligence chief disregarded all reports to the contrary and informed the government that there was only a "low probability" of an Egyptian attack. A few days later the Egyptian army crossed the canal.

### **Government misled**

Throughout the 1990's, the man in charge of intelligence estimates, Amos Gilad, deliberately misled the government into believing that Yasser Arafat was deceiving them and was actually plotting the destruction of Israel. Gilad was later openly accused by his subordinates of suppressing their expert reports and submitting estimates of his own, which were not based on any intelligence whatsoever. Later, as the guru of Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Gilad coined the phrase "We have no Palestinian partner for peace".

In the US, the intelligence chiefs famously supplied President George W. Bush with

the (false) intelligence he needed to justify his invasion of Iraq.

All this shows how vitally important it is to have an estimates chief of intellectual integrity and wide experience and knowledge. Admiral Blair could not have chosen a better person than Charles Freeman, a man of sterling character and uncontested expertise, especially about China and the Arab world.

And that was his undoing.

As a former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Freeman is an expert on the Arab world and the Israeli-Arab conflict. He has strong opinions about American policy in the Middle East, and makes no secret of them.

In a 2005 speech, he criticized Israel's "high-handed and self-defeating policies" originating in the "occupation and settlement of Arab lands," which he described as "inherently violent."

In a 2007 speech he said that the US had "embraced Israel's enemies as our own" and that Arabs had "responded by equating Americans with Israelis as their enemies." Charging the US with backing Israel's "efforts to pacify its captive and increasingly ghettoized Arab populations" and to "seize ever more Arab land for its colonists," he added that "Israel no longer even pretends to seek peace with the Palestinians."

Another conclusion is his belief that the terrorism the United States confronts is due largely to "the brutal oppression of the Palestinians by an Israeli occupation that has lasted over 40 years and shows no signs of ending."

Naturally, the appointment of such a person was viewed with great alarm by the pro-Israel lobby in Washington. They decided on an all-out attack. No subtle behind-the-scenes intervention, no discreet protestations, but a full-scale demonstration of their might right at the beginning of the Obama era.

Public denunciations were composed, senators and congressmen pressed into action, media people mobilized. Freeman's

**Throughout the 1990's, the man in charge of intelligence estimates, Amos Gilad, deliberately misled the government into believing that Yasser Arafat was deceiving them and was actually plotting the destruction of Israel.**

## BEATING OBAMA

Many people in Israel, who view the establishment of the new rightist government with apprehension, cite as their main fear the danger of a clash with the new Obama administration

integrity was called into question, shady connections with Arab and Chinese financial interests “disclosed” by the docile press. Admiral Blair came to his appointee’s defense, but in vain. Freeman had no choice but to withdraw.

The full meaning of this episode should not escape anyone.

It was the first test of strength of the lobby in the new Obama era. And in this test, the lobby came out with flying (blue-and-white) colors. The administration was publicly humiliated.

The White House did not even try to hide its abject surrender. It declared that the appointment had not been cleared with the President, that Obama had no hand in it and did not even know about it. Meaning: of course he would have objected to the appointment of any official who was not fully acceptable to the lobby. The portrayal of the power of the lobby by Professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, has been fully vindicated.

This has a significance which goes far beyond the already far-reaching implications of the affair itself.

### Clash with Obama

Many people in Israel, who view the establishment of the new rightist government with apprehension, cite as their main fear the danger of a clash with the new Obama administration. Such a clash, they believe, could be fatal for Israel’s security. But the rightists deride such arguments. They assert that no American president would ever dare to confront the Israeli lobby. The captive congressmen and senators, as well as the supporters of the Israeli government in the media and even in the White House itself, would sink on sight any American policy opposed by even the most extreme right-wing government in Israel.

Now the first skirmish has taken place, and the President of the United States has blinked first. Perhaps one should not rush to conclusions, perhaps Obama needs more time to find his bearings, but the signs are

ominous for any Israeli interested in peace.

It may be too early to call this episode the Rape of Washington, but it is certainly vastly more important than Katsav’s sexual escapades.

By the way, or not by the way, a word about my trip to London.

I went there to lend support to a group of Jewish personalities, well-known in academic and other circles, who have set up an organization called “Independent Jewish Voices”.

Recently they published a book called *A Time To Speak Out*, in which several of them contributed to the debate about Israel, human rights and Jewish ethics. The views expressed are very close to those current in the Israeli peace camp. But when they offered their book for presentation in the Jewish Book Week, they were rudely rejected. In protest, they convened an event of their own, and that’s where I spoke.

I believe that it is of utmost importance that such Jewish voices be heard. In several countries, including the US, groups of brave Jews are trying to stand up to the Jewish establishment that unconditionally supports the Israeli Right. In the US, several such groups have sprung up, some quite recently. One of them, called “J Street”, is trying to compete with the formidable and notorious AIPAC.

It is important for governments and peoples to know that the unconditional support for the Israeli Right does not represent the majority of Jews in the US, the UK and other countries. The Jewish public is far from monolithic. The majority is liberal and believes in peace and human rights. Until now this was a silent majority, out of fear of a repressive establishment. It is indeed “a time to speak out”.

I believe that it is in the interest of Israel to support these groups – and that their activities are somewhat more important than Mr. Katsav’s exploits. **CT**

*Uri Avnery is an Israeli writer and peace activist with Gush Shalom*

# Did Andy Warhol spoil it for Rock Hudson?

An excerpt from the book, *Souvenirs of a Blown World*  
by **Gregory McDonald**

**W**e went to an Andy Warhol party and interviewed ourselves in his reflecting glasses.

Andy Warhol first established his vanishing presence in 1957-8. His art was existential, intensified the immediate by denying the past, denying the future, by choosing and perceiving the essence of only the most transitory. He was lionized.

Some lionized him because they understood him.

Others lionized him because they thought him a delightful fraud, a self-made gimmick in an age which happily responded to such, an appearance utterly departed from reality in a society which inclined to put appearance well ahead of reality, a complete negative in a world fresh out of positives. Like a little candle in a cavernous church, his existence was only noticed because he flickered.

If contemporary heroism was the achievement of success without the fact of work,

Warhol was a Napoleon. He was a tower of passivity.

In his Factory, a New York City silver-lined loft, his works were assembled for him by his gnomes. Static works, movies, helium-filled pillows he sold as clouds were put together under his direction but seldom with his direct involvement. Occasionally he languished a brush, or stood by a camera, but even this effort was soon resisted altogether, as too sapping of his energies.

He insisted, in the fall of 1966, he would do no more painting. His underground movies required his full attention. The nightclub he owned jointly with Bob Dylan, the Velvet Underground, was the prime source of his lack of amusement.

**Cars and a shooting: even in the life of a 100-pound artist**

Before Warhol arrived at his own party, we toured his works.

One Hundred Campbell Soup Cans, 1962, acrylic on canvas (Beef Noodle), Three Campbell Soup Cans, acrylic and silk screen enamel on canvas

**If contemporary heroism was the achievement of success without the fact of work, Warhol was a Napoleon. He was a tower of passivity.**



ART: TONY JENKINS

## BOOK EXCERPT

His touted entourage looked like a group of children tumbling back downstairs after having been sent to spend a rainy afternoon playing among the wardrobes in the attics

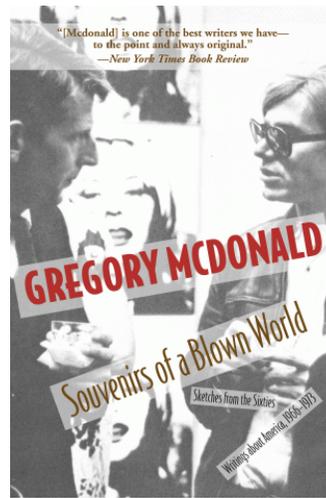
(Condensed), his Twenty-Four Brillo Boxes; his works of atrocity, Saturday Disaster, 1964 (duplicate photos of an auto accident, one body hanging from the roof, another spilling from the seat to the ground), Electric Chair, 1964, in shocking red and yellow and grey and white, Orange Disaster #5 (fifteen sombre electric chairs with shocking yellow backgrounds); grossly overstated flower designs (red and yellow on jungle green background). There were two portraits, one of a pretty girl, which did not flatter the subject, Holly Solomon, in nine identical panels, and Self-Portrait, which did, in twenty-four identical panels.

On two consoles, three of Warhol's ideas of what a movie should be reeled endlessly. *Eat* portrayed a man biting and chewing a mushroom but never seeming to get anywhere with it. *Kiss* showed, close up, a couple osculating long beyond what human patience ordinarily permits. The third, *Sleep*, was far more osculant with viewer reaction.

Perhaps the most original piece was *Do It Yourself*, 1962, acrylic on canvas, a seascape, blue sky and pink clouds painted in, a pencil outline of two yachts, both schooners, the rest a sea of numbers, à la number painting.

As is proper for someone being lionized, there was a rush for Andy Warhol when he entered the party, the hero of minimalism and multiplicity, who had made such a vast presence out of disappearance, who had made some oft-quoted crack as "Sooner or later, everyone will be a celebrity for twenty minutes."

Extremely small – "He's always on some diet or other," reported a companion, David Whitney; "wispy is the word" – his hair was



**SOUVENIRS OF  
A BLOWN WORLD**  
*Gregory McDonald*  
Seven Stories Press  
(US\$16.95)

silvered with a drugstore dye, his drawn face made up with a fairly thick paste, and his eyes were hidden behind one-way, silver-fronted sunglasses, never removed in public. His thin hands, his wrists denied the need for makeup, deathly frail, pastey white. (Two years after first meeting Warhol, I was told by James Klee, then an assistant professor of psychology at Brandeis University, that Andy Warhol was piebald. Curiously, Klee had had both Andy Warhol and Abbie Hoffman as students. According to Klee, as a student Warhol was painfully self-conscious of his abnormalcy.) He hovered

in the shadows of a room; one had to look to see him, train one's eyes to distinguish him from the cracks in the floor. When forced, he came forward to meet one in an apparent fainting condition on wobbly knees; he spoke in a whisper more or less to a single ear.

His touted entourage looked like a group of children tumbling back downstairs after having been sent to spend a rainy afternoon playing among the wardrobes in the attics. One wore an old, wide-lapel tuxedo, white open shirt and, of course, sneakers. Another's suit was of silver-threaded upholstery fabric. The most constant waiting lady, International Velvet (Warhol resists the suggestion her alias is designed to one-up a fictional race horse once nuzzled by Elizabeth Taylor; the rumor passed through the party that she was a Bottomley, which caused newspaperman/sailor Phillip Weld to enquire if she was, one of the horse-Bottomleys), carried copies of *Vogue* and *Bazaar* against her chest but dressed in the hooded capes and black, baseball-sized, dangling earrings previously featured only in the cartoons of Charles Addams. From

dust, they were.

In June 1969, one of his entourage, Valerie Solanos, the “antimale star” of *I, a Man*, was to be sentenced to three years in jail for shooting Andy Warhol. It was a remarkable feat, probably the most extraordinary example of marksmanship in the history of womankind.

Warhol’s personal integrity was symbolized by his all-occasion brown leather jacket, dirty white shirt, black trousers, which would have been tight on anyone less emaciated, but on him sagged and bagged, held up by a wide silver belt, the weightiest thing about him.

Warhol’s covering almost everything with silver, including himself, expresses his solid interest in the ephemeral. That which is present, yet almost does not exist, approaches essence. He likes silver, he said, because, due to its odd surface qualities, “it makes things disappear.”

“My work has no future at all. I know that. A few years. Of course my images will mean nothing.”

“Does your lack of posterity bother you?”

“No.”

“If you agree your work has no posterity, is it art?”

“Yes.”

“You say there can be an art without a posterity?”

“Yes.”

#### **A conscious celebration of the immediate**

Has there been an age so surrounded by the transitory, the impermanent? To our forebears, a tomato was recognizable as a tomato because it had the properties of a tomato. To us, a tomato is recognizable as a tomato by the label on the tomato can, which will change. Is a rose a rose?

His static work made this point. By offering to the viewer the commonplace in duplicate he celebrated, made conscious, the immediate experience of seeing the transitory love goddess, news photo, commercial package. These common things, so

present in our existence, achieve an almost essential nonexistence; their presence cannot extend beyond the immediate; their multiple existence, without a past, without a future, makes them existentially precious things. No matter how many times the image of the Coke bottle is repeated today, its ide-tity cannot extend into tomorrow.

This is the essence of modern existence. The ratio of the impermanent to the permanent may be the reverse of what we have known in history.

The man eats his mushroom, but nothing is consumed; the couple kiss, but nothing is consummated; even sleep does not extend beyond the now.

Today we presume accelerating change. The cigarette package, as constantly in our hands as prayer beads in the hands of a monk, will be replaced next year by a newer design. The change in our neighborhoods is noticeable after a summer’s vacation. Few can go back to his old school and find it as it was, or frequently even where it was. Today’s newspaper exists in six hundred thousand copies; what will be the level of existence of today’s newspaper tomorrow? The television report of the end of the world will be contained in a ninety second segment.

The more transitory things are, the more meaningless. Reality, our environment, our existence, is cluttered by things deprived of meaning by their sheer impermanence. The most immediate has no past, and no future: simple, lateral multiplicity. Of more meaning, then, is transition itself. Essence of immediacy is gained by that which is most denied permanence.

Warhol’s work, by itself, is without a future, he says. His success has been in intensifying the immediate by denying the past, denying the future, by choosing and perceiving the essence of only the most transitory.

But his vision probably is permanent. If the presumption of accelerating change is accurate, after Warhol there will come other artists to celebrate with us, make con-

**Today’s newspaper exists in six hundred thousand copies; what will be the level of existence of today’s newspaper tomorrow?**

## BOOK EXCERPT

“So the next day I walked along the parade route all by myself, hoping to be mauled. No one recognized me. Store windows had my pictures in them. I stood beside one for a long time and no one even smiled at me. I was really crushed”

scious and intense, those things of our immediate world, including ourselves, which have only the most limited existence.

LUNCHING at Aunt Pittypat’s Porch, in Atlanta, Georgia, film star Rock Hudson told me the following story on himself:

“When I was twenty-two or twenty-three I went on my first publicity trip: Portland, Oregon.

“There was a big parade through town. Bands. We each had our own convertible with our names plastered on the sides.

“When we got to the theater, police had made a corridor through the crowd, their arms locked Indian fashion. When I was halfway across the sidewalk the crowds squeezed in, banging the policemen’s heads together, and I had to hit the sidewalk and crawl on my hands and knees into the theater.

“I didn’t sleep a wink that night. I was

too excited. I had really liked that. I decided I would like some more of it.

“So the next day I walked along the parade route all by myself, hoping to be mauled. No one recognized me. Store windows had my pictures in them. I stood beside one for a long time and no one even smiled at me. I was really crushed.

“I didn’t sleep, that night, either. I decided I had learned my lesson.” **CT**

*The year was 1966, and fresh off the heels of his debut novel **Running Scared**, **Gregory McDonald** – bestselling author of the **Fletch** series – was hired to write for the **Boston Globe** with the instruction to “Go and have fun and write about it, and if you end up cut and bleeding on the sidewalk, call the office.” *Souvenirs of a Blown World* is an exuberant account of the people, the encounters, and emotions that raced through the nation during those indelible years*



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# The other side of Easy Rider

**Larry Houghtelling** tells a tale of a pretty girl, a lusting actor, and a little marijuana in a hotel bedroom

I arrived in Taos in April of 1968, fresh from two years of being a newspaper reporter and hippie wannabe in California, ready to do different stuff.

On my first day in town I met an exotic local girl, Felicia, and through her I met a whole tribe of local hipsters, drug addicts, thieves and intellectuals, and started to enjoy their company. Through one of this bunch, Duke, I met Mace McHorse, Duke's father, and hit it off with him. Mace's generous hospitality introduced some regularity to my life in Taos. Mace, who looked like LBJ's grandfather and knew it, had been around Taos for ages. "Been married five times in these high altitudes," he liked to say. A true Taoseno, he was ready for Number Six.

Despite the security provided by knowing I could bunk at Mace's house, I was footloose, and I owned a car. And one day I took off for San Francisco to visit for a while, for no particular reason. So it chanced that when the "Easy Rider" crowd that included Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper and many weird and wonderful characters came through Taos to film a number of scenes, I missed all the action. \*

When I got back to Taos a while later I learned about all the recent excitement, and felt not a little left out. I supposed that "Easy Rider" must be another dumb motorcycle gang movie like the infamous

"Wild Angels" (with Fonda and Nancy Sinatra as, you know, bikers in love), but I was still upset that I'd missed all the fun. (Flash forward: I was amazed and happy when the movie turned out to be very different from my expectations, so much so that I overlooked what I now perceive as large lies and major shortcomings.)

Then, one lazy Taos day, the "Easy Rider" caravan was back. It turned out that Peter Fonda had been sick the day of filming at the Manby Hot Springs, and they needed footage of him in the springs in order to make the scene work. All other shooting was complete, so Dennis and Peter and a small crew would have sufficed, but almost the whole "Easy Rider" crowd had returned to Taos. I suppose that Peter and Dennis had come to like having a crowd around, and still had a few bucks unspent, and brought the gang along just for the fun of it. Those who weren't needed at the shoot avoided the grueling trek down the cliff to the hot springs – to see Peter naked? – and could be found goofing off in town.

## **We meet Vincent Frost**

That day I was hanging out with some friends, a couple of local Spanish hippies I'll call Fredo and Misha, and Camilla Saunders, an Angla from a large local family. Cammy couldn't really be considered a hippie, but she seemed to spend most

**When the "Easy Rider" crowd that included Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper and many weird and wonderful characters came through Taos to film a number of scenes, I missed all the action**

## FORE PLAY

**The thought of Cammy Saunders taking her clothes off would have gotten Lazarus' attention, and Vince Frost was hardly Lazarus. We were in his big wide Smooth-mobile in three minutes, at the springs in 20 minutes, and – lucky for us, there was no one there – naked in 21**

of her time with freaks. I'd been trying to make some time with her since I'd met her two months earlier, but so far I'd had no luck. Cammy had herself a steady boyfriend off in Vietnam, and she was a loyal gal. Oh, she loved hanging out and getting high, and she'd even bestowed a couple of friendly but brief tongue kisses on me, but that was as far as it had gone. I'd quickly learned there was no point in pushing her. "No" with her meant simply no. She was an inspirationally pretty girl – natural, with no seeming guile, perfect features, a great figure, and long brown hair that looked beautiful no matter what she did with it. She was also sweet and smart and good to talk with – good company. So I was practicing my platonic friendship skills and consoling myself with what the rich fool tells the girl he's crazy about in "Some Like It Hot" when he learns that "she" is a "he": "Well, nobody's perfect."

The four of us were sitting in La Cantina on the plaza, having a root beer and talking about maybe going out to the Llano Quemado Hot Springs. But I was the only one with a car, and coming back from San Francisco I'd heard some strange noises, and I didn't really want to transport four people up that terrible road. So we were just sitting there when in came Vincent Frost.

