

How US Policy Risks More 9/11s

Though the U.S. military is no longer inflicting large-scale slaughters in Afghanistan and Iraq, the more selective “drone” campaigns continue to kill the families and neighbors of the targets, a reality that is stirring more anti-Americanism in the region, as Lawrence Davidson notes.

By Lawrence Davidson

In a short piece entitled “The Human Toll of the U.S. Drone Campaign,” Glenn Greenwald noted that the population of the United States is kept in the dark about the civilian victims of the drone campaign by a government that “refuses to disclose anything about these attacks and media outlets [which] virtually never report on [its] victims.”

What the U.S. public does get from both of these sources is a picture of the Middle East “as a cauldron of sub-human demons,” he wrote.

Greenwald’s article references a BBC program about a Pakistani “jirga” or gathering of tribal leaders. The leaders were from the Warziristan region of the country but the gathering took place in the capital of Islamabad. Warziristan has been the site of many drone attacks and the leaders brought with them some of the maimed survivors so they could be seen and their stories told.

The picture that came through is that there are now rapidly growing numbers of innocent victims of these attacks: children, teenagers, adults and the elderly essentially anyone in the neighborhood of an intended target. The number of those actually targeted who have been killed is impossible to know because the government will claim such kills even if the only verifiable victims are “half-blinded, double-amputee teenagers.”

Greenwald correctly observes that “it is easy to cheer for a leader when the victims of his on-going violence remain invisible.” However, the question remains, how is this invisible status maintained in a country with a “free press”? Here are some relevant points that might shed light on this issue:

1. The “news business” in America is infinitely more interested in profit than it is in journalistic excellence. Much of that profit comes from advertisers who have no wish to underwrite what might appear to be unpatriotic investigations into unwarranted wars and foreign interventions. This makes the business-oriented boards and stockholders of media outlets very conservative and also encourages a “make no waves” cooperative attitude toward the government and its preferred storylines.

2. Most citizens do not care about all this. In the U.S., and elsewhere, the majority are apolitical. They focus on the local and thus "other people" are "real" only relative to their geographic and relational distance. As you move further away from the average person's focal center, victims of accidents or injustice become more abstract.

3. Being apolitical does not mean that the average citizen cannot be scared out of his or her wits. Deliver the same media message over and over again, consistently and with the right amount of emotion and you can create a nationwide consensus based on nothing but a sales pitch.

Among other things you can sell the population an enemy (Vietnam, Iraq, Iran or any state you chose) to the point where almost an entire nation will support invasion and slaughter. This is what I call a "thought collective." And, as our own recent history reveals, you can create this sort of group-think repeatedly over a relatively short period of time.

Distorted Vision

Greenwald's piece is an indicator that, when it comes to the Middle East, the United States has long been steeped in a thought collective that distorts the vision of both the common folk and the elites alike. The 9/11 attacks raised this national mind set to the point of near hysteria.

In the immediate aftermath of that disaster, anyone who suggested that U.S. foreign policy might have helped motivate the terrorists (an obvious fact for anyone who had read the speeches of Osama bin Laden) was likely to be labeled unpatriotic, maybe even a traitor, lose their job, maybe even their friends, and refused admittance into the arena of national mourning.

When in early October 2001 Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal gave the city of New York a check for \$10 million to help with recovery efforts, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani rejected the offer out of hand. It seems the Prince had suggested that now was a good time for the U.S. to rethink its Middle East foreign policy.

Only in the last year or so have there been signs of small cracks in the thought collective. Growing numbers of ordinary citizens, to the extent that they think about these things at all, want the U.S. out of the Middle East. They are even starting to question the \$3 billion a year that goes to Israel.

And, it may be that Islamophobia has peaked as a popular topic of national concern. More and more, this bit of paranoia is being identified with fringe factions of the conservative right.

Unfortunately, these cracks are visible only outside the Beltway. Inside the

Beltway that is in Official Washington nothing has really changed. The thought collective is, if anything, stronger than ever.

This is because the formulation of policy is strongly influenced by special interests whose power over the politicians and the political parties is financially decisive. It will stay that way until millions of Americans decide change in our foreign policy is important enough to be a voting issue.

