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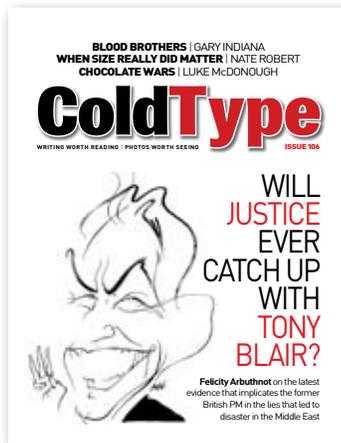
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ISSUE 106



WILL
JUSTICE
EVER
CATCH UP
WITH
TONY
BLAIR?

Felicity Arbutnot on the latest evidence implicating the former British PM in the lies that led to disaster in the Middle East



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Will justice ever catch up with Tony Blair?

Felicity Arbuthnot on the latest evidence implicating the former British Prime Minister in the lies that led to disaster in the Middle East

In what Britain's *Mail on Sunday* newspaper has described as a "bombshell White House memo," leaked classified correspondence from former US Secretary of State General Colin Powell to President George W. Bush, from March 28, 2002, alleges that former British Prime Minister Tony Blair had done what the newspaper called "a deal in blood" with Bush to support him, come what may, in the attack on Iraq – a full year before the invasion.

Blair was, at the same time, claiming to be seeking a diplomatic solution in the Iraq crisis. "We're not proposing military action," he told the public as he prepared

"to act as spin doctor for Bush," states the *Mail*, which also reveals Powell's confirmation that "the UK will follow our lead."

Despite this, Blair continued to say he had made no decision regarding military action for most of 2002, but claimed a diplomatic solution was being pursued. Now Powell's memo proves the lie. Headed: "Memorandum to the President. Subject: Your Meeting with United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair, April 5-7, 2002, Crawford, Texas," Powell wrote:

"Blair continues to stand by you and the US as we move forward on the war on terrorism and on Iraq. He will present to

Paper reveals Tony Blair's "deal in blood" with George W. Bush to support him, come what may, in the attack on Iraq – a full year before the invasion

CLOSING IN

The Bush and Blair regimes were totally aware of the lawlessness of attacking a sovereign nation that posed no threat, and whose "sovereignty and territorial integrity" was guaranteed by the UN

you the strategic, tactical and public affairs lines that he believes will strengthen global support for our common cause."

That paragraph confirms Blair's integral part in the planning and strategy of the illegal invasion, while he was telling Parliament an entirely different tale

While Blair was telling Parliament and the British public that Saddam's government was involved in the World Trade Center attack on September 11, 2001, "the war on terrorism and on Iraq" seem to be entirely separated in the Powell-Bush-Blair discussions, which didn't mention Blair's numerous public allegations that Iraq was linked to international terrorism.

Confirming that, "On Iraq, Blair will be with us should military actions be necessary," Powell pointed out that Blair did not enjoy universal support from his government colleagues, writing, "Aside from his foreign and defence secretaries, however, Blair's Cabinet shows signs of division, and the Labour Party and the British public are unconvinced that military action is warranted now."

He added, "Blair may suggest ideas on how to make a credible public case on current Iraqi threats to international peace, and how to handle demands for any action to be sanctioned by the UN Security Council."

Thus the Bush and Blair regimes were totally aware of the lawlessness of attacking a sovereign nation that posed no threat, and whose "sovereignty and territorial integrity" was guaranteed by the UN.

In September that same year, Blair announced that Saddam Hussein's government could release weapons of mass destruction on the West "within forty five

minutes," a claim Colin Powell used in his notorious Iraq war speech to the UN the following February.

Powell's communication also states falsely that Blair would "demonstrate that we have thought through 'the day after.'" Not only had "the day after" not been "thought through," but nor had the weeks, months, or years as shown by the bloody fact that Iraq continues to implode and Iraqis are dying in their uncounted thousands. (Even Iraq Body Count, whose estimates of Iraqi deaths are so sanguine and understated that they are used by the US and UK governments, released a report early this year stating Iraqi deaths from violence are doubling year on year).

Blair, wrote Powell, "is sharply criticized by the media for being too pro-US, too arrogant and 'presidential' (not a compliment in the British context) and too inattentive on issues of concern to voters.

"Blair knows he may have to pay a political price for supporting us on Iraq and wants to minimize it. Nonetheless he will stick with us on the big issues. His voters will look for signs that Britain and America are truly equal

partners in the special relationship."

It seems Powell had not been paying attention. The majority of British voters wanted no "equal partnership" and nothing to do with the Iraq assault or general US global belligerence.

The *Mail on Sunday's* revelations have not come at a good time for Blair, whose involvement in Iraq's tragedy has become increasingly criticised over the years. A petition is circulating demanding that Britain's Parliament impeach him, and in a poll asking, "Should Tony Blair Stand Trial for War Crimes?," the vote in support ranges



Smoking gun: How the Daily Mail reported the Powell memo.

between 95 and 96% in favour.

It also seems Mr Blair was not entirely truthful with his words to the £10-million, six-year long Chilcot Inquiry into the Iraq invasion, the publication of which is still awaited. Sir John Chilcot has given varying reasons for the delay, including 2002 correspondence between Bush and Blair, which has been withheld from the Inquiry.

The Mail on Sunday says, "During his appearance before the Chilcot inquiry in January 2010, Blair denied that he had struck a secret deal with Bush at Crawford to overthrow Saddam. Blair said the two men had agreed on the need to confront the Iraqi dictator, but insisted they did not get into 'specifics.'"

British MP David Davis, a former Shadow Home Secretary, is clearly stunned at the memo, saying, "This is one of the most astonishing documents I have ever read. It proves in explicit terms what many of us have believed all along: Tony Blair effectively agreed to act as a front man for American foreign policy in advance of any decision by the House of Commons or the British Cabinet. He was happy to launder George Bush's policy on Iraq and subcontract British foreign policy to another country without having the remotest ability to have any real influence over it."

Davis adds, "Judging from this memorandum, Blair signed up for the Iraq War even before the Americans themselves did. Blair was telling MPs and voters back home that he was still pursuing a diplomatic solution while Colin Powell was telling President Bush: 'Don't worry, George, Tony is signed up for the war come what may - he'll handle the PR for you, just make him look big in return.'"

"What is truly shocking is the casualness of it all, such as the reference in the memo to 'the day after' - meaning the day after Saddam would be toppled."

Davis concludes by linking the terrorism scourging Iraq and the Middle East directly to the actions in which Blair had such an

integral part, "We saw the catastrophic so-called 'de-Baathification' of Iraq, with the country's entire civil and military structure dismantled, leading to years of bloodshed and chaos. It has infected surrounding countries to this day and created the vacuum into which Islamic State has stepped.

"This may well be the Iraq 'smoking gun' we have all been looking for."

How wrong, devious and duplicitous can one man be? For how long can he now avoid justice? When will this man be arrested?

Afterword

Just after this piece was finished, Tony Blair, in an interview with his friend, US political broadcaster Fareed Zakaria, on CNN, made what has been described as "an apology" for the disaster that Iraq has become as a result of the invasion, the tragedy that is engulfing Syria and threatening the region in the form of ISIS - and for acting on intelligence that was "wrong."

The invasion was, he admitted obliquely, responsible for the rise of ISIS. But, as ever, Blair was spinning. He and Bush had decided to attack Iraq come what may and "intelligence" - in both meanings of the word, had nothing to do with it. There was a "... mistake in our understanding of what would happen once you removed the regime." No, there was not. They had been warned and warned by experts on Iraq and the region. But they didn't listen.

Blair found it "hard to apologise for removing Saddam." The fact that he was lynched and the entire Iraq exercise at every level from Moment 1 was illegal was ignored, his friendly interviewer omitting to broach the subject.

It was not an apology, but a damage limitation exercise while pressure mounts just as Sir John Chilcot gave a June 2016 date for the release of his Inquiry's findings.

Oh, and Blair still wants to invade Syria!

CT

Blair and Bush had decided to attack Iraq come what may and "intelligence" - in both meanings of the word, had nothing to do with it

.....
Felicity Arbuthnot is a London-based political commentator specialising in the Middle East and the environment. She was senior researcher for John Pilger's "Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq" and "Denis Halliday Returns" the latter for RTE (Ireland)

How the Western media lost the plot

Which countries' foreign policies are out of control and crazy? Try looking not at Russia, but a little closer to home, urges **Tara McCormack**

Since the Ukrainian crisis, the British media seem to have killed off their critical faculties and burned the remains for good measure

It is extraordinary to look back at Western Cold War propaganda: the scare-mongering posters and films in which America is under attack from a vast alien force abroad and undercover agents at home. Very few intelligent people today would accept this propaganda as an accurate representation of reality. It is easy to see in hindsight that much Cold War propaganda was designed to create a climate of fear domestically and drum up support for overseas militarism.

Nevertheless, one of the most profoundly depressing things about the British press today is how uncritically it parrots the official line when it comes to foreign policy. Since the Ukrainian crisis, the British media seem to have killed off their critical faculties and burned the remains for good measure. Even intelligent analysts and commentators have forgotten the lessons of the Cold War and have so easily slipped back into a pale imitation of a Cold War narrative.

When it comes to the coverage of Russian bombing in Syria, however, the British media have surpassed themselves. The reporting on Russian airstrikes in Syria has ranged from the idiotic to the dishonest to the frankly astonishing. A headline in the *Times* a few weeks ago read "Putin defies the West!" Clearly, Putin didn't get the memo that Russian foreign policy is

now controlled in Brussels and Washington.

Putin has been presented as a cross between Professor Moriarty, Fu Manchu and Joseph Goebbels – a master strategist and evil genius using smoke and mirrors to befuddle the West as he carries out his inscrutable campaign. "What is he up to in Syria?" is the constant refrain. Recently, I debated journalist and former US diplomat James Rubin at the Cheltenham Literature Festival, and he kept remarking on how inscrutable Putin was. No wonder a kind of grudging admiration for Putin occasionally creeps into the commentary.

The problem is that this is utter nonsense. First of all, consider the claim that we have no idea what Russia is up to. This has been a running theme since the Ukraine crisis, but this is an outright lie. Russia's motives in Ukraine and in Syria are well known. They are well known not because we've got a team of Kremlinologists scrutinising Russia's obscure statements and mysterious behaviour, but because, as a representative of his government, President Putin has consistently told the West his intentions.

Now, we may not agree with Russia's motives, but that is an entirely different point. The fact of the matter is that Putin is not hiding his intentions. And yet the



Vladimir Putin: Not quite as inscrutable as the media claims.

media have never reported on it. Noam Chomsky once argued that, in a democracy, things are often hidden in plain sight – this is a very good example.

Similarly, it is simply not true that we do not know what Russia’s aims are in Syria. Russia is a long-term supporter of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad, but is by no means averse to a post-Assad Syria; its main aim is to stop Syria from collapsing. This has all been openly stated by Putin – at the UN, for example, that little known secret forum, in an interview with CBS. We may not agree with it, but to present Russian intervention as some kind of fiendish, unfathomable plot is simply laughable.

Ignored

What’s more, consider the heated debate about the impact of Russia’s intervention on Syria. Who knew the British media were so concerned about the malign effects of bombing a foreign country? You certainly wouldn’t have guessed it from the coverage of the US and its allies’ own year-long bombardment of Syria. Nor do

you get this impression from the media discussion of the British government’s desire to join in on the Western bombing. The British media have completely ignored the disastrous effects of Western intervention in Syria. The West has been attempting to bomb Islamic State positions while, at the same time, supporting jihadi groups such as the al-Nusra Front. Our new “allies” in Syria have links to al-Qaeda. Have we totally taken leave of our senses? More to the point, why isn’t this front page news? And let’s not forget the US’s \$500-million plan to train up fighters – of whom about four or five remain. The Free Syrian Army is more or less a fiction, with little existence outside of the imagination of the State Department and the Foreign Office. At the same time, the West is allowing one of the most disgusting and shameful acts of this crisis to go on unchallenged – that is, Turkey’s bombing of the truly heroic Kurdish forces, the only coherent, pro-West political and military force in Syria and Iraq that is attacking IS.

Where is all the coverage of the utterly useless, dishonest and misguided Western campaign in Syria? If this had a 10th of the coverage given to Russian bombing I think the public and political discussion in Britain would be very different. The British media present Russian political elites as out of control and crazy, but anyone looking at Western foreign policy over the past 20 years would see that the West has been the single most destabilising force in world affairs since the Cold War. We hear an awful lot about the biases of Russian state media, but the Western media have little self-awareness of their own failings. **CT**

.....
Tara McCormack is a lecturer in international politics at the University of Leicester. She is author of “Critique, Security and Power: The Political Limits to Critical and Emancipatory Approaches to Security,” published by Routledge

The British media present Russian political elites as out of control and crazy, but anyone looking at Western foreign policy over the past 20 years would see that the West has been the single most destabilising force in world affairs since the Cold War

'I would have refused such an order'

British pilot tells **David Edwards** and **David Cromwell** what he thinks about US bombing of the Afghan hospital at Kunduz

"The fact that the hospital was targeted on five separate occasions with unerring accuracy simply underlines how deliberate this attack was"

On October 24, Médecins Sans Frontières announced that 30 people had now tragically died after the deliberate US bombing of a hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, on October 3, up from the initial toll of 22. The humanitarian organisation, also known as Doctors Without Borders, continued to call for an independent international investigation into what it has called a "war crime." Associated Press has just reported new evidence "that US forces destroyed what they knew was a functioning hospital."

The report comments:

"The Army Green Berets who requested the Oct. 3 airstrike on the Doctors without Borders trauma center in Afghanistan were aware it was a functioning hospital but believed it was under Taliban control, The Associated Press has learned."

Damningly, AP adds:

"A day before an American AC-130 gunship attacked the hospital, a senior officer in the Green Beret unit wrote in a report that US forces had discussed the hospital with the country director of the medical charity group, presumably in Kabul, according to two people who have seen the document."

Meanwhile, there has still been no leading article in any UK newspaper backing MSF's call for an independent inquiry.

In response to an earlier media lens ar-

ticles about the event, we were contacted by a former RAF pilot with 20 years' military experience in several countries, including Afghanistan. He had discovered our articles by following a link in a comment posted underneath a recent *Guardian* piece mentioning the attack.

The former pilot gave us his name but, for obvious reasons, wishes to remain anonymous. He told us that he has experience flying fast jets and multi-engine aircraft, and that he served operationally in the Balkans, Kosovo, Afghanistan and elsewhere. As far as we can tell, he appears to be genuine. He wrote to Media Lens in a series of emails (October 21-24):

"It has been my firm opinion from the very beginning that Kunduz hospital was indeed deliberately targeted. I slightly digress from the Lindorff article in that the AC-130 Gunship is a pinpoint platform with a choice of munitions. The fact that the hospital was targeted on five separate occasions with unerring accuracy simply underlines how deliberate this attack was. The Gunship itself is a revered weapon on the battlefield, manned by elite crews who are very highly trained. I was involved in the Afghan campaign almost from the beginning when things were pretty hairy. The aircraft of choice for UK Special Forces on the ground was the Gunship and they lobbied for a UK version. It is expensive and



Murder machine: The hospital at Kunduz was attacked by a monster AC-130 Gunship.

Photo: Wikipedia

due to the side-mounted howitzer limited to one role and so their requests were denied. The Gunship gives unsurpassed support to troops on the ground because of its multi-hour endurance and loiter capability and the accuracy of its smaller calibre cannon and capability of its enormous 105mm howitzer.”

He continued:

“I do not accept that the target could have been mistakenly targeted. The crew and command centre would have been fully aware they were attacking a hospital. I followed one of your links suggesting that the C130 crew challenged their orders to target the hospital. This is the very least that I’d have expected to happen. I have extensive operational experience flying in Afghanistan. I am struggling to comprehend in what circumstance I would blindly follow an order to attack a fully manned civilian hospital. If the description provided by MSF’s director-general is

accurate I can say without hesitancy that I would have refused such an order for it is an obvious war crime. During the Kosovo war it was fairly routine for RAF Harrier pilots to return home with bombs still loaded because they had been unable to confirm visual acquisition of targets. RAF pilots are probably more inclined to think for themselves than American crews who are extremely tightly controlled. American military personnel give up many rights when they join up, but I am still disappointed that this crew did not appear to do more to challenge their orders. Back in the UK, we lost crown immunity many years ago and **it is essential to challenge every questionable act carried out on the battlefield** (our emphasis).

“Given that we agree that the hospital was deliberately targeted it would be useful to try and understand why. It is my opinion that whilst possible, it is unlikely that this was a mistake, intentional

“American military personnel give up many rights when they join up, but I am still disappointed that this crew did not appear to do more to challenge their orders”

HOSPITAL ATTACK

“Unfortunately, the US military changed their version several times which weakened their case immediately”



Aftermath: the bombed hospital at Kunduz in Afghanistan.

or otherwise, by Afghan commanders on the ground. I saw an unconfirmed report stating that US Special Forces were on the ground in Kunduz so it is unlikely that Afghans alone would have called in the attack. So the alternative is that the crew were given their mission from US Central Command or it was called in on the ground by their own people. This is why I doubt we'll see an independent inquiry. Very senior military officers would be on the hook for what happened in Kunduz because they would have authorised the sustained attack. It is still possible that the Kunduz hospital is seen as an operational 'success'; the world of special operations is opaque. It is also a vague possibility that this was an act of gross incompetence, but that would still constitute a war crime. In any case, I simply do not believe it to be incompetence because of the sustained nature of the attack.”

He also commented on media coverage:

“The response in the mainstream media mainly consisted of repeating what came off the wires. Unfortunately, the US military changed their version several times which weakened their case immediately.

My own experience of BBC journalists is positive but when it comes to describing a major news event there is an immediate suspicion of editorial control from on high. I think it is extremely valuable that you target both individual journalists and the reporting of such events in general. I absolutely commend this approach, which is why I am happy to support you in your endeavours.”

Readers may be shocked that even the deliberate bombing of a hospital may be regarded as an operational “success” There is no doubt that, were the full truth to emerge, the attack on the MSF hospital would be even more deeply embarrassing and damaging to Western interests than it already is. After all, “we” do not commit war crimes; only “our” enemies do that.

Long-time readers of Media Lens may recall that, in 2007, a serving British army officer in Iraq responded to an exchange we'd had with Mark Urban, the diplomatic editor of BBC Newsnight. The officer strongly rejected Urban's contention that the central US aim was that of “forcing a democracy into the heart of the Middle East” (Newsnight, BBC2, April 12, 2005), commenting:

“There is a widespread, and well-sourced, belief based on both experience and evidence, in both the British military and academia, that the US is not ‘just in Iraq to keep the peace, regardless of what the troops on the ground believe. It is in Iraq to establish a client state amenable to the requirements of US realpolitik in a key, oil-rich region. To doubt this is to be ignorant of the motives that have guided US foreign policy in the post-war period and a mountain of evidence since 2003.’ (quote from Media Lens).”

