

Likening Palestinians to Blades of Grass

Exclusive: Israeli hardliners joke about the periodic need to decimate each new generation of Palestinian militants as “mowing the grass,” a process underway again in new bombardments of Gaza. This ugly metaphor has also penetrated the think-tank world of Official Washington, as ex-CIA analyst Elizabeth Murray learned.

By Elizabeth Murray

In early 2010, one of Washington DC’s most prestigious think tanks was holding a seminar on the Middle East which included a discussion of Israel’s December 2008-January 2009 assault on Gaza which killed about 1,300 Palestinians. When the death toll was mentioned, one expert on the panel smiled enigmatically and intoned: “It’s unfortunate, but every once in a while you have to mow the lawn.”

The remark, which likened killing hundreds of men, women and children many of them noncombatants with trimming the grass, was greeted with a light tittering around the room, which was filled with some of Washington’s most elite, highly educated and well-paid Middle East experts. Not a single one objected to the panelist’s black humor.

On the contrary, several analysts and experts were grinning at the reference to Israel’s strategy of mounting periodic attacks on the Palestinians to cull each new generation of militants. Such is the nonchalance of Washington’s policy-advising cognoscenti toward the ongoing and systematic genocide of Gaza’s oppressed population.

The cavalier language is symptomatic of the policymaking community’s increasingly pervasive tendency to disregard and disparage the humanity of Palestinian victims of Israeli attacks, which are often waged by Israel’s high-tech drones and U.S.-supplied F-16’s. There is also a tendency to ignore or downplay Israeli war crimes.

This dangerously sociopathic attitude is prevalent whether cloaked in a cheap joke or reflected in the failure by the State Department spokesman to condemn or even acknowledge the criminality of Israel’s latest aerial and sea-based bombardment of Palestinian civilians, at least 18 of whom have been killed in the past 48 hours. Three Israelis also have died in retaliatory rocket fire.

After the latest attacks, the State Department’s statement justified Israel’s bombardment of Gaza as Israel’s “right to defend itself” against the launching of relatively primitive rockets, mostly by radical groups, from inside Gaza.

Yet, while the State Department urged both sides to avoid civilian casualties, nowhere was there mention of the Palestinians' right to defend themselves from various attacks by Israel. Apparently only one side is granted that privilege, according to the U.S. statement.

The relegation of Palestinians to a less-than-human status by Israel and the United States especially the inhabitants of Gaza who are perpetually locked into an open-air prison and subject to an Israeli blockade was noted by MIT professor Noam Chomsky after a visit to Gaza to attend an academic conference. In comments broadcast by "Democracy Now" on Nov. 14, Chomsky remarked:

"It's kind of amazing and inspiring to see people managing somehow to survive as essentially caged animals subject to constant, random, sadistic punishment – only to humiliate them – no pretext. They [the Palestinians] would like to have dignified lives, but the standard Israeli position is that they shouldn't raise their heads."

Instead of a serious effort to reach a peace acceptable to both sides, Israel seems to prefer a state of endless conflict with the Palestinians. After all, the prospect of peace might require the Israeli government to treat their neighbors as equals and withdraw from territory occupied since 1967.

So, rather than making meaningful concessions, some Israeli hardliners simply promote the idea of periodically "mowing the grass," i.e. killing the latest generation of Palestinian militants who sprout up from the injustice all around them. Perhaps that is why Israel broke an informal ceasefire on Wednesday by assassinating Hamas military commander Ahmed Jabari in an air strike.

Jabari was killed hours after he received the draft of a permanent truce agreement with Israel, which included mechanisms for maintaining the ceasefire, according to Israeli peace activist Gershon Baskin, who helped mediate talks between Israel and Hamas for the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

Jabari was a key Palestinian interlocutor in the release of Shalit, and an important intermediary for truce negotiations with groups such as the PFLP and Islamic Jihad. Such a relatively moderate figure may have been perceived as a threat to Israeli leaders who prefer to portray Hamas as rejectionist toward any peace.

These developments and the U.S. response to them are a chilling omen for those who had hoped for a change in U.S. Middle East policy after the U.S. presidential election – namely, increased pressure on Israel to halt its cruel oppression of Palestinians and obey international law.

There is still a window of opportunity for the U.S. to shift its approach before

the violence spirals out of control. One also can hope that President Barack Obama is working the phones to rein in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But Obama's eerie and reprehensible silence during the Israeli assault on Gaza in December 2008-January 2009 must not be repeated.

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Death Knell for a Failing Paradigm

The death and destruction from Super Storm Sandy this time inflicted near the U.S. power center of New York City are warnings of what's in store if the global-warming deniers continue to obstruct action. Future devastation will shatter the creaky framework of modern civilization, says Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

So much has been lost to the hubris and cupidity inherent to the hyper-industrialization and commercial hustler that defines the Anthropocene Epoch (i.e. the era since human activity began to significantly affect the Earth's ecosystem, often dated to the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th Century).

To take it all in, to allow oneself to feel the full implications of the dire situation, of the ecocide and humanity lost to endless war and economic exploitation, one would be knocked to one's knees with sorrow or compelled to give voice to bursts of full-throated rage.

Therefore, as the grid-decimating tide of Sandy recedes and the power and lights have been restored to our East Village, fifth floor walk-up flat, I sit at my writing desk, and I am staring down the scope of my cerebral cortex, desiring to unload both barrels into the delusional asses of climate change deniers.

This mutant strain of hurricane (that has inflicted much disruption in our lives and a great amount of stress on my six-month, pregnant wife, Angela) was caused by changes in the Gulf Stream, wrought by manmade greenhouse gasses.

Personally, I'm done with attempting to persuade idiots by intelligent discourse and fools by plying them with common sense ... finished with issuing reasoned

warnings to dissemblers and dimwits who claim the iceberg directly in the path of our ocean liner is simply an ice dispenser, conveniently located to refresh our beverages.

Sandy (as did Katrina) reveals, how tenuous the grid work of final-stage capitalism is ... how rapidly it comes unraveled by nature's impersonal fury.

While composing the first draft of this essay (pre-Sandy) – as I was writing the following lines, “Often, the soul is forced to get your attention by guiding you into situations that serve to open your heart by means of breaking it. Closed off from the temptation and tumult ” – I received a phone call bearing the message that my best friend in this breathing world was dead.

The next lines I wrote were: Alright then, soul, you have my full attention, although my eyes are blurred and scalded by tears.

After inexplicable and heart shattering events, one's mind searches for deeper meaning even when there can be none gleaned from quotidian tragedy. In this case a fall involving a bicycle, and a friend, a brilliant artist, a vivid soul, a warm, passionate human being, a generous, compassionate companion has been forever lost.

Meaning is an ad hoc, flimsy structure erected of metaphysical eggshells convictions garnered from happenstance, the traumas of early life, books happened upon, chance meetings, misheard advice, friendships lost and cultivated.

In the presence of death and in the aftermath of great storms, we apprehend how vainly we cling to the illusion of certainty and permanence. Yet, deep down, we know how insubstantial our constructs are How fate and circumstance can intervene, and can leave us staring into the indifferent maw of eternity.

“For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow” – Ecclesiastes 1:18

To John, my departed friend: I'm not going to allow you to travel too far away from the realm of the living without your soul glistening with my abundant tears.

As Sandy raged around our home and then departed, I stood in grief's dominion. There are empty spaces here – graceless voids – torn into the hours of the day after a person close to you has been, suddenly and without warning, taken by death.

John, you and I spoke often and for long durations about the necessity of

artists and writers allowing themselves to be undone by life and remade by creative choices. For me, your sudden death has accomplished the primary.