Because the thought collective within the government has not changed, foreign policies and actions have not changed. Violent intervention is still the mainstay of policy as can be seen in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Pakistan (with perhaps Iran in the wings).

Greenwald notes at the end of his piece that while Americans “hear almost nothing” about the victims of U.S. aggression, “the people in that part of the world hear a lot about it and that explains much about the vast discrepancy between the two regions.”

The Verdict

And what might that continuing discrepancy mean for the future of the United States? Well, it means the U.S. will almost certainly lose the war in Afghanistan, just as it lost the war in Iraq. You see, in Afghanistan as in Iraq, there are just too many people who really hold a fearsome dislike for the U.S., its government and its soldiers, to make likely successful conquest and pacification.

A more general victory in the “war of terror” is equally unlikely. Here the applicable logic is rather simple. There were a set of conditions that led up to the 9/11 attacks and the attacks themselves created a precedent.

America’s contribution to those conditions (our policies and our behavior) have held constant. Whatever damage we have caused al-Qaida can, and probably will, be repaired and other equally dangerous groups are likely to spring up in the foreseeable future.

So what then is the answer to the question of whether there will be more 9/11s? The honest answer is that if there continues to be no change in U.S. policies and behavior in the Middle East, it is more likely than not that another attack of the magnitude of 9/11 will occur within the next ten years.

The time line is guesswork, but the rest of the answer is not.

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Iran's Soviet Bomb-Maker Who Wasn't

In the new Iranian nuclear-bomb allegations, the most sensational charge was that a former Soviet nuclear weapons expert spent years tutoring Iranian scientists, but it turns out the Ukrainian was a specialist in commercial nanodiamonds, not A-bombs, reports Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

The report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) published by a Washington think tank Tuesday repeated the sensational claim previously reported by news media all over the world that a former Soviet nuclear weapons scientist had helped Iran construct a detonation system that could be used for a nuclear weapon.

But it turns out that the foreign expert, who is not named in the IAEA report but was identified in news reports as Vyacheslav Danilenko, is not a nuclear weapons scientist but one of the top specialists in the world in the production of nanodiamonds by explosives.

In fact, Danilenko, a Ukrainian, has worked solely on nanodiamonds from the beginning of his research career and is considered one of the pioneers in the development of nanodiamond technology, as published scientific papers confirm. (Nanodiamonds have widespread commercial applications in manufacturing and in medicine.)

It now appears that the IAEA and David Albright, the director of the International Institute for Science and Security in Washington, who was the source of the news reports about Danilenko, never bothered to check the accuracy of the original claim by an unnamed "Member State" on which the IAEA based its assertion about his nuclear weapons background.

Albright gave a "private briefing" for "intelligence professionals" last week, in which he named Danilenko as the foreign expert who had been contracted by Iran's Physics Research Centre in the mid-1990s and identified him as a "former Soviet nuclear scientist," according to a story by Joby Warrick of the Washington Post on Nov. 5. The Danilenko story then went worldwide. [For more on Albright, see Consortiumnews.com's "[An Iraq-WMD Replay](#)"]

on Iran.”]

The IAEA report says the agency has “strong indications” that Iran’s development of a “high explosions initiation system,” which it has described as an “implosion system” for a nuclear weapon, was “assisted by the work of a foreign expert who was not only knowledgeable on these technologies, but who, a Member State has informed the Agency, worked for much of his career in the nuclear weapon program of the country of his origin.”

The report offers no other evidence of Danilenko’s involvement in the development of an initiation system.

The member state obviously learned that Danilenko had worked during the Soviet period at the All-Russian Scientific Research Institute of Technical Physics in Snezhinsk, Russia, which was well known for its work on development of nuclear warheads and simply assumed that he had been involved in that work.

However, further research would have revealed that Danilenko worked from the beginning of his career in a part of the Institute that specialized in the synthesis of diamonds. Danilenko wrote in an account of the early work in the field published in 2006 that he was among the scientists in the “gas dynamics group” at the Institute who were “the first to start studies on diamond synthesis in 1960.”

Danilenko’s recollections of the early period of his career are in a chapter of the book, *Ultrananocrystalline Diamond: Synthesis, Properties and Applications* edited by Olga A. Shenderova and Dieter M. Gruen, published in 2006.