The officer gave rare voice to widespread scepticism within the military:

“That the invasion was ‘illegal, immoral and unwinnable,’ and the ‘greatest foreign policy blunder since Suez.’.. is the overwhelming feeling of many of my peers, and they speak of loathsome six-month tours, during which they led patrols with dread and fear, reluctantly providing target practice for insurgents, senselessly haemorrhaging casualties, and squandering soldiers’ lives, as part of Bush’s vain

attempt to delay the inevitable Anglo-US rout until after the next US election.

“Given a free choice most of us would never have invaded Iraq, and certainly would have withdrawn long ago.”

In response, Urban discussed the officer’s email on the BBC’s Newsnight programme; a rare concession to media activism.

Recall that the former RAF officer who emailed us after our Kunduz media alert made this particularly welcome point:

“It is essential to challenge every questionable act carried out on the battlefield.”

It certainly is essential. And this is true, not just for military personnel with destructive high-tech weaponry at their fingertips, but also for journalists whose reporting has the power to facilitate or obstruct crimes against humanity. **CT**

.....
David Cromwell and David Edwards are co-editors of media lens, the British media watchdog at <http://medialens.org>

“Given a free choice most of us would never have invaded Iraq, and certainly would have withdrawn long ago”

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Ambushed

Dell Franklin drives a family down to the post office

She always sorts through her mash of cash when I drive her home late at night and makes sure to hand me the most wrinkled, soggy singles and lets me keep the coin change if it's 50 cents or less

Around 5 o'clock rush hour I am sent to the Super 8 motel at the north edge of town on motel row. It's one of the few motels in San Luis Obispo that lodges people at weekly rates for as long as they want provided they don't damage the rooms or disturb other lodgers. I know my passengers are a black family, one of two regular customers among the tiny black population in this small college town.

The other black person I pick up is a buxom, good-natured woman around 40 who drinks heavily nights in the ghastly Gas Light and hooks some characters in that dive for small bills. She always sorts through her mash of cash when I drive her home late at night and makes sure to hand

me the most wrinkled, soggy singles and lets me keep the coin change if it's 50 cents or less. She resides in a rundown apartment complex among many Latinos and a scattering of blacks and white folks who seem refugees from our shabbiest trailer parks.

Once, when I dropped her off in a tipsy, flirty condition, she had no money and had me wait while she went upstairs to drag down her man to pay. He was small, with a pot belly, and cloudy eyes glowering with murderous intent as he asked me if I could "put this one on the cuff." When I shook my head he sent her back up to the apartment for a piggy

bank. She docilely complied while he stood not looking at me or anything, but I glanced at him and saw in his eyes utter hopelessness long dissolved into sullen indolence barely concealing a terrifying cold-heartedness.

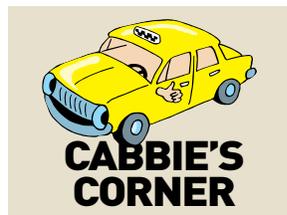
When the lady returned, handing him a glass of coins, he slowly dropped quarters, dimes, nickels and pennies into my hand for exact change and then glanced quickly at his woman, who crept off like a dog anticipating a beating from her master, and then followed her, body clenched.

The black folks in this apartment complex, other than the hooker, never take cabs. They take the bus. You see them in laundromats and thrift shops and dollar stores and fast food franchises. You seldom see them

walking the streets or the trendy downtown or riding bicycles; you see them at bus stops alongside Latino nannies and the homeless.

The family of seven has been living in a couple of rooms at the Super 8 for about six months. Before moving here they lived in a now-bulldozed vintage two-storey wooden Victorian in an old neighborhood at the edge of town. The home was in disrepair and an eyesore among new homes replacing versions of a past era.

There is no indication that any member of this family works. The matriarch is a wiz-



ened woman of at least 80 who has no teeth and talks as if from the south. The daughter is around 60, her husband the same age, their two daughters perhaps 35 or 40, a grandson and granddaughter seem elementary school age. All are silent and uncommunicative except the female child, who always insists on coming along when I drive to their usual destination of Food 4 Less at the beginning of each month when their cheques come in, and wait with meter running for up to an hour.

I used to pick up one of the patriarch's sons, a 40-ish wreck of a supreme saxophonist who once played on a grand stage but later tried to sell me his beloved sax for a cab ride and cash so he could visit his heroin dealer. I turned him down. He begged. I pleaded with him to give up the drugs and recapture the magic I'd witnessed at a local club years back. He gazed at me like I was a lunatic.

"Why y'all give a mothafuck?" he asked, a formerly ultra mellow cat showing his first signs of anger.

"You're a human being, man."

"Fuck yah, y'all ain't knows shit. What whirl y'all livin' in?"

"Get out of my cab, Leon. You smell bad, look bad. Go die somewhere else."

"Yeh, I get out, mothafucka, fuck y'all."

None of my fellow white cabbies want to pick up the family or any of its members. They never tip. They make you wait while they do errands. Their anger and distrust lurks beneath exaggerated politeness. Often they do their shopping at Food 4 Less late at night, when planes come in and bars are closing and a cabbie makes bank, and you seethe, knowing the other two cabbies are flying around stealing your money.

It is 4:30 in the afternoon when I pull up to the Super 8. I honk the horn. As usual, there is no reaction. It's usually five minutes before a door opens and I never honk twice, realizing they won't face the public unless perfectly presentable. Even if I'm 30 minutes late, at least five minutes pass

before a door opens. This time, out come the old matriarch, the two 60-year-olds, the daughter, and the little girl. The oldsters sit in back, momma in the middle, the daughter and child in front, the child beside me.

The patriarch in the back is well groomed and still handsome and of a lighter skin, like the great Cab Calloway, and was evidently once a musician of note like his son. I have never seen the very attractive daughter up front when she wasn't scowling in a manner that might intimidate an inexperienced white person. The child beside me is in pigtails and always wants to talk, asking where I live and do I like my job and am I happy, and I'm always friendly and responsive to her while the others remain stony and aloof.

The patriarch says, "Goin' to the post office." The old Roosevelt era post office is in the centre of downtown on a main artery across from the Cineplex and Barnes & Noble and a row of little franchise boutiques and cafes and a Starbucks. I head down motel row in that direction and make a turn having gone about half a mile, when the woman up front snarls, "Where the fuck you goin'?"

These are her first words to me ever. "To the post office, ma'am."

"The post office ain't that way. Where y'all takin' us?"

"The main post office downtown, on Marsh Street."

"We ain't goin' to that post office downtown. We goin' to the post office over on Madonna Road."

"I didn't know that..."

"What you doin', you takin' the long way an' run up the meter. You takin' advantage of poor folks, what YOU doin'."

"I don't do that. You should have told me you wanted to go to the post office clear across town when the main one's only a short hop downtown. I can't read your mind."

"You prejudice mothafucka, don't y'all sass me."

My heart beats like a base drum as a chill runs up my spine, tingles my scalp. I feel sud-

Often they do their shopping at Food 4 Less late at night, when planes come in and bars are closing and a cabbie makes bank, and you seethe, knowing the other two cabbies are flying around stealing your money

ON THE ROAD

The little girl stares at me, her wide-eyed innocence shattered, as if I'm a monster. There is a relaxed smugness in back

denly weak, deflated. "I'm not a prejudiced person, ma'am."

"Fuck y'all ain't. Y'all got the attitude, you hatin' us niggers. I smell a racist mothafucka a mile away. That you. Now y'all turn around an' take us to the mothafuckin' post office on Madonna, you hear?"

I'm shaking. I gaze in the rearview mirror. They're all meeting my eyes with knowing, persecuted, surly eyes of their own. The little girl stares at me, her wide-eyed innocence shattered, as if I'm a monster. There is a relaxed smugness in back.

I turn the cab and head for the freeway, which I can take to the Madonna Road exit. "Look," I say to the woman in front. "I'm turning off the meter. This is a misunderstanding, so let's start over. When I pass the Super 8 I'll restart it, okay?"

"Sheee-it," she mutters. "I reportin' y'all to the cab comp'ny. Y'all tryin' rip us off."

I release a massive sigh and enter the freeway, start the meter. She's glaring at me. "Us poor niggers got to put up with yo' racist bullshit. Y'all treat us like shit. Y'all ain't nothin' but po' white trash."

"I'm just the opposite, if you'd give me a chance."

I gun the engine, wanting to get this ordeal over with. My face feels flushed as she glares at me, smoldering with righteous rage.

"Y'all can't fool me. We ain't payin' shit fo' this cab ride, mothafucka, cuz y'all try an' rip is off cuz we niggers. You ain't getting' shit!"

Something snaps and I find myself pounding the dashboard twice with such savagery that the Crown Victoria shakes. The sound coming out of me is strangled yet so loud it echoes in my own ears: "I'll pull this cab over right now you don't pay! I'll drop the whole goddam bunch of you off right here, right now, and call the goddam cops and have you thrown in jail for refusing to pay cab fare. TRY not paying me, bitch!"

"You mothafuckin' piece o' trash, try an' call the cops."

I start to pull over. The patriarch calmly taps my shoulder from behind. "Keep going.

Take us to the post office. We will pay."

I'm trying to get my breath. I've got an instant headache. I'm sweating bullets and my gut roils with nausea. My hands shake as if palsied. I veer onto the Madonna Road off ramp. There is silence, but the woman sitting shotgun rests her malignant eyes on me, nodding slowly, reassuring me that I am exactly what she has accused me of being, and worse – the enemy, the pestilence responsible for centuries of misery and humiliation and their current plight. My heartbeat is strangling me. We poke along Madonna Road parallel to the giant mall and I can feel the woman's baleful eyes on me but refuse to look at her.

I pull up to the post office.

"We ain't payin' this low-life trash," growls my tormentor.

"Momma," says the patriarch calmly. "Give the man his money."

While the little girl gazes at me in horror, near tears, the ancient lady picks through a saggy cloth hand bag with gnarled fingers. She inspects each of the nine wrinkled bills to make sure they're singles; then adds a dime and two nickels for exact fare. They all pile out, the woman who tongue-lashed me haughty, not bothering to cast me one last scowl, finished with me, proud, regal. The ancient lady, creakily gathering herself out of the back seat on the hand of the patriarch, catches my eye with her own rheumy eyes.

"Y'all can't hep who you is," she utters with resigned sadness. "Po thang."

I pull over a few spaces and park. I cannot drive. I am unnerved to the very core. Still, I check in with our dispatcher and tell her I will never pick these people up again, racist or no racist, and she reminds me that somebody has to pick them up, so live with it.

Hours later, though, during dead time between dinner and the bar crowd, the lingering uneasiness still in my gut, it dawns on me with blinding finality: These people are always clean and pleasantly fragrant and dressed exquisitely in new, well-pressed, stylish attire – even the ancient one – while I look as if I just got off the boat. **CT**

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Lost passport blues

Fred Reed checks into the US embassy in Bogota and walks right into misery

I wonder whether Americans realize just how closely the United States is coming to resemble a country of the Third World, not just in its corruption and attributes of a police state, but in the incompetence of governmental bureaucracies. Federal agencies don't work. They are rotted by affirmative action. The bureaucrats are inattentive, unaccountable, anonymous, can't be fired, and get paid whether they do their jobs or not. Congress is not interested.

A few examples, from my experience or that of people I know, mostly involving veterans, but typical.

Nightmare the First: Incompetence at state

A few weeks ago my wife and I, traveling in Colombia, managed to lose our passports, so we went to the US Embassy to get replacements. I see very poorly thanks to an ancient federal war to enrich the arms manufacturers and a bungling naval eye surgeon. Consequently Violeta had to fill out the forms for me to apply for an emergency passport.

In three separate places, she printed my name: Frederick Venable Reed. Venable. V-E-N-A-B-L-E. In my hearing, Vi spelled it out for the woman, letter by letter. And of course my passport records in the State Department's database spelled it correctly.

So we get the passport, \$135, take it to the

Mexican Embassy to start getting my residency proved, and fly to Santa Marta for a week of beaches and huge shrimp, expecting to find everything done on our return.

No. Instead, we find that the passport has my middle name as "Venerable." If you do not travel much, this may seem minor. It is not. No country will accept approximations on passports. Far worse, it can look like a fraudulent document, and then you are in big trouble. So back to the embassy, which charges me another \$135 to correct their mistake and, for complex reasons I won't bore you with, 10 extra days in Colombia trying to unscrew the downstream results of incompetence. Airline change fees, hotels, meals. It was not fun.

Now - bear with me - Embassy people know that passports are important. The change from "Venable" to "Venerable" is not a typo, but a deliberate substitution of a word for a name. Why? Was the woman too lazy to check the spelling against many sources that had it correctly? Thinking about buying some new shoes? Just didn't give a damn? Can't be fired, and gets paid anyway? Or maybe that State consists notoriously of semi-pseudo-kind-Ivy prisses, and Vi and I were traveling in jeans and sweats. Not their kind of people? I have encountered State 'crats around the world. They are not the sort who much like aging vets with high-school diplomas and old jeans. Which we

So back to the embassy, which charges me another \$135 to correct their mistake and 10 extra days in Colombia trying to unscrew the downstream results of incompetence

THIRD WORLD?

How does a vet in a small village in Mexico, where he lives because it is the only place he can afford, get to some remote appointment with no car?

looked like.

Unaccountable. Anonymous. Inattentive. Federal. Third World.

Nightmare the Second: Casual abandonment of disabled veterans

In Mexico where I live, there are a lot of mutilated vets, mostly aging men from Vietnam days, a fair number rated as 100 per cent disabled: half crazy, blind, in wheel chairs, organs don't work, or in constant pain. An RPG coming through the deck of a Huey does things like that. So do lots of other things.

Now the Drug Enforcement Agency, like so many parts of our sorry government, is making it harder for vets to get pain medication. As usual, the technique is to multiply rules, regulations, requirements, and forms until it becomes almost impossible to comply. How is a veteran in Mexico, with a high-school education and no experience of federal bureaucracy, supposed to obey rules he probably hasn't heard of, rules that just don't work here? Monthly appointments to renew prescriptions? Appointments with whom? How does a vet in a small village in Mexico, where he lives because it is the only place he can afford, get to some remote appointment with no car?

DEA doesn't care. Veterans? What?

Nightmare the third: Throwing away money

By law, children of the 100-per cent-disabled combat vets can receive help, about \$8,500 a year, with the university expenses of their children. One such vet here, I'll call him Dad, was accepted for such aid for his kid, whom I will call Kid.

Dad, reasonably enough, asked the Veteran Affairs to deposit the money directly into Kid's account in Mexico. Direct deposit is instantaneous, secure, and verifiable. But T/VA (Treasury or VA, he isn't sure which) won't deposit money electronically to accounts in Mexico.

Well, said Dad, deposit it directly to my

account in the US. No, said T/VA, we can deposit money only to an account in Kid's name.

The government had thus ruled out the only secure means of transferring the taxpayer's money.

Well, said Dad, send a check to my mail-forwarding service in Laredo. It is not perfectly secure, but far more so than the Mexican mails. No, said T/VA, they could not send the money of Kid in Mexico to a post-office box in Texas.

This ruled out even the reasonably secure methods. T/VA was going to send a large cheque through the mails of a notoriously corrupt country. This insistence embodied the normal governmental qualities of stupidity, irresponsibility, lack of realism, and unconcern with results.

Now, if you are going to send a large cheque through extremely corrupt mails, the wise thing to do is to send it in a plain envelope, the way banks send replacement credit cards. No. Treasury sends cheques in distinctive brown envelopes with a cellophane window, making the cheque visible. This is stupid even by federal standards, and federal standards are very high. The envelope does not actually say, "cheque! cheque! Steal me!" But it comes close.

If you insist on sending a large check of someone else's money in an obvious envelope through crooked mails, would it not make sense to endorse the check, "For deposit to account of payee only. Require passport"? Yes, it would. But we are talking about the government. It's not their money. They don't care.

The cheque was stolen and cashed illegally in California. The same thing happened to Kid's second cheque sent as a replacement, and then to a third. That is, the feds, who are anonymous, unaccountable, don't care, can't be fired, and get paid anyway, threw away \$25,000 of the taxpayers' money. Might the Treasury notice this, and perhaps do something different? No. Why should they? Federal workers get paid anyway.

Why does this happen? Hint: Nobody goes through college thinking, “Gee, I can’t wait to get on with IRS or HUD or TSA and spend the best 30 years of my life in a boring and meaningless job.” The government gets (1) people who value security over all else, (2) sociology majors with no ambition who need, well, some kind of job, (3) people who are not good enough at what they do – lawyers, accountants, programmers – to get on with real companies, and (4) affirmative-action hires.

Nightmare the fourth: Technological primitivism

Further stupidity: The government doesn’t use email, making it almost impossible to deal with any federal entity reliably from outside the country. Thirty-five years into the age of the internet, this is insane, but governmental employees have no incentive to behave sanely.

For example, if the VA or, probably, any branch of the government, wants a vet to fill out Form VA-4-3455/GH3599 (I made that up, but it probably exists), it does not email him with an attachment or a link to the form online. No. This would be instantaneous, secure, and verifiable. It is not the governmental way.

Instead it sends a paper form, which in Mexico may arrive in five days, three months, or not at all. He then has to fill it out and send it back in physical mail, squaring the probability of loss. Just as, if the form doesn’t get to him he has no way of knowing it was sent, if the reply doesn’t get to the government, he has no way of knowing that it didn’t. Symmetry.

It is not unusual to receive a federal letter two months after it was sent, threatening dire consequences if not answered within one month. Incompetence of this sort occurs all through the bureaucracy. The Internal revenue Service ignores 60 per cent of calls from taxpayers. When undercover agents try to smuggle weapons and explosives past TSA, they succeed 95 per cent% of

the time. Nothing works.

You might expect it in Haiti. You get it in the United States.

Nightmare the fifth: More technological primitivism

To deal with the VA, a vet usually needs his military records. Good freaking luck. They do not exist in electronic form, but only as paper in boxes somewhere. When I needed mine recently I was told that they were in Pittsburg, no, St. Louis, no, Austin, no, Portland. It took six months and I never would have gotten them without the help of a friend, an aggressive retired attorney and blown-up explosive ordnance demolition guy out of Nam, who threatens litigation when vets are stonewalled.

Which brings us to an important point: A veteran on his own cannot deal with the government. Almost nobody can. The incompetence, stupidity, inattention, lack of incentive, ignorance of their own regulations, and so on make it impossible. For the price of one useless fighter plane VA records could be scanned and keyed to social-security numbers, thus making them available in 10 seconds. The government just doesn’t care. If it did, it would scan.