Through, our perpetual dialog, we explored the interplay of polis and ecosystem, and how this essential criteria was absent from so much current day art and curation e.g., how in art one might limn New Orleans' ragged (yet vividly alive) grandeur – the city's alluring, dangerous, vitally alive character – its crumbling agora – and the forever living, always dying nature of the bayous and wetlands that surround the city. And the manner one might merge and express those elements in one's aesthetic.

(Apropos: Much of the city of New Orleans itself was comprised of swamp land that was drained, thus creating the city's familiar crescent shape and susceptibility to deadly flooding.)

In John's art work and curation, he desired to evoke a dialog between the ghosts of the past and the living present, human beings and nature, cityscape to backwater, brain to gut, beating heart to eternal moment, phantom to flesh, memory to heavenly fire, compost to possibility, possibility to fruition.

John was driven to entice the individual artists out of his/her prison of enshrinement/exile of hyper-individualist alienation to bring the work of an individual artist into a broadening dialog with the work of other artists to create the affect of a vital agora.

He grasped that art does not exist alone; it is not an embalmed corpse, but a living (and dying) thing; hence, it must share common space and communion to be fully alive as well as decay to compost (and therefore be granted renewal) when it dies.

John desired a dialog between passion and putrefaction. He grasped the nearer an artist drew to expressing the impossible was made possible by exploring the realm of the possible. But, in addition: messing with things quotidian, breaking them apart, caressing, tormenting, tweaking reconfiguring all available material into new forms.

Like lovers, battling and entwined, whose love fuses the familiar and the alien, thus broadening the lives of both parties, by allowing them to become greater than the sum of their parts, art must challenge our verities; it must induce one to become more like one's essential self by the dissolution of safe, but soul-defying, habitual thinking.

An awareness of the ongoing (and exponentially increasing) catastrophic changes to the ecological balance of our besieged planet can serve the same end. Otherwise, one would risks being as devoid of character as those reality-adverse

creatures – monsters really – possessed of inexplicable self-regard, who wield power in this age of hype and hubris.

Conversely, one's suffering unites the psyche with the sorrows of the earth; teaches us that we are bound by its limits and laws. The knowledge grounds us in humility, by revealing that eternity is boundless, but we are not. Because eternity treats us with such callous disregard, we feel an affinity with other vulnerable things. One recognizes the commonality of suffering, thus one gains empathy.

Yes, death is implacable; the only thing close to matching death's tenacity is: The persistence of memory and the urgency of the soul to make every moment holy.

Often, in the locations where one's heart has been wounded by circumstance, thus seized by novel (even agonizing) apprehensions, as is the case in the sections of a forest that have been scoured by fire – new life, nourished by ash, will grow. Have you ever walked through a field of bright wild flowers, risen from the charred ground, where a wild fire has blazed?

Over the last few years, many people close to me have died. A firestorm has run riot through my heart. In its wake, regions of my soul are vivid with eternity's wild flowers. The view is breathtaking.

History is a story of bitter grace and pain-wrought wisdom: In this tale, we learn: Collective trust is a catastrophic misjudgment, made possible by its partner in crime, an artist of legerdemain, who goes by the moniker, Hope.

Once you have had your heart shattered into pieces, and even though time has mended it back together, because all of the shattered pieces and scattered shards can never be retrieved, you, as a result, will never be the same.

And that is a propitious development, because room has been made within you for novelty and wisdom. The process allows for transformation, for one remains oneself, as, all the while, alien elements are merged with one's own uniqueness. Accordingly, providence favors those whose faith has been shattered.

"A casual stroll through the lunatic asylum shows that faith does not prove anything." • Friedrich Nietzsche

Life begins in mystery, what lies after life ends is unknowable – and, in between, we experience constant bafflement. Yet, how exquisite the landscape is as it rolls by; what exquisite sorrow we yield by being part of it all.

My best friend was plucked from this tormented world. My father died last May I'm buffeted, shattered by circumstance, but Angela, my dear wife, is more than

half way through the second trimester of pregnancy. The event has engendered much soul-searching for a certain father-to-be i.e., wandering in awe and bewilderment through the landscape of his psyche, and forays, in his better moments, into the image-rich landscape of Animus Mundi.

Art is merely artifice, if it is not sown from the soul's veritable soil. What is the song of the night bird sans the night? A thousand gradations of green comprise a swamp's canopy. The heart is just a pump, sans a loving/embattled (both are borne of libido) connection to the soul of the world.

My recent proximity to the realities of birth and death has forced me close to the living heart/inhuman abyss of the soul of the world. Yet amid this startling landscape the mind abides greater, even agonizing truths.

Climate chaos. Dying oceans. The degradation of U.S. corporate/militarist empire and the concomitant collapse of the global, neoliberal order. Our child will be born into a world where there will be a paradigm shift – or there will come mass tragedy.

My father was born on an Indian reservation. My mother escaped Nazi Germany on a Kindertransport, shortly after her father was taken to a concentration camp for anti-Nazi activity. Angela, was born in a small, rural home, a sharecroppers shack, in the South Carolina Low Country that housed generations of cotton-harvesters and tobacco-croppers.

Our people, sharing the fate of multitudes born into this world, have endured and even flourished under terrible conditions. The Tyler/Rockstroh whelp will be afforded the same opportunity. Who is his grim augury-prone old man to deny him the chance? That would be the very emblem of hubris, because, among the living, there exists no bottom line – only how you choose to write the book of your life.

“Life moves on, whether we act as cowards or heroes. Life has no other discipline to impose, if we would but realize it, than to accept life unquestioningly. Everything we shut our eyes to, everything we run away from, everything we deny, denigrate or despise, serves to defeat us in the end. What seems nasty, painful, evil, can become a source of beauty, joy, and strength, if faced with an open mind. Every moment is a golden one for him who has the vision to recognize it as such.” ~Henry Miller

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A Closer Look at New Gaza Conflict

The new round of violence between Israel and Palestinians in Gaza is receiving the typical U.S. media treatment, blaming Hamas and absolving Israel. But the origins of the latest clashes are much more complex than that simplistic and one-sided version, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

There they go again, another tragic upsurge in the violent tit-for-tat between Israel and Hamas. As with most tit-for-tat contests, at each stage each side can point to what the other side just did as an action that warrants retaliation.

Often the story that reaches American ears is instead more lopsided: a story of Hamas firing rockets and Israel responding with armed force. But the actual process is very much two-way, with Hamas responding to Israeli violence at least as much as the other way around.

Hamas had endeavored to maintain a cease-fire, despite difficulty in controlling the actions of smaller, more militant groups that have a presence in the Gaza Strip, most of the time since Operation Cast Lead, the brutal Israeli invasion of the Strip almost four years ago. That war resulted in 1,400 Palestinian deaths, probably over half of whom were noncombatants. (Israeli deaths in the war totaled three noncombatants and ten soldiers, four of whom were killed by friendly fire.)

But Hamas, as the only government the residents of the Gaza Strip have to turn to for security, came under increasing pressure from those residents to respond forcefully to Israeli actions that continued to claim Palestinian victims.

As Phyllis Bennis points out, who appears to be retaliating against whom depends on when you start the clock. Most American media accounts have begun coverage of the latest rounds of violence with a Palestinian attack on Israeli soldiers on Nov. 8. Less noticed in the coverage was that the soldiers were part of an element of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), including four tanks and an armored bulldozer, that was operating inside the Gaza Strip at the time.

Exactly what those operations included is still unclear, but the IDF did later say it was "investigating" the death of an 11-year-old boy that day. Within the next three days the Palestinian Center for Human Rights documented the deaths of five more Palestinian civilians, including three children, with 52 other

civilians wounded. Most of the casualties were incurred in a single Israeli attack on a playground soccer field.