Fredo and Misha had met Vince the Actor a few weeks before, during the first "Easy Rider" go-round. A Hollywood type, he wasn't hard to figure out – a big tough-handsome macho guy, full of himself, and completely willing to share the bonanza of self with others, especially girls. He sat down with us and immediately zoned in on Cammy. Normally I would have been resentful and jealous of any interest she paid him, but this was quite a spectacle, and I just watched.

His main stock-in-trade was a good-natured, slightly self-mocking kind of bragging – where he'd been; who he knew; how by God he had *survived* (and with Style). Naturally, as he got deeper into the narrative, he started mixing in references to

what a hit he always was with the ladies. Misha, always shy around strangers, was mildly interested in him, but Fredo and I kept exchanging looks as Vince persisted in homing in on Cammy. At first I was worried that maybe she needed some help, but she seemed to be holding her own, and even slyly playing with him, asking him wide-eyed questions about his wilder boasts. He redoubled his efforts and widened his appeal to take us all in, telling funnier and bolder stories.

### **We go to the hot springs**

Anyone who's ever spent much time with a preening egomaniac of an actor knows that, at his best, the type can be quite entertaining. What cinched it was that Vince had a car, and when he learned that we'd been thinking of going to the hot springs ... zowie! The thought of Cammy Saunders taking her clothes off would have gotten Lazarus' attention, and Vince Frost was hardly Lazarus. We were in his big wide Smooth-mobile in three minutes, at the springs in 20 minutes, and – lucky for us, there was no one there – naked in 21.

This was the first time I had seen the lovely Camilla *au naturel*, and I want to take this chance to thank Vince Frost for affording me that opportunity. I didn't have much else to thank him for. Within minutes we were, for all practical purposes, two parties. Vince had turned the full power of his personality on Cammy, while Fredo, Misha and I, crowded into one corner of the biggest of the three small pools, provided a half-willing audience. Misha, who had unaccountably decided to be modest, sat clothed next to us at the edge of the pool. Vince, using the rest of pool as his stage, was putting on his show. He did everything he could think of to make himself the alpha male of Cammy's wet dreams. Of course, as I had expected, nothing quite worked, though I *was* fascinated to see whether such an irresistible force *might* somehow move an immovable object.

Cammy may have been a bit of an inno-

cent, but she surely was conscious of how hard Vince was working, since she was parrying his every thrust, modulating her responses, keeping her distance emotionally and physically. When he tried to embrace her, she'd glide away, laughing. When his boasts became too absurd, she'd assume a light, teasing tone, always keeping him off-balance. We all understood, I think, that if she and Vince had been alone, he would have cut short the wooing, and simply raped her, secure in the certainty that being forced was what in her heart of hearts Cammy was yearning for. But with an audience, rape was out. At last, with us getting bored, and starting to talk about leaving, Vince realized he needed a new stage to work on if he wanted to have his way with Cammy. "Let's go back to my motel and get some grass," he suggested. "I smoked the last of mine but most of the other guys have some, and we can get some great shit," he promised.

#### **New scenery, same scenario**

Well, old Vince certainly knew *our* weakness, and we were soon in his motel room at the El Pueblo Motor Lodge, sitting on twin beds while he called around trying to locate someone with a little marijuana. No immediate luck, but he did learn that the group that had gone out to the Manby Hot Springs was expected soon, and that several of them had sizable stashes. Rumored to have the best stuff of all, he added, was Jack, a young actor who had made a big impression on everyone in Taos during the previous visit, a guy about whom I'd been hearing for days. "Oh, yeah, Jack has some great shit," Vince assured us, as he went out to leave a note in Jack's box asking him to come over with some stuff as soon as he got back. So we stayed on, patiently, and got to watch Vince resume his ardent courtship.

Cammy must have been feeling safe as well as playful. Would you believe it, she mentioned a little soreness in her shoulders? Vince was – of course – the master masseur, the man with the healing hands.

As Fredo, Misha and I pretended not to gawk, his rubbing hands went from outside to under her shirt in record time. Then she confessed that her whole back hurt a bit, and he persuaded her to lie down, and he pulled her shirt up to her shoulders, and she helped him to take her shirt off. Finally, he somehow got her pants off, too. Within 15 minutes from the first shoulder-twinge, Cammy was face down and naked on one of the twin beds, while Vince busily caressed her flesh. Fredo, Misha and I, huddled together on the other bed, resumed our role as audience.

To get naked at the hot springs was one thing, an accepted part of our hippie culture. But to get naked in a motel room is a completely different thing. Unless a girl intended to have sex with a guy, she really had no business letting him undress her in his motel room. And since we were almost certain that Cammy had intention of having sex with Vince – or does she? what the hell do I know? this is fucking weird – her actions seemed perverse and disturbing. But watch we did.

Vince was willing, God knows. He rubbed her, he kneaded her (God, how he kneaded her!), he cooed to her. He began openly suggesting that she spend the night alone with him. The "back-rub" was fine, but she verbally drew the line at that. Yet she made no move to get up. On he went with his ministrations, ever more fervent, with three strangers watching as he tried everything he knew to get a *completely naked girl* lying on his bed to give herself to him. And all the while the girl was keeping up the pretense that they were engaged in some kind of therapeutic enterprise: "Oooh, that feels good. Right there."

This went on a surprisingly long time, but finally there came the knock we were waiting for. Since no one else made a move, Vince had to go open the door, and in came Jack. Well, you know Jack, of course; Jack is totally famous, and totally cool. But this was a different Jack. This was his breakthrough role: goofy George in "Easy Rider."

**We all understood, I think, that if she and Vince had been alone, he would have cut short the wooing, and simply raped her, secure in the certainty that being forced was what in her heart of hearts Cammy was yearning for**

## FORE PLAY

**His entrance apparently even took Cammy aback, because she seemed now to press her body down into the mattress in a way she hadn't before**

As you probably remember, Jack played a sweet, rather unworldly young man. Maybe the guy who walked into Vince's motel room was George, a young man not quite sure of himself in a strange place. And this was a strange place, for lying on one of the twin beds was a lovely nude girl. Jack's eyes took in the splendid sight on the bed and quickly looked away ... and he kept his eyes averted from the nude girl from then on. His entrance apparently even took Cammy aback, because she seemed now to press her body down into the mattress in a way she hadn't before.

### **In which the story is resolved**

Did Jack have the stuff? Vince asked. Jack pulled out a large joint from his shirt pocket with shy pride, as Fredo, Misha and I swooped in on him. He lit the joint and passed it to me. The joint made the rounds. Every time it got to Vince he'd take a toke and then offer it to Cammy, who hadn't moved from her stiff, prone position. She turned her head to take a little puff the first time it was offered, but after that she didn't take any more. Jack sat on the floor at the foot of the bed with his back turned to her. Fredo, Misha and I sat with him on the floor. As if taking our cue from Jack, we shifted our focus away from the naked girl and the man kneading her flesh. After the joint was finished we stayed seated at the foot of the bed talking quietly. Vince kept rubbing and pleading, but a corner had been turned. Cammy stayed facedown on the bed, taking no part in our conversation and just fending Vince off.

Jack was very sweet, and he made conversation easily with all of us, even with Misha, who tended to be tongue-tied even with old friends, and with Fredo, who went so far inward whenever he smoked he might almost have been "in Paris," as the funny line in another of that era's movies had it. So Jack and I did most of the talking. We were pretty high, and while we talked about other things – what's going to happen in black America now that Martin King

and Bobby Kennedy have been murdered? how do you like Antonioni? how about that Bob Dylan? – I think we were both very conscious of the desperate nature of Vince's pleas, and the sad but firm quality of Cammy's responses.

After a while Jack said he had an early morning something-or-other coming up and he'd better get going so he could get some sleep, and Misha and Fredo and I echoed him, and Cammy announced from her prone position that she'd be getting along, too. Vince begged for a sentence or two more, but even he had figured out by this time that this was one mountain he wasn't gonna get to climb; his pleas were strictly pro forma. Cammy wriggled around and put her clothes on, and Jack studiously didn't watch, and I pretended not to watch but snuck a few glances at the disappearing flesh. When she was clad we all said thanks and goodnight to Vince as though it was just an ordinary breakup of an ordinary party, and we all headed out. Jack went across the street to his room at the Kachina, Fredo and Misha headed off to her house, and I walked Cammy down North Pueblo Road to where my car was parked, and drove her home. We were quiet the whole way to Cañon, and she seemed far away when she gave me a quick peck on the cheek at her front door.

By the next afternoon the film company was gone. As I said, "Easy Rider" turned out to be much more interesting than the shitty American-International biker pictures that had helped inspire it, though not as good as many of us imagined it was at the time.

I stayed friends with Fredo and Misha, and watched them get together and break up several times, until she moved away. He was still in Taos last time I heard, living a kindly, middle-aged, middle-class life, but I have no idea what happened to her.

I drifted apart from Camilla after that. I don't believe we were ever alone together again, and neither of us tried to set up such an encounter. I guess we knew a little

more than we wanted to know about each other. I heard at some point that Soldier-boy had returned safely from Vietnam and that they got married. I imagine them with three very attractive children who would now be – let’s see – maybe in their mid ‘30s. Cammy may well be a grandmother. Strangely enough, I can’t summon up an actual image when I think of her.

Jack went on to become, you know, Jack. I saw him in September at Yankee Stadium a few years back. I think if I’d reminded him of our evening together he would have remembered, but he was busy with an entourage being Jack, so I paid attention to the game, and got rewarded when the Red Sox scored a couple of runs off the great Rivera in the ninth inning and upset the Yankees. That was the year the Red Sox

conquered the 86-year jinx. The turnabout started that night.

One other thing: I heard that Dennis Hopper learned that a couple of years before Vince had slept with a girl Dennis considered to be his own property, and in retaliation Dennis cut Vince’s one big scene from “Easy Rider.” Vince is still visible for a split second, in a crowd scene, but his name does not appear in the credits. So it goes. **CT**

*Lawrence Houghteling is a teacher at the Heritage School, a public high school in Spanish Harlem, New York*

*\* Anyone curious about my stay in San Francisco is invited to go to [www.coldtype.net/Asset08/pdfs/0608/Reader27.pdf](http://www.coldtype.net/Asset08/pdfs/0608/Reader27.pdf) and read the article entitled “Protecting the Candidate”*

**Cammy may well be a grandmother. Strangely enough, I can’t summon up an actual image when I think of her**

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## HURWITT’S EYE

Mark Hurwitz

# Guarding the Public Henhouse



# French kissing

**Diana Johnstone** on NATO's mission creep and why it likely to add to the misery of a world that is already in deep trouble

**Sarkozy's predecessor Jacques Chirac, wrongly labeled "anti-American" by US media, was already willing to rejoin the NATO command if he could get something substantial in return, such as NATO's Mediterranean command. The United States flatly refused**

**N**ATO, the main overseas arm of the US military-industrial complex, just keeps expanding. Its original *raison d'être*, the supposedly menacing Soviet bloc, has been dead for 20 years. But like the military-industrial complex itself, NATO is kept alive and growing by entrenched economic interests, institutional inertia and an official mindset resembling paranoia, with think tanks looking around desperately for "threats".

This behemoth is getting ready to celebrate its 60th birthday in the twin cities of Strasbourg (France) and Kehl (Germany) on the Rhine early in April. A special gift is being offered by France's increasingly unpopular president, Nicolas Sarkozy: the return of France to NATO's "integrated command". This bureaucratic event, whose practical significance remains unclear, provides the chorus of NATOlatrous officials and editorialists something to crow about. See, the silly French have seen the error of their ways and returned to the fold.

Sarkozy puts it in different terms. He asserts that joining the NATO command will enhance France's importance by giving it influence over the strategy and operations of an Alliance which it never left, and to which it has continued to contribute more than its share of armed forces.

The flaw in that argument is that it was the totally unshakable US control of

NATO's integrated command that persuaded General Charles de Gaulle to leave in the first place, back in March 1966. De Gaulle did not do so on a whim. He had tried to change the decision-making process and found it impossible. The Soviet threat had diminished, and de Gaulle did not want to be dragged into wars he thought unnecessary, such as the US effort to win a war in Indochina that France had already lost and considered unwinnable. He wanted France to be able to pursue its own interests in the Middle East and Africa. Besides, the US military presence in France stimulated "Yankee go home" demonstrations. Transferring the NATO command to Belgium satisfied everyone.

Sarkozy's predecessor Jacques Chirac, wrongly labeled "anti-American" by US media, was already willing to rejoin the NATO command if he could get something substantial in return, such as NATO's Mediterranean command. The United States flatly refused. Instead, Sarkozy is settling for crumbs: assignment of senior French officers to a command in Portugal and to some training base in the United States. "Nothing was negotiated. Two or three more French officers in position to take orders from the Americans changes nothing", observed former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine at a recent colloquium on France and NATO. Sarkozy announced the

return on March 11, six days before the issue was to be debated by the French National Assembly. The protests from both sides of the aisle will be in vain.

There appear to be two main causes of this unconditional surrender.

One is the psychology of Sarkozy himself, whose love for the most superficial aspects of the United States was expressed in his embarrassing speech to the US Congress in November 2007. Sarkozy may be the first French president who seems not to like France. Or at least, to like the United States better (from watching television). He can give the impression of having wanted to be president of France not for love of country, but in social revenge against it. From the start, he has shown himself eager to “normalize” France, that is, to remake it according to the American model.

The other, less obvious but more objective cause is the recent expansion of the European Union. The rapid absorption of all the former Eastern European satellites, plus the former Soviet Republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, has drastically changed the balance of power within the EU itself. The core founding nations, France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries, are no longer able to steer the Union toward a unified foreign and security policy. After France and Germany refused to go along with the invasion of Iraq, Donald Rumsfeld dismissed them as “old Europe” and gloated over the willingness of “new Europe” to follow the United States lead. Britain to the west, and the “new” European satellites to the East are both more attached to the United States politically and emotionally than they are to the European Union that took them in and provided them with considerable economic development aid and a veto over major policy issues.

This expansion effectively buried the longstanding French project to build a European defense force that could act outside the NATO command. The rulers of Poland and the Baltic States want US defense, by way of NATO, period. They would never

accept the French project of an EU defense not tied to NATO and the United States.

France has its own military-industrial complex, totally dwarfed by the one in the United States, but the largest in Western Europe. Any such complex needs export markets for its arms industry. The best potential market would have been independent European armed forces. Without that prospect, some may hope that joining the integrated command can open NATO markets to French military products.

A slim hope, however. The United States jealously guards major NATO procurements for its own industry. France is unlikely to have much influence within NATO for the same reason it is giving up its attempt to build an independent European army. The Europeans themselves are deeply divided. With Europe divided, the United States rules. Moreover, with the economic crisis deepening, money is running short for weaponry.

From the viewpoint of French national interest, this feeble hope for marketing military hardware is vastly outweighed by the disastrous political consequences of Sarkozy’s act of allegiance.

It is true that even outside the NATO integrated command, France’s independence was only relative. France followed the United States into the first Gulf War – President François Mitterrand vainly hoped thereby to gain influence in Washington, the usual mirage that beckons allies into dubious US operations. France joined the 1999 NATO war against Yugoslavia, despite misgivings at the highest levels. But in 2003, President Jacques Chirac and his foreign minister Dominique de Villepin actually made use of their independence by rejecting the invasion of Iraq. It is generally acknowledged that the French stand enabled Germany to do the same. Belgium followed.

Villepin’s February 14, 2003, speech to the UN Security Council giving priority to disarmament and peace over war won a rare standing ovation. The Villepin speech was hugely popular around the world, and

**In 2003, President Jacques Chirac and his foreign minister Dominique de Villepin actually made use of their independence by rejecting the invasion of Iraq.**

## WAR PLAY

**The economic interests and institutional inertia of NATO are pushing the world toward a pre-war lineup far more dangerous than the Cold War. The lesson NATO refuses to learn is that its pursuit of enemies creates enemies**

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greatly enhanced French prestige, especially in the Arab world. But back in Paris, the personal hatred between Sarkozy and Villepin has reached operatic heights of passion, and one can suspect that Sarkozy's return to NATO obedience is also an act of personal revenge.

The worst political effect is much broader. The impression is now created that "the West", Europe and North America, are barricading themselves by a military alliance against the rest of the world. In retrospect, the French dissent accomplished a service to the whole West by giving the impression, or the illusion, that independent thought and action were still possible, and that someone in Europe might listen to what other parts of the world thought and said. Now, this "closing of ranks", hailed by the NATO champions as "improving our security", will sound the alarms in the rest of the world. The empire seems to be closing its ranks in order to rule the world. The United States and its allies do not openly claim to rule the world, only to regulate it. The West controls the world's financial institutions, the IMF and the World Bank. It controls the judiciary, the International Criminal Court, which in six years of existence has put on trial only one obscure Congolese warlord and brought charges against 12 other persons, all of them Africans – while meanwhile the United States causes the deaths of hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of people in Iraq and Afghanistan and supports Israel's ongoing aggression against the Palestinian people. To the rest of the world, NATO is just the armed branch of this enterprise of domination. And this at a time when the Western-dominated system of financial capitalism is bringing the world economy to collapse.

This gesture of "showing Western unity" for "our security" can only make the rest of the world feel insecure. Meanwhile, NATO moves every day to surround Russia with military bases and hostile alliances, notably in Georgia. Despite the smiles over dinner with her Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, Hillary Clinton repeats the stunning

mantra that "spheres of influence are not acceptable" – meaning, of course, that the historic Russian sphere of interest is unacceptable, while the United States is vigorously incorporating it into its own sphere of influence, called NATO.

Already China and Russia are increasing their defense cooperation. The economic interests and institutional inertia of NATO are pushing the world toward a pre-war lineup far more dangerous than the Cold War. The lesson NATO refuses to learn is that its pursuit of enemies creates enemies. The war against terrorism fosters terrorism. Surrounding Russia with missiles proclaimed "defensive" – when any strategist knows that a shield accompanied by a sword is also an offensive weapon – will create a Russian enemy.

### **The search for threats**

To prove to itself that it is really "defensive", NATO keeps looking for threats. Well, the world is a troubled place, thanks in large part to the sort of economic globalization imposed by the United States over the past decades. This might be the time to be undertaking diplomatic and political efforts to work out internationally agreed ways of dealing with such problems as global economic crisis, climate change, energy use, hackers ("cyberwar"). NATO think tanks are pouncing on these problems as new "threats" to be dealt with by NATO. This leads to a militarization of policy-making where it should be demilitarized.

For example, what can it mean to meet the supposed threat of climate change with military means? The answer seems obvious: military force may be used in some way against the populations forced from their homes by drought or flooding. Perhaps, as in Darfur, drought will lead to clashes between ethnic or social groups. Then NATO can decide which is the "good" side and bomb the others. That sort of thing.