Compare the foregoing with a company in the real world—Amazon, say. It has my fairly complex records instantly available, answers emails usually within a day, and its telephone staff, who answer quickly, actually want to solve problems, and always do—courteously. If I order something, they calculate the Mexican tax, tell me when it will arrive, and it does.

Do you suppose that if Amazon’s employees threw away \$25,000 of the company’s money through sheer stupidity and unconcern, they would long be Amazon’s employees? If the company ignored 60% of calls from customers, or if 95% of shipments failed to reach their destinations, do you suppose the company would survive? This is exactly the federal standard. Bush world. **CT**

For the price of one useless fighter plane VA records could be scanned and keyed to social-security numbers, thus making them available in 10 seconds

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Fred Reed’s books include “Nekkid in Austin: Drop Your Inner Child Down a Well,” “Reports from a Fractal Dung Beetle,” “Au Phuc Dup,” “Nowhere to Go: The Only Really True Book About VietNam.” he blogs at <http://fredoneverything.org>

Blood brothers

Gary Indiana reads a revealing new book about the Boston bombers

The brothers had placed, and detonated by remote control, two explosive devices fashioned from pressure cookers stuffed with shrapnel

On 24 June, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the younger of two Chechen-American brothers responsible for the Boston Marathon bombing on April 15, 2013, was sentenced to death in a Boston federal court. (His older brother, Tamerlan, died following a street battle with police in Watertown, Massachusetts, several nights after the bombing.) The brothers had placed, and detonated by remote control, two explosive devices fashioned from pressure cookers stuffed with shrapnel; three people were killed in the blasts, and more than 260 others suffered serious, permanent injuries, including 16 who lost limbs.

Footage from multiple surveillance cameras overlooking the Boston Marathon dispelled any reasonable doubt that the Tsarnaev brothers had planted the bombs and set them off. At Tsarnaev's trial, notwithstanding his 'not guilty' plea on 30 separate capital charges, his chief defence attorney told the court: "It was him." This effectively confined the defence case to the assertion that Dzhokhar had acted under the powerful influence of Tamerlan, and would not have carried out the bombing on his own, counting on character witnesses in the trial's penalty phase to dramatise this idea to the jury. One witness testified that Dzhokhar had been 'like a puppy following his brother,' a characterisation eerily illustrated by surveillance videos of Dzhokhar

trailing Tamerlan by several metres on the pavement lining the marathon route.

The defence team's sole objective was a life sentence for their client, an unlikely outcome from the outset, given that the court denied motions to change the trial venue from Boston itself to a town where jurors' friends or families were less likely to have been affected by the bombing. In a non-death penalty state like Massachusetts a federal case in which execution is an option can still be heard so long as the jury is "death-qualified" – i.e. all the jurors have declared themselves willing to deliver a death verdict. Since 80 per cent of Massachusetts residents specifically opposed execution in the Tsarnaev case, the jury was necessarily drawn from an unusually narrow pool, and was therefore disproportionately likely to impose capital punishment. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev has since been moved to federal death row in Terre Haute, Indiana, since – although a non-death penalty state can deliver a death verdict – the executions themselves must be carried out in a state that has death penalty statutes. This risible scruple has a practical aspect: Such states also have the requisite killing equipment on hand, and often seem to relish the chance to use it. (In recent Ohio, Arizona and Oklahoma executions, a European export embargo on lethal injection drugs has prompted mix'n'match improvisations



Blood and devastation: After the Boston bombing of April 15, 2013.

Photo: Wikipedia

A European export embargo on lethal injection drugs has prompted mix'n'match improvisations with untested pharmaceuticals, with results Josef Mengele would consider plagiarism

with untested pharmaceuticals, with results Josef Mengele would consider plagiarism.) Timothy McVeigh, whose trial venue was shifted from Oklahoma City to Denver, Colorado, got transferred post-trial to the same death row in Terre Haute.

Whether Tsarnaev will, as McVeigh did, forego the often decades-long appeals process to hasten his end is an open question. While hiding from police inside a boat in a backyard in Watertown, Dzhokhar managed to write a rather long note on the boat's hull that began: "I'm jealous of my brother who ha [bullet hole] ceived the reward of jannatul Firdaus (inshallah) before me." ("Jannatul Firdous" is a name for "the highest paradise" in Arabic, as well as a line of speciality fragrances available online from Givaudan Roure, "the oldest perfumery house in the Arabian Gulf.") For all we know, Dzhokhar's jealousy may already have cooled. If so, ample grounds for appeal exist. There is the venue issue. Then too, US District Judge George O'Toole Jr refused to give the standard jury instruction, which says that a single holdout juror can avert a death sentence permanently – that

is, without the penalty phase of the trial being repeated until a unanimous verdict is reached. The grotesqueness of executing a 22-year-old is not considered grounds for appeal: The death-qualifying age, so to speak, is 18.

Unlike several recent books on the marathon bombing, Masha Gessen's "The Brothers" is uninflected by consoling homilies, Manichean narrative framing or civic propaganda. Gessen's is a superlative work of reporting that locates the Boston atrocity and the Tsarnaevs in the queasy context of the modern world, where atrocities happen every day, in places presumed to be 'safe' as well as those beset by civil war. "The Brothers" provides essential Soviet and post-Soviet geopolitical background, charting the Tsarnaev family's peregrinations from Kyrgyzstan (to where Stalin brutally transplanted the entire Chechen population in 1944) to Novosibirsk in south central Russia, where the brothers' parents, Anzor and Zubeidat, met (he was finishing his Soviet military service, she seeking her eldest brother's permission to move to Moscow). They later moved to Kalmykia, the Soviet

FAMILY LIFE

The Tsarnaevs arrived in America soon after 9/11, when Muslims began to replace communists as objects of fear for the media demonisation industry

republic where Tamerlan was born; back to Kyrgyzstan, where two daughters, Bella and Ailina, were added to the family; then to Chiry-Yurt in Chechnya, Dzhokhar's birthplace.

From Chechnya they returned again to Kyrgyzstan to escape the 1994 Russian bombing of Grozny. In 2000, they moved to Makhachkala in Dagestan, where the second Chechen war was spilling over the border. Wahhabi fundamentalism had spread through the Caucasus, its suspected adherents a target for Russian troops and local police. As Gessen writes:

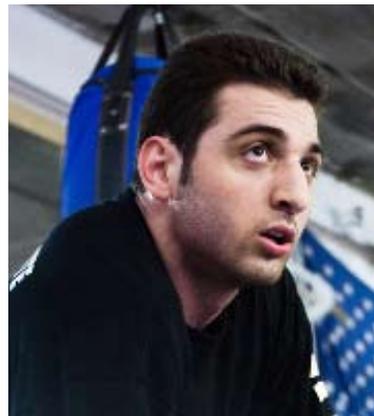
"Makhachkala and much of the rest of Dagestan became a battleground ... This was the Dagestan to which Anzor and Zubeidat brought their four children, including Tamerlan, who at 14 was on the verge of becoming that most endangered and most dangerous of human beings: a young Dagestani man. [They] had to move again, to save their children - again."

They would go to America after all.

The Tsarnaevs weren't always fleeing incipient war zones. Sometimes they just rolled elsewhere in search of a better deal. More often than not, his mother, Zubeidat, the more wilful and ambitious of the parents, decided where they would go. Bad timing, bad luck and defective reality-testing all feature prominently in the story Gessen tells; so do seemingly minuscule ethnic and



Blood brothers: Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (above) was sentenced to death; his elder brother Tamerlan (below) died following a street battle with police.



religious distinctions that caused the Tsarnaevs to feel out of place wherever they lived. They were Chechens outside Chechnya, Muslims in only the nominal sense that their ethnic codes reflected a vaguely Islamic influence.

Things didn't work out in America. The Tsarnaevs arrived soon after 9/11, when Muslims began to replace communists as objects of fear for the media demonisation industry. Chechens, who had once been welcomed as refugees from Russian aggression, became suspect after Russia and the US began collaborating in the "war on terror." (The US ignored Russian atrocities in Chechnya in exchange for air bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.) While it's unclear whether the Tsarnaevs experienced egregious anti-Muslim, anti-Chechen or other discrimination in the US (they didn't wear Islamic dress, and one daughter successfully copped a Latina identity for a while), their

ethnicity and religion complicated the legal status of some family members, and they must have seen themselves as part of a despised, if nebulous, minority.

The travails of the Tsarnaev clan are almost too numerous and tangled to itemise. The new life in America started with the thorny process of asylum-seeking, scrambling for housing and off-the-books work (asylum applicants are prohibited from employment or collecting benefits for a year), finding schools for the children, and trying to decipher local conditions. The Tsarnaevs landed in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which

was a mixed blessing: a liberal enclave of top-notch universities and rapidly gentrifying neighbourhoods, its contiguous working-class areas a Hogarthian reminder of the destiny awaiting failure. A well-educated, Russian-speaking, guardian angel landlady, Joanna Herlihy, entered their lives at a propitious moment. Herlihy, who “for most of her adult life ... had been trying to save the world,” can be viewed retrospectively as a mixed blessing too. Untiringly helpful in practical matters, she sheltered her new tenants behind a baffle of contentious idealism, ratifying their feelings of persecution when wishes didn’t come true. The stellar expectations of the Tsarnaevs eroded in increments. Within a few years, they collected grievances like baseball cards.

Gessen writes that kids in newly arrived families “stop being kids, because the adults have lost their bearings ... they go through a period of intense suffering and dislocation made all the more painful for being forced and unexpected. But at the other end of the pain, they locate their roles and settle into them, claiming their places in the new world.” Most of the Tsarnaev children, however, did less and less well as time went on. The family pattern had been set by their parents: when troubles piled up after every fresh start, they just moved somewhere else. Gessen’s narrative makes the Tsarnaevs palpable enough, but unworldliness mists the atmosphere around them; Anzor and Zubeidat sound too narcissistic, too skilled in extracting sympathy and favours from new acquaintances, to compromise much with American reality. No one in the family stuck to any ambitious plan long enough to realise it. Anzor, whose bogus claim to have been a prosecutor’s assistant in Kyrgyzstan got him nowhere, took up his previous trade as a freelance car mechanic; Zubeidat, after thwarted efforts to translate documents for human rights groups, became a home care worker, later a beautician. With the exception of Dzhokhar, the undoubtedly bright children began

to stumble in their new surroundings.

Zubeidat, who believed Tamerlan “perfect’ and ‘destined for greatness,” no doubt instilled a great deal of self-belief in him. But, as Gessen writes, “he had lived in seven cities and attended an even greater number of schools,” entering 10th grade in Cambridge at 17. He struggled for good grades and to learn English, but as the oldest child was also the most wrongfooted by repeated dislocation. Hopes for him shifted to a career in boxing or music. Catnip to women, he dressed like a gigolo and kept himself gym-solid shapely. He played keyboards, and thought of becoming a music star, but never really pursued it. After dropping out of community college, he delivered pizzas and sold weed. He married, and fathered a child. He won some impressive boxing matches and an amateur Golden Gloves trophy, but was afterwards barred from title contests because he wasn’t a US citizen; his application was held up after he was arrested for smacking his wife. At the time of the bombings, he was living on benefits and dealing drugs.

The daughters, Bella and Ailina, despite some early promise, scuttled their educations; they married Chechen men (a cultural ukase), had children, divorced, got busted for passing on counterfeit banknotes and selling weed. Nothing reachy was expected of them in the first place and they soon seemed fated for a life of welfare and sporadic work in service industries. Their designated roles were to marry within the clan, have babies to continue the bloodline, and embrace domestic servitude, as per the will of Allah. They were independent enough to get out of bad marriages and free enough to keep their own children (in the old country children were a husband’s property), but otherwise their American road turned into a dead end.

Dzhokhar, having spent his whole childhood in Cambridge, was the most assimilated of the family, and the last to stumble. A sweet, smart boy loved by all, he gradu-

Gessen writes that kids in newly arrived families “stop being kids, because the adults have lost their bearings ... they go through a period of intense suffering and dislocation made all the more painful for being forced and unexpected”

FAMILY LIFE

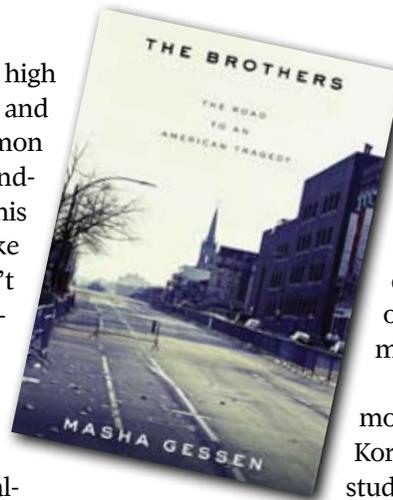
One of Zubeidat's home care clients, a loose screw called Donald Larking, passed along conspiracist libertarian newspapers and magazines

ated with honours from high school (Cambridge Rindge and Latin, alma mater of Matt Damon and Ben Affleck), despite spending much of it stoned out of his mind. He also was dealing, like Tamerlan. While he couldn't have afforded a prestige university, Dzhokhar's choice of the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth – in Gessen's generous description, “the least academically challenging” of the schools he was admitted to – reflects a dazed, amiable passivity. The Tsarnaevs were a “tight-knit family” in the most ruinous sense that family alone provided each member's sense of identity and direction. If one ran awry, eventually they all would.

All the descriptions of Dzhokhar, Gessen writes, “that have emerged from conversations with people who knew him, including people who cared for him deeply, are spectacular in their flatness. Those who watched him from a distance describe him as a social superstar. To those who thought they got closer, he was charming. Indeed, charm appears to have been his sole distinguishing personality trait. Teachers thought he was bright but uninterested in thinking for himself.”

In his sophomore year at Dartmouth he began failing subjects, stepped up his marijuana sales and narrowed his social circle to a small band of other immigrant Dartmouth students – Dias Kadyrbayev and Azamat Tazhayakov from Kazakhstan, and Robel Phillipos, an Ethiopian with US citizenship – and their occasional girlfriends. He tweeted, he facebooked. He spent much of his time away from his dorm room, at a New Bedford apartment the Kazakhs rented.

The group spent three or four evenings a week on that sofa, getting stoned, watch-



THE BROTHERS
The Road To An American Tragedy
Masha Gessin
Riverhead
\$18.63 (Amazon.com)

ing movies and eating. The boys played FIFA, a soccer video game; the girls talked about which of the boys might be the hottest lovers, though it does not appear that anyone but Dias was getting much action.

In 2009, Tamerlan and his mother “began studying the Koran.” Tamerlan also began studying “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” ever popular in Russia and the bible of anti-Semites everywhere. One of Zubeidat's home care clients, a loose screw called Donald Larking, passed along conspiracist libertarian newspapers and magazines. The internet

provided even more enticing forms of inflammatory propaganda – lectures by the al-Qaeda recruiter Anwar al-Awlaki and the like – and the opportunity to share festering resentments with thinkalikes all over the planet. Relatedly or not, Dzhokhar, a whizz at languages, opened an account on vk.com, “a Facebook clone site on which most Russians his age maintained their social media lives.” By this time, evidently, everyone realised that America had been a wrong move.

Anzor, despite a few drunken fights and scrapes with neighbours, was an essentially passive, Soviet-made working stiff, svelte and athletic in his youth, gaunt and ailing by middle age, indifferent to Islamist manias and 9/11 conspiracy lore, resigned to getting by fixing cars. His health deteriorated, and his marriage to Zubeidat, who had taken to wearing a burqa, fell apart. They divorced in 2011; in 2012, Anzor left the country for Dagestan. Meanwhile, after 10 years, Herlihy got fed up with her rebarbative tenants and their increasingly cracked views. She asked them to leave, but gave them several months to do so.

Here, more or less, is where the train goes into the tunnel. More finely sifted details of all the above can be found in Gessen's extraordinary book. It's worth noting here that Zubeidat was arrested for shoplifting from the Cambridge branch of the department store Lord & Taylor in 2012; she then took off for Dagestan, two weeks after Tamerlan returned from a seven-month visit. With both parents gone, Tamerlan was, by custom, now the head of the family in America, though Bella and Ailina, haphazardly in and out of Cambridge with their children, were living erratic lives of their own. Dzhokhar shambled back and forth in a cloud of smoke between Cambridge and New Bedford. "There was an understanding in the family now: Dagestan was the place to live." Dzhokhar spoke of moving there next summer. Tamerlan was only waiting until he could get a US passport – a valuable commodity in a pinch.

At the time of the bombings, Tamerlan was 26, Dzhokhar 19. They had no known accomplices, though the bombs were far from simple to make, and no traces of their assembly were discovered anywhere. It's also unclear when the idea of bombing the marathon first occurred to either brother. In the months before the bombing, the brothers were rarely in the same place at the same time. It's easy to suppose they created a gang of two through phone calls and text messages, and fortified their sense of mission with YouTube jihadist videos and al-Qaeda's online magazine, *Inspire*, which ran a DIY article entitled "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom." Had they held off for a year, ISIs might have attracted the brothers to Syria, but the Isis brand hadn't yet overtaken al-Qaeda's outside the Middle East and the Caucasus. It was widely reported that Tamerlan had been "radicalised" during his visit to Dagestan in 2012. Gessen thinks this an exaggeration, having tracked his activities there very closely. He hung out

with young Salafi Muslims belonging to the Union of the Just, "allied with Hizb ut-Tahrir, one of the largest Islamic organisations in the world. Hizb ut-Tahrir proclaims the goal of creating a caliphate that would unite the Muslim lands of the world ... by peaceful means, through political and philosophical struggle only." Gessen notes that some analysts consider Hizb ut-Tahrir "a gateway organisation that facilitates young Muslims' passage from peaceful civilians to jihadis," but all the same, Tamerlan did nothing much in Dagestan besides talk the Islamist talk and show off his fancy clothes.

Retrospective suspicion that Tamerlan had murdered three drug dealers in Waltham, Massachusetts, in 2011, by slitting their throats, insinuates the possibility that Tamerlan had killed people before visiting Dagestan, and was already disinhibited about inflicting lethal violence. However, we don't know, and we probably never will; the only purported witness/accomplice to the Waltham murders, a gym-mate called Ibragim Todashev, was shot seven times and killed by an FBI agent in Orlando, Florida, a month after the bombing. According to the FBI, Todashev "became aggressive" while writing out a confession implicating Tamerlan, the uncompleted text of which was inconsistent with the Waltham crime scene.

This sort of obscurity is everywhere in the Tsarnaev saga. Why was a bevy of federal agents buzzing around the MIT area in Cambridge several hours before the Tsarnaevs shot an MIT security cop? Had the FBI, at the instigation of the Russian FSB, not just interviewed Tamerlan as a suspected extremist several times in 2011, but tried to recruit him as an informant? An informant who "went rogue"? If this were the case, could the FBI have hoped to take him out before he could spill, if the police caught him alive?

