

The 'America-Held-Hostage' Narrative

Exclusive: From the moment Barack Obama took office, the Republicans plotted to sabotage his presidency, even though the nation faced its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. The U.S. news media knows that, but can't resist blaming the President for the high unemployment, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Misguided media conventional wisdom can prove decisive in close elections, and we are seeing that again this year as one of the key storylines of the U.S. presidential campaign is that Barack Obama is at fault for the poor jobs numbers. Reporters know better, but they can't break from this "blame Obama" narrative.

So, every time disappointing jobs numbers are released, the media chorus is that Obama will pay a steep price on Election Day 2012. You hear this even from liberal commentators. But it's no secret that the Republicans have done all they can since Inauguration Day 2009 to obstruct the President's plans to boost hiring.

Journalistically, the truthful way to present this story is to note that the Republicans have obstructed Obama's jobs plans at every turn and that their strategy to make the U.S. economy "scream" appears to be working.

If unemployment stays high, the GOP trusts that the pain of America's jobless will cost Obama votes and give Mitt Romney the White House. The Republicans not only stand to benefit from high unemployment but they are doing all they can to achieve it.

Reporters are familiar with the evidence. Author Robert Draper reported that leading Republicans, such as former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, began plotting a destroy-Obama strategy just hours after the new President was sworn in on Jan. 20, 2009.

Though the United States was facing its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression with millions of Americans losing their jobs and millions of families facing foreclosures on their homes the Republicans were already focused on ensuring that Obama's presidency would fail.

The process began with a few "moderate" Republicans insisting that Obama's \$787 billion stimulus package be slimmed down in size and watered down with tax cuts. Then, most Republicans called it a "failure" because, they claimed, it didn't save or create any jobs (despite the Congressional Budget Office's conclusion

that the stimulus actually kept some 3 million Americans from being unemployed).

Republican obstructionism increased after the 2010 elections, when the GOP gained control of the House. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell vowed that the top Republican priority would be to ensure the defeat of Obama in 2012.

Accordingly, the President's economic proposals were declared dead on arrival on Capitol Hill and when hiring began to pick up in 2011 nonetheless the Republican Tea Partiers precipitated a crisis over the debt ceiling, injecting more uncertainty into the struggling economy.

Some estimates on the impact of the GOP's obstruction suggest that the U.S. jobless figure could be below 6 percent now, instead of at 8.2 percent, if Obama's major jobs bill had been enacted in 2011 and if severe austerity had not been imposed at state and local levels, often by Republican officials.

But such an improving jobs picture would not be desirable for Mitt Romney's campaign or for Republican congressional prospects. The GOP would be denied its favorite talking point: that venture capitalist Romney knows more about creating jobs than President Obama does.

The national press corps knows the facts about the orchestrated Republican obstructionism, but still can't escape the narrative that Obama is to blame for the sluggish economy.

A similar pattern existed in the bogus storyline of 2000, with journalists portraying Al Gore as a lying braggart and George W. Bush as a regular guy. It didn't matter what the reality actually was. The national press corps just fell in love with the narrative. [For details on that media failure, see [Neck Deep](#).]

Ironically, the truthful narrative for Campaign 2012 would make for a more dramatic storyline than the "blame Obama" one. The real narrative would ask: Will the Republicans' audacious "take-the-economy-hostage" scheme work? Will the American people, in effect, ransom their economy by sacrificing President Obama and surrendering to Mitt Romney?

Yes, the price for surrender would be high allowing major new tax breaks for the rich and accepting big cuts in domestic spending that helps the country as a whole but by giving in at least the American voters could end the ugly political stalemate. That choice would be a story worth covering.

By always placing the blame on Obama, the news media is both missing this more interesting story and rewarding the Republicans for their sabotage. In effect, a Republican "October Surprise" is playing out before our eyes making sure that the jobless numbers are still high in October but the mainstream media can't get

past the “blame Obama” conventional wisdom.

It is another way that the U.S. press corps is failing the American people – and boring them, too.

To read more of Robert Parry’s writings, you can now order his last two books, *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, at the discount price of only \$16 for both. For details on the special offer, [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.

The Battle over the Constitution

Claiming to speak for the Constitution, the Right has convinced many Americans of an upside-down account of what the Framers were doing and timid historians have let these false impressions harden into conventional wisdom. Beverly Bandler says a vigorous and honest debate about this history is needed now.

