

THE GOOD OL' BOYS' BURNING MAN | ALEXANDER ZAITCHIK
'YOU HAVE TO NOT MIND KILLING INNOCENTS' | JEREMY KUZMAROV
SPEND, DON'T MEND | GEORGE MONBIOT

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WRITING WORTH READING

ISSUE 80

One country, two histories

**JOHN PILGER: How I discovered the power
of people's history in England – and why
it is so feared by politicians today**

PHOTO: ALAN CHAPMAN





Cover:

Woman plays seaside
slot machine at Skegness,
England, by
Alan Chapman

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ISSUE 80

- 3. 'YOU HAVE TO NOT MIND KILLING INNOCENTS'
- 7. IRAN'S NUKE: THE ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM
- 10. ENDLESS STALEMATE
- 14. THE GOOD OL' BOYS' BURNING MAN
- 18. COVER STORY – ONE COUNTRY, TWO HISTORIES
- 20 WHO'S TO BLAME FOR BATTLEFIELD AMERICA?
- 23. HEARTLESS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Jeremy Kuzmarov

Barry Lando

David Cromwell

Alexander Zaitchik

John Pilger

John W. Whitehead

Sam Pizzigatti



*The long road to
Grasshopper Junction,
Page 25*

- 25. ON THE ROAD . . .
- 33. IMPLODING THE MYTH OF ISRAEL
- 38. ANOTHER COVERT ASSASSINATION
- 41. OBAMACARE: THE REPUBLICANS' LONG CON
- 45. SPEND, DON'T MEND
- 47. SIX LESSONS FROM NELSON MANDELA
- 52. PAYING THE TOLL ON THE ECONOMIC HIGHWAY
- 54. A TRAIL OF TEARS
- 58. LISTENING IN
- 63. ELECTRIFIED THOUGHT FENCES
- 68. THE DEEPER YOU DIG
- 71. ISRAEL: JUST ANOTHER HAPLESS BRITISH COLONY

Tony Sutton

Chris Hedges

Jonathan Cook

Michael I. Niman

George Monbiot

Danny Schechter

William John Cox

Ann Jones

William Blum

David Edwards

Trevor Grundy

John Kozy

Editor: Tony Sutton – editor@coldtype.net

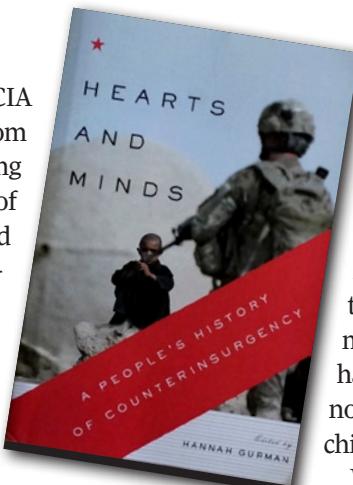
‘You have to not mind killing innocents’

An edited excerpt of an essay by **Jeremy Kuzmarov** from the book *Hearts And Minds: A People’s History of Counterinsurgency*, published by The New Press

Billy Waugh is a seasoned CIA paramilitary specialist from Bastrop, Texas, with a long career in the business of espionage and killing. A decorated veteran of the Korean and Indochina wars who led mercenary forces in the secret war in Laos and clandestine missions in Libya alongside the disgraced CIA operative Edwin Wilson, he has been in dozens of countries since 1989.

After 9/11, the seventy-two-year-old was asked to lead a CIA-paramilitary unit in Afghanistan’s Southern Logar province whose goal was to send to Washington Osama bin Laden’s body in a box. Threatening any media that came within three kilometers, Waugh and his men set up networks of intelligence “assets” and trained local Afghans, many of whom said they joined for the money and to even the score with clan rivals.

A precursor to mercenaries affiliated with Blackwater (later Xe Services, now Academi) and DynCorp (formerly California Eastern Airways), Waugh’s unit had authorization to assassinate enemy combatants and to call in air strikes using smart bombs and hellfire missiles controlled by remote-control joystick. He told a reporter that the way to win the war is to “let them kill each other.



HEARTS AND MINDS
A People’s History Of Counterinsurgency
Edited by Hannah Gurman
(The New Press)

\$19.95

Send up a satellite and take pictures. Keep the Special Operations teams in the hills, fifty miles out of the towns. Then go in at night and do your work. Kill them. Kill like we did in Germany. Flatten the place. You have to not mind killing innocents. Even the women and children.”

Waugh’s candid comments epitomize the violence and terror underlying US counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy in Afghanistan, which has been concealed from the public with the complicity of the mainstream media and prowar intellectuals. Furthermore, Waugh’s career is significant because he embodies

the continuity in American policy from wars such as Vietnam where similarly repulsive tactics were employed.

Defined by the anthropologists Roberto Gonzalez, Hugh Gusterson, and David Price as efforts to “eliminate an uprising against a government,” the term “counterinsurgency” was formally adopted by the Kennedy administration in the early 1960s and has been a feature of American military strategy since the late-nineteenth-century Indian wars and the colonization of the Philippines.

.....
“Go in at night and do your work. Kill them. Kill like we did in Germany. Flatten the place”
.....

In one case, a detainee was kept in an air-conditioned room for four years to exploit his fear of the cold and was later ordered to be thrown into the South China Sea from a height of ten thousand feet

During the Cold War, in the attempt to counter wars of national liberation, military intellectuals sought to emulate the tactics of the revolutionary commanders Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, and Vo Nguyen Giap, who effectively mobilized peasant armies to defeat better-armed forces. Drawing on the writings of European colonial strategists such as Britain's Sir Robert Thompson, they devised strategies to undercut guerrilla movements by isolating villagers through forced relocation into strategic hamlets (which often entailed spraying their fields with chemical defoliants), developing skilled police and intelligence agencies, and adopting such civic action programs as building schools and setting up medical clinics in the attempt to win "hearts and minds."

An important model for American COIN strategy in Afghanistan is the Vietnam Phoenix program, whose goal was to eliminate the "Viet Cong" infrastructure (VCI) through the use of sophisticated computer technology, intelligence-gathering techniques, and improved coordination among military and civilian intelligence agencies. In a secret blueprint for Phoenix, Frank Armbruster of the Hudson Institute referred favorably to a RAND Corporation study by Chong Sik-Lee on Japanese tactics during World War II and the anti-Huk campaign in the Philippines, and stressed the importance of identity cards, police roundups, and interrogation in pinpointing enemy cadres. Effective counterinsurgents were best recruited from the native population, because they knew the terrain. Once identified, hard-core VC (South Vietnamese guerrillas; the National Liberation Front) would be isolated and never allowed to return to their communities or executed outright. The rest of those detained could be won over through political indoctrination built around a counter-ideology.

On the whole, an estimated twenty thousand to eighty thousand people were killed under Phoenix and thousands more were subjected to torture, with the CIA promoting interrogation techniques designed to

emphasize the prisoner's dependence on his captor. In one case, a detainee was kept in an air-conditioned room for four years to exploit his fear of the cold and was later ordered to be thrown into the South China Sea from a height of ten thousand feet.

Flash forward forty years, and American COIN operations are yielding similarly deadly and counterproductive consequences, contributing to a resurgence of the Taliban. After the withdrawal of Mullah Omar into Pakistan following the September 2001 invasion, the US-NATO coalition worked to stabilize the power of Hamid Karzai, a former deputy foreign minister whose father was assassinated by Taliban agents. Born to a distinguished Pashtun family of the Popalzai clan in Kandahar, Karzai ran an NGO in Pakistan during the 1980s assisting the anti-Soviet mujahideen, earning the nickname the "Gucci guerrilla" for spending most of his time networking in the lobby of the Islamabad Holiday Inn.

Analogous to its British and Russian predecessors, the US-NATO occupation has uprooted communities, altered local power structures, and aggravated tensions among the Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, and Pashtun, boding ill for future peace prospects. A key reason the war has gone on for so long is that American war planners see Afghanistan not only as a base of terrorist operations but a country of strategic importance in accessing Central Asian oil and gas resources in the new "great game" of imperial competition with China and Russia. Afghanistan's connection to 9/11, meanwhile, is ambiguous.

Some of the deadliest bombings have been carried out in the remote Pakistani border region by computerized drone machines that have killed ten civilians for every "militant," according to the Brookings Institution. A precedent was established during the secret war in Laos, which, according to the peace activist Fred Branfman, saw the development of a "new type of warfare . . . fought not by men but machines and which could erase distant and unseen societies clandestinely, unknown to and even unsuspected by the world outside."

As a central facet of COIN, the United States has invested billions of dollars trying to create professional army and police forces whose main function is to “kill and capture terrorists.” Quoting favorably from British colonialist T.E. Lawrence, Lt. Col. John Nagl wrote in his influential manual *Learning How to Eat Soup with a Knife: CI Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*: “Local forces have inherent advantages over outsiders in a COIN campaign. They can more easily gain intelligence. They don’t need to hire translators to run patrols and understand local behavioral patterns and the local terrain.”

While purporting to offer lessons from history, Nagl and other COIN gurus fail to mention that internal security forces built up by the United States have historically been poorly motivated, undisciplined, and often ruthless, owing largely to the cynical reasons people have joined.

History is repeating itself in Afghanistan, where the journalist Ann Jones notes, “Taliban fighters seem so bold and effective, while the Afghan National Police [ANP] are dismally corrupt and the Afghan National Army [ANA] a washout.” Commanders were known for taking sex slaves, raping girls, stealing food and land, and robbing homes.

In Nangarhar Province, true to Jones’s observations, ANA soldiers were found stealing equipment and cowering in ditches rather than fighting. Michael Bell, who headed a team of Hungarian trainers, stated: “They don’t have the basics so they lay down. I ran around for an hour trying to get them to shoot [which they did not].” The ANP have proven to be as disloyal and corrupt as the ANA. After nearly nine years and over \$7 billion spent on training and salaries, Newsweek reported in a March 19, 2010, cover story, “The Gang That Couldn’t Shoot Straight,” that officers could barely shoot a rifle or hit a target fifty meters away and sold or provided ammunition to insurgents.

After the ouster of the Taliban, Germany took the lead in police training, receiving criticism from NATO commanders for mis-

management and poorly integrating the programs into COIN. The State Department subsequently gave DynCorp International of Falls Church, Virginia, which trained internal security forces in Kosovo (where employees were linked to the child sex trade and illegal arms sales), a \$1.1 billion contract. Police advisers traveled around the country seeking to upgrade record-keeping, communications, and riot control capabilities. Training centers were established with short, two-to eight-week courses in handcuffing, weapons maintenance, constitutional procedure, and guerrilla warfare. British and Canadian soldiers provided lectures in crime scene investigation, evidence collection, and dismantling IEDs (improvised explosive devices).

Most of the recruits were illiterate. They sat on hard benches in classrooms that baked in the summer and froze in the winter listening to English-speaking instructors and poorly trained translators who were unfamiliar with police terminology. Journalist Ann Jones noted that the exercises looked like military maneuvers.

Coming primarily from low-paid police forces in Texas, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, DynCorp employees made six-figure salaries, fifty times more than their Afghan counterparts. Operating under limited legal oversight, they alienated Afghans through such practices as “driving through the streets fast and furious without regard for the locals,” as one contractor put it, public drunkenness, whoring, torture, and shooting civilians. One of DynCorp’s slogans was: “I do this job for the opportunity to kill the enemies of my country and also to get that boat I always wanted.... [W]hen engaged I will lay waste to everything around me.”

The lack of an effective judicial or legal system and the Bush administration’s support for torture hastened the ANP’s lawlessness. The Red Cross reported massive prison overcrowding, “harsh” conditions, a lack of clarity about the legal basis for detention, and inmates being subjected to “cruel” treatment in violation of the Geneva Conventions, in-

Operating under limited legal oversight, DynaCorp alienated Afghans through such practices as “driving through the streets fast and furious without regard for the locals,” as one contractor put it, public drunkenness, whoring, torture, and shooting civilians

"Throw some fuckin' grenades, we're not there to arrest people, just fuckin' kill people"

cluding hanging from the ceiling and sexual abuse of women and juveniles incarcerated for escaping bad marriages. Sensory deprivation and other forms of psychological torture were common, leading prisoners to go insane. Many were held without charges for years in facilities lacking rudimentary toilets. An undisclosed number died in custody, including hundreds transported by the army's chief of staff, Rashid Dostum, in unventilated containers where they suffocated to death or were shot.

The scale of abuse paralleled Iraq, where DynCorp was given a \$750 million contract in 2004 to professionalize the police and other security forces implicated in torture and death-squad activity. Robert Cole, a police officer from East Palo Alto, California, and an employee of DynCorp, explains that racist attitudes were engrained in a mini-boot camp training session, where he was "brainwashed, reprogrammed and desensitized" and "morphed" into a "trained professional killer." Taught that Arabs only understood force, he was instructed to shoot first and think later and to command police to do the same. "If you see a suspicious Iraqi civilian, pull your weapon and gun him down," he was told, "you don't fire one . . . or two shots. . . . You riddle his sorry ass with bullets until you're sure he's dead as a doorknob."

Showing where their loyalties rested, in May 2006, when a US tank smashed into a traffic jam in Kabul, police threw off their uniforms and joined protestors in looting buildings, vehicles, and police posts, denouncing the occupation. At the Pul-e Charkhi facility, eighteen prison officers, one of them a colonel, were arrested for taking bribes from Taliban commanders. In the Sarposa Prison in Kandahar, guards were stoned on drugs when close to five hundred inmates escaped in April 2011.

Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke characterized the \$800 million counternarcotics campaign run by DynaCorp as "the most wasteful [government program]" he had seen in forty years. Targeting predominantly

competitors of US-backed warlords, police counter-narcotic teams armed with hoes, sticks and weed whackers eradicated a paltry 2,373 acres of poppy in raids which killed and wounded dozens of Afghans and were met with stones, snipers, roadside bombs and angry mobs.

In 2007, William Wood, the US ambassador to Colombia nicknamed "Chemical Bill" for his advocacy of herbicides, was transferred to Afghanistan, showing a continued commitment to repressive eradication. Also in 2007, the US military took over police training from DynCorp and tried to clean up corruption by raising salaries, providing electronic pay, and dismissing abusive chiefs (or so it claimed). Little changed apart from further militarization. Journalist Nir Rosen overheard a US sergeant telling his men:

The Obama administration's troop surge in 2010 generally deepened the humanitarian crisis in a region of the world already ravaged by decades of conflict. Amid escalating violence, unemployment in Afghanistan hovers around 60 percent, and child mortality is among the worst in the world.

From Billy Waugh's escapades in 2001 to the disastrous efforts at police and military training, American intervention has contributed immeasurably to the climate of misery, while failing to win "hearts and minds." The unleashing of violent social forces and ethnic hatred will be difficult to contain over the long term. Afghanistan is only the latest country to be the victim of American COIN strategies, which have changed little over the past half century and draw directly on colonial precedents.

Malalai Joya writes, in *A Woman Among Warlords*, that the only positive outcome of the US-NATO intervention has been the development of a political consciousness among many Afghans. One can only hope the same will hold true in America, where the population has been lulled into acquiescence by the sanitized rhetoric of politicians, COIN theorists, and the mainstream media, which belies the grisly reality on the ground. **CT**

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Iran's nukes: The elephants in the room

When we're talking about Iran's nuclear ambitions, why do we always seem to forget about Israel's arsenal? asks **Barry Lando**

You want chutzpah? This is chutzpah: an OpEd piece this week in the *New York Times* by a prominent Israeli journalist, Ari Shavit, lambasting George W. Bush – not Barack Obama – for the fact that Iran is on the threshold of becoming a nuclear power. Instead of going after Iraq in 2003, says Shavit, instead of fatally draining America's resources and prestige, Bush should have organized a co-ordinated coalition of powers to throttle a much weaker Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Where's the chutzpah? Well, for one thing, if you want to blame an American president for failing to prevent nuclear weapons being introduced into the Middle East – and then passively accepting their presence – the list of culprits begins with Dwight D. Eisenhower, and continues through just about every American President since.

The nuclear weapons we're talking about are not Iran's feared – but not yet existing – devices, but Israel's very real nuclear arsenal. Somehow Shavit, like most Israeli and American commentators analyzing the standoff with Iran, never gets around to the fact that Israel has had nuclear weapons for the past half a century.

The *New York Times*'s Tom Friedman – who also rarely mentions Israel's nukes – points out that we're right to distrust Iran's assurances, because its government "has lied and cheated its way to the precipice

of building a bomb." That's an excellent description of the tactics Israel used to obtain its nuclear arsenal. But it would never have succeeded without the willingness of so many leaders – American and others – to turn their back to what was going on.

For instance, in 1963-64, Argentina played a major role in providing Israel with 80-100 tons of uranium oxide ("yellowcake") vital for Israel's clandestine nuclear program.

Those secret Argentine shipments were quickly discovered by Canadian intelligence officials in 1964, who passed on the news to their British and American colleagues, who passed it on to their civilian leaders. That revelation cast strong doubts on Israel's claims that its nuclear program was completely peaceful.

So, what happened? In response to US carefully worried diplomatic queries about the sale, the government of Israel spent years dancing around any straightforward replies. The US and its allies showed no appetite to seriously challenge Israel's ongoing evasions.

Theirs, as I've previously written, was the continuation of an ostrich-like policy that began under Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1950's – and continues to this day.

As Seymour Hersh chronicled in *The Sampson Option*, in 1958 or 1959 America's U2 spy planes spotted what looked almost certainly to be a nuclear reactor being built

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Israel has invaded Lebanon twice over the past few years, swarmed into Gaza, bombed and carried out air strikes in Iraq and Syria

at Dimona in southern Israel. Two analysts rushed the raw images to the White House, expecting urgent demands from the Oval Office for more information: this was, after all, a development that could initiate a disastrous nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

But there was absolutely no follow-up from the White House.

"By the end of 1959," writes Hersh, "the two analysts had no doubts that Israel was going for the bomb. They also had no doubts that President Eisenhower and his advisers were determined to look the other way."

France – which is now in the forefront of nations demanding that Iran forswear the right to enrich uranium to its end – was also secretly helping Israel to build its nuclear facilities.

When the Eisenhower administration finally acted indirectly – leaking word of Dimona and France's involvement to the *New York Times* in December 1960, Israel's David Ben Gurion flatly denied the *Times* report.

He assured American officials – as well as the Israeli Knesset – that the Dimona reactor was completely benign. French officials guaranteed that any plutonium produced at Dimona would be returned to France for safekeeping (another lie).

The Eisenhower administration, however, had no stomach to take on Israel and its American lobby. Despite the continued reports of CIA analysts, Ben Gurion's denials went unchallenged.

That hypocrisy remains official American policy – and mainline media coverage of Israel – to this day: a wink and a nod about Israel's nuclear program.

The hardnosed attitude is: Yeah, OK. the Israelis have nukes. But, what the hell. They're threatened with extinction by their neighbors, like that half-crazed Iranian-leader whatshisname? Amunjihad?, and terrorists like Hezbollah and Hamas, eager to wipe Israel off the map.

The fact, however, is that Israel also has its share of political crazies, some of whom

have been increasingly powerful over the last few years, crazies who have talked openly of using nuclear weapons on Iran, and continue to advocate a Greater Israel free of all Arabs. And as far as attacking its neighbors, Israel has invaded Lebanon twice over the past few years, swarmed into Gaza, bombed and carried out air strikes in Iraq and Syria,

But it's not just Israel's nuclear weapons that are only whispered about in Washington, there's another elephant in the room: the major force driving US policy on the issue of Iran's nuclear program is not cool, rational logic, but the pro-Israel lobby.

Twenty years ago, when we did a report at the TV programme *Sixty Minutes* on the most influential part of that lobby, AIPAC, not a single sitting senator or congressman would talk to us on the record; though all agreed on the lobby's enormous power, second only to the NRA. (As if to prove the point, when our report aired, it generated more vicious calls and condemnation than any other report I'd ever done.)

Twenty years later, the issue of the pro-Israel lobby is still so sensitive that the *New York Times*'s Tom Friedman, created a sensation of sorts by stating a fact that that most mainstream columnists have are still leery of tackling.

"Never," Friedman wrote, "have I seen more lawmakers – Democrats and Republicans – more willing to take Israel's side against their own president's. I'm certain this comes less from any careful consideration of the facts and more from a growing tendency by many American lawmakers to do whatever the Israel lobby asks them to do in order to garner Jewish votes and campaign donations."

For his efforts, Friedman's column was viciously and immediately attacked by the usual suspects, with the usual charges.

MJ Rosenberg, who spent 20 years dealing with AIPAC as an aide to a senator and several House members, has also written several accounts of Aipac's influence. "Ini-

tially," he wrote, "I felt like a voice in the wilderness."

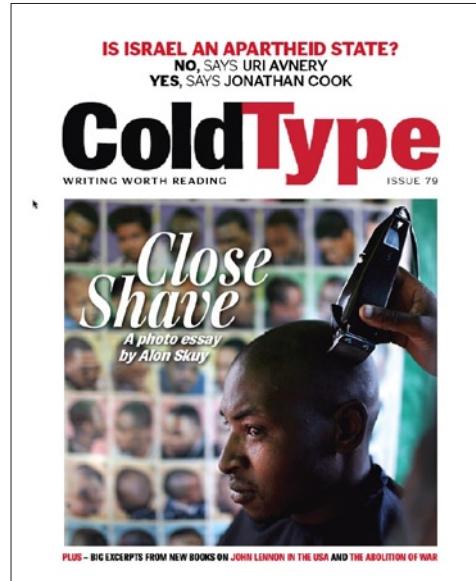
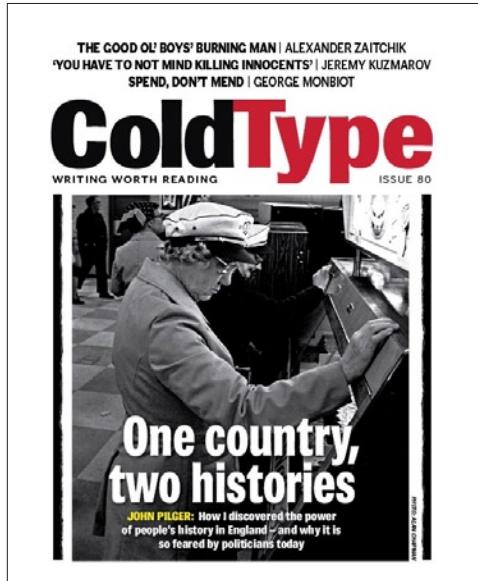
The bottom line is this – whatever your view about Iran or Israel's right to nuclear weapons – how can statesmen or reporters or anyone seriously discuss the current crisis over Iran when a key part of the dispute is officially hidden from view?

How can the US and Israel deal with proposals for non-proliferation and a nuclear free Middle East when they still refuse officially to acknowledge that the region is not nuclear free – and hasn't been for the past 50 years?

How can they discuss and vote on these issues intelligently when many of the congressional players are acting not for the good of the country or the Middle East but according to the wishes of a very narrow and partisan lobby – whose influence many won't even acknowledge? **CT**

Barry Lando's novel "*The Watchman's File*" about the attempts of an American TV reporter to unravel the secret behind Israel's most powerful weapon (it's not the bomb). is available on Amazon in soft cover and Kindle editions.

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Endless stalemate

David Cromwell tells how the interests of fossil fuel corporations are foiling much-needed international action on climate control

“The answer to the oft-asked question of whether an event is caused by climate change is that it is the wrong question”

The devastation wreaked by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines has led to heart-wrenching scenes of human suffering, with the death toll now put at over 5,000 and likely to rise still further. Yeb Sano, the head of the Philippines climate delegation, gave a moving speech at the UN climate talks in Warsaw, Poland, linking the typhoon to global warming, and then went on a hunger strike which would last, he said, ‘until we stop this madness’.

Sadly, the madness looks set to continue if we recognise that the corporate media is an integral part of the problem: pulverising us with corporate advertising to encourage increased levels of consumption and planetary resource depletion, while averting our gaze from the root cause of the climate problem; namely, corporate-led global capitalism.

