

# Sandra Day O'Connor's 'Maybe' Regret

**Exclusive:** Ex-Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who normally ducks questions about overturning Al Gore's election in 2000 and putting George W. Bush in the White House, admits that "maybe" a mistake was made. But she still won't accept the magnitude of her judicial crime, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Even as an investigative reporter experienced in writing about terrible decisions that lead to horrible results, I find it galling that former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor now grudgingly concedes that "maybe" she shouldn't have joined four other Republicans to hand the White House to George W. Bush in 2000.

In an interview with the Chicago Tribune editorial board last Friday, the 83-year-old O'Connor acknowledged that "maybe the court should have said, 'We're not going to take it [Bush's appeal of a lower court ruling], goodbye.'"

Yet, perhaps even more galling, O'Connor didn't try to defend her reasoning in the decision, that the Florida State Supreme Court's mandate to count ballots that were kicked out by antiquated voting machines but still revealed how citizens intended to vote was somehow a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's requirement of equal protection under the law.

The amendment was passed after the Civil War to protect the legal rights of former African-American slaves, but in the hands of O'Connor and four other Republicans it was turned inside-out, used to disenfranchise blacks and other Floridians living in poorer districts lacking the newer voting machines of whiter and richer communities.

O'Connor, who for more than a dozen years has resisted discussing the 2000 decision that overturned the will of the American voters, suggested in her comments to the Tribune that the court's legal reasoning was only a facade anyway. She noted that the disputed election had "stirred up the public" and "obviously the court did reach a decision and thought it had to reach a decision."

She added, "It turned out the election authorities in Florida hadn't done a real good job there and kind of messed it up. And probably the Supreme Court added to the problem at the end of the day."

O'Connor lamented, too, that the ruling "gave the court a less-than-perfect reputation." Of course, more significantly, it gave the United States "a less-

than-perfect" leader who proceeded to blunder the nation into a series of catastrophes that cost the lives of hundreds of thousands, threw the global economy into a depression, and left the U.S. government deeply in debt.

Though the mainstream press typically treats O'Connor with kid gloves, the hard truth is that she bears a great deal of responsibility for all that human suffering because she was the pivotal vote that overturned the collective judgment of the American people who had favored Vice President Al Gore both nationally and in Florida.

Not only did Al Gore win the national popular vote in Election 2000 but if all ballots legal under Florida law had been counted, he would have prevailed in that swing state, too, and thus become the 43<sup>rd</sup> U.S. President. However, instead of giving Florida canvassing boards the chance to tally the ballots, O'Connor and four other Republicans simply stopped the count.

In siding with Bush, the U.S. Supreme Court also rewarded the Bush campaign for all the obstructions it had placed in the way of a full-and-fair vote count, including flying in rioters from Washington to disrupt the work of the Miami canvassing board. [For details on the election battle, see [Neck Deep](#).]

### **Stopping the Recount**

Finally, the Florida Supreme Court ordered a state-wide recount to determine if legally cast ballots had been missed. In response, Bush's team of lawyers rushed into federal court seeking to stall the recount until after Dec. 12, 2000, when Bush's 537-vote victory, as certified by Republican Secretary of State Katherine Harris, was scheduled to become official and render any recount meaningless.

In demanding the stay, Bush's lawyers argued that the vote counting was a threat to "the integrity of the electoral process" and could cause Bush "irreparable injury." But there would have been nothing irreparable about conducting the recount and then, if the U.S. Supreme Court agreed with Bush, to throw out the newly discovered votes.

On the other hand, there would be irreparable harm to Gore's campaign if an injunction blocked the counting of the votes and the Dec. 12 deadline preserved Bush's margin which by then had shrunk to 154 votes. When Bush's legal arguments were presented to the conservative-dominated U.S. Court of Appeals in Atlanta, the case was promptly rejected. But Bush's lawyers then hastened to a friendlier venue, the U.S. Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, in Florida, the state-court-ordered recount was underway. County by county, election canvassing boards were moving smoothly through the machine-rejected ballots, discovering hundreds that clearly had registered choices for

presidential candidates. Gore gained some and Bush gained some.

When there was a dispute, the ballots were set aside for later presentation to Leon County Circuit Judge Terry Lewis, who had been named by the Florida Supreme Court to oversee the process and was given wide leeway to make judgments about which ballots should be counted.