The ensuing two-way violence continued until Egypt was able to mediate a short-lived cease-fire, broken when Israel launched this Wednesday a substantial aerial attack, including the assassination of a senior Hamas leader, Ahmed Jabari.

Israel, of course, has far greater and more sophisticated means (much of it U.S.-supplied) of inflicting death and destruction than does Hamas. The different means tend to carry different labels: ground-launched rockets are called terrorism, while the operations of attack aircraft are called a nation defending its borders.

That difference in capability also helps to explain why Israel is the side that perpetrates the most marked escalations in this violent dialogue. If Hamas had anything approaching Israel's capabilities, it probably would feel obliged to respond right now to Israel's actions with much more deadly operations than anything it has been able to muster so far.

But then again, if it did have such capabilities, there would be a major element of deterrence that would almost certainly dissuade Israeli leaders from perpetrating anything like the violence they have in fact inflicted.

The United States has no national interest in taking sides in any of this lethal tit-for-tat. And yet, to its own disadvantage and discredit, it does take sides. The statement the State Department issued on Wednesday "strongly condemns" rocket fire coming out of Gaza, says there is "no justification" for the "cowardly acts" of "Hamas and other terrorist organizations," talks about Hamas attacking Israel "on a near daily basis" and supports "Israel's right to defend itself."

The closest the statement comes to even a pretense of recognition of the, substantially greater, pain and destruction being inflicted in the other direction is to "regret the death and injury of innocent Israeli and Palestinian civilians" and to "encourage Israel to continue [sic] to take every effort to avoid civilian casualties."

This posture is especially discouraging as one of the administration's first official statements on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since President Barack Obama's re-election. Scott Wilson writes in the *Washington Post* about how at the President's press conference this week "the customarily cautious Obama spoke like a politician with nothing to lose after winning the last race of his life" and exuded "confidence and ease."

If the lifting of the burden of re-election is going to enable the administration to formulate a more effective and more just policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the State Department's statement showed no sign of it happening yet. A better statement would have begun something like this:

"The United States deplores the latest upsurge in violence between Israelis and Palestinians. This tragic conflict is causing unnecessary suffering among innocent people on both sides. The United States calls on both sides to pull back from what has become a seemingly endless cycle of destruction. None of the acts of violence committed by either side does anything to advance a goal that the United States shares and that should be shared by all the people of the region: a resolution of differences that will enable Israelis and Palestinians alike to live side-by-side in peace and security."

That's just the start. The United States should address the long-term consequences of what is taking place, and specifically the consequences of the futile Israeli reliance on escalation and destruction. It might borrow the words of Israeli peace activist Gershon Baskin, who was trying earlier this week to mediate a new cease-fire between Israel and Hamas; his principal Hamas contact was Jabari, the military leader whom Israel killed by obliterating his car with an airstrike.

"I tell myself," says Baskin, "that with every person who is killed we are engendering the next generation of haters and terrorists."

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How Mistress Helped Petraeus

A back story to the sex scandal that ended David Petraeus's 14 months as director of the CIA is that his mistress, Paula Broadwell, was an apologist for abusive actions by the U.S. command in Afghanistan. She defended the leveling of an Afghan village deemed uncooperative, Gareth Porter says at Inter Press Service.

By Gareth Porter

Paula Broadwell, whose affair with former Gen. David Petraeus brought his career

to a sudden end last week, had sought to help defend his decision in 2010 to allow village destruction in Afghanistan that not only violated his own previous guidance but the international laws of war.

At the time, Petraeus was under pressure from the Obama administration to produce tangible evidence of "progress" that could be used to justify troop withdrawals. But the efforts had the opposite effect. The new Petraeus policy guidance allowed the destruction of villages in three districts of Kandahar province if the population did not tell U.S. forces where homemade bombs were hidden.

In early January 2010, Broadwell went to visit the Combined Task Force I-320th in Kandahar to write a story justifying the decision to destroy the village of Tarok Kaloche and much of three other villages in its area of operations.

Ironically, it was Broadwell who introduced the complete razing of the village of Tarok Kalache in Kandahar's Arghandab Valley in October 2010 to the blogosphere. Dramatic photographs of the village before and after it was razed, which she had obtained from U.S. military sources, were published with her article in the military blog Best Defense on Jan. 13, 2011. The pictures and her article brought a highly critical response from blogger Joshua Foust, who is a specialist on Afghanistan.

Tarok Kalache was only one of many villages destroyed or nearly destroyed in an October 2010 offensive by U.S. forces in three districts of Kandahar Province, because the heavy concentrations of IEDs had made clearing the village by conventional forces too costly.

In the late summer and early fall, commanders in those districts had been ordered to clear the villages of Taliban presence, but they had taken heavy casualties from IEDs planted in and around the villages. As commander of Combined Task Force I-320th, Lt. Col. David Flynn was responsible for several villages in the Arghandab valley, including Tarok Kalache.

Flynn told Spencer Ackerman of the Danger Room blog in early February 2011 that, once he felt he had the necessary intelligence on IEDs in Tarok Kalache, he had adopted a plan to destroy the village, first with mine clearing charges, which destroyed everything within a swath 100 yards long and wide enough for a tank, then with aerial bombing. U.S. forces completed the destruction on Oct. 6, 2010, dropping 25 2,000-pound bombs on what remained of Tarok Kalache's 36 compounds and gardens, according to Flynn's account.

And in an interview with the Daily Mail nearly three weeks after Tarok Kalache

had been flattened, Flynn revealed that he had just told residents of Khosrow Sofla that if they didn't inform him of the location of the IEDs in their village within a few days, he would destroy the village. Flynn later confirmed to Ackerman that he had told the residents, if they couldn't tell him exactly where the bombs were located, he would have no way of disposing of them without blowing up the buildings.

The sequence of events clearly suggests that Flynn was using the destruction of Tarok Kalache to convince the residents of Khosrow Sofla that the same thing would happen to them if they didn't provide the information about IEDs demanded by Flynn.

That tactic apparently succeeded. Carlotta Gall reported in *The New York Times* on March 11, 2011, that after seeing what had happened to Tarok Kalache, the residents of the still undestroyed homes in Khosrow Sofla had hired a former mujahedeen to defuse the IEDs.

In her fawning biography of Petraeus, Broadwell quotes Flynn's response to being informed by the Khosrow Sofla village chief that the IEDs were all gone, which U.S. troops had verified: "No dozers. No mass punishment. They were already punished by the Taliban."

The destruction of Tarok Kalache was thus a "collective punishment" of the residents of the village as well as "intimidation" of the residents of Khosrow Sofla practices that were strictly forbidden by the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons. Article 33 of that agreement states, "Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited."

The village destruction also contravened a central principle of the counterinsurgency guidance that had been promulgated by Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal when he became the top commander in Afghanistan in 2009. "Destroying a home or property jeopardizes the livelihood of an entire family and creates more insurgents," said McChrystal's guidance.

Petraeus had confirmed that prohibition in an August 2010 guidance, warning that killing civilians or damaging their property would "create more enemies than our operations eliminate." But Petraeus was under pressure from the Barack Obama administration to produce tangible evidence of "progress" that could be used to justify troop withdrawals. He needed to be able cite the clearing of those villages, regardless of the political fallout.

Petraeus himself clearly approved the general policy allowing the destruction of villages by Flynn and other commanders in Kandahar in late 2010. Flynn told

Ackerman he had sent his plan up the chain of command and believed that International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters were informed.

Carlotta Gall reported on March 11, 2011, that revised guidelines "reissued" by Petraeus permitted the total destruction of a village such in Tarok Kalache, according to a NATO official. Although the large-scale demolition of homes had been reported by the Times in November, it had not generated any significant reaction in the United States. But in Afghanistan, the home destruction created frictions between Afghans and Petraeus's command over the loss of homes and livelihoods.

When Broadwell traveled to Flynn's command post in early January 2011, Petraeus was anticipating a story in the New York Times on the growing friction over the home destruction. Broadwell's first article for Best Defense was published on Jan. 13, 2011, the same day as the New York Times article reporting that the Afghan government estimate of property damage from the destruction of homes and fields was 71 times higher than the \$1.4 million ISAF estimate.

Although a note following her article referred to her as the author of a forthcoming book on Petraeus, Broadwell was ostensibly writing as an independent journalist rather than as a constant companion of Petraeus. The article portrayed Flynn as forced to choose between "suffering the tragic losses and the horrific daily amputees" to clear the four villages in question and destroying the IED-laden homes.

In a comment apparently reflecting Petraeus's concern, she said the unit "could not afford to lose momentum." Broadwell claimed the residents had abandoned the village when the Taliban "conducted an intimidation campaign to chase the villagers out."

After Afghanistan blogger Joshua Foust sharply criticized her lack of concern about the razing of Tarok Kolache, Broadwell wrote on her Facebook page, "I definitely have sympathy for the villagers who had been displaced, even though they made the judgment call to 'sell' the village to the Taliban."

Both those explanations were untrue, however. Former residents told IPS reporter Shah Noori in February that they had begun leaving their homes only in August when the Taliban began gearing up for an assault by U.S. troops by laying IEDs. They also said the Taliban had allowed residents to return to check on their houses, and to tend their gardens and orchards.

Broadwell repeated an ISAF claim that the compounds were booby-trapped, but

residents insisted to Noori that only some compounds had explosives. Finally Broadwell claimed that the villagers who had lost their homes and gardens had told Petraeus and other visitors that “Flynn was their hero and they wanted him to move into the village with them.”

Then she acknowledged that villagers were “pissed about the loss of their mud huts,” adding cheerfully, “but that’s why the BUILD story is important here.”

Gareth Porter, an investigative historian and journalist specializing in U.S. national security policy, received the UK-based Gellhorn Prize for journalism for 2011 for articles on the U.S. war in Afghanistan.

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/11/broadwell-defended-petraeus-village-destruction-policy/>.

Separating War from the Vets

On Veterans Day, Americans make a point of thanking men and women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. But this appreciation has the effect of shielding today’s perpetual warfare from the critical examination it deserves, writes former Marine Matthew Hoh.

By Matthew Hoh

I get lots of notes thanking me for my service on Veterans Day. I am grateful and appreciative. My friends, both veterans and active duty service members, receive the same affections of respect and esteem and, of course, value those sentiments.

There comes a time, however, when a line is breached. I have difficulty receiving a message from a teacher thanking me for what I have done for my country. I blush at the handshakes, emails, Facebook posts, Twitter tweets and banners from police officers, firefighters, nurses, nonprofit organizers and volunteers, clergy, utility workers and good parents; people who do more on a daily basis for our nation than I have ever done.

Please understand me. What these men and women do everyday contributes more to the well being and welfare of this nation than anything done overseas over the last decade in our country’s name. (With the exception of a relatively small, dedicated cadre who have actually dealt with the several dozen or few hundred terrorists that truly threaten the United States.)

I have no greater pride than in the Marines and Sailors I led in Iraq. They were consummate professionals: tough, disciplined and compassionate. They took care of one another, adhered to vague, illogical and unfair rules of engagement and followed, to the best they could, a mission even more vague, illogical and unfair.

What they did, they did for one another and they would do so again. They deserve the admiration of a nation for their performance and their conduct in situations impossible to understand unless you were there. However, their performance in their duties must be divorced and recognized separately from the misbegotten and politically expedient narrative that we live in a safer America today because of an invasion of Iraq and an 11-year occupation of Afghanistan.

What allows for this unquestioning acceptance of a patriotic and romantic yet specious narrative? Maybe it is the fear resident from the horror of the September 11 attacks? An act carried out by what history will detail to have been a band of madmen and not a force worthy of a war or the designation as an existential threat.

Maybe it is a form of collective guilt, shame or inferiority for not having served? This attitude within the American public has manifested itself in elected officials and prevents questioning, critical thought or oversight pertaining to anything military in Washington, DC.

Maybe it is a fawning media? Desperate for ratings, pressured by competition and needful of access, the media has been easily suckered by the world's largest and best-trained public relations machine, run by the Pentagon.

Maybe it is even a growth in the general knowledge and understanding of war by the American public? I mean, who needs a draft, because, thanks to video games: "There's a soldier in all of us."

Whatever the reason, it is tragic and absurd that we confuse the hard work and selfless sacrifice of most veterans with overly simplistic, factually lazy and politically manipulative stories of freedom and liberty, of defense of economic prosperity, or of holding back barbarians at our gates.

I am quite certain Godwin's Law is in effect as many read this, but for every analogy or comparison to World War II and Nazi Germany in modern American foreign policy discourse, a referencing of the tragedies of Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon and Somalia would be more appropriate. For these conflicts are not just closer in time and generation, but are more similar in their substance and form, and in their loss and inconclusiveness, to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq than the Good War is to the Afghan and Iraq Wars.

Do not be misled, we lost the Iraq War and we are losing the Afghan War. Not that either of those wars were worth winning, which, of course, is little consolation to the families of the dead and maimed.

Despite these losses; despite the disgraces of Generals McChrystal, Caldwell, Petraeus and Allen, all undone by vainglorious stupidity; despite the level of the Pentagon's fiscal profligacy, one without equal in the modern world; and despite a suicide epidemic that only the satirical publication *The Onion* seems willing to take head on, the military is the most widely respected institution in the United States.

Veterans deserve a great share of the responsibility for such foolishness. For too long we have been placed on a pedestal, immune from criticism or investigation, in some cases receiving adoration and reverence approaching clerical or pontifical status among the American public.

Have we, those no longer in service, met our obligations to those still serving and to those who will serve? Have we honestly and critically examined our most recent histories and reported, candidly, what we saw, what we did, what we accomplished, whether or not it was worth it, and what it meant?

Maybe it is too soon for such introspection. Many of the more poignant, sincere and astute recollections and summaries of war have been published decades after the homecomings. Perhaps it is just too soon for many of us. However, as a friend of mine reminds me, for veterans to not speak genuinely, but rather to silently and graciously accept accolades of unwarranted praise and glory, ensures propaganda lives on as history.

Maybe in time my generation will produce memoirists like Kotolwitz, Sledge or Fussel, novelists like Vonnegut, Heller or Mailer, or films like *Paths of Glory*, *MASH* or *The Deer Hunter*. With a few exceptions, most reporting of the Afghan and Iraq wars by veterans has been simply that: reporting.

This absence of critical examination and of serious questioning of the wars by veterans has allowed for an infirmity to take hold within the American people that disallows for questioning warriors and, to the benefit of a few, expedites policies of perpetual war.

Thank you for your sympathies on the hardship of war, they are right and deserved. However, please truly consider the merit of crediting the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq for the continuing liberties, freedoms and welfare of the United States. I did not see any al Qaeda in Afghanistan or weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, nor do I know many Afghans who are benefiting from Karzai's kleptocracy or Iraqis who are grateful for the horrors of civil war.

Rather than receive thanks undeserved, I would prefer we hold ourselves accountable for our mistakes and our failures. Until that time, I will read the below poem each Veterans Day. I have seen more of what it speaks of in war and its aftermath than I ever did of any freedom or liberty.

SUICIDE IN THE TRENCHES

By Siegfried Sassoon

I knew a simple soldier boy
Who grinned at life in empty joy,
Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,
And whistled early with the lark.