News reports and editorials were ultra-cautious not to link Typhoon Haiyan directly to climate change; either not mentioning climate change at all, or providing the worn-out disclaimer that individual weather events cannot be attributed to global warming. But as Kevin Trenberth, senior climate scientist at the US National Center for Atmospheric Research, said last year:

“The answer to the oft-asked question of whether an event is caused by climate change is that it is the wrong question. All weather events are affected by climate

change because the environment in which they occur is warmer and moister than it used to be.”

Climate scientist Peter Gleick noted that data in the form of ‘unusually high sea levels and warm temperatures’ supported the claim that climate change had influenced Typhoon Haiyan.

Peter Hart, a media analyst with Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting, emphasised the point that mattered: “There is no way that one massive hurricane will be stamped ‘Created by Climate Change,’ while another would be considered a ‘normal’ hurricane.

“These catastrophes are occurring, and will continue to occur, in a climate that has been undeniably altered. Waiting for the “real” climate change-caused storms to hit before talking about climate change is illogical and irresponsible.”

Sadly, the corporate world, with the corporate media a vital supporting pillar propping up the system, has long shown that it is irresponsible.

The business fix of false solutions

Meanwhile, politicians have been paying lip service, at best, to the risk of climate catastrophe, just as they have since UN climate talks led to the ineffectual Kyoto Protocol in 1997. The latest fix bandied about at climate talks is a “global carbon market ‘toolbox’

thus ‘making climate change targets more achievable’. The farce quickly becomes evident on further reading: ‘governments have proposed launching a framework’ to create ‘a single voluntary platform to share ideas, with a view to eventually launching a global market to battle climate change.’

This sums up how the world works. The planet is rapidly and dangerously overheating, but elite economic and financial interests, with bought-for governments under their corporate thumbs, will nevertheless continue to do whatever they can to retain profit and power. So, for instance, they’ll devise a ‘toolbox’ in a ‘global market’ for that to happen, and it will be cynically sold to the public as a means of ‘battling climate change’.

Indeed, for years corporate elites have lobbied intensely behind the scenes at UN climate talks to steer any agreement in their direction. Worse, they don’t want any ‘sweeping international treaties’ at all, as these are seen as, “no longer the key for charting the planet’s path to sustainable development. Instead, partnerships among governments, businesses, and NGOs hold the most promise for measurable progress on sustainability issues, including climate change.”

As for the climate talks themselves, the campaigning group Corporate Europe Observatory has exposed what the corporate media is happy to overlook; namely that corporate polluters are poised to gain most from the talks: “The EU aims to expand carbon markets that would benefit big polluters at the UN climate talks, COP19 in Poland, says a Statement signed by 135+ groups, movements and networks from all over the world. The Statement denounces the corporate capture of COP19 by the same companies that stand to profit.”

The Brussels-based group, which monitors and challenges the privileged access and influence enjoyed by corporate lobby groups in EU policy making, added: “COP19 is the first UN climate talks to have corpo-

rate sponsorship, with some of the biggest climate crooks as official ‘partners’, including ArcelorMittal, Alstom and BMW.”

ArcelorMittal is the world’s biggest steel company and Alstom is a French conglomerate with major interests in power generation and transmission.

A new report, *COP19 Guide to Corporate Lobbying: Climate Crooks and the Polish Government’s Partners in Crime*, published jointly by Corporate Europe Observatory and the Transnational Institute (TNI), shows how: “Big business, industry and finance, keen to set the agenda and shape the rules in the interests of their profits – and at the expense of climate justice – have infiltrated COP19.”

These elite actors not only include giant fossil fuel companies, but wider business groups, financial interests, agribusiness and agrofuels, as well as other polluting industries. A sobering infographic on the TNI website displays the power interests ‘behind the scenes’, explaining succinctly ‘why UN climate negotiations never work’.

It is therefore unsurprising that NGOs finally had enough of the climate talks in Warsaw and walked out in protest last month, with one campaigner saying: “It has become quite flagrantly obvious that progress to reach any legally binding climate treaty is being obstructed by the lobbying forces of the fossil fuel industry.”

Even after campaigners had walked out of the climate talks, searches of the Lexis database found not a single newspaper report into the real extent and intensity of corporate lobbying on climate in any of the national UK newspapers. At best, there was just a passing mention in a tiny handful of opinion pieces about ‘vested interests’ or fossil-fuel lobbying that sought to ‘deliver watered down versions’ of the ‘effective instrument’ of carbon markets. In particular, there was not a single news article about the eye-opening report on corporate lobbying by Corporate Europe Observatory and the Transnational Institute exposing the hollowness of current UN climate talks.

Searches of the Lexis database found not a single newspaper report into the real extent and intensity of corporate lobbying on climate in any of the national UK newspapers

CLIMATE CHANGERS

Like the rest of the corporate media, the ‘impartial’ and publicly-funded BBC News largely avoids exposing the truth behind the failure to tackle the climate crisis

Following the NGO walkout from the UN talks, the *Guardian* did go as far as publishing an online opinion piece by Amy Goodman, host of Democracy Now!, which touched on the ‘corporate sponsorship’ of the climate summit, quoting one of the campaigners responsible for the report on industry lobbying: “This is perhaps the most corporate climate talks we have ever experienced.”

But this was a rare and brief foray into the reality of the huge corporate forces that are obstructing climate sanity.

Climate science ‘really clear’ that ‘we need radical change’

Goodman presented Democracy Now! from the UN climate talks and interviewed Kevin Anderson and Alice Bows-Larkin, two British scientists from the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research. They rightly observed that ‘runaway global warming’ is not being addressed by world leaders, and they pointed to the urgent need for ‘radical and immediate de-growth strategies in the United States, EU and other wealthy nations.’ This was a welcome and much-needed intervention from two climate scientists who have refused to be hidebound by academic conventions of what it is ‘politic’ to say – or not say.

They called for ‘reparation’ to be paid by the ‘traditional polluters’, namely the industrialised countries, to poorer nations to help them develop ‘renewable, low-carbon energy systems’ and a decent quality of life for their people. The scientists also supported the walkout by climate campaigners and, admirably, encouraged other climate scientists to be more vocal in demanding the radical action that is needed to avert catastrophic climate change. Professor Anderson spoke bluntly: “I think the scientific community has for too long really let the policymakers, and indeed the wider public, down, that we haven’t been as vociferous as we should have been about what our science is telling us. So, our science is telling us, and has told

us, to be honest, for 10 to 15 years at least, that – you know, explain the situation that we’re in and that we need these radical levels of change. But we have not – we have not translated that in a language that indicates how important that is. We have used language which is more acceptable to the policymakers. It’s more politically palatable. So we’ve converted, you know, “impossible within the current economic framework” to “a little bit challenging.” Now, that’s not a fair reflection of what our analysis is showing us.”

He added: “Our role as scientists is to stand up for the analysis that we do. And if it is misused, we should be louder and louder and louder about how it is being misused. But at the moment, there is pressure [...] for us as scientists to stay quite quiet about this, just to say, “Oh, it’s an issue, a problem that we can resolve in the current way of thinking.” You know, that’s all rubbish. The analysis and the maths are really clear about this now. We need radical change.”

As Naomi Klein notes in a recent piece titled, ‘How science is telling us all to revolt’: “So what Anderson and Bows are really saying is that there is still time to avoid catastrophic warming, but not within the rules of capitalism as they are currently constructed. Which may be the best argument we have ever had for changing those rules.”

Meanwhile, like the rest of the corporate media, the ‘impartial’ and publicly-funded BBC News largely avoids exposing the truth behind the failure to tackle the climate crisis. Instead, it bemoans ‘the scale of what can be achieved in any new deal’, and misleadingly calls this abysmal state of affairs ‘realism’. But in a rapidly and dangerously warming world, ‘realism’ means capitulating to the state-corporate elites that are driving humanity towards the abyss of climate chaos.

Veteran environment writer Andy Rowell did not mince his words: the UN talks are a

'charade' and hundreds of campaigners had rightly said: "Enough is enough". He added: "The bottom line is that the ability of current policies to achieve meaningful climate action is being undermined by the fossil fuel industry. As it has for the last 20 years. As it has been for every UN climate meeting."

In a nutshell: "The political stalemate is due to the fossil fuel industry."

Rowell suggests that we learn from the example of tobacco. The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control warns of the 'fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the tobacco industry's interests and public health policy interests.' Just as public health policies have been protected from vested tobacco interests, so should UN climate talks 'exclude the villains from the climate process': namely, fossil fuel interests.

In an interview with The Real News Network, campaigner Rachel Tansey, lead

author of the COP19 corporate lobbying report, cogently made the same point: "... do you see the World Health Organization inviting big tobacco companies like Philip Morris to its conferences on how to stop the harm that tobacco causes? No, you don't."

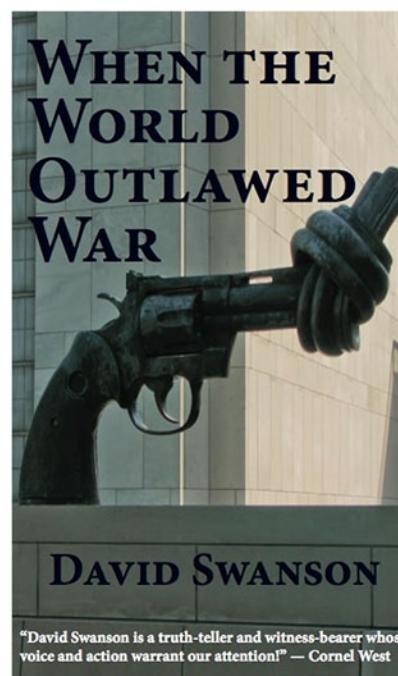
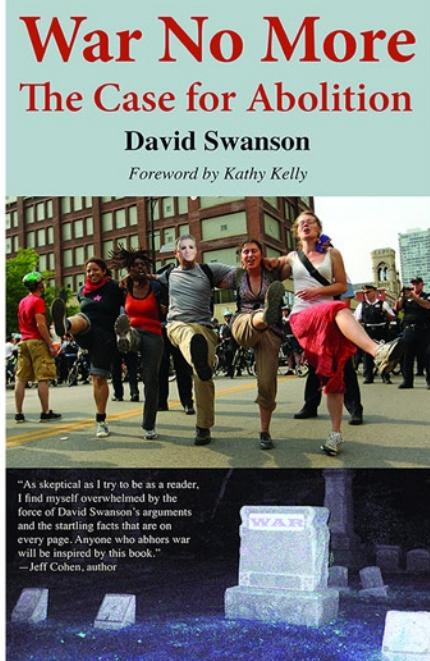
Rowell correctly concluded: "It is now time to kick the vested interests of the fossil fuel industry out of the UN process. There is a 'fundamental and irreconcilable conflict' between the fossil fuel industry interests and those trying to fight climate change."

Not a single national newspaper in the UK has called for fossil fuel interests to be kept out of UN climate talks. On a planet that is rapidly warming out of control, that in itself is a damning indictment of the so-called 'free press'.

CT

David Cromwell is co-editor of *Media Lens*, the British media watchdog – at <http://medialens.org>

Just as public health policies have been protected from vested tobacco interests, so should UN climate talks 'exclude the villains from the climate process': namely, fossil fuel interests



DavidSwanson.org/Store

The Good Ol' Boys' Burning Man

Alexander Zaitchik writes a letter from the annual gathering of gun freaks and assorted crazies at the Knob Hill Creek Machine Gun Shoot

For sale among them were spiral-bound copies of white-power manifestos and neo-fascist fantasy fiction, including a samizdat edition of *The Turner Diaries*, an influential skinhead classic by the neo-Nazi leader William Pierce

It's an odd feeling to get the upsell on instruction manuals related to domestic terrorism. The nice lady from the Illinois hamlet of Smithton would never describe her wares that way, but that's what they are. The booklets were stacked in neat rows that wrapped around her four tables in the exhibitor's hall at October's Knob Creek Machine Gun Shoot, a biannual event just south of Louisville that looks and sounds a lot like a reenactment of the first days of the Siege of Stalingrad. Since 1979, the Shoot has drawn growing numbers of full-auto aficionados to the wooded hills of West Point, Ky. for holidays of high explosives, artillery and machine gun fire. Each April and October, bombs shake the earth and blacken the sky. Streams of bullets smack steel and rubber targets until they burst aflame. The rumble from the range is audible even at the far end of the event's 900-table vendors hall, where I found myself one fine autumn morning perusing technical guides to building kitchen-table bombs and retro-engineering semi-automatic rifles into military-style machine guns.

Most of the many thousands of blueprints for sale at the Shoot – old Army manuals for M16 maintenance, recipes for homemade bullets of every conceivable caliber – can be described as ideologically neutral. The same cannot be said for those sold by the lady from Smithton (who refused to give

her name, but let's call her Blanche). Her stapled pamphlets each contained cryptic forewords about government mind-control and the need to "advance our culture." For sale among them were spiral-bound copies of white-power manifestos and neo-fascist fantasy fiction, including a samizdat edition of *The Turner Diaries*, an influential skinhead classic by the neo-Nazi leader William Pierce. I was reading a page from the *Diaries* when Blanche returned with the change on my purchase of *Plastique Explosives: Composition C and Cyclonite Base With Various Plasticizing Agents*. With all the nonchalance of a barista mentioning a new latte, she delivered her pitch on fertilizer bombs.

"You know," she said, "if you're interested in plastics, you might like the one my son's just putting out now." I followed her nod toward a gangly teenager in braces arranging the display of a tract titled, *Kitchen Improvised Fertilizer Explosives*.

In certain extremist circles, there is a romance to this breed of bomb. The hero-martyr of *The Turner Diaries*, which I continued to hold in my hands, begins his "race war" by detonating truck bombs made from heating oil and ammonium nitrate fertilizer. Expository sections in *The Turner Diaries* explain the bomb-making process and may have inspired America's most murderous fertilizer bomber, Timothy McVeigh. Sections of the *Diaries* were found in McVeigh's get-

away car after his 1995 attack on the Oklahoma City federal center. Three years after McVeigh's truck bomb, the Texas Klansman who dragged James Byrd Jr. to death from the back of his pick-up truck reportedly got behind the wheel with the words, "We're starting *The Turner Diaries* early."

The boy cheerfully handed me a copy of *Fertilizer Explosives* and I put the *Diaries* down. He and his mother watched me as I flipped through the instructions for mixing acetone with powdered nitroglycerin, the itemized lists of detonation velocities and pressures, the grades given to various mixtures for their applicability in the three categories of Blasting, Demolitions, and Munitions. For smaller jobs, there was a two-page recipe for a smokeless powder that can be spooned into PVC pipes for a "dynamite alternative with good shattering characteristics." There were a few empty pages in the back for notes.

"Yeah, this is great," I said. "But I've been spending a lot of money out there." I extended a thumb in the direction of the range, where men, women, and children were lining up to pay \$1.50 per bullet to unload ammo clips and belts at explosives-laden junkyard sedans and burned-out appliances.

"We'll be here all weekend if you change your mind," said Blanche. "Better to have these in paper. They're watching you now on the Internet."

Blanche placed my book on plastiques in a discreet brown paper bag and I strolled toward an exit under a weather-beaten Confederate battle flag. On the way out I passed the table of an Indiana-based online retailer of skinhead fashion. The business card on the table advertised "WWII German Memorabilia," but there was little for the collector at Knob Creek. Its presentation mostly featured items that looked like they had just come from the factory: crisp swastika patches, reflective SS stickers, Wehrmacht Eagle t-shirts, hoodies with Panzerdivision and Afrikakorps insignia. Across the aisle

from both the neo-Nazi gear and the Tim McVeigh bookstore, two women in pink t-shirts offered \$10 off annual memberships to the NRA.

The Knob Creek Shoot is best understood as American gun culture's Burning Man. Like the annual art and music festival in the Nevada desert, it has spawned a community that stretches across the country, even as the defining event keeps a regional heart and spirit. The same way "Burners" meet up locally throughout a calendar year anchored by the August pilgrimage to Black Rock, Nevada, "Knob Creekers" stay in touch between biannual shoots. They socialize online, meet up at gun ranges, and organize Knob Creek crews. Like Burning Man, the Shoot has been around long enough to become a multigenerational rite of passage. At the range reserved for small arms like Uzis and Mac-10s, it is common to see a father-son ritual of dads taking their boys to fire their first machine gun, a sort of ballistic bar mitzvah. The grass parking lots around Knob Creek are dotted with tents, canopies and clusters of folding NASCAR seats, around which friends fire up barbecue and tailgate to a nearby soundtrack of simulated war. Ask them why they come, often using vacation days to do so, and they'll tell you, "it's a hoot," that it's "all the stuff you want to do in your backyard but can't," and that it's a chance to see old friends and "get your hands on the big guns." Many are history buffs, often with a focus on the German military and its many pioneering machine guns. One attendee at October's shoot strolled the grounds in an original 1950s East German 1st Lt. infantry uniform. When I asked him to identify his army and rank, he raised his chin and answered in a bad Colonel Klink accent.

The most obvious parallel between Knob Creek and Burning Man is the way both events culminate in a cathartic nighttime fire. Burning Man peaks with fireworks and a wooden effigy bonfire. The Shoot's big finale begins at sundown on its second day,

For smaller jobs, there was a two-page recipe for a smokeless powder that can be spooned into PVC pipes for a "dynamite alternative with good shattering characteristics."

.....
Thousands of tracer bullets crisscross the field and ricochet off their targets at what seem like improbable angle
.....

when downrange targets are larded with explosive charges and surrounded with brimming drums of diesel oil. After the setting of the sun and the singing of many patriotic songs, a firing line of machine guns and artillery pieces light up the night sky with a deafening and mesmerizing pyrotechnic barrage. It is, as the Knob Creek Shoot brochure boasts, a scene featuring “giant, explosive mushroom clouds like fireballs from Hell!” Thousands of tracer bullets crisscross the field and ricochet off their targets at what seem like improbable angles. Watching their pinball trajectories could be a lesson in the tragic geometry of urban gun violence, where cars, street signs, and fire hydrants often send bullets on new line paths far from their intended targets.

It should go without saying that Knob Creek isn’t the place to find discussion about the 30,000 Americans killed annually by gun violence. But it is surprisingly absent of any interest in gun policy at all, at least as commonly understood. On the surface, the Shoot is a cultural and recreational event, where the politics are at once everywhere and nowhere. Beneath the surface, if only barely, runs an ideological undercurrent that overlaps little with stuff of state and federal court decisions. The politics of Knob Creek are those of apocalypse and secession, not background checks and magazine-limits. The Shoot draws a range of gun folk, but they skew toward those looking ahead to the day when country roads are ruled by cars like the M60-mounted SUV with a skull hood ornament that drew universal admiration inside the vendor’s hall. As a group, Knob Creekers seem eager for the day when, to paraphrase one t-shirt I saw, “ammo is the new currency.”

The Knob Creek Gun Range, where “2nd Amendment Freedom” is “Served Extra Crispy,” has long been a hub of survivalist culture with a sharp neo-Confederate edge. This history is visible in the layers of faded political stickers on the cash register of the Knob Creek gun store where racks of

assault rifles sit beneath Confederate flags and their state variations. This palimpsest of Kentucky fried paranoia chronicles a shifting cast of “Others”: from the global communist conspiracy, to Clinton and Janet Reno’s ATF, to the UN, to Islam and Aztlan, and back to the UN and a new Democratic president, who is seen as combining elements of every previous enemy. Knob Creek is just one of the more famous gun ranges that have made a good business in training its customers for a coming conflict imagined as an Invasion USA. sequel directed by Ban Ki Moon. Knob Creek’s latest course offering is called *Zombies & Black Helicopters Re-considered*, the zombies being thinly veiled stand-ins for UN blue helmets and liberal gun-grabbers.

The iconography and spirit of secession is alive year-round at Knob Creek, but it appears to gain new life during the biannual Shoots. When I arrived at the entrance on Friday morning, a middle-aged female volunteer greeted me with a free copy of a “rebel” newspaper called *The First Freedom*. The headline declared, “Knob Creek Gun Range Practices 2nd Amendment Rights.” Below it was an article asking, “Have You Considered Secession?” The 24-page broadsheet included articles on why “Normal Whites everywhere must do more than die with a smug smile,” and how the League of the South is fighting back against the immigration policies of the “ZOG” (Zionist Occupied Government). The issue also featured an essay penned by Henry Ford during his anti-Semitic period, entitled, “How the Jewish Song Trust Makes You Sing,” and a profile of Rochus Misch, Adolf Hitler’s bodyguard, who died recently while defiantly maintaining that his old boss “was no brute.” The First Freedom had made official arrangements with the Knob Creek management, and was the closest thing to an in-house newspaper during the shoot.

The fantasy of secession as found in the pages of the First Freedom may in part explain the glorification, and quasi-religious

attention to maintenance, of the sorts of heavy weapons exhibited at Knob Creek. Should there be another war between the states, the only militia with a fighting chance, in theory, is the one armed with the .50 cal. sniper rifles, howitzers, belt-fed M-60s, mortars, heavy artillery, flame throwers, grenade launchers and privately owned attack helicopters. All of these can be appreciated and used for a price at Knob Creek.

Until this arsenal is called forth as part of some future insurrection, its ritual collection and display is actually a rare sign of good health in American gun law. The reason so many people travel so far and pay so much to shoot these weapons is because they are so strictly regulated, and thus relatively rare and inaccessible. There are people, here and there, who argue machine guns should be as easy to buy on the civilian market as semi-automatic rifles – the evangelical author and Glenn Beck favorite David Barton believes Americans should be able to purchase not just machine guns, but Abrams Tanks and fighter jets – but these voices do not add up to a lobby.

After briefly toying with an effort to deregulate machine guns in the 1980s, the NRA has come to accept the laws, first signed by FDR and strengthened by Ronald Reagan, that put full-auto weapons behind the wall of a very expensive and federally monitored Class III firearms license. NRA president David Keene recently reaffirmed his organization's acceptance of this regime. The Facebook group "Deregulate Machine Guns in America," with just 900 followers, is right to place more hope in 3-D printing than

any foreseeable change in the law. Even the anonymous author of an auto-conversion pamphlet I picked up at Knob Creek felt obliged to note the limited practicality of automatic fire outside of "a few hosing down operations."

So long as these weapons and the "hosing down operations" to which they are suited remain confined to rural gun ranges, the Shoot doesn't signify much beyond all of the smoke and the fire. It's recommended to keep an eye on people like Blanche and her customers, especially those interested in fertilizer. Yet for all its neo-Nazi apparel, neo-Confederate Mad Max fantasies and eardrum destroying fury, the larger machine gun subculture has settled into ritualized gun-range play dates where the weapons, which have been banned from entering civilian circulation since 1986, are as much museum pieces as weapons. History tells us to take seriously the record number of Patriot and Militia groups sprouting up around institutions like Knob Creek. But as a self-contained celebration of the machine gun, the country's biggest Shoot is of roughly the same political consequence as the party at Burning Man. Which is another way of saying none at all.

CT

Alexander Zaitchik is a Brooklyn-based freelance journalist. His book, "Common Nonsense: Glenn Beck and the Triumph of Ignorance", is published by Wiley & Sons. His website is <http://www.zaitchik.com>. This essay was originally published by Media Matters for America at <http://mediamatters.org>

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Until this arsenal
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One country, two histories

John Pilger tells how he discovered the power of people's history in England – and why it is so feared by politicians today

That solidarity was, for me, the story, as if it was the missing chapter in England's political heritage, a people's history of modern times

England is two countries. One is dominated by London, the other remains in its shadow. When I first arrived from Australia, it seemed no one went north of Watford and those who had emigrated from the north worked hard to change their accents and obscure their origins and learn the mannerisms and codes of the southern comfortable classes. Some would mock the life they had left behind. They were changing classes, or so they thought.

When the *Daily Mirror* sent me to report from the north in the 1960s, my colleagues in London had fun with my naïve antipodean banishment to their equivalent of Siberia. True, it was the worst winter for 200 years and I had never worn a scarf or owned a coat. Try to imagine what it is like in darkest Leeds and Hull, they warned.

This was a time when working people in England were said to be "speaking out", even "taking over". Realist films were being made, and accents that had not been welcome in the broadcast media and sections of the entertainment business were now apparently in demand, though often as caricatures.