Gessen has taken flak from the *New York Times* for merely asking such questions, in

They had no known accomplices, though the bombs were far from simple to make, and no traces of their assembly were discovered anywhere. It's also unclear when the idea of bombing the marathon first occurred to either brother

FAMILY LIFE

Well before the Tsarnaev brothers were identified as suspects, tabloid TV and print media launched a free-ranging witch hunt targeting Muslims, people who looked like Muslims, and unaccountable others, picked out of footage of the marathon crowd

a ponderous review by Janet Napolitano, director of the Department of Homeland Security at the time of the marathon bombing. A figure much loved by America's spy networks, Napolitano dismissed the book's descriptions of FBI malfeasance, abuses of the deportation laws and draconian prosecutions on accessory charges as "conspiracy theory." This seems quite unfair to Gessen, who tries for several pages to imagine a plausible scenario in which the FBI agent who shot Todashev seven times could have been acting in "self-defence." That she is unable really to do so is hardly her fault. The FBI itself issued several different versions of what happened before settling on something remotely credible.

Well before the Tsarnaev brothers were identified as suspects, tabloid TV and print media launched a free-ranging witch hunt targeting Muslims, people who looked like Muslims, and unaccountable others, picked out of footage of the marathon crowd, or out of nowhere; at one strange moment, even the actress Zooey Deschanel was identified as a bombing suspect on a news broadcast, perhaps because of the slightly unusual spelling of her name. After the police shoot-out (in which Tamerlan's nearly dead body was recovered, Dzhokhar having run over it in an SUV), authorities asked residents of the Boston area to "shelter in place," putting an entire American city under lockdown.

After Dzhokhar's arrest, various provisions of the US Patriot Act permitted authorities to question the gravely wounded suspect, a US citizen, for hours before he was read his Miranda rights; in the days and months that followed, almost anyone in the United States with the faintest connection to the Tsarnaevs was either harassed, deported or prosecuted for minor, even unconscious infractions that, if shoved under the umbrella of "terrorism," can be magnified by federal prosecutors into major felonies. Dias Kadyrbayev, Azamat Tazhayakov and Robel Phillipos, who removed some of

Dzhokhar's belongings from his dorm room in a stoned panic, are currently doing long stretches in federal prison; another friend who deleted the search history on his own computer has been in custody for two years awaiting trial. The charges brought against these people presumed deliberate obstruction of the bombing investigation, or of making "materially false, fictitious and fraudulent statements" to police and the FBI, when in any reasonable view, nothing they did, or told or didn't tell authorities, had any effect on the investigation whatsoever. They had no knowledge of the bombing before it happened, and were in an even greater state of confusion afterwards than anyone else in Boston, simply because they happened to know the Tsarnaevs.

What passed between the brothers in the 10 months after Zubeidat's departure to Dagestan is terra incognita. The chances are no specific event or Svengali-like radicalisation inspired the Tsarnaev brothers to blow up the Boston Marathon. As a policeman in Yasmina Khadra's 2006 novel "The Attack" puts it: "I think even the most seasoned terrorists really have no idea what has happened to them. And it can happen to anyone. Something clicks somewhere in their subconscious, and they're off ... Either it falls on your head like a roof tile or it attaches itself to your insides like a tapeworm. Afterwards, you no longer see the world in the same way." The media fantasy that Tamerlan was schizophrenic and "heard voices" is highly improbable. The consensus among terrorism experts is that terrorists are normal people. "He was a perfectly nice guy." "The last person I'd imagine doing something like this." After the fact, neighbours, friends and co-workers invariably say the same things about terrorists as they say about serial killers. It's worth noting that there isn't a single provable instance of the legendary FBI profiling unit in Quantico, Virginia, actually instigating the capture of a serial killer: It tends to be when someone is stopped for driving with

a broken tail light that the dead body in the trunk is discovered. It's only afterwards that we're told they "fit the FBI profile."

Why did they do it? How could they? In the world we live in now, the better questions are: Why not? Why wouldn't they? To quote Khadra's novel again, on suicide bombers: "The only way to get back what you've lost or to fix what you've screwed up - in other words, the only way to make something of your life - is to end it with a flourish: turn yourself into a giant firecracker in the middle of a school bus or launch yourself like a torpedo against an enemy tank."

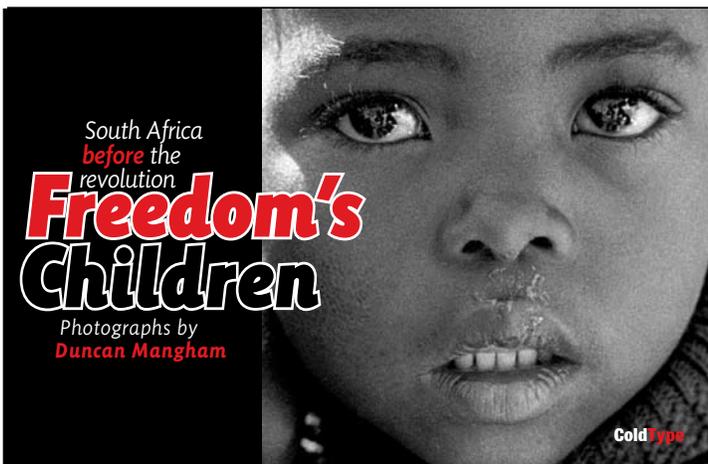
Everything the US has done to prevent terrorism has been the best advertising terrorism could possibly have. The "war on terror" has degenerated since its ugly inception in Afghanistan and Iraq into a two-pronged war against the US domestic population's civil rights and the infrastructures of Muslim nations; every cynical episode of this endless war has inched America closer to a police state, and turned people minding their own business in other countries into jihadists and suicide bombers. If

the United States were at all interested in preventing terrorism, it would first have to acknowledge that the country belongs to the citizens its economic policies have impoverished, and get rid of emergency laws that violate their rights on the pretext of ensuring their safety. This would involve dismantling the surveillance state apparatus that inflates its criminally gigantic budgets with phony terrorism warnings and a veritable industry of theatrical FBI sting operations. And then the country would have to address the systemic social problems that have been allowed to metastasise ever since the presidency of Ronald Reagan. As everyday existence becomes more punitive for all but the monied few, more and more frustrated, volatile individuals will seek each other out online, aggravate whatever lethal fairy tale suits their pathology, and, ultimately, transfer their rage from the screen world to the real one.

CT

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Gary Indiana's memoir, *"I Can Give You Anything but Love,"* has just been published. This essay was originally published by the *London Review of Books* at <http://lrb.co.uk>

Every cynical episode of this endless war has inched America closer to a police state, and turned people minding their own business in other countries into jihadists and suicide bombers



WORDS and PICTURES
 Download ColdType's photo essays at
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Behind the walls of death row

Lilly Hughes discusses a new collection of essays
by political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal

He joined the local Black Panther Party at 16 and went on to become a radio journalist, known for his critical coverage of police violence and corruption and his indictment of city leaders for their treatment of MOVE, a local Black radical collective

Fighting for freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal was my first step on the path toward becoming an abolitionist. It's the first death penalty case I organized around, and Mumia was the first person on death row who made me understand the urgent need to amplify the voices and the humanity of the men and women behind the walls.

A new collection of Mumia's essays, *Writing on the Wall*, will further amplify this important voice for abolition to a new generation of activists.

I joined the Campaign to End the Death Penalty (CEDP) in the fall of 1998 and helped start a chapter in Austin, Texas. We began following Mumia's case through the CEDP's newsletter, *The New Abolitionist*.

Mumia was on death row in Pennsylvania, wrongfully convicted for murdering a police officer. In Philadelphia, Mumia was a known voice in activist circles and city politics. He joined the local Black Panther Party at 16 and went on to become a radio journalist, known for his critical coverage of police violence and corruption and his indictment of city leaders for their treatment of MOVE, a local Black radical collective. On his radio show, Mumia decried the constant harassment, wrongful imprisonment and police violence against MOVE members.

To supplement his income, Mumia drove a cab at night. In the early morning hours of December 9, 1981, he pulled over his cab to intervene on behalf of his brother, who police were arresting. Moments later, Mumia was shot by officer Daniel Faulkner, who was subsequently shot by another person on the scene.

Months later, police would claim that Mumia confessed to the murder of Faulkner while he lay recovering in a hospital bed. That was just one of the many lies that police and prosecutors told in their attempts to frame Mumia. The many problems in the case are documented in an addendum at the end of this latest book – including false witness testimony, evidence tampering and racial bias.

Our CEDP chapter adopted the case as our first organizing campaign. We organized at the University of Texas to bring a group to Millions for Mumia, a march held in Philadelphia in April 1999. Our group of about 20 or so students and community activists joined a bus of Mumia supporters in Houston for the trip.

It was my first mass rally, and I marched alongside thousands of people who believed in Mumia's innocence, many of who also opposed the death penalty. My participation in Millions for Mumia inspired my continuous struggle for abolition of the death penalty to this day.

After the march, our chapter helped to build a local coalition devoted to fighting for justice for Mumia. One of the central aspects of our campaign was broadcasting Mumia's voice, through his writings and the available recordings he had done for radio from inside the walls.

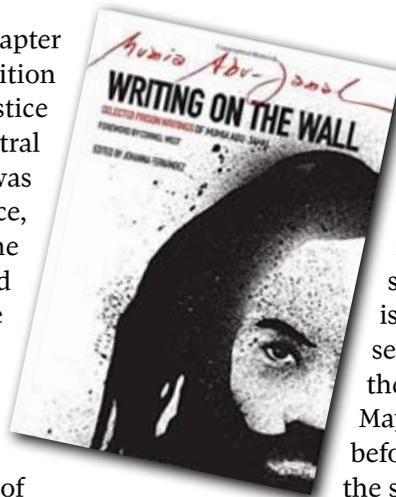
Mumia's voice, played back on cassette tapes and CDs at numerous events, was at the heart of our struggle – it played an indelible role in the personal connection that many felt to him. Hearing about his struggle in his own words was powerful, yet it was his articulation of political struggle well beyond his own case that resonated deeply with me and the other young abolitionists I worked with.

Even if you've never heard him speak before, Mumia's powerful voice rings through *Writing on the Wall*. The words here are written to be spoken – the writing is concise and the ideas are laid out with simple clarity. Yet each selection is imbued with passion and a feeling of urgency.

The essays are laid out in chronological order, beginning with an essay from Christmas 1982 shortly after Mumia was first jailed. In "Christmas in a Cage," Mumia begins by railing against his treatment at the hands of the police and the prison, only to finish the piece with a story about violence perpetrated against another prisoner at a cell not far from his own.

This solidarity is a hallmark of Mumia's writings and at the centre of his political expression, from his writings about MOVE to his attention to fellow prisoners.

The Austin chapter began organizing



WRITING ON THE WALL
Selected Prison Writings
of Mumia Abu-Jamal
 Mumia Abu-Jamal

City Lights
 \$10.96 (Amazon.com)

around the case of Texas death row prisoner Shaka Sankofa in 1999. Shaka, a juvenile at the time of his alleged crime, was deeply politicized during his time in prison and spoke out against the racism and cruelty of the death sentence. Mumia wrote about the case in a short essay from May 2005, just a few months before Shaka was murdered by the state:

“If there is a crime for which Bloody Texas seeks his death, it is this: it is a crime in a racist nation for a black youth to be conscious and thinking in political and collective terms. For Shaka Sankofa, innocence is not enough.”

His contention that racism is at the heart of the death penalty system is evident in a fiery passage from an address he wrote to the first World Congress Against the Death Penalty:

“There can therefore not be a World Congress to abolish the death penalty without an acknowledgement that the racist instrument of white supremacy devalues black life, whether that of an accused or that of a potential juror, while elevating white life.

“There can be no real movement here unless there is the recognition that law, whether international or domestic, is an illusion designed to perpetuate a polite status quo that for decades has been based upon the premise that ‘the whole problem is really the blacks,’ and that the system must recognize this ‘while not appearing to.’ It is this very status quo that is the lifeblood of the vampiric American death penalty machine. And it must be shattered if abolition can ever become reality.”

Mumia's writings here extend far be-

His contention that racism is at the heart of the death penalty system is evident in a fiery passage from an address he wrote to the first World Congress Against the Death Penalty

Despite being imprisoned for decades, Mumia's sensitivity to the struggles developing around him is a hallmark of his writings and a reminder that his voice is paramount in the movements beyond the walls

yond the death penalty or even just the criminal justice system. He writes brilliantly on the case of Lynn Stewart and rails against the vigilante murder of Trayvon Martin.

He frequently writes about the imperial adventures of the US – in earlier writings throughout the late 1980s and early '90s, he frequently discusses America's interventions in South and Latin America. Another essay from September 17, 2001, titled "9-11...Why," discusses the history of colonial violence in Afghanistan:

"Afghanistan, one of the poorest, most rugged places on earth, has a population with a male life expectancy of 46 (45 for females!). It has a literacy rate of about 29 per cent. It looks at the swollen opulence of the Americans, the global reach of the American Empire, and bristles."

Further essays take on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as Israel's role as a US proxy in the region. Discussing the violent foundation of Israel, he concludes, "Such roots can only lead to bitter fruits." Other essays take on labour history and union organizing, the writings of radical black socialist Franz Fanon, the rise of the Tea Party and the election of Barak Obama – no stone is unturned.

Toward the end of the book, Mumia considers the developing Black Lives Matter movement. In an essay from August 31, 2014, he writes about the protests that erupted against police murder in Ferguson, Missouri:

"For the youth – excluded from the American economy by inferior, substandard education; targeted by the malevolence of the fake drug war and mass incarceration; stopped and frisked for Walking While Black – were given front-row seats to the national security state at Ferguson after a friend was murdered by police on their streets. Ferguson is a wake-up call. A call to build social, radical, revolutionary movements for change."

One of my favorites essays in the book

is a piece from January 3, 2014, called "Martin, Women and the Movement." He writes about the ways that sexist attitudes hindered the work of activists in the civil rights movement, and later the Black Panther Party (BPP). He begins by discussing the relationship between King and Ella Baker.

Mumia says that Baker was "a brilliant and skillful organizer, unable to defer to any of the spiritual and national leaders of the time." He argues that King felt uncomfortable around Baker, but that because of women like Baker, King became more open over time to the role of women in the lead of the movement.

He describes the pivotal role that women played in the creation and maintenance of the Black Panther Party, concluding:

"Women form the core of the movements. They organize, as did Ella Baker, they lead, as did Elaine Brown. They do the work to make organisations – and movements – work. And given the sexism in capitalist society, it rarely gets reported, much less known. But the simple truth is that revolution is women's work. It is the work of all of us, as comrades."

At a time when women's rights are under renewed attack, Mumia's profound solidarity is incredibly moving. Despite being imprisoned for decades, Mumia's sensitivity to the struggles developing around him is a hallmark of his writings and a reminder that his voice is paramount in the movements beyond the walls.

Mumia often ends his essays with a question – challenging the reader to go further in our various struggles for social justice. The essays in "Writing on the Wall" aren't simply analysis. They are alive – a powerful call to action to readers to join the fight for a better world. **CT**

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Lilly Hughes is a member of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty. This book review was originally published by Socialist Worker at <http://socialistworker.org>

The world is a traffic jam

A poem by **Philip Kraske**

Sitting so mad in the next traffic jam,
You might hear The Fates to you whisper "Wham!"
Yes, modern life's dropped by to say hi,
And snatch that big ripe pie from your sky.

'Cause it don't matter if your car is a Jag,
Ferrari, Porsche, or Dodge top-rag.
You're stuck in the same lane inches away,
From skins and rappers and lovers-for-pay.

And who's your saviour, who is your daddy?
But yonder three lights: God's little caddie.
For like it or not, on the state you depend.
And on fellow drivers not you to upend.

Of such jams there's a lot going 'round,
Problems stupendous and no saviours in town:

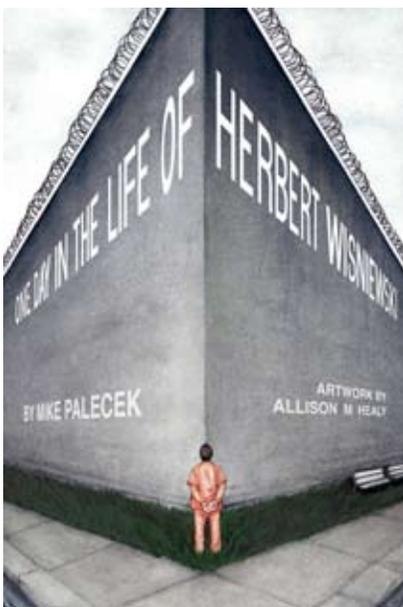
Economies, the oceans, some decent tap water,
Or a future of possibles for our son and daughter.

What's clear it's only a fool that depends
On enterprise-free to make the amends.
Like V-Dub with its engines so clever,
Which end up pickling the air forever.

Or XL oil from the north to the south:
Long as it doesn't go make its own mouth.
Or slick-suited traders who move the big cash,
Forgetting it's plumbers who pay when they're rash.

Like it or not, let's all say it as one,
The best hope we have is more law and less fun.
Lest we wind up like those folks from Syrak,
Asking kind strangers to cut us some slack.

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



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When size really did matter

Nate Robert visits Bulgaria, where he finds some of the largest monuments of the communist era, memorials that are 'as subtle as a Cadillac in North Korea'



Buzludzha Communist Party headquarters, Bulgaria.

Most young Bulgarians are hell-bent on absorbing and aping as much American-influenced popular culture as possible

Tripping through the Bulgarian countryside in search of communist-era monuments is perhaps the most Western experience I have ever had. The thing is, most people who live in nations that were formerly under the Soviet sphere of influence would really like to forget that whole communism thing. In contemporary times, most young Bulgarians are hell-bent on absorbing and aping as much American-influenced popular culture as possible. The locals dream of spring-break in Florida,

grabbing selfies with Tiffany and Billy-Ray, punishing Jetski's, and shot-gunning beers. Ironically, they don't realise what lays right in their own backyard. For what could be more "Western" than three people who haven't worked a real job in years, cruising the back roads of a former-communist nation in search of Instagram and Facebook posts? There's only one thing could be more first-world than that - blogging about it. And so, here we are.

Nobody did communist monuments



Infiltrating the concrete UFO perched atop a remote Bulgarian mountain has reached the status amongst urban explorers normally reserved for a tour of Detroit ruin-porn



Main dome of Buzludzha abandoned memorial/lazer tag arena.

bigger than Bulgaria. Sure – Ukraine, Georgia, and a few other ex-Soviet puppet nations built a giant lady-statue or two. But in communist Bulgaria, money was spent on concrete and bricks like a forced-labour-camp buying cold gruel. The Bulgarian propaganda machine skillfully combined architecture and design with enormous wads of cash to produce a collection of enormous “Pametnik” that are about as subtle as a Cadillac in North Korea.