Another chapter in the book covering the history of Russian patents related to nanodiamonds documents the fact that Danilenko’s center at the Institute developed key processes as early as 1963-66 that were later used at major “detonation nanodiamond” production centers.

Danilenko left the Institute in 1989 and joined the Institute of Materials Science Problems in Ukraine, according to the authors of that chapter.

Danilenko’s major accomplishment, according to the authors, has been the development of a large-scale technology for producing ultradispersed diamonds, a particular application of nanodiamonds. The technology, which was later implemented by the “ALIT” company in Zhitomir, Ukraine, is based on an explosion chamber 100 square meters in volume, which Danilenko designed.

Beginning in 1993, Danilenko was a principal in a company called “Nanogroup” which was established initially in the Ukraine but is now based in Prague. The company’s website boasts that it has “the strongest team of scientists” which

had been involved in the “introduction of nanodiamonds in 1960 and the first commercial applications of nanodiamonds in 2000.”

The declared aim of the company is to supply worldwide demand for nanodiamonds.

Iran has an aggressive program to develop its nanotechnology sector, and it includes as one major focus nanodiamonds, as blogger Moon of Alabama has pointed out. That blog was the first source to call attention to Danilenko’s nanodiamond background.

Danilenko clearly explained that the purpose of his work in Iran was to help the development of a nanodiamond industry in the country.

The IAEA report states that the “foreign expert” was in Iran from 1996 to about 2002, “ostensibly to assist in the development of a facility and techniques for making ultra dispersed diamonds (UDDs) or nanodiamonds” That wording suggests that nanodiamonds were merely a cover for his real purpose in Iran.

The report says the expert “also lectured on explosive physics and its applications”, without providing any further detail about what applications were involved.

The fact that the IAEA and Albright were made aware of Danilenko’s nanodiamond work in Iran before embracing the “former Soviet nuclear weapons specialist” story makes their failure to make any independent inquiry into his background even more revealing.

The tale of a Russian nuclear weapons scientist helping construct an “implosion system” for a nuclear weapon is the most recent iteration of a theme that the IAEA introduced in its May 2008 report, which mentioned a five-page document describing experimentation with a “complex multipoint initiation system to detonate a substantial amount of high explosives in hemispherical geometry” and to monitor the detonation.

Iran acknowledged using “exploding bridge wire” detonators such as those mentioned in that document for conventional military and civilian applications. But it denounced the document, along with the others in the “alleged studies” collection purporting to be from an Iranian nuclear weapons research program, as fakes.

Careful examination of the “alleged studies” documents has revealed inconsistencies and other anomalies that give evidence of fraud. But the IAEA, the United States and its allies in the IAEA continue to treat the documents as though there were no question about their authenticity.

The unnamed member state that informed the agency about Danilenko's alleged experience as a Soviet nuclear weapons scientist is almost certainly Israel, which has been the source of virtually all the purported intelligence on Iranian work on nuclear weapons over the past decade.

(Israel is a United Nations "member" state, although it has refused to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and thus does not subject its secret nuclear weapons arsenal to IAEA supervision. Iran did sign the treaty and does grant IAEA inspectors some access to its nuclear-related facilities, which Iran insists are for peaceful purposes only.)

Israel has made no secret of its determination to influence world opinion on the Iranian nuclear program by disseminating information to governments and news media, including purported Iran government documents. Israeli foreign ministry and intelligence officials told journalists Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins about the special unit of Mossad dedicated to that task at the very time the allegedly fraudulent documents were being produced.

In an interview in September 2008, Albright said Olli Heinonen, then deputy director for safeguards at the IAEA, had told him that a document from a member state had convinced him that the "alleged studies" documents were genuine. Albright said the state was "probably Israel."

The Jerusalem Post's Yaakov Katz reported Wednesday that Israeli intelligence agencies had "provided critical information used in the report," the purpose of which was to "push through a new regime of sanctions against Tehran."

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Who Is Judge Richard Leon?

Exclusive: The appointment of federal judges is a key power of the U.S. president. It can reward partisan allies for past services and ensure favorable rulings in the future. Both factors were in play for District Judge Richard Leon who just struck down new cigarette warnings, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

On Monday, U.S. District Court Judge Richard Leon handed the tobacco industry a big victory by blocking a new federal requirement that cigarette packs carry graphic warning labels. Though the ruling may mean illness and premature death for many Americans, it wouldn't have come as a surprise to anyone who knew Leon's history as a partisan activist.

Leon was appointed to his lifetime judicial post by George W. Bush in 2002 after Leon had "earned" the gratitude of the Bush Family by protecting its interests as an aggressive and reliable Republican legal apparatchik on Capitol Hill. There, the heavy-set Leon gained a reputation as a partisan bully who made sure politically charged investigations reached a desired outcome, whatever the facts.

In the 1990s, Leon served as special counsel to the House Banking Committee as it transformed President Bill Clinton's minor Whitewater real estate deal into a major scandal that eventually led to the House vote to impeach Clinton in 1998 and thus set the stage for Bush's disputed election victory in 2000.

However, Leon's most important work for the Bushes may have come in the 1980s and early 1990s when he helped construct legal justifications for Republican law-breaking and sought to intimidate Iran-Contra-related witnesses who came forward to expose GOP wrongdoing.

In 1987, when Rep. Dick Cheney, R-Wyoming, was leading the Republican counteroffensive against the Iran-Contra investigation into evidence that President Ronald Reagan and Vice President George H.W. Bush had engaged in a wide-ranging conspiracy involving illegal weapons shipments and money transfers, Leon stepped forward as deputy chief counsel on the Republican side.

Leon worked with Cheney not only in fending off accusations of wrongdoing, but in coming up with a counter-argument that accused Congress of intruding on foreign policy prerogatives of the President.

"Congressional actions to limit the President in this area should be reviewed with a considerable degree of skepticism," the Republican minority report said. "If they interfere with the core presidential foreign policy functions, they should be struck down."

In 2005 as vice president, Cheney harkened back to that Iran-Contra minority report in defending George W. Bush's assertion of unlimited presidential powers during wartime.

"If you want reference to an obscure text, go look at the minority views that

were filed with the Iran-Contra committee," Cheney told a reporter. Cheney said those old arguments "are very good in laying out a robust view of the president's prerogatives with respect to the conduct of especially foreign policy and national security matters."

So, one could say that Richard Leon was there at the birth of what became George W. Bush's imperial presidency.

Cover-up of Crimes

But Leon's crucial work went beyond building a legal framework for Republican presidents to ignore the law. More significantly, he conducted cover-ups of their crimes.

In 1992, when a House task force was examining evidence that Reagan and Bush began their secret contacts with Iran in 1980 while trying to unseat President Jimmy Carter, Leon was the Republican point man to make sure nothing too damaging came out. Leon served as chief minority counsel to the House task force investigating the so-called October Surprise allegations.

At the time, evidence was mounting that Reagan and the senior Bush had interfered with President Carter's efforts to gain the release of 52 U.S. hostages held by Islamic radicals in Iran, a crisis that helped doom his reelection in 1980.

From the start of the congressional inquiry, however, the goal seemed more to debunk the allegations of Republican wrongdoing than to seriously assess the evidence. At one point, I went to the task force's office and questioned chief majority counsel Lawrence Barcella and his assistant, Michael Zeldin, about this peculiar style of investigating.

Barcella and Zeldin pointed to Leon's insistence that interviews with witnesses be conducted only with him or another Republican present. This stricture had sharply limited the task force's ability to follow leads and develop new witnesses.

Indeed, some key October Surprise witnesses described to me how Leon sought to intimidate them into retracting their allegations about Republican wrongdoing. When these witnesses refused to alter their sworn testimony, they became the targets of the task force, more so than Reagan and Bush.

Jamshid Hashemi, an Iranian businessman who had been recruited to assist the Carter administration on the hostage issue in 1980, alleged that he and his brother Cyrus Hashemi also helped Reagan's campaign chief William Casey arrange secret meetings with Iranian officials in Madrid in summer 1980.

Jamshid Hashemi's account of the Madrid meetings was publicized by ABC's "Nightline" program and later came under attack from journalists at the New Republic and Newsweek who apparently saw their role more as sweeping these troubling charges under the rug than getting at the truth.