During that first drive north, when I stopped for petrol, I failed to understand what the man said; within weeks, what the people were seemed perfectly clear. They were another nation with a different history, different loyalties, different humour, even different values.

At the heart of this was the politics of class. Crossing the Pennines, the Empire dropped away. The imperial passions of the south barely flickered. On Merseyside and Tyneside, apart from the usual notables, no one gave a damn for royalty. There was the all-for-one-and-one-for-all of a wagons-drawn working class society - unless, as was made painfully clear in later years, you happened to be black or brown.

That solidarity was, for me, the story, as if it was the missing chapter in England's political heritage, a people's history of modern times, suppressed by Thatcher and Blair and still feared by their echoes.

I had already glimpsed the power of this solidarity in the place where my parents had grown up and I knew as a boy: the mining region of the Hunter Valley in New South Wales. Here, whole collieries



COVER STORY

had shipped out from Yorkshire, Tyneside and Durham. "Watch them; they're communists," I heard someone say. They were fighters for working class decency: proper pay, safety and solidarity. The Welsh were the same. They brought with them the pain and suffering and anger of those who had industrialised the world and gained little but the resilient comfort of each other.

The *Mirror* published my reports of working lives: miners working in three foot shafts, steelworkers in unimaginable heat. I would find a street, virtually any street, and knock on doors.

What intrigued me then was that such human warmth and forbearance could survive the treadmill of northern cities. Moreover, the great radical tradition of resistance in the north - from the cotton workers of the 19th century to the Great Miners' Strike of 1984-5 - always threatened the game known in London as "the consensus".

This was the nod-and-wink arrangement between Labour and Tory governments and the five per cent who owned half the wealth of all of the United Kingdom. The Labour MP turned media man, Brian Walden, described how it worked. "The two front benches [in Parliament] liked each other and disliked their back benches," he wrote. "We were children of the famous consensus... turning the opposition into government made little difference, for we believed much the same things."

My second film for television, made for Granada TV in Manchester, was called 'Conversations with a Working Man'. It was the story of Jack Walker, a dyehouse worker from Keighley in Yorkshire whose job was monotonous, filthy and injurious to his health, yet he derived a pride from "doing it well". Jack believed passionately that working people should stand together. That an articulate trade unionist was allowed to express his views without intrusion by those who often claimed to speak for him, and to worry out loud about the

stitched-up democracy in Westminster, was beyond the pale. The term "working class", I was told, had "political implications" and would not be acceptable to the Independent Television Authority. It would have to be changed to "working heritage". Then there was the problem of the term "the people". This was a "Marxist expression" and also had to go. And what was this "consensus"? Surely, Britain had a vibrant two-party system.

When I read recently that 600,000 Greater Manchester residents were "experiencing the effects of extreme poverty" and that 1.6 million were slipping into penury, I was reminded how the political consensus was unchanged.

Now led by the southern squirearchy of David Cameron, George Osborne and their fellow Etonians, the only change is the rise of Labour's corporate management class, exemplified by Ed Miliband's support for "austerity" - the new jargon for imposed poverty.

In Clara Street in Newcastle upon Tyne, in the wintry dark of early morning, I walked down the hill with people who worked more than sixty hours a week for a pittance. They described their "gains" as the Health Service. They had seen only one politician in the street, a Liberal who came and put up posters and said something inaudible from his Land Rover and sped away.

The Westminster mantra then was "paying our way as a nation" and "productivity". Today, their places of work, and their trade union protection, always tenuous, have gone. "What's wrong," a Clara Street man told me, "is the thing the politicians don't want to talk about any more. It's governments not caring how we live, because we're not part of their country." **CT**

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**John Pilger's new film, Utopia, opened in
cinemas in the UK last month and will be
launched in Australia in January. This article
was first published in New Statesman magazine**

Who's to blame for Battlefield America?

Is it militarized police or a militarized culture that's leading to increased brutality? asks John W. Whitehead

Suspecting that Eckert was carrying drugs because his "posture [was] erect" and "he kept his legs together," the officers forced Eckert to undergo an anal cavity search, three enemas, and a colonoscopy. No drugs were found

"It felt like I was in a big video game. It didn't even faze me, shooting back. It was just natural instinct. Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!" – Sgt. Sinque Swales, reflecting on a firefight in Iraq

It's hard to pinpoint what exactly is responsible for the growing spate of police shootings, brutality and overreach that have come to dominate the news lately, whether it's due to militarized police, the growing presence of military veterans in law enforcement, the fact that we are a society predisposed to warfare, indoctrinated through video games, reality TV shows, violent action movies and a series of endless wars that have, for younger generations, become life as they know it – or all of the above.

Whatever the reason, not a week goes by without more reports of hair-raising incidents by militarized police imbued with a take-no-prisoners attitude and a battlefield approach to the communities in which they serve.

The latest comes out of New Mexico, where cops pulled David Eckert over for allegedly failing to yield to a stop sign at a Wal-Mart parking lot. Suspecting that Eckert was carrying drugs because his "posture [was] erect" and "he kept his legs together," the officers forced Eckert to undergo an anal cavity search, three enemas, and a colonos-

copy. No drugs were found.

In Iowa, police shot a teenager who had stolen his father's work truck in a fit of anger and led cops on a wild car chase that ended on a college campus. When 19-year-old Tyler Comstock refused orders to turn off the car despite having stopped, revving the engine instead, police officer Adam McPherson fired six shots into the truck, two of which hit Comstock. Members of the community are demanding to know why less lethal force was not used, especially after a police dispatcher suggested the officers call off the chase.

And then there was the incident involving 13-year-old Andy Lopez, who was shot dead after two sheriff's deputies saw him carrying a toy BB gun in public. Lopez was about 20 feet away from the deputies, his back turned to them, when the officers took cover behind their car and ordered him to drop the "weapon." When Lopez turned around, toy gun in his hand, one of the officers – Erick Gelhaus, a 24-year veteran of the force – shot him seven times. A field training officer for new recruits and a firing range instructor, Gelhaus seems to subscribe to the philosophy that an officer should ensure their own safety at all costs. As Gelhaus wrote in a 2008 article for S.W.A.T. magazine: "Today is the day you may need to kill someone in order to go home. If you cannot turn on the "mean gene" for yourself, who will?

If you find yourself in an ambush, in the kill zone, you need to turn on that mean gene. Taking some kind of action – any kind of action – is critical. If you shut down (physically, psychologically, or both) and stay in the kill zone, bad things will happen to you. You must take some kind of action.”

While some critics are keen to paint these officers as bad cops hyped up on the power of their badge, I don’t subscribe to the bad cop theory. The problem, as I explain in my book, *A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State*, is far more pervasive, arising as it does out of America’s obsession with war and all things war-related, which is reflected in the fact that we spend more than 20% of the nation’s budget on the military, not including what we spend on our endless wars abroad. The US also makes up nearly 80% of the global arms exports market, rendering us both the world’s largest manufacturer and consumer of war.

Then there’s the nation’s commitment to recycling America’s instruments of war and putting them to work here at home, thanks largely to a US Department of Defense program that provides billions of dollars worth of free weapons, armored vehicles, protective clothing and other military items to law enforcement agencies. Ohio State University’s police department recently acquired a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle (MRAP), a hyped up armored vehicle used on the battlefield to withstand explosive devices, land mines and other sneak attacks. The university plans to use its MRAP for crowd control at football games. Indiana University is also in line for an MRAP, as well as dozens of police departments across the country.

Keep in mind, once acquired, this military equipment which is beyond the budget and scope of most communities finds itself put to all manner of uses by local law enforcement agencies under the rationale that “if we have it, we might as well use it” – the same rationale, by the way, used with deadly results to justify assigning SWAT teams

to carry out routine law enforcement work such as delivering a warrant.

In much the same way that community police departments have been finding homes for retired military equipment, they’re also providing jobs for returning military personnel. PoliceLink reports: “As the competition for coveted law enforcement positions increases throughout the country, police and federal recruiters have the luxury of picking and choosing the absolute best and brightest individuals. More often than not, police chiefs, sheriffs, and recruiters are turning to military veterans to fill these positions as they staff the next wave of warriors in the war on crime.”

In addition to staffing police departments with ex-military personnel and equipping them with military gear, the government is also going to great lengths to train local police in military tactics. For example, civilian police train alongside military forces at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, California, making full use of their weapons and equipment. The collaborated training exercises help police incorporate military techniques into their skillset, including exercises in how to clear and move up a stairway, position themselves as snipers and take aim at opposing snipers, and clear a room. With such military training a.k.a. indoctrination in the works, it’s little wonder that police officers increasingly look upon American citizens as enemy combatants.

Even those police officers who are not formally trained in military tactics are at a minimum being given greater access to more powerful firepower. In Boston, for example, the police department is preparing to train 99 of its patrol officers in how to use semiautomatic rifles, which would become standard fare in police cruisers. “It’s almost like we’re moving away from being community policing officers to being Navy SEALs,” stated Jack Kervin, president of the Boston Police Superior Officers Federation. Indeed, as the *Boston Globe* reports, the Boston po-

Ohio State University’s police department recently acquired a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle (MRAP), a hyped up armored vehicle used on the battlefield to withstand explosive devices, land mines and other sneak attacks

Incredibly, the relationship between the military and the video game industry (one aspect of the military-entertainment complex) goes back decades

lice have long been angling for more powerful weapons, dating back to 2009, when they “were slated to receive 200 M-16s from the US military and had planned to train dozens of patrol officers and members of specialized units such as the bomb squad and the harbor patrol to use the weapons.”

Last, but not least, there’s the overall glorification of war and violence that permeates every aspect of American society, from our foreign policy and news programs to our various modes of entertainment, including blockbuster Hollywood action movies and video games. Indeed, thanks to a collaboration between the Department of Defense and the entertainment industry, the American taxpayer is paying for what amounts to a propaganda campaign aimed at entrenching the power of the military in American society. Nick Turse, author of *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives*, points out, “Today, almost everywhere you look, whether at the latest blockbuster on the big screen or what’s on much smaller screens in your own home – likely made by a defense contractor like Sony, Samsung, Panasonic or Toshiba – you’ll find the Pentagon or its corporate partners.”

Nowhere is this indoctrination more evident than in the recent sci fi/action movie blockbuster hit *Ender’s Game*, in which a 10-year-old boy, seemingly training for war with battlefield simulations, is in fact waging war against enemy forces. Couple that with the recent release of *Battlefield 4*, a first-person-shooter video game that allows users to wage war against the enemy using a phalanx of military weaponry and gear, and you have the military’s core strategy for recruiting and training future soldiers, who will in turn eventually become civilian warriors, a.k.a., police officers, in the government’s war on crime.

Incredibly, the relationship between the military and the video game industry (one aspect of the military-entertainment complex) goes back decades. America’s Army, the first military-developed video game,

was released to the public for free in 2002. It has since “become a more effective recruiting tool than all other Army advertising combined.” A main focus of the game’s producers is to get it into the hands of young, impressionable people. As Marsha Berry, executive producer of the third game in the series put it, “We wanted kids to be able to start playing at 13. If they haven’t thought about the Army by the time they get to 17, it’s probably not something they’ll do.”

Taking recruitment one step further, Col. Casey Wardynski, the creator of America’s Army, now serves as superintendent for an Alabama school district with its own cyber-war curriculum, operated in partnership with the US Army Cyber Command, which provides high school students with a fast-track to the army, complete with full-time mentoring by West Point. Indeed, the military’s targeting of youth, down and out due to financial crisis and dwindling education budgets, has gotten more aggressive, with military personnel establishing curriculums in high schools in order to recruit students straight out of high school and into the army.

Getting back to the question of who’s to blame for *Battlefield America*, as we are coming to know it, whether it’s militarized police or a militarized culture, it’s a little like the chicken and the egg debate. Whichever way you look at it, whichever one came first, the end product remains the same. Clearly, the American homeland is now ruled by a military empire. Everything our founding fathers warned against – a standing army that would see American citizens as combatants – is now the new norm. In other words, it looks like the police state is here to stay.

CT

John W. Whitehead is a constitutional attorney, president of The Rutherford Institute and editor of *GadflyOnline.com*. His latest book is “*A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State*” (SelectBooks)

Heartless for the holidays

Sam Pizzigati wonders why rich and powerful people engage in such callous behaviour

Scrooge has come early this year. He's already kicking our Tiny Tims. This holiday season, kids in America's poorest families will have less to eat.

November 1 brought \$5 billion in new cuts to the nation's food stamp program, now officially known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

Poor families are losing on average 7 percent of their food aid, calculates the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. A mother with two kids will lose \$319 over the rest of the current federal fiscal year. The cuts could cost some families a week's worth of meals a month, says the chief of America's largest food bank.

More cuts are looming. A House of Representatives majority is demanding an additional \$39 billion in "savings." Ohio and other states, in the meantime, are moving to limit food stamp eligibility.

Today's heartlessness toward America's most vulnerable actually goes far deeper than food stamp cuts, as a new Economic Policy Institute report documents in rather chilling detail.

Four states, the report notes, have "lifted restrictions on child labor." In Wisconsin, state law used to limit school-age kids to five hours of work a day on school days. The new law erases these limits.

Other states are cutting back on protections for low-wage workers of all ages. Ear-

lier this year, Mississippi adopted a law that bans cities and counties in the state from giving local workers even unpaid sick leave rights.

America's current surge of mean-spiritedness, observes Gordon Lafer, the University of Oregon author of the EPI study, essentially erupted right after the 2010 elections. In 11 states, those elections gave right-wingers "new monopoly control" over the governor's mansion and both legislative chambers.

Lafer links this right-wing electoral triumph directly to growing inequality. A widening income gap, he explains, "has produced a critical mass of extremely wealthy businesspeople, many of whom are politically conservative," and various recent court cases have given these wealthy a green light to spend virtually unlimited sums on their favored candidates.

But America's new heartlessness reflects much more than this turbocharged political power of America's rich. The wider a society's economic divide, as Demos think tank analyst Sean McElwee observes, the less empathy on the part of the rich toward the poor. In a starkly unequal society, people of affluence "rarely brush shoulders" with people of little advantage. These rich don't see the poor. They stereotype them instead as lazy and unworthy.

In Wisconsin, state law used to limit school-age kids to five hours of work a day on school days. The new law erases these limits

.....
East Carroll's most highly subsidized farm owner grabbed \$655,000 from one federal subsidy alone. The average food stamp payout in the parish: \$1,492 per person per year
.....

CNN columnist John Sutter has just brought us face-to-face with this phenomenon, via a moving and insightful portrait of America's most unequal locale, East Carroll Parish in Louisiana.

In East Carroll, the rich live north of Lake Providence, the poor south. The two groups seldom interact. East Carroll's most affluent 5 percent average \$611,000 a year, 90 times the \$6,800 incomes the poorest fifth of the parish average.

"Looking across Lake Providence from the north," writes Sutter, "can warp a person's vision."

One example of this warped vision: East Carroll's rich see food stamps as an "entitlement" that rots poor people's incentive to work. Yet these same rich annually pocket enormously generous farm subsidies. In 2010, East Carroll's most highly subsidized farm owner grabbed \$655,000 from one federal subsidy alone.

The average food stamp payout in the parish: \$1,492 per person per year.

What should we do about the rampant inequality in East Carroll Parish – and far beyond? For starters, we could end federal farm subsidies for wealthy farmers – and restore food stamps to full strength.

The longer-term task? That would include everything from raising taxes on the nation's most privileged to raising minimum wages for the nation's lowest-paid workers. In 2013 America, sums up CNN's Sutter, we've come to see stark gaps between rich and poor as "inevitable." His simple reminder for us all: "They don't have to be."

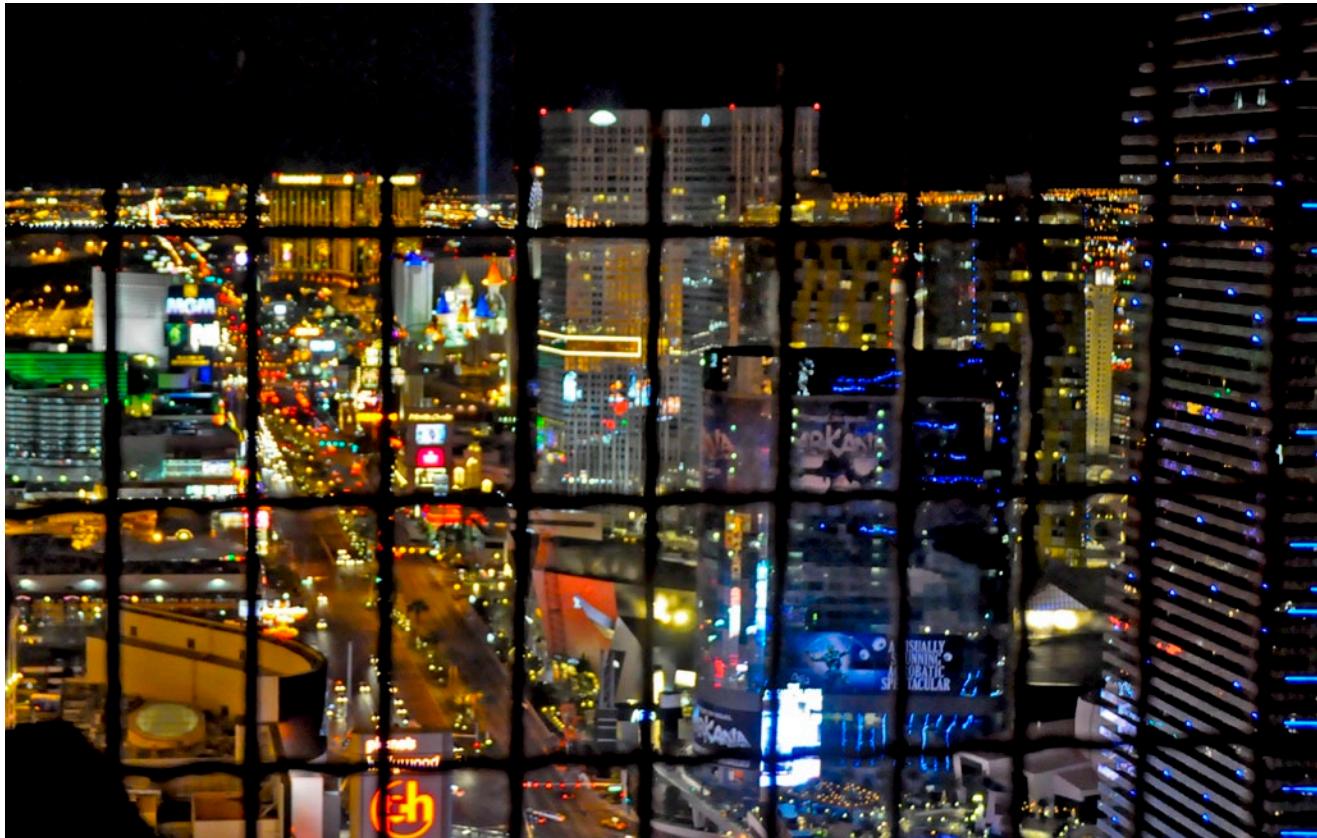
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Sam Pizzigati, an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, edits the inequality weekly *Too Much*. His latest book is "The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class". Find his work at <http://OtherWords.org>

BENDIB'S WORLD

Khalil Bendib, OtherWords.org





When a man tires of Las Vegas, he climbs onto a bus and heads across the desert to the Grand Canyon.

On the road . . .

Tired of the bright lights of Las Vegas, **Tony & Jools Sutton** take a long, long bus journey through the desert to the world's most famous hole in the ground

The past two days have been an adrenaline rush of activity; sights, shows, sounds, flashing lights and never-ending jingle-jangle of slot machines draining uncountable wallets in interminable casinos. Now, striding the pulsating Las Vegas Strip, Jools and I have learned to ignore the hustlers stalking their tourist prey. But one of them smells blood. Ours!

"Best deal on the Strip. Day trip to the Grand Canyon. Cheap. Reduced from \$170 to \$130. Lunch and Route 66 included. Bus

will collect you at your hotel at 7 tomorrow morning."

Jools takes the bait, no haggling. It's perfect. The Grand Canyon is right at the top of the bucket list of things she needs to do before she pops her mortal coil. And I'll get a break from the Vegas razzmatazz – so we'll both be happy. Following the hustler into his shop, we hand over the readies and take the tickets. Then, as we're leaving, Jools spots a flyer for garish wedding chapels. "Maybe it's time we renewed our wedding vows?" she wonders.

.....
Jools and I have learned to ignore the hustlers stalking their tourist prey. But one of them smells blood. Ours!
.....



Like a pimple in the desert, this rock protrudes from the sandy floor of the Lake Mead Recreation Area.

.....
**Ten bum-bouncing
hours on a bus,
leaving three hours
to gaze into a big
hole . . .**

“Perhaps when you return from the Canyon?” suggests the agent.

“Perhaps,” Jools responds.

“Perhaps not,” I declare, as I lead her away from temptation . . .

Next morning, 6:30 am – Not the best time to crawl out of bed to catch a bus, but at least we’re not commuting to work in the snow; we’re on holiday. Downside? The journey from Vegas to the Grand Canyon is 450km. Five hours. It gets worse. We’re coming back tonight. So, that’s ten bum-bouncing hours on a bus, leaving three hours to gaze into a big hole.

We wait outside our hotel, accompanied by four other yawning day trippers – a businessman with time between conferences and a Japanese family who speak as much of our language as we do theirs. We communicate through smiles, nods and enthusiastic bows, then clamber into a mini van and

are dropped minutes later at a cavernous waiting room behind another hotel. (The businessman seems to be everywhere during the trip, camera in hand, shooting everything that moves and lots that doesn’t. But the family disappears from view almost immediately. The next time we meet them is at the end of the day, when there’s a gentle tap on my shoulder. I turn around and farewell smiles abound.)

Joining forty fellow travelers, we grab wake-up shots of strong black coffee (Jools), not-so-strong tea (me), a couple of muffins and a donut before boarding the bus, where we meet Larry, our driver/guide/shepherd/new-best-friend. He’s big, silver-haired and in love with his microphone which, I swear, barely leaves his lips. Non-stop patter, never-ending information, well-worn jokes.

After a while, the chatter washes over like waves on a rough sea; Larry’s with

**When in Vegas it's easy to forget you're in the middle of a desert.
Hit the highway and reality bites**



Lonely shack in the Mohave desert. One man's idea of hell is his wife's vision of heaven.

us, but only when we care to tune in. We half-hear tales of the building of Vegas, the suffering of cash-strapped homeowners after the stock market crash, the industries that have been and gone. Throughout this monologue, the bus is weaving along suburban streets of box-like homes that seem to have taken root in the arid soil, the dull monotony hardly broken by patches of sand grass and a few spindly trees reaching skyward in a futile quest for moisture.

When in Vegas it's easy to forget you're in the middle of a desert. Hit the highway and reality bites. You think, *Jeeze, I'd hate to live here.* Then you realise that it's no more bland or soul-destroying than, for example, Toronto's suburban wilderness of Scarborough whose nickname – Scarberia – says all that needs to be said. And at least the cool late-Fall sun shines warmly on the edge of the Mohave while Torontonians are preparing for the first falls of snow.

Suburbs behind, the bus now bowling along Route 93, Larry gives his voice a rest and puts on the first of the journey's movies, a documentary about the building of the Hoover Dam, the walls of which we're almost, but not quite, going to see. Until three years ago, the highway crossed the Hoover, but it's now bypassed by the Pat Tillman Memorial Bridge, the second highest bridge in the US, which straddles a massive gorge high above the Colorado River.

Larry is not silent for long; he's in love, remember. So, every few minutes, he interrupts the movie to give us more information, announcing the sights coming up at each side of the bus (passengers rise, edge into the aisle, click cameras and move back to their seats), how far to the pee-break, what time lunch will be, yadda, yadda, yadda.

Once through the mountainous Lake Mead Recreation Area, Nevada is behind us; we're now in Arizona, on the edge of

.....
The bus is weaving along suburban streets of box-like homes that seem to have taken root in the arid soil, the dull monotony hardly broken by patches of sand grass and a few spindly trees reaching skyward in a futile quest for moisture
.....