The world indeed appears to be heading into a time of troubles. NATO appears getting ready to deal with these troubles by using force against unruly populations. **CT**

*Diana Johnstone is author of Fools' Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions (Monthly Review Press). She can be reached at diana.josto@yahoo.fr*

# My article got a man thrown into Gitmo

We thought our story on how to make an A-bomb was just harmless satire, but 30 years later it helped put an innocent man in Guantanamo, writes **Barbara Ehrenreich**

I like to think that some of the things I write cause discomfort in those readers who deserve to feel it. Ideally, they should squirm, they should flinch, they might even experience fleeting gastrointestinal symptoms. But I have always drawn the line at torture. It may be unpleasant to read some of my writings, especially if they have been assigned by a professor, but it should not result in uncontrollable screaming, genital mutilation or significant blood loss.

With such stringent journalistic ethics in place, I was shocked to read in the February 14 *Daily Mail Online* brief article headed “Food writer’s online guide to building an H-bomb...the ‘evidence’ that put this man in Guantánamo.” The “food writer” was identified as me, and the story began:

“A British ‘resident’ held at Guantanamo Bay was identified as a terrorist after confessing he had visited a ‘joke’ website on how to build a nuclear weapon, it was revealed last night.

“Binyam Mohamed, a former UK asylum seeker, admitted to having read the ‘instructions’ after allegedly being beaten, hung up by his wrists for a week and having a gun held to his head in a Pakistani jail.”

While I am not, and have never been, a “food writer,” other details about the “joke” rang true, such as the names of my co-authors, Peter Biskind and physicist Michio Kaku. Rewind to 1979, when Peter and I were

working for a now-defunct left-wing magazine named *Seven Days*. The government had just suppressed the publication of another magazine, *The Progressive*, for attempting to print an article called “The H-Bomb Secret.” I don’t remember that article, and the current editor of *The Progressive* recalls only that it contained a lot of physics and was “Greek to me.” Both in solidarity with *The Progressive* and in defense of free speech, we at *Seven Days* decided to do a satirical article entitled “How to Make Your Own H-Bomb,” offering step-by-step instructions for assembling a bomb using equipment available in one’s own home.

The satire was not subtle. After discussing the toxicity of plutonium, we advised that to avoid ingesting it orally, “Never make an A-bomb on an empty stomach.” My favorite section dealt with the challenge of enriching uranium hexafluoride:

First transform the gas into a liquid by subjecting it to pressure. You can use a bicycle pump for this. Then make a simple home centrifuge. Fill a standard-size bucket one-quarter full of liquid uranium hexafluoride. Attach a six-foot rope to the bucket handle. Now swing the rope (and attached bucket) around your head as fast as possible. Keep this up for about 45 minutes. Slow down gradually, and very gently put the bucket on the floor. The U-235, which is lighter, will have risen to the top, where it can be skimmed off

**The satire was not subtle. After discussing the toxicity of plutonium, we advised that to avoid ingesting it orally, “Never make an A-bomb on an empty stomach”**

## DANGEROUS WORDS

**Smith speculates that the part about the H-bomb got through, although not the part about the joke. The result, anyhow, was that Mohamed was thrust into a world of unending pain – tortured at the US prison in Baghram, rendered to Morocco for eighteen months of further torture, including repeated cutting of his penis with a scalpel**

**Barbara Ehrenreich** is the author of thirteen books, including the *New York Times* bestseller *Nickel and Dimed*. A frequent contributor to the *New York Times*, *Harpers*, and the *Progressive*, she is a contributing writer to *Time* magazine. She lives in Florida.

like cream. Repeat this step until you have the required 10 pounds of uranium. (Safety note: Don't put all your enriched uranium hexafluoride in one bucket. Use at least two or three buckets and keep them in separate corners of the room. This will prevent the premature build-up of a critical mass.)

Our H-bomb cover story created a bit of a stir at the time, then vanished into the attics and garages of former Seven Days staffers, only to resurface, at least in part, on the Internet in the early 2000s. Today, you can find it quoted on the blog spot of a University of Dayton undergraduate, along with the flattering comment: "This forum post is priceless. It is one of the best pieces of scientific satire I have ever seen. I can only hope and pray that terrorist groups attempt to construct an atomic bomb using these instructions – if they survive the attempt, they'll have at least wasted months of effort."

### Turned over to the FBI

Enter Binyam Mohamed, an Ethiopian refugee and legal resident of Britain who had found work as a janitor after drug problems derailed his college career. According to his lawyer, Clive Smith of the human rights group Reprieve, Mohamed traveled to Afghanistan in 2001, attracted by the Taliban's drug-free way of life – which, from my point of view, was a little like upgrading from bronchitis to lung cancer. War soon drove him out of Afghanistan and to Karachi, from where he sought to return to the UK. But, as a refugee, he lacked a proper passport and was using a friend's, which led to his apprehension at the airport. Smith says the Pakistanis turned him over to the FBI, who were obsessed at the time with the possibility of an Al Qaeda nuclear attack on the United States. After repeated beatings and the above-mentioned hanging by the wrists, Mohamed "confessed" to having read an article on how to make an H-bomb on the Internet, insisting to his interrogators that it was a "joke."

But post-9/11 America was an irony-free zone, and it's still illegal to banter about

bombs in the presence of airport security staff. It's not clear how the news of Mohamed's H-bomb knowledge was conveyed to Washington – many documents remain classified or have not been released – but Smith speculates that the part about the H-bomb got through, although not the part about the joke. The result, anyhow, was that Mohamed was thrust into a world of unending pain – tortured at the US prison in Baghram, rendered to Morocco for eighteen months of further torture, including repeated cutting of his penis with a scalpel, and finally landing in Guantánamo for almost five years of more mundane abuse. He was just released and returned to Britain last month. As if that were not enough for a satirist to have on her conscience, the United States seems to have attributed Mohamed's presumed nuclear ambitions to a second man, an American citizen named Jose Padilla, aka the "dirty bomber."

The apparent evidence? Padilla had been scheduled to fly on the same flight out of Karachi that Mohamed had a ticket for, so obviously they must have been confederates. Commenting on Padilla's apprehension in 2002, the *Chicago Sun-Times* editorialized: "We castigate ourselves for failing to grasp the reality of what they're [the alleged terrorists are] trying to do, but perhaps that is a good thing. We should have difficulty staring evil in the face."

I am not histrionic enough to imagine myself in any way responsible for the torments suffered by Mohamed and Padilla – at least no more responsible than any other American who failed to rise up in revolutionary anger against the Bush terror regime. No, I'm too busy seething over another irony: whenever I've complained about my country's torturings, renderings, detentions, etc., there's always been some smug bastard ready to respond that these measures are what guarantee smart-alecky writers like myself our freedom of speech.

Well, we had a government so vicious and impenetrably stupid that it managed to take my freedom of speech and turn it into someone else's living hell. **CT**

# Being serious about torture. Or not

If we're interested in punishing need war criminals, we don't have far to look for them, writes **William Blum**

In Cambodia they're once again endeavoring to hold trials to bring some former senior Khmer Rouge officials to justice for their 1975-79 war crimes and crimes against humanity. The current defendant in a United Nations-organized trial, Kaing Guek Eav, who was the head of a Khmer Rouge torture center, has confessed to atrocities, but insists he was acting under orders. As we all know, this is the defense that the Nuremberg Tribunal rejected for the Nazi defendants. Everyone knows that, right? No one places any weight on such a defense any longer, right? We make jokes about Nazis declaring: "I was only following orders!" (*"Ich habe nur den Befehlen gehorcht!"*) Except that both the Bush and Obama administrations have spoken in favor of it. Here's the new head of the CIA, Leon Panetta: "What I have expressed as a concern, as has the president, is that those who operated under the rules that were provided by the Attorney General in the interpretation of the law [concerning torture] and followed those rules ought not to be penalized. And ... I would not support, obviously, an investigation or a prosecution of those individuals. I think they did their job." Operating under the rules ... doing their job ... are of course the same as following orders.

The UN Convention Against Torture (first adopted in 1984), which has been ratified by the United States, says quite clearly,

"An order from a superior officer or a public authority may not be invoked as a justification of torture." The Torture Convention enacts a prohibition against torture that is a cornerstone of international law and a principle on a par with the prohibition against slavery and genocide.

Of course, those giving the orders are no less guilty. On the very day of Obama's inauguration, the United Nation's special torture rapporteur invoked the Convention in calling on the United States to pursue former president George W. Bush and defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld for torture and bad treatment of Guantanamo prisoners.

On several occasions, President Obama has indicated his reluctance to pursue war crimes charges against Bush officials, by expressing a view such as: "I don't believe that anybody is above the law. On the other hand I also have a belief that we need to look forward as opposed to looking backwards." This is the same excuse Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen has given for not punishing Khmer Rouge leaders. In December 1998 he asserted: "We should dig a hole and bury the past and look ahead to the 21st century with a clean slate." Hun Sen has been in power all the years since then, and no Khmer Rouge leader has been convicted for their role in the historic mass murder.

And by not investigating Bush officials, Obama is indeed saying that they're above

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## ANTI EMPIRE REPORT

**It should also be noted that the United States supported Pol Pot (who died in April 1998) and the Khmer Rouge for several years after they were ousted from power by the Vietnamese in 1979**

the law. Like the Khmer Rouge officials have been. Michael Ratner, a professor at Columbia Law School and president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, said prosecuting Bush officials is necessary to set future anti-torture policy. “The only way to prevent this from happening again is to make sure that those who were responsible for the torture program pay the price for it. I don’t see how we regain our moral stature by allowing those who were intimately involved in the torture programs to simply walk off the stage and lead lives where they are not held accountable.”

One reason for the non-prosecution may be that serious trials of the many Bush officials who contributed to the torture policies might reveal the various forms of Democratic Party non-opposition and collaboration.

It should also be noted that the United States supported Pol Pot (who died in April 1998) and the Khmer Rouge for several years after they were ousted from power by the Vietnamese in 1979. This support began under Jimmy Carter and his National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and continued under Ronald Reagan. A lingering bitterness by American cold warriors toward Vietnam, the small nation which monumental US power had not been able to defeat, and its perceived closeness to the Soviet Union, appears to be the only explanation for this policy. Humiliation runs deep when you’re a superpower.

Neither should it be forgotten in this complex tale that the Khmer Rouge in all likelihood would never have come to power, nor even made a serious attempt to do so, if not for the massive American “carpet bombing” of Cambodia in 1969-70 and the US-supported overthrow of Prince Sihanouk in 1970 and his replacement by a man closely tied to the United States. Thank you Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. Well done, lads.

By the way, if you’re not already turned off by many of Obama’s appointments, listen to how James Jones opened his talk at the Munich Conference on Security Policy on February 8: “Thank you for that won-

derful tribute to Henry Kissinger yesterday. Congratulations. As the most recent National Security Advisor of the United States, I take my daily orders from Dr. Kissinger.”

Lastly, Spain’s High Court recently announced it would launch a war crimes investigation into an Israeli ex-defense minister and six other top security officials for their role in a 2002 attack that killed a Hamas commander and 14 civilians in Gaza. Spain has for some time been the world’s leading practitioner of “universal jurisdiction” for human-rights violations, such as their indictment of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet a decade ago. The Israeli case involved the dropping of a bomb on the home of the Hamas leader; most of those killed were children. The United States does this very same thing every other day in Afghanistan or Pakistan. Given the refusal of American presidents to invoke even their “national jurisdiction” over American officials-cum-war criminals, we can only hope that someone reminds the Spanish authorities of a few names, names like Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell, Rice, Feith, Perle, Yoo, and a few others with a piece missing, a piece that’s shaped like a conscience. There isn’t even a need to rely on international law alone, for there’s an American law against war crimes, passed by a Republican-dominated Congress in 1996.

Israeli columnist, Uri Avnery, writing about the Israeli case, tried to capture the spirit of Israeli society that produces such war criminals and war crimes. He observed: “This system indoctrinates its pupils with a violent tribal cult, totally ethnocentric, which sees in the whole of world history nothing but an endless story of Jewish victimhood. This is a religion of a Chosen People, indifferent to others, a religion without compassion for anyone who is not Jewish, which glorifies the God-decreed genocide described in the Biblical book of Joshua.”

It would take very little substitution to apply this statement to the United States – like “American” for “Jewish” and “American exceptionalism” for “a Chosen People”.

### Hell hath no fury like an imperialist scorned

Hugo Chávez's greatest sin is that he has shown disrespect for the American Empire. Or as they would say in America's inner cities – He's dissed the Man. Such behavior of course cannot go unpunished lest it give other national leaders the wrong idea. Over the years, the United States has gotten along just fine with brutal dictators, mass murderers, torturers, and leaders who did nothing to relieve the poverty of their population – Augusto Pinochet, Pol Pot, the Greek Junta, Ferdinand Marcos, Suharto, Duvalier, Mobutu, the Brazil Junta, Somoza, Saddam Hussein, South African apartheid leaders, Portuguese fascists, etc., etc., terrible guys all, all seriously supported by Washington at one time or another; for none made it a regular habit, if ever, to diss the Man.

The latest evidence, we are told, that Hugo Chávez is a dictator and a threat to life as we know it is that he pushed for and got a constitutional amendment to remove term limits from the presidency. The American media and the opposition in Venezuela often make it sound as if Chávez is going to be guaranteed office for life, whereas he of course will have to be elected each time. Neither are we reminded that it's not unusual for a nation to not have a term limit for its highest office. France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, if not all of Europe and much of the rest of the world, do not have such a limit. The United States did not have a term limit on the office of the president during the nation's first 162 years, until the ratification of the 22nd Amendment in 1951. Were all American presidents prior to that time dictators?

In 2005, when Colombian President Alvaro Uribe succeeded in getting term limits lifted, the US mainstream media took scant notice. President Bush subsequently honored Uribe with the American Presidential Medal of Freedom. But in the period leading up to the February 15 referendum in Venezuela, the American media were competing with each other over who could paint

Chávez and the Venezuelan constitutional process in the most critical and ominous terms. Typical was an op-ed in the *Washington Post* the day before the vote, which was headlined: "Closing in on Hugo Chávez". Its opening sentence read: "The beginning of the end is setting in for Hugo Chávez."

For several years now, the campaign to malign Chávez has at times included issues of Israel and anti-Semitism. An isolated vandalism of a Caracas synagogue on January 30th of this year fed into this campaign. Synagogues are of course vandalized occasionally in the United States and many European countries, but no one ascribes this to a government policy driven by anti-semitism. With Chávez they do. In the American media, the lead up to the Venezuelan vote was never far removed from the alleged "Jewish" issue.

"Despite the government's efforts to put the [synagogue] controversy to rest," the *New York Times* wrote a few days before the referendum vote, "a sense of dread still lingers among Venezuela's 12,000 to 14,000 Jews."

A day earlier, a *Washington Post* editorial was entitled: "Mr. Chávez vs. the Jews – With George W. Bush gone, Venezuela's strongman has found new enemies."<sup>14</sup> Shortly before, a *Post* headline had informed us: "Jews in S. America Increasingly Uneasy – Government and Media Seen Fostering Anti-Semitism in Venezuela, Elsewhere"

So commonplace has the Chávez-Jewish association become that a leading US progressive organization, Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) in Washington, DC, recently distributed an article that reads more like the handiwork of a conservative group than a progressive one. I was prompted to write to them as follows:

"Dear People,

"I'm very sorry to say that I found your Venezuelan commentary by Larry Birns and David Rosenblum Felson to be remarkably lacking. The authors seem unable, or unwilling, to distinguish between being against Israeli policies from anti-semitism. It's kind

**Synagogues are of course vandalized occasionally in the United States and many European countries, but no one ascribes this to a government policy driven by anti-semitism. With Chávez they do**

## ANTI EMPIRE REPORT

**After Chávez won the term-limits referendum with about 55% of the vote, a State Department spokesperson stated: “For the most part this was a process that was fully consistent with democratic process”**

of late in the day for them to not have comprehended the difference. They are forced to fall back on a State Department statement to make their case. Is that not enough said?

“They condemn Chávez likening Israel’s occupation of Gaza to the Holocaust. But what if it’s an apt comparison? They don’t delve into this question at all.

“They also condemn the use of the word “Zionism”, saying that “in 9 times out of 10 involving the use of this word in fact smacks of anti-Semitism.” Really? Can they give a precise explanation of how one distinguishes between an anti-Semitic use of the word and a non-anti-semitic use of it? That would be interesting.

“The authors write that Venezuela’s “anti-Israeli initiative ... revealingly transcends the intensity of almost every Arabic nation or normal adversary of Israel.” Really. Since when are the totally gutless, dictator Arab nations the standard bearer for progressives? The ideal we should emulate. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan are almost never seriously and harshly critical of Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. Therefore, Venezuela shouldn’t be?

“The authors state: “In a Christmas Eve address to the nation, Chávez charged that, ‘Some minorities, descendants of the same ones who crucified Christ ... took all the world’s wealth for themselves’. Here, Chávez was not talking so much about Robin Hood, but rather unquestionably dipping into the lore of anti-Semitism.” Well, here’s the full quote: “The world has enough for all, but it turns out that some minorities, descendants of the same ones who crucified Christ, descendants of the same ones who threw Bolivar out of here and also crucified him in their own way at Santa Marta there in Colombia ...” Hmm, were the Jews so active in South America?”

The ellipsis after the word “Christ” indicates that the authors consciously and purposely omitted the words that would have given the lie to their premise. Truly astonishing.

After Chávez won the term-limits refer-

endum with about 55% of the vote, a State Department spokesperson stated: “For the most part this was a process that was fully consistent with democratic process.” Various individuals and websites on the left have responded to this as an encouraging sign that the Obama administration is embarking on a new Venezuelan policy. At the risk of sounding like a knee-reflex cynic, I think this attitude is at best premature, at worst rather naive. It’s easy for a State Department a level-or-so above the Bushies, i.e., semi-civilized, to make such a statement. A little more difficult would be accepting as normal and unthreatening Venezuela having good relations with countries like Cuba, Iran and Russia and not blocking Venezuela from the UN Security Council. Even more significant would be the United States ending its funding of groups in Venezuela determined to subvert and/or overthrow Chávez.

### **You’ve got to be carefully taught**

I’ve been playing around with a new book for a while. I don’t know if I’ll find the time to actually complete it, but if I do it’ll be called something like “Myths of US foreign policy: How Americans keep getting fooled into support”. The leading myth of all, the one which entraps more Americans than any other, is the belief that the United States, in its foreign policy, means well. American leaders may make mistakes, they may blunder, they may lie, they may even on the odd occasion cause more harm than good, but they do mean well. Their intentions are honorable, if not divinely inspired. Of that most Americans are certain. And as long as a person clings to that belief, it’s rather unlikely that s/he will become seriously doubtful and critical of the official stories.

It takes a lot of repetition while an American is growing up to inculcate this message into their young consciousness, and lots more repetition later on. Think of some of the lines from the song about racism from the Broadway classic show, “*South Pacific*” – “*You’ve got to be taught*” ...