By Beverly Bandler

In 1987, Americans celebrated the 200th anniversary of the Constitution of the United States with great fanfare. Warren E. Burger, chairman of the Commission on the Bicentennial of the Constitution and Chief Justice of the U.S. from 1969 to 1986, wrote of the “vitality of this remarkable document that has withstood 200 years of change, including a Civil War, two World Wars, and 40 years of Cold War.”

This coming Sept. 17, the 225th anniversary of the Constitution portends to be a significantly less joyous occasion. Given the political vitriol of the last several years, it will probably be marked with heated discord of division and partisanship.

The past 25 years have brought unforeseen, astounding and alarming changes in the nation. We have a United States “unraveling” with its more than 300 million people in various stages of either polarized engagement or numbed complacency. Those who are politically engaged appear to be participants in a non-violent (so

far, fortunately) civil war that has echoes of both the 1861-1865 Civil War and the late Weimar Republic.

The nation in 2012 is not a “more perfect union,” and “justice” and “domestic tranquility” are in short supply. “Defense” has come to mean more often aggressive “offense.” The “pursuit of happiness” appears to be limited to the 1 percent. Most scholars agree that wealth inequality in the U.S. is at historic highs.

Americans appear to have lost confidence in crucial institutions. The approval rating for the Congress sank as low as 10 percent. American mass culture, heavily influenced by banal television offerings, heavy on violence and “skin,” is generally frivolous and foolish; the infrastructure is crumbling; the education system has been severely compromised; politics has become dominated by people who make a virtue out of ignorance.

Susan Jacoby, author of *The Age of American Unreason*, has asserted that: “America is now ill with a powerful mutant strain of intertwined ignorance, anti-rationalism and anti-intellectualism”—cognitive dissonance on a profound scale. For example, the Texas curriculum standards in science and history are not being written by accredited academics, they are being developed by a dentist and insurance salesman.

A sizable portion of the American public cannot distinguish between opinion and argument, between belief and logic, between perception and reality. Too many not only reject facts and reason, but accept bald lies with equanimity. U.S. politics, especially on the Right, appears to have entered “a parallel universe where ignorance, denial and unreason trump facts, evidence and rationality,” according to an article in *New Science* magazine.

Particularly ominous is the Right’s nationwide effort to disenfranchise voters who are most likely to vote Democratic. The first Voter ID laws of the current era were passed in 2003. As of March 2012, 19 states require no ID, but the other 31 have requirements that range from non-photo ID to strict photo ID. In Pennsylvania, a GOP-supported voter-ID law threatens to disenfranchise 10 percent of the state’s voters.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Supreme Court and the federal appellate courts have undergone a dramatic shift to the right, as distinguished law professor and constitutional expert Erwin Chemerinsky points out. The goal is to enforce a conservative worldview on the people of the United States by “reinterpreting the Constitution by reshaping the judiciary. Basic long-standing principles of constitutional law have been overturned already by the Rehnquist and Roberts courts.”

Some ultra-conservatives seek to replace America's democratic system with a theocracy. It can be argued that the United States is, in fact, no longer a republic. While we can debate when the Republic's death began, some trace it to the late 1960s. Others point to the 1970s. But it certainly accelerated with the so-called Reagan Revolution in the 1980s and the subsequent second Gilded Age.

Many consider the nail in the coffin to be the *Citizens United* decision by the Supreme Court on Jan. 21, 2010. This decision confirmed corporations as "people" and opened the flood gates of corporate money into a political system that was already broken, dysfunctional and corrupt.

Certainly the United States now has all the unmistakable signs of an oligarchy, the corrupt rule of the wealthy. Americans have been witnessing the hostile takeover of the government by corporations, their *corporados*, and by religious zealots, a takeover already in its late stage.

The country appears to be becoming what social futurist Sara Robinson calls "Plantation America" and what political philosopher Sheldon Wolin calls "inverted totalitarianism." The title of constitutional lawyer Bruce Fein's 2008 book states the country's condition clearly: *Constitutional Peril: The Life and Death Struggle of Our Constitution and Democracy*.

The Right's fundamentalism has been aided immeasurably by the general ignorance and what has been characterized as "learned helplessness" among the 70 percent of the American public and a complacent and complicit corporate media.

"Laissez-faire government, unchecked corporate power and the deprivations and inequalities they [the right-wingers] bred weren't just bad public policy – they were constitutional infirmities," writes William E. Forbath, professor of law and history. "But liberals have largely forgotten how to think, talk and fight along these lines."

Making a similar point, journalist Robert Parry wrote: "In Roberts's decision [rejecting the Commerce Clause as constitutional justification for the Affordable Care Act], you find references to the faux founding history that the Right has been assembling over the past several decades."