In November 1991, both magazines splashed across their covers articles seeking to debunk Hashemi's claims of Madrid meetings by using an alibi for Casey that later turned out to be false. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Unmasking October Surprise Debunker](#)."]]

'The Fat Man'

When Jamshid Hashemi stuck to his account in sworn testimony before the task force in 1992, he said Leon tried to pressure him to recant his allegations. "I found this Mr. Leon who I knew as 'the fat man' every time we had a break and my lawyer would go to the washroom, he would rush into my room where I was sitting and say, 'come on, change the story'," Jamshid Hashemi told me.

"I said I would not change my story at all. The last time he opened the door, I said, 'Get out of my office. If you have anything to say, say it in front of my lawyer.'" Hashemi said Leon, rather than task force chief counsel Barcella, appeared to be running the October Surprise investigation with the goal of protecting Republicans.

I received a similar account of Leon's behavior from former Israeli intelligence official Ari Ben-Menashe, who had testified that he and other Israelis helped arrange a Paris meeting in October 1980 involving Casey, George H.W. Bush and key Iranians. Ben-Menashe said Leon demanded that he alter his sworn testimony as well, calling Leon "a Bush crony."

Besides Hashemi and Ben-Menashe, more than a score of individuals described Republican guilt including: ex-Iranian president Abolhassan Bani-Sadr (who sent the task force a detailed account of the Iranian-Republican contacts from his view in Tehran); senior officials of the Palestine Liberation Organization who described overtures from Republicans seeking help in interfering in the hostage crisis; and French intelligence chief Alexandre deMarenches (who told his biographer about secret GOP-Iran hostage meetings in Paris, claims corroborated by other French intelligence officials).

Recently released documents from the George H.W. Bush presidential library also indicate how in 1992 the then-president and his team counted on Leon's help as the White House sought to restrict congressional access to key papers.

In a "[top secret](#)" memo dated June 26, 1992, to the State Department about cooperation with the October Surprise probe, National Security Council executive

secretary William F. Sittmann demanded “special treatment” for NSC documents related to presidential deliberations.

Regarding the House task force, Sittmann recommended that only Republican counsel Leon and Democratic counsel Barcella be “permitted to read relevant portions of the documents and to take notes, but that the State Department retain custody of the documents and the notes at all times.”

Though Republicans kept insisting that the October Surprise allegations were a myth, the Bush administration in 1992 was going to extraordinary lengths to control the evidence. [For details, see “[Inside the October Surprise Cover-up.](#)”]

Mission Accomplished

Leon did his job well, constraining the investigation sufficiently to ensure that the task force fell in line with Republican demands that the October Surprise allegations be rejected.

Years later, Barcella told me that so much new evidence in support of the October Surprise allegations poured in late in the investigation in December 1992 that he urged task force chairman, Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Indiana, to extend the deadline for several months. Hamilton, however, refused and ordered the probe wrapped up with a finding of Republican innocence.

However, even after the finishing touches had been put on the task force report clearing the Republicans, complications for Leon, Hamilton and the other debunkers continued to emerge.

On Jan. 11, 1993, just two days before the task force’s debunking report was scheduled for release, the Russian government sent an extraordinary report to Hamilton describing Moscow’s internal intelligence on the controversy.

The Russian report described Republican meetings with Iranians in Europe, including Casey’s trip to Madrid and the Paris meeting that the Russians said also involved George H.W. Bush and then-CIA officer Robert Gates (and later U.S. Defense Secretary).

Instead of making the Russian report public, Barcella stuck it and its startling information in a cardboard box that was filed away with other classified and unclassified material from the investigation. (I found the Russian report later when I got access to the task force’s raw documents. For the text of the Russian report, click [here](#). To view the actual U.S. embassy cable that includes the Russian report, click [here](#).)

While concealing the Russian report and other evidence supporting the October

Surprise allegations, the House task force released its negative findings on Jan. 13, 1993, and went on the attack against the witnesses who had rejected Leon's demands that they recant their testimony.

In January 1993, task force leaks indicated that Jamshid Hashemi and Ari Ben-Menashe would be referred to the Justice Department for prosecution on perjury charges. However, no such charges were ever filed. Over the years, both Hashemi and Ben-Menashe have stuck to their stories.

