

Is Unity Still a Value?

As the United States commemorates the 150th anniversary of the Civil War fought over the South's secession in defense of slavery today's irony is that the U.S. government is experiencing a resurgence of the divisions that empowered secession in 1861, as Danny Schechter notes in this guest essay.

By Danny Schechter

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One of America's greatest songs begins this way:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:

He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;

He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:

His truth is marching on.

Think of that image of "truth marching on" with "terrible swift swords" at the ready to reunify a nation divided over slavery, end a bitter secession and restore a union that had been torn asunder.

The author, Julia Ward Howe, was not just a patriot, but an activist, and an abolitionist who supported the North against the South to eradicate slavery and restore the union.

When President Obama speaks today, he always makes a point of invoking and punching up the name, or perhaps the memory, of "The UNITED States of America."

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps,

They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;

I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:

His day is marching on.

For a nation that has fought a war every twenty years or so, the American Civil War was the bloodiest in our history. For both sides, it became a holy cause, a crusade of righteous service to conflicting ideals in the name of God in the heavens.

The song sung by Union soldiers as they marched conjured up a "trumpet that shall never call retreat."

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;

He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat:

Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!

Our God is marching on.

The chant in the North was “union, union” in the service of one nation. It later found expression in the idea of an “indivisible” nation “with liberty and justice for all.” Those words, written by the Socialist minister Francis Bellamy, are in our Pledge of Allegiance, the promise that we make with hands on hearts. It’s that pledge that makes Americans Americans.

Bellamy had wanted the pledge to be used by all nations. (Today’s self-styled far-right patriots have no idea that the pledge they recite with so much fervor was originally the work of a man of the Left.)

For Americans, in that era, the idea of being UNITED was not just the name of an airline.

Today, as that savage war marks its 150th anniversary, publishers and television networks are hyping their Civil War histories, even as another kind of civil war is underway. It’s a partisan war, not between the blue and the gray of the 1860s but between blue states and red states of the 21st Century.

The South has risen again politically winning disproportionate influence in the Congress and the media. The “rebels” who get media attention these days are in the Tea Party.

Overseas, the rebels we are being taught to like are in Libya where a shadowy opposition aided and abetted by NATO bombing are all we hear about.

Unity is a value we embrace but spreading disunity is what we practice.

We fought two wars to keep countries from reuniting. We won on the Korean peninsula where North and South are kept divided partially by a phalanx of nuclear-armed U.S. soldiers.

We lost the battle in Vietnam to Ho Chi Minh’s forces when the North and the South reunified by kicking U.S. forces out. Millions of Asians died as well as over fifty thousand Americans.

In that war, our trumpet called retreat.

Today, some of our pundits and cheerleaders speak in hopeful turns about the collapse of the European Community. Some want to see debt-ridden Greece be divided into a “Good Greece” and a “Bad Greece.”

Divide and rule is the oldest axiom for power elites.

In recent years, we divided Bosnia into two states that continue to battle and hate each other.

There were calls in U.S. policy circles to divide Iraq into three, hoping the Kurds could keep the Arabs in line. That proposal failed.

We supported Kosovo independence from Serbia even as we learned that members of that separatist government were running drug gangs. Africa has long been balkanized like the Balkans.

A part of Sudan has become a separate country, Southern Sudan. There’s even talk of splitting Libya into an Eastern Libya where the oil wells are and a Western Libya. That is, if Gaddafi clings to power.

The idea of a long-hoped-for-unity deal between the Palestinian movements, Fatah and Hamas, is anathema to policy makers in Israel and Washington. They prefer the Palestinians to fight amongst themselves and kill each other.

Keeping the Palestinians divided has been a U.S. objective ever since the West colluded with Israel in creating the Islamist Hamas to compete with Yasser Arafat's nationalist Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO.)

Now, Israel's supporters slam Hamas for not recognizing Israel which refuses to recognize Hamas despite its victory in a democratic election,

Leave it to a liberal hawk like Martin Peretz, publisher of the New Republic, to put the disunity doctrine into words back in 1982. He advised Israel to deliver Palestine a "lasting military defeat" that would "clarify to the Palestinians in the West Bank that their struggle for an independent state has suffered a setback of many years."

Then "the Palestinians will be turned into just another crushed nation, like the Kurds or the Afghans," and the Palestinian problem – which "is beginning to be boring" – will be resolved."

"Crushed nations" are what we seem to like, especially when they become dependent on us and march to our trumpets.

National unity is something our leaders support in the U.S., but only up to a point overseas.

The Battle Hymn has even become controversial. The great American singer Judy Garland wanted to dedicate the song to President John F. Kennedy after his assassination, but CBS refused to allow her to do so on her own program.

Imagine, petty censorship by a major network on such an occasion!

Martin Luther King quoted the lyric in his last speech in Memphis before he would be assassinated. King's last public words ended with the opening lyrics of the anthem, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

So it can be risky to preach the message of unity today. In England, the Manchester United football club uses a version as its fight song.

In the U.S., this battle hymn was downgraded into parody to celebrate the lives of garment workers as in the "Battle of Harry Lewis."

"His name was Harry Lewis, and he worked for Irving Roth/He died while cutting velvet on a hot July the Fourth," and "Oh Harry Lewis perished / In the Service of his Lord / He was trampling through the warehouse / Where the Drapes of Roth are stored."

Oy!

And so goes that journey in which great ideas are turned on their heads before being turned into a joke.