Buzludzha, the UFO-shaped former

Communist Party Headquarters, meeting hall, and laser-tag arena, is becoming well known, and currently grabs much of the attention. Infiltrating the iconic concrete UFO perched atop a remote Bulgarian mountain has reached the status amongst urban explorers normally reserved for a tour of Detroit ruin-porn. And, deservedly so. But, Bulgarian communist monuments don’t stop at Buzludzha. Oh no.

Home to the cubist-styled memorial, the “Monument to 1,300 Years of Bulgaria,” the

The Bulgarian propaganda machine skillfully combined architecture and design with enormous wads of cash



Monument to 1,300 years of Bulgaria in the city of Shumen.

I really had no idea of the colossal size of the giant concrete structure at Shumen

city of Shumen was my first insight into just how determined the communist Bulgarian government was on demonstrating its concrete expertise. The monument at Shumen was built in 1981, designed by Bulgarian sculptors Krum Damyanov and Ivan Slavov, and I really had no idea of the colossal size of this structure. Driving about 20 kilometres out of Shumen, I looked in my rear-vision mirror, and noticed my friend Darmon had that contented grin only a British-born bohemian-freelance-urban-explorer-writer-musician-dark-tourism-

expert living in Bulgaria is capable of. “So, Nate, I should tell you, that Transformer’s-esque horse monument you want to see, it’s over there.” I could see it, jutting out above Shumen, from 20 kilometres away. Up close, the Shumen monument is a collection of somewhat menacing cubist concrete statues, housed in a modernist geometric building, positioned atop a hill overlooking the city.

Unlike many Bulgarian communist-era monuments, the Shumen memorial has been well maintained. On the day I visited,



Russian soldiers facing Moscow. Varna, Bulgaria.

apart from being trapped due to a fittingly grim storm (I will never, ever, forget the look on the staunch faces of the statues I sheltered beneath being lit-up by lightning), a wedding party was using the memorial for a photo shoot. Not all of Bulgaria's monuments receive this kind of love and attention, particularly the more "Russian" of the bunch. Over on the Bulgarian coast in the Black Sea town of Varna, the Monument of the Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship, is now 10,000 tonnes of vandalised concrete and iron being left to decay. Per-

haps it has something to do with the message of the monument, often interpreted as "dear strong, brave, and fearless Russian soldiers, please accept these gifts of bread, flowers, and salt from our finest Bulgarian women, seriously, thanks so much, we couldn't have looked after our poor country without your help, you're the best." To top it off, the memorial at Varna was built in a position that faces towards Moscow. Subtle.

Beneath the Varna monument, a long, deep, concrete staircase descends into a

Over on the Bulgarian coast in the Black Sea town of Varna, the Monument of the Bulgarian-Soviet Friendship, is now 10,000 tonnes of vandalised concrete and iron



Plovdiv Hillock of Fraternity. Perhaps the coolest name of any communist monument.

In the upper section of the Varna monument are various rooms, once used for official communist business, but today used as shelter for the homeless

dark and long abandoned nuclear bunker, with symbols painted on the wall that appear to be letters. However, it's not from any alphabet on this planet. I'm not saying aliens had something to do with this memorial, but I'm sure the History Channel would agree that the evidence of aliens working with the Russian and Bulgarian politburo's is basically irrefutable and conclusive. In the upper section of the Varna monument are various rooms, once used for official communist business, but today used as shelter for the homeless.

Plovdiv, one of Europe's oldest cities, went the truly abstract route – with the amazingly named Knoll of Fraternity Memorial Complex. Slabs of concrete create a symphony of 1974 geometry, layered atop one another to symbolize a Thracian hillock. The Thracians were one of many peoples who have inhabited the ancient city of Plovdiv throughout its 7,000 year history. Yes, thousand. The concrete knoll was constructed at one end of a grand Soviet-styled boulevard – designed to run through the city as a place to celebrate



Monument at Zimnitsa (population 878). Entry statements like these appear outside towns all over Bulgaria.

communist-era “festive activities.” As with the mythical Memorial to Great Farmers of Potatoes, the plans for Plovdiv’s spacious boulevard were never fully realised. Today, even the “eternal flame” in the middle of the Plovdiv monument has long been extinguished.

It’s true, these monuments remind the locals that Bulgaria did indeed live through a sinister, murderous, brutal regime, hell-bent on the spread of propaganda and oppression. But in the 21st century, perhaps the Bulgarian people can get a bit of their

own back, using these reminders to capitalise on the growing number of international tourists with a strange nostalgia for a time and place that existed in the “West” only though our own government propaganda, which was being distributed at a rate that would make the Bulgarians blush. **CT**

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***Nate Robert** specialises in travel photography. Since July 2012, he has been traveling the world full time, traveling through 54 countries. His website is <http://yomadic.com>*

These monuments remind the locals that Bulgaria lived through a murderous, brutal regime, hell-bent on the spread of propaganda and oppression

Chocolate wars

Companies fight over the shape of candy, golden bears and customer confusion, writes **Luke McDonough**



KitKat: The shape's the thing.

It is possible under trademark law to register a three dimensional shape – in this case the four fingers – as a trademark, as long as that shape has sufficient “distinctiveness”

Rivals operating in the multi-billion pound world of chocolate branding occasionally launch attacks on one another as they seek to secure your snacking loyalty. They want to defend their existing empires, as well as pursue new territories and markets – and two such trademark battles have come to the fore in the news in recent weeks, revealing a lot about the tension between the legal protections provided by trademark law and the competitive nature of the marketplace for chocolate.

First, in mid-September the Court of Justice of the EU ruled on Nestlé’s bid to receive UK trademark protection for the (allegedly) distinct shape of the four-finger version of the KitKat, long touted as the UK’s favourite chocolate bar. Nestlé’s main

aim is apparently to prevent a rival four-finger chocolate bar from being marketed by Cadbury. Then, in late September the German Federal court ruled on the dispute between jelly sweet giant Haribo and Lindt over Lindt’s chocolate bears and Haribo’s “Gold Bear” trademark.

Dealing first with the KitKat case, Nestlé’s claim over the four finger shape was framed around two fundamental aspects of trademark law. First, it is possible under trademark law to register a three dimensional shape – in this case the four fingers – as a trademark, as long as that shape has sufficient “distinctiveness.” It is also possible for a shape to “acquire” distinctiveness through use in the marketplace and consumer recognition. Cadbury argued that the shape had not acquired sufficient distinctiveness in the minds of consumers.

So far, so simple. But the other key question centred on whether a shape with so-called functional elements in its design could also be protected as a trademark. In the case of KitKat, that basically refers to the ability to break off each individual finger to dip in your tea (or however you choose to eat it). Now, generally, the law does not protect purely “functional” shapes – the reason being that competitors ought to be allowed to produce competing goods.

On the matter of distinc-



tiveness, the court ruled that to obtain trademark protection, Nestlé had to demonstrate that consumers identify the four finger shape itself – stripped of any packaging or branding – with Nestlé and KitKat. This ruling was widely reported in the media as a victory for Cadbury, but the legal reality is more complex.

Nestlé claims that even without its well known red and white packaging or the use of the existing trademark name, the shape of the bar should of itself be regarded as sufficiently distinct, and it claims some consumer survey evidence to support this.

For Cadbury there is a further sting in the tail. On the issue of functionality the court's ruling seems to strongly favour Nestlé because the key elements of the four finger shape do not seem to fall within a single category of objection, which means that Nestlé's four finger shape is likely to survive this test. The case now returns to the High Court for a determination on the facts.

Keeping rivals at bay

The case between Haribo and Lindt has a similar ring to it, and it is again all about stopping rivals encroaching on your space in the confectionery aisle of the supermarket, however limited that danger might appear to us shoppers.

Their dispute concerned the “Gold Bear” trademark under which Haribo has long marketed a well-known range of gummy bears; the words themselves are protected under trademark law as a word mark. The problems started when Swiss chocolate maker Lindt began selling a gold foil-wrapped chocolate teddy bear. Haribo was quick to accuse its rival of infringing the Gold Bear trademark.

Haribo claimed that consumers would confuse the two products and go on to incorrectly associate the Lindt gold bear with Haribo. Lindt, meanwhile, argued that its foil-wrapped chocolate bears were merely a variation on its famous chocolate Easter bunny rabbit design. Lindt pointed out that



Confusing? Lindt chocolate teddy bears.

Photo: Jocelyn & Cathy.

both the Lindt bear and the Lindt bunny rabbit are typically packaged in gold foil with a red ribbon, and argued there was no intention to associate with Haribo's Gold Bear mark.

Haribo won the first round of this battle when, in December 2012, a German regional court banned future sales of Lindt's bears. However, a later German appeal court in Cologne rejected that ruling and said that Haribo's feared consumer confusion between the two products would not in fact occur. This appeal ruling has now been upheld by the German Federal court in a decision that leaves the Lindt bears on the shelf and which brings this particular chocolate war to a fitting close.

If nothing else, these cases are a useful reminder of how valuable you – the consumer – are to makers of sugary snacks, and how fearful companies are that your gaze might be diverted from their offering. Disputes that might on the surface seem petty have pitted together three of Europe's largest chocolate manufacturers (Cadbury, Nestlé and Lindt) as well as one of its premier sweet manufacturers (Haribo).

Behind the scenes of your mid-morning treat is a fierce battle to protect trademarks, market share and, ultimately, profit margins.

CT

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Luke McDonagh is a lecturer in law at City University London. This article originally appeared at <http://theconversation.com>

The case between Haribo and Lindt has a similar ring to it, and it is again all about stopping rivals encroaching on your space in the confectionery aisle of the supermarket

Dark side of the free market

There's a reason they call them 'impulse purchases,' write **George A. Akerlof** and **Robert J. Schiller**

As long as there is a profit to be made, free markets will also deceive us, manipulate us and prey on our weaknesses, tempting us into purchases that are bad for us

It is now not uncommon for 11-year-olds to be diabetic. We see one reason for it every time we check out at our local convenience stores. The candy is right there at the cash register, waiting to be eaten.

But this does not mean the manager of the store is mean or even irresponsible. If she has qualms about this practice, she would face a real dilemma: she needs to show a profit. The margins at supermarkets are tiny. No matter what her morals, she has almost no choice but to place those sweet impulse buys where customers can see them. In other words, there is an economic equilibrium in which businesses take advantage of every opportunity to increase profits. In such an equilibrium, the candy will be at the checkout counter.

Curiously, while economists understand each and every such instance where people are tempted to buy things that are not good for them, they fail to appreciate that this occurs because of a general principle of economics. They fail to understand that free markets, as bountiful as they may be, will not only provide us with what we want, as long as we can pay for it; they will also tempt us into buying things that are bad for us, whatever the costs.

Just as free markets can serve the public good "by an invisible hand" (as Adam Smith said more than two centuries ago, and is the foundation of the field of eco-

nomics), free markets will do something else. As long as there is a profit to be made, they will also deceive us, manipulate us and prey on our weaknesses, tempting us into purchases that are bad for us. That is also a fundamental feature of market equilibrium, in which supply and demand balance each other out.

Our fellow economists, while they recognize such behavior in individual instances, fail to see this as a general principle. And thus a lot of bad things happen, such as the candy at the checkout counter. Most notably, we economists should have been a chorus warning of the financial crash of 2008. We should have recognized that people should not be buying overrated mortgage-based securities, nor should banks have been creating the insecure loans that backed them. Instead there were at most a few lone voices of protest. We should have been more skeptical.

But this is not just about economists and what we think, because through long chains of reportage and other channels, what we say in our faculty lounges affects politicians and the public opinion more generally.

This failure to understand that markets have this downside is then passed on into policy more narrowly defined. The public fails to understand that in the economic equilibrium, if there is a profit to be made, someone will take it up, as long as it is le-

gal and as long as there is no public protest against it.

A recent book we wrote called “Phishing for Phools” describes how the fundamental logic of economics, going back to Adam Smith, delivers this conclusion. That is, markets are not benign forces working for the greater good but instead are filled with businesses that “phish” by exploiting our weaknesses to get us to buy their products. We are the subjects of those phishes – the “phools” – when we fall for it.

The onus in the book was on us to show that temptations to make bad decisions really do significantly affect our well-being. Such a demonstration was surprisingly easy.

There are four huge areas of our lives – consumer spending, investment, health and politics – in which we are making decisions that no one (on reflection) could possibly want. Yet we make those decisions, and the free market provides them, just as bountifully as it satisfies our more benign impulses.

First, even in the US, as rich as we are by all historical standards, most of us go to bed at night worried about how to pay our bills. We are continually tempted, and have a very hard time sticking to a budget. Thus, the median American family has on average less than one month’s expenditure in its bank account; half of all US respondents in a 2011 survey said they would have a very hard time raising US \$2,000 in a month’s time if an emergency occurred; and my rough estimate suggests that 20 per cent of us will go bankrupt at some point over our lifetimes.

Second, there are financial booms and busts because stories – what we are saying to ourselves and what we say to each other when we make our decisions – spread like epidemics. Those stories lead people into bad investments, and then, when those investments go sour, there are declines in confidence that threaten the whole finan-

cial system. Humpty Dumpty has a great fall and only slowly is pieced back together again.

Third, regarding health, the market gives us tobacco, which, according to Centers for Disease Control estimates, is responsible for almost 20 per cent of deaths in the United States. The pharmaceuticals industry sells us drugs with unknown long-term effects, which are sometimes severe. And Big Food serves us sugar and fat, so that two-thirds of Americans are overweight, with more than half of them also obese. The list goes on.

Finally, the political system in a democracy is like a market system: There is a competition for votes. But that too has a “phishing equilibrium.” To keep their jobs, politicians have to raise money from “the interests” and use it for TV ads that show what nice folks they really are.

Free markets may lead to prosperity, but they also deliver more than the unalloyed benefits ascribed to them. This unwillingness to acknowledge their dark side undergirds the basic fundamental thinking of economists and leads to bad government policies. A grownup’s view of the economy that incorporates the downsides of capitalism is a prerequisite for sane policy.

The economic system works as well as it does not just because of individual incentives, but also because a whole raft of individual heroes, social agencies and government regulation puts limits on this downside of markets to phish us for phools. Such policy is a balancing act, to filter out the bad sediment while allowing through the true benefits of free markets.

This view of a phishing equilibrium thus challenges current economic thinking in a new way. There is a huge payoff to incorporating it into our view of the economy. Just as we love our children, we should love free markets; but as with our children, it would be a mistake to think that they can do no wrong.

To keep their jobs, politicians have to raise money from “the interests” and use it for TV ads that show what nice folks they really are

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CT

Death by fracking

Securing the future of humankind will entail mass acts of sustained civil disobedience and jail time, writes **Chris Hedges**

The activists are waging a war against a corporate state that is deaf and blind to the rights of its citizens and the imperative to protect the ecosystem

The maniacal drive by the human species to extinguish itself includes a variety of lethal pursuits. One of the most efficient is fracking. One day, courtesy of corporations such as Halliburton, BP and ExxonMobil, a gallon of water will cost more than a gallon of gasoline. Fracking, which involves putting chemicals into potable water and then injecting millions of gallons of the solution into the earth at high pressure to extract oil and gas, has become one of the primary engines, along with the animal agriculture industry, for accelerating global warming and climate change.

The Wall Street bankers and hedge fund managers who are profiting from this cycle of destruction will – once clean water is scarce and crop yields decline, once temperatures soar and cities disappear under the sea, once droughts and famines ripple across the globe, once mass migrations begin – surely profit from the next round of destruction. Collective suicide is a good business, at least until it is complete. It is a pity most of us will not be around to see the power elite go down.

I met recently in Denver with three of the country's leading anti-fracking activists: Gustavo Aguirre Jr of KEEN (Kern Environmental Enforcement Network) in California; Kandi Mossett with the Indigenous Environmental Network and from

the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation in North Dakota, the second-largest oil-producing state because of hydraulic fracturing; and Shane Davis, a longtime campaigner against fracking and the founder of fractivist.org, a data-mining organisation that exposes what fracking corporations are doing in communities around the country.

The activists are waging a war against a corporate state that is deaf and blind to the rights of its citizens and the imperative to protect the ecosystem. The corporate state, largely to pacify citizens being frog-marched to their own execution, passes environmental laws and regulations that, at best, slow the ongoing environmental destruction. Corporations, which routinely ignore even these tepid restrictions, largely write the laws and legislation designed to regulate their activity. They rewrite them or overturn them as the focus of their exploitation changes. They turn public hearings on local environmental issues into choreographed charades or shut them down if activists succeed in muscling their way into the room to demand a voice. They dominate the national message through a pliable and bankrupt corporate media and slick public relations. Elected officials are little more than corporate employees, dependent on industry money to stay in office and, when they retire from “public



No to fracking: Protestors demonstrate outside the home of New York state Governor Cuomo.

Photo: Adam S. Welz

service,” salivating for jobs in the industry. Environmental reform has become a joke on the public. And the Big Green environmental groups are complicit because they rely on donors, at times from the fossil fuel and animal agriculture industries; they are silent about the reality of corporate power, largely ineffectual, and part of the fiction of the democratic process.

Resistance will be local. It will be militant. It will defy the rules imposed by the corporate state. It will turn its back on state and NGO environmental organisations. And it will not stop until corporate power is destroyed or we are destroyed.

“Forty years after the major environmental laws were adopted in the US, and 40 years after trying to regulate the damage caused by corporations to the natural environment and our communities, by almost every major environmental statistic, things are worse now than they were

before,” Thomas Linzey, the executive director of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, told me recently.

The fracking industry is omnivorous, biologist Davis noted. It “is so intoxicated and bloated by greed that it has moved into our backyards, near our school playgrounds, our hospitals, universities, our day cares, our state parks, our national grasslands, and has its sights on the rest of our public lands across America unless we stop them,” he said.

In writing “Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt,” the cartoonist Joe Sacco and I visited devastated “sacrifice zones” where corporate power manipulates judicial and political power, and has free rein to impoverish families, destroy or abandon infrastructure, plunder and pollute the environment and shape the message disseminated by mass communications. Those who orga-

Resistance will not stop until corporate power is destroyed or we are destroyed

FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE

We need to understand what unfettered, unregulated corporate power looks like, how it operates and what levels of wholesale destruction it inflicts in the lust for profit on human beings and the environment

nize and resist are met with intimidation and violence from the state and private security firms in the pay of corporations.

Sacco and I wrote the book from the poorest pockets of the United States, including Camden, NJ, the nation's poorest city, per capita, among those with more than 65,000 residents; the Lakota reservation at Pine Ridge, SD, where the average life expectancy for a male is only 48 and where at any one time 60 per cent of residents have neither running water nor electricity; devastated coal fields of southern West Virginia where the tops of Appalachian mountains have been blown off to extract coal seams and the landscape has become a wasteland; and produce fields in Florida where undocumented workers are not only sickened by pesticides but at times are held in bondage and slavery.