When I re-interviewed Hashemi in 1997 about the October Surprise case, he said, "I thought it was my duty that the people in the United States should know. They should know, they should be the judge of it."

Though Hashemi sat through my interview with the same gentlemanly style that I encountered when I first met him in 1990, he did flash with anger when I asked him about the task force's report. "Rubbish, that's what I think," said Hashemi. "Just a whitewash of the whole situation. It's a cover-up."

Hashemi argued that it made no sense for him to have invented his October Surprise account, which he repeated under oath to Congress in 1992. He had nothing to gain and a great deal to lose, he said. "Who has ever paid me a single dime?" Hashemi asked. "I had to pay all my lawyer's fees. What did I gain here?"

Hashemi blamed the cover-up primarily on the attack strategy of Republican lawyers on the task force, particularly Richard Leon.

Casey in Madrid

In the recent release of documents from the Bush library, one was particularly relevant to Hashemi's claim that Casey had traveled secretly to Madrid, a claim that the New Republic/Newsweek articles and the House task force had rejected (albeit with contradictory and false alibis).

State Department legal adviser Edwin D. Williamson told associate White House counsel Chester Paul Beach Jr. that among the State Department "material potentially relevant to the October Surprise allegations [was] a cable from the Madrid embassy indicating that Bill Casey was in town, for purposes unknown," Beach noted in a "memorandum for record" dated Nov. 4, 1991

In other words, even as the New Republic and Newsweek and then the House task force were impugning Hashemi's truthfulness about a Madrid trip, Bush's White House was aware of evidence that placed Casey in Madrid during the October Surprise time frame. [For more details on the October Surprise case, see Robert Parry's Secrecy & Privilege.]

Some Americans might see Richard Leon's partisan attacks on the October Surprise witnesses and his role in distorting U.S. history as disqualifying for a federal judgeship, but his actions actually paved the way for his appointment.

When George W. Bush, the eldest son of the former president, found himself in the White House in 2001 (with the help of five Republican justices on the U.S. Supreme Court), Leon's name landed on a list of judicial candidates. He was nominated by Bush on Sept. 10, 2001, and confirmed by the Senate on Feb. 14, 2002.

Thus, Leon was sitting on the federal bench when the tobacco industry needed some protection from a federal regulation requiring cigarette packs to carry graphic images showing the harmful effects of cigarettes on lungs and other parts of the human body.

The Food and Drug Administration estimated that the unsettling images would cut the number of smokers by 213,000 by 2013 and save \$221 million to \$630 million each year for the next two decades. But the cigarette industry didn't want to comply and Leon agreed.

After Leon's ruling striking down the requirement, tobacco companies expressed their pleasure, while health advocates voiced dismay. "Judge Leon's ruling ignores the overwhelming scientific evidence about the need for new cigarette warnings and their effectiveness," said Matthew L. Myers of the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids.

However, it was not the first time that Richard Leon ignored evidence.

[For more on related topics, see Robert Parry's *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

When Guns Defeat Butter

History is filled with cautionary tales about militarily powerful empires that

collapsed because they spent far too much on guns over butter. The United States is now tempting a similar fate behind a ruling elite that uses fear and propaganda to maintain control, as Gary G. Kohls notes.

By Gary G. Kohls

Years ago I read a newspaper story about an elderly man, a loner, who lived in an impoverished area of Cleveland. Neighbors had noticed his mail piling up on his porch. When they received no responses to phone calls or to knocks on the door, they called the police, who broke into the man's house. What they found is an allegory for our time

The withered old man was dead in his bed, surrounded by rifles, pistols and guns of every description. Boxes of bullets and cartridges were stacked on the floor. He had a knife in his cold, dead hand and an actual harpoon was leaning against his refrigerator, *which was empty*.

In a nation of plenty and with grocery stores in the man's neighborhood, he had starved to death.

He had fiercely upheld his Second Amendment rights but had ignored his health. He had apparently heard the National Rifle Association's sermons about defending one's property against trespassers – by lethal means if necessary – but he died, alone and friendless.

He had wasted away, in a paranoid state, while “defending” himself against “the other,” who never did come to rob him. He had spent all of his money his Social Security checks, his pension, everything on guns and ammunition, but he had spent nothing on food or life-giving activities. He was afraid of burglars and thieves and had developed an obsessive fear that had cost him his life.

And, what was perhaps a more tragic reality, he had been suspicious of his neighbors who probably were keeping their distance from that crazy and scary old man who had all the guns in his house.

Guns or Butter?

For Americans, our paranoid, militarized and heavily armed nation doesn't seem to be capable of learning the lessons that is obvious from that story.

The arms race that financially bankrupted the Soviet Union and morally bankrupted and nearly financially bankrupted the United States during the Cold War, was at the expense of the sick, hungry, under-employed, homeless and desperate people everywhere, including many who were living, unnoticed, in our own backyards – in the local ghettos on the other side of the tracks.

Mutual fear of “the other” caused the two superpowers and their allies to spend obscene amounts of money on inedible weapons systems. The training of tens of millions of “kill or be killed” warriors (ultimately depriving many of them of their physical and mental health for the rest of their lives) drastically weakened the moral integrity of the nation as well, all in the name of “national security.”

Contrary to what patriotic believers in American exceptionalism want us to believe, a nation can't afford, for very long, both guns and butter.

During the Cold War, the saber-rattling superpowers each spent/wasted an irretrievable \$12 trillion dollars. In the case of the U.S., this spending was done mostly with borrowed money that accrued handsome interest rate repayments that went mainly to wealthy investors, and which are still not even close to being paid off!

America spent trillions of dollars on: recruiting, training and retaining troops; researching, developing and producing costly weapons systems; maintaining hundreds of budget-busting military bases in both friendly fascist states as well as democracies, all the while virtually ignoring the growing numbers of impoverished and under-privileged people and oppressed minorities who helplessly watched their health, savings, civil rights, jobs and food security disappear.

America has been ruled by a powerful insider group of over-privileged, body-guarded, and indifferent Wall Street elites who live in gated communities and are the 1 percent fingered by the Occupy Wall Street movement. That 1 percent has been responsible for what is destined to become the Great American Depression of the 21st Century.

The nefarious group that is responsible for the crash has, with its ill-gotten gains, managed to buy and pay for most of our politicians (and even our judges), who are now faithfully serving that 1 percent by helping to implement the ubiquitous neo-fascist agendas in right-wing statehouses around the nation.

Most of our elected pro-corporate state and national political leaders (including five of our nine Supreme Court justices) are serving that ungodly agenda. These traitors to true democracy only preach fiscal responsibility when the bottom lines of their paymasters are at risk, but they never seem to do it when those of us in the lower 99 are in crisis.

The moneyed ruling class, with its large fortunes and its casino capitalism to protect, has conveniently forgotten that it was the Reaganomics-inspired, profligate borrowing and spending (the propaganda trick called trickle-down

economics) that sky-rocketed the national debt to unmanageable levels.

The debt crises that followed were only met by more borrowing, raising the debt ceiling and cutting the spending on programs of social uplift, while never questioning the obscene budget requests from the Pentagon. These budget requests were, year after year, invariably approved by large majorities of our chicken-hearted legislators in the dark of night, after the limited scrutiny of the daily news cycle had passed.

Chickens Home to Roost

And now, predictably, the chickens (in more than one sense of the phrase) have come home to roost.

Strongly deluded that there is “glory” in war and trusting in blank-check borrowing and spending on weaponry, America has spawned tens of millions of sick, hungry, homeless, under-employed, under-educated, addicted, psychologically-traumatized and impoverished people, many of whom are conveniently hidden in inner cities that the out-of-touch elite policy-makers never see.

Universal health care, which large majorities of the population desire, is habitually rejected by the powers-that-be in the medical, pharmaceutical and insurance industries.

After all, the politicians that have been financed by such industries have great health insurance and health care themselves. So why would greedy power-mongers want to have their taxes go to help those that are sick, poor and hungry? (For that matter why should the 1 percent want to pay taxes that support public libraries and parks when they themselves have personal libraries and private playgrounds? Let the average folk eat grass.)

But America’s rapidly deteriorating infrastructure can’t and won’t be fixed while bloated and wasteful military budgets go unopposed in Congress. You can’t afford both guns and butter!

If readers are seeing cuts to the programs that make life worth living, understand that much of the responsibility lies in the massive Pentagon borrowing and spending that has gone on every year since the Vietnam war, with massive increases in spending on nuclear weaponry during the late, lamented Reagan/Bush administrations.

What is the eventual outcome of putting basic human needs last? Poor mental and physical health, poor educational opportunities, a poorly trained workforce, hopelessness, suicidal tendencies, addictive behaviors, drug use, domestic

abuse, street gangs, prostitution, violence, ignorance, malnutrition, desperation, crushing poverty and, inevitably, anger at a system of government and corporate control that neglects its people and then shows no signs of remorse for having done so.

It shouldn't surprise us that the Occupy Wall Street and Arab Spring movements have, at long last, emerged. The despair and desperation behind these movements (summarized in the preceding paragraph) are what the mainstream news media and the talking-head "experts" pretend not to understand.

Are average Americans going to continue to allow themselves to be perpetually and increasingly sickened and impoverished while blindly and patriotically cheering an unaffordable "we're number one" military-superpower status?

Are we going to continue to waste scarce resources on bankrupting wars and military occupations world-wide while ignoring investments that would foster a sustainable peace, a sustainable economy and a sustainable planet?

Are the weapons-makers, the Pentagon, the CIA, the FBI and the dozens of other intelligence agencies in reality expensive make-work jobs programs that enrich and protect the wealthy war-profiteers at the expense of the poor? When one adds in all the "black box" budgets of the intelligence agencies, one wonders if the United States has a military or if the military has a nation.

Are we going to continue ignoring the fact that war industry jobs cost taxpayers at least twice as much to generate and fund as health-care, education or green-technology jobs? Are we going to continue to allow excessive military spending at the expense of the disappearing middle-class and the already lost lower classes?

Are we going to continue fearing the wrath of the 800-pound gorillas of the 1 percent that intimidate and threaten us into silence? Or are we going to courageously organize and band together to demand justice from the ones who are withholding it from those of us in the lower 99?

Is It Too Late?

The unchecked spending of taxpayer money on the biggest and most bloated of the gorillas – the military/industrial/congressional/media/investor-class complex – which has flourished since World War II, has finally been proven to be disastrous for non-wealthy Americans.

That complex has orchestrated the extinction of small-family farms and small businesses while creating the heartless multinational corporations that try to pay slave wages. That complex has been behind the "fouling of the nest" (the

poisoned, exploited environment) with tens of thousands of lethal and cancer-causing industrial pollutants, radioactive waste disposal sites and toxic military dumpsites that are poisoning the water, soil and air.

Unsustainable levels of borrowing by powerful corporations and government entities have created obscene levels of debt and obscene disparities in wealth between the haves and have-nots.

Unsustainable levels of personal credit-card debt and home-mortgage debt among the 99 percent, who were tempted by predatory lenders to imitate the actions of the 1 percent at the top, have resulted in an epidemic of under-employment, home-mortgage foreclosures and personal bankruptcies.

Although it might already be too late, the lower 99 may finally be waking up and trying to reverse the orchestrated descent toward total economic collapse, at which time the 1 percent, with their fortunes undepleted, will snap up everything they can afford at fire-sale prices.

Being armed to the teeth and universally feared and hated (because America's exploitative bullying behavior around the world) is not a sustainable path to security. Rather, we are destined to be pariahs as we sink into moral, spiritual, physical and brain malnourishment.

Because of America's misbegotten over-spending on inedible weapons systems and its bullying behavior that is victimizing billions of people, we will soon have nobody who will be interested in rescuing us from our self-imposed, suicidal path towards collapse.

Americans cannot continue to delude themselves by thinking that they can afford both butter and guns. America cannot have refrigerators that are well-stocked with nutritious food and also be armed to the teeth. It must reject one and embrace the other.

Gary G. Kohls is a retired physician who practiced holistic mental health care. Dr. Kohls feels it is his professional duty to warn others of the dangers to mental and physical health that are inherent in the participation of violence, especially military violence.