*You've got to be taught  
from year to year.  
It's got to be drummed  
in your dear little ear.  
You've got to be taught  
before it's too late.  
Before you are 6 or 7 or 8.  
To hate all the people  
your relatives hate.  
You've got to be carefully taught.*

The education of an American true-believer is ongoing, continuous. All forms of media, all the time. Here is Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the highest military officer in the United States, writing in the *Washington Post* recently:

“We in the US military are likewise held to a high standard. Like the early Romans, we are expected to do the right thing, and when we don't, to make it right again. We have learned, after seven years of war, that trust is the coin of the realm – that building it takes time, losing it takes mere seconds, and maintaining it may be our most important and most difficult objective. That's why images of prisoner maltreatment at Abu Ghraib still serve as recruiting tools for al-Qaeda. And it's why each civilian casualty for which we are even remotely responsible sets back our efforts to gain the confidence of the Afghan people months, if not years. It doesn't matter how hard we try to avoid hurting the innocent, and we do try very hard. It doesn't matter how proportional the force we deploy, how precisely we strike. It doesn't even matter if the enemy hides behind civilians. What matters are the death and destruction that result and the expectation that we could have avoided it. In the end, all that matters is that, despite our best efforts, sometimes we take the very lives we are trying to protect. ... Lose the people's trust, and we lose the war. ... I see this sort of trust being fostered by our troops all over the world. They are building schools, roads, wells, hospitals and power stations. They work every day to build the sort of infrastructure that enables local governments to stand on their own. But mostly, even when

they are going after the enemy, they are building friendships. They are building trust. And they are doing it in superb fashion.”

How many young service members have heard such a talk from Mullen or other officers? How many of them have not been impressed, even choked up? How many Americans reading or hearing such stirring words have not had a lifetime of reinforcement reinforced once again? How many could even imagine that Admiral Mullen is spouting a bunch of crap? The great majority of Americans will swallow it. When Mullen declares: “What matters are the death and destruction that result and the expectation that we could have avoided it”, he's implying that there was no way to avoid it. But of course it could have been easily avoided by not dropping bombs on the Afghan people.

You tell the true-believers that the truth is virtually the exact opposite of what Mullen has said and they look at you like you just got off the Number 36 bus from Mars. Bill Clinton bombed Yugoslavia for 78 days and nights in a row. His military and political policies destroyed one of the most progressive countries in Europe. And he called it “humanitarian intervention”. It's still regarded by almost all Americans, including many, if not most, “progressives”, as just that.

Now why is that? Are all these people just ignorant? I think a better answer is that they have certain preconceptions; consciously or unconsciously, they have certain basic beliefs about the United States and its foreign policy, most prominent amongst which is the belief that the US means well. And if you don't deal with this basic belief you'll be talking to a stone wall. **CT**

**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 Obama's US is still a dictatorship

The end to the 7-year isolation of a US citizen accused of being an enemy combatant was seen as a significant move by the Obama administration. The details suggest otherwise, says **Andy Worthington**

**In a brief to the court, the lawyers pointed out that the president lacked the legal authority to designate and hold al-Marri as an “enemy combatant” for two particular reasons**

**W**hen the Obama administration announced recently that it was bringing to an end the disturbing isolation endured by Ali al-Marri, a US resident who has been held without charge or trial for seven years and two months – and who, most worryingly, has spent the last five years and nine months as an “enemy combatant” in solitary confinement in the Naval Consolidated Brig in Charleston, South Carolina – it was clear that one of the Bush administration’s most arrogant and un-American policies was coming to an end.

President Obama clearly regarded al-Marri’s imprisonment as significant, as he issued a presidential memorandum on his second day in office ordering the Justice Department to review the Qatari national’s case, and the announcement that al-Marri was to be moved out of his seemingly endless legal limbo and into the federal court system demonstrated that, in this specific case at least, the president was sticking to his word.

However, what worried al-Marri’s lawyers – and those, like myself, who have been following his case closely – was that the president’s decision would also bring to an end al-Marri’s pending Supreme Court challenge, in which the nation’s most powerful judges were scheduled to review whether or not the president – any presi-

dent, not just a member of the Bush family – had the right to designate as an “enemy combatant” any person accused of terrorism arrested on American soil, whether a citizen or a resident, and to imprison them indefinitely without charge or trial.

This was not merely an academic exercise. When al-Marri’s case was reviewed by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals last July, a majority of the judges decided that the president was indeed entitled to subject people arrested on American soil to arbitrary imprisonment, despite the complaints of the dissenting judges, led by Judge Diana Gribbon Motz, who argued that, if the ruling were allowed to stand, it “would effectively undermine all of the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.”

## **Complaints ignored**

The Fourth Circuit majority also ignored the complaints of al-Marri’s lawyers, even though they were clearly more aware of the restraints on executive power that had been enforced by Congress in the wake of the 9/11 attacks than most of the judges. In a brief to the court, the lawyers pointed out that the president lacked the legal authority to designate and hold al-Marri as an “enemy combatant” for two particular reasons: firstly, because the Constitution “prohibits the military imprisonment of civilians arrested in the United States and

outside an active battlefield,” and secondly, because, although a district court had previously held that the president was authorized to detain al-Marri under the Authorization for Use of Military Force (the September 2001 law authorizing the President to use “all necessary and appropriate force” against those involved in any way with the 9/11 attacks), Congress explicitly prohibited “the indefinite detention without charge of suspected alien terrorists in the United States” in the Patriot Act, which followed five weeks later.

#### **Moved to federal court**

When the Obama administration announced its decision to move al-Marri to the federal court system, Justice Department officials also asked the Supreme Court to dismiss the pending case as “moot,” and the justices agreed, although, to their great credit, they also made a point of vacating the horrendous decision made by the Fourth Circuit Appeals Court last summer.

As a result, you may be thinking that the president no longer has the power to hold Americans without charge or trial as “enemy combatants,” but if this is the case then you may be – and should be – dismayed to learn that a previous ruling to this effect still stands, which was not addressed by the Supreme Court, and which has not been addressed by the Obama administration either.

In February 2005, in the case of Jose Padilla, an American citizen who was also held in prolonged solitary confinement as an “enemy combatant,” District Court Judge Henry F. Floyd ruled against the government, and ordered Padilla’s release. Noting that the power to suspend the writ of habeas corpus “belongs solely to Congress” under the Constitution, Judge Floyd declared, “Since Congress has not acted to suspend the writ, and neither the President nor this Court have the authority to do so,” Padilla had to be released. “It is true,” he added, “that there may be times during which it is necessary to give the Executive Branch greater power than at other times.

Such a granting of power, however, is in the province of the legislature and no one else – not the Court and not the President... Simply stated, this is a law enforcement matter, not a military matter.” Echoing the decision taken by President Obama’s Justice Department in the case of Ali al-Marri, Judge Floyd added that the government could avoid releasing Padilla if it filed criminal charges against him, or acted to hold him as “a material witness.”

However, Judge Floyd’s ruling only stood for seven months. On September 9, 2005, three Fourth Circuit judges – J. Michael Luttig, M. Blane Michael, and William B. Traxler Jr. – overturned it, based on their belief (contested by Padilla’s lawyers, and also, as noted above, by al-Marri’s

**Just before a review was scheduled to begin, the Bush administration got cold feet, and moved Padilla into the federal court system, where, in August 2007, he was convicted of providing material support for terrorism in a lopsided trial and, in January 2008, received a sentence of 17 years and 3 months**

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## ENEMY COMBATANTS?

**President Obama and Attorney General Holder need to spell out clearly that no president will ever again treat suspected terrorists, either Americans or foreigners, arrested on American soil as “enemy combatants”**

that Congress had granted these sweeping and otherwise unconstitutional powers to the president as part of his wartime prerogative under the Authorization for Use of Military Force.

As with al-Marri, this ruling was never tested in the Supreme Court. Just before a review was scheduled to begin, the Bush administration got cold feet, and moved Padilla into the federal court system, where, in August 2007, he was convicted of providing material support for terrorism in a lopsided trial – in which all mention of his long years of torture in solitary confinement were excluded by the judge – and, in January 2008, received a sentence of 17 years and 3 months.

In many ways, of course, history is repeating itself with al-Marri, even though the man at the top has changed, but what is most worrying is that the Padilla ruling still stands. Without the Supreme Court being given the opportunity to rule decisively on this question, what is needed is a clear repudiation of the policy by the Obama administration.

Instead, the Justice Department explained, in a brief filed with the Supreme Court that, while the government “did not defend its power to detain Mr. Marri at present” (as Glenn Greenwald described it for Salon.com), “it left open the possibility that he or others might be subject to

military detention as enemy combatants in the future.” In the Justice Department’s exact words, “Any future detention – were that hypothetical possibility ever to occur – would require new consideration under then-existing circumstances and procedure.”

It’s one thing, I suppose, to keep your options open, but quite another to defend the indefensible. Instead of fudging, in anticipation of future emergencies, President Obama and Attorney General Holder need to spell out clearly that no president will ever again treat suspected terrorists, either Americans or foreigners, arrested on American soil as “enemy combatants.” Otherwise, Barack Obama’s fine words, in August 2007, when he declared, “We will again set an example to the world that the law is not subject to the whims of stubborn rulers, and that justice is not arbitrary,” will be meaningless, and Judge Rogers’ opinion – that the very constitutional foundations of the Republic had been fatally undermined – will be as applicable to the Obama administration as it was to that of George W. Bush. **CT**

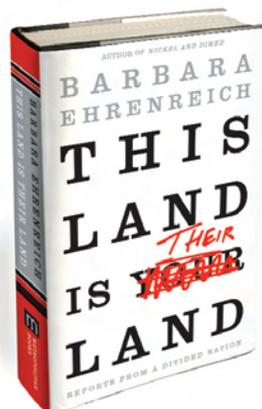
*Andy Worthington is the author of **The Guantánamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America’s Illegal Prison** (published by Pluto Press). Visit his website at: [www.andyworthington.co.uk](http://www.andyworthington.co.uk)*

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# Messin' where we shouldn't oughta

Fred Reed's guide to a thoroughly stupid foreign policy

I strain for words to describe adequately Washington's policy toward Latin America. Candidates come to mind: Imbecilic, moronic, catatonic, Pollyannaish, blind, incurious. No, these are poor creatures and frail, not equal to the task. Retarded? Anencephalic? Those too lack descriptive power. The EEG has flat-lined. The patient is dead.

I recently found the following from McClatchey news service:

WASHINGTON — *As the Pentagon eyes a bigger role in Mexico's drug war, the military's efforts to open the door to a new relationship with its southern neighbor ....*"

Book me a ticket to Mars. The Pentagon is eyeing something, a sure recipe for disaster. Previously it has eyed Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and made a horrendous mess of each. Now the Five-Sided Sand Box is eyeing Mexico. Oh good. Let's get involved in another third-world catastrophe by meddling in what we don't understand.

Continues McClatchey: "During a trip designed to expand U.S. Mexican-military relations, Adm. Michael Mullen, the highest-ranking U.S. military officer, visited the graves of American troops who died during the Mexican-American war just as Gates did during his first visit in August."

How stupid can you get? (The question

is rhetorical. Pentagonal stupidity does not converge, but increases without limit.) To improve relations with the Mexican army, we rub its nose in having defeated them. "Haha, Pedro, you got a few of our guys, but we kicked your hindparts good, didn't we?" The unspoken subtext to any Mexican being, "And we can do it again."

Let me explain something. To Mexicans, the US is not a friendly nation. The reasons are countless, some valid and some not, but Mexicans do not see America as benign. They fear the US military, which they regard as out of control, invading country after country in pursuit of oil.

Mexico has oil. America lost control of it in 1938 when Lazaro Cardenas nationalized it. Mexicans believe, in dead seriousness, that the US would love a pretext for invading to get it back. A pretext such as coming in to help Mexico fight drugs, and just not leaving. Iraq comes instantly to their minds.

And so the good admiral and the SecDef come to pay homage to the American soldiers who conquered Mexico. What diplomatic genius. While they are at it, why not lay a wreath in Hiroshima to the brave American airmen who died over Japan? Or maybe erect a statue to Sherman in Atlanta? What if the Mexican army chief went to New York to commemorate the courageous freedom fighters who took down the towers?

No, no, no. Keep the gringo soldiers out of

**Mexico has oil. America lost control of it in 1938 when Lazaro Cardenas nationalized it. Mexicans believe, in dead seriousness, that the US would love a pretext for invading to get it back**

## BORDER CROSSINGS

**Is Hillary Clinton the Secretary of State for her long experience abroad, her command of languages? Or because her appointment healed a schism in the Democratic Party and soothed the Israeli lobby?**

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

Mexico. To Mexicans, the US military means only one thing: unshirted aggression. The dates 1846-1848 might convey something to one American in a hundred. Mexicans know that in those years they lost half their country to what U.S. Grant called an utterly unjustified invasion. They remember.

You don't have to agree with Grant's assessment (though I don't see how it can be intelligently disputed). Mexican behavior is determined by what Mexicans think, not what we think they ought to think.

People remember invasions for a very long time. It is not smart to step on a country's national corns. Even today a lot of Southerners would march on Washington under arms if they thought they had a chance of winning.

It is not just that Mullen and Gates did what they did, but that they had no idea what they were doing. I mean...look, Mexico is not the Dry Tortugas. It is a country of 110 million people sharing a very long border with the US. What happens here has consequences for the United States. It might make sense to treat the place with a modicum of thought, to have some grasp of how Latins think. I don't mean a firm grasp, or real understanding. I am not an extremist. But...maybe just a clue.

From Guadalajara, our policy towards the continent below seems determined by bumbling children, by domestic politics, by truculent and heavily armed Boy Scouts. Is Hillary Clinton the Secretary of State for her long experience abroad, her command of languages? Or because her appointment healed a schism in the Democratic Party and soothed the Israeli lobby? No one in power seems even to know that there is anything to know about South America. I suspect I could count on the fingers of an amputee's hand the number of high US officials who speak Spanish. It is ridiculous.

In the past it perhaps didn't matter much whether Washington knew anything about Caracas, La Paz, or Brasilia. Latin Americans were all the same—serape, tequila, exaggerated sombrero, sleeping under a cactus,

burro waiting. I am still asked by Americans, "In Mexico, do they, you know, have paved roads?" Unbright. Very unbright.

Today wiser policy is in order, but seems unlikely to be forthcoming. In particular, a ratpack of colonels in arrested development are the worst possible people to handle relations with Latin countries. Colonels live in a clean-edged, simple mental universe in which orders are followed, everyone is a good guy or a bad guy, and you can trust those thought to be on your side. They believe in American values, in military values, and believe that everyone really wants to be like them, like us. Nothing to it: You bomb the bad guys into submission, teach the people to be honest and democratic as America isn't and never was and, bingo, a docile Reader's Digest version of Switzerland pops into existence. Good luck.

Latin America doesn't work that way. It is complex, often profoundly corrupt, at times chaotic, and inclined to view the rule of law as an interesting idea perhaps worthy of examination at a later date. Power flows through channels written nowhere. Latins intensely resent American intrusiveness. Most would prefer their own narcos to US soldiery. The world below the Rio Bravo is not suitable for military fiddling.

In today's complicated world, with the Asian giants rising and seeking raw materials, maybe we should pay more attention. Maybe sending the Marines isn't the answer to every problem. Since World War II, the Pentagon has displayed a nearly solid record of failure in fighting either drugs or peasants with AKs. We do not need to blunder into new and better Afghanistans. We seem to want to, though, and it will bring more leftists to power. In the last election here, a truly nutball leftist (AMLO—Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador) came within a few chads of being president of Mexico. Hugo Chavez thrives on American hostility. We treat Cuba as an enemy and, sure enough, it acts like one. None of this is in the American national interest, boys and girls. It's just brainless. **CT**

# Stick your damn hand in it

**Greg Palast** remembers the 20th anniversary of the Exxon Valdez lie

**G**ail, Please! Stick your hand in it!” The petite Eskimo-Chugach woman gave me that you-dumb-ass-white-boy look.

“Gail, Gail. STICK YOUR DAMN HAND IN IT!”

She stuck it in, under the gravel of the beach at Sleepy Bay, her village’s fishing ground. Gail’s hand came up dripping with black, sickening goo. It could make you vomit. Oil from the Exxon Valdez.

It was already two years after the spill and Exxon had crowed that Mother Nature had happily cleaned up their stinking oil mess for them. It was a lie. But the media wouldn’t question the bald-faced bullshit. And who the hell was going to investigate Exxon’s claim way out in some godforsaken Native village in the Prince William Sound?

So I convinced the Natives to fly the lazy-ass reporters out to Sleepy Bay on rented float planes to see the oil that Exxon said wasn’t there.

The reporters looked, but didn’t see it, because it was three inches under their feet, under the shingle rock of the icy beach. Gail pulled out her hand and now the whole place smelled like a gas station. The network crews wanted to puke.

And now, with their eyes open, they saw the oil, the vile feces-colored smear across the glaciated ridge faces, the poisonous

“bathtub ring” that ran for miles and miles at the high tide level. And it’s still there. Less for sure. But twenty years later, IT’S STILL THERE, GODDAMNIT. And I want YOU, dear reader, to stick your hand in it. I want YOU, President Obama, to stick your hand in it before you blithely fulfill your Palin-esque campaign promise for a little more offshore drilling.

\*\*\*

Tuesday, March 24 marked the 20th anniversary of the Exxon Valdez grounding and the smearing of 1,200 miles of Alaska’s coastline with its oil.

It also marked the 20th anniversary of a lie. Lots of lies: catalogued in a four-volume investigation of the disaster; four volumes you’ll never see. I wrote that report, with my team of investigators working with the Natives preparing fraud and racketeering charges against Exxon. You’ll never see the report because Exxon lawyers threatened the Natives, “Mention the f-word [fraud] and you’ll never get a dime” of compensation to clean up the villages. The Natives agreed to drop the fraud charge – and Exxon stiffed them on the money. You’re surprised, right?

\*\*\*

Doubtless, for the 20th anniversary of the Great Spill, the media will schlep out that

**With their eyes open, they saw the oil, the vile feces-colored smear across the glaciated ridge faces, the poisonous “bathtub ring” that ran for miles and miles at the high tide level. And it’s still there**

## TROUBLED WATERS

**So why the story of the drunken skipper? Because it lets Exxon off the hook: Calling it a case of “drunk driving” turns the disaster into a case of human error, not corporate penny-pinching**

old story that the tanker ran aground because its captain was drunk at the wheel. Bullshit. Yes, the captain was “three sheets to the wind” – but sleeping it off below-decks. The ship was in the hands of the third mate who was driving blind. That is, the Exxon Valdez’ Raycas radar system was turned off; turned off because it was busted and had been busted since its maiden voyage. Exxon didn’t want to spend the cash to fix it. So the man at the helm, electronically blindfolded, drove it up onto the reef.

So why the story of the drunken skipper? Because it lets Exxon off the hook: Calling it a case of “drunk driving” turns the disaster into a case of human error, not corporate penny-pinching

Indeed, the “human error” tale was the hook used by the Bush-stacked Supreme Court to slash the punitive damages awarded against Exxon by 90%, from \$5 billion, to half a billion for 30,000 Natives and fishermen. Chief Justice John Roberts erased almost all of the payment due with the la-dee-dah comment, “What more can a corporation do?”

Well, here’s what they could have done: Besides fix the radar, Exxon could have set out equipment to contain the spill. Containing a spill is actually quite simple. Stick a rubber skirt around the oil slick and suck it back up. The law requires it and Exxon promised it.