The point of the book, whose last chapter takes place in Zuccotti Park in Manhattan during the Occupy movement, is this: These sacrifice zones went first and we are next. We have all become part of a sacrifice zone. It behooves us to understand what unfettered, unregulated corporate power looks like, how it operates and what levels of wholesale destruction it inflicts in the lust for profit on human beings and the environment. If we do not know how corporate power works, and the lengths it will travel to exploit us and the ecosystem, we will not be able to fight it. Both in theological terms and literally, these corporate forces are forces of death.

There is a low-level insurgency, in many of the sacrifice zones and elsewhere, against the corporations that carry out destruction and plunder, including fracking. This is an insurgency worth joining. It is a battle far more important than the charade of presidential elections. Real change will come only from below. It will come from those participating in efforts such as the Black Lives Matter movement, the anti-fracking movement and the movement to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an

hour. It will come from radical organizations that organize outside the system and physically impede corporate destruction. It will come through open revolt. Our fate as a species will be determined on these lonely and difficult battlegrounds.

The fracking industry, bolstered by the security and surveillance state, has devoted tremendous resources to monitoring, demonizing and criminalizing anti-fracking activists. Activists are followed, harassed, arrested and defamed in corporate-funded propaganda campaigns even as their communities see their drinking water poisoned, air polluted, greater earthquake activity, the dumping of radioactive waste on their land, and farm animals sickened, born with birth defects and killed by drinking contaminated water.

The oil and gas industry, often backed by state governments, routinely sues communities that have asserted their democratic rights to ban fracking. The corporations know that communities in most cases do not have the resources to challenge high-priced corporate legal teams and lobbyists. This means that for citizens seeking redress, the courts are largely useless. High-court decisions in Ohio, Colorado and New Mexico, along with a ruling by the state Senate in Texas and a law passed in Oklahoma, deny the right of communities to impose fracking bans. So, in effect, when you raise consciousness about the dangers of fracking, when you organize to protect yourselves and your children, when you pass a ban in a democratic vote, your action is nullified by the courts or the state. The consent of the governed becomes a farce.

"We are being sued by our own governor," Davis said of John Hickenlooper, whose Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission has joined a lawsuit against the city of Longmont to challenge a vote by Longmont residents to ban fracking. "Communities cannot protect themselves. There are homes in Colorado where base-

ments have filled up with explosive levels of gases from previous fracking industry operations, sending people to burn centres. There are homes where people can light their tap on fire because of high levels of thermogenic methane in the water. But the victims of fracking are prohibited by law from safeguarding themselves.”

There are more than 15 million Americans, many of them children, who live within a mile of a fracking site. Most are being exposed daily to a deadly brew of toxins. Because the oil and gas industry is not required under law to disclose the chemicals used in fracking, communities are not told what is being injected into their groundwater. The array of carcinogens is known to the public only through analysis of samples taken at sites. These samples include endocrine disruptors and chemicals such as benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene. Infrared cameras set up by activists show plumes of methane and other hydrocarbon gases, invisible to the naked eye, spiraling upward from underground fracking sites. Methane is a greenhouse gas whose potential for trapping heat and therefore for global warming has been estimated at 86 times greater than that of carbon dioxide.

Those who live around fracking sites often suffer skin rashes, nosebleeds, headaches, respiratory problems, premature births and cancers. Yet the corporations, along with our governments, doggedly refuse to link the diseases to fracking. This is a pattern familiar to all who live in sacrifice zones. Corporations have no intention of being held accountable for what they do. That would cost money.

“A lot of people around me have cancer,” said Mossett. “I’m a cancer survivor. It has become something that is normal for us. It comes in all forms – bone cancer, lung cancer, uterine cancer and prostate cancer, amongst others. Even before the fracking began we had seven coal-fired power plants in North Dakota. Every inch

of our over 11,000 miles of rivers, lakes and streams is already contaminated with mercury. Then fracking started to take off around 2006. People, at first, had no clue what was coming. Infrastructure started to be built. We got water towers through the rural water department. Many saw this as positive. A brand new bridge was built over Lake Sakakawea.”

But once the infrastructure was in place it became apparent that it had been built to facilitate the extraction of oil by fracking, not improve the lives of those on North Dakota’s reservations.

White people are not the only problem. The fracking corporations, Mossett said, easily bought off local tribal leaders. “Our tribal council [of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation] sold us out. The council gave away sovereignty rights to allow the oil industry to operate on tribal lands. The council signed contracts to give away parcels of land. It set up front companies, since you have to be native if you frack on native land.” (The events that Mossett criticized occurred before the election of a new chairman last year.)

Cancer rages like a plague across the reservations.

“The Centers for Disease Control do not show clusters of cancers in our communities,” Mossett said. “This is because illness and sickness are coded out of the place where referrals are made. Since we don’t have a hospital to treat these illnesses, patients are referred to a clinic like the Mayo Clinic in Minneapolis. So the huge clusters of cancers on the reservation are not properly documented.”

The fracking industry in much of North Dakota, rather than extract the subterranean gas, burns it off in jets of flame known as flares. It trucks out the more valuable oil.

“The flares burn all day and all night,” Mossett said. “There are hundreds of them. They are loud. There is enough gas produced from these flares, some have

Infrared cameras set up by activists show plumes of methane and other hydrocarbon gases, invisible to the naked eye, spiraling upward from underground fracking sites

FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE

Justice will come by defying the institutions that claim to maintain justice. Truth will be heard by defying the institutions that claim to speak truth. The law will be upheld by breaking the law

estimated, to heat half a million homes every day. And all this is going into the atmosphere. Then came the waste injection sites. The trucks began to dump what they called ‘produced water’ [toxics and water injected underground and later brought to the surface as wastewater] onto the roads. It covered our roads. It filled our ditches with toxic chemicals. I drove past a ditch near Mandaree on the Fort Berthold Reservation and it was on fire. The fields and pastures along the roads are being poisoned.”

The dilemma facing activists is that the enemy is not only the corporations but also the federal and state governments. Federal and state authority is a tool used by corporations to make legal what should be illegal. Nonviolent, democratic dissent is criminalized. This creates a terrifying dilemma. If, as it does, the law slavishly serves the interests of the corporate criminals, how is justice to be obtained? If the law, as it does, outlaws legitimate democratic and nonviolent dissent, how is dissent to be expressed? If we cannot receive, as we cannot, justice from the courts or state and federal legislators, where will justice come from? If we cannot legally impede the destruction of our communities, what are the physical methods we will have to employ to save ourselves?

“The corporations fight us with the government,” said Aguirre. “The DOGGR [California’s Division of Oil, Gas & Geothermal Resources] makes the claim that activists want to take jobs from neighbors and families. It claims we are killing the economy. ... The acute health impacts that occur in the communities, the disproportionate toxic fumes that these communities breathe, are never factored in. Our community members are already marginalized. They live in low-income communities. They can’t afford or don’t have health care coverage. And they don’t have a voice.

“I have been followed by numerous diesel engine trucks [as I made] toxic tours with my constituents, taking them to fracking projects and refineries to percolation ponds, evaporation ponds,” Aguirre said. “I’ve been threatened at public hearings. I’ve been called a communist and a socialist. I’ve been called a mouth runner, someone who has been paid by some group to stir up the community. The board supervisors of my community have told me to stop doing what I am doing. These are the same elected officials who are cashing in on the industry.”

Justice will come by defying the institutions that claim to maintain justice. Truth will be heard by defying the institutions that claim to speak truth. The law will be upheld by breaking the law. Power will be obtained by overthrowing the power of the corporation state. We will save ourselves by facing the grim and unpleasant truth that all of the established mechanisms designed to carry out reform, including what we still call American democracy, is in corporate hands. We must unleash the power of the powerless. We must use our bodies to obstruct these forces of death to protect life. We must refuse to cooperate in our own destruction. Fracking is one assault. There are many, many others. But they all will lead to the same fatal conclusion if we do not rise up and resist.

I admire these activists, men and women, who soldier forward. They understand the imperative of a new radicalism. They speak in the language of revolution. They know if we are to have a future it will entail mass acts of sustained civil disobedience and jail time. This resistance will mean that we court violence, maybe even our deaths. Corporations will use every weapon in their vast arsenals to bend us to their will. But if we do not begin to openly rebel, if we do not reverse the corporate coup d’état that has taken place, the world bequeathed to our children will be a holocaust. **CT**

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Rebel flags fall, but Columbus stands tall

Michael I. Niman explains why the United States needs to abandon another of its cultural icons

Over the Labour Day weekend, someone painted an accurate history lesson on the City of Buffalo's Christopher Columbus statue

South Carolina removed the Confederate battle flag from its statehouse grounds this summer. Walmart removed it from its stores. Virginia is removing it from vanity license plates. Ridding popular culture of this racist symbol is long overdue, considering the stars and bars first rose to support a treasonous rebellion in support of state-supported white supremacy, manifested in the most grotesque fashion as legally sanctioned enslavement, wanton murder, and rape of black Americans. The flag later had a resurgence beginning in the 1940s, with white supremacists raising it in opposition to civil rights and desegregation. It's not the Southern heritage of lemonade and hospitality that Confederate symbol represents, but this darker heritage of white privilege and the horrific subjugation of blacks – and no number of Dukes of Hazzard reruns can erase that.

Also this year, the Lancaster, New York, school board voted unanimously to change the racist name of its high school sports teams. The original name began its life in the 19th century, referring to the dried scalp-skins of Native Americans which could be exchanged for cash by bounty hunters during a genocidal period of American history. Supporters of the racist name protested and, in a last-ditch effort to keep their town in the middle 1800s, imported a rather random Native American from South

Dakota and a Cuban Indian impersonator from Connecticut to testify that they were okay with the racist moniker. The school board, however, feeling the tidal pull of the 21st century – and, probably more importantly, confronting a growing boycott of their teams by other schools – ditched the name.

It seemed like we were finally confronting the enduring symbols of our racist past, albeit with tiny baby steps.

Pecca Vestra Exponuntur

Sometime over the Labor Day weekend, someone, or some group of people, painted a rather accurate history lesson on the City of Buffalo's Christopher Columbus statue, located in Columbus Park on the city's Lower West Side, adjacent to a neighbourhood that hosts one of New York state's largest urban Native American communities. Three local TV news crews covered the story on September 7 (Time Warner Cable News) and 8 (WIVB and WGRZ), all contextualizing the incident as vandalism and asking viewers to snitch out the writers to police, with two reports broadcasting a tip line number.

The writers painted the word “rape” across the front of the statue's base, “slaver” on one side, “genocide” on another. Most interestingly, they wrote the Latin phrase “pecca vestra exponuntur,” which



New York's Empire State Building glows green, white and red in celebration of Columbus Day. Photo: Michael Scicolone

translates to “your sins are exposed,” across the back of the base.

All three television crews chose to ignore this last message; one (WIVB) also ignored “slaver,” while another (TWC) misstated it as “slave,” which would reverse the meaning. None of the reporters expressed any understanding of the context of the story – why, in the run-up to Columbus Day, these messages appeared, or why other writers have been painting similar messages on this statue for decades.

To quickly recap the history behind the Columbus myth: The character of Christopher Columbus, “the great discoverer,” was created in 1828 by the American writer, Washington Irving, as a piece of historical fiction based on the life of Cristóbal Colón. Colón, along with other members of the “voyages of discovery,” kept logs and took meticulous notes in journals, leaving a strong record of evidence describing events from multiple perspectives. These logs and journals exist to this day in the Spanish archives and paint a pretty damning picture of Colón. Far from being the fabled explorer who argued to an unbelieving world

that the earth was round, Colón actually lived out his life arguing that it was pear-shaped even though the concept of a round earth was well accepted by 1492. His most significant contribution to history was as the father of the transatlantic slave trade, who presided over a brutal reign of murder and rape shortly after arriving in the New World.

When he did not find gold in the Caribbean, Colón looked for an alternative commodity to satisfy his investors and win funding for subsequent voyages. That commodity turned out to be his hosts, the Taino people. Colón, impressed by their friendliness, generosity, and peaceful nature, wrote in his journal that, “They are the best people in the world and above all the gentlest.” What this meant, he wrote, was that “with 50 men they could all be subjected and made to do all that one might wish.” The Taino, he explained, were “fit to be ordered about, to sow, and do everything else that may be needed.”

Colón captured what he described as “seven head of women, young ones and adults, and three small children” to bring

His most significant contribution to history was as the father of the transatlantic slave trade, who presided over a brutal reign of murder and rape shortly after arriving in the New World

CONFRONTING GENOCIDE

The fact that news producers chose to broadcast this embarrassing idiocy speaks volumes not only about the crisis of journalism but about the epidemic of ignorance regarding issues of racism

back to Spain as cargo, along with exotic birds and fruits. This act by Colón, who claimed previous experience as a slave trader in Africa, laid the precedent and foundation for one of the darkest chapters in world history – the transatlantic slave trade, which, after most of the indigenous population in the Caribbean was worked to death or killed by genocide and disease, thrived, bringing captured Africans to the Americas. The journals from Colón’s voyages graphically document acts of rape and depraved brutality, beyond the pale even for 15th-century Europe. There is no place in any American city for a statue of this man, much less a holiday in his honor.

The TWC reporter sought his explanation for the Columbus statue “vandalism” from a confused passerby, who explained to viewers that the writers must be “ignorant people with small minds” who “do stupid things,” which, he added, “doesn’t make any sense.” Seeking out folks for comment based solely on the fact that they are clueless on the subject matter seems to be a forte of Buffalo television news reporters.

The fact that news producers chose to broadcast this embarrassing idiocy speaks volumes not only about the crisis of journalism but about the epidemic of ignorance regarding issues of racism. One of the most noticeable aspects of white privilege is the privilege to remain ignorant of, or just not give a damn about, the persistence of racism. TWC’s interview subject concluded that, “The statue isn’t bothering anybody and has been there for years.” The ignorance exemplified by this reporting clues us in to why it’s still there.

Boston’s Anti-Columbus Gangstas

Of course Buffalo doesn’t have a monopoly on bad journalism – or on Columbus statues. Earlier this summer someone covered part of Boston’s Columbus statue in blood red paint, writing “Black Lives Matter” across its base. “Boston’s News Leader,” WCVB, also framed its televised story on

the incident as one about “vandals” who “tagged” the statue, as if “Black Lives Matter” was an artist’s tag rather than a message. Their story begins, “The paint has since been removed, but a lot of questions and frustration has been left behind.” Their confused on-air interview subject goes on to ponder, “Why here? It just seems so out of place.” The paint incident follows an earlier beheading of the same statue.

Adding to the reporter’s seemingly insurmountable confusion was the fact, she reported that, “The vandalism follows numerous similar attacks on Confederate monuments across the South.” Apparently unaware of the connection she just made, she went on to give a report about statues of historic Confederate racists recently being “defaced” in Texas, South Carolina, and Virginia, though, she explained, “It’s not clear who is behind the vandalism,” or, by inference, why someone would want to deface a racist symbol.

There are Columbus statues and place names around the United States; only George Washington has more cities, roads, parks, etc. named after him. As more people continue to become historically literate about the Colón legacy, the continued existence of these tributes has become more controversial and offensive to larger segments of the population.

In Buffalo, TWC interviewed Niagara District Councilman David Rivera on camera about the writing on the Columbus statue. Rivera promised, “We’re going to be looking at what we can do to find the folks” who did the writing. The TWC reporter also claimed in their report that “with Columbus Day approaching next month, Rivera says the statue’s historical value should still be respected.” In an interview for this article, Rivera denies this interpretation of what he said, which doesn’t appear on-camera on TWC’s televised report. Instead he explained that he is fully aware of the history surrounding Colón and is sympathetic to complaints about the statue and

the name of the park.

Rivera went on to explain how the Buffalo City Council voted unanimously in June of this year to change the name of an island in the Niagara River from Squaw Island to Unity Island after Seneca Nation leaders complained about the racist and misogynist name – a name that dates back more than three centuries. Rivera’s complaint about the painting of the Columbus statue, he reiterated, is against the method of protest, which he considers damaging public property, rather than the sentiment of the protest or the accuracy of the message. Yes, “Columbus” was a rapist and slaver, but the statue honoring his legacy is protected public property. Rivera suggests that activists protest legally and petition the city government with any demands or complaints regarding the statue.

Buffalo’s Columbus statue, like others around the country, is literally anchored by a deep foundation. Once erected, it’s hard to muster the funding and political capital to tear such things down, no matter what they represent and whom they offend. Rivera uses the Unity Island case, however, to argue that city government is open to responding to protests and petitions. What they would be willing to do, however, would likely depend on the strength of the protests and political threats generated by such protests. Anything is possible. The Unity Island name change came after more than three centuries. In historical terms, the Columbus statue, despite being anchored in stone, is just an adolescent, dating back only 63 years.

Racist infrastructure

Given our nation’s history, many cities are saddled with such racist infrastructure. As the political class in the country becomes more diverse, there increase the demands to end the whitewashing of American history and challenge the mythology that distorts the teaching of history. How municipalities deal with this infrastructure

is revealing. Government officials in Alabama still refuse to change the name of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, for example, despite the fact that the high-visibility bridge, scene to historic 1965 police attacks on civil rights protesters, is named after a grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan.

By contrast, the town of Plymouth, Massachusetts, erected a monument near their historic rock, honouring the National Day of Mourning, which is a Native American alternative to Thanksgiving. Cast in bronze, the monument explains why many Native Americans don’t celebrate the arrival of the Pilgrims, referencing how, to Native Americans, Thanksgiving “is a reminder of the genocide of millions of their people, the theft of their lands, and the relentless assault on their culture.”

The Plymouth monument goes on to explain that the National Day of Mourning honours “Native ancestors and the struggles of Native peoples to survive today...as well as a protest of the racism and oppression which Native Americans continue to experience.”

In a similar vein, Neto Hatinakwe Onkwehonwe, a Native American arts and cultural organisation, erected a monument in Buffalo at a public park at the mouth of Lake Erie. The Neto monument offers an alternative to an older municipal monument emblazoned with a historically contentious narrative about warlike Indians. Five years ago, however, the City of Buffalo hired a Missouri restoration firm to renew its Columbus statue.

In an era when Confederate flags and racist team names are regularly being challenged around the country; when the narratives on other historical monuments meet empirical challenges cast in bronze and stone; and decades after Eastern Europeans demonstrated how statues, in their case hundreds of statues of Lenin, can be torn down, our Columbus statues continue to stand tall as enduring symbols of racism beyond the reach of change. **CT**

**Thanksgiving
“is a reminder of
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people, the theft
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and the relentless
assault on their
culture.”**

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Dr Strangelove is naked

Putin's campaign in Syria has smashed US plans for Middle East domination, writes **Pepe Escobar**

The Pentagon never saw it coming. And they are absolutely terrified of the inevitable consequences



Ready for action: Russian jet prepares for an attack on terrorists in Syria.

The whole Global South is now informed about how the Russian campaign in Syria has swiftly smashed all of “Exceptionalistan’s” elaborate plans for a “Greater Middle East.”

These plans span everything from the Wolfowitz Doctrine to Dr Zbig “Grand Chessboard” Brzezinski’s categorical imperative of preventing the emergence of a strategic competitor across Eurasia.

But the subtext is even more intriguing: The Pentagon never saw it coming. And they are absolutely terrified of the inevitable consequences.

The panic was palpable, as relayed by Dr Strangelove, sorry, NATO’s top commander Gen. Philip Breedlove, a.k.a. Breedlove/hate, the man who announces every week Russia is invading Ukraine.

Although proverbially handicapped in

his geopolitical analysis – Russia wants to hinder US and “coalition” operations in the region – Breedlove/hate is clearly puzzled by the new, unforeseen, intricate layers of Russia’s defence network.

In his own words: “We’re a little worried about another A2/AD bubble being created in the eastern Mediterranean.”

In Pentagonese, A2/AD means anti-access/area denial.

Translation: a mix of surface-to-air missiles and anti-ship missiles that can be deployed to prevent any player from entering or crossing a certain area.

Breedlove/hate goes as far as to admit this is Russia’s “third denial zone” around Europe. The first is in the Baltics – via the Kaliningrad base. The second – based in Crimea – covers the Black Sea. In his own words: “Their cruise missiles range the en-

tire Black Sea, and their air defense missiles range about 40 to 50 per cent of the Black Sea.”

He is convinced the deployment of these “very sophisticated air defense capabilities” is not about purging Syria from the Salafi-jihadi constellation. It’s about “something else.”

And the point about “something else” is that the Pentagon knows it, but cannot possibly admit it publicly. Neocons and neoliberalcons at best can transform their apoplexy into vociferous demands for a mega-upgraded Pentagon budget, or to force Obama into keeping troops in Afghanistan indefinitely – as if any informed observer would doubt there would never be an exit.

But the real game-changer, once again, has been the show-stopping performance of the 26 Kalibr-NK cruise missiles launched by the Russian Caspian fleet against 11 Salafi-jihadi targets 1,500 kilometres away, destroying them all.

Breedlove/hate cannot possibly admit the Caspian cruise “message” was directed at NATO. The Kalibr-NK flew over both Iran and Iraq, at a maximum altitude of 100 metres – not to mention speeding by a US drone. Translation: This spells out the absolute irrelevance of all: Multibillion, elaborate plans for missile defense deployed in Eastern Europe. Remember those US missiles which would be deployed against the “Iranian threat.”

Jammed by Russia

NATO is also terrified that all its state-of-the-art C4i software – command, control, communications, computer, intelligence – has been totally jammed by Russian technology, all across Syria and southern Turkey. Essentially, reduced to sitting ducks. Imagine a similar, much amplified scenario in a hypothetical war on European soil over Ukraine, which neocons never cease to itch for.

No wonder these military break-

throughs translate, in terms of public opinion, into fabulous PR for Russia. Just check Putin the Hajji in Iraq. Incidentally, if one really wants to know how “Exceptionalistan” destroyed Iraq in the first place – creating the conditions for the rise of al-Qaeda in Iraq and then ISIS/ISIL/Daesh – might as well ditch Claire Danes in Homeland and check out: Iraq Year Zero, by Abbas Fahdel, which hits the screen in France next year.

As for the non-stop uproar in US corporate media, if this is the best American “Putinologists” can come up with it, the Kremlin certainly does not need enemies.

Meanwhile, on the economic front, Russian domestic oil demand is growing. What this means is Russia is slowly but surely shifting from an import economy to a manufacturing centre, replacing US and EU imports, moving towards self-sufficiency and focusing on domestic credit expansion for productive investments. The military breakthroughs are a “don’t mess with us” message inbuilt in a complex economic transformation process.

In addition, Chinese oil imports grew 8 per cent for January through September year-over-year – especially in the petrochemical and transport sectors, outweighing any apparent slowdown in the use of industrial oil. Next week comes the crucial announcement of the next Chinese five-year plan. No, China is not crashing, as much as the China-Russia strategic partnership keeps expanding.

Beijing is following in close detail the “messages” sent by Russia in Syria. And don’t forget that in the A2/AD department, China has its own set of messages, including the bunker-busting DF15B, the DF-16 with a 1,000-kilometre range, and the DF-21D “carrier killer” – 2,500-kilometre range and capable of carrying a nuclear warhead.

Expect many a naked lunch between Dr Strangelove and his masters in the Beltway. **CT**

The real game-changer, once again, has been the show-stopping performance of the 26 Kalibr-NK cruise missiles launched by the Russian Caspian fleet

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Pepe Escobar
is the author of
“Globalistan: How
the Globalized
World is Dissolving
into Liquid War”
(Nimble Books,
2007), “Red Zone
Blues: a snapshot of
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does Globalistan”
(Nimble Books,
2009). His latest
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Chaos”

Building armies – and watching them fail

Andrew J. Bacevich explains why Washington is incapable of building effective military forces in foreign countries

The shooting would stop, Bush vowed, only when countries like Afghanistan had ceased to harbor anti-American terrorists and countries like Iraq had ceased to encourage them

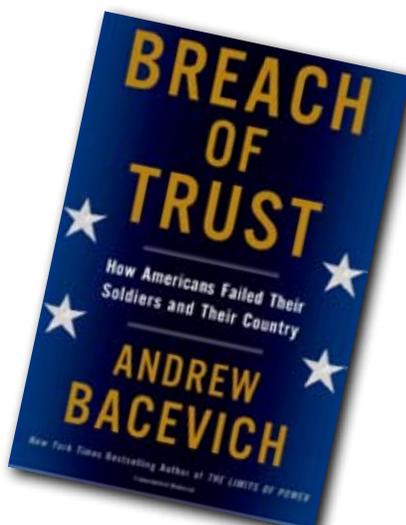
First came Fallujah, then Mosul, and later Ramadi in Iraq. Now, there is Kunduz, a provincial capital in northern Afghanistan. In all four places, the same story has played out: In cities that newspaper reporters like to call “strategically important,” security forces trained and equipped by the US military at great expense simply folded, abandoning their posts (and much of their US-supplied weaponry) without even mounting serious resistance. Called upon to fight, they fled. In each case, the defending forces gave way before substantially outnumbered attackers, making the outcomes all the more ignominious.

Together, these setbacks have rendered a verdict on the now more-or-less nameless Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Suc-

cessive blitzkriegs by ISIS and the Taliban respectively did more than simply breach Iraqi and Afghan defences. They also punched gaping holes in the strategy to which the United States had reverted in hopes of stemming the further erosion of its position in the Greater Middle East.

Recall that, when the United States launched its GWOT soon after 9/11, it did so pursuant to a grandiose agenda. US forces were going to imprint onto others a specific and exalted set of values. During President George W. Bush’s first term, this “freedom agenda” formed the foundation, or at least the rationale, for US policy.

The shooting would stop, Bush vowed, only when countries like Afghanistan had ceased to harbor anti-American terrorists and countries like Iraq had ceased to encourage them. Achieving this goal meant that the inhabitants of those countries would have to change. Afghans and Iraqis, followed in due course by Syrians, Libyans, Iranians, and sundry others, would embrace democracy, respect human rights, and abide by the rule of law, or else. Through the concerted application of American power, they would become different – more like us and therefore more inclined to get along with us. A bit less Mecca and Medina, a bit more “we hold these truths” and “of the people, by the people.”



BREACH OF TRUST
How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country
Andrew Bacevich
Metropolitan Books
\$21.47 (Amazon.com)



Iraqi Special Forces soldiers assigned to the 1st Marines patrol south clearing every house on their way through Fallujah, Iraq, during Operation Al Fajr (New Dawn). Photo: Wikipedia

Once liberated, grateful Afghans and Iraqis would align themselves with a conception of modernity that the United States had pioneered and now exemplified

So Bush and others in his inner circle professed to believe. At least some of them, probably including Bush himself, may actually have done so.

History, at least the bits and pieces to which Americans attend, seemed to endow such expectations with a modicum of plausibility. Had not such a transfer of values occurred after World War II when the defeated Axis Powers had hastily thrown in with the winning side? Had it not recurred as the Cold War was winding down, when previously committed communists succumbed to the allure of consumer goods and quarterly profit statements?

If the appropriate mix of coaching and coercion were administered, Afghans and Iraqis, too, would surely take the path once followed by good Germans and nimble Japanese, and subsequently by Czechs tired of repression and Chinese tired of want. Once liberated, grateful Afghans and Iraqis would align themselves with a conception of modernity that the United States had pioneered and now exemplified. For

this transformation to occur, however, the accumulated debris of retrograde social conventions and political arrangements that had long retarded progress would have to be cleared away. This was what the invasions of Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom!) and Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom!) were meant to accomplish in one fell swoop by a military the likes of which had (to hear Washington tell it) never been seen in history. POW!

Standing them up as we stand down

Concealed within that oft-cited “freedom” – the all-purpose justification for deploying American power – were several shades of meaning. The term, in fact, requires decoding. Yet within the upper reaches of the American national security apparatus, one definition takes precedence over all others. In Washington, freedom has become a euphemism for dominion. Spreading freedom means positioning the United States to call the shots. Seen in this context, Washington’s expected victories in both

WAR GAMES

After the Gulf War of 1991, basking in the ostensible success of Operation Desert Storm, the officer corps persuaded itself that it had once and for all banished its Vietnam-induced bad memories

Afghanistan and Iraq were meant to affirm and broaden its preeminence by incorporating large parts of the Islamic world into the American imperium. They would benefit, of course, but to an even greater extent, so would we.

Alas, liberating Afghans and Iraqis turned out to be a tad more complicated than the architects of Bush's freedom (or dominion) agenda anticipated. Well before Barack Obama succeeded Bush in January 2009, few observers – apart from a handful of ideologues and militarists – clung to the fairy tale of US military might whipping the Greater Middle East into shape. Brutally but efficiently, war had educated the educable. As for the uneducable, they persisted in taking their cues from Fox News and the *Weekly Standard*.

Yet if the strategy of transformation via invasion and “nation building” had failed, there was a fallback position that seemed to be dictated by the logic of events. Together, Bush and Obama would lower expectations as to what the United States was going to achieve, even as they imposed new demands on the US military, America's go-to outfit in foreign policy, to get on with the job.

Rather than midwifing fundamental political and cultural change, the Pentagon was instead ordered to ramp up its already gargantuan efforts to create local militaries (and police forces) capable of maintaining order and national unity. President Bush provided a concise formulation of the new strategy: “As the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down.” Under Obama, after his own stab at a “surge,” the dictum applied to Afghanistan as well. Nation-building had flopped. Building armies and police forces able to keep a lid on things now became the prevailing definition of success.

The United States had, of course, attempted this approach once before, with unhappy results. This was in Vietnam. There, efforts to destroy North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces intent on unify-

ing their divided country had exhausted both the US military and the patience of the American people. Responding to the logic of events, presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon had a tacitly agreed upon fallback position. As the prospects of American forces successfully eliminating threats to South Vietnamese security faded, the training and equipping of the South Vietnamese to defend themselves became priority number 1.

Dubbed “Vietnamisation,” this enterprise ended in abject failure with the fall of Saigon in 1975. Yet that failure raised important questions to which members of the national security elite might have attended: Given a weak state with dubious legitimacy, how feasible is it to expect outsiders to invest indigenous forces with genuine fighting power? How do differences in culture or history or religion affect the prospects for doing so? Can skill ever make up for a deficit of will? Can hardware replace cohesion? Above all, if tasked with giving some version of Vietnamisation another go, what did US forces need to do differently to ensure a different result?

At the time, with general officers and civilian officials more inclined to forget Vietnam than contemplate its implications, these questions attracted little attention. Instead, military professionals devoted themselves to gearing up for the next fight, which they resolved would be different. No more Vietnams – and therefore no more Vietnamisation.

After the Gulf War of 1991, basking in the ostensible success of Operation Desert Storm, the officer corps persuaded itself that it had once and for all banished its Vietnam-induced bad memories. As Commander-in-Chief George H.W. Bush so memorably put it, “By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all.”

In short, the Pentagon now had war figured out. Victory had become a foregone conclusion. As it happened, this self-congratulatory evaluation left US troops ill-

prepared for the difficulties awaiting them after 9/11 when interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq departed from the expected script, which posited short wars by a force beyond compare ending in decisive victories. What the troops got were two very long wars with no decision whatsoever. It was Vietnam on a smaller scale all over again – times two.

Vietnamisation 2.0

For Bush in Iraq and Obama after a brief, half-hearted flirtation with counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, opting for a variant of Vietnamisation proved to be a no-brainer. Doing so offered the prospect of an escape from all complexities. True enough, Plan A – we export freedom and democracy – had fallen short. But Plan B – they (with our help) restore some semblance of stability – could enable Washington to salvage at least partial success in both places. With the bar suitably lowered, a version of “Mission Accomplished” might still be within reach.

If Plan A had looked to US troops to vanquish their adversaries outright, Plan B focused on prepping besieged allies to take over the fight. Winning outright was no longer the aim – given the inability of US forces to do so, this was self-evidently not in the cards – but holding the enemy at bay was.

Although allied with the United States, only in the loosest sense did either Iraq or Afghanistan qualify as a nation-state. Only nominally and intermittently did governments in Baghdad and Kabul exercise a writ of authority commanding respect from the people known as Iraqis and Afghans. Yet in the Washington of George Bush and Barack Obama, a willing suspension of disbelief became the basis for policy. In distant lands where the concept of nationhood barely existed, the Pentagon set out to create a full-fledged national security apparatus capable of defending that aspiration as if it represented reality. From day 1, this was a

faith-based undertaking.

As with any Pentagon project undertaken on a crash basis, this one consumed resources on a gargantuan scale – \$25 billion in Iraq and an even more staggering \$65 billion in Afghanistan. “Standing up” the requisite forces involved the transfer of vast quantities of equipment and the creation of elaborate US training missions. Iraqi and Afghan forces acquired all the paraphernalia of modern war – attack aircraft or helicopters, artillery and armored vehicles, night vision devices and drones. Needless to say, stateside defence contractors lined up in droves to cash in.

Based on their performance, the security forces on which the Pentagon has lavished years of attention remain visibly not up to the job. Meanwhile, ISIS warriors, without the benefit of expensive third-party mentoring, appear plenty willing to fight and die for their cause. Ditto Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. The beneficiaries of US assistance? Not so much. Based on partial but considerable returns, Vietnamisation 2.0 seems to be following an eerily familiar trajectory that should remind anyone of Vietnamisation 1.0. Meanwhile, the questions that ought to have been addressed back when our South Vietnamese ally went down to defeat have returned with a vengeance.

The most important of those questions challenges the assumption that has informed US policy in the Greater Middle East since the freedom agenda went south: that Washington has a particular knack for organizing, training, equipping, and motivating foreign armies. Based on the evidence piling up before our eyes, that assumption appears largely false. On this score, retired Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, a former military commander and US ambassador in Afghanistan, has rendered an authoritative judgment. “Our track record at building [foreign] security forces over the past 15 years is miserable,” he recently told the *New York Times*. Just so.

The most important of those questions challenges the assumption that has informed US policy in the Greater Middle East since the freedom agenda went south: that Washington has a particular knack for organizing, training, equipping, and motivating foreign armies

WAR GAMES

Prudence might actually counsel that Washington assume instead, when it comes to organizing, training, equipping, and motivating foreign armies, that the United States is essentially clueless

Some might argue that trying harder, investing more billions, sending yet more equipment for perhaps another 15 years will produce more favorable results. But this is akin to believing that, given sufficient time, the fruits of capitalism will ultimately trickle down to benefit the least among us or that the march of technology holds the key to maximizing human happiness. You can believe it if you want, but it's a mug's game.

Indeed, the United States would be better served if policymakers abandoned the pretense that the Pentagon possesses any gift whatsoever for "standing up" foreign military forces. Prudence might actually counsel that Washington assume instead, when it comes to organizing, training, equipping, and motivating foreign armies, that the United States is essentially clueless.

Exceptions may exist. For example, US efforts have probably helped boost the fighting power of the Kurdish peshmerga. Yet such exceptions are rare enough to prove the rule. Keep in mind that before American trainers and equipment ever showed up, Iraq's Kurds already possessed the essential attributes of nationhood. Unlike Afghans and Iraqis, Kurds do not require tutoring in the imperative of collective self-defence.

What are the policy implications of giving up the illusion that the Pentagon

knows how to build foreign armies? The largest is this: Subletting war no longer figures as a plausible alternative to waging it directly. So where US interests require that fighting be done, like it or not, we're going to have to do that fighting ourselves.

By extension, in circumstances where US forces are demonstrably incapable of winning or where Americans balk at any further expenditure of American blood – today in the Greater Middle East both of these conditions apply – then perhaps we shouldn't be there. To pretend otherwise is to throw good money after bad or, as a famous American general once put it, to wage (even if indirectly) "the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy." This we have been doing now for several decades across much of the Islamic world.

In American politics, we await the officeholder or candidate willing to state the obvious and confront its implications. **CT**

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*Andrew J. Bacevich is professor emeritus of history and international relations at Boston University. He is the author of *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country*, among other works. His new book, *America's War for the Greater Middle East* (Random House), is due out in April 2016. This essay originally appeared at <http://tomdispatch.com>*



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Fear of the Walking Dead

TV series is a drama about occupation, the breakdown of society and the ease with which might makes right, warns **John W. Whitehead**

The zombies are back. They are hungry. And they are lurking around every corner. The zombie narrative, popularized by the hit television series *The Walking Dead*, in which a small group of Americans attempt to survive in a zombie-ridden, post-apocalyptic world where they're not only fighting off flesh-eating ghouls but cannibalistic humans, plays to our fears and paranoia.

Yet as journalist Syreeta McFadden points out, while dystopian stories used to reflect our anxieties, now they reflect our reality, mirroring how we as a nation view the world around us, how we as citizens view each other, and most of all how our government views us.

Fear the *Walking Dead* – AMC's new spinoff of its popular *Walking Dead* series – drives this point home by dialing back the clock to when the zombie outbreak first appears and setting viewers down in the midst of societal unrest not unlike our own experiences of the past year (“a bunch of weird incidents, police protests, riots, and ... rapid social entropy”). Then, as *Forbes* reports, “the military showed up and we fast-forwarded into an ad hoc police state with no glimpse at what was happening in the world around our main cast of hapless survivors.”

Forbes found Fear's quick shift into a police state to be far-fetched, but anyone

who has been paying attention in recent years knows that the groundwork has already been laid for the government – i.e., the military – to intervene and lock down the nation in the event of a national disaster.

Recognizing this, the *Atlantic* notes: “The villains of [*Fear the Walking Dead*] aren't the zombies, who rarely appear, but the US military, who sweep into an L.A. suburb to quarantine the survivors. Zombies are, after all, a recognizable threat – but Fear plumbs drama and horror from the betrayal by institutions designed to keep people safe.”

Government paranoia

While zombies may be the personification of our darkest fears, they embody the government's paranoia about the citizenry as potential threats that need to be monitored, tracked, surveilled, sequestered, deterred, vanquished and rendered impotent.

For years now, the government has been carrying out military training drills with zombies as the enemy. In 2011, the DOD created a 31-page instruction manual for how to protect America from a terrorist attack carried out by zombie forces. In 2012, the CDC released a guide for surviving a zombie plague. That was followed by training drills for members of the military,

While zombies may be the personification of our darkest fears, they embody the government's paranoia about the citizenry as potential threats

VISION OF THE FUTURE

The government started playing around with the idea of using zombies as stand-ins for enemy combatants in its training drills right around the time the Army War College issued its 2008 report, warning that an economic crisis in the U.S. could lead to massive civil unrest

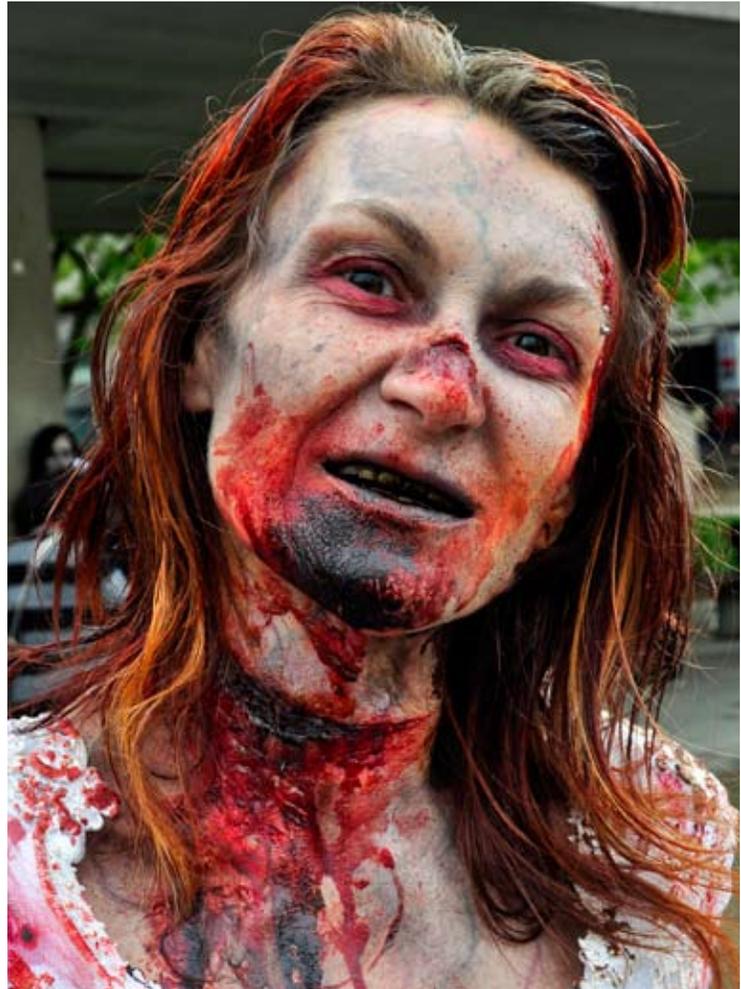
police officers and first responders.

The zombie exercises appear to be kitschy and fun, but what if the zombies in the exercises are us, the citizenry, viewed by those in power as mindless, voracious, zombie hordes?

Consider this: The government started playing around with the idea of using zombies as stand-ins for enemy combatants in its training drills right around the time the Army War College issued its 2008 report, warning that an economic crisis in the US could lead to massive civil unrest that would require the military to intervene and restore order.

That same year, it was revealed that the government had amassed more than 8 million names of Americans considered a threat to national security, to be used “by the military in the event of a national catastrophe, a suspension of the Constitution or the imposition of martial law.” The program’s name, Main Core, refers to the fact that it contains “copies of the ‘main core’ or essence of each item of intelligence information on Americans produced by the FBI and the other agencies of the U.S. intelligence community.”

Also in 2008, the Pentagon launched the Minerva Initiative, a \$75-million military-driven research project focused on studying social behavior in order to determine how best to cope with mass civil disobedience or uprisings. The Minerva Initiative



Fear this! Who will save us when the killer zombies arrives? Not the military, they'll kill everything that moves. Photo: Tony Sutton

has funded projects such as “Who Does Not Become a Terrorist, and Why?” which “conflates peaceful activists with ‘supporters of political violence’ who are different from terrorists only in that they do not embark on ‘armed militancy’ themselves.”

In 2009, the Dept. of Homeland Security issued its reports on right-wing and left-wing Extremism, in which the terms “extremist” and “terrorist” were used interchangeably to describe citizens who were disgruntled or anti-government. Meanwhile, a government campaign was underway to spy on Americans’ mail, email and cell phone communications.

Fast forward a few years more and you

have local police being transformed into extensions of the military, taught to view members of their community as suspects, trained to shoot first and ask questions later, and equipped with all of the technology and weaponry of a soldier on a battlefield.

Domestic terrorism czar

Most recently, the Obama administration hired a domestic terrorism czar whose job is to focus on anti-government right-wing American “extremists” who have been designated a greater threat to America than ISIS or al Qaeda. As part of the government’s so-called war on right-wing extremism, the Obama administration has agreed to partner with the United Nations to take part in its Strong Cities Network program, which will train local police agencies across America in how to identify, fight and prevent extremism.

Noticing a pattern yet?

“We the people” or, more appropriately, “we the zombies” are the enemy in the eyes of the government.

So when presented with the Defense Department’s battle plan for defeating an army of the walking dead, you might find yourself tempted to giggle, however, in an age of extreme government paranoia, this is no laughing matter.

The DOD’s strategy for dealing with a zombie uprising, outlined in “CONOP 8888,” is for all intents and purposes a training manual for the government in how to put down a citizen uprising or at least an uprising of individuals “infected” with dangerous ideas about freedom.

Rest assured that the tactics and difficulties outlined in the “fictional training scenario” are all too real, beginning with martial law.

The strategy manual’s primary methods of launching a zombie counter-offensive involve surveillance, military drills, awareness training, militarized police forces, and martial law.

Notice the similarities?

As I point out in my book, “Battlefield America: The War on the American People,” if there is any lesson to be learned, it is simply this: Whether the threat to national security comes in the form of actual terrorists, imaginary zombies or disgruntled American citizens infected with dangerous ideas about freedom, the government’s response to such threats remains the same: detect, deter and annihilate.

To return to AMC’s Fear the Walking Dead: It’s the police state “tasked with protecting the vulnerable” that poses some of the gravest threats to the citizenry. Indeed, as David Sims writing for the Atlantic points out, “the military doesn’t really have a plan except to crush any potential threat.”

Sims continues: “The latest episode, ‘Cobalt,’ revealed the military’s endgame: With the zombie situation deteriorating, they plan to flee and wipe out everyone they leave behind, at this point motivated only by the need to survive, rather than to protect. Countering that is the family unit that has forged new bonds in the crisis. These organically loyal communities, the writers Robert Kirkman and David Erickson argue, are the only kind that can survive in such a world... More than anything, Fear the Walking Dead is a drama about occupation, the breakdown of society, and the ease with which seemingly decent people can decide that might makes right. Like any dystopian fiction, it’s easy to dismiss as fantasy, but remove the zombies and Fear could be taking place in dozens of real-world locations... This is happening here, Kirkman and Erickson are saying, but it could happen anywhere.”

CT

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With the zombie situation deteriorating, the military plans to flee and wipe out everyone they leave behind, at this point motivated only by the need to survive, rather than to protect

Jerusalem chaos warns of bleak future

Jonathan Cook on the chaotic violence that signals a strong warning about the future of Israel

Futile knife attacks may appal outsiders, but for many Palestinians they are the moment when an individual briefly fights back on behalf of a collectively subjugated and humiliated people

Among Palestinians and Israelis, the recent upsurge in violence has been variously described as the children's, lone-wolf, Jerusalem and smartphone intifadas. Each describes a distinguishing feature of this round of clashes.

The steady erosion of Fatah and Hamas' authority during the post-Oslo years, as the Palestinian factions proved incapable of protecting their people from the structural violence of the occupation, has driven Palestine's politically orphaned children to the streets, armed with stones.

The growing hopelessness and sense of abandonment have led a few so-called "lone wolves" to vent their fury on Israelis with improvised weapons such as knives, screwdrivers and cars. These attacks have attracted the most publicity, becoming the equivalent of the second intifada's suicide bomber. But they serve chiefly as a barometer of Palestinian despair.

Jerusalem is the centre of events, with the Palestinians' only unifying symbol, al-Aqsa mosque, at its heart. For Palestinians, the incremental takeover of the compound – and the West's indifference – is like watching the mass dispossession of 1948 play out again in slow motion.

In addition, Jerusalem is the main fault line. Israel's illegal annexation of the city has left Palestinians there in an extreme

form of isolation – indefinitely stateless and supremely vulnerable.

And finally, the smartphone camera has allowed Palestinians to document their suffering and witness unmediated their compatriots' personal acts of resistance and self-sacrifice.

Futile knife attacks may appal outsiders, but for many Palestinians they are the moment when an individual briefly reclaims his or her agency and fights back on behalf of a collectively subjugated and humiliated people.

The need for so many different labels for these events reveals another important facet of the current Palestinian struggle: its disorganised nature.

Israel has almost completed the division and enclosure of Palestinians into disconnected enclaves. As they hear the sound of the prison doors closing, Palestinian youths are lashing out at the guards closest to hand.

Because the divisions between Palestinian populations have become so entrenched geographically, and their leaders politically, it is hard for Palestinians to find any unifying vision or organising principle. Do they fight first against their occupiers or their spent leadership?

But the lack of planning and discipline has exposed Israel's own limitations too.

Israel has little but stopgap measures

to defend against the protests. Its intelligence agencies cannot predict the lone wolf, its guns cannot deter the knife, its military might cannot subdue the craving for justice and dignity.

Strangely, in the face of all this, there are signs of a parallel breakdown of order and leadership on the Israeli side.

Mobs of Jews patrol Jerusalem and Israeli cities, calling out “Death to the Arabs!” A jittery soldier causes pandemonium by firing his rifle in a train carriage after a bogus terror alert. An innocent Eritrean asylum seeker is shot by a security guard during an attack because he looks “Arab,” then beaten to a pulp by a lynch mob that includes soldiers.

Meanwhile, politicians and police commanders stoke the fear. They call for citizens to take the law into their own hands. Palestinian workers are banned from Jewish towns. Israeli supermarkets remove knives from shelves, while 8,000 Israelis queue up for guns in the first 24 hours after permit rules are eased.

Some of this reflects a hysteria, a heightened sense of victimhood among Israelis, fuelled by the knife attack videos. But the mood dates to before the current upheavals.

It is also a sign of the gradual leaching of the settlers’ lawlessness into the mainstream. A popular slogan from the past weeks is: “The army’s hands are tied.” Israeli civilians presumably believe they must take up arms instead.

After six uninterrupted years of the extreme right in power, Israelis don’t blame their government’s policy of relentless force for the backlash. They demand yet more force against the Palestinians.

Polls show Avigdor Lieberman, the former Moldovan bouncer who became the hard man of the Israeli right, is most favoured to lead the nation out of the crisis.

Solutions are being applied most savagely in East Jerusalem, where Palestinians are being locked even more tightly into neighbourhood ghettos. Israel’s “eternal, unified capital” is being carved up by roadblocks. Palestinian residents are made to endure daily searches and insults that will sow the seeds of yet more fury and resistance.

As Israel tries to slam shut the door of one prison cell in Jerusalem, the inmates threaten to break open the door of another, in Gaza. Israel’s leadership has watched uneasily the repeated breaches of Gaza’s fence over the past days by youths enraged by their own misery and what they see happening in the other prison wings.

The current unrest may recede, but more waves of protest of ever greater intensity are surely not far behind.

Jafar Farah, a Palestinian leader in Israel, has warned of it heading slowly from a national conflict into a civil war, one defined by the kind of debased one-state solution Israel is imposing.

The chaotic violence of the past weeks looks like a warning from the future – a future Israel is hurtling towards. **CT**

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

After six uninterrupted years of the extreme right in power, Israelis don’t blame their government’s policy of relentless force for the backlash. They demand yet more force against the Palestinians

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Home ground

George Monbiot tells how Britain's housing crisis won't end until people face some uncomfortable truths

Britain's problem is not a shortage of housing. We have a surplus of housing, more per head than we have ever had before. But its distribution is terrible

When you lend rooms to the homeless, expect cheers of approbation. When you explain why they are homeless, expect howls of execration.

This is not to diss what soccer stars Gary Neville and Ryan Giggs have done – far from it. Allowing homeless squatters to stay in the building they are turning into a luxury hotel is a true act of kindness, in a sector characterised by cruelty.

So extreme has the housing crisis become that scarcely anyone would claim to be unmoved by the condition of those at the bottom. The 40 per cent rise in homelessness over the past five years, the 2,500 families trapped in bed-and-breakfast lodgings, the slim chances for most of those who are young today of ever buying a home, and the ridiculous rents they must pay – these outcomes are lamented almost everywhere. But when you start to discuss the underlying reasons, sympathy soon gives way to anger and denial.

We are prepared to discuss certain aspects of the problem. The continued sale of council houses and the government's broken promise to replace them rightly ignite public fury. So does the recent deal with housing associations, which further reduces the homes available to the poor. So do empty homes and the general failure to build, exacerbated by land hoarding

on the part of speculators.

But the major cause of the housing crisis? We just don't want to know, and it's not hard to see why. The major cause is a spectacular failure to tax those who own property.

Britain's problem is not a shortage of housing. We have a surplus of housing, more per head than we have ever had before. But its distribution is terrible. Government figures released last year reveal that 5 per cent of homes in England and Wales meet the official definition of overcrowded. But 69 per cent meet the official definition of underoccupied (possessing at least one spare bedroom). Of these, half (8.1 million) had two or more spare bedrooms.

This is, in theory, a free country, and I'm not proposing that those who have more than they need should be forced to move. But in the midst of an acute housing crisis, you would expect fiscal policies to help match supply to demand. Current taxes do the opposite.

Tax exemption

The exemption from capital gains tax for main residences, inheritance tax breaks, a grossly unfair and regressive banding of council tax: all create powerful incentives to pour your money into a bigger house than you need, and then hold onto

it. These incentives also drive up prices, by ensuring that all the gain accrues to the owner. The results include unaffordability, unsustainable levels of debt and speculative bubbles.

It's absurd that the only windfall tax on house prices is stamp duty (and even more absurd that it's the buyer who pays). When a higher turnover of stock is required, so that houses are better matched to need, the last thing you want is a tax on transactions. Surely the logical response is a tax on hoarding, calibrated to the rate of occupancy? A variable council tax is the simplest way of doing it: The more spare bedrooms you possess, the more you pay. This would help families to obtain family-sized homes, and encourage the division of very large houses.

You say these things at your peril. When I first proposed such measures, in 2011, they were greeted with fury. In the *Telegraph* my idea was pronounced "far closer to fascism than the ethno-centric populism of the European radical Right." Curiously, when the government proposed a similar measure, the bedroom tax, aimed not, as I proposed, at property owners, but at the poorest households (tenants on housing benefit), the same people were delighted.

In a recent debate in the *Guardian*, Joan Bakewell, who is almost the transcendental form of English liberalism, and whose own house, she says, is "worth millions," argued that it would be "mean-spirited" to encourage "old people living alone in big houses ... to sell up and make room for young and aspiring families." I would argue that holding onto such houses while families are homeless is, in aggregate, far meaner.

But she has a solution: "Let them build more houses." The phrasing has unfortunate resonances, but it perfectly captures the prevailing narrative. Let's not look back at the profligate use of the space we already possess. Let's not change the policies that encourage it. Let's just keep

building. It's like dumping half our food in landfill then demanding that food production rises. And we would never do that, er, would we?

I agree, as it happens, that more building is needed, and I support Labour's proposal for 100,000 new social homes a year. But the idea that building alone will solve the problem is pure fantasy. There are 26.7 million households in the UK. In 2014, 1,219,000 homes were traded. So even if the government were to achieve its aim of building 200,000 homes a year, which some housebuilding experts consider impossible, it would add less than 1 per cent a year to the total stock, and increase the volume of transactions by only one sixth. In other words, unless we want to wreck vast tracts of countryside, we cannot build our way out of this crisis. If we really want to solve it, the greatest contribution must come from the redistribution of existing stock.

But not even Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party will champion such obvious solutions, for fear of alienating people who bemoan the problem but don't really want it solved. His speech to the party conference was marked by the contrast between the strength of his feelings and the weakness of his proposals. In an act of gobsmacking capitulation, Labour has appointed the chief executive of the housebuilding firm Taylor Wimpey to "set out the ideas needed for a wide new debate." Perhaps it could also ask Bashar al-Assad to lead its human rights review.

So we all play Marie Antoinette, proposing only to "let them build more," while stoutly ignoring the injustice that underlies this crisis. Other people, and the countryside, must pay for our peculiar fixation with the property-based, rent-based economy.

Let's applaud Neville and Giggs for their kindness, but let's stop pretending that we are mere spectators. Many sympathetic people are complicit in the problem these heroes are trying to address. **CT**

Not even Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party will champion such obvious solutions, for fear of alienating people who bemoan the problem but don't really want it solved

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George Monbiot's book "*Feral*" was recently released in paperback format. His web site is <http://monbiot.com> This article was first published in the *Guardian*

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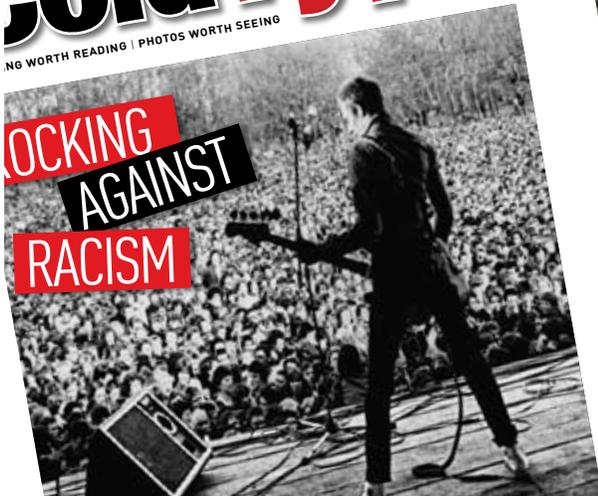
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