In winter trenches, cowed and glum,
With crumps and lice and lack of rum,
He put a bullet through his brain.
No one spoke of him again.

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you'll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go.

Matthew Hoh is a Senior Fellow at the Center for International Policy (www.ciponline.org). Matthew formerly directed the Afghanistan Study Group, a collection of foreign and public policy experts and professionals advocating for a change in U.S. strategy in Afghanistan. Matthew has served with the U.S. Marine Corps in Iraq and on U.S. Embassy teams in both Afghanistan and Iraq. He resides in North Carolina. [This article originally appeared at the HuffingtonPost and is republished with the author's permission. The link is http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-hoh/a-few-days-after-veterans-day_b_2123758.html]

The Neocons' Waterloo

Exclusive: The last week has witnessed what might be called the Neocons' Waterloo as their bid to reclaim power was beaten back by President Obama's reelection and their last major government ally, CIA Director David Petraeus, resigned amid a sex scandal, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

The decisive defeat of Mitt Romney in the presidential race and the forced resignation of ex-Gen. David Petraeus as CIA director have marginalized America's neoconservatives more than at any time in the past several decades, confining them mostly to Washington think tanks and media opinion circles.

The neocons bet heavily on a Romney victory as they envisioned a return to power, like what they enjoyed under President George W. Bush when they paved the way for the U.S. invasion of Iraq and dreamed of forcing "regime change" in Iran and Syria. During the campaign, Romney largely delegated his foreign policy to a cast of neocon retreads from the Bush era.

Yet, amid the wreckage of the past week with Romney blamed for a disastrous campaign and Petraeus embarrassed by a tawdry extramarital affair the neocons now find themselves without a strong ally anywhere inside the Executive Branch. And with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who sometimes sided with them, expected to leave shortly, the neocons could be even more isolated in the weeks ahead.

This reversal of fortune has led some key neocons to send out what amount to peace feelers to the Obama administration. The Weekly Standard editor William Kristol and Washington Post columnist (and Brookings Institution senior fellow) Robert Kagan have joined in urging Republicans to show more flexibility regarding their opposition to tax hikes on the wealthy.

Kristol made his views known on weekend talk shows, declaring on Fox News: "It won't kill the country if we raise taxes a little bit on millionaires." Kagan penned an op-ed column for the Washington Post that stated: "It seems pretty obvious that a compromise will require both tax reform, including if necessary some tax increases, and entitlement reform, since those programs are the biggest driver of the fiscal crisis."

Some on the Left have cited the tax flexibility of Kristol, in particular, as an indication of Republican willingness to compromise seriously with President Obama in a second term. However, the truth is that neocons have never been economic conservatives. Instead, they have favored lavishing money on military programs and financing warfare to implement their imperial strategy of imposing political change by force. The budget has never been a high priority.

A Split on the Right

Over the past three-plus decades, the neocons have joined with cultural and economic conservatives more as a marriage of convenience than as a sign of true affection and shared values. Now, as the Religious Right and the Ayn Rand

ideologues face harder times politically, the neocons are pondering a trial separation, if not an outright divorce.

The signs of a split among conservatives may be welcome news for President Obama who has been contemplating a number of controversial foreign policy moves in the post-election environment, including reaching an accommodation with Iran over its nuclear program. Harsh economic sanctions on Iran appear to have made Iranian leaders more serious about striking a deal and Obama is expected to seek a resolution in the weeks ahead.

However, the neocons have remained hostile to any concessions toward Iran. If Mitt Romney had won the presidency, the neocons likely would have hijacked the sanctions from their stated goal of achieving Iranian concessions on nuclear issues and transformed them into an economic club to bludgeon "regime change." That could have set the stage for another Middle East war.

The significance of Petraeus's resignation as CIA director is that the ex-four-star general was one of the neocons' last insiders who could be counted on to frustrate Obama's negotiations with Iran. Last year, Petraeus complicated U.S.-Iranian ties by pushing a dubious story about Iran planning a terrorist attack in Washington.

The White House and the Justice Department doubted that Iranian leaders were implicated in the harebrained scheme to assassinate the Saudi ambassador by blowing up a Washington restaurant. But Petraeus's CIA embraced the suspicions and won over the Washington press corps, which largely swallowed the story whole.

It has since turned out that the central figure in the plot, an Iranian-American car dealer Mansour Arbabsiar, was diagnosed by doctors from his own defense team as suffering a bipolar disorder. In other words, his lawyers say he has a severe psychiatric ailment that affected his grasp of reality.

Nevertheless, the blaring news of the terror plot echoing across U.S. front pages and American TV screens strained the delicate negotiations between the Obama administration and the Iranian leadership. So, Obama's inner circle saw a silver lining in Petraeus's sudden departure: this neocon ally will not be around to sabotage talks again.

The Accommodating Obama

After winning the presidency in 2008, Obama extended an olive branch to the Republicans, the neocons and much of the Washington Establishment by retaining President George W. Bush's last Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Bush's military high command, including Petraeus who was then head of Central Command

and thus overseeing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Amid media applause for this “team of rivals,” Obama also picked Hillary Clinton as his Secretary of State. As a New York senator, Clinton had developed close ties to the neocons and generally supported their hawkish positions on Iraq and Afghanistan.

Obama’s generosity, which included a decision not to seek any accountability for war crimes committed by the Bush administration, won him little reciprocity, however. Secretary Gates and Gen. Petraeus, with the tacit support of Secretary Clinton, blocked Obama’s interest in hearing less aggressive options on Afghanistan. They essentially steered him into support of a major troop “surge.”

Behind the young President’s back, Gen. Petraeus even mounted a P.R. campaign in support of a larger and longer Afghan War. In 2009, when Obama was weighing what to do about Afghanistan, Petraeus personally arranged extraordinary access to U.S. field commanders for two of his influential neocon friends, Max Boot of the Council on Foreign Relations and Frederick Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute.

“Fears of impending disaster are hard to sustain if you actually spend some time in Afghanistan, as we did recently at the invitation of General David Petraeus, chief of U.S. Central Command,” they wrote upon their return when they penned a glowing report in about the prospects for success in Afghanistan if only President Obama sent more troops and committed the United States to stay in the war for the long haul.

In mid-2011, Gates finally left the Pentagon, with Obama replacing him with CIA Director Leon Panetta, who had emerged as a trusted Obama adviser. To fill the CIA job, Obama named Petraeus partly to prevent the ambitious general from launching a political career as a Republican, including possibly becoming the GOP’s presidential standard-bearer in 2012.

Obama’s move was risky, in that Petraeus could use his position at the CIA to leak out information to his neocon allies that could undercut Obama’s foreign policies, a possibility that appears to have come to pass in the alleged Iranian assassination plot.

So, when the White House learned that Petraeus had entangled himself in a sex scandal, there was no rush to help the CIA chief extricate himself. Rather than sweeping the scandal under the rug and letting Petraeus stay on as he apparently expected or concocting a cover story for a graceful exit, the Obama administration let the story play out in all its messy details.

Decks Cleared

Between the outcome of the election and the departure of Petraeus, President Obama now has the chance to take full control of his foreign policy. The neocons also find themselves sitting on the outside looking in more so than at any time since the 1970s when they emerged as a group of hawkish ex-Democrats and embittered ex-Leftists who defected to Ronald Reagan.

Many neocons worked on Reagan's presidential campaign in 1980 and were rewarded with prominent jobs on President Reagan's foreign policy team, the likes of Elliott Abrams, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz and Frank Gaffney. Though their influence ebbed and flowed over the 12 years of Republican rule, the neocons established themselves as a potent force in Washington policymaking.