News Dissector Danny Schechter directed the film Plunder The Crime Of Our Time (plunderthecrimeofourtime.com) He blogs at newsdissector.com. Comments to

US Spying Detects No Iranian Nukes

Despite fresh alarms from U.S. and Israeli officials about Iran's nuclear program, evidence remains elusive that Iran has resumed work on a bomb. That lack of proof continues even though U.S. intelligence has engaged in extensive monitoring of suspected research sites, according to a new report reviewed by Sherwood Ross.

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The former Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a new published report that he had not seen "a shred of evidence" that Iran was "building nuclear-weapons facilities and using enriched materials."

Mohamed ElBaradei, the Nobel Peace Prize recipient who spent 12 years at the IAEA, told investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, "I don't believe Iran is a clear and present danger. All I see is the hype about the threat posed by Iran."

El Baradei, who is now a candidate for the presidency of Egypt, added, "The core issue is mutual lack of trust. I believe there will be no solution until the day that the United States and Iran sit down together to discuss the issues and put pressure on each other to find a solution."

El Baradei's remarks are contained in an article by Hersh titled "Iran And The Bomb," published in the June 6 issue of *The New Yorker* magazine.

Hersh points out that the last two U.S. National Intelligence Estimates (N.I.E.s) on Iranian nuclear progress "have stated that there is no conclusive evidence that Iran has made any effort to build the bomb since 2003."

An N.I.E. Report supposedly represents the best judgment of the senior offices from all the major American intelligence agencies.

The latest report, which came out this year and remains highly classified, is said by Hersh to reinforce the conclusion of the last N.I.E. Report of 2007, that "Iran halted weaponization in 2003."

A retired senior intelligence officer, speaking of the latest N.I.E. Report, told Hersh, "The important thing is that nothing substantially new has been learned in the last four years, and none of our efforts—informants, penetrations, planting of sensors—leads to a bomb."

Hersh revealed that over the past six years, soldiers from the Joint Special Operations Force, working with Iranian intelligence assets, "put in place cutting-edge surveillance techniques" to spy on suspected Iran facilities. These included:

—Surreptitiously removing street signs and replacing them with signs containing radiation sensors.

—Removing bricks from buildings suspected of containing nuclear enrichment activities and replacing them "with bricks embedded with radiation-monitoring devices."

—Spreading high-powered sensors disguised as stones randomly along roadways where a suspected underground weapon site was under construction.

—Constant satellite coverage of major suspect areas in Iran.

Going beyond these spy activities, two Iranian nuclear scientists last year were assassinated and Hersh says it is widely believed in Tehran that the killers were either American or Israeli agents.

Hersh quotes W. Patrick Lang, a retired Army intelligence officer and former ranking Defense Intelligence Agency(DIA) analyst on the Middle East as saying that after the disaster in Iraq, "Analysts in the intelligence community are just refusing to sign up this time for a lot of baloney."

The DIA is the military counterpart of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Hersh writes that Obama administration officials "have often overstated the available intelligence about Iranian intentions." He noted that Dennis Ross, a top Obama adviser on the region, told a meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee that Iran had "significantly expanded its nuclear program."

Hersh noted further that last March, Robert Einhorn, the special arms control adviser to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, told the Arms Control Assn. The Iranians "are clearly acquiring all the necessary elements of a nuclear-weapons capability."

Additionally, Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Connecticut, a strong Israel supporter, told Agence France-Presse, "I can't say much in detail but it's pretty clear that they're(Iran) continuing to work seriously on a nuclear-weapons program."

Hersh recalled that "As Presidential candidates in 2008, both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton had warned of an Iranian nuclear arsenal, and occasionally spoke as if it were an established fact that Iran had decided to get the bomb."

But last March, Lieutenant General James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence which creates the N.I.E. Assessments, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Iran had not decided to re-start its nuclear weapons work. When asked by Committee Chairman Carl Levin, "What is the level of confidence that you have (in that estimate)? Is that a high level?" Clapper replied, "Yes, it is."

At a round of negotiations in Istanbul five months ago, Iranian officials told Western diplomats that the United States and its allies need to acknowledge Iran's right to enrich uranium and that they must lift all sanctions against Iran.

Clinton adviser Einhorn has said that because of those sanctions Iran may have lost as much as \$60 billion in energy investments and that Iran had also lost business in such industries as shipping, banking, and transportation. "The sanctions bar a wide array of weapons and missile sales to Iran, and make it more difficult for banks and other financial institutions to do business there," Hersh writes.

However, Hersh says, "The general anxiety about the Iranian regime is firmly grounded" even if there is no hard evidence it is working to build a nuclear weapon. "President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has repeatedly questioned the Holocaust and expressed a desire to see the state of Israel eliminated, and he has defied the 2006 United Nations resolution calling on Iran to suspend its nuclear-enrichment program."

He goes on to write that while IAEA inspectors "have expressed frustration with Iran's level of cooperation and cited an increase in production of uranium...they have been unable to find any evidence that enriched uranium has been diverted to an illicit weapons program."

One approach to resolving the Iran nuclear issue has been suggested by former ranking American diplomat Thomas Pickering, a retired ambassador who served in Russia, Israel, Jordan and India, and who has been active in the American Iranian Council, devoted to the normalization of relations with Iran.

According to Hersh, Pickering has been involved "in secret, back-channel talks with...some of the key advisers close to Ahmadinejad" and has long sought a meeting with President Obama.

Hersh quotes one of Pickering's colleagues as saying if Obama were to grant a

meeting, Pickering would tell him: "Get off your no-enrichment policy, which is getting you nowhere. Stop your covert activities. Give the Iranians a sign that you're not pursuing regime change. Instead, the Iranians see continued threats, sanctions, and covert operations."

Politico.com reported on May 31 that a senior administration intelligence official asserted Hersh's article was nothing more than "a slanted book report."

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