Grasshopper Junction: Bomb testing, murders and medical marijuana.

.....
Half-close your
eyes and the mind
conjures up sepia-
toned images
of valiant pony
express riders
chased by hordes
of red Indians, in
turn pursued by
US cavalrymen
.....

the Mohave desert, scrubby soil broken by patches of grass, bushes and small trees. Telegraph poles jut into the sky seconds apart, sagging wires stretching from coast to coast, reminding us that for much of the history of the United States this was the only way of linking coastal civilisation to internal anarchy. Half-close your eyes and the mind conjures up sepia-toned images of valiant pony express riders chased by hordes of red Indians, in turn pursued by US cavalrymen; images of a heavily one-sided history passed from generation to generation of non-critical schoolboys.

Now, here and there, houses – shacks really – sprout in the near-desert. I nudge Jools, who's reading a magazine, and tell her I'd hate to live in such hellish loneliness. She disagrees, proclaiming it her idea of heaven. "When can we move in?" she asks. "Over my dead body," I reply. She smiles, mumbles an evil response and resumes reading.

The solitary homesteads are replaced by more sociable clusters of mobile homes, each with a large, grimy pickup truck parked alongside, ready to carry their owners off to Vegas at the first sign of cabin fever. Freshly-built storage units dot the roadside. Then, on a dirt road running parallel to the interstate, we spy Grasshopper Junction. Pizza shop, mini-mart and general store, a couple of anonymous shops, more mobile homes and we're back in the desert.

The Junction's biggest claims to fame (infamy is perhaps a better word) are its proximity to the old Nevada nuclear testing site – sightseers used to gather here to watch the spectacular, and deadly, mushroom clouds – and the gruesome murder in 1991 of two of its six residents, Dean Morrison and Jackie Appelhans, co-owners of a store and restaurant.

Grasshopper's newest attraction is less lethal: a state-sanctioned medical mariju-



Sightseers gathered here to watch the spectacular, and deadly, mushroom clouds



Waiting: The Grand Canyon Polar Bear Express.

na factory where legal “high quality cannabis” is grown “under the power of the full unfiltered Arizona sun”. Unfortunately, we don’t have time to sample the wares

10.00 am – First stop on the journey, Castle Rock Trading Post at Kingman, AZ. Most passengers don’t pause to admire the scenery, but dash to the front of a line forming at the ablution block next to the store. Yes, there is a toilet at the rear of the bus, but only the absolutely desperate have had the courage to brave the withering gaze of fellow passengers unfortunate enough to be seated in nose-twitching range of the chemical bouquet emanating from that forbidden zone.

So, while half the bus dashes for the rest room which, Larry tells us, was the most expensive in the whole of Arizona when it was built (must have had mink-covered seats and gold-plated taps, as the outside is hard-

ly an architectural delight), the rest of the passengers hit the trading post. We’ve got 15 minutes to buy snacks and trinkets, and to take photos of the bar, entertainment area, huge rodeo ground and – like animals in a zoo – the locals.

Chatting to an assistant in the suddenly-busy store, I remark on the lack of traffic along the route and wonder how they manage to survive. “We get four tourist coaches a day,” she drawls, “and we have live bands every Saturday”. She adds that they only get traffic *leaving* Vegas as the carriageways of the highway are separated by a rocky outcrop. But the Post has been around since 1871, so I ask if the local cowboys have big expense accounts. She grins, but before she can respond, there’s a call for stragglers to reboard the bus.

Back on the road, over the hills onto arid plains dotted with huge rocky pillars, the monotonous swish of rubber on tarmac is

Most passengers don’t pause to admire the scenery, but dash to the front of a line forming at the ablution block next to the store

Roadside decals keep reminding us that we're now burning rubber on Historic Route 66



Get your kicks: Williams, Arizona.

Didn't know the North Pole was in Arizona, but who am I to argue?

drowned by another documentary, this time about the Arizona section of Route 66, delivered in tones that would lull an insomniac into deep sleep within seconds. zzzzzz.

Suddenly we're awake and staring from the windows. Larry has announced we're about to turn onto the most famous road in America, if not the known world. But it looks the same as the one we've just left, apart from the roadside decals which keep reminding us that we're now burning rubber on the Historic Route 66 ...

12 noon – We pull into the parking lot at our lunch spot, a huge and almost empty buffet restaurant at the railway station in Williams, 50 kms from Flagstaff. Outside stands the Grand Canyon Polar Express, a grand old steam engine that runs to the Grand Canyon, 100 kms away. The train's winter journey – based on *The Polar Express*, the classic children's book by Chris Van



Worth five hours in a bum-numbing bus!: Indescribably

Allsburg – is famous, according to the operating company's website, for "following the nighttime wilderness of Williams, Arizona, to the enchanted beauty of the North Pole – where Santa Claus and his reindeer are waiting with a keepsake present for every good boy and girl on route to the Canyon." Didn't know the North Pole was in Arizona, but who am I to argue? However, I can say with authority that the meal – meat loaf, pizza, lasagne, salad – is not the greatest. Judging



beautiful, the Grand Canyon is one of the world's most eye-catching sights.

by the lack of people lining for seconds, I'm not the only one who thinks that.

After lunch, we pile back onto the bus, seeing enough of Williams as we crawl along its narrow streets to make Jools decide she'd like to return, not aboard a bum-numbing bus, but in a '69 soft-top Mustang cruising along what we've just been told is the best section of Route 66.

1.30 pm – Jools has spent the final hour in

childlike anticipation of one of the modern wonders of the world. She's not disappointed. When we arrive, she leaps from the bus, asks Larry where the big hole is and bolts away like a jackrabbit, with me in pursuit. Clambering onto a big rock overlooking the Canyon, she spreads her arms in triumph and demands photos. I oblige, standing as far back as possible, my fear of heights reinforced by the scale and overwhelming beauty of what I'm seeing (no, Jools, the Canyon, not you) ...

Jools leaps from the bus, asks Larry where the big hole is and bolts away like a jackrabbit, with me in pursuit



Three storeys high, the Lookout photographic studio clings to the edge of the Canyon.

.....
**"Can't you just
hear the silence?"
she asks me.
No, not really**
.....

4.30 pm. Three hours later, we've seen Mather Point, Yavapai Point, Bright Angel Point, clambered up and down rocky trails, visited museums, quaffed ale and downed warming coffees. Jools is entranced by the sights, the stark emptiness of the Canyon – “Can't you just hear the silence?” she asks me. No, not really. I'm more interested in the Kolb Brothers Studio, perched precariously on the edge of a mighty cliff. The brothers were true American pioneers, opening their studio 75 years ago, and lugging huge cameras up and down the cliffs and canyons to take some of the most iconic pictures of the Canyon.

We pile back onto the bus, cold, knackered and thrilled. Lights are dimmed as the evening's drift into darkness reveals a huge, fiery sunset. A comedy flickers on the entertainment system. We pause for refreshment at a truck stop, stocking up with sandwich-

es, pizza and soft drinks. Then we're silent, until Larry points out the Hoover Dam, this time floodlit in the dark hills. Cameras are whipped out, photos taken – mine's just a blur; the bus wheels bounce just as I click the shutter . . .

9.30 pm. Back in Vegas, 40 weary travelers troop off the bus, bags of trinkets in hand, and head back to their hotels. As we hit Las Vegas Boulevard, I'm accosted by a sharply-dressed gent, who thrusts a card into my hand, promising a “night of passion with the girl of your dreams.” Jools comes across, “Not another day trip!” She reaches for the card; the hustler steps back, gold tooth flashing in the neon glare.

“Another night, perhaps,” he suggests.

“Perhaps,” I respond.

“Perhaps not,” declares Jools, as she leads me away from temptation.

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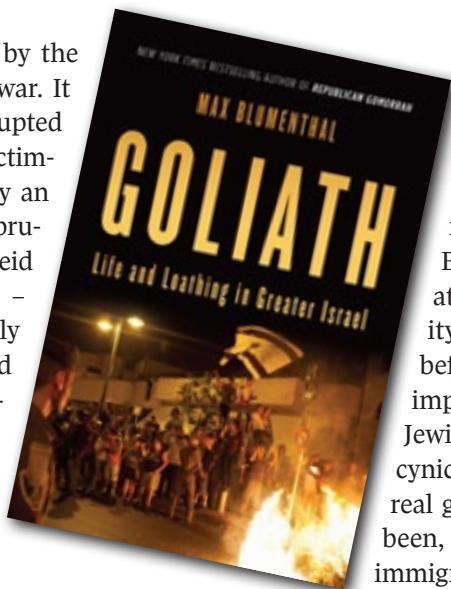
Tony Sutton is the editor of *ColdType* – editor@coldtype.net

Imploding the myth of Israel

Chris Hedges reviews *Goliath: Life And Loathing In Greater Israel*, by Max Blumenthal, published by Nation Books

Israel has been poisoned by the psychosis of permanent war. It has been morally bankrupted by the sanctification of victimhood, which it uses to justify an occupation that rivals the brutality and racism of apartheid South Africa. Its democracy – which was always exclusively for Jews – has been hijacked by extremists who are pushing the country toward fascism. Many of Israel's most enlightened and educated citizens – 1 million of them – have left the country. Its most courageous human rights campaigners, intellectuals and journalists – Israeli and Palestinian – are subject to constant state surveillance, arbitrary arrests and government-run smear campaigns. Its educational system, starting in primary school, has become an indoctrination machine for the military. And the greed and corruption of its venal political and economic elite have created vast income disparities, a mirror of the decay within America's democracy.

And yet, the hard truths about Israel remain largely unspoken. Liberal supporters of Israel decry its excesses. They wring their hands over the tragic necessity of airstrikes



GOLIATH
Life And Loathing In
Greater Israel
Max Blumenthal
(Nation Books)
\$26.99

on Gaza or Lebanon or the demolition of Palestinian homes. They assure us that they respect human rights and want peace. But they react in inchoate fury when the reality of Israel is held up before them. This reality implodes the myth of the Jewish state. It exposes the cynicism of a state whose real goal is, and always has been, the transfer, forced immigration or utter subjugation and impoverishment of Palestinians inside Israel and the occupied territories. Reality shatters the fiction of a peace process. Reality lays bare the fact that Israel routinely has used deadly force against unarmed civilians, including children, to steal half the land on the West Bank and crowd forcibly displaced Palestinians into squalid, militarized ghettos while turning their land and homes over to Jewish settlers. Reality exposes the new racial laws adopted by Israel as those once advocated by the fanatic racist Meir Kahane. Reality unveils the Saharonim detention camp in the Negev Desert, the largest detention

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Reality lays bare the fact that Israel routinely has used deadly force against unarmed civilians, including children, to steal half the land on the West Bank
.....

The Israeli army, Blumenthal points out in his first chapter, employs a mathematical formula to limit outside food deliveries to Gaza to keep the caloric levels of the 1.5 million Palestinians trapped inside its open air prison just above starvation

center in the world. Reality mocks the lie of open, democratic debate, including in the country's parliament, the Knesset, where racist diatribes and physical threats, often enshrined into law, are used to silence and criminalize the few who attempt to promote a civil society. Liberal Jewish critics inside and outside Israel, however, desperately need the myth, not only to fetishize Israel but also to fetishize themselves. Strike at the myth and you unleash a savage vitriol, which in its fury exposes the self-adulation and latent racism that lie at the core of modern Zionism.

There are very few intellectuals or writers who have the tenacity and courage to confront this reality. This is what makes Max Blumenthal's *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel* one of the most fearless and honest books ever written about Israel. Blumenthal burrows deep into the dark heart of Israel. The American journalist binds himself to the beleaguered and shunned activists, radical journalists and human rights campaigners who are the conscience of the nation, as well as Palestinian families in the West Bank struggling in vain to hold back Israel's ceaseless theft of their land. Blumenthal, in chapter after chapter, methodically rips down the facade. And what he exposes, in the end, is a corpse.

I spent seven years in the Middle East as a correspondent, including months in Gaza and the West Bank. I lived for two years in Jerusalem. Many of the closest friends I made during my two decades overseas are Israeli. Most of them are among the Israeli outcasts that Blumenthal writes about, men and women whose innate decency and courage he honors throughout his book. They are those who, unlike the Israeli leadership and a population inculcated with racial hatred, sincerely want to end occupation, restore the rule of law and banish an ideology that creates moral hierarchies with Arabs hovering at the level of animal as Jews – especially Jews of European descent – are elevated to the status of demigods. It

is a measure of Blumenthal's astuteness as a reporter that he viewed Israel through the eyes of these outcasts, as well as the Palestinians, and stood with them as they were arrested, tear-gassed and fired upon by Israeli soldiers. There is no other honest way to tell the story about Israel. And this is a very honest book.

Goliath is made up of numerous vignettes, some only a few pages long, that methodically build a picture of Israel, like pieces fit into a puzzle. It is in the details that Israel's reality is exposed. The Israeli army, Blumenthal points out in his first chapter, "To the Slaughter," employs a mathematical formula to limit outside food deliveries to Gaza to keep the caloric levels of the 1.5 million Palestinians trapped inside its open air prison just above starvation; a government official later denied that he had joked in a meeting that the practice is "like an appointment with a dietician." The saturation, 22-day bombing of Gaza that began on Dec. 27, 2008, led by 60 F-16 fighter jets, instantly killed 240 Palestinians, including scores of children. Israel's leading liberal intellectuals, including the writers Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua and David Grossman, blithely supported the wholesale murder of Palestinian civilians. And while Israelis blocked reporters from entering the coastal Gaza Strip – forcing them to watch distant explosions from Israel's Parash Hill, which some reporters nicknamed "the Hill of Shame" – the army and air force carried out atrocity after atrocity, day after day, crimes that were uncovered only after the attack was over and the press blockade lifted. This massive aerial and ground assault against a defenseless civilian population that is surrounded by the Israeli army, a population without an organized military, air force, air defenses, navy, heavy artillery or mechanized units, caused barely a ripple of protest inside Israel from the left or the right. It was part of the ongoing business of slaughtering the other.

"Unarmed civilians were torn to pieces

with flechette darts sprayed from tank shells," Blumenthal writes. "Several other children covered in burns from white phosphorous chemical weapon rounds were taken to hospitals; a few were found dead with bizarre wounds after being hit with experimental Dense Inert Metal Explosive (DIME) bombs designed to dissolve into the body and rapidly erode internal soft tissue. A group of women were shot to death while waving a white flag; another family was destroyed by a missile while eating lunch; and Israeli soldiers killed Ibrahim Awajah, an eight-year-old child. His mother, Wafaa, told the documentary filmmaker Jen Marlowe that soldiers used his corpse for target practice. Numerous crimes like these were documented across the Gaza Strip."

By the end of the assault, with 1,400 dead, nearly all civilians, Gaza lay in ruins. The Israeli air force purposely targeted Gaza's infrastructure, including power plants, to reduce Gaza to a vast, overcrowded, dysfunctional slum. Israel, Blumenthal notes, destroyed "80 percent of all arable farmland in the coastal strip, bombing the strip's largest flour mill, leveling seven concrete factories, shelling a major cheese factory, and shooting up a chicken farm, killing thirty-one thousand chickens."

"Twelve [years old] and up, you are allowed to shoot. That's what they tell us," an Israeli sniper told Haaretz correspondent Amira Hass in 2004 at the height of the Second Intifada, Blumenthal writes. "This is according to what the IDF [Israel Defense Force] says to its soldiers. I do not know if this is what the IDF says to the media," the sniper was quoted as saying.

The 2008 murderous rampage is not, as Blumenthal understands, an anomaly. It is the overt policy of the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who advocates "a system of open apartheid." Israel, as Blumenthal points out, has not lifted its state of emergency since its foundation. It has detained at least 750,000 Palestinians, including 10,000 women, in its prisons since

1967. It currently holds more than 4,500 political prisoners, including more than 200 children and 322 people jailed without charges, Blumenthal writes, including those it has labeled "administrative detainees." Israel has a staggering 99.74 percent conviction rate for these so-called security prisoners, a figure that any totalitarian state would envy.

Blumenthal cites a survey of Jewish Israeli attitudes on the Gaza bombing, known as Operation Cast Lead. The survey, by Daniel Bar-Tal, a political psychologist from Tel Aviv University, concluded that the public's "consciousness is characterized by a sense of victimization, a siege mentality, blind patriotism, belligerence, self-righteousness, dehumanization of the Palestinians, and insensitivity to their suffering." Bar-Tal tells Blumenthal "these attitudes are the product of indoctrination." And Blumenthal sets out to chronicle the poison of this indoctrination and what it has spawned in Israeli society.

The racist narrative, once the domain of the far right and now the domain of the Israeli government and the mainstream, demonizes Palestinians and Arabs, as well as all non-Jews. Non-Jews, according to this propaganda, will forever seek the annihilation of the Jewish people. The Holocaust, in which Israeli victimhood is sanctified, is seamlessly conflated with Palestinian and Arab resistance to occupation. The state flies more than 25 percent of Israeli 11th-graders to Poland to tour Auschwitz and other Nazi extermination camps a year before they start army service. They are told that the goal of Arabs, along with the rest of the non-Jewish world, is another Auschwitz. And the only thing standing between Israelis and a death camp is the Israeli army. Israeli high schools show films such as "Sleeping With the Enemy" to warn students about dating non-Jews, especially Arabs. Racist books such as "Torat Ha'Melech," or "The King's Torah," are given to soldiers seeking rabbinical guidance on the rules of engagement. Rabbi

Israel has detained at least 750,000 Palestinians, including 10,000 women, in its prisons since 1967

The Israeli lie over the Mavi Marmara attack was trumpeted while every camera, video and tape recorder, computer and cellphone of the activists on board was seized and destroyed

Yitzhak Shapira and Rabbi Yosef Elitzur, the authors of the 230-page book, inform soldiers that non-Jews are “uncompassionate by nature” and may have to be killed in order to “curb their evil inclinations.” “If we kill a gentile who has violated one of the seven commandments [of Noah] ... there is nothing wrong with the murder,” Shapira and Elitzur write. The rabbis claim that under Jewish law “there is justification for killing babies if it is clear that they will grow up to harm us, and in such a situation they may be harmed deliberately, and not only during combat with adults.”

These narratives of hatred make any act of deadly force by the Israeli army permissible, from the shooting of Palestinian children to the 2010 killing by Israeli commandos of nine unarmed activists on the Turkish boat the Mavi Marmara. The activists were part of a flotilla of six boats bringing humanitarian supplies to Gaza. The Israeli propaganda machine claimed that the small flotilla was a covert terror convoy. Never mind that the Mavi Marmara was in international waters when it was attacked. Never mind that no one on the boat, or any of the five other boats, was armed. Never mind that the boats were thoroughly searched before they left for Gaza. The Israeli lie was trumpeted while every camera, video and tape recorder, computer and cellphone of the activists on board was seized and destroyed – or in a few cases sold by Israeli soldiers when they got back to Israel – while those on the boats were towed to an Israeli port and detained in isolation. The ceaseless stoking of fear and racial hatred – given full vent by the Israeli government and media in the days after the Mavi Marmara incident – has served to empower racist political demagogues such as Netanyahu and Avigdor Lieberman, a camp follower of Meir Kahane. It has also effectively snuffed out Israel’s old left-wing Zionist establishment.

“In Israel you have three systems of laws,” the Israeli Arab politician Ahmed Tibi observes in the Blumenthal book. “One is de-

mocracy for 80 percent of the population. It is democracy for Jews. I call it an ethnocracy or you could call it a Judocracy. The second is racial discrimination for 20 percent of the population, the Israeli Arabs. The third is apartheid for the population in the West Bank and Gaza. This includes two sets of governments, one for the Palestinians and one for the settlers. Inside Israel there is not yet apartheid but we are being pushed there with ... new laws.”

As Blumenthal documents, even Israeli Jews no longer live in a democracy. The mounting state repression against human rights advocates, journalists and dissidents has reached the proportions of US Homeland Security. The overtly racist cant of the political elite and the masses – “Death to Arabs” is a popular chant at Israeli soccer matches – has emboldened mobs and vigilantes, including thugs from right-wing youth groups such as Im Tirtzu, to carry out indiscriminate acts of vandalism and violence against dissidents, Palestinians, Israeli Arabs and the hapless African immigrants who live crammed into the slums of Tel Aviv. Israel has pushed through a series of discriminatory laws against non-Jews that eerily resemble the racist Nuremberg Laws that disenfranchised Jews in Nazi Germany. The Communities Acceptance Law, for example, permits “small, exclusively Jewish towns planted across Israel’s Galilee region to formally reject applicants for residency on the grounds of ‘suitability to the community’s fundamental outlook.’ ” And all who denounce the steady march of Israel toward fascism – including Jewish academics – are attacked in organized campaigns as being insufficiently Zionist. They are branded as terrorists or collaborators with terrorists. As a headline in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz read: “The settlers are the real government of Israel.”

“Woody [a law school graduate from New York] became my initial liaison to Tel Aviv’s radical left, introducing me to a loose-knit band of a few hundred anarchists, disillusioned

sioned ex-soldiers, disaffected children of ultra-Zionists, queers, academics, and generally idealistic and disillusioned young people who came of age during the Second Intifada when the liberal Zionist ‘peace camp’ closed ranks with the militaristic right wing,” Blumenthal writes. “This tiny band of social deviants comprised the only grouping of people I met who sincerely embraced multiculturalism and who took concrete action against the discriminatory foundations of their country’s political apparatus. Right-wingers and many Jewish Israelis who considered themselves part of the social mainstream referred to members of the radical left as smolinim, which simply means ‘leftists,’ but the word carried a deeply insulting connotation of an unacceptable caste, an Other. As branded social outcasts, inflexible in their principles, disdainful of ordinary politics, and brazen in their racial liberalism they resembled nothing so much as the pre-Civil War abolitionists.”

The late Amnon Dankner, the former editor of *Maariv*, one of Israel’s major newspapers, Blumenthal notes, denounced “neo-Nazi expressions in the Knesset” and “entire parties whose tenor and tone arouse feelings of horror and terrifying memories.” David Landau, the former editor-in-chief of *Haaretz*, has called on Israelis to boycott the Knesset “to stand against the wave of fascism that has engulfed the Zionist project.” And Uri Avnery, a left-wing politician and journalist, says: “Israel’s very existence is threatened by fascism.”

The disillusionment among idealistic young immigrants to Israel dots the book. As one example, Canadian David Sheen is recorded as saying that everything he had known about Israel and Palestinians was, in Blumenthal’s words, “a fantasy cultivated through years of heavy indoctrination.” But perhaps what is saddest is that Israel has, and has always had, within its population intellectuals, including the great scholar Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who sought to save Israel from itself.

Leibowitz, whom Isaiah Berlin called “the conscience of Israel,” warned that if Israel did not separate church and state it would give rise to a corrupt rabbinate that would warp Judaism into a fascistic cult.

“Religious nationalism is to religion what National Socialism was to socialism,” said Leibowitz, who died in 1994. He understood that the blind veneration of the military, especially after the 1967 war that captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem, was dangerous and would lead to the ultimate destruction of the Jewish state and any hope of democracy. “Our situation will deteriorate to that of a second Vietnam, to a war in constant escalation without prospect of ultimate resolution.” He foresaw that “the Arabs would be the working people and the Jews the administrators, inspectors, officials, and police – mainly secret police. A state ruling a hostile population of 1.5 million to 2 million foreigners would necessarily become a secret-police state, with all that this implies for education, free speech and democratic institutions. The corruption characteristic of every colonial regime would also prevail in the State of Israel. The administration would have to suppress Arab insurgency on the one hand and acquire Arab Quislings on the other. There is also good reason to fear that the Israel Defense Force, which has been until now a people’s army, would, as a result of being transformed into an army of occupation, degenerate, and its commanders, who will have become military governors, resemble their colleagues in other nations.” He warned that the rise of a virulent racism would consume Israeli society. He knew that prolonged occupation of the Palestinians would spawn “concentration camps” for the occupied and that, in his words, “Israel would not deserve to exist, and it will not be worthwhile to preserve it.”

But few, then or now, cared to listen. This is why Blumenthal’s new book is so important.

Right-wingers and many Jewish Israelis who considered themselves part of the social mainstream referred to members of the radical left as smolinim, which simply means ‘leftists,’ but the word carried a deeply insulting connotation of an unacceptable caste, an Other

Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter. His most recent book is “*Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle*.” This originally appeared at <http://truthdig.org>

CT

Another covert assassination?

Jonathan Cook reminds us why Israel wanted Palestine leader Yasser Arafat dead

In January 2002, Shaul Mofaz, Israel's military chief of staff, was caught on a microphone whispering to Israel's prime minister, Ariel Sharon, about Arafat: "We have to get rid of him"

It seems there are still plenty of parties who would prefer that Yasser Arafat's death continues to be treated as a mystery rather than as an assassination.

It is hard, however, to avoid drawing the logical conclusion from the finding last month by Swiss scientists that the Palestinian leader's body contained high levels of a radioactive isotope, polonium-210. An inconclusive and much more limited study by a Russian team published immediately after the Swiss announcement also suggests Arafat died from poisoning.

It is time to state the obvious: Arafat was killed. And suspicion falls squarely on Israel.

Israel alone had the means, track record, stated intention and motive. Without Israel's fingerprints on the murder weapon, it may not be quite enough to secure a conviction in a court of law, but it should be evidence enough to convict Israel in the court of world opinion.

Israel had access to polonium from its nuclear reactor in Dimona, and it has a long record of carrying out political assassinations, some ostentatious and others covert, often using hard-to-trace chemical agents. Most notoriously, Israel tried to quietly kill another Palestinian leader, Khaled Meshal of Hamas, in Jordan in 1997, injecting a poison into his ear. Meshal was saved only because the assassins were caught and Is-

rael was forced to supply an antidote. Israeli leaders have been queuing up to deny there was ever any malign intent from Israel's side towards Arafat. Silvan Shalom, the energy minister, claimed last month: "We never made a decision to harm him physically." Shalom must be suffering from a memory lapse.

There is plenty of evidence that Israel wanted Arafat – in the euphemism of that time – "removed". In January 2002, Shaul Mofaz, Israel's military chief of staff, was caught on a microphone whispering to Israel's prime minister, Ariel Sharon, about Arafat: "We have to get rid of him."

With the Palestinian leader holed up for more than two years in his battered compound in Ramallah, surrounded by Israeli tanks, the debate in the Israel government centred on whether he should be exiled or killed.

In September 2003, when Shalom was foreign minister, the cabinet even issued a warning that Israel would "remove this obstacle in a manner, and at a time, of its choosing." The then-deputy prime minister, Ehud Olmert, clarified that killing Arafat was "one of the options".

What stayed Israel's hand – and fuelled its equivocal tone – was Washington's adamant opposition. In the wake of these threats, Colin Powell, the US secretary of state, warned that a move against Arafat would trigger

"rage throughout the Arab world, the Muslim world and in many other parts of the world".

By April 2004, however, Sharon declared he was no longer obligated by his earlier commitment to President George Bush not to "harm Arafat physically". "I am released from that pledge," he observed. The White House too indicated a weakening of its stance: an unnamed spokesman responded feebly that the US "opposed any such action".

Unknown is whether Israel was able to carry out the assassination alone, or whether it needed to recruit a member or members of Arafat's inner circle, with him inside his Ramallah compound, as accomplices to deliver the radioactive poison.

So what about motive? How did Israel gain from "removing" Arafat? To understand Israel's thinking, one needs to return to another debate raging at that time, among Palestinians.

The Palestinian leadership was split into two camps, centred on Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas, Arafat's heir apparent. The pair had starkly divergent strategies for dealing with Israel.

In Arafat's view, Israel had reneged on commitments it made in the Oslo accords. He was therefore loath to invest exclusively in the peace process. He wanted a twin strategy: keeping open channels for talks while maintaining the option of armed resistance to pressure Israel. For this reason he kept a tight personal grip on the Palestinian security forces.

Abbas, on the other hand, believed that armed resistance was a gift to Israel, delegitimising the Palestinian struggle. He wanted to focus exclusively on negotiations and state-building, hoping to exert indirect pressure on Israel by proving to the international community that the Palestinians could be trusted with statehood. His priority was cooperating closely with the US and Israel in security matters.

Israel and the US strongly preferred Ab-

bas's approach, even forcing Arafat for a time to reduce his own influence by appointing Abbas to a newly created post of prime minister.

Israel's primary concern was that, however much of a prisoner they made Arafat, he would remain a unifying figure for Palestinians. By refusing to renounce armed struggle, Arafat managed to contain – if only just – the mounting tensions between his own Fatah movement and its chief rival, Hamas.

With Arafat gone, and the conciliatory Abbas installed in his place, those tensions erupted violently into the open – as Israel surely knew they would. That culminated in a split that tore apart the Palestinian national movement and led to a territorial schism between the Fatah-controlled West Bank and Hamas-ruled Gaza.

In Israel's oft-used terminology, Arafat was the head of the "infrastructure of terror".

But Israel's preference for Abbas derived not from respect for him or from a belief that he could successfully persuade Palestinians to accept a peace deal. Sharon famously declared that Abbas was no more impressive than a "plucked chicken".

Israel's interests in killing Arafat are evident when one considers what occurred after his death. Not only did the Palestinian national movement collapse, but the Palestinian leadership got drawn back into a series of futile peace talks, leaving Israel clear to concentrate on land grabs and settlement building.

Contemplating the matter of whether Israel benefited from the loss of Arafat, Palestinian analyst Mouin Rabbani observed: "Hasn't Abu Mazen's [Abbas'] exemplary commitment to Oslo over the years, and maintenance of security cooperation with Israel through thick and thin, already settled this question?"

Abbas' strategy may be facing its ultimate test now, as the Palestinian negotiating team once again try to coax out of Israel

Sharon famously declared that Abbas was no more impressive than a "plucked chicken"

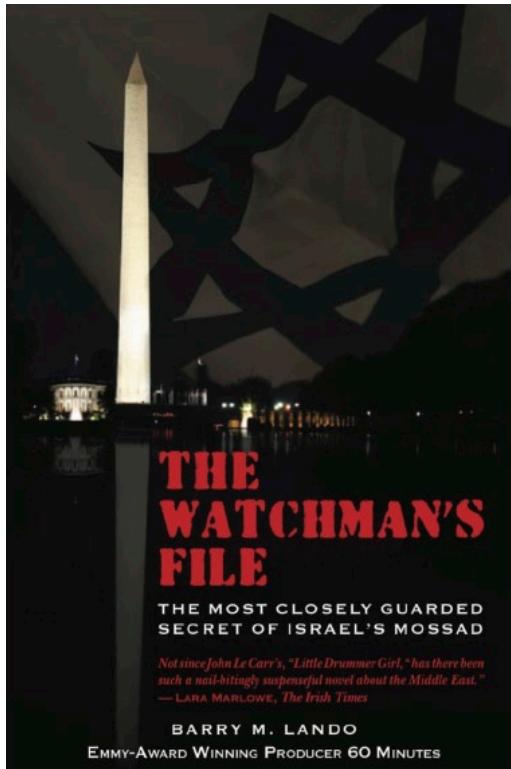
.....
Israel has so far announced in return a massive expansion of the settlements

the barest concessions on statehood at the risk of being blamed for the talks' inevitable failure. The effort already looks deeply misguided.

While the negotiations have secured for the Palestinians only a handful of ageing political prisoners, Israel has so far announced in return a massive expansion of the settlements and the threatened eviction of some 15,000 Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem.

It is doubtless a trade-off Arafat would have rued. **CT**

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



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Obamacare: The Republicans' long con

Michael I. Niman on the lies and vested interests that are killing real healthcare reform in the United States

Never underestimate the resilience of the Republican Party. After the fall of Tricky Dick Nixon, pundits wrote its eulogy, warning that the US was in danger of becoming a one-party state. Four years later, Republicans were back at the helm, taking the White House for another 12 years, only to surrender it to Bill Clinton, who succeeded in moving the Republican agenda forward better than any traditionally branded Republican.

Now once again, after the Republicans gave us two of the lamest House sessions in history, humiliating us internationally with crazed apocalyptic rhetoric while giving us the government shutdown and little else, the pundits are back at it, foretelling the 2014 collapse of the Republican brand.

What they don't understand and haven't factored in is the combined power of a short national attention span and a long con.

The long con is the Affordable Care Act, what both parties now term Obamacare, with the Democrats wagering on its eventual popularity and the Republicans on its failure. The global move toward universal healthcare came after World War II, with almost every industrialized nation, and many developing nations, guaranteeing a base level of healthcare to all of their citizens by the end of the 20th century. As momentum for a European- and Canadian-style single-

payer healthcare system grew in the US, Republicans turned toward their think tanks to come up with a plan to thwart healthcare reform.

Being nothing more than a mob of wholly owned flunkies for corporate greed and oligarchic wealth, Republican lawmakers prioritized their agenda. Since capturing the White House in 1980, they've been working to give the largest public sectors of the economy – education, prisons, and the military – over to corporate pillage, what they term “privatization,” opening new terrain to a corporate profit skim where no such skim previously existed.

The healthcare sector, however, which competes with the military for the largest slices of the budget pie, was already safely in corporate hands. With healthcare profits trickling into their campaign coffers, as well as those of compliant Democrats, maintaining this private, for-profit healthcare system has always been a top priority for the party. Any ersatz healthcare reform had to maintain this corporate domination.

Toward that end, the ultra-corporatist Heritage Foundation came up with the blueprint for a Republican plan for universal healthcare. They strategically tossed it at one of the bluest and most likely states to pioneer healthcare reform, but one that also had a Republican head of state: Mas-

The global move toward universal healthcare came after World War II, with almost every industrialized nation, and many developing nations, guaranteeing a base level of healthcare to all of their citizens by the end of the 20th century

WAR ON HEALTHCARE

The current system is working just fine, according to most Republicans, with corporations skimming profits both by poisoning people and by treating them

sachusetts. Thus was born Romneycare, the blueprint for what later became Obamacare. The Heritage plan allowed the universal healthcare juggernaut to move forward like a speeding locomotive, cleverly switching it to a siding that enshrined the entire corporate healthcare structure in perpetuity.

When Barack Obama was elected president with a promise to bring the US into the fold of civilized nations with the establishment of universal healthcare, Republicans geared up for a fight. Their “compromise” involved Obama adopting their plan – the Massachusetts model. As quickly as the president moved toward the Republican plan, the Republicans backed away from it, leaving Obama “owning” a structurally doomed system that has to both hold costs down while enshrining gigantic corporate profits and executive salaries. And it’s not just corporate profits that are driving up the cost of American healthcare.

The high costs of a sick population

Healthcare costs are also being driven up by the combined factors of an ever sicker population and healthcare advances that keep this sicker population alive and receiving treatment for longer periods of time.

While keeping people alive is good, making them sick isn’t. Yet the biggest disease vector is our consumer culture, which aggressively markets a toxic diet of industrial junk food, much of it subsidized by our endemically corrupt government, to an ever sickenning population. The results of a diet burdened by high fructose corn syrup, greasy sodium-laced fats, and feedlot-fattened meats is our historically unprecedented obesity epidemic, which in turn fuels a plethora of health problems ranging from cancer and heart disease to nervous system disorders. Add to that a mélange of chemical additives and pesticides in our food, and persistent environmental toxins, all of which contribute to cancer and a host of other ailments, and we get a glimpse of

the big picture behind spiraling healthcare needs and costs.

A comprehensive national healthcare system would work more holistically and efficiently, funding not just the treatment of sickness but the prevention of sickness and the promotion of health. Hence, a first step, for example, would be to stop subsidizing corn production and the infusion of high fructose corn syrup into our diet. This is off the table, however, because corporate agriculture, like the healthcare sector, is a major Republican sponsor.

The current system is working just fine, according to most Republicans, with corporations skimming profits both by poisoning people and by treating them. This is also good for the GDP, representing growing levels of economic activity as the population sickens.

A comprehensive healthcare system would also fund itself by capturing some of the societal costs that the sickening industries foist onto the public. Under the current system, producing unhealthy food is profitable since producers don’t have to include the costs of treating their victims on their balance sheets.

The same holds true for corporations that poison our air and water. A national healthcare system, backed by a Congress that isn’t corrupt, would develop mechanisms to move the costs of treating sick people back onto the balance sheets of the corporations that sicken them.

This is not radical socialism. It’s a conservative principle of making people and businesses individually responsible for their actions, instead of socializing the costs of treating the problems they create. The fix here would be in the form of a tax on unhealthy foods, and maybe a subsidy for healthy foods, which is already a popular idea around the world.

With junk food becoming more expensive, and healthy food becoming cheaper, the latter effect finally putting an end to the nutritional war against the poor, we’d

see a healthier nation and hence lower overall healthcare expenditures.

Again, however, this holistic approach to national healthcare is off the table as it threatens the junk food industry's ability to profit at the expense of the nation's health. The junk food industry is just one more dirty business that has invested in mob protection in the form of a bought-and-paid-for Congress.

With Obamacare, it's business as usual. In fact, this was one of the president's promises, that we wouldn't see any essential changes in the way our healthcare system operates. Locked into this status quo health plan is a continuing spiral of high costs, as we move forward giving corporations a near monopoly to treat an ever-sickening population. The sicker we get, the more money is spent treating us, the more dollars pass through the health insurance and treatment industries, the larger their skim.

The long con

The key to Obamacare's survival, and the health insurance industry's continuing support of the plan, is the universal mandate, where everyone has to carry insurance, subsidized by the government if you are poor, or by individuals if the government determines you can afford it. This will be a boon for the health insurance industry, as universal auto insurance mandates have been for auto insurers. This is also where the Republican long con comes into play.

The fly in the ointment is that young people never were big on buying health insurance. Odds are, they won't get sick. And if they do, they're often judgment proof, often near destitute as they start out in life, or financially upside-down, mired in student loan and credit card debt. So why pay for health insurance when you're essentially already bankrupt? Factor in the bravado of youth: Young people feel invulnerable, and often they pretty much are, so why think about disease or accidents?

The Heritage, Romneycare, Obamacare calculus mandates that insurance premiums paid by healthy young people, who won't need much care, will offset the expenses of caring for older sicker segments of the population. If this doesn't happen, the system won't pay for itself.

Insurance has always been about spreading risk over large populations. This concept is not new. But it is new to the health insurance industry, where insurance companies refused to sell policies to sick people and high-risk populations, leaving them to go without care, or to get rudimentary care and go bankrupt.

Applying a more democratic risk-sharing protocol to health insurance isn't so much about spreading a somewhat random risk, as in auto or home insurance, but in accepting a clear probability. And for young people, the probability is that they will shoulder the cost of caring for the sick and elderly. This is the concept behind most social programs, but nowhere is it made so clear as with a government mandate that you must buy a private insurance policy.

This is also where Republicans will apply their mischief as the next election cycle heats up. The old men who run the Republican Party will incite generational warfare against their own generation in an attempt to pry young voters away from the Democratic Party. And it just might work.

Saddled with college debt caused by Republican-sponsored cuts to higher education, or locked out of good blue collar manufacturing jobs as a result of Republican-backed free trade policies, young voters are feeling too much of a financial pinch to accept shouldering the costs of caring for a generation that, unlike them, enjoyed government-funded education and a better job market. Right now many young people, some encouraged by Republican-sponsored advertising campaigns promoting an Obamacare boycott among the young, aren't signing up for health insurance. Just about election time next year, the government will be

The sicker we get, the more money is spent treating us, the more dollars pass through the health insurance and treatment industries, the larger their skim

WAR ON HEALTHCARE

The old Republican men who engineered this crisis will position themselves as saviors of youth

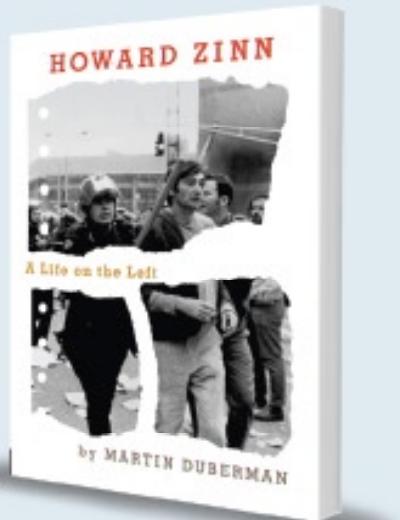
coming after them, enforcing the mandate to fork their meager savings over to the for-profit health insurance industry. This will also be the same time the old Republican men who engineered this crisis will position themselves as saviors of youth, protecting them from the overreach of what everyone has branded, Obamacare.

With the information dominance their

propaganda system enjoys, this will be the meme at election time, with 2013's Republican antics lost and forgotten down the memory hole.

CT

Michael I. Niman is a professor of journalism and media studies at SUNY Buffalo State. His previous columns are archived at www.mediastudy.com

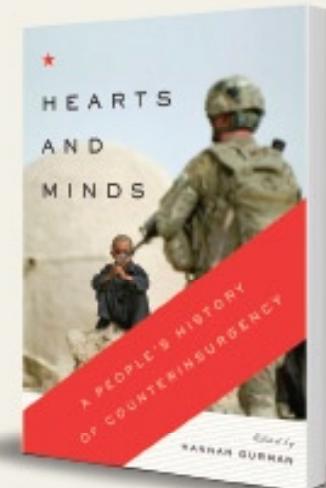


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Spend, don't mend

Advertising and consumerism dull our capacity for empathy, writes **George Monbiot**

Guilt is good. It's the feature that distinguishes the rest of the population from psychopaths. It's the sensation you are able to feel when you possess a capacity for empathy.

But guilt inhibits consumption. So a global industry has developed to smother it with a 13-tog duvet of celebrities and cartoon characters and elevator music. It seeks to persuade us not to see and not to feel. It seems to work.

The 2012 Greendex survey found that people in poorer countries feel, on average, much guiltier about their impacts on the natural world than people in rich countries. The places in which people feel least guilt are, in this order, Germany, the US, Australia and Britain, while the people of India, China, Mexico and Brazil have the greatest concerns. Our guilt, the survey reported, exists in inverse proportion to the amount of damage our consumption does. This is the opposite of what a thousand editorials in the corporate press tell us: that people cannot afford to care until they become rich. The evidence suggests we cease to care only when we become rich.

"Consumers in countries such as Mexico, Brazil, China and India," the survey tells us, "tend to be most concerned about issues like climate change, air and water pollution, species loss, and shortages of

fresh water ... In contrast, the economy and the cost of energy and fuel elicit the most concern among American, French and British consumers." The more you have, the more important money becomes. My guess is that in poorer countries empathy has not been so dulled by decades of mindless consumption.

Watch the latest advertisement for Toys 'R Us in the US. A man dressed up as a ranger herds children onto a green bus belonging to "the Meet the Trees Foundation". "Today we're taking the kids on the best field trip they could wish for," he confides to us. "And they don't even know it."

On the bus he starts teaching them, badly, about leaves. The children yawn and shift in their seats. Suddenly he announces, "but we're not going to the forest today ...". He strips off his ranger shirt. "We're going to Toys 'R Us guys!" The children go berserk. "We're going to get to play with all the toys, and you're going to get to choose any toy that you want!" The children run, in slow motion, down the aisles of the shop, then almost swoon as they caress their chosen toys.

Nature is tedious, plastic is thrilling. The inner-city children I took to the woods a few weeks ago would tell a different story, but hammer home the message often enough and it becomes true.

Nature is tedious,
plastic is thrilling.
The inner-city
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tell a different
story

.....
There's a smart cuckoo clock, for those whose dumb ones aren't up to the mark; and a remotely-operated kettle
.....

Christmas permits the global bullshit industry to recruit the values with which so many of us would like the festival to be invested – love, warmth, a community of spirit – to the sole end of selling things that no one needs or even wants. Sadly, like all newspapers, the *Guardian* participates in this orgy. Saturday Nov 23's magazine contained what looks like a shopping list for the last days of the Roman empire. There's a smart cuckoo clock, for those whose dumb ones aren't up to the mark; a remotely-operated kettle; a soap dispenser at £55; a mahogany skateboard (disgracefully, the provenance of the wood is mentioned by neither the *Guardian* nor the retailer(6)); a “papardelle rolling pin”, whatever the hell that is; £25 chocolate baubles; a £16 box of, er, garden twine.

Are we so bored, so affectless, that we need to receive this junk to ignite one last spark of hedonic satisfaction?

Have people become so immune to fellow feeling that they are prepared to spend £46 on a jar for dog treats or £6.50 a bang on personalised crackers, rather than give the money to a better cause? Or is this the Western world's potlatch, spending ridiculous sums on conspicuously useless gifts to enhance our social status? If so, we must have forgotten that those who are impressed by money are not worth impressing.

To service this peculiar form of mental illness, we must wear down the knap of the Earth, ream the surface of the planet with great holes, fleetingly handle the products of that destruction then dump the materials into another hole. A report by the Gaia Foundation reveals an explosive growth in the pace of mining: cobalt production up 165% in ten years, iron ore by 180%, a 50% increase in non-ferrous metals exploration between 2010 and 2011.

The products of this destruction are in everything: electronics, plastics, ceramics, paints, dyes, the packaging in which our futilities arrive. As the richest deposits are

mined out, ever more land must be attacked to maintain production. Even the most precious and destructive materials are junked when a new dopamine hit is required: the UK government reports that a tonne of gold embedded in electronics is landfilled in this country every year.

In August a most instructive row ignited within the Conservative Party. The environment minister Lord de Mauley urged people to repair their gadgets rather than junking them. This, he argued, was necessary to reduce the amount of landfill, in line with the European waste directive. The Telegraph reported that “the proposals risk alarming businesses that are struggling to increase demand for their products.”

The Tory MP Douglas Carswell demanded to know “since when do we need government to tell us what to do with broken toasters? ... having ruined our prospects of economic growth, the Eurocrats now seem to be giving us advice on how to make do and mend. The sooner we leave the European Union the better.”

He understood that the government's programme for economic recovery depends on unceasing consumption: that if people start repairing things, the scheme collapses; that mahogany skateboards and wifi kettles are necessary responses to a saturated market; that the iron god of growth to which we must bow demands that we spend the living world into oblivion.

“But old clothes are beastly,’ continued the untiring whisper. ‘We always throw away old clothes. Ending is better than mending, ending is better than mending.’. [Aldous Huxley's] *Brave New World* seems less fantastic every year.

CT

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George Monbiot's latest book is “Feral: Rewilding The Land, The Sea and Human Life.” This essay originally appeared in The Guardian newspaper. More of his work appears at his web site <http://monbiot.com>

Six lessons from Nelson Mandela

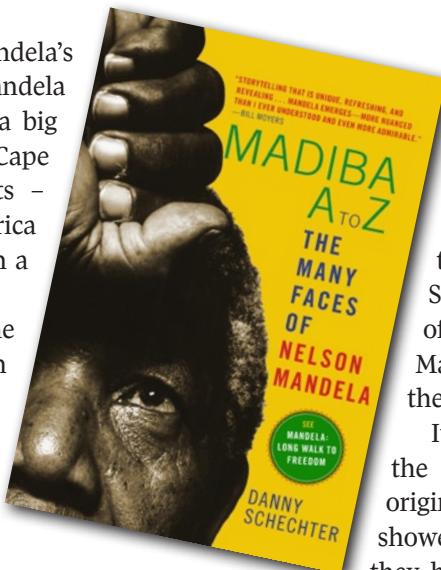
An excerpt from Danny Schechter's new book, *Madiba A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela*, published by Seven Stories Press

In 2012, I spent part of Mandela's July 18th birthday, Mandela Day, in South Africa, at a big high school outside of Cape Town. Hundreds of students – called "learners" in South Africa – gathered for an assembly in a packed exercise yard.

They began by singing the country's national anthem Nkosi Sikelel iAfrika, a hauntingly beautiful hymn asking the Lord to "Bless Africa." It was banned during the freedom struggle, and when it was sung the singers always held a fist aloft to express their determination to end apartheid.

The version that was heard that morning was a new one ordered by Mandela himself, fusing the original African words with a passage from *Die Stem*, the official national anthem when the Afrikaners ruled, and a third lyric in English underscoring that South Africa was now home for all national and racial groups.

The new anthem was a symbol of a post-1994 commitment to nonracialism and reconciliation. No longer does anyone wave fists aloft.



MADIBA A TO Z

*The Many Faces of
Nelson Mandela*

Danny Schechter
(Seven Stories Press)
\$16.95

After the anthem, there was one more song: a spirited "Happy Birthday" to Mandela. The version the kids adopted was the one introduced by Stevie Wonder, in one of his efforts to promote Mabiba's freedom during the prison years.

It wasn't clear to me if the kids knew the song's origins. If they didn't, it showed how seamlessly they had adopted the popular culture of an anti-apartheid movement with a global footprint. That song travelled smoothly from Stevie Wonder's studio in Hollywood to their school in the Cape Flats. The blind musician, first known as "Little Stevie Wonder," clearly felt the connection between

South Africa's history and heritage and his own, even as Nelson Mandela's ANC had its origins in Harlem in New York City, where the organization was born exactly a hundred years earlier, in 1912, the same year that American blacks founded the National Association For the Advancement of Col-

.....
The new anthem was a symbol of a post-1994 commitment to nonracialism and reconciliation. No longer does anyone wave fists aloft
.....

Mandela himself would enjoy their energy and adulation, but he would also try to tell them that he had not acted alone, that he was not Superman

ored People (NAACP), with similar goals to the ANC's.

After I filmed the enthusiastic, upbeat songs, I asked a few why they praised Mandela so effusively.

One told me how Mandela had "suffered and sacrificed" for South Africa. Others repeated that he had brought them "freedom," although it wasn't clear how they defined that, given they were attending an overcrowded, all-black school in a very poor township.

Most spoke of him as they might speak of superheroes they saw on television or at the movies – if they went to any. It was as if he had used a magic wand or superpowers to single-handedly throw off the yoke of oppression and lead South Africa, Jesus-like, to the promised land.

Mandela himself would enjoy their energy and adulation, but he would also try to tell them that he had not acted alone, that he was not Superman.

Students – learners – who get to see the *Mandela: Long Walk To Freedom* movie, or read this book and Mandela's autobiography of the same name will come to appreciate how long the struggle took, and how many obstacles had to be overcome. They will learn about people of different races and backgrounds who stood up for freedom and about the many who were beaten back, imprisoned, sometimes tortured and killed.

They will see a whole history unfold – unfortunately a history that is not always well taught in their schools or in a culture that in its insistence to move forward all too often passes over the experiences of so many who gave so much for the new South Africa they are inheriting.

I like to think of six lessons I have learned from Madiba.

The movie tells Madiba's story on a political and personal level. It shows how he went from a rural area to attend school, and then university and law school. It shows how as a lawyer he fought for clients who

were mistreated and deprived of their rights. You see how even as he became a leader he realized that he could never be free until his country was. That is the first lesson: We are connected to others and their needs are as important as our own.

He then discovered that he personally could not bring about the changes that he realized were necessary. There is a scene in the film where Mandela and his friends – Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Ahmad Kathrada, and others say that to make a fist you need many fingers, and to build a movement you need many people. That's the second lesson – the need for collective action, not just individual protest.

The third lesson is that you can't win unless you reach out to others, to like-minded Indians, whites, and Afrikaners. The movement became like an army when others realized the value of working together in alliances across racial and religious lines.

He then realized that you have to understand your enemies if you hope to overcome them. Madiba's fourth lesson was that he had to learn to speak Afrikaans, and win over people who feared him.

The fifth lesson was that the movement had to be flexible and people had to learn by doing. That meant making mistakes and learning from them. The movement went from nonviolence to violence, from community organizing to educating comrades in prison. (That's why Robben Island came to be called "Robben Island University.") He was diplomatic when diplomacy was needed, and militant when an armed struggle was required to defend the people.

He realized that South Africans couldn't win their freedom by themselves because Apartheid was such a powerful system. That's why he and the ANC reached out to friends and foes, to the United Nations, and other South Africans, Africans and people of the world to support the struggle.

Even as the apartheid South African government tried to isolate them by throwing activists in jail, he and his comrades isolat-

ed the government with boycotts and sanctions that forced the all-white ruling party to negotiate, to free prisoners and, ultimately, to end Apartheid. This sixth lesson was decisive: You need to pressure your enemies by every means possible.

Those are the six lessons Madiba taught me. When you ask yourself what you would have done under the circumstances, what list do you come up with?

Would you have had the courage to stand up as Mandela and his comrades stood up, to take personal risks for freedom, or would you have stayed on the sidelines and only

worried about yourself?

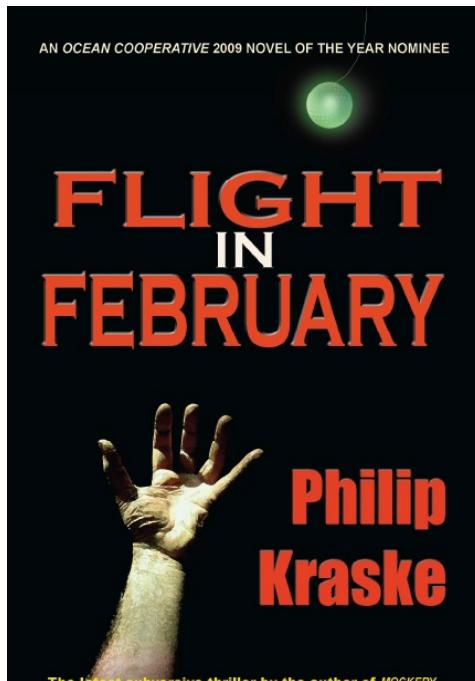
Delving into this fascinating history can help you appreciate your own past.

Madiba has had a long life. If you asked him when he was your age if he believed he might spend much of his adult life in prison, and then go from prisoner to president, he would have laughed at you. It would have seemed so preposterous, an impossible nightmare, an impossible dream. **CT**

News Dissector Danny Schechter blogs at <http://newsdissector.net> and edits mediachannel – <http://mediachanel.org>

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**FLIGHT IN
FEBRUARY**

Veterans' Day, from another angle

Fred Reed joins a gathering of Marine veterans, listens to their speeches and explains why he's not quite as proud of the corps as they are

How exactly had remote wars against primitive societies on the other side of the world protected our freedom?

As I write, it is Veterans' Day. Coincidentally last night, November tenth, the annual Marine Corps birthday party took place at the Trattoria, a local Italian restaurant. I hadn't gone before, not being much of a joiner, but went this time with Vi and Natalia. The assembled were nice people, well along in years, as am I. There were good food, patriotic speeches, and a birthday cake. We sang the Marine Corps Hymn, though "from the halls of Montezuma" was perhaps not a high point of diplomatic appropriateness in Mexico.

A camaraderie exists among Marines, into which I fit oddly. It starts with boot camp at Parris Island or, for the Hollywood Marines, at the recruit depot in San Diego. Men remember it because it was hard, demanding, a rite of passage to manhood. I understand that boot has been watered down as the country moves toward the goal of a non-violent Marine Corps, but in the Sixties it hadn't been. If you got through it, you had done something, and you knew it. Those who hadn't were an inferior species. We remember it with fondness, and a bond.

And then for Marines there are the wars, which we always have. I don't know why. For most at the Trattoria, it was I suppose Southeast Asia. We had talk of sacrifice and duty. There is a romance to war that has called to men since well before the days of Marcus Aurelius wintering on the Rhine-Danube line,

when Rome, not America, was Rome. War is another bond.

For me it was lying in the tropical night of Danang on top of a sand-bagged Amtrac, LVT P5, big engine growling at the idle, star shells flickering high and trailing white smoke that looked almost solid, rifle in hand, occasional spent bullets from the valley below zzzzzzzzzzzzz! overhead. It was a time for men, of big events, away from the sorry life we would mostly retune to of offices and soft pogues for bosses.

So I understand when veterans get together and give patriotic speeches at a thousand Legion halls around the world. Yet, listening to the speeches, I wondered at the near total disconnect from reality. We Marines, I heard over and over, had made sacrifices "to protect our freedom." Made sacrifices or been sacrificed? How exactly, I wondered, had remote wars against primitive societies on the other side of the world protected our freedom? As so often, I marveled at the automatic assumption that America is somehow more free than other places. How more free than Switzerland, Australia, Japan, Germany, or Holland? I feel freer in Mexico than in the growing police state to the north.

Most veterans in the Legion halls have had little contact with people in other countries, especially with the people of the countries where they have fought. I did. I covered the last year of the debacle in Vietnam, 1974-75,

as a stringer for *Army Times*. A very green reporter cutting my teeth on a big story, I lived in \$20-a-month rooms in back alleys, close to the bone.

There I found the Viets, the Cambodians, the Chinese to be likable sorts, damned interesting, caught up in a godawful tragedy not of their making and beyond their understanding. They didn't understand about our freedom. They didn't understand why half a million foreigners were in their country, bombing, shelling, napalming, burning, killing. Which is exactly what we were doing.

A decade of so back, I was visiting friends in Bangkok and decided to catch the train north to Nong Khai on the Thai-Lao border and spend a week in Laos. I took a room in a hotel on the Mekong, not much more than a large creek at that point. At a local pizzeria I met a young Lao woman who spoke English and, with her husband, ran a jackleg tour service. He had a car.

Laos was then, as it was during the war, a slow, hot, pleasant Asian backwater posing no threat to anyone at all. We drove through endless quiet, quiet, quiet, hot, hot, hot countryside to see what was there. At one point we stopped in Vientiane to talk to some of the young woman's friends. They spoke English. She mentioned something about before her father died. What happened to him, I asked?

"He died fighting the Americans."

Wrong question.

How many Laos did we butcher for nothing, how many Vietnamese, how many Cambodians? Millions, literally. For nothing. Nothing. How many Iraqis? Afghans? Pakistanis? If any of it preserved my freedom, I am unaware of it.

How many in the Legion halls, the Marine Corps birthdays – they are friendly, decent, likeable men – have any idea of this?

Cambodia: Another sleepy land of jungle and silence and horrendous death, thanks to protecting our freedom. During the siege, I lived on a rooftop apartment at 98 Jawaharlal Nehru Street, shared with Steve Hedder, a young stringer for *Time* or *Newsweek*, I forgot

which. Half of it was patio, open to the sky.

Here was more of the poisoned romance of war. Often we lay under the night, floating in a Nembutal haze, the smell of flower trees thick in the air and charcoal smells and low murmur of Khmer voices from neighboring roofs. There was the occasional whistling twitter of Chicom 107s sailing in from the swamps, kerboom, but we knew we were out of range. Oh yes.

There were living with us two young Khmer girls, perhaps sixteen, sisters I think of Steve's Cambodian wife Devi. They were pretty, slender, sweet kids. I could talk to them because they had learned French at the Alliance Francaise and mine, while it would have caused the entire nation of France to retch in three-part harmony, was adequate for communication.

The end came. Steve got Devi out in the evacuation, but not the girls. Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, a direct result of the destabilization of Southeast Asia by the US, took Phnom Penh. The KR proceeded to kill, by torture, beating, starvation or overwork, anyone with soft hands – students, intellectuals, the middle class. The girls didn't have a chance. Rifle-butted to death? Raped and bayoneted? Fell from exhaustion on the forced exodus from the city? I don't know.

But please God, not Tuol Sleng, the torture operation set up by the KR in a former girls' school. I went there many years later and wished I hadn't. Far better to be raped and bayoneted. God knows how many of these poor innocents were tortured to death in Tuol Sleng, a place the CIA would love. After the war a friend found a picture of a former girlfriend in the death records. We are, however, still free.

The rest of the planet pays a high price for our freedom. This is no doubt justified because we are the city of the hill, a light to the nations, bringing democracy and human rights to a globe thirsty for improvement by us. I have just never seen it. I like the people at the Legion halls, at birthdays for the Marine Corps, but I may be a little less proud of what we did.

**How many Laos
did we butcher for
nothing, how many
Vietnamese, how
many Cambodians?
Millions, literally.
For nothing**

Fred Reed lives
in Mexico. He has
worked for *Army
Times*, *The
Washingtonian*,
Soldier of Fortune,
*Federal Computer
Week*, and
*The Washington
Times*. His web site
is [http://fredon
everything.net](http://fredon
everything.net)

CT

Paying the toll on the economic highway

William John Cox explains how to make our tax systems more equitable

We should hear a tiny “ka-ching” every time stocks, bonds and futures are bought and sold, every time currencies and derivatives are traded, and whenever an oil company buys a new drilling rig or a bank rolls the dice in the financial casino

The political coma of the US government induced by Congress and its failure to represent those who elect it can ultimately be traced to the unfair and complex system of income taxation. Better for the country and more equitable for its taxpayers would be a toll tax on the movement of all money along the nation’s economic highway.

Not a national sales tax, not a value-added tax, not a flat income tax, and not a speculation tax, but rather a slight levy should be imposed on *every* single financial transaction. Not just every time you fill up your gas tank or buy groceries, but we should hear a tiny “ka-ching” every time stocks, bonds and futures are bought and sold, every time currencies and derivatives are traded, and whenever an oil company buys a new drilling rig or a bank rolls the dice in the financial casino.

The federal government could easily operate on revenues produced by a “toll tax” of less than one percent on the movement of *all* money. Significantly, the payment of taxes would shift to those who most profit from government – from individuals to corporations and from the laboring poor to the wealthy elite, who would pay taxes on their money games and spending for luxuries, instead of their “income.”

A toll tax would result in a slight increase in the overall cost of goods and services;

however, the toll would apply to *all* monetary transactions, including financial manipulations by the wealthy, who engage in every imaginable scheme to avoid having any “taxable income.”

A “transaction tax” was first suggested by James Tobin 40 years ago and expanded upon by University of Wisconsin Professor Edgar L. Feige, who has proposed an Automated Payment Transaction Tax.

Professor Feige believes the payment of taxes should be split between the transaction parties and paid immediately. While the automatic payment of taxes into sequestered tax accounts by financial institutions could and should be easily accommodated, most individuals and companies would find it more difficult to comply. Moreover, there would be a temptation to avoid taxes by engaging in cash transactions.

For most taxpayers, collection of the toll tax could occur somewhat like the current income tax, in that individuals, small businesses and corporations would still prepare and file an annual tax report. The preparation of returns, however, would be simplified and tax fraud greatly reduced.

Let’s consider a married couple with joint earnings of \$100,000. Their employers would still prepare 1099 and W-2 forms, and the couple would file a return setting forth incoming money. They would then deduct the amount paid out for health in-

surance, including Medicare, and further reduce their outlay by the amount paid into Social Security, IRAs, 401(k) plans, and into federally-insured savings accounts. From a policy standpoint, these funds are not spent until withdrawn and circulated.

When allowable deductions are subtracted from income, the difference would be how much money the couple spent. Their toll tax would be paid on the balance, and even without any deductions, a one-percent tax would only be \$1,000. Since, however, it has been suggested that a 0.35 percent toll tax would produce the same revenue as the present income tax, the couple's annual toll tax could be as low as \$350.

In addition to simplifying their accounting procedures, a toll tax would provide other benefits for businesses and corporations. To the extent they are owned by US citizens and their salaries are paid to US citizens, businesses, corporations and other organizations should not have to pay a toll tax on their payroll, as salaries would be di-

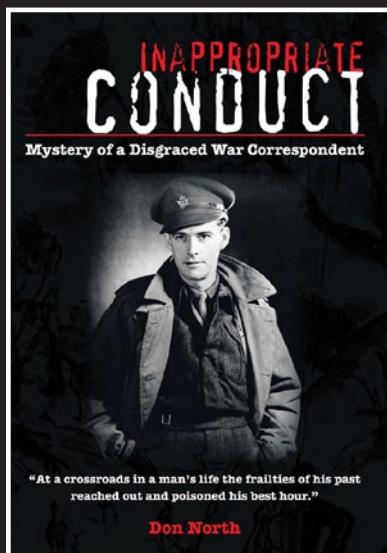
rectly passed through to their employees to spend (and to be taxed) in the economy.

Payrolls paid to foreign workers by American businesses, however, should be subject to the toll tax, as the money would not pass through the US economy. This provision could reverse the current trend of "outsourcing" American jobs.

Finally, while the Earned Income Tax Credit was well intentioned, it has encouraged wide-spread fraud and many resent it as a socialistic redistribution of income. The credit should be eliminated, and all spending above an established "poverty line" should be reported and taxed. Every individual, rich and poor, and every business, large and small, should support good government by fairly contributing to a uniform toll tax that is the least painful and most equitable – a true "win-win" for all. **CT**

William John Cox is a retired prosecutor and public interest lawyer who writes on political, policy and social matters.

"I went in behind the lines and emerged as a kind of agent. I went in as a reporter and came out a kind of soldier. I sometimes wish I had never gone in at all" – Paul Morton



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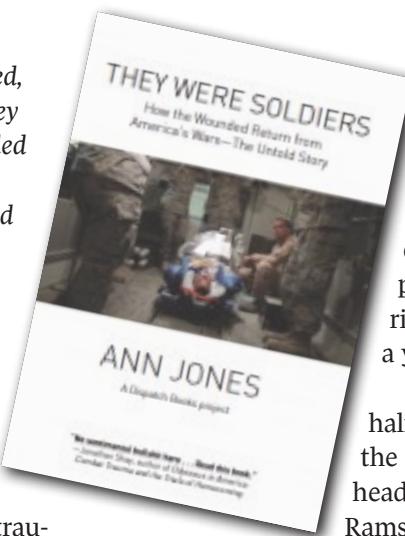
An excerpt from *They Were Soldiers: How The Wounded Return From America's Wars*, the new book by Ann Jones, published by Dispatch Books

This evening, the ambulance from LRMC heading for the flight line at Ramstein will be full of critical-care patients, so I leave the hospital early and board the plane to watch the medical teams bring them aboard

This is an excerpt, slightly adapted, from Ann Jones's new book *They Were Soldiers: How the Wounded Return from America's Wars – The Untold Story*, just published by Dispatch Books/Haymarket Books

In 2010, I began to follow US soldiers down a long trail of waste and sorrow that led from the battle spaces of Afghanistan to the emergency room of the trauma hospital at Bagram Air Base, where their catastrophic wounds were surgically treated and their condition stabilized. Then I accompanied some of them by cargo plane to Ramstein Air Base in Germany for more surgeries at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, or LRMC (pronounced Larm-See), the largest American hospital outside the United States.

Once stabilized again, those critical patients who survived would be taken by ambulance a short distance back to Ramstein, where a C-17 waited to fly them across the Atlantic to Dover Air Base in Delaware. There, tall, multilayered ambulances awaited the wounded for the last leg of their



THEY WERE SOLDIERS
How The Wounded
Return From America's
Wars – The Untold
Story
Ann Jones
(Dispatch Books/
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many-thousand-mile journey to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington D.C. or the Naval Hospital at Bethesda, Maryland, where, depending upon their injuries, they might remain for a year or two, or more.

Now, we are in Germany, halfway home. This evening, the ambulance from LRMC heading for the flight line at Ramstein will be full of critical-care patients, so I leave the hospital early and board the plane to watch the medical teams bring them aboard. They've done this drill many times a week since the start of the Afghan War. They are practiced, efficient, and fast, and so we are soon in the air again. This time, with a full load.

Two rows of double bunks flank an aisle down the center of the C-17, all occupied by men tucked under homemade patchwork quilts emblazoned with flags and eagles, the handiwork of patriotic American women. Along the walls of the fuselage, on straight-backed seats of nylon mesh, sit the ambulatory casualties from the Contingency Aeromedical Staging Facil-

ity (CASF), the holding ward for noncritical patients just off the flight line at Ramstein.

At the back of the plane, slung between stanchions, are four litters with critical care patients, and there among them is the same three-man CCAT (Critical Care Air Transport) team I accompanied on the flight from Afghanistan. They've been back and forth to Bagram again since then, but here they are in fresh brown insulated coveralls, clean shaven, calm, cordial, the doctor busy making notes on a clipboard, the nurse and the respiratory therapist checking the monitors and machines on the SMEEDs. (A SMEED, or Special Medical Emergency Evacuation Device, is a raised aluminum table affixed to a patient's gurney.) Designed to bridge the patient's lower legs, a SMEED is now often used in the evacuation of soldiers who don't have any.

Here again is Marine Sergeant Wilkins, just as he was on the flight from Afghanistan: unconscious, sedated, intubated, and encased in a vacuum spine board. The doctor tells me that the staff at LRMC removed Wilkins's breathing tube, but they had to put it back. He remains in cold storage, like some pod-person in a sci-fi film. You can hardly see him in there, inside the black plastic pod. You can't determine if he is alive or dead without looking at the little needles on the dials of the machines on the SMEED. Are they wavering? Hard to tell.

The CCAT team has three other critical patients to think about. They are covered with white sheets and blankets, but it's easy to see that the second patient is missing both legs. His right hand is swathed in thick bandages, almost as fat as a football. His face is ripped and torn so that his features appear to be not quite where they belong, but pushed up and to one side – his nose split and turned askew. He's sedated and on a ventilator meant to assist his breathing, but his chest convulses as he struggles with the job.

The respiratory therapist hovers, checking monitors, adjusting a breathing tube,

and the man quiets. But not for long. The IED blast that took off both his legs above the knee bypassed his pelvis to slam into his chest. He must have been doubled over, crouching, when he walked onto the bomb. The impact damaged his lungs in ways not yet fully understood, so that now when he breathes on his own, every breath costs him more than he has to give.

The CCAT team confers. To stop the convulsive effort to breathe, the doctor can paralyze him and let the ventilator do the work of respiration, but that means removing from his intestine the feeding tube pumping in the calories he needs to heal these catastrophic wounds. It's a fine line, and the team walks it for the next hour until it's clear the man needs rest more than nourishment. Then the doctor administers a drug, the body grows still as stone, and the soldier inside sleeps softly while the ventilator steadily breathes in and breathes out.

Patient number three is breathing on his own and fast asleep, a saline drip feeding into his arm. He looks okay, but for the flattening of the blanket under the SMEED. He's lost both legs, but both below the knee. He has his hands. He has his junk. Of these four patients, he's the one the military and the media will call "lucky." But the doctor doesn't call him that. He says, "You can't assess his injuries in comparison to those of other soldiers who happen to be on the same plane. You have to assess them in comparison to who he was before." He is a boy who used to have legs and now he doesn't.

The fourth CCAT patient is a darkly handsome kid who lost both legs to an IED. His right arm ends in a bulbous bandage, but something about its shape suggests the hand might still be all there. He's conscious and breathing on his own, vaguely gazing at a thin woman in blond boots and a light jacket who stands next to his litter and clutches at the rail as if to hold herself upright.

She was called to LRMC because her son was close to death, but she is now taking

Marine Sergeant Wilkins remains in cold storage, like some pod-person in a sci-fi film. You can hardly see him in there, inside the black plastic pod

.....
"His right arm is all there, but the hand is blasted. He'll probably lose his fingers at least, but he may have enough of a hand left to power a wheel chair on his own. It's hard to say. He lost one testicle, too, and part of the penis and urethra"
.....

him home, what's left of him, alive. In the dim light, she looks dazed, but she leans over him and speaks into his ear and soon he sleeps. The doctor tells me that the boy, a Marine, lost one leg below the knee, and the other very high up – too high for him to wear a prosthetic leg.

"He'll be in a wheel chair," the doctor says. "It's doubtful he'll ever walk. His right arm is all there, but the hand is blasted. He'll probably lose his fingers at least, but he may have enough of a hand left to power a wheel chair on his own. It's hard to say. He lost one testicle, too, and part of the penis and urethra. But he could still be fertile. There's a chance."

The cavernous plane is very cold. There's a blanket on each of the seats along the wall. I wrap myself up and sit down next to my military minder Sergeant Julian, mainly to stay out of the way of the CASF nurses who are busy checking on their patients, getting those on the bunks well settled for the long flight. The mother of the handsome kid has also sunk into a seat next to her son's litter, but she leans forward, still clutching the bedrail as if to hang on to her boy. She has thrown a blanket around her like a cape, but even at a distance I can see that she's cold. I pick up a spare blanket and take it to her. She looks up as I hold it out to her wordlessly in the deafening plane. "I'm fine," she says, loudly enough for me to hear.

"Your son?"

"He's fine." She looks at him and changes tense. "He's going to be fine."

"That's good," I say.

"He's alive. He almost wasn't, but he's alive. He's fine."

I offer the blanket again. "Take it. Keep warm."

Later I notice that she has made a cocoon of the blankets and slumped over the adjacent seat to sleep. Only toward the end of the flight, when she must be feeling some relief that her son is going to survive it, does she begin to tell me about him. She got word of his injury when he was still in the field

hospital in Helmand Province, and she arrived at LRMC from southern California the same day he was brought in from Bagram. Three days later, miraculously, she is bringing him home. Well, not home really, but to the States anyway, to the Naval hospital at Bethesda, Maryland.

Her son has an older brother who deployed once to Iraq and once to Afghanistan and now is safe at home in California. But this boy, a Marine, had a training accident that left him with a head injury requiring brain surgery. He was medically discharged, but reenlisted and was deployed to Afghanistan. He had been there two months when his unit was assigned to clean up an area another unit had officially cleared of Taliban. You remember the policy: clear, hold, and build. They were doing the hold part when he stepped on the IED. The other Marine, the one who can't breathe, was hit by the same blast, or maybe another one at the same time. "They told me how it happened," she says, "but I don't think I heard."

Months later, I will call her in California to see how her son is getting along. He's still in the hospital. They're still working on his wounds. He's not doing any rehab yet. But the military moved him to San Diego so she and her husband can visit him often. She says he's doing "fine," though it will still be many months before he can come home.

In the meantime, her contractor husband has enlisted his friends to help widen doorways, lower light switches, build ramps, and reconstruct a bathroom on the ground floor for a boy in a wheelchair. It's a weekend and I can hear them hammering as we talk on the phone. "They say he'll always be in a wheelchair," she says, her voice shaking. "I was in our pool this morning, and I realized that he'll never be able to get into it by himself. He loves the pool." I stay on the line, listening to her cry. She says, "He's a beautiful swimmer."

On the plane I talk to some of the ambulatory patients sitting along the walls, wrapped in blankets like so many Pashtuns.

Most are hurt just enough to have to be out of action for a while. One boy got a boot caught in the door of an armored vehicle, an MRAP, that wasn't moving at the time. It's a long way down from the passenger seat. He broke his arm. He blurts this out, then tells me he worries about what he's going to say back at his home base. "I can't tell them I just fell out."

Another kid dropped a barbell in the gym and broke some bones in his foot. Two others hadn't recovered from chronic back pain and muscle spasms induced by carrying too much weight. Doctors sent them back downrange to their units two or three times and each time they broke down again. The painkillers had only left them dazed. One says, "Everything still hurts, and you can't remember what you're doing, so it makes you nervous. So now they're sending me home because I guess maybe the pain doesn't make you so nervous in the US of A."

One young man collapsed while jogging at a base in the Persian Gulf. "I need a new valve in my heart," he says, "so they're sending me home to get it done there. I'm really lucky they found it. The Army saved my life." His wife sits beside him, wearing a brand new Frankfurt sweatshirt and a bracelet dripping with gnomes. While the doctors at LRMC assessed her husband's cardiac function, she went shopping. She tells me confidentially, "I for sure didn't want to sit

around any old hospital."

An older Army officer calls me over and gestures toward the empty seat by his side. He sits ramrod straight, wrapped in his blanket, and speaks through tight lips as if he fears what might come out of his mouth. "I've been in the Army twenty-six years," he says, "and I can tell you it's a con."

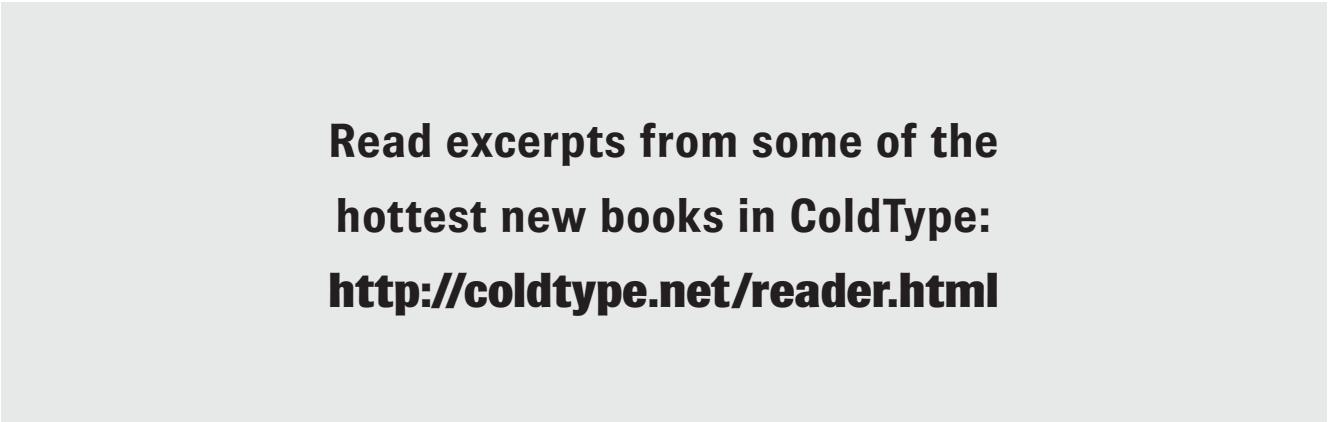
He has been an adviser to the chief counterterrorism officer in Iraq. It's hard even to imagine what's involved in work like that, but his version of his job description evidently failed to match the official checklist of his boss. He doesn't think much of military bosses or politicians or Americans in general who send the lowliest 1% to fight wars that make the other 1%, on the high end, "monu-fuckin'-mentally rich."

He says he's going home for "psych reasons" caused by "life," and he is never going to deploy again. He has two sons, 21 and 23, in college, "They won't have to serve," he says. "Before that happens, I'll shoot them myself."

I ask if he has any particular reason to dislike the military so intensely. "War is absurd," he says. "Boys don't know any better. But for a grown man to be trapped in stupid wars – it's embarrassing, it's humiliating, it's absurd." **CT**

One boy got a boot caught in the door of an armored vehicle, an MRAP, that wasn't moving at the time. It's a long way down from the passenger seat. He broke his arm

Ann Jones is a journalist, photographer (Getty Images), and the author of eight books of nonfiction. Copyright 2013 Ann Jones



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Listening in

William Blum on the National Security Agency – the only part of the US government that really listens to what you have to say

What would the National Security Agency – on moral principle – refuse to say or do?

The New York Times (November 2) ran a long article based on NSA documents released by Edward Snowden. One of the lines that most caught my attention concerned “Sigint” – Signals intelligence, the term used for electronic intercepts. The document stated:

“Sigint professionals must hold the moral high ground, even as terrorists or dictators seek to exploit our freedoms. Some of our adversaries will say or do anything to advance their cause; we will not.”

What, I wondered, might that mean? What would the National Security Agency – on moral principle – refuse to say or do?

I have on occasion asked people who reject or rationalize any and all criticism of US foreign policy: “What would the United States have to do in its foreign policy to lose your support? What, for you, would be too much?” I’ve yet to get a suitable answer to that question. I suspect it’s because the person is afraid that whatever they say I’ll point out that the United States has already done it.

The United Nations vote on the Cuba embargo – 22 years in a row

For years American political leaders and media were fond of labeling Cuba an “international pariah”. We haven’t heard that for a very long time. Perhaps one reason is the annual vote in the United Nations General

Assembly on the resolution which reads: “Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba”. This is how the vote has gone (not including abstentions):

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

| | | |
|------|-------|-------------------|
| | | Islands, Palau |
| 2008 | 185-3 | US, Israel, Palau |
| 2009 | 187-3 | US, Israel, Palau |
| 2010 | 187-2 | US, Israel |
| 2011 | 186-2 | US, Israel |
| 2012 | 188-3 | US, Israel, Palau |
| 2013 | 188-2 | US, Israel |

Each fall the UN vote is a welcome reminder that the world has not completely lost its senses and that the American empire does not completely control the opinion of other governments.

Speaking before the General Assembly, October 29, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez declared: “The economic damages accumulated after half a century as a result of the implementation of the blockade amount to \$1.126 trillion.” He added that the blockade “has been further tightened under President Obama’s administration”, some 30 US and foreign entities being hit with \$2.446 billion in fines due to their interaction with Cuba.

However, the American envoy, Ronald Godard, in an appeal to other countries to oppose the resolution, said:

“The international community ... cannot in good conscience ignore the ease and frequency with which the Cuban regime silences critics, disrupts peaceful assembly, impedes independent journalism and, despite positive reforms, continues to prevent some Cubans from leaving or returning to the island. The Cuban government continues its tactics of politically motivated detentions, harassment and police violence against Cuban citizens.”

So there you have it. That is why Cuba must be punished. One can only guess what Mr. Godard would respond if told that more than 7,000 people were arrested in the United States during the Occupy Movement’s first 8 months of protest; that their encampments were violently smashed up; that many of them were physically abused by the police.

Does Mr. Godard ever read a newspaper

or the Internet, or watch television? Hardly a day passes in America without a police officer shooting to death an unarmed person?

As to “independent journalism” – what would happen if Cuba announced that from now on anyone in the country could own any kind of media? How long would it be before CIA money – secret and unlimited CIA money financing all kinds of fronts in Cuba – would own or control most of the media worth owning or controlling?

The real reason for Washington’s eternal hostility toward Cuba? The fear of a good example of an alternative to the capitalist model; a fear that has been validated repeatedly over the years as Third World countries have expressed their adulation of Cuba.

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

The Cold War Revisited

I’ve written the Introduction to a new book recently published in Russia that is sort of an updating of my book *Killing Hope*. Here is a short excerpt:

The Cold War had not been a struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. It had been a struggle between the United States and the Third World, which,

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The Cold War had typically been a movement by the United States in support of dictatorships, authoritarian regimes and corrupt oligarchies

in the decade following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, continued in Haiti, Somalia, Iraq, Yugoslavia and elsewhere.

The Cold War had not been a worldwide crusade by America to halt Soviet expansion, real or imaginary. It had been a worldwide crusade by America to block political and social changes in the Third World, changes opposed by the American power elite.

The Cold War had not been a glorious and noble movement of freedom and democracy against Communist totalitarianism. It had typically been a movement by the United States in support of dictatorships, authoritarian regimes and corrupt oligarchies which were willing to follow Washington's party line on the Left, US corporations, Israel, oil, military bases, et al. and who protected American political and economic interests in their countries in exchange for the American military and CIA keeping them in power against the wishes of their own people.

In other words, whatever the diplomats at the time thought they were doing, the Cold War revisionists have been vindicated. American policy had been about imperialism and military expansion.

Apropos the countless other myths we were all taught about the Soviet Union is this letter I recently received from one of my readers, a Russian woman, age 49, who moved to the United States eight years ago and now lives in Northern Virginia:

I can't imagine why anybody is surprised to hear when I say I miss life in the Soviet Union: what is bad about free healthcare and education, guaranteed employment, guaranteed free housing? No rent or mortgage of any kind, only utilities, but they were subsidized too, so it was really pennies. Now, to be honest, there was a waiting list to get those apartments, so some people got them quicker, some people had to wait for years, it all depended on where you worked. And there were no homeless people, and crime was way lower. As a first grader I was taking the public trans-

portation to go to school, which was about 1 hour away by bus (it was a big city, about the size of Washington DC, we lived on the outskirts, and my school was downtown), and it was fine, all other kids were doing it. Can you even imagine this being done now? I am not saying everything was perfect, but overall, it is a more stable and socially just system, fair to everybody, nobody was left behind. This is what I miss: peace and stability, and not being afraid of the future.

Problem is, nobody believes it, they will say that I am a brainwashed "tovarish" [comrade]. I've tried to argue with Americans about this before, but just gave up now. They just refuse to believe anything that contradicts what CNN has been telling them for all their lives. One lady once told me: "You just don't know what was going on there, because you did not have freedom of speech, but we, Americans, knew everything, because we could read about all of this in our media." I told her "I was right there! I did not need to read about this in the media, I lived that life!", but she still was unconvinced! You will not believe what she said: "Yes, maybe, but we have more stuff!". Seriously, having 50 kinds of cereal available in the store, and walmarts full of plastic junk is more valuable to Americans than a stable and secure life, and social justice for everybody?

Of course there are people who lived in the Soviet Union who disagree with me, and I talked to them too, but I find their reasons just as silly. I heard one Russian lady whose argument was that Stalin killed "30, no 40 million people". First of all it's not true (I don't in any way defend Stalin, but I do think that lying and exaggerating about him is as wrong)*, and second of all what does this have to do with the 70s, when I was a kid? By then life was completely different. I heard other arguments, like food shortages (again, not true, it's not like there was no food at all, there were shortages of this or that specific product, like you wouldn't find mayo or bologna in the store some days, but everything else was there!). So, you would come back next day, or in 2-3 days,

and you would find them there. Really, this is such a big deal? Or you would have to stay in line to buy some other product, (ravioli for example). But how badly do you want that ravioli really that day, can't you have anything else instead? Just buy something else, like potatoes, where there was no line.

Was this annoying, yes, and at the time I was annoyed too, but only now I realized that I would much prefer this nuisance to my present life now, when I am constantly under stress for the fear that I can possibly lose my job (as my husband already did), and as a result, lose everything else – my house? You couldn't possibly lose your house in Soviet Union, it was yours for life, mortgage free. Only now, living here in the US, I realized that all those soviet nuisances combined were not as important as the benefits we had – housing, education, healthcare, employment, safe streets, all sort of free after school activities (music, sports, arts, anything you want) for kids, so parents never had to worry about what we do all day till they come home in the evening.

* We've all heard the figures many times ... 10 million ... 20 million ... 40 million ... 60 million ... died under Stalin. But what does the number mean, whichever number you choose? Of course many people died under Stalin, many people died under Roosevelt, and many people are still dying under Bush. Dying appears to be a natural phenomenon in every country. The question is how did those people die under Stalin? Did they die from the famines that plagued the USSR in the 1920s and 30s? Did the Bolsheviks deliberately create those famines? How? Why? More people certainly died in India in the 20th century from famines than in the Soviet Union, but no one accuses India of the mass murder of its own citizens. Did the millions die from disease in an age before antibiotics? In prison? From what causes? People die in prison in the United States on a regular basis. Were millions actually murdered in cold blood? If so, how? How many were criminals executed for non-political crimes? The logistics of murdering tens of millions of people is daunting.

Let's not repeat the Barack fuckup with Hillary

Not that it really matters who the Democrats nominate for the presidency in 2016. Whoever that politically regressive and morally bankrupt party chooses will be at best an uninspired and uninspiring centrist; in European terms a center-rightist; who believes that the American Empire – despite the admittedly occasional excessive behavior – is mankind's last great hope. The only reason I bother to comment on this question so far in advance of the election is that the forces behind Clinton have clearly already begun their campaign and I'd like to use the opportunity to try to educate the many progressives who fell in love with Obama and may be poised now to embrace Clinton. Here's what I wrote in July 2007 during the very early days of the 2008 campaign:

Who do you think said this on June 20?

- a) Rudy Giuliani; b) Hillary Clinton; c) George Bush; d) Mitt Romney; or e) Barack Obama?

"The American military has done its job. Look what they accomplished. They got rid of Saddam Hussein. They gave the Iraqis a chance for free and fair elections. They gave the Iraqi government the chance to begin to demonstrate that it understood its responsibilities to make the hard political decisions necessary to give the people of Iraq a better future. So the American military has succeeded. It is the Iraqi government which has failed to make the tough decisions which are important for their own people."

Right, it was the woman who wants to be president because ... because she wants to be president ... because she thinks it would be nice to be president ... no other reason, no burning cause, no heartfelt desire for basic change in American society or to make a better world ... she just thinks it would be nice, even great, to be president. And keep the American Empire in business, its routine generating of horror and misery be-

Hillary Clinton just thinks it would be nice, even great, to be president. And keep the American Empire in business

I've long known Hillary Clinton is a conservative; going back to at least the 1980s, while the wife of the Arkansas governor, she strongly supported the death-squad torturers known as the Contras, who were the empire's proxy army in Nicaragua

ing no problem; she wouldn't want to be known as the president that hastened the decline of the empire.

And she spoke the above words at the "Take Back America" conference; she was speaking to liberals, committed liberal Democrats and others further left. She didn't have to cater to them with any flag-waving pro-war rhetoric; they wanted to hear anti-war rhetoric (and she of course gave them a bit of that as well out of the other side of her mouth), so we can assume that this is how she really feels, if indeed the woman feels anything. The audience, it should be noted, booed her, for the second year in a row.

Think of why you are opposed to the war. Is it not largely because of all the unspeakable suffering brought down upon the heads and souls of the poor people of Iraq by the American military? Hillary Clinton couldn't care less about that, literally. She thinks the American military has "succeeded". Has she ever unequivocally labeled the war "illegal" or "immoral"? I used to think that Tony Blair was a member of the right wing or conservative wing of the British Labour Party. I finally realized one day that that was an incorrect description of his ideology. Blair is a conservative, a bloody Tory. How he wound up in the Labour Party is a matter I haven't studied. Hillary Clinton, however, I've long known is a conservative; going back to at least the 1980s, while the wife of the Arkansas governor, she strongly supported the death-squad torturers known as the Contras, who were the empire's proxy army in Nicaragua.

Now we hear from America's venerable conservative magazine, William Buckley's *National Review*, an editorial by Bruce Bartlett, policy adviser to President Ronald Reagan; treasury official under President

George H.W. Bush; a fellow at two of the leading conservative think-tanks, the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute – You get the picture? Bartlett tells his readers that it's almost certain that the Democrats will win the White House in 2008. So what to do? Support the most conservative Democrat. He writes: "To right-wingers willing to look beneath what probably sounds to them like the same identical views of the Democratic candidates, it is pretty clear that Hillary Clinton is the most conservative."

We also hear from America's premier magazine for the corporate wealthy, *Fortune*, whose recent cover features a picture of Clinton and the headline: "Business Loves Hillary".

Back to 2013: In October, the office of billionaire George Soros, who has long worked with US foreign policy to destabilize governments not in love with the empire, announced that "George Soros is delighted to join more than one million Americans in supporting Ready for Hillary."

There's much more evidence of Hillary Clinton's conservative leanings, but if you need more, you're probably still in love with Obama, who in a new book is quoted telling his aides during a comment on drone strikes that he's "really good at killing people". Can we look forward to Hillary winning the much-discredited Nobel Peace Prize?

I'm sorry if I take away all your fun. **CT**

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

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Electrified thought fences

When media parrots call mavericks, dissidents and whistleblowers ‘narcissist’, they don’t know what they are talking about, says **David Edwards**

One of the great tasks of the state-corporate commentariat is to install electrified thought fences between the public and rare voices attempting to challenge the status quo.

Dissidents are attacked from ostensibly noble positions opposing fascism, genocide, sexism and selfishness. The smears are empowered by the fact that they target an opponent’s reputation with ugly-looking labels that nobody really understands.

For example, no-one in fact knows at what point (if any) honest disagreement morphs into the Thought Crime ‘genocide denial’. But if enough pundits shriek with sufficient conviction and disgust that they know, many will believe them.

The mix of feigned outrage and genuine confusion deters neutrals from challenging the smear for fear of appearing foolish, or of being tarred with the same brush. They may instead step back from supporting, or even mentioning, the work of someone that ‘everyone knows’ is a ‘genocide denier’, a ‘sexist’, or a ‘narcissist’.

Last month, Joan Smith of the *Independent*, wrote of Russell Brand: “I don’t think you would have to be a passionate feminist to conclude that this guy is (a) a sexist idiot and (b) a narcissist whose ideas about politics are likely to be only slightly more coherent than those of a 13-year-old boy.”

Smith’s comment was provoked by

Brand’s opening sentence in a long article for the *New Statesman*: “When I was asked to edit an issue of the *New Statesman*, I said yes because it was a beautiful woman asking me.”

Numerous commentators denounced this as an unacceptable, sexist remark. But does anyone believe that Brand was seriously claiming he had chosen to edit a national political magazine – incorporating his own impassioned, 5,000-word, political/spiritual essay – in response to a sexual urge? Brand, a comedian, was clearly mocking the all too human tendency to be at least in part guided by ‘lower’ urges as we pursue ‘higher’ ideals (classic comedic fare). He was surely also firing a shot at his own ego, at the idea that he was setting himself up as some pompous political leader.

As even Smith observed, “the ‘beautiful woman’ who asked him is, I assume, the paper’s associate editor and current Brand love interest (for want of a better phrase), Jemima Khan”.

Describing Khan as merely the ‘current Brand love interest’ is itself dismissive and patronising. Perhaps Brand is the ‘current Khan love interest’. Or perhaps she is Brand’s soul-mate and they are desperately in love. In which case, Brand’s comment could be viewed as a loving gesture in her direction, rather than an example of crazed sexual Pavlovianism. One can imagine that

The smears are empowered by the fact that they target an opponent’s reputation with ugly-looking labels that nobody really understands

The evidence justifying such damning criticism of Brand, Assange and Galloway is pitifully thin and even fabricated

if a Clinton or an Obama had delivered a comparable reference to Hillary or Michelle, the press corps would have smiled at this ‘human touch’ and shifted admiringly in their seats.

Again, most people are unsure exactly what Brand has said, meant and done in his life, just as they are unsure where reasonable references to sexuality end and sexism begins. They are also unsure when comments and actions justify someone being permanently branded (indeed) as thoroughgoing ‘sexists’. But Smith seems to know. Many will have deferred to her fierce certainty, particularly given that she describes herself as a feminist, a label which suggests a depth of understanding on these issues which she may or may not in fact possess.

In the *New Statesman*, Laurie Penny (formerly of the *Independent*) also took Brand to task for being “clearly a casual and occasionally vicious sexist”. This sexism, “It’s everywhere” on the left, Penny claimed: “It’s Julian Assange and George Galloway...”

In fact the evidence justifying such damning criticism of Brand, Assange and Galloway is pitifully thin and even fabricated. Consider, after all, that Penny commented: “Brand is hardly the only leftist man to boast a track record of objectification, of harassment and of playing cheap misogyny for laughs.”

The serious claim that Brand boasts a ‘track record’ of sexual ‘harassment’ came with an embedded link to an August 3, 2012 blog on a website called ‘Jezebel – Celebrity, Sex, Fashion for Women. Without Airbrushing,’ which reported that Brand had refused to begin filming a musical, *What About Dick?*, “until he convinced a wardrobe assistant to flash him [her breasts]. He actually delayed production for two hours, haranguing her the entire time”.

The blog continued: “co-star and comic Billy Connolly took him [Brand] aside for a stern talking-to. So, yup, Hollywood is full of professionals and no breasts are safe. Good Lord, imagine what Brand might have

requested from a PA?”

Jezebel’s source for the story, to which it linked, was Murdoch’s *Sun* newspaper. Easy to understand why the author of the ‘Penny Red’ blog chose not to link to the *Sun* as some kind of credible source.

Worse still, in December 2012, the *Independent* published this comment by Connolly: “That [widely reported] story,” says Connolly evenly, “is a total invention. A complete fabrication. It’s total bollocks. It never happened. Russell was very well-behaved, and I found him very interesting.”

Media Lens wrote to Penny, asking whose account of the story was accurate. She replied on November 6: “I understand that Connolly refuted the claims – amended the copy 4 days ago to reflect that.”

But ‘4 days ago’ was close to one year after the refutation had been published by the *Independent*! We pointed out that the claims had not been amended in the version posted on ZNet (where we read them). Penny answered: “Znet isn’t my responsibility – I wasn’t consulted before they published.”

A curiously passive reaction from someone who portrays herself as a tub-thumping ‘activist’. Penny commented in her *New Statesman/ZNet* piece: “The left, because we like to fight from the moral high ground, is particularly bad at confronting its own bullshit.”

Suzanne Moore wrote in the *Guardian* of Brand: “He may indeed be a sexist. Or, as he put it earlier this week in these pages, in his most imitable style, may ‘suffer from the ol’ sexism’.

Brand, it seems, is also guilty of unbearable ‘braggadocio’.

Moore has previously described Julian Assange as ‘the most massive turd’.