Even after President Bill Clinton took office, the neocons retained some measure of influence in his administration and became favorites on newspaper op-ed pages and at powerful think tanks, including some that were regarded as center and center-left, such as the Council on Foreign Relations and the Brookings Institution.

The neocons reached the apex of their power under President George W. Bush when they persuaded the inexperienced Bush to respond to the 9/11 attacks by invading and occupying Iraq, which had nothing to do with al-Qaeda or 9/11.

Iraq had long been on the neocon target list as a threat to Israel. The neocons also envisioned using occupied Iraq as a base for forcing "regime change" in Iran and Syria, with the ultimate goal of allowing Israel to dictate peace terms to its near-in enemies, Lebanon's Hezbollah and Palestine's Hamas.

The neocon hubris in Iraq contributed to the geopolitical disaster there as nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers died and hundreds of billions of dollars were wasted. Finally, neocon power began to recede. By the end of his administration, Bush was resisting pressure from Vice President Dick Cheney and the neocons around him to bomb Iran.

Still, when Barack Obama won the presidency in 2008, the neocon influence remained strong enough in Official Washington that the new President left in place a number of key neocon allies, especially Gates and Petraeus, and named Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State.

Though Obama upset the neocons by completing the military withdrawal from Iraq, he accepted their plan for an expanded war in Afghanistan, and he continued much of Bush's "war on terror," albeit without the name.

Turning on Obama

Obama's concessions garnered some favorable neocon commentaries in important

news outlets, such as The Washington Post, but the neocons still rallied behind Mitt Romney's campaign to oust Obama in 2012. Romney assembled a team of Bush retreads to write his foreign policy white paper, "[An American Century](#)."

The title was an obvious homage to the neocon Project for the New American Century, which in the 1990s built the ideological framework for the disastrous Iraq War and other "regime change" strategies. Romney recruited Eliot Cohen, a founding member of the Project for the New American Century and a protégé of prominent neocons Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle, to write the foreword.

Romney's white paper chastised Obama for pulling out the 30,000 "surge troops" from Afghanistan by mid-2012 and conducting a gradual withdrawal of the remaining 70,000 by the end of 2014. Instead, Romney's white paper argued that Obama should have followed the advice of field commanders like then-Gen. David Petraeus and made withdrawals either more slowly or contingent on U.S. military success.

However, like Napoleon seeking to regain his former glory through an audacious challenge to his entrenched adversaries, the neocons encountered a Waterloo instead. Their strategic defeat began with Romney's loss to Obama on Nov. 6 but it then grew worse with the humiliating resignation of Petraeus from the CIA. Now, the neocons are left with no major foothold within the Executive Branch.

But no need for tears. The neocons still retain their lucrative niches at prominent think tanks, as talking heads on TV and on influential op-ed pages.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

'Citizens United' Still a Threat

The hundreds of millions of dollars from billionaires seeking to control the outcomes of Campaign 2012 largely failed as their preferred Republicans mostly went down to defeat. But these gushers of money remain a threat to American democracy, says Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

Forty years ago, as a young, aspiring political operative, I was a staff member

on Sen. George McGovern's presidential campaign. We thought we could beat Richard Nixon but famously lost every state in the union except Massachusetts (with the District of Columbia thrown in as a forlorn consolation prize).

To commit to the presidential campaign lifestyle endless hours and damn little charm you really have to believe, no matter what, that your candidate will win. So last week I wasn't surprised by the many stories about how the Romney team was convinced they would emerge victorious, polling evidence to the contrary, to the point where reportedly they had a fireworks display poised for ignition above Boston Harbor when the requisite electoral votes were achieved.

But what I don't understand is building a castle in the air and even in defeat trying to keep paying rent on it, almost all evidence to the contrary.

For years, the right wing has been living in its own version of Tolkien's Middle Earth in *Lord of the Rings*, an alternative and fanciful, fierce universe rarely bearing resemblance to real life but for odd, embittered moments like the one at President Obama's victory celebration in Chicago on Election Night, when Fox News' Ed Henry dourly announced, "The crowd is near pandemonium now, despite the fact that unemployment is hovering near eight percent."

Talk about a party pooper. This all has been going on since at least 2004, when an unnamed aide to George W. Bush widely thought to be Karl Rove told journalist Ron Suskind, "We create our own reality. ... We're history's actors ... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."

Last week, that so-called reality collided with one huge fact that a younger, more ethnically diverse and liberal population is increasing in size.

Resistance is futile, as they say in those science fiction movies, but as long as the conservative Right live in a media cocoon and act like sightless bats, trying to find their way with high frequency shrieking that bounces off the walls and only they can hear, you've got trouble, my friends. Even Dick Morris, that unctuous pollster and paragon of propriety, had to admit that his prediction of a Romney landscape was wrong because, "This isn't your father's America."

But then there's the money. On the McGovern campaign, I was paid the munificent sum of \$40 a week. In those days, it was considered a decent salary for political work, especially as most of us slept on other people's couches, ate free meals usually prepared by liberal faculty wives (I haven't been able to look at gazpacho since) and frankly, there never was time to spend it anyway.

So to me, the contrast with today's paychecks for top campaign staffers and consultants is especially stunning. Over the weekend, *The Washington Post*

reported, "In the presidential race alone, the two main media firms working for President Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney earned profits for handling more than half a billion dollars of campaign advertising, according to disclosures and ad tracking data. Neither company is required to report how much it received in compensation for that work, but their combined cut could easily be \$25 million or more at standard industry rates."

As for salaries, "Romney paid his top advisers more than Obama paid his, including handing out about \$500,000 in bonuses for senior staff in August and September, records show. As of Oct. 17, campaign manager Matt Rhoades had received \$292,000 in salary and bonuses, compared with \$197,000 for Obama campaign manager Jim Messina."

Not the megamillions paid to Wall Street CEO's, but nonetheless that's a lot of gazpacho.

As others have noted, Karl Rove is in deep explaining mode, rationalizing what happened to those hundreds of millions the fat cats spent bankrolling his saturation bombing of attack ads against the President and other Democrats who emerged victorious in spite of the wrath of Rove. And he's not alone.

"Never before has so much political money been spent to achieve so little," the *Post* noted. "Record spending by independent groups, which in many ways defined how campaigns were waged this year, had no discernible effect on the outcome of most races. Indeed, if election investments are like the stock market, a lot of billionaires just lost their shirts."

But as Nicholas Confessore writes in *The New York Times*, "Though the outcome of the 2012 elections dealt a blow to the wealthy donors who poured several hundred million dollars into groups seeking to defeat Mr. Obama, the president's re-election does not presage a repudiation of the deregulated campaign financing unleashed by the Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United decision. Instead, his victory most likely reinforced the practice.

"In virtually every respect, the growth of unlimited fund-raising and the move of outside groups to the mainstream of politics have magnified the already outsize role of money in political campaigns. They have changed how incumbents and challengers alike campaign and raise money, altered how voters experience politics, and expanded the influence of a small group of large donors on the policies and messages espoused by candidates."

What's more, the non-partisan, investigative journalism group, The Center for Public Integrity, notes that outside spending indeed made a "big difference in state-level races." They report, "Contests for the top executive and judicial

spots, in states whose bans on corporate outside spending were invalidated by the [Citizens United] ruling, were newly shaped by unlimited cash from out-of-state corporate and union treasuries.”

You may think that such mixed results might dampen enthusiasm for restoring campaign finance reform or even overturning Citizens United with a constitutional amendment. Think again.

On Election Day, voters in both Montana and Colorado passed by three-to-one margins orders directing legislators to support an amendment. That makes 11 states in all, according to the group Free Speech for People.org, which is about a quarter of the way toward getting the deed done if all the proper i’s and t’s were to be dotted and crossed.

The question is whether this groundswell for transparency and reform continues and builds or whether the candidates and incumbents so dependent on transfusions of campaign cash smother the effort in its crib. But like that old joke about what you call 500 politicians at the bottom of the ocean, it’s a good start.

Michael Winship, senior writing fellow at the think tank Demos, is senior writer of the weekly public affairs program, Moyers & Company, airing on public television. Check local airtimes or comment at www.BillMoyers.com.

The ‘War on Terror’ Comes to Mali

Mali, where Islamists have claimed control of the remote north, is the latest front in the so-called “global war on terrorism,” partly a spillover of conflicts in northern Africa. But should the U.S. get involved, asks the Independent Institute’s Ivan Eland.

By Ivan Eland

The United States is meddling in another internal civil war to prevent a “terrorist haven” from developing. This time it’s not in Somalia or Yemen but instead in the West African country of Mali.

The United States and France are concerned that Islamists have taken over northern Mali, and the two countries are heavily leaning on Abdelaziz Bouteflika, president of the neighboring regional power Algeria, to support an international invasion of Mali.

The American and French implication is that, if left unmolested, the Islamists

in control of this territory will create a base for international Islamist terrorist operations. They back an invasion because they believe the government of Mali is incapable of retaking its own territory.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently met with and tried to browbeat a reluctant President Bouteflika, who believes such an invasion would create more problems than it would solve. The U.S. superpower, with many carrots and sticks, can probably eventually “persuade” Bouteflika to get on board. Such a proxy invasion of Mali would fit with a recent pattern used by the United States, a nation with a domestic population, after direct interventions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which is fatigued with war.

Instead, in Libya, Yemen, and Somalia, the United States has supported proxy armies. In Libya and Yemen, the U.S. has supported indigenous forces from the air. In Somalia, it has supported a nominal government from the air and also recruited Ethiopia and Kenya to invade and fight the al-Shabab Islamist fighters. In Mali, any invasion would probably mirror that in Somalia by the recruitment of regional powers to do the dirty work.

As it did in Afghanistan and Iraq, however, the U.S. often bulls ahead without listening to those who know best, people who actually live in the particular region involved. Bouteflika’s reluctance should be a big red flag to U.S. pressure for proxy military action. Bouteflika’s country has experienced Islamist militancy firsthand, and the capture by Islamists of neighboring northern Mali should worry Algeria far more than it does the faraway United States.

But as during the Cold War, the U.S. superpower regularly worries more about regional threats to friendly countries than the countries do themselves. And as during the Cold War, the distant superpower fails to distinguish among potential adversaries. For much of the Cold War, until Richard Nixon recognized that the Chinese and Soviet Communists hated each other and that such divisions could be exploited, all Communists were regarded as alike.

Nowadays, the United States makes a similar error by regarding all Islamist radicals as fellow travelers with al-Qaeda. Yet most of the groups in Yemen, Somalia, and Mali are Islamists with mainly local concerns. Meddling in their business only creates more enemies of the U.S. Instead of dividing (and even cultivating) potential opponents, as Nixon did to U.S. advantage, indiscriminate American hostility usually drives locally oriented Islamists to support al-Qaeda.

Making further unnecessary enemies undoubtedly has entered Bouteflika’s mind and helps explain his reluctance to endorse an invasion of Mali. After all,

Bouteflika has to live in the same neighborhood with these people.

Instead of being the usual “bull in a china shop,” the U.S. should learn from Bouteflika’s lack of enthusiasm. Why create more anti-U.S. terrorists in a part of the world that is hardly strategic to U.S. vital interests? France, with Mali being somewhat close to the Mediterranean, may have some interest in what happens there, but the distant U.S. should have much less.

If, in the worst case, somehow local Islamists in Mali allow anti-U.S. terror groups to train in any of their camps established there, at much risk to their own cause, the United States could easily take out such facilities with drone attacks or airstrikes in the open desert environment. But at a time of war weariness and budget and economic crises at home, the U.S. cannot afford to keep making new and unnecessary enemies by promoting an invasion of Mali.

Ivan Eland is Director of the Center on Peace & Liberty at The Independent Institute. Dr. Eland has spent 15 years working for Congress on national security issues, including stints as an investigator for the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Principal Defense Analyst at the Congressional Budget Office. His books include Partitioning for Peace: An Exit Strategy for Iraq The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed, and Putting “Defense” Back into U.S. Defense Policy.

Brinkmanship over Iran Tensions

Like a decade ago with Iraq, the Washington press corps today is hyping every dubious incident that raises tensions with Iran, such as shots fired at an unmanned U.S. drone off Iran’s coast. Downplayed are the endless Israeli threats to bomb Iran, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

Recent reports that in 2010 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak ordered the Israeli military to increase its readiness level in anticipation of war with Iran appeared to leave some unanswered questions.

Since none of us who do not have Israeli military manuals on our shelves know exactly what level “P-plus” means, it is hard to adjudicate the reported disagreement between Israeli military chiefs, who resisted the order on grounds that it could precipitate a war, and Netanyahu and Barak, who reportedly assured

them that it would not.

A subsequent analysis by Israeli journalist Yossi Melman helps to clear matters up. Melman explains: "The truth is that Netanyahu and Barak did not order the military to plan a direct, all-out attack on Iran. Their true intention was to trigger a chain of events which would create tension and provoke Iran, and eventually could have led to a war that might drag in the United States."

The Israeli military's chief of staff, General Gabi Ashkenazi, warned Netanyahu and Barak that what they were ordering could "create uncontrollable facts on the ground" that would touch off an unwanted war. "If you open and press an accordion, the instrument starts playing music," is the way Ashkenazi put it. The understandable worry among the generals was about a 1914-style situation in which the responses and fears engendered by mobilization measures lead to a war that nobody had specifically chosen in the first place.

Netanyahu surely is smart enough to understand these dangers. The incident highlights a game he is playing; to stoke tensions with Iran sufficiently that the United States may be ensnared in a war that it does not want, but in which once war breaks out, the United States would do Israel's dirty work by inflicting more destruction on Iran than Israel could inflict on its own.

The timing of the incident underscores another purpose of Netanyahu's tension-stoking brinksmanship: to divert attention from continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and inaction on the festering Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He issued his order about the same time, in the late summer of 2010, that President Obama was making an ultimately unsuccessful attempt at getting Israeli-Palestinian peace talks restarted.

Netanyahu's efforts to precipitate an unwanted war are made all the more worrisome by an incident a couple of weeks ago off the Iranian coast in the Persian Gulf. A U.S. Predator drone was met by two Iranian SU-25 fighters that fired some shots in the vicinity of the drone but did not hit it. According to the Pentagon, at the time of the encounter the drone was 16 nautical miles off the Iranian coast, four more than the 12-mile territorial waters. An Iranian military spokesman confirmed that the incident occurred and said Iran would defend its territory.

It has not been established, and the Iranians did not explicitly say, whether the intent of the shots was to issue a warning or whether they were aimed at the drone but missed. The Pentagon sought to downplay the difference. Suffice it to note that in terms of the capabilities of the equipment the slow-flying Predator would be no match for SU-25s, even though the latter are designed primarily for ground-attack missions rather than air-to-air combat.

Any firing of live ammunition over international waters is serious business, but to understand the Iranian perspective do a little role reversal. Imagine that Iran was flying aircraft within 16 miles of the U.S. coast. Imagine the Iranians were doing this with aircraft that can be armed as well as perform reconnaissance, and that not long ago one of these aircraft came down on U.S. soil. And imagine that this was all happening amid endless talk in Iran about possibly launching an armed attack on the U.S. homeland.

The screams in Congress and elsewhere to do something about this threat are not at all hard to imagine. Given how much talk we hear about preemption, there would surely be demands to do something more forceful than just to fire warning shots, international waters or no international waters.

And yet the encounter off the Iranian coast is now being added to the litany of things cited to show that Iran supposedly is a dangerously aggressive regime that must be stopped. Such an interpretation evokes memories of another sequence of events leading to war in the past, this time not in 1914 but instead 50 years later, in 1964. Purported North Vietnamese aggressiveness against U.S. military assets in the Gulf of Tonkin was taken as a sign that the Vietnamese communists needed to be stopped.

The Gulf of Tonkin incident was the trigger for a congressional resolution authorizing what became the Vietnam War, and the rest is history. As with the recent incident over the Persian Gulf, no shots hit any American assets in the encounter in the Gulf of Tonkin, and the alleged attack that was the focus of the war resolution probably never occurred.

The difference between a 12-mile territorial limit and a flight path that is 16 miles from a coast is an awfully thin margin on which to rest the avoidance of war. To put that margin in perspective, an SU-25 flying nearly at top speed could traverse the four-mile difference in about 30 seconds. It is hard enough as it is to avoid accidentally stumbling into war under such conditions. It is harder still when the prime minister of Israel is doing what he can to help make accidents happen.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

Protests Mount over Keystone Pipeline

Environmentalists and the oil industry continue to clash over the Keystone pipeline and the plan to pump Canadian tar sands through the U.S. to the Gulf of Mexico, amid new reports on the plan's environmental harm, reports William Boardman.

By William Boardman

In Washington, D.C., the day before the 2012 election, an Occupy action by dozens of protesters blocked the entrance to McKenna Long and Aldridge, a major law firm with the oldest government contract practice in the United States. The firm also represents the Canadian corporation TransCanada, which is seeking U.S. government permission to build the Keystone XL pipeline from Alberta, Canada, to the Gulf Coast.

Organizers called this demonstration a "Tar Sands Solidarity Action," in support of the Tar Sands Blockade of the KeystoneXL pipeline now under construction in East Texas. Police arrested four people for refusing to move from in front of TransCanada's lobbyist's front door.

Increased non-violent direct action seems to be a harbinger of mounting pressure by environmentalists across the country to persuade President Barack Obama to shut down the Keystone XL pipeline altogether for the sake of the health of the planet.

The President is also under pressure from Canadian officials and the oil industry to give the \$7 billion, 1,700-mile pipeline project a green light for the sake of the health of the global economy. Industry supporters continue to claim the project "will create 20,000 shovel-ready jobs," even though TransCanada chief executive Russ Girling admitted a year ago that the number is false, about three times too high.

That same day before the Nov. 6 election, the environmental side of the argument got scientific reinforcement when a Canadian newspaper reported that government scientists had confirmed 2010 research showing that tar sands contamination was increasing in the region's precipitation and snowpack. The article went on to describe how Environment Canada, the Canadian environmental protection agency, had worked to suppress the information and prevent scientists from discussing it with reporters or even at scientific gatherings.

Suppressed Science

In 2011, Environment Canada tried to suppress its own report on widespread river pollution, by stamping it secret. After an access-to-information lawsuit that took six months, the report was released showing the Canadian government's own projections of the devastating impact of tar sands development on river systems, natural habitats, and the release of greenhouse gases. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers lobbying group said it didn't see any "new" information in the report.

The President is expected to announce his decision about the Keystone pipeline in early 2013, prompting environmental groups to mount new mass actions now. On Sunday, Nov. 18 in Washington, 350.org is organizing a march around the White House and rally at Freedom Plaza.

That same weekend in East Texas, Tar Sands Blockade is training volunteers for a non-violent action on Monday, Nov. 19, along the pipeline route. Solidarity demonstrations are planned across the country for the week of Nov. 14-20.

The day before the presidential election also marked the beginning of the seventh week of the Tar Sands Blockade's tree-sitting in trees TransCanada wants to cut down, a form of non-violent resistance in the path of pipeline construction. The blockade, which started with eight tree-sitters at one location on Sept. 24, has slowly expanded to numerous tree-sitters in a variety of locations.

While the tree-sitters and their supporters on the ground have slowed pipeline construction somewhat, the TransCanada crews have continued working up to and beyond the blockades, with occasional violent, direct confrontation. The company has hired an unknown number of private security officers, in addition to the county sheriff's officers already on the scene, and it uses helicopter surveillance.

Candidate Arrested

On Oct. 31, a TransCanada employee who showed no identification arrested a presidential candidate, Green Party nominee Dr. Jill Stein, after she had delivered a knapsack full of supplies to the tree-sitters. The video of this event shows a construction worker with a swastika on the front of his hardhat. Salon.com reported on Nov. 8 on "an actual neo-Nazi among the ranks of construction workers" and showed a picture of a man with a swastika on the back of his hardhat.

Candidate Stein explained her position in a three-minute video and in a written statement issued before her arrest with six other people, Dr. Stein wrote:

"I'm here to connect the dots between superstorm Sandy and the record heat,

drought, and fire we've seen this year and this Tar Sands pipeline, which will make all of these problems much worse.

"And I'm here to connect the dots between climate devastation and pipeline politicians both Obama and Romney who are competing, as we saw in the debates, for the role of Puppet In Chief for the fossil fuel industry. Both deserve that title. Obama's record of 'drill baby drill' has gone beyond the harm done by George Bush. Mitt Romney promises more of the same."

Stein had never been arrested before she became a presidential candidate. This misdemeanor arrest for trespassing was her second in a month. Her first arrest was for disorderly conduct, when she tried to enter the building for the second presidential debate at Hofstra College in New York. Her arrest was the 32nd arrest related to the Tar Sands Blockade.

Going After Tree Sitters

Oct. 31 was the day the Tar Sands Blockade first arrived in Nacogdoches County in East Texas, near the town of Sacul, complete with local TV coverage. The contingent of about a dozen people included two New England women, identified only as Lauren and Pika, who established a new tree-sitting position.

County sheriff's officers used cherry pickers in an effort to bring the women down. They succeeded with Lauren. But Pika, who is an experienced climber from Vermont, climbed higher in her tree, beyond the reach of the cherry picker. Police then cut down her platform and climb line, leaving her with only the rope she had on her person. While still in the tree, about 70 feet up, she wrote:

"I'm sitting in this pine tree under flood lights and the watchful eyes of cops, just thinking about all the implications of this pipeline and that the destruction I see 70 feet below me is just one tiny part. I feel grief, but I also feel strong! I don't have any food or water. I couldn't get it high enough quickly enough, so the cops cut it down. It's starting to get a little chilly. Thanks so much for all the amazing support!!"

At about 2 a.m., Pika came down and was arrested. She and Lauren were each charged with Fourth Degree (State) Felony Criminal Mischief and Class B Misdemeanor Criminal Trespass minus the Class A Misdemeanor Resisting Arrest charge. Bond was set at \$25,500. They were identified as Lauren Zygmunt, 24, of Concord, New Hampshire, and Hannah Morgan, 24, of Hartland, Vermont. When they were released, police kept Pika's shoes. Earth First News reports that, on an earlier occasion, police used similar tactics on another climber, Tre Arrow, "causing his near-fatal 40-foot fall."

In Austin, Texas, a disorganized call for Tar Sands Blockade solidarity march on Nov. 5 produced a turnout of half a dozen people or so, even though many more had responded on Facebook that they'd be there. Support rallies the preceding three weeks had drawn TV cameras and some newspaper coverage.

On Nov. 9, a Vermont Solidarity Event put on by Rising Tide Vermont and 350 Vermont held a dessert fundraiser that raised \$400 for Tar Sands Blockade.

William Boardman lives in Vermont, where he has produced political satire for public radio and served as a lay judge.