So, when the tanker hit, where was the rubber skirt and where was the sucker? Answer: The rubber skirt, called “boom” – was a fiction. Exxon promised to have it sitting right there near the Native village at Bligh Reef. The oil company fulfilled that promise the cheap way: they lied.

And the lie was engineered at the very top. After the spill, we got our hands on a series of memos describing a secret meeting of chief executives of Exxon and its oil company partners, including ARCO, a unit of British Petroleum. In a meeting of these oil chieftains held in April 1988, ten months before the spill, Exxon rejected a plea from T.L. Polasek, the Vice-President of its Alas-

ka shipping operations, to provide the oil spill containment equipment required by law. Polasek warned the CEOs it was “not possible” to contain a spill in the mid-Sound without the emergency set-up.

Exxon angrily vetoed ARCO’s suggestion that the oil companies supply the rubber skirts and other materiel that would have prevented the spill from spreading, virtually eliminating the spill’s damage.

Regulations state that no tanker may leave the Alaska port of Valdez without the “sucker” equipment, called a “containment barge,” at the ready. Exxon signed off on the barge’s readiness. But, that night twenty years ago, the barge was in dry-dock with its pumps locked up under arctic ice. By the time it arrived at the tanker, half a day after the spill, the oil was well along its thousand-mile killing path.

Natives watched as the now-unstoppable oil overwhelmed their islands. Eyak Native elder Henry Makarka saw an otter rip out its own eyes burning from oil residue. Henry, pointing down a waterside dead-zone, told me, in a mix of Alutiiq and English, “If I had a machine gun, I’d shoot every one of those white sons-of-bitches.”

\*\*\*

Exxon promised – promised – to pay the Natives and other fisherman for all their losses. The Chief of the Natives at Nanwalek lost his boat to bankruptcy. His village, like other villages, Native and non-Native, decayed into alcoholism. The Mayor of fishing port Cordova killed himself, citing Exxon in his suicide note.

On the island village of Chenega, Gail Evanoff’s uncle Paul Kompkoff was hungry. Until the spill, he had lived on seal meat, razor clams and salmon Chenegans would catch, and on deer they hunted. The clams and salmon were declared deadly and the deer, not able to read the government warning signs, ate the poisoned vegetation and died.

The President of Exxon, Lee Raymond, helicoptered into Chenega for a photo op.

He promised to compensate the Natives and all fishermen for their losses, and Exxon would thoroughly clean the beaches.

Uncle Paul told the Exxon chief of his hunger. The oil company, sensing PR disaster, shipped in seal meat to the isolated village. The cans were marked, "NOT FIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION." Uncle Paul said, "Zoo food."

Paul didn't want a seal in a can. He wanted a boat to go fishing, to bring the village back to life.

Two years after the spill, Otto Harrison, General Manager of Exxon USA, told Evanoff and me to forget about a fishing boat for Uncle Paul. Exxon was immortal and Natives were not. The company would litigate for 20 years.

They did. Only now, two decades on, Exxon has finally begun its payout of the court award – but only ten cents on the dollar. And Uncle Paul's boat? No matter. Paul's dead. So are a third of the fishermen owed the money.

\*\*\*

Lee Raymond, President of Exxon at the time of the spill – and its President when the company made the secret decision to do without oil spill equipment, retired in April 2006. The company awarded him a \$400 million retirement bonus, more than

double the bonuses received by all AIG executives combined.

\*\*\*

Gail's oily hand never made it to national television. The networks were distracted with another oil story.

After sailing back to Chenega from Sleepy Bay, I sat with Uncle Paul, watching the smart bombs explode over Baghdad. Gulf War I had begun.

Uncle Paul was silent a long time. The generals on CNN pointed to the burning oil fields near Basra. Paul said, "I guess were all some kind of Native now." **CT**

*Greg Palast investigated fraud and racketeering claims for the Chugach Natives of Alaska. Now a journalist whose work appears on BBC Television Newsnight, Palast is the author of the New York Times bestselling books *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy* and *Armed Madhouse*. Visit [GregPalast.com](http://GregPalast.com) for more.*

*Check out the YouTube clip of Greg Palast on Air America's 'Ring of Fire' with Mike Papantoni on the Exxon Valdez and on the death of investigative reporting in America in this weekend on your Air America station. Palast is a Nation Institute/Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow for investigative reporting.*

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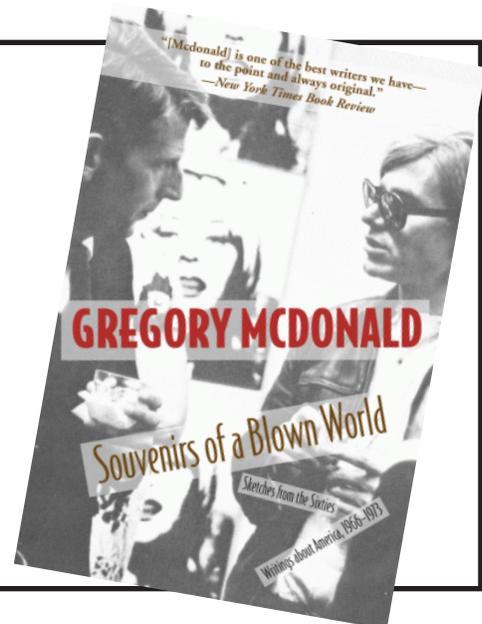
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# Gullible's travels

**David Cromwell** tells of selective reporting by Britain's media on the nuclear ambitions of Iran and Israel

**So when a demonstrably mendacious leader claims he "passionately believed" in a lie, the media has to take him at his word. This is the same brand of journalistic gullibility that has had such tragic consequences for the people of Iraq**

**H**ave journalists learnt nothing from recent history? It truly is a wonder when a reporter can assert in public, on the BBC News no less, that "Tony Blair passionately believed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and posed a grave threat." (BBC1, Six O'Clock News, February 24, 2009). When BBC reporter Reeta Chakrabarti was challenged on this remarkable display of naïveté, she compounded her grievous error by responding:

"I said Mr Blair passionately believed Iraq had wmd because he has consistently said so. When challenged he has stuck to his guns." (Email posted on the Media Lens Message Board, March 2, 2009)

So when a demonstrably mendacious leader claims he "passionately believed" in a lie, the media has to take him at his word. This is the same brand of journalistic gullibility that has had such tragic consequences for the people of Iraq. This is the endless, uncritical obedience to power that boosted the warmongering agenda of London and Washington, allowing them to fit 'facts' to a pre-ordained policy of launching a war of aggression. Such an act, sold by the BBC as Blair's "passionate belief", is the supreme international crime, as judged by the 1946 Nuremberg Tribunal.

And a similar tragic fate may yet befall the people of Iran, if the corporate media

portrayal of Iran as a rogue state lorded over by "ruling mullahs", desperate to get their hands on nuclear weapons, goes unchallenged.

## **A nuclear programme under close surveillance**

At the end of 2007, a thorough assessment by the United States concluded that Iran's nuclear weapons programme had already halted in 2003. The National Intelligence Estimate was the consensus view of all 16 US spy agencies. (Mark Mazzeti, 'US Says Iran Ended Atomic Arms Work,' New York Times, December 3, 2007)

In its latest report on Iran, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) strengthened this assessment when it stated it had "been able to continue to verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material [for possible military purposes] in Iran." (IAEA, 'Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors by IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei,' March 2, 2009; <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Statements/2009/ebsp2009n002.html>)

But under pressure from powerful Western countries, in particular the United States, the UN Security Council and the IAEA have been demanding that Iran suspend the enrichment of uranium "until Iran's peaceful intentions can be fully established." (BBC online, 'Q&A: Iran and

the nuclear issue,' 10:39 GMT, February 25, 2009; [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4031603.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4031603.stm))

Under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), a country has the right to enrich uranium as fuel for civil nuclear power, although it must remain under inspection by the IAEA. The agency says in its latest report that although Iran is continuing to enrich uranium, it is doing so at a reduced rate.

The IAEA also reported that it had found an increase in Iran's stockpile of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to 1,010 kg. This figure was over one-third greater than the estimate that had been provided by Iran. However, the IAEA emphasised that "Iran is cooperating well with UN nuclear inspectors to help ensure it does not again understate the amount of uranium it has enriched."

News agency Reuters made an important observation: "The IAEA statement seemed aimed at quashing any impressions... that the accounting shortfall might have been deliberate evasion."

According to IAEA spokeswoman Melissa Fleming: "The (IAEA) has no reason at all to believe that the estimates of LEU produced in the (Natanz) facility were an intentional error by Iran. They are inherent in the early commissioning phases of such a facility when it is not known in advance how it will perform in practice."

She emphasised: "Iran has provided good cooperation on this matter and will be working to improve its future estimates.

"No nuclear material could have been removed from the facility without the agency's knowledge since the facility is subject to video surveillance and the nuclear material has been kept under seal." (Mark Heinrich, 'Iran cooperates after understating atom stocks-IAEA,' Reuters, February 22, 2009; <http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-38148320090222?sp=true>)

The IAEA stated that it is seeking improved transparency and further information about Iran's nuclear programme. But it

also noted that: "[T]he apparent fresh approach by the international community to dialogue with Iran will give new impetus to the efforts to resolve this long-standing issue in a way that provides the required assurances about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme, while assuring Iran of its right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes." (IAEA, op.cit.)

### Scaremongers R Us

However, for many years, the corporate media has been amplifying supposed "fear" in the West about Iran becoming a nuclear-armed nation alongside the US, the UK, France, Russia – and Israel.

Compare the sane and sober IAEA analysis above with the *Daily Telegraph's* reporting in February of "fears in Israel and the US that Iran is approaching the point of no return in its ability to build atom bomb." Use of "the point of no return" is a classic scare tactic intended to induce a sense of panic. Time is running out! Soon it will be too late! As though warmongering propaganda over Iraq had taken place in a parallel universe, the paper blithely asserted that "Israeli and Western intelligence agencies believe the 20-year-old programme, which was a secret until 2002, is designed to give the ruling mullahs an atom bomb." (Philip Sherwell, 'Israel launches covert war against Iran,' *Daily Telegraph*, February 16, 2009; <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/4640052/Israel-launches-covert-war-against-Iran.html>)

"Ruling mullahs" is another trigger phrase intended to resonate in the public mind alongside "mad mullahs," "Islamic fundamentalism" and "militant Islam".

Remarkably, the BBC told the public, who pay for the broadcaster: "Germany has warned Iran that it would support tougher sanctions if diplomatic efforts to stop the Iranians acquiring nuclear weapons broke down." (BBC online, 'Germany warns Iran over sanctions,' 15:39 GMT, February 7, 2009; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/>

**"Ruling mullahs" is another trigger phrase intended to resonate in the public mind alongside "mad mullahs," "Islamic fundamentalism" and "militant Islam"**

## LESSONS UNLEARNED

**There was no hint that it is the US which is “ambitious” and “overbearing” – with a long and shameful record of aggression towards Iran and many other countries in the region – and a proven eagerness to assert its dominance**

[world/europe/7876659.stm](http://www.world/europe/7876659.stm))

So according to the BBC, Iran is indeed trying to acquire nuclear weapons. The corporation’s famed “impartiality” really is a joke.

Meanwhile, *The Times* maintained its own tragicomic tradition of balanced coverage (see Media Lens Media Alert, ‘Selling the Fireball’, June 25, 2008; [http://www.medialens.org/alerts/08/080625\\_selling\\_the\\_fireball.php](http://www.medialens.org/alerts/08/080625_selling_the_fireball.php)).

The paper’s chief foreign commentator, Bronwen Maddox, inaccurately described Iran’s nuclear programme as “accelerating.” In her column, Iran was portrayed as “ambitious” and keen to upset “the balance of power even further in a region already tense about Tehran’s overbearing ways.” (Bronwen Maddox, ‘Ambitious Iran is bent on tilting the balance of power,’ *The Times*, February 27, 2009). There was no hint that it is the US which is “ambitious” and “overbearing” – with a long and shameful record of aggression towards Iran and many other countries in the region – and a proven eagerness to assert its dominance.

It is par for the course, and closely aligned with Western state priorities, for the corporate media to portray Iran as a threat; its “ruling mullahs” desperate to build nuclear weapons or arm “militants” targeted by the US in its “war on terror.”

The ‘liberal’ *Guardian* plays its part in the same propaganda system. A recent piece by the *Guardian*’s Rory McCarthy about a new Amnesty report on arms in the Middle East wrongly implicated Iran in the supply of weapons to Hamas in Gaza. McCarthy wrote: “For their part, Palestinian militants in Gaza were arming themselves with ‘unsophisticated weapons’ including rockets made in Russia, Iran and China, it said.” (McCarthy, ‘Suspend military aid to Israel, Amnesty urges Obama after detailing US weapons used in Gaza,’ *The Guardian*, February 23, 2009; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/feb/23/military-aid-israel-amnesty>)

This then, according to McCarthy, is

what “it”, Amnesty, said.

But in fact Amnesty was +not+ the source of allegations about the origins of Palestinian rockets. Amnesty had merely cited the publication *Janes Defence Weekly*, and was not itself in a position to verify the claims. Worse for the *Guardian*, as the Amnesty report made clear, the claims actually originate from Israeli and Egyptian security and police sources. Such claims should be treated with extreme caution and, at the very least, be correctly attributed by the *Guardian*.

Worse still, Amnesty had this to say on the claim that rockets have been supplied from Iran: “There have been several reports that Iran has provided military equipment and munitions, including rockets, to Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups but Amnesty International has not seen any evidence to verify these allegations.” (Amnesty International, ‘Fuelling conflict: Foreign arms supplies to Israel/Gaza,’ AI Index: MDE 15/012/2009, February 23, 2009; <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE15/012/2009/en>; page 31)

Medialens co-editor David Edwards and I wrote to both Rory McCarthy and Siobhain Butterworth, the readers’ editor, suggesting they publish a prompt correction in the *Guardian*. As usual, we received only silence in response.

### **Friendly nukes – Israel doesn’t threaten anyone, never did**

No sane person wants nuclear conflict. What single act could be more monstrous than that of instantly incinerating a city full of men, women and children? This is what America did, twice, in its atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (See David Cromwell, ‘Racing Towards The Abyss,’ Media Lens Cogitations, January 15, 2008; [http://www.medialens.org/cogitations/080115\\_racing\\_towards\\_the.php](http://www.medialens.org/cogitations/080115_racing_towards_the.php))

Who could argue with the United Nations’ “goal of establishing in the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and all missiles for their de-

livery”? (UN resolution 687, April 3, 1991; <http://www.fas.org/news/un/iraq/sres/sreso687.htm>)

But the stoked-up fears, and media hype, over Iran generally overlook the fact that there is already a nation in the region armed with nuclear weapons – Israel. But Israel is a western ally and therefore to be regarded as essentially benign.

Estimates for Israel’s nuclear weapons stockpile range from 70 to 400 warheads. An assessment published by the Federation of American Scientists in 2007 concluded that the most likely number lay in the range 100-200. (Steven Aftergood and Hans M. Kristensen, ‘Nuclear weapons – Israel,’ Federation of American Scientists, updated January 8, 2007; <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/israel/nuke/>)

In 2008, the BBC reported former US President Jimmy Carter’s statement that Israel has “150 or more” nuclear weapons. (BBC online, ‘Israel “has 150 nuclear weapons”’, 20:26 GMT, May 26, 2008; [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/7420573.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7420573.stm))

Unlike Iran, Israel is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Also unlike Iran, Israel does not allow international inspection of its nuclear facilities. In fact, Israel has never formally admitted that it possesses nuclear weapons, instead following a “policy of ambiguity.” However, in an embarrassing slip, Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert told a German television interviewer in 2006 that Iran was “aspiring to have a nuclear weapon as America, France, Israel and Russia.”

Olmert reacted angrily when asked if Israel’s alleged nuclear programme weakened the Western case against Iran, insisting no such comparisons could be made: “Israel is a democracy, Israel doesn’t threaten any country with anything, never did.”

He said Iran could not be compared to the US, Russia, France and the UK, as Iran had threatened “to wipe Israel off the map.” (For a refutation of this mistranslation from Farsi, see Jonathan Steele, ‘Lost

in translation,’ *The Guardian*, June 14, 2006; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentis-free/2006/jun/14/post155>)

Olmert explained in all seriousness: “You are talking about civilized countries that do not threaten the foundations of the world [and] that do not threaten other countries that they will use the nuclear weapons in order to destroy them. That is why there is a big difference.” (Associated Press and Ynet, ‘Olmert: Iran wants nuclear weapons like Israel,’ December 12, 2006; <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3338783,00.html>)

In 2006, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates told a Senate committee that Israel possessed nuclear weapons and that these might provide Iran with the motivation to acquire its own. He even recognised that Iran faced a potential US threat: “They [Iran] are surrounded by powers with nuclear weapons – Pakistan to their east, the Russians to the north, the Israelis to the west and us in the Persian Gulf.” (Associated Press, ‘Incoming US Defense Secretary tells Senate panel Israel has nuclear weapons,’ *Ha’aretz*, December 9, 2006; <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/798405.html>)

#### Orwell’s memory hole

One searches in vain for any corporate media analysis focusing on Israel’s large stockpile of over 150 nuclear weapons. Where is the in-depth discussion that Israel might have a reason to divert attention from its own nuclear arms by cynically manipulating fears over Iran?

At best, there is an occasional subtle nod in the direction of uncomfortable truth. For instance, the *Guardian*’s Middle East editor, Ian Black, noted blandly that: “Israel, which has its own undeclared nuclear weapons arsenal, has been warning for some time that Iran is far closer than believed in the west to being able to build a bomb.” (Ian Black, ‘US fears that Iran has capability to build a nuclear bomb,’ *The Guardian*, March 2, 2009)

**But the stoked-up fears, and media hype, over Iran generally overlook the fact that there is already a nation in the region armed with nuclear weapons – Israel. But Israel is a western ally and therefore to be regarded as essentially benign**

## LESSONS UNLEARNED

**Somehow, there is no in-depth reporting or analysis of Israel's hugely threatening stock of nuclear weapons; or of "our ally's" threat to regional and global instability.**

But has Israel been simply "warning", in the manner of a responsible citizen phoning the police about a mad gunman roaming the streets? Or has it, perhaps, been hyping fears about Iran for its own ends – and those of US power?

It is now almost unmentioned in media coverage that Israel carried out a massive military exercise in the eastern Mediterranean last June. This involved 100 bombers, rescue helicopters and midair refuelling planes over Crete, 1,400 kilometres from Israel – about the same distance separating Israel from Iran's uranium enrichment facility at Natanz.

A few days after the exercise, Israel's deputy prime minister, Shaul Mofaz, said: "If Iran continues its programme to develop nuclear weapons, we will attack it. The window of opportunity has closed. The sanctions are not effective. There will be no alternative but to attack Iran in order to stop the Iranian nuclear programme." (Jonathan Steele, 'Israel asked US green light to bomb Iran,' *The Guardian*, September 26, 2008)

Around the same time, the US announced that it would sell Israel 1,000 bunker-busting "smart" bombs, capable of penetrating 90 cm of steel-reinforced concrete. It was reported in passing that the US and Israel were in advanced talks about upgrading Israel's Arrow II ballistic missile shield.

In 2007, Israeli forces conducted an air raid against an alleged Syrian nuclear facility. Seemingly unable to obtain US backing for similar strikes against Iran, Israel has launched a "covert war" involving hitmen, sabotage, front companies and double agents to stop "the regime's illicit weapons project." (Sherwell, op. cit.)

Although these developments have been given limited coverage, they invariably, and rapidly, disappear down the Orwellian 'memory hole.' Inconvenient facts are forgotten or overlooked. Somehow, the dots – the West's long record of criminal actions, its current threats and longstanding strategic interests – are never joined. Somehow, there is no in-depth reporting or analysis of Israel's hugely threatening stock of nuclear weapons; or of "our ally's" threat to regional and global instability. Somehow, the West's (particularly the US's) massive financial, diplomatic and ideological support for a nuclear-armed Israel is not part of the story.

All of this is simply not discussed in any meaningful, sustained way by 'mainstream' broadcasters and newspapers. And so, like many others in the region, the people of Iran remain in the crosshairs of Western firepower; just as the Iraqis were.

Sadly, this deadly cocktail of media silence and diversion will likely yield yet more corpses, more mutilations, more victims demented by grief, fear and misery.

Whatever steps each of us can take to challenge the agenda of power propagated through the media are well worth the effort.

**CT**

*David Cromwell is co-editor of Media Lens, the British media watchdog web site. The Media Lens book 'Guardians of Power: The Myth Of The Liberal Media' by David Edwards and David Cromwell (Pluto Books, London) was published in 2006. A new Media Lens book, 'Newspeak in the 21st Century,' by David Edwards and David Cromwell, will be published by Pluto Press in the autumn.*

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# Reboot America

A lesson from post-consumerist Cuba, by **Michael I. Niman**

**A** local income tax prep company has ads on TV showing a family wearing sweaters and cozying up around the fireplace to stay warm, and a man dressed up in a business suit grabbing his briefcase and mounting his bike to head off to work. The narrator reassures us that no, we wouldn't have to "go to extremes" to save money, like wearing sweaters in the winter or riding a bike to work. We could instead save cash by letting them prepare our tax returns. My spouse called my attention to the ad, saying, "Hey, that's us," minus the suit, of course.

So here are my questions: Are we really an aberration? Are we freaks for riding our bikes to work and keeping our house comfortably cool in the winter? What's normal, really? Should we bring our 3,000-pound machines to work and struggle for a place to park them when we'd just as soon spend the same time riding our bikes? Should we heat our house to feel like we live in Miami, just so we can wear summer clothing in the winter? Are we freaks for not buying in to this weirdness? Are we really an aberration? I don't think so. Not anymore, at least.

The new economy is ushering in a new reality. Factory output is down. Consumption is down. This means resource depletion and waste production are consequently down as well. Big boxes are closing their

doors and, get this, the national savings rate has moved from the negative numbers (meaning the average American was falling deeper into debt spending more than she or he was earning) to a more sane five percent of household income. It turns out we really didn't need all that shit after all.

Deep ecologists and credit counselors have been trying for quite some time to get us to stop buying our way into ecocide and bankruptcy. It seems that both the planet and our wallets couldn't take it. It sucks that it took a depression to get us here, but historians might just look back on this depression as the event that saved the ecosystem just when we were on the brink of flopping over a climatic tipping point. Maybe there's a silver lining to a plummeting Dow. Maybe it's not just our environment that may have gotten a reprieve. Perhaps our collective soul as a culture may have gotten a breather as well. Enough was enough. We clearly weren't shopping our way into happiness.

I've seen the aftermath of a consumerist apocalypse. That was Havana. By the time I showed up on the scene, first as a grad student in the late 1980s and later in 1999 and 2000 after the collapse of Cuba's Soviet benefactor, the skeletons of the hedonistic 1950s were lying as well preserved but lifeless ruins.

Havana's downtown shopping district

**Should we heat our house to feel like we live in Miami, just so we can wear summer clothing in the winter? Are we freaks for not buying in to this weirdness? Are we really an aberration?**

## THE NEW AGE

**On the road, Cubans are still driving around in 60- and 70-year-old cars. The inability to afford new ones forced them to figure out how to keep the old ones on the road forever . . . We don't need to replace everything all the time. Things can be fixed. People can be employed fixing things**

was eerie on one level, yet bizarrely normal and even healthy on another. The department stores were still there, with their stainless steel and marble facades, but the goods were gone and the stores mostly boarded up and abandoned to the elements, with an old Rex store appearing to bleed some sort of fluid from its long sealed entrance-way. The old Woolworth was still open last time I was there, but its shelves were all but bare, with an odd array of automotive gaskets and hairclips filling an old glass display case. People still came, as if exercising ancestral muscle memory. But there really wasn't anything to buy. Clearly they miss all the bling and, almost to a person, want to tell you about how difficult life is and how they long for stuff to buy. Middle-class Cubans even reduce themselves to pining for the half-empty bottles of shampoo their gringo friends leave behind. But oddly, they seem for the most part to be happy.

Last month, with reports of collapsing consumer confidence and freefalling housing and stock markets here in the US, I dove into the task of scanning my old Cuba negatives into digital files. As I manipulated the newborn digits on these photos, I looked once again at the faces of the Cubans navigating through post-consumerist ruins. Their world appears crazy, but there's laughter, smiles, and healthy human interaction. They're sitting on benches talking, playing chess and dominos, and watching their kids run about. Their conversation isn't dominated by "things."

I recall how goods would occasionally trickle into the stores, and folks would line up for a chance to spend worthless pesos on the item du jour. When I was there, it was colorful striped spandex stretch pants

— worthless to us, but cherished by Cuban consumers with little else to buy. This is old-time consumerism: You don't have much, but you value the little that you do have. And you enjoy and appreciate having it. Think of a poor kid whose family saves for a year to buy him or her that special Christmas present. And think about the months spent anticipating its arrival. And how it was cherished once it came. Then think about the spoiled rich kid with his or her little warehouse of unused and unappreciated toys. Life is not about the quantity of what you own, but about the quality of your experiences, both with things and without.

Two generations of life without consumerism has given Cuba one of the smallest per capita ecological footprints in the world. The US embargo and Cuba's dearth of hard currency meant that they couldn't afford pesticides and patented genetically modified organisms. The result is that Cuba moved ahead in research on pesticide- and Frankenfood-free agriculture. Today, they are a global leader in sustainable organic farming. On the road, Cubans are still driving around in 60- and 70-year-old cars. The inability to afford new ones forced them to figure out how to keep the old ones on the road forever. It turns out that junkyards, which, like massive garbage dumps, are among the topographic blisters of consumerism, are actually just culture-bound syndromes. We don't need to replace everything all the time. Things can be fixed. People can be employed fixing things.

This is not to say that poverty is fun. And as a well-off American I don't want to romanticize a poverty I'm not forced to experience. And as someone with the free-

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dom to criticize my own government and culture, I certainly don't want to romanticize life in a one-party state without a free press. But we can learn from the Cuban experience in that life is indeed possible after consumerism. And it appears to be much more sustainable on both an ecological and a social level.

Depressions, including those that can last for generations, aren't fun. But they are survivable. They can be learning moments—chances to reboot society and get our priorities and values back in order. Perhaps we can once again value quality time with our friends, lovers, and families. Maybe we can appreciate leaving a healthy planet to our kids more than racing to the mall in a new Lexus. Maybe.

The challenge to maintaining social cohesion in a depression is the equitable distribution of pain. The Cubans can weather living with almost nothing, on a material level, because what they do have, are the essentials. Everyone has some sort of housing, food, access to education, and a baseline of medical care. What a deepening depression will look like here, however, threatens to be much worse, with some folks not being able to afford their chemotherapy, while others continue to day trade. We can have social cohesion, but not with Maseratis speeding past homeless encampments.

Our growing poverty is also quite different from Cuba's. Ours began as conceptual poverty. The rich material wealth and infrastructural assets of our society are still here. Our buildings, roads, and machines haven't disappeared. Our depression, like my scanned photos, is digital: Digital concepts of wealth, such as stock indexes and home equity, have evaporated. Conceptual wealth flipped to conceptual poverty. High stock and housing market indexes are like fiat currencies—worth only what people are willing to pay for them, which ain't much right now. Digital wealth has been looted by hedge funds and driven into chaos by

derivative markets. This caused a real poverty, with unemployment soaring and the very people whose real-life work buoyed the economy for so long, feeling most of the pain. With digital poverty now causing real life poverty, it's time to reboot the system.

First we need to get real and understand how we got here. When the Berlin Wall fell, and the Reagan crowd cheered the “death of communism,” I feared that something entirely different was happening. There was just too much hubris and greed in the air. Back then, I argued that it wasn't communism that was in peril—it was capitalism that now would be left to its own self-destructive hand. And sure enough, we took the deregulation and upward wealth redistribution balls put into play by the Reagan administration, snorted some coke, and throughout the next two decades let the roulette wheel spin, finally removing the last safeguards on the banking system during the George W. Bush presidency.

Ultimately it was the short-sighted, greed-based policies of the Republican party that put us into two depressions. Now, once again, the nasty task of pulling us out of a depression falls on the shoulders of Democrats who inherited another soiled economy. The only way to get us out of this mess is to reverse the upward redistribution of wealth that got us into this quagmire. The fix is going to take much more than a stimulus package. It will require a total reboot of our national priorities and personal values. Economic recovery and sustainability will require fixing things like our health care system, where private monopolistic control of life-saving technologies enabled a debilitating inflationary cycle that put health care out of the reach of the working poor. It also fueled the bankruptcy crisis, and ultimately, with the cost of providing healthcare to workers falling on manufacturers, made our industrial products uncompetitive in the global marketplace. Fixing the economy starts with fixing health-care— not because it's the right thing to

**When the Berlin Wall fell, and the Reagan crowd cheered the “death of communism,” I feared that something entirely different was happening. There was just too much hubris and greed in the air**

## THE NEW AGE

**If we doubled their taxes, people in the top brackets would still be paying 20 percent less than they did during the Republican Eisenhower administration**

do but because we have to do it. The same goes for building a 21st-century, sustainable power grid, transportation infrastructure, and public education system.

And yes, the only way to pay for this is to tax those who can pay, who happen to be the same people who benefitted from the generation-long looting that brought our economy down. The simple sociology here is that the rich can only be rich because governments exist to protect their privilege to be rich – to maintain their islands of luxury in the middle of a sea of comparative poverty.

The Obama administration seems to understand much of this, but they're pissing on a forest fire. Their actions thus far have been dwarfed by the problems they're combating.

Letting the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy expire, for example, adds up to less than a four percent increase on their tax rate. To put this into perspective, if we doubled their taxes, people in the top brackets would still be paying 20 percent less than they did during the Republican Eisenhower administration. Likewise, by simply saving failed banks and insurance companies, we're bailing out failed polices and reinforcing an out of control digital economy. Our problems are big. Our solutions have to be equally big and brilliantly creative. We're America. We can do this. **CT**

*Michael I. Niman is a professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Buffalo State College.*



# Management: The book not written

**Jim Fuller** on dumb business leaders who helped run the world economy over the edge of the cliff

**F**or more than 30 years, I kept notes on the silliness, childish attitudes, wrong-headed assumptions, dishonesty, greed and frequent over-the-top stupidities of American business leadership.

Oh, yes: I also took notes when I ran across a genuinely intelligent and able business leader, but the stack of those notes was thin by comparison. The truly intelligent and mature top executives, and I did encounter some great ones, are stuck in my mind yet; they were shining rarities.

As a business and economics reporter who consistently dealt with the top levels of management in many industries, but especially financial businesses, I had plenty of opportunity for observation.

I planned for most of those years to spend some considerable amount of post-retirement time writing what I intended to be a funny but scathing book about corporate management.

Just a couple of months after retiring from full-time newspaper work, however, I decided (a.) I didn't want to spend any more time with or on the people who wear the big titles in American big business, (b.) there is no way to make a dent in their thick skulls anyway, and (c.) neither our politicians nor the average worker has the guts to take them on, so such a work would be a complete waste of my time at worst, and

at best merely fuel for employee grumbling that was almost constant anyway.

In truth, most Americans admire and actually fawn on the rich and powerful, no matter how cretinous.

Out went the notes, and away went the responsibility I had laid on myself for producing the book.

Now and then I still get the urge to smack some executives upside the head, of course, and that feeling grew much stronger and more frequent over the past few years, as it became ever more apparent that they were leading us into an economic disaster that didn't have to happen.

So let me summarize in a tiny fraction of the space, and without the hundreds of items of specific evidence, the conclusions of my 40-plus years of reporting and editing:

The American management class is made up, in vast majority, of dimwitted, ignorant cowards who, while dodging genuine responsibility at every turn, believe themselves to be the best, brightest and bravest heroes in all the land. Delusion is, in fact, their most characteristic flaw.

Nothing is sillier than the constant bleating about the rarity of management talent — bleating that has become even louder in the face of our economic meltdown and the accompanying incontrovertible proof that the people at the top of our

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## DUMB AND DUMBER

**There was no way that the American manufacturers' refusal to recognize environmental needs and the coming collapse of gas-guzzling behemoths could lead to anything but a sales implosion. Most of the world could see that; auto company executives shut their eyes to it**

financial institutions and most of the rest of our corporations have been wrong about almost everything they have done, said or preached throughout their grotesquely over-paid careers.

Those guys still claim with straight faces that they have to pay themselves and each other and their little vice presidential toadies and market manipulators huge sums of money in order to retain "management talent" that might otherwise go elsewhere. (Where they might go in this stinking swamp of failure is left unsaid.)

The degree to which any of the claimants believes what he is saying about the need for "retention compensation" is a measure of his intellectual incapacity. The degree to which he's just blowing diversionary smoke is yet another measure of his crookedness.

### **Someone else's fault?**

For a solid, clear analysis of the falsity of financial industry executive claims that the present mess is someone else's fault and that they couldn't have done anything different from what they did, see the op-ed piece by William D. Cohan in the March 12 *New York Times*. Cohan nails it.

Speaking of the banking and brokerage hotshots, Cohan says: "Could these Wall Street executives have made other, less risky choices? Of course they could have, if they had been motivated by something other than absolute greed."

At another point, after laying down more evidence, Cohan says, "So enough already with the charade of Wall Street executives pretending not to know what really happened and why."

Hear! Hear!

Much the same thing could be said about auto industry executives who are now playing along with the right-wing flapjaws who, with the goal of using our present economic crisis to further weaken labor unions, are trying to lay the near collapse of that industry at the feet of the manufacturing plant employees who actually make (or made) the cars.

Again, along with dishonesty, delusion: A great many top executives have been coddled, feted and had their behinds kissed so regularly and amorously for so long that they really believe themselves infallible. Ergo, all mistakes must have been committed by someone else.

Before some unreconstructed right winger emails me:

Your question is, "If they're so bad, how come the companies did so well for so long?" The answer, though possibly not simple enough for those who can think only in bumper sticker terms, is not all that complicated:

First, a great many companies, including almost all of our big banks and the American auto makers, profited mightily, but temporarily, by following models that had no chance of long-term functioning. There simply was no way that the mortgage-based securities could go on producing profits indefinitely; collapse was inevitable, and many people recognized that even though the bank leaders did not – or would not.

There was no way that the American manufacturers' refusal to recognize environmental needs and the coming collapse of gas-guzzling behemoths could lead to anything but a sales implosion. Most of the world could see that; auto company executives shut their eyes to it.

Secondly, it takes no genius to profit in an up market. It took some sense and perspective to recognize that the decades of credit spending that kept the American economy moving so swiftly for so long had to slow drastically at some not-too-distant point. Almost no American corporate executives had that sense or perspective.

Neither did they have the sense to realize that their taking bigger and bigger pieces of the economic pie for themselves while using their purchased politicians to squeeze the incomes of the vast majority of the world's people inevitably would lead at some point to a huge dropoff in markets for the crap they peddled.

Along with delusional thinking, another of the primary characteristics of American corporate management is cowardice – particularly a paralyzing fear of doing anything that everyone else isn't doing and a terror of taking honest responsibility for one's decisions and actions. Evidence has turned up showing that some bankers were aware that the sub-prime mortgage market was going to cave in soon, but lacked the guts to pull out while all the other banks were still playing the crooked game. They didn't want to face their directors, even though they owned the directors, and talk about why they were "passing up profits."

### Passing the blame

Do you know what the enormous growth of university MBA programs in recent decades is really about?

The simple, but essentially accurate, answer is that it is yet another manifestation of corporate executives' desire to lay off responsibility onto "experts." Everything that can be taught about managing people and businesses – to someone who has the capacity to learn – can be taught in less than a day. The rest is technical detail, the deconstructing of normal morality and replacing it with an insanely inhumane template for business, and providing elaborate lessons in how to create excuses for failure.

More evidence of the fear of simple decision making is found in the fact that for as long as I can remember – and that's a long way back – American corporations and executives and would-be executives have jumped on one "management" fad after another. There have been dozens of such fads, perhaps 30 or 40 over the time since I first started following business and economics as a reporter.

There was the period – what? maybe

25 years ago now – when everybody who wanted to be somebody or thought he was somebody in the American corporate world read at least two books about the wonders of the Japanese management style. That was before Japan's rigidly structured economy went into a decade-long tailspin, of course.

A few of the others that come to mind: Quality Circles, Total Quality Management, Matric Management, Term-Based Management, Peak Performance (whatever that was), and two or three types of "re-engineering." A quick Google search will turn up a couple dozen more such bits of nonsense.

And every one of those fads produced very high-paying work for "consultants." Of course, some "consultants" didn't need such a fad. They had their little niches that could be used in conjunction with whatever the flavor-of-the-month management style was – speech consulting, appearance consulting, consulting on how to make a presentation, and on and on and on.

All of those vacuous ideas, and all of that consultant money had and has one purpose: To absolve executives from responsibility and to push the onus of making decisions onto someone or something else.

The only proper response to the claims that some executive is worth millions or even tens of millions of dollars a year for his (or, rarely, her) management skills is a ripe tomato in the kisser followed by a severance notice. **CT**

*Jim Fuller spent 30 years at the Minneapolis StarTribune, where he was a business and economics reporter, features writer, and sometime music critic. Nominated for Pulitzer Prizes in 1977 and 1992, he now blogs at [jamesclayfuller.com](http://jamesclayfuller.com)*

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# Down, but not out, on \$464 million a year

Who are the best-paid executives of all time? Hedge fund managers – and they’re just getting richer, says **Sam Pizzigati**

**Paulson no doubt understands the lucrative irony behind his enormous personal windfall. His colleagues in the hedge fund industry helped inflate the market for subprime securities in the first place**

**N**ot everyone in the global hedge fund industry is making millions. Not everyone in the hedge fund industry right now even has a job. Amid the worst global economic melt-down since the Great Depression, hedge funds are hemorrhaging positions. An estimated 20,000 will be gone by year’s end.