“The Circuit Court is directed to enter such orders as are necessary to add any legal votes to the total statewide certifications and to enter any orders necessary,” the Florida Supreme Court ruling stated. “In tabulating the ballots and in making a determination of what is a ‘legal’ vote, the standard to be employed is that established by the Legislature in our election code which is that the vote shall be counted as a ‘legal’ vote if there is ‘clear indication of the intent of the voter.’”

As the recount proceeded, the chairman of the Charlotte County canvassing board posed a question to Judge Lewis: what should be done with ballots in which a voter both punched the name of a presidential candidate and wrote the name in? These so-called “over-votes” containing two entries for President although for the same candidate had been kicked out of the counting machines, too, along with the “under-votes,” those where the machine couldn’t discern a vote for President.

The Florida Supreme Court ruling had only specified tallying the under-votes, but the ruling also had instructed Judge Lewis to count every vote where there was a “clear indication of the intent of the voter.” The over-votes demonstrated even more clearly than the under-votes who the voter wanted.

So Lewis sent a memo to the state canvassing boards, instructing them to collect these over-votes and send them along with under-votes still in dispute. “If you would segregate ‘over-votes’ as you describe and indicate in your final report how many where you determined the clear intent of the voter,” Judge Lewis wrote, “I will rule on the issue for all counties.”

Lewis’s memo a copy of which was later obtained by *Newsweek* magazine might not have seemed very significant at the time, but it would grow in importance because the over-votes were discovered to heavily favor Gore.

If they were counted as they almost surely would have been under Lewis’s instructions Gore would have carried Florida regardless of what standard was applied to the “chads,” the tiny pieces of paper that were not completely dislodged from the punch-through ballots that were then kicked out by the counting machines.

After the Lewis memo surfaced almost a year later, the *Orlando Sentinel* of

Florida was virtually alone in asking the judge what he would have done with the over-votes if the Florida recount had been permitted to go forward. Lewis said that while he had not fully made up his mind about counting the over-votes in December 2000, he added: "I'd be open to that."

In effect, Lewis's instructions had signaled an obvious decision to count the over-votes because once the votes that were legal under Florida law had been identified and collected there would be no legal or logical reason to throw them out, especially since some counties had already included over-votes in their counts.

### **A Heart-Stopping Decision**

But only hours after Lewis issued his instructions, five Republicans on the U.S. Supreme Court did something unprecedented. The narrow court majority ordered a halt in the counting of ballots cast by citizens for the election of the President of the United States.

It was a heart-stopping moment in the history of a democratic Republic. It carried the unmistakable odor of a new order imposing itself in defiance of the popular will. There were no tanks in the streets, but the court's ruling was as raw an imposition of political power as the United States had seen in modern times.

In the 5-4 decision, the highest court in the land told vote-counters across Florida to stop the recount out of fear that it would show that Gore got more votes in Florida than Bush did. Such an outcome would "cast a cloud" over the "legitimacy" of an eventual Bush presidency if the U.S. Supreme Court later decided to throw out the Gore gains as illegal, explained Justice Antonin Scalia in an opinion speaking for the majority, which included Justices William Rehnquist, Anthony Kennedy, Clarence Thomas and O'Connor.

"Count first, and rule upon the legality afterwards, is not a recipe for producing election results that have the public acceptance democratic stability requires," wrote Scalia, an appointee of President Ronald Reagan. In other words, it was better for the U.S. public not to know for sure that Gore got the most votes if as expected the Supreme Court later decided simply to award the presidency to Bush.

In a sharply worded dissent, Justice John Paul Stevens took Scalia's reasoning to task. Stevens, a moderate who was appointed by Republican President Gerald Ford, said the injunction against the vote tally violated the traditions of "judicial restraint that have guided the Court throughout its history." Stevens complained that the high court's action overrode the judgment of a state supreme

court, took sides on a constitutional question before that issue was argued to the justices, and misinterpreted the principles of “irreparable harm.”

“Counting every legally cast vote cannot constitute irreparable harm,” Stevens argued. “On the other hand, there is a danger that a stay may cause irreparable harm to the respondents [the Gore side] and, more importantly, the public at large” because the stay could prevent a full tally of the votes before the impending deadline of Dