

# Neocons Escape Accountability

Nearing the Iraq War's tenth anniversary, an overriding truth is that few of the key participants in government, media or think tanks have faced accountability commensurate with the crime. Indeed, many of these Mideast "experts" are still go-to people for advice, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

One regularly hears much talk in Washington about accountability, but also regularly sees examples of how the concept of accountability gets applied in this town in an inconsistent and warped way. There are the inevitable calls for heads to roll after any salient untoward event, and huzzahs to senior managers who do roll heads in response.

I have addressed previously what tends to be wrong about how such episodes play out. Too often there is no consideration of whether the untoward event is or is not part of some larger pattern of malfeasance or incompetence, whether those at any one level in a chain of command could reasonably be expected to prevent all such events when the action is at some other level, and whether there is any reason to expect the changes in personnel to result in any change in institutional performance.

Nor is there consideration of why those who roll heads and collect the huzzahs but who also are part of the same chain of command should be allowed to determine, in a very un-Truman-like, the-buck-didn't-get-to-me way, that accountability stops just below their own level.

The converse of this is that in some instances in which there *is* a proven pattern of error, and good reason to believe that if we trust the same people who led us into failure in the past we are likely to be led into failure again, no accountability seems to be taking place. Accountability in this instance would not necessarily mean losing a particular job; it could mean being discredited as a source of policy advice.

There is such a thing as malpractice in policy analysis. The most obvious example of lack of this type of accountability is that neocons, the people who gave us the Iraq War, still get listened to. Not only that, but they still get listened to on matters eerily reminiscent of getting us into the Iraq War.

Another example is brought to mind by the latest set of recommendations from veteran Middle East peace processor Dennis Ross. A fair reaction to this comes from Lebanese commentator Rami Khouri. Khouri observes that it is understandable

to think about how the Obama administration, with its new secretary of state, might try to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. But, he continues,

“Less understandable is why a leading American publication, the *New York Times* in its Sunday Review section, should turn for advice on this issue from former diplomat Dennis Ross. ... I say this is less understandable because Ross has almost nothing but failure to show for his 11 years of leadership on Arab-Israeli and other Middle Eastern issues in the White House and State Department, between 1993 and 2011. Only in Washington could a serial failure in Arab-Israeli diplomacy such as Ross be consulted on how to move ahead in Arab-Israeli diplomacy.”

Another type of accountability-shedding, which one sees especially on Capitol Hill but also elsewhere, is that someone who supported what turned out to be a failure disclaims responsibility on grounds of having been misinformed. This certainly has been a pattern regarding the Iraq War ever since it turned sour. Some proponents of the war have confessed to having made an error; a larger number have used the excuse of having been misinformed by the Bush administration, the intelligence community, or both about Iraqi weapons programs.

The excuse gets repeated even though very few members of Congress ever bothered to look at what the intelligence agencies were saying either about the weapons programs or about anything else concerning Iraq, and even though there would not have been a case for launching this offensive war even if everything the administration had said about the weapons had been true.

A similar way of shedding responsibility, again a favorite of members of Congress, is to immerse oneself in the political mood of the moment and to disregard how that mood represents a change from earlier moods. Here the outstanding example is the practice that gets euphemistically called enhanced interrogation techniques.

Scott Shane has an excellent description in the *New York Times* of the state of play about this issue that confronts John Brennan, and particularly about the question of how he will handle a reportedly damning report prepared by Democratic Congressional staff.

He faces Democrats who have moved strongly into the anti-torture camp, Republicans who haven't moved as much, and employees involved in the interrogation process who have seen public and political standards about this subject shift markedly between the early post-9/11 days, when they were doing some of this stuff, and now, when people want to hold someone accountable for doing that stuff.

Given past patterns, the smoothest way out of this bind may be found in the report itself, in which, according to Shane, people involved in the interrogation program are described as having given “top Bush administration officials, members of Congress, the American public and even their own colleagues, possibly including Mr. Brennan himself, a deeply distorted account of its nature and efficacy.”

Here’s a prediction: Mr. Brennan will find places at lower levels to satisfy the appetite for accountability, while further determining that both he and members of Congress had been “misinformed.”

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## Mother of the Sit-Down Strike

**From the Archive:** During the late-Nineteenth-Century struggles against America’s Robber Barons and the Ku Klux Klan, Lucy Gonzales Parsons was a brave fighter for human rights. In recognition of International Women’s Day, we are re-posting William Loren Katz’s account of her remarkable life.

By William Loren Katz (Originally published on March 6, 2012)

On March 7, 1942, fire engulfed the simple home of 89-year-old Lucy Gonzales Parsons on Chicago’s North Troy Street, and ended a life dedicated to liberating working women and men of the world from capitalism and racial oppression.

A dynamic, militant, self-educated public speaker and writer, she became the first American woman of color to carry her crusade for socialism across the country and overseas. In 1905, she was credited with the idea of striking workers sitting down at their work place rather than going outside, a concept that has resonated through time with the lunch counter sit-ins for civil rights and today’s Occupy movement.

Lucy Gonzales started life in Texas. She was of Mexican-American, African-American, and Native-American descent and born into slavery. The path she chose after emancipation led to conflict with the Ku Klux Klan, hard work, painful personal losses, and many nights in jail.

In Albert Parsons, a white man who's *Waco Spectator* fought the Klan and demanded social and political equality for African-Americans, she found a handsome, committed soul mate. The white supremacy forces in Texas considered the couple dangerous and their marriage illegal, and soon drove them from the state.

Lucy and Albert reached Chicago, where they began a family and threw themselves into two new militant movements, one to build strong industrial unions and the other to agitate for socialism. Lucy concentrated on organizing working women and Albert became a famous radical organizer and speaker, one of the few important union leaders in Chicago who was not an immigrant.

In 1886, the couple and their two children stepped onto Michigan Avenue to lead 80,000 working people in the world's first May Day parade and a demand for the eight-hour day. A new international holiday was born as more than 100,000 also marched in other U.S. cities.

By then, Chicago's wealthy industrial and banking elite had targeted Albert and other radical figures for elimination, to decapitate the growing union movement. A protest rally called by Albert a few days after May Day became known as the Haymarket Riot when seven Chicago policemen died in a bomb blast. No evidence has ever been found pointing to those who made or detonated the bomb, but Parsons and seven immigrant union leaders were arrested.

As the corporate media whipped up patriotic and law-and-order fervor, a rigged legal system rushed the eight to convictions and death sentences. When Lucy led the campaign to win a new trial, one Chicago official called her "more dangerous than a thousand rioters." When Albert and three other comrades were executed, and four others were sentenced to prison, the movement for industrial unions and the eight-hour day was beheaded.

Lucy, far from discouraged, accelerated her actions. Though she had lost Albert, and two years later lost her young daughter to illness, Lucy continued her crusade against capitalism and war, and to exonerate "the Haymarket Martyrs." She led poor women into rich neighborhoods "to confront the rich on their doorsteps," challenged politicians at public meetings, marched on picket lines, and continued to address and write political tracts for workers' groups far beyond Chicago.

Though Lucy had justified direct action against those who used violence against workers, in 1905 she suggested a very different strategy. She was one of only two women delegates (the other was Mother Jones) among the 200 men at the founding convention of the militant Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the only woman to speak.

First she advocated a measure close to her heart when she called women “the slaves of slaves” and urged IWW delegates to fight for equality and assess underpaid women lower union fees. In a longer speech, she called for the use of nonviolence that would have broad meaning for the world’s protest movements.

She told delegates that workers shouldn’t “strike and go out and starve, but to strike and remain in and take possession of the necessary property of production.”

A year later Mahatma Gandhi, speaking to fellow Indians at the Johannesburg Empire Theater, advocated nonviolence to fight colonialism, but he was still 25 years away from leading fellow Indians in nonviolent marches against India’s British rulers.

Eventually Lucy Parsons’s principle traveled to the U.S. sit-down strikers of the 1930s, Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the antiwar movements that followed, and finally to today’s Arab Spring and the Occupy movements.

Lucy was an unrelenting agitator, leading picket lines and speaking to workers’ audiences in the United States, and then before trade union meetings in England. In February 1941, poor and living on a pension for the blind, the Farm Equipment Workers Union asked Lucy Parsons to give an inspirational speech to its workers, and a few months later she rode as the guest of honor on its May Day parade float.

After the fire that took her life, federal and local lawmen arrived at the gutted Parsons home to make sure her legacy died with her. They poked through the wreckage, confiscated her vast library and personal writings, and never returned them.

Lucy Parsons’s determined effort to elevate and inspire the oppressed to take command remained alive among those who knew, heard, and loved her. But few today are aware of her insights, courage and tenacity. Despite her fertile mind, writing and oratorical skills, and striking beauty, Lucy Parsons has not found a place in school texts, social studies curricula, or Hollywood movies.

Yet she has earned a prominent place in the long fight for a better life for working people, for women, for people of color, for her country, and for her world.

**William Loren Katz adapted this essay from his updated and expanded edition of *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* [Atheneum, 2012]. Website: [williamlkatz.com](http://williamlkatz.com). This essay also appears at the Zinn Education Project: <http://zinnedproject.org/posts/16855>**

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# Nuke Sludge Leaking at Hanford

The U.S. rush to build a giant arsenal of nuclear weapons during the Cold War created an environmental disaster at Hanford in Washington State along the Columbia River. Clean-up costs are staggering and radioactive sludge threatens to contaminate the region's water supply, writes nuclear watchdog John LaForge.

By John LaForge

Federal and state officials said in February six giant underground tanks holding an explosive and toxic brew of highly radioactive liquid wastes are leaking at the 570-square-mile Hanford Reservation, on the Columbia River in South Central Washington State.

Hanford is perhaps the dirtiest reactor site in the world with 1,000 inactive dumps, 100 to 200 square miles of contaminated ground water, and 50,000 drums of plutonium wastes in temporary storage.

For 40 years, Hanford's eight production reactors made plutonium for H-bombs, and in the process its contractors dumped plutonium, cesium, technetium, tritium, strontium and other isotopes into the air, soil, ground water and, astonishingly, even directly into the Columbia River, the drinking water source for downstream cities.

Hanford has 54 million gallons of the high-level liquids and sludge in 177 aged and decrepit tanks. In the 1980s, the Department of Energy (DOE) disclosed that up to 69 of the million-gallon tanks were leaking. February's disclosure makes 75.

In 1998, the DOE said it expected all the tanks to leak eventually. Twenty years ago *Newsweek* declared that all "177 unlabeled tanks leak radioactive glop." Several million gallons have since been removed for processing.

DOE spokeswoman Lindsey Geisler said late last month there was no immediate health risk from the newly discovered leaks. This reassurance is suspect since the DOE said for decades that tank wastes would take 10,000 years to reach the ground water. It got there in less than 40.

A similar but contemporary PR twist came Feb. 22, when Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said that the state would impose a "zero-tolerance" policy on radioactive waste leaking into the soil. Looking back at Hanford's record, a "zero-

containment" policy is more likely.

## **Radioactive Iceberg**

This season's leaks, which reportedly amount to 300 gallons per year, seem barely newsworthy in view of the colossal dumping that's been done at Hanford. In the heyday of plutonium production, the Seattle Times has reported, "The DOE estimates that as many as 750,000 curies of radioactive iodine, xenon, cesium, strontium, plutonium and uranium may have been put *into the Columbia River each year* in the 1950s."

A week earlier the paper reported said, "Many of the releases involved dumping of cooling water into the Columbia River." Tim Connor of Hanford Watch in Spokane told the paper that daily releases of 430 curies noted in one 1946 report were, "the equivalent of a Three Mile Island accident every hour."

DOE officials admitted in 1991 that managers dumped *440 billion gallons* of radioactive liquids *directly into the soil*, using ditches, cribs, trenches and injection wells, and that hazardous waste had "fouled the Columbia River." A 1965 report from Hanford among 19,000 pages of documents declassified in 1986 says "a total of 6 million curies" of radioactive material were dumped directly into the Columbia. In 2000, the DOE estimated that the tanks held 190 million curies of radioactivity.

Leaving aside the billions of gallons of nuclear poisons poured directly into it, the *New York Times* reported in Oct. 1997 that, "If leaks from the tanks reach the Columbia River through ground water, radioactive material would eventually be incorporated into the food chain and could expose people to radiation *for centuries*."

And even with all these millions of curies thrown into the soil, a ground water manager at Hanford said in 2000 that the "worst" tank wastes, including technetium-99 and cobalt-60, are "probably still 20 years away" from the Columbia.

Twenty-five years since its reactors were shut down (they stopped making plutonium in 1987) leaking plutonium tank wastes are not the only way that Cold War cancers are still being dispensed from Hanford.

Wildfires burned 300 acres of the reservation in summer 2000, when Energy Secretary Bill Richardson rushed to say July 1, "There does not appear to be any contamination whatsoever." Wrong again. By Aug. 3, plutonium was found to have been lofted to 10 far-flung areas, including five Eastern Washington city neighborhoods.

Even then, Jerry Leitch, an EPA official at the time, told the *Seattle Post* that the amount of plutonium was below what's considered a threat to health. Really? A single atomic particle of plutonium if inhaled can cause lung cancer.

The estimated cost of cleanup, the most expensive anti-pollution effort in history, has steadily increased. In 1989, DOE guessed it would take \$57 billion and 50 years. By 1997 its estimate was over \$200 billion.

### **Explosive Risks**

The DOE has long worried that its waste tanks, at Hanford and at Savannah River, South Carolina, could explode due to the buildup of hydrogen gas or organic vapors. Indeed, a 1965 explosion at Hanford ruptured one tank that subsequently leaked 800,000 gallons of cooling water into the soil. Again on May 14, 1997, a tank holding plutonium processing chemicals blew up, sending its heavy steel lid and a plume of toxic gas through the roof.

Arjun Makhijani has said that an analysis by the DOE in 1978 put that chance of hydrogen explosions Savannah River's tanks at 1-in-10,000. Chances of an explosion of organic vapors were ten times higher, or 1-in-1,000. Considering the number of tanks, the chance of one of them having an explosion was one-in-50 each year.

In 1986, researcher Michael Blain at Boise State University showed that women in Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho had elevated rates of thyroid and breast cancer and said there was a high probability that "the excess cancers are attributable to the release of radioactive iodine."

Cancers, miscarriages and other health problems suffered by people in the area have been blamed on the deliberate spewing of 5,500 curies of iodine-131 to the atmosphere in a Dec. 3, 1949, experiment called "green run," and on the offhand dispersal of 340,000 curies in 1945 alone.

In 1974, Dr. Samuel Milham in Washington's state health department published his finding that men who had worked at Hanford had a 25 percent higher proportion of cancer deaths than for similarly aged men in other work.

And in 1977, the journal *Health Physics* published Alice Stewart, Thomas Mancuso and George Kneal's finding of a 6 or 7 percent increased cancer effect in Hanford workers. About this increase Dr. Stewart said, "It wasn't much of an effect but the shock was that there was any effect at all since the cancers were occurring at radiation exposure levels well below the official limit of five rads per year. It meant that the current standards for nuclear safety might be as much as 20 times too high."

In 1990, a DOE analysis of radiation exposures downwind from Hanford found that infants and children were heavily contaminated because of drinking contaminated milk. The Hanford Environmental Dose Reconstruction Project found that 13,500 people may have received doses over 33 rads of iodine-131 and that infants and children closest to Hanford could have consumed between 650 and 3,000 rads. Even a single rad can cause thyroid cancer and other illnesses.

Not to put too fine a point on it: Hanford's latest six leaks are the tip of its iceberg of radiation which is spreading to the Columbia River and beyond a plague of cancer and disease that will never come to an end.

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