But the hedge fund industry still does have something no other industry in the known universe can match: the best-paid top executives who ever lived.

“These are the highest earners,” as Manhattan College financial historian Charles Geisst put it last week, “of all time.”

That observation came right after Alpha, the hedge fund industry trade journal, reported that the hedge fund industry’s top 25 managers added \$11.6 billion to their personal fortunes in 2008, an average of \$464 million each.

How did the movers and shakers of hedge fund land work such magic? For the most part, we simply don’t know. Hedge funds, as largely unregulated entities, don’t have to reveal almost anything about how they go about their business.

The most secretive hedge fund manager of them all, James Simons of Renaissance Technologies, netted \$2.5 billion last year. One of the funds Simons manages generated a 160 percent return in 2008, through some financial alchemy that observers, in

the absence of any real information, have taken to describing as “computer-driven trading strategies.”

The number two on this year’s hedge fund top 25 we know more about. John Paulson of Paulson & Co. has made his big money – \$2 billion in just 2008 alone – by betting that the incredibly overinflated market for subprime mortgage-backed securities would tank.

Paulson no doubt understands the lucrative irony behind his enormous personal windfall. His colleagues in the hedge fund industry helped inflate the market for subprime securities in the first place.

## **Reagan revolution**

Fifty years ago, in a more equal America, hedge funds as we now know them didn’t exist. They didn’t explode onto the financial scene until the 1980s, when the Reagan revolution was rapidly concentrating income and wealth at the top of the U.S. economic ladder.

America’s newly flush rich, their pockets bulging, had plenty of cash to invest, and the emerging new hedge funds — pools of investment capital open only to deep-pocket investors — promised better returns than those deep pockets could get anywhere else.

Hedge fund managers, needing to deliver on those promises, hungered mightily

for high-return investment opportunities that could keep their wealthy clients happy. Traditional Wall Street investments — corporate stocks and bonds — couldn't deliver the high returns the hedge funds needed. But the financial world's new-fangled "derivatives" could.

These increasingly exotic financial instruments, all based on the endless repackaging of ever-shakier mortgage loans and consumer debt, would find an eager hedge fund market.

Hedge fund dollars, in effect, kept the U.S. economy blowing bubbles.

The bubbles all burst in 2008, and the hedge fund industry has certainly felt the aftershock. Over 900 hedge funds, about 14 percent of the fund total worldwide, shut their doors last year. The industry ended 2008 with assets down 37 percent, over \$700 billion, from the industry peak last June.

**\$1.2 trillion sloshing about**

But that downturn has left \$1.2 trillion still sloshing in hedge fund coffers, more than enough to power top hedge fund execs to another round of windfalls

These top execs typically charge investors a fixed percentage of the billions in assets they manage, usually 2 percent. The celebrity hedge fund managers charge even more. James Simons, for instance, levies a 5 percent management fee on the billions investors turn over to him — and then takes a 44 percent cut on any profits he makes selling the assets he buys with those investor billions.

In 2008, you didn't have to be a hedge fund celebrity like Simons to score big. Even junior hedge fund analysts did quite wonderfully, given the economic tenor of

our times. They averaged \$195,520 last year, says the trade journal Alpha.

Industrywide, hedge fund jobs paid an average \$794,000 in 2008, down from \$940,000 the year before. But cheerier days may be coming. U.S. Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner last week unveiled a plan that will hand hedge funds and other big investors a subsidy worth as much as \$1 trillion to start buying up the toxic derivative securities that now have no little or market value.

If Geithner's plan works, hedge funds will take those tax dollars and jumpstart the market for toxic securities, the securities will rise handsomely in value, and hedge fund managers will reap still more jackpots.

But some financial insiders like venture capitalist Peter Cohan don't believe Geithner's plan will work. A good many hedge fund managers won't play ball with Geithner's new plan, Cohan predicts, "because they fear that there'll be a public outcry over their compensation if the plan makes them even richer."

And if that outcry gets loud enough, the hedges no doubt worry, lawmakers may feel compelled to shut the loophole that lets hedge fund managers claim much of their income as capital gains. That neat trick lowers the tax rate on a hefty chunk of hedge fund manager earnings from 35 to 15 percent.

The cost to taxpayers? The hedge fund loophole, the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C. estimates, is running taxpayers about \$2.7 billion a year. **CT**

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

**James Simons, for instance, levies a 5 percent management fee on the billions investors turn over to him — and then takes a 44 percent cut on any profits he makes selling the assets he buys with those investor billions**

**READ THE BEST OF TOM ENGELHARDT**

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

# Bush, Galloway and threats to Canada

Joshua Blakeny tells how George W. Bush went to Canada in the same week an anti-war MP was banned

**The Canadian government's politically motivated negligence has illuminated for the world that from their perspective domestic and international law exists only for the marginalized and weak people and governments, whilst rich people and rich governments are to be afforded impunity and police protection**

A gross violation of constitutional and international law occurred one day in March heralding a dark day for Canadian governance and society. The credibly accused war criminal George W Bush was allowed entry into Canada in violation of Canada's ratified international and constitutional obligations.

A legal group named Lawyers Against the War wrote to the Prime Minister of Canada weeks before the war criminal's arrival emphasizing: "first, the Minister of Immigration is legally bound to prevent Bush's entry into Canada at any time and for any reason; second, if Bush enters Canada, the Attorney General of Canada must prosecute him for torture or provide consent to private prosecution."

The two enshrined acts which were applicable to Bush's Crimes Against Humanity were the: Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act.

On March 17th, hundreds of citizens amassed on the streets of Calgary to protest the hosting of this credibly accused war criminal by the Calgary Chamber of Commerce and its corporate affiliates such as the Bennett Jones legal firm.

One of the bravest activists, Splitting the Sky, a Mohawk activist and Attica veteran, was unjustly incarcerated, for attempting

a citizens arrest, by police who were defending those complicit in the illegal act of hosting a credibly accused war criminal and torturer.

The Canadian government's politically motivated negligence has illuminated for the world that from their perspective domestic and international law exists only for the marginalized and weak people and governments, whilst rich people and rich governments are to be afforded impunity and police protection.

The Canadian government's complicity in regard to the war criminal's visit, was starkly contrasted with the haste of the government in banning the anti-war British MP George Galloway from entering Canada, where he was planning to speak to an anti-war church group in Toronto. James Clark of the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War condemned the Harper government's censorship as "a frontal attack on free speech."

The double standard is obvious. The very same legal codes which the Canadian government were prepared to defenestrate to accommodate the war criminal George W Bush were preyed in aid by the Canadian Minister of Immigration, Jason Kenny, to inform the peace activist Galloway that he would not be welcome in Canada based on his opinions on the illegal war in Afghani-

stan. Jason Kenny, a Calgary MP who recently embraced the so called People's Mujahedeen of Iran (banned by most European governments for being a terrorist group) and who scolded the Lebanese prime minister, for his criticisms of Canada's support for the Israeli War Crimes against Lebanon in 2006, branded Galloway: "an infamous street corner Cromwell" (an interesting formulation seeing that Cromwell was a man who stood against arbitrary government).

It soon became apparent that there was some lucrative lobbying occurring behind the scenes. The Jewish Defence League in an ironic alliance with Canada's far right government vociferously lobbied to prohibit the anti-racist, anti-fascist British MP, from entering Canada. Meir Weinstein of the JDL debated Galloway on UK Channel 4 this week, labelling him: "a threat to Canadian security" and a "proxy agent" for Hamas and Hezbollah, finishing by threatening all of the Canadian pro-Galloway supporters that the JDL: "will be looking into these organization to expose their links to terrorist organizations."

Galloway described the fulminations of the JDL representative as: "venal and brute threats", and called for debate rather than exclusion.

It is curious that the JDL is ostensibly planning to launch a witch hunt against those on the Canadian anti-war left who support anti-racist, socialist figures like Galloway, whilst they ally themselves with a far right government, governed by a party which has its genesis in the highly bigoted Reform Party.

Surely such folly exposes these groups as being merely political mouthpieces for Israel rather than genuine humanitarian watchdogs? Mr Galloway is, contrary to the claims of the JDL, famous for his hostility towards those who spew the poison of anti-Semitism. In November 2007 Galloway organized a protest against the infamous Holocaust-denier David Irving whom many – myself included – believed he should not have been provided with a plat-

form at Oxford University to deny the Holocaust. (see: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-496301/Oxford-students-sit-protest-fails-silence-Holocaust-denier-David-Irving-BNP-leader-Nick-Griffin.html>). Moreover Galloway, who hosts a radio show twice a week, regularly traduces those who would seek to criticise Israel with anti-Semitic slurs (see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILISOXfEyOo>).

These nuances were deliberately glossed over by what Professor Denis Rancourt, of University of Ottawa, characterizes as Canada's "Israel Lobby", who pressured the Canadian government to censure Mr Galloway from speaking to Canadians. The "Israel Lobby" charges that Mr Galloway is a supporter of Hezbollah and Hamas and because of this he should not be permitted entry into Canada as Canada is one of only five countries in the world which classifies Hezbollah and Hamas terrorist organizations (soon to be four because Britain is planning to recognize Hezbollah as a legitimate resistance movement involved in democratic politics).

As somebody who follows Galloway's work closely I feel obliged to expound Mr Galloway's opinions in regard to Hezbollah and Hamas, in order to dispel this smoke screen conjured up by the corporate media and the "Israel Lobby" to demonize this widely respected individual.

As a five times elected politician, Mr Galloway takes the democratic opinion that the Palestinian people and the Lebanese people should be allowed to vote for whoever they like, regardless of whether it pleases or infuriates the White House and the Israeli Knesset. In this sense he departs from Harper and Bush who merely want slave governments; either democratically elected or autocratic "compradors." This is why Harper and Bush support Saudi Arabia's kleptocracy, Egypt's puppet dictatorship, and is why they have installed obedient puppet regimes in Kabul and Bagdad to replace the previous regimes which negated their imperialist orders.

**The Jewish Defence League in an ironic alliance with Canada's far right government vociferously lobbied to prohibit the anti-racist, anti-fascist British MP, from entering Canada.**

## TRAVELERS' TALES

**That indisputable fact is not to say that Galloway supports Hezbollah, it is merely to say that he recognizes that the vast majority of the people of Lebanon identify with Hezbollah and that he respects their democratic right to do so**

Galloway openly opposes the aforementioned regimes which is why he is loved in the Arab and Muslim world and despised in right-wing political circles in the West. Indeed one of the premises for censuring Galloway, according to the office of the Minister of Immigration, was because he called for the overthrow of the US-backed Egyptian dictatorship. Mr Galloway believes that we should respect the right of all people to elect whichever government they like into power. He has openly said in parliament, many times, that he does not support Hamas and that he is rather a supporter of Fatah (see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IipvrOJQoJo&feature=related>).

Nonetheless he is not prepared to neglect the Palestinian struggle against Zionist imperialism simply because they elected Hamas and not Fatah. One of Galloway's most recent "crimes" in the eyes of his detractors was to lead a convey of aid to the starving captives of the Gaza ghetto (see: [www.vivapalestina.com](http://www.vivapalestina.com) ). If he is guilty of providing support to Hamas, it was with ambulances, medicine and baby diapers, rather than with bombs, guns and chemical weapons as is the case with the US government to Israel.

As for Hezbollah, Galloway asserted in Parliament that if Lebanon had true democracy, rather than the sectarian constitution (imposed by the CIA in 1956), which they currently have, that: "Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah would be the president because he would get the most votes."

That indisputable fact is not to say that Galloway supports Hezbollah, it is merely to say that he recognizes that the vast majority of the people of Lebanon identify with Hezbollah and that he respects their democratic right to do so.

The democratic aspirations of the Lebanese and Palestinian people are troubling to western governments – who are funded by the corporations which profit from the despoliation of the Middle East – hence they would rather attempt to censure the

truth than allow the public have a full understanding of the situation.

With the same rationale employed by many Canadian people who presumably defend their right to elect a government which, in the eyes of millions of people, commits state-terrorism against the people of Afghanistan, so Galloway defends the rights of the Palestinian and Lebanese people to elect whoever they want without imperialist interference or subversions.

Mr Galloway's actual opinions on Hezbollah and Hamas can be verified in all of his parliamentary speeches which are on YouTube. His autobiography *I'm Not the Only One* is also an important text, if one is to comment on Mr Galloway and his chosen path in life.

It is blatantly obvious that the Canadian government did not want an eloquent anti-war voice subverting their contrived disinformation campaign which they and their pro-war lobby groups invest millions of dollars into disseminating.

It is an embarrassment that the Canadian government ignored the calls of Lawyers Against the War, Ramsay Clark (former Attorney General of United States of America) and many other righteous activists and scholars to implement its own laws and apprehend an actual terrorist, namely George W Bush, whilst at the same time censuring one of the world's most prominent and respected anti-war activists, namely George Galloway MP.

A country which lacks the rule of law is a tyranny. These far-right regimes have come for the Muslims and massacred them in their millions, now they are coming for the socialists and activists. Who will be next in this McCarthyist purge? **CT**

*Joshua Blakeney, originally from the UK, lives in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, where he is a student of Sociology at the University of Lethbridge. When in living in London Joshua was active in the Anti-War movement. Joshua's most recent activism was at the "Arrest Bush" protest in Calgary.*

# Welcome to Vietnam, Mr President

President Obama has just committed to escalating the war in Afghanistan. Is he about to learn a big lesson from recent history?, asks **Ray McGovern**

I was wrong. I had been saying that it would be naïve to take too seriously presidential candidate Barack Obama's rhetoric regarding the need to escalate the war in Afghanistan. I kept thinking to myself that when he got briefed on the history of Afghanistan and the oft proven ability of Afghan militants to drive out foreign invaders – from Alexander the Great, to the Persians, the Mongolians, Indians, British, Russians – he would be sure to understand why they call mountainous Afghanistan the 'graveyard of empires.'

And surely he would be fully briefed on the stupidity and deceit that left 58,000 US troops – not to mention 2 to 3 million Vietnamese – dead in Vietnam. John Kennedy became president the year Obama was born. One cannot expect toddler-to-teenager Barack to remember much about the war in Vietnam, and it was probably too early for that searing, controversial experience to have found its way into the history texts as he was growing up.

## **Innocent of history, and distracted**

But he was certainly old enough to absorb the fecklessness and brutality of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. And his instincts at that time were good enough to see through the administration's duplicity. And, with him now in the White House, surely some of his advisers would be able

to brief him on both Vietnam and Iraq, and prevent him from making similar mistakes—this time in Afghanistan. Or so I thought.

Deflecting an off-the-topic question at his March 24 press conference, Obama said, "I think that the last 64 days has been dominated by me trying to figure out how we're going to fix the economy . . . right now the American people are judging me exactly the way I should be judged, and that is, are we taking the steps to improve liquidity in the financial markets, create jobs, get businesses to reopen, keep America safe?"

Okay, it is understandable that President Obama has been totally absorbed with the financial crisis. But surely, unlike predecessors supposedly unable to do two things at the same time, our resourceful new president certainly could find enough time to solicit advice from a wide circle, get a better grip on the huge stakes in Afghanistan, and arrive at sensible decisions. Or so I thought.

It proved to be a bit awkward waiting for the president to appear . . . a half-hour late for his own presentation. Was he for some reason reluctant? Perhaps he had a sense of being railroaded by his advisers. Perhaps he paused on learning that just a few hours earlier a soldier of the Afghan army shot dead two US troops and wounded a third before killing himself, and that Taliban fighters had stormed an Afghan police

**One cannot expect toddler-to-teenager Barack to remember much about the war in Vietnam, and it was probably too early for that searing, controversial experience to have found its way into the history texts as he was growing up**

## MEMORY GAP

**Perhaps Obama's instincts told him he was about to do something he will regret. Maybe that's why he was embarrassingly late in coming to the podium**

post and killed ten police earlier that morning. Should he weave that somehow into his speech?

Or maybe it was learning of the Taliban ambush of a police convoy which wounded seven other policemen; or the suicide bomber in the Afghan border area of Pakistan who demolished a mosque packed with hundreds of worshippers attending Friday prayers, killing some 50 and injuring scores more, according to preliminary reports. Or, more simply, perhaps Obama's instincts told him he was about to do something he will regret. Maybe that's why he was embarrassingly late in coming to the podium.

### **Another March of Folly**

One look at the national security advisers arrayed behind the president was enough to see wooden-headedness.

In her best-selling book, *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam*, historian Barbara Tuchman described this mindset: "Wooden-headedness assesses a situation in terms of preconceived fixed notions, while ignoring or rejecting any contrary signs ... acting according to the wish while not allowing oneself to be deflected by the facts."

Tuchman pointed to 16<sup>th</sup> Century Philip II of Spain as a kind of Nobel laureate of wooden-headedness. Comparisons can be invidious, but the thing about Philip was that he drained state revenues by failed adventures overseas, leading to Spain's decline.

It is wooden-headedness, in my view, that permeates the "comprehensive, new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan" that the president announced. Author Tuchman points succinctly to what flows from wooden-headedness:

*"Once a policy has been adopted and implemented, all subsequent activity becomes an effort to justify it...Adjustment is painful. For the ruler it is easier, once he has entered the policy box, to stay inside. For the lesser official it is better not to make waves, not to*

*press evidence that the chief will find painful to accept. Psychologists call the process of screening out discordant information 'cognitive dissonance,' an academic disguise for 'Don't confuse me with the facts.'"*

It seems only right and fitting that Barbara Tuchman's daughter, Jessica Tuchman Mathews, president of the Carnegie Foundation, has shown herself to be inoculated against "cognitive dissonance." A January 2009 Carnegie report on Afghanistan concluded, "***The only meaningful way to halt the insurgency's momentum is to start withdrawing troops. The presence of foreign troops is the most important element driving the resurgence of the Taliban.***"

In any case, Obama explained his decision on more robust military intervention in Afghanistan as a result of a "careful policy review" by military commanders and diplomats, the Afghani and Pakistani governments, NATO allies, and international organizations.

### **No estimate? No problem**

Know why he did not mention a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) assessing the likely effects of this slow surge in troops and trainers? Because there is none. Guess why. The reason is the same one accounting for the lack of a completed NIE before the "surge" in troop strength in early 2007.

Apparently, Obama's advisers did not wish to take the risk that honest analysts – ones who had been around a while, and maybe even knew something of Vietnam and Iraq, as well as Afghanistan – might also be immune to "cognitive dissonance," and ask hard questions regarding the basis of the new strategy.

Indeed, they might reach the same judgment they did in the April 2006 NIE on global terrorism. The authors of that estimate had few cognitive problems and simply declared their judgment that invasions and occupations (in 2006 the target then was Iraq) do not make us safer but lead instead to an upsurge in terrorism.

The prevailing attitude this time fits

the *modus operandi* of Gen. Petraeus ex Machina, who late last year took the lead by default with the following approach: We know best, and can run our own policy review, thank you very much. Which he did, without requesting the formal NIE that typically precedes and informs key policy decisions. It is highly regrettable that President Obama was deprived of the chance to benefit from a formal estimate. Recent NIEs have been relatively bereft of wood-en-headedness. Obama might have made a more sensible decision on how to proceed in Afghanistan.