In the *Sunday Times*, Katie Glass described Brand as ‘an exhibitionistic narcissist obsessed with celebrity’. (Katie Glass, ‘The ultimate Marmite Brand,’ *Sunday Times*, September 22, 2013)

Arguably, one could search long and hard before finding a ‘mainstream’ politician of

whom this could not be said. But of course no corporate journalist would ever dare heft such a ferocious smear in the direction of an Obama, Cameron or Blair.

Glass continued: "If you did not find his drughtaking, philandering or humour offputting, you should try him now he has reinvented himself as a yoga-addicted, transcendental meditating vegan hippie, and a modern prophet with a Jesus complex.

"We suspect his arrogant bravado, his over-the-top narcissism, even his sex addiction are signs that he is deeply fragile."

While accusations of 'sexism' are used to smear high-profile dissidents, feigned concern for women's rights is also deployed as a weapon in the propaganda arsenal promoting 'humanitarian intervention'. This played a crucial role in the 2001 demonisation of the Taliban as targets for Western attack.

In 2007, Medialens conducted a Lexis media database search for the terms 'Taliban' and 'women's rights'. Since 1995, there had been 56 mentions in the *Guardian*. Of these, 36 had appeared since the September 11, 2001 attacks. There was the same number of mentions (nine) in the last three and a half months of 2001 as in the previous three years combined. 90 per cent of the mentions in 2001 occurred after September 11. We found a similar pattern of reporting on gay rights in Afghanistan.

In 2011, concocted tales of Viagra-fuelled mass rape were also used to target the Libyan government for 'intervention' and destruction amid widespread concern about the security of women's rights under Gaddafi. Notice, we are not here for one moment challenging the merits of feminism, but the abuse of feminism by state-corporate propagandists.

The herd behaviour of media parrots

The focus on the 'narcissism' of leading dissidents is a recurring theme across the corporate media. *Bloomberg Businessweek* featured an article entitled, 'The Unbearable

Narcissism of Edward Snowden.'

Jeffrey Toobin condemned Snowden in the *New Yorker* as "a grandiose narcissist who deserves to be in prison".

On CBS, Bob Schieffer commented: "I think what we have in Edward Snowden is just a narcissistic young man who has decided he is smarter than the rest of us."

Richard Cohen in the *Washington Post*: "Everything about Edward Snowden is ridiculously cinematic. He is not paranoiac; he is merely narcissistic. He jettisoned a girlfriend, a career and, undoubtedly, his personal freedom to expose programs..."

Cohen detected no cognitive dissonance in the idea that a narcissist would be willing to sacrifice his girlfriend, career and personal freedom to expose political corruption. In reality, this is exactly what narcissists are not inclined to do.

Similarly, Seumas Milne protested in the *Guardian* that, despite not having been charged, let alone convicted, of any crime: "as far as the bulk of the press is concerned, Assange is nothing but a 'monstrous narcissist', a bail-jumping 'sex pest' and an exhibitionist maniac.

Sir Harold Evans commented in the *Observer*: "I have not been impressed by the blather about "freedom of the press" surrounding the narcissistic Edward Snowden..."

Glenn Greenwald who, unlike most of the above critics, has met Snowden and worked closely with him, observed: "One of the most darkly hilarious things to watch is how government apologists and media servants are driven by total herd behavior: they all mindlessly adopt the same script and then just keep repeating it because they see others doing so and, like parrots, just mimic what they hear... Hordes of people who had no idea what 'narcissism' even means – and who did not know the first thing about Snowden – kept repeating this word over and over because that became the cliche used to demonize him.

"The reason this was darkly hilarious is

In 2011, concocted tales of Viagra-fuelled mass rape were also used to target the Libyan government for 'intervention' and destruction amid widespread concern about the security of women's rights under Gaddafi

"Edward Snowden has refused every request because he does not want the attention to be on him, but rather on the disclosures that he risked his liberty and even his life to bring to the world."

because there is almost no attack on him more patently invalid than this one. When he came to us, he said: 'after I identify myself as the source and explain why I did this, I intend to disappear from media sight, because I know they will want to personalize the story about me, and I want the focus to remain on the substance of NSA disclosures.'

"He has been 100% true to his word. Almost every day for four months, I've had the biggest TV shows and most influential media stars calling and emailing me, begging to interview Snowden for TV. He has refused every request because he does not want the attention to be on him, but rather on the disclosures that he risked his liberty and even his life to bring to the world."

But according to the Daily Banter blog, none of this should be taken seriously. Why? "Glenn Greenwald has been looking to take down Obama and feed his own depthless narcissism for years now. He just managed to accomplish one of these goals in spades..."

Further ironies afflict these many casual denunciations of Assange, Brand, Snowden and Greenwald as 'sexists' and/or 'narcissists'.

Most commentators – including many on the left – appear to have little or no understanding of what these terms actually mean.

As the psychologist and social theorist Erich Fromm noted, narcissism in fact is characteristic of individuals "who are preoccupied with themselves and who pay little attention to others, except as echoes of themselves" (Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, American Mental Health Foundation, 2010, p.66). A narcissist is unable to see issues from the point of view of others and has "a lack of genuine interest in the outside world". (p.67)

But as Fromm (and Freud) also noted, "even in the case of normal development, man remains to some extent narcissistic throughout his life". Indeed, "The 'normal,'

'mature' person is one whose narcissism has been reduced to the socially accepted minimum without ever disappearing completely." (pp.60-61)

In other words, rare corporate bodhisattvas aside, the critics damning Assange, Brand, Snowden and Greenwald as 'narcissists' are busy throwing stones in greenhouses. But this only scratches the surface of their hypocrisy.

Sexism, of course, is a prime example of 'group narcissism', the idea that: "I am somebody important because I belong to the most admirable group in the world – I am white"; or, "I am an Aryan". (p.76) Or indeed, "I am male."

Group narcissism is so dangerous because it generates extreme distortions of rational judgement. Fromm commented: "The object of narcissistic attachment is thought to be valuable (good, beautiful, wise, etc.) not on the basis of an objective value judgement, but because it is me or mine. Narcissistic value judgement is prejudiced and biased." (p.70)

This, of course, is in direct collision with rational analysis, scientific method and simple common sense. Alas, Fromm concluded that despite some ameliorating impacts from higher education, "it has not prevented most of the 'educated' people from joining enthusiastically the national, racial, and political movements which are the expression of contemporary narcissism". (p.81)

And this, indeed, is the great irony of so much criticism of Brand the 'narcissist'. Because Brand is a rare dissident precisely throwing off the corporate chains of "contemporary narcissism" to point out "the absolute, all-encompassing total corruption of our political agencies by big business".

And: "The planet is being destroyed. We are creating an underclass. We are exploiting poor people all over the world. And the genuine legitimate problems of the people are not being addressed by our political class."

These are some of the central truths and crises of our time that corporate journalists employed by the very system doing the damage will not and cannot discuss. Brand's willingness to discuss them in the face of intense pressure to do otherwise – the corporate system will continue to strongly punish him for speaking out – his empathy with victims of corporate power, are again the exact opposite of what one would expect from a narcissist.

On the other hand, the determination of corporate commentators to ignore the importance and truth of Brand's arguments,

and to focus instead on his 'sexism', 'narcissism', and his relationship with Jemima Khan, are classic examples of group narcissism; of journalists prioritising their careers, their corporations, their class, "not on the basis of an objective value judgement, but because it is me or mine".

As for the people and planet being subordinated to power and profit – they barely even register.

CT

Brand's empathy with victims of corporate power, are again the exact opposite of what one would expect from a narcissist

David Edwards is co-editor of *Media Lens*, the British media watchdog - <http://medialens.org>



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The deeper you dig

Christians, Jews and Palestinians talk sense about Israel – in South Korea, writes **Trevor Grundy**

"We see the suffering and feel the fear of people in the Middle East, but this problem will not be solved without justice"

The further you are from London, Paris, New York and Washington, the easier it is to talk about Israel and the danger of the Zionist state sparking off a third intifada – uprising – if it continues allowing Jews to settle on Arab land.

Many of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders at the recent 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in Busan, South Korea were an uninhibited collection of men and women. There were over 5,000 delegates representing more than 300 churches and 100 countries, including 2,500 Korean Christians, Christians from China and, for the first time since the WCC was founded in 1948, a strong delegation from the Roman Catholic Church.

Those I spoke to after public meetings which were held at the vast Bexco Conference Centre in South Korea's second city dismissed charges made in the American and British media that many of those people who criticize Israel are not only anti-Semites but closet Nazis and Holocaust deniers, too.

"It is those who, out of fear, are saying and doing nothing that are the problem," the Palestinian bishop Munin A. Youman told me.

Youman heads the Lutheran World Federation. He mixes easily with Jewish and Muslim religious leaders and calls on his fellow Christians to speak up "with the voices of the Old Testament prophets" against injustice in the Middle East.

"Christian churches must be prophetic and challenge their governments in France, in Britain and in Germany and in America and speak to them about the urgent need for justice in the Middle East. The Palestine-Israel problem can only be solved by bold political and religious leaders who believe in a two-state solution with the 1967 borders in mind. The state of Palestine will then live alongside the state of Israel. Jerusalem must be shared. It must be for three religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam and there must be a political solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees and an end to Israel's settlement policies. There must also be a sharing of the area's resources and the world's leaders must set about solving this explosive problem not tomorrow – but right now."

Youman, who received his theological training in Finland, in 2010 became the first Arab to head the 70-million strong Lutheran World Federation.

"We see," he said, "the suffering and feel the fear of people in the Middle East, but this problem will not be solved without justice. We need bold religious and political leadership and not lip service from the world's leaders."

He said that even though Western powers including Britain, France and the United States created the problem of Israel and Palestine in the first place, they now have to be drawn in to solve the problem along the lines of the United Nations resolutions 242 and 338.

"It's no good thinking that the Palestinians and the Israelis can do this on their own on a one-to-one basis. The international community has to be involved. Americans and Europeans are responsible for problems in the Middle East and they must now realise that if they don't help bring justice to the Middle East then they will be indirectly affected themselves."

His reference was to the growth of extremism both in religion and politics. And he made it clear that extremism is not the monopoly of any one religion or sect within a religion.

"We are watching the growth of extremism and we are all hostages to this extremism. The longer there is no solution, the more extremism will grow. We have Jewish extremists and we have Christian extremists. If we don't solve this problem, it will be bad for all of us."

Youman said there are some courageous religious leaders who fearlessly call for justice in Israel, "but not enough of them."

He told me: "It's no good having one voice in a choir. You need several voices – a choir of courageous religious leaders inspired by the prophets who challenged their leaders. Then we will have a symphony of justice and that will always disturb those politicians and those people who are not working for justice in the Middle East."

He said that although a Palestinian such as himself had lost land and seen the destruction of so many lives "we have not lost our dignity and that dignity gives us the power to work for justice, peace and reconciliation."

And he dismissed charges that critics of Israel's policies are anti-Semites. "All of us, even me as a Palestinian, are completely against any form of anti-Semitism. We will fight any form of anti-Semitism that exists anywhere in the world."

BEFORE the assembly began, I contacted one of the world's most influential Jewish leaders at her home in Jerusalem.

Debbie Weissman is the President of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ). She has the ear of not only the Pope

and the Archbishop of Canterbury but also leaders of Christianity and Judaism the world over. Like Youman, she condemned anti-Semitism and called on the WCC to continue to condemn and fight it "especially where it is on the rise today, in places like Hungary, Greece and the Ukraine."

During the Second World War, even the Gestapo's top leaders were surprised at the ferocity ordinary Hungarians showed against Jews who had lived alongside them for hundreds of years. The same in Ukraine after the German Army's invasion.

In Greece, the fast-rising Golden Dawn movement regularly denounces its government's closeness to Israel. Per head of population, more Jews were killed in Greece by the Nazis than any other country in the world.

She called on the WCC to renew a commitment made at the Christian organisation's foundation at Amsterdam in 1948 to treat anti-Semitism as "a sin against God."

In a written answer to my questions she said: "We would hope that Christians would feel a special relationship with Jews and Judaism because of our shared Scriptures and because of the Jewishness of Jesus. We hope that any discussion of the precarious situation of Christians in the Middle East would note that Christians have more freedom of religion within the state of Israel than in any other country in the region. The occupation of the Palestinian Territories is a serious problem but it's a political one not specifically a religious one. And she recalled that the ICCJ recently published a statement on the situation in Israel/Palestine in a document called 'As long as you believe in a living God, you must have hope.' She explained that this was a direct quotation from Bishop Youman.

The Jewish religious leader also spoke about the rise of extremist views in both the religious as well as political arenas saying: "The liberal religious movements seem to be on the decline. What can Jews and Christians do together to express their faith through what we (Jews) call

Extremism is not the monopoly of any one religion or sect within a religion

CONFRONTING ZIONISM

He said that one day the wall dividing Jew from Arab in Israel would fall. “Walls always come down”

Tikun Olam (mending a broken world)?”

And she strongly denied that the WCC was in any shape or form anti-Jewish.

WELCOMING the arrival of Weissman was a man at the heart of Christian influence and change in the Middle East, Manuel Quintero, the international programme coordinator of the WCC's Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI),

He told me that Debbie Weissman had done “a great deal” to improve relations between Palestinians and Israelis

“She has always said that by wanting to see change in Israel, the WCC is certainly not an anti-Semitic organisation. She is one of the Jews in Jerusalem who understands the humanity of other people and the EAPPI wants to improve its relationship with everyone in Israel.”

Quintero is an elder in the Presbyterian Church of Cuba. He has been involved in the ecumenical movement since 1969 and told me his function at the WCC meeting in Busan was to bring the potentially explosive issue of Israel and Palestine before Christian leaders the world over. He also denied accusations made by some leading Jewish journalists – and many gentile writers and commentators – that the WCC is an anti-Semitic organization.

On its website, EAPPI says it campaigns for a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict through an end to the Occupation, respect for international law and implementation of UN resolutions.

I found it surprising that Quintero had high raise for many of the Israeli government's achievements since 1948. “If you go to Israel, you'll see how they've modified the landscape,” he told me. “It's a very scientifically progressive society. They (the Jews) are so culturally advanced and they have so much to contribute.”

But then: “It's a pity with all that richness they stop Palestinians enjoying their basic rights and privileges. I'm not anti-Semitic at all. But what we have here is a David and Goli-

ath situation. Israel has all the military power and all the economic advantages. Palestinians are helpless. When one Israeli is killed, 100 Palestinians die.”

He said that one day the wall dividing Jew from Arab in Israel would fall. “Walls always come down.” But that could take some time yet. It's 147 kilometers long and eight meters high. Israel's critics say the country has turned into an apartheid state with Arabs living like Africans under all white rule (in Bantustans) in South Africa before 1990 when the African national Congress and the South African Communist Party were unbanned and Nelson Mandela was released from prison.

Asked if the end of The Wall would also mean the end of Israel, he said: “No, we believe that The Occupation is bad for both Palestinians and Israelis. Our aim is to end that Occupation.”

As the centre of global Christianity shifts away from Europe towards Africa more and more non-Western voices will be heard on the never-ending Israeli/Palestinian dispute. Already the changed American attitude towards Israel under the presidency of Barak Obama is worrying Tel Aviv.

The prominent American Christian leader Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (an adviser for ecumenical relationships with the Reformed Church of America) told me that because of this global shift the WCC should consider moving its headquarters from Geneva to a place in Africa – perhaps Johannesburg in South Africa, possibly Accra in Ghana.

A change of venue for peace talks about the Middle East – especially peace talks about Israel and Palestine – might also be a good idea providing that labeling men and women critical of Israel as “anti-Semites” is first ditched.

That might take a UN resolution to implement but it's worth considering. **CT**

Trevor Grundy is a British journalist and author who lived and worked in central, eastern and southern Africa from 1966-1996. He lives in southern England and works as an author, researcher and journalist

Israel: Just another hapless British colony

John Kozy looks at the problems of recent Middle East history and says Westerners need to study their own civilization to find the reasons

"The world would learn of a cruel and imperialistic country stealing from ... needy and naked people."
— Mohammad Mosaddegh

How incidents and situations are defined largely determines how they are thought of. For instance, consider the trial of George Zimmerman for Trayvon Martin's killing which resulted in an acquittal. The prosecution allowed the incident's start to be defined as the moment Trayvon confronted George after being followed for some time and distance. Defining the incident that way made it appear that Trayvon was the aggressor. If, as many believe should have been done, the incident's start had been defined as the moment George decided to follow Trayvon even after having been told by the police that that was unnecessary, George would have been made to appear as the aggressor. The trial's outcome likely would have come out differently.

Apply the same analysis to the West's, especially Britain's and America's, antagonistic relationship with Iran. The West has defined the situation's start as the moment the Iranians invaded the U.S. Consulate making the Iranians look like aggressors. But the Iranians define the situation's start as the moment British MI6 and the American CIA instigated the overthrow of the duly elected,

democratic government of enormously popular Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953. The coup imposed an autocratic Shah on Iran who was himself overthrown 26 years later. Defining the situation this way clearly makes the West the aggressor. Now apply the same analysis to the so-called War on Terror.

The West defines the war's start as September 11, 2001 which makes those who hijacked the airplanes the aggressors. But Muslims define the war as having begun much, much earlier. To them, "terrorists" are over here because the West has been over there for a very long time.

In classes on Western Civilization, students are seldom told that it is a predatory culture. The Greeks were constantly at war, if not with the Persians, with each other. Alexander was an early empire builder. So too were the Romans. Portugal and Spain were early predators of the Americas. Then came England, Holland, and France. We are all familiar with the predatory nature of the Vikings. The Italians and Germans tried to colonize Africa. And when these nations were not trying to colonize the world, they were often at war with one another. Western Civilization is bellicose, and it has been at war with Islam at least since the Crusades which began in 1099 when the Holy Roman Empire sent armies to "free the Holy Land from the infidel" and take control of trade routes to

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The West defines the war's start as September 11, 2001 which makes those who hijacked the airplanes the aggressors. But Muslims define the war as having begun much, much earlier
.....

CAUSE AND EFFECT

The Israelis treat Palestinians exactly like the English colonists, wherever they have gone, have treated aborigines

the Far East. The invading Christians created several Christian states, and the Muslims in the region vowed to wage holy war (jihad) to regain control. (Sounds familiar, doesn't it?)

(Because of the American educational system's almost total concern with vocational training, most Americans know nothing of the Crusades.)

Near the end of the 13th century, the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt overwhelmed the coastal, Christian stronghold of Acre and drove the European invaders out of Palestine and Syria. Still throughout the 13th century, Crusaders tried to gain ground in the Holy Land through short-lived raids that proved little more than annoyances to Muslim rulers.

But that wasn't the end of it. In 1798, Napoleon invaded Egypt and Syria. In 1882, Britain made Egypt into a protectorate (which is a fancy name for 'colony.') In 1919, France again went to war with Syria. In the 1920s, the League of Nations granted Britain and France permission to make Syria a French protectorate and Palestine a British protectorate. Now the West has invaded Iraq and Afghanistan, regularly bombs Pakistan, and seems intent on a war with Iran. For more than ten centuries, the Middle East has suffered under the assaults of Western Europeans! None of the West's efforts has gotten it the hegemony it seeks.

So at the end of the Second World War, the British realized, as the system of protectorates in the Middle East began to unravel, that a different strategy was needed. Not having been able to transplant Western values in the populations of any Middle Eastern country, it became apparent that only another British colony, populated by people of European origin, could ever hope to succeed. Thus the British continued the duplicitous diplomacy of making promises it never intended to keep, concocted a racist Balfour Declaration, and sought to use the Jews of Europe as its colonists to establish a Western style state in Palestine called Israel.

No, you say! But consider this: the Israelis

treat Palestinians exactly like the English colonists, wherever they have gone, have treated aborigines. The English have mistreated people wherever they have gone. Don't believe it? Ask an Irishman! The mistreatment of people seems to be a genetic characteristic of the English who once were slavers to Americans and drug pushers to the Chinese.

But the creation of Israel hasn't worked out too well either. The establishment of the state of Israel is just another chapter in the centuries old war on Islam, and Israel could not have survived without the continuous financial and military support it receives from the West, especially the United States. If the Israelis were historians, they would be wary of that support. The West, especially the United States and Britain, have a history of abandoning allies whenever it suits their own interests. Ask anyone from the string of governments America supported in South Vietnam. Ask Hosni Mubarak. Resuscitate the shah of Iran and ask him. After having been put on Iran's throne by an American and British coup, when he began to exercise some independence he, too, lost American support. Ask Saddam Hussein; he was once an American darling too. America and the West will abandon Israel just as soon as doing so furthers their interests. Rosemary Hollis, Middle East analyst at City University in London has said, "There is a deep-rooted belief . . . that Britain is always up to something, is never passive and always devious." The Israelis should view it that way too.

The Israelis may believe that America's Jews will keep America from abandoning them. The American tobacco industry thought like that too. After more than a century of paying off the Congress, when the mood of the people about tobacco changed, the corrupt Congress had no trouble abandoning the industry whose money it had always been happy to accept.

Israel beware! When the English convinced the members of the United Nations Security Council to create the state of Israel by partitioning Palestine it did so to promote

English national Interests, not because anyone cared for the welfare of Jews. Western Europeans are not and never have never been an especially religious people. Western Civilization has never had an Age of Piety! The scripturally based arguments that support the creation of the state of Israel carry no conviction. Not only will no Hindu, Sikh, or follower of Shinto ever care one bit about what Jewish scripture says, neither will most Christians whose only interest is in the Second Coming, the Rapture, and Armageddon, none of which present Jews with a wholesome outcome. They predict the annihilation of Israel and its Jewish inhabitants. So, as George Bush has seen, the only alternative the Jews of Israel have is conversion to Christianity. One would expect that Zionists would object to being proselytized by Christians, but they do not. They are too cowardly to risk alienating the support of their fundamentalist Christian "friends."

The world's Christians care no more for the world's Jews than they care about Muslims. These Christians often exhibit no special concern even for the welfare of fellow Christians. Where I live, there are three different Christian churches belonging to the same denomination. Their congregations do not like each other enough to even worship together. Do Israelis really believe the world likes them? Israelis are merely pawns on a gameboard. Their welfare really doesn't matter! Only the Second Coming does.

In a Cato Institutional piece written by Sheldon L. Richman, even America's right wing says, "Beware!"

After 70 years of broken Western promises . . . it should not be surprising that the West is viewed with suspicion and hostility by the populations (as opposed to some of the political regimes) of the Middle East. The United States, as the heir to British imperialism in the region, has been a frequent object of suspicion. Since the end of World War II, the United States, like the European colonial powers before it, has been unable

to resist becoming entangled in the region's political conflicts. Driven by a desire to keep the vast oil reserves in hands friendly to the United States . . . the United States has compiled a record of tragedy in the Middle East.

Richman continued by writing that in 1979, President Jimmy Carter dismissed reminders of America's long intervention as "ancient history." Carter implied that there was nothing of value to be learned from that history. In his view, dredging up old matters was dangerous, because it exposed skeletons in the closets of Western nations they wanted to keep hidden. So to raise historical issues was unpatriotic. But hiding or denying the evil done in the past does not absolve the guilt.

When Israel is seen as an English colony, England has to be seen as primarily responsible for all of the horrors committed by its "colonists." In fact, England and France must be seen as primarily responsible for the horrors committed by all the West in the Middle East at least since 1857, the end of the Anglo-Persian war. The United States became complicit when it inherited the imperialist policies of Western Europe.

The only national interests any Western nation has in the Middle East are imperialist interests. That's why no Western diplomat who uses the phrase "national interests" ever tells anyone what specific interests are being referred to and it's also why no Western nation ever refers to the national interests other nations might have in the West. Non-imperialist nations have no national interests beyond their borders. Only imperialist nations do. So any diplomat who claims to be protecting "national interests" is nothing but a plundering imperialist.

CT

When Israel is seen as an English colony, England has to be seen as primarily responsible for all of the horrors committed by its "colonists"

John Kozy is a retired professor of philosophy and logic who writes on social, political, and economic issues. His on-line pieces can be found on <http://www.jkozy.com/> and he can be emailed from that site's homepage.

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