In all the confusing public commentary about the Constitution in today's turbulence, this is clear: most Americans know very little if anything about the U.S. Constitution. Most of what we "know" is based on superficial exposure, sketchy beliefs, myths and assumptions. This is particularly true for those not exposed to civics education and history over the last several decades; for many of us the memory of this part of our education is dim.

It has been pointed out that: "You can read the U.S. Constitution, including its 27 amendments, in about a half-hour, but it takes decades of study to understand how this blueprint for our nation's government came into existence." It requires interpretation and an awareness of history.

The Constitution decidedly does not justify free-market fundamentalism, and Americans will not find these words in the Constitution: "Democracy," "God," "Capitalism," "Free Market," or "Socialism." "Liberty" is mentioned three times, but it is not defined. "Welfare" is mentioned twice and also not defined.

Given the current acrimonious political landscape, it is crucial that Americans be better informed about the Constitution – and not only about our founding documents but about American history.

A well-educated citizenry is particularly important if the current effort to enact a 28th amendment is to succeed, one that states that corporations are not persons and can be regulated, a proposal in response to the Supreme Court ruling on *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*.

Robert Dahl, who has been called "the premier democratic theorist of our time," has explored the "vital tension between the Americans' belief in the legitimacy of their constitution and their belief in the principles of democracy." He suggests that we think about the Constitution in a new way, and his hope is that we start discussing it.

Let us also think about the Founders and Framers in a new way: several were unquestionably extraordinary not only for their time but any time. They were, however, as Hendrik Hertzberg points out, "circumscribed by what they knew, and what they thought they knew, and what they lived too soon to have any way of knowing. ..."

"Later, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an explosion of democratic theory, experience, and practice yield up an abundance of new democratic norms and mechanisms."

Constitutional law professor Jack M. Balkin emphasizes: "The framers expected that their language, not their intentions, would control future generations. They created, in John Marshall's words, a 'constitution, intended to endure for ages to come, and consequently, to be adapted to the various crises of human affairs.'"

As Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. wrote in 1920, the Constitution's words "called into life a being" whose "development could not have been foreseen completely by the most gifted of its begetters." Hence we must interpret our Constitution "in the light of our whole experience and not merely in that of

what was said a hundred years ago.”

The Founders and Framers were not infallible demi-gods, they were mortal men who tried to do the very best they could at that time and place.

Though Chief Justice Roberts upheld the constitutionality of health-care reform under the narrow taxing power of Congress – while rejecting the use of the broader Commerce Clause – constitutional scholar Bruce Ackerman said, “John Roberts’ decision on health care places the country at a constitutional crossroads.”

Pamela S. Karlan, professor of public interest law, warns that the Supreme Court decision on the Affordable Care Act “has given Americans who care about economic and social justice a reason to worry.”

In the November 2012 election, the stakes are higher than most Americans understand. In a polarized nation, the Constitution can again become what Professor Richard R. Beeman reminds us: “Our nation’s most powerful symbol of unity.” But to meet that desirable goal, we must do the homework required.

We would all like to think that there are short cuts, that we can save our Republic and our Constitution the easy way. We cannot. And we’re late.

Beverly Bandler is a public affairs professional whose career spans some 40 years. Her credentials include serving as president of the state-level League of Women Voters of the Virgin Islands and extensive public education efforts in the Washington, D.C. area for 16 years. She writes from Mexico.

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The Mystery of Arafat's Death

Exclusive: In 2004, when Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat suddenly fell ill and died, suspicions swirled that he might have been poisoned, but no autopsy was performed. Now, nearly eight years later, his death is getting new scrutiny,

though ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern doubts a complete answer will ever be found.

By Ray McGovern

We may never know with complete certainty whether the still unexplained health crisis that suddenly did in Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was due to natural or unnatural causes. But the recent discovery of polonium on Arafat's clothing, added to a considerable body of circumstantial evidence, has increased an already widespread suspicion that Israel was involved in his sudden demise.

Last week, Al Jazeera reported findings by pathologists in Switzerland that Arafat may have been poisoned by polonium; they based this observation on their examination of parts of Arafat's clothing provided by his widow, Suha. She has now asked that his body be exhumed and examined.

Polonium is the lethal radioactive substance that was used in the high-profile assassination of Alexander Litvinenko, a former Russian spy, in London in 2006. John Croft, a retired British radiation expert who worked on the Litvinenko case, said a dose large enough to kill would probably have to come from a government with either civilian or military nuclear capabilities.

Suha Arafat says that, after her husband died, she stored some of his clothing in her lawyer's office before making them available to the Swiss. Nevertheless, there are sure to be important questions relating to the chain of custody. Doubts on that score could be allayed IF the necessary permissions for a carefully monitored exhumation are granted and IF suspicious traces of polonium are found on Arafat's body, which is interred in a grave in Ramallah on the West Bank.

A radiological science expert at University College London, Derek Hill, has said that, despite the natural decay of the substance after almost eight years, an autopsy should be able to tell "with pretty high confidence" whether Arafat had polonium in his body when he died.

A credible exhumation/examination undertaking, however, would require the cooperation of Israel (itself a suspect) and of Palestinian National Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas, who many believe was himself complicit, at least in covering up what happened to Arafat.

In other words, there are many possible slips between cup and lip, that is, there is no guarantee that more definitive physical evidence will emerge and even if it does, there is virtually no prospect that it will be undisputed.

This iffy prognosis takes into account how little is known about polonium

poisoning, as well as the entirely predictable challenges by scientists, some of whom can be expected to be serving political agendas. Polonium aside, the upsurge in speculation on the cause of Arafat's death has already injected still more poison into the atmosphere of relations between the Palestinians and Israelis.

The latest news has already fueled unrest in the West Bank and could conceivably lead to more violence. On the other hand, almost eight years have gone by since Arafat's death, and the great majority of Palestinians have long since concluded that Israel was responsible for his demise. Besides, Arafat had been losing popularity among Palestinians even before then.

Just the same, when a major world leader dies under suspicious circumstances, it seems worth trying to discern what facts one can before speculating on what actually happened.

What is Known

-Arafat seemed in good health until he fell suddenly ill on Oct. 12, 2004.

-Doctors in Lausanne, Switzerland, and elsewhere have ruled out a range of rumored causes of death, based on Arafat's original medical file provided by his wife.

-The director of Lausanne's University Center of Legal Medicine, Patrice Mangin, M.D., a forensic pathologist, has said: "There was not liver cirrhosis, apparently no traces of cancer, no leukemia. Concerning HIV, AIDS there was no sign, and the symptomology was not suggesting these things."

-The Swiss pathologists had hoped to study the blood and urine samples taken from Arafat while he was at Percy Military Hospital in France. But when Suha attempted to obtain them, she was told that those samples had been destroyed. Adding to the confusion, a senior French military doctor has told the Associated Press, "Samples taken in the hospital remain in the hospital."

-The suspicions of Arafat's longtime personal physician, Dr. Ashraf al Kurdi, zoomed immediately after Arafat's death, when Abbas blocked an autopsy. In an interview in early 2005, Kudri called Arafat's death "stealth assassination." Kudri examined Arafat on day 16 of his 29-day illness and noted what he believed to be signs of poisoning, a reddish patch on his face and skin with a metallic yellow coloring, as well as severe weight loss.

-In an interview five months after Arafat died, Kudri said: "If someone (of the Islamic faith) dies of unknown causes, it is mandatory to have an autopsy, mandatory. I suspect Arafat died of a 'killing poison' The death was due to

this.”

-Alexander Litvinenko, the former Russian intelligence officer mentioned above, who became a harsh critic of the Russian government is the first person known to have been deliberately killed by plutonium poisoning. Hospitalized in London in November 2006, he died three weeks later. Traces of polonium were found in his teacup.

-In [a blog](#) on Jan. 2, 2007, journalist Stephen Lendman (to whom I am indebted for some of the data on this wrap-up list) commented on a book titled *Ariel Sharon: An Intimate Portrait* by Uri Dan, a confidant of Ariel Sharon. Dan accused the former Israeli Prime Minister of poisoning Arafat, with the prior approval of President George W. Bush.

-Lendman also notes that 14 months before Arafat died, the Israeli security cabinet decided to “remove” the Palestinian leader, using deliberately vague language that could mean expulsion or killing.

Ehud Olmert (then Israeli vice prime minister under Sharon) went public telling Israeli radio after the cabinet decision: “The question is – How are we going to do it (remove him, that is)? Expulsion is certainly one of the options, and killing is also one of the options.” Other Israeli officials rang changes on this theme, but Olmert was the closest confidant of Sharon to state that Arafat might be killed.

-Dov Weisglass, former chief of staff to Prime Minister Sharon, insisted in a radio interview Thursday that “Israeli officials never considered killing Arafat.”

-Israeli officials are making a major effort to belittle the Swiss findings. Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor has said, “Making up conspiracy theories based on pretend evidence is so ludicrous that it befits the comedy channel and not a news channel.” (Jon Stewart take note.)

Israel’s PR Counteroffensive

Like their official Israeli counterparts, Israeli and American pro-Israel commentators have been coming out of the woodwork to discredit the polonium story.

Hussein Ibish, one of the neocons’ favorite Arab commentators, quickly placed an article in *Foreign Policy* in which he dismisses the “orgy of conspiratorial theorizing” as “utterly baseless.” In what may be the most unkindest cut of all, Ibish compares the Al Jazeera editors to Glenn Beck and his “conspiracy-minded talk show.”

My personal favorite, though, is a *Jerusalem Post* article by Yaakov Lappin, titled "Polonium found on Arafat's clothing was planted," quoting at length a Dr. Ely Karmon. According to Lappin, Karmon is "a specialist in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear terrorism, working at Israel's Interdisciplinary Center of Herzliya's Institute for Counterterrorism."

Dr. Karmon claims that the half-life of the polonium in question would make it impossible for it to have been discovered at such high levels if it had been used to kill Arafat eight years ago.

And Karmon should know: he holds a B.A. in English and French Culture from Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a license in International Relations and a license in Bantu Languages from universities in Paris, and a PhD in political science from Haifa University. His bio on the Herzliya Web site says nothing about where Dr. Karmon acquired expertise related to chemistry, biology, radiology, or nuclear matters.

The Supremes to Bush to Sharon

Who is primarily responsible for Arafat's demise? Ultimately, you could say the same Supreme Court that gave the 2000 election to George W. Bush with his flair for sizing up people and his jaunty compassion-deficit disorder.

Experience showed President Bush to be an impressionable sort with a roulette penchant for putting great premium on initial impressions and latching onto people believed to be kindred souls be it Russian President Vladimir Putin (trust at first sight), or Ariel Sharon.

As for Sharon, retired Gen. Brent Scowcroft, who was national security adviser to President George H. W. Bush, did not like what he was seeing under the second President Bush. A master of discretion with the media, Scowcroft nevertheless saw fit to tell the London *Financial Times* on Oct. 14, 2004 that Sharon had Bush "mesmerized" and "wrapped around his little finger."

At the time, Scowcroft was chair of the prestigious President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board and thus well positioned to watch the U.S.-Israeli relationship unfold. He was summarily fired after making the Sharon-Bush comments.

George W. Bush first met Sharon in 1998, when the Texas governor was taken on a tour of the Middle East by Matthew Brooks, then executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition. Sharon was foreign minister and took Bush on a helicopter tour over the Israeli occupied territories. An Aug. 3, 2006, McClatchy wire story by [Ron Hutcheson](#) quotes [Matthew Brooks](#):

“If there’s a starting point for George W. Bush’s attachment to Israel, it’s the day in late 1998, when he stood on a hilltop where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, and, with eyes brimming with tears, read aloud from his favorite hymn, ‘Amazing Grace.’ He was very emotional. It was a tear-filled experience. He brought Israel back home with him in his heart. I think he came away profoundly moved.”

Bush made a highly revealing reference to that trip at the very first meeting of his National Security Council (NSC) on Jan. 30, 2001. After announcing he would abandon the decades-long role of honest broker between Israelis and Palestinians and would tilt pronouncedly toward Israel, Bush said he had decided to let Sharon do whatever he saw fit to do.

At that point Bush brought up his trip to Israel with the Republican Jewish Coalition and the flight over Palestinian camps, but there was no trace of concern for the Palestinians. In *A Pretext for War*, James Bamford quotes Bush: “Looked real bad down there,” he said with a frown. Then he said it was time to end America’s efforts in the region. “I don’t see much we can do over there at this point,” he said.

As for Yasser Arafat, he quickly became *bête noire* for Bush, and Vice President Dick Cheney, as well as for Sharon. And the Israeli Prime Minister played Bush and Cheney like a violin and viola. A few months before Arafat’s death, George W. Bush arbitrarily withdrew U.S. recognition of Arafat and the PLO as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.”

On July 18, 2004, in an interview in *Le Figaro*, Bush dismissed Arafat as a negotiating partner, saying, “The real problem is that there is no leadership that is able to say ‘help us establish a state and we will fight terror and answer the needs of the Palestinians.’”

That departure by Bush was criticized by the European Union and Russia, who were part of the quartet leading negotiations between Israel and the PLO. Sharon had already said what Bush said.

Irony in Arafat’s Death

On many levels, Arafat was very cooperative with Israel and the U.S., which is why he became so deeply despised by many Palestinians. They saw him as a sellout to Israel for going along with the land-grab sham (also known as “the peace process”), enriching himself and his cohorts in the process, and establishing a narrow, repressive and authoritarian regime.

Ironically, Arafat usually jumped when Israel said jump, but he wasn’t able to deliver anything to his people, because the Israelis were not really interested

in anything like the peace that most Palestinians envisage.

So Tel Aviv had a malleable puppet, but also an increasingly restive Palestinian population tired of no progress/reforms, worsening poverty, a growing popularity/respectability of relatively non-corrupt groups like Hamas and others opposed to Arafat, who had outlived his usefulness.

Here, with some dates highlighted, is a short chronology of important pre-Arafat-disposal events:

On **Oct. 14, 2004**, the usually taciturn Brent Scowcroft tells the *Financial Times*: "Sharon just has him [George W. Bush] wrapped around his little finger; I think the president is mesmerized." By then it was well known that Bush agreed with Sharon that Arafat had to be replaced. How much the Bush White House was aware beforehand of the circumstances of Arafat's demise is not known, yet.

On **Oct. 25, 2004**, Arafat falls seriously ill from as yet unknown causes. He died on **Nov. 11, 2004** of the identical unknown causes. Shortly thereafter, Arafat's relatives and friends, and countless others, speculated that he died an "unnatural" death.

It is well known that Israel's Mossad has a branch of scientists and operatives who are experts in lethal poisons (shades of the Soviet KGB's "Mokryie Dela" [wet affairs] department). And, as is well known, the operatives in Israel's Knocking-Off-Iranian-Scientists Branch have been chalking up merit commendations, so to speak, over recent years.

Senior Israeli officials take considerable pride in this "wet-affairs" capability, and have taken to brag about it. On Jan. 11, 2012, for example, Israeli armed forces chief Benny Gantz warned Parliament: "2012 is expected to be a critical year for Iran," mentioning the nuclear issue and "continued international pressure" on Iran. Still on Iran, Gantz made a point of adding "things that happen to it unnaturally."

Less than a day after Gantz's warning, a 32-year-old Iranian scientist, father of two, was killed by assassins on motorcycles, an attack that the Associated Press called "almost certainly the work of Israel."

Last November, when Iranian Revolutionary Guards Gen. Hassan Moghadam, one of the driving forces behind Iran's advanced ballistic missile program, was killed in a large explosion, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak commented publicly the next day that he would like to see more such explosions in Iran.

Time magazine cited a Western intelligence source as saying Israel's Mossad was behind the explosion at the Iranian military base. "Don't believe the Iranians

that it was an accident," the official said. The source added that more acts of sabotage were in the works as part of an effort to stop Iran's nuclear program. "There are more bullets in the magazine," he added.

And More Polonium Too?

Israeli investigative journalist Michael Karpin wrote about polonium in his 2006 book, *The Bomb in the Basement: How Israel Went Nuclear and What that Means for the World*. Karpin reveals that exposure to polonium, the radioactive substance used to poison Litvinenko, killed several Israeli scientists a few decades ago.

These Weizmann Institute scientists were exposed to the same dangerous substance that was found at a number of London sites Litvinenko had visited, as well as in three British Airways planes that flew the Moscow-London route.

According to Karpin, in 1957 a leak was discovered at a Weizmann Institute laboratory operated by Israel's Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). The Israeli authorities did not admit that the leak and the deaths were connected, but people close to one fatal casualty confirmed that the state took responsibility for the accident and compensated his family.

Having learned how lethal polonium can be, it seems clear in retrospect that Israeli scientists set out to learn all they could about polonium poisoning. From Litvinenko's demise it seems clear the Russians have had a parallel program. Or, maybe do you suppose?

Israel runs a major defense research institute specializing in biology, medicinal chemistry and environmental science at Nes Ziona, 20 miles south of Tel Aviv; it is called the Israel Institute for Biological Research. With 350 employees, including 150 scientists, it is suspected of also developing biological toxins for use by Israeli intelligence for assassinations. This is probably where Israel conducts its research on polonium.

More bullets in the magazine; polonium/"stealth assassination"; drones with "hellfire" missiles, whatever. Life (the life of some, that is) is cheap. And assassinations are us. O Tempora, O Mores!

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was an Army infantry/intelligence officer and then a CIA analyst for 30 years, and now serves on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).