As one might imagine, NIEs can, and should, play a key role in such circumstances, with a premium on objectivity and courage in speaking truth to power. That is precisely why Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair appointed Chas Freeman to head the National Intelligence Council, the body that prepares NIEs – and why the Likud Lobby got him ousted.

### Estimates on Vietnam

As one of the intelligence analysts watching Vietnam in the sixties and seventies, I worked on several of the NIEs produced before and during the war.

Sensitive ones bore this unclassified title: “Probable Reactions to Various Courses of Action With Respect to North Vietnam.” Typical of the kinds of question the President and his advisers wanted addressed were: Can we seal off the Ho Chi Minh Trail by bombing? If the US were to introduce X thousand additional troops into South Vietnam, will Hanoi quit? Okay, how about XX thousand?

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

Our judgments (the unwelcome ones, anyway) were often pooh-poohed as negativism. Policymakers, of course, were in no

way obliged to take them into account, and often didn’t. The point is that they continued to be sought. Not even Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon would decide on a significant escalation without seeking our best estimate as to how US adversaries would likely react to this or that escalatory step.

So, hats off, I suppose, to you, Gen. Petraeus and those who helped you elbow the substantive intelligence analysts off to the sidelines.

What might intelligence analysts have said on the key point of training the Afghan army and police? We will never know, but it is a safe bet those analysts who know something about Afghanistan...or about Vietnam would roll their eyes and wish Petraeus luck. As for Iraq, what remains to be seen is against whom the various sectarian factions target their weapons and put their training into practice.

In his Afghanistan policy speech, Obama mentioned training eleven times. To those of us with some gray in our hair, this was all too reminiscent of the prevailing rhetoric at the start of US involvement in the Vietnam War. In February 1964, with John Kennedy dead and President Lyndon Johnson improvising on Vietnam, then-Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara prepared a major policy speech on defense, leaving out Vietnam, and sent it to the president to review. The Johnson tapes show the president finding fault:

*LBJ: “I wonder if you shouldn’t find two minutes to devote to Vietnam.”*

*McN: “The problem is what to say about it.”*

*LBJ: “I would say that we have a commitment to Vietnamese freedom ... Our purpose is to train the [South Vietnamese] people, and our training’s going good.”*

But our training was not going good then. And specialists who know Afghanistan, its various tribes and demographics tell me that training is not likely to go good there either. Ditto for training in Pakistan.

Obama’s alliterative rhetoric aside, it is

**So, hats off, I suppose, to you, Gen. Petraeus and those who helped you elbow the substantive intelligence analysts off to the sidelines**

## MEMORY GAP

**Gates ought to read up on Vietnam, for his words evoke a similarly benighted comment by US Army Col. Harry Summers after that war had been lost**

going to be no easier to “disrupt, dismantle, and defeat” al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan with more combat forces and training than it was to defeat the Viet Cong with these same tools in Vietnam.

Obama seemed to be protesting a bit too much: “Going forward, we will not blindly stay the course.” No sir. There will be “metrics to measure progress and hold ourselves accountable!” Yes, sir! And he will enlist wide international support from countries like Iran, Russia, India, and China that, according to President Obama, “should have a stake in the security of the region.” Right.

### **Long time passing**

“The road ahead will be long,” said Obama in conclusion. He has that right. The strategy adopted virtually guarantees that. That is why Gen. David McKiernan, the top US commander in Afghanistan publicly contradicted his boss, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, late last year when Gates, protesting the widespread pessimism on Afghanistan, started talking up the prospect of a “surge” of troops in Afghanistan.

McKiernan insisted publicly that no Iraqi-style “surge” of forces would end the conflict in Afghanistan. “The word I don’t use for Afghanistan is ‘surge,’” McKiernan stated, adding that what is required is a “sustained commitment” that could last many years and would ultimately require a political, not military, solution.

McKiernan has that right. But his boss Mr. Gates did not seem to get it.

Late last year, as he maneuvered to stay on as defense secretary in the new administration, Gates hotly disputed the notion that things were getting out of control in Afghanistan.

The argument that Gates used to support his professed optimism, however, made us veteran intelligence officers gag – at least those who remember the US in Vietnam in the 1960s, the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s and other failed counterinsurgencies.

“The Taliban holds no land in Afghanistan, and loses every time it comes into contact with coalition forces,” Gates explained.

Our Secretary of Defense seemed to be insisting that US troops have not lost one pitched battle with the Taliban or al-Qaeda. (Engagements like the one on July 13, 2008, in which “insurgents” attacked an outpost in Konar province, killing nine US soldiers and wounding 15 others, apparently do not qualify as “contact.”)

Gates ought to read up on Vietnam, for his words evoke a similarly benighted comment by US Army Col. Harry Summers after that war had been lost.

In 1974, Summers was sent to Hanoi to try to resolve the status of Americans still listed as missing. To his North Vietnamese counterpart, Col. Tu, Summers made the mistake of bragging, “You know, you never beat us on the battlefield.”

Colonel Tu responded, “That may be so, but it is also irrelevant.”

### **The military brass**

I don’t fault the senior military...Cancel that, I DO fault them. They resemble all too closely the gutless general officers who never looked down at what was really happening in Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff of the time have been called, not without reason, “a sewer of deceit.”

The current crew is in better odor. And one may be tempted to make excuses for them, noting for example that if admirals/generals are the hammer, small wonder that to them everything looks like a nail. No, that does not excuse them.

The ones standing in back of Obama yesterday have smarts enough to have said, NO; IT’S A BAD IDEA, Mr. President. That should not be too much to expect. Gallons of blood are likely to be poured unnecessarily in the mountains and valleys of Afghanistan – probably over the next decade or longer. But not their blood.

General officers seldom rise to the occasion. Exceptions are so few that they im-

mediately spring to mind: French war hero General Philippe LeClerc, for example, was sent to Indochina right after WW-II with orders to report back on how many troops it would take to recapture Indochina. His report: “It would require 500,000 men; and even with 500,000 France could not win.”

Equally relevant to Obama’s fateful decision, Gen. Douglas MacArthur told another young president in April 1961: “**Anyone wanting to commit American ground forces to the mainland of Asia should have his head examined.**” When JFK’s top military advisers, critical of his reluctance, virtually called him a traitor – for pursuing a negotiated solution to the fighting in Laos, for example – Kennedy would tell them to convince Gen. MacArthur first, and then come back to him. (Alas, there seems to be no comparable Gen. MacArthur today.)

Kennedy recognized Vietnam as a potential quagmire, and was determined not to get sucked in – despite the misguided, ideologically-salted advice given him by Ivy League patricians like McGeorge Bundy. Kennedy’s military adviser, Gen. Maxwell Taylor said later that MacArthur’s statement made a “hell of an impression on the president.”

MacArthur made another comment about the situation President Kennedy had *inherited* in Indochina. This one struck the young president so much that he dictated it into a memorandum of conversation: Kennedy quoted MacArthur as saying to him, “The chickens are coming home to roost from the Eisenhower years, and you live in the chicken coop.”

Well, the chickens are coming home to roost after eight years of Cheney and Bush, but there is no sign that President Obama is listening to anyone capable of fresh thinking on Afghanistan.

Obama has apparently decided to stay in the chicken coop. And that can be called, well, chicken.

Can’t say I actually KNEW Jack Kennedy, but it was he who got so many of us down here to Washington to explore what

we might do for our country. Kennedy *resisted* the kind of pressures to which President Obama has now succumbed. (There are even some, like Jim Douglass in his book *JFK and the Unspeakable*, who conclude that this is what got President Kennedy killed.)

Mr. Obama, you need to find some advisers who are not still wet behind the ears and who are not brown noses – preferably some who have lived Vietnam and Iraq and have an established record of responsible, fact-based analysis. You would also do well to read Douglass’ book, and to page through the *Pentagon Papers*, instead of trying to emulate the Lincoln portrayed in *Team of Rivals*. I, too, am a big fan of Doris Kearns Goodwin, but Daniel Ellsberg is an author far more relevant and nourishing for this point in time. Read his *Secrets*, and recognize the signs of the times.

There is still time to put the brakes on this disastrous policy. One key lesson of Vietnam is that an army trained and supplied by foreign occupiers can almost always be readily outmatched and out-waited in a guerilla war, no matter how many billions of dollars are pumped in.

Professor Martin van Creveld of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the only non-American military historian on the US Army’s list of required reading for officers, has accused former president George W. Bush of “launching the most foolish war since Emperor Augustus in 9 BC sent his legions into Germany and lost them.”

Please do not feel you have to compete with your predecessor for such laurels. **CT**

*Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. In the Sixties he served as an infantry/intelligence officer and then became a CIA analyst for the next 27 years. e is on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS). This article originally appeared on Consortiumnews.com.*

**Kennedy recognized Vietnam as a potential quagmire, and was determined not to get sucked in – despite the misguided, ideologically-salted advice given him by Ivy League patricians like McGeorge Bundy**

# Republican alternative stimulus plan

**David Michael Green** reveals the Republican Party's 11-point plan to save the US from the economic abyss

**The particular thing that sticks in my craw of late is the reckless allegation that Republicans are just the Party of No, and that they have no plans of their own to help revive the American economy**

I'm kinda pissed off at the lousy treatment America is giving to Republicans these days.

First of all, in a general sense, it just seems ungrateful and ungracious. I mean, Republicans worked hard this last decade to make America what it is today. We wouldn't have the foreign relations we do, or the war situations, or the environmental conditions, or the fiscal situation or any of that stuff if the GOP hadn't been on the job all these years.

And we wouldn't have this economy, either. Can't Americans show a little respect and gratitude where it is due? The particular thing that sticks in my craw of late is the reckless allegation that Republicans are just the Party of No, and that they have no plans of their own to help revive the American economy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Or, at least, that's what Rush told me to say. But I believe it. In fact, the reality is that the GOP has a very sophisticated, very elaborate, 11-point plan for rescuing the country from the economic abyss. And, while the liberal media may be working overtime to make sure you never hear about it, I'll be glad to set you straight. Here goes:

## **1. TALK A LOT ABOUT FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY**

We all know that marketed perceptions are more important than actual realities, and nowhere more so than in this domain. For-

get about what anyone actually does. Just remember that the Democrats are always "tax-and-spend liberals", and the GOP is the "party of fiscal responsibility". Say it over and over. Pretty soon you'll even believe it, and others will too.

## **2. DEIFY RONALD REAGAN, IN ALL WAYS, ALL THE TIME.**

Never miss a chance to remind people of the wonderful powers and accomplishments of Reagan, from ending the Cold War to curing polio and walking on water. If anyone thinks those are some dubious claims, or mentions the one or two boo-boos of the Reagan years, give them that special Moonie stare of the true believer, dismiss them as part of the Looney Left, and walk away to where your consciousness remains safely protected from any challenging thoughts.

## **3. PRACTICE VODOO ECONOMICS**

If you run for president, do what Reagan did. Promise that you'll slash taxes, spend way more on the military, and balance the budget – all at the same time. If you get elected, do what Reagan did again. Triple the national debt. Because your campaign promises are physically impossible. Oops.

## **4. PRACTICE VODOO ECONOMICS AGAIN**

(S)elect George W. Bush as president, and

repeat Reagan's amazing accomplishment, this time on steroids. Take the largest surplus in American history and turn it into the largest deficit. Take the federal government's debt, accrued over more than two centuries, and double it from \$5 trillion to \$11 trillion in just eight years. Spend the money on vital necessities like massive tax cuts for the already fantastically wealthy, and incredibly expensive and disastrous wars against non-enemies.

#### 5. TALK EVEN MORE ABOUT FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Wait until a Democratic president comes to office, inheriting the worst American economy since 1932. All of a sudden, relocate your outrage – previously gone on walk-about – at the horrors of deficit spending. Only days after the Bush administration has ended, start talking incessantly about fiscal responsibility, just as if the last eight years had never happened.

#### 6. HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO PLAN FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Whatsoever. Pledge to do precisely what Hoover did in 1932: Absolutely nothing! Let people crash and burn when they lose their jobs and healthcare and homes. Take away the few shreds of a social safety net they have. Don't even spend stimulus funds for unemployment insurance in your state. Avoid the evils of middle class moral hazard by letting (ordinary) people starve.

#### 7. MAKE A LOT OF NOISE ABOUT EARMARKS

Who cares if they're less than one percent of the budget?? They have lots of marketing value and can help disable the Democratic government while diverting attention from all the great fiscal and economic achievements of the past eight years.

#### 8. REINVENT HISTORY

Franklin Roosevelt didn't solve the problem of the Great Depression, but his New Deal program of massive government spending

did in fact achieve two key things. First, it nearly halved unemployment, cutting it from 25 percent to 15 percent. And, second, it literally kept alive millions of Americans who would have otherwise perished when no other safety net remained. All of this, of course, is a serious problem in 2009, given the desire of the public for the government to resolve the current problem. Solution? Lie like hell, Brother. Tell people that the New Deal had no recovery impact at all, and was a complete waste of money.

#### 9. REINVENT ECONOMICS

Talk about the stimulus package as though it were an ordinary spending bill, loaded with pork barrel waste. Never make the connection between spending, purely for its stimulative effect, and economic recovery. Argue that it was World War II that ended the Depression, not the New Deal, remaining completely oblivious to the fact that both were nothing short of massive government spending programs, exactly what the Democrats are doing with their stimulus legislation today.

#### 10. BLOCK ACTION TO REVIVE THE ECONOMY

Even though you haven't got one of your own, carp incessantly about everything that is wrong – real or imagined – with the Democrats' recovery plans. Even though the public has repudiated you in two successive elections and you are the minority in both the House and the Senate, use every tool possible to block action of any sort by the government elected by the people to solve the crisis. Watch as the middle class is eviscerated. No worries.

#### 11. COMMIT POLITICAL SUICIDE

Yep, that's the ticket. Create an incredible crisis. Deny everything. Reinvent history. Block all solutions except those that would repeat the same disasters of the past. Ask the people to vote for you.

See what I mean? Who says the Republicans don't have a plan?

**Even though you haven't got one of your own, carp incessantly about everything that is wrong – real or imagined – with the Democrats' recovery plans**

*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)*

**CT**

# The joy economy

**Elizabeth Johnstone** wonders how the tiny basement comedy clubs stay afloat, when even the ten-dollar DVD meccas are closing?

**One wonders: how do little places like Ha!, in such a bad time for any sort of business, stay open, when even the ten-dollar DVD meccas cannot keep up?**

**K**eemo, a smooth-talking young man with a friendly smile, spends his Friday nights on the corner of New York's West 43rd and Broadway wearing a blue shirt and yellow sign. He might ask you if you like stand-up comedy. If you say yes, he'll whisk you three busy blocks west – dodging tourists and hurtling past the closing Virgin Mega-store – before ushering you down a dingy flight of stairs under Sweet Caroline's Dueling Pianos.

The club down there – Ha! Comedy Club NYC – is anonymous and unheralded. More importantly, it's in a basement. One wonders: how do little places like Ha!, in such a bad time for any sort of business, stay open, when even the ten-dollar DVD meccas cannot keep up?

According to stand-up comedian and Ha performer Shawn Cornelius, the club stays afloat mostly due to its tourist-centric location (West 46th and 7th Avenue) and the efforts of guys like Keemo, who are paid to grab tourists off the streets of Times Square and fill the seats.

But comedy is also verifiably popular in times like these.

Three years ago, Cornelius quit his day job as a mentor to focus on comedy full time. He usually found work around this time at ski resorts, but thanks to the souring economy, fewer people are taking trips,

and the pay dwindled. But his regular comedy gigs, for college performances and clubs, weren't affected.

"People are gonna come out and laugh," Cornelius said. "We laugh at stuff like this, you know, we laugh at the economy. "We as comedians, it's our duty to keep things going."

History seems to support theory of comedy thriving amid economic crisis. Over 300 comedy clubs opened across the country between 1978 and 1988, and the number of stand-up comedians rose. Wall Street was devastated after October 19, 1987, when the Dow Jones Industrial Average sank 22.6 percent, the second largest one-day percentage decline in US stock market history. But subsequent *New York Times* headlines, such as "Market for Humor Still Bullish" (1987) and "Laughter: the Best Medicine for Stress" (1989) suggest that the humor business was relatively stable.

Stand-up comedian Liz Miele pointed out that comics have always been good at making fun of finances. "We all have our struggling artist jokes," Miele said. "What I ask [audience members] is, 'what do you do?' I would say that at least a third of the audience is unemployed. They're in between jobs; they are bartending now when they didn't before."

Miele works part-time as a nanny and still comes up short on rent. She plans to

move to a cheaper apartment, a goal that conflicts with her desire to quit the nannying job.

“With the economy...it’s actually a scary time to let go of that safety net,” Miele said.

Lee Camp, a stand-up comedian and writer who recently appeared on the PBS series “Make ‘Em Laugh: America’s Funny Business,” might recommend she hang on to it. Camp quit his day job about five years ago. Now, the college performances he relies upon are threatened by university budget cuts.

“If you have a secondary job, then I think it’s a fine time [to be a comedian]. But in terms of throwing off the second job and giving it a go, I would imagine it would be difficult,” Camp said. “Clubs are falling back on comedians that they know can fill the room, and obviously a newcomer can’t do that.”

He added, “It’s a very tough time for me, and I’ve been making a living at it for five years.”

#### Inexpensive

Kevin Carolan, a performer since 1993, thinks comedy will continue to thrive, because a night in a comedy club is still a relatively inexpensive way to spend an evening. “If things get slow enough, a club could cut back on its number of shows, and that will trickle down some hurt to the comics that have to fight for less slots,” he said. “But that’s on a smaller, local level. Bookers will be the ones responsible for filling the bigger clubs, and I don’t think that’ll slow down too much.”

Laura Newmark, a comedy talent man-

ager with the New York City-based Beatrix Klein Management, confirmed that bookers are looking for well-known talent to draw crowds. “If you don’t have a fan base, they don’t really want you,” Miele said of the bigger clubs. “They want somebody who can put people in the seats. Our business, for club owners, is about alcohol. It’s not about comedy.”

Though recession has hit Illinois especially hard, Cate Freedman, an improvisational and sketch comic who performs at Second City and Improv Olympics in Chicago, said Second City’s comedy conservatory continues to flourish. The conservatory started with one classroom behind the theater and now occupies several floors in an adjacent building.

Facebook, MySpace and YouTube have also become new outlets for humor, and marketing tools for comedians, who can book themselves into shows if they can parlay online success into a club-going, drink-buying fan base.

“People aren’t going to sit by their TVs all day,” Camp said. “As long as you’re still in your house, you’re not truly free of your daily grind, your fears of unemployment, your fears of the mortgage. So a bad economy could actually create a resurgence for live comedy.”

**CT**

*Elizabeth Johnstone majors in journalism and dramatic writing at New York University. She has interned at Harper’s Bazaar and NBC Universal, and was assistant managing editor of the daily student newspaper, The Washington Square News. This article originally appeared at NYU Livewire at [journalism.nyu.edu](http://journalism.nyu.edu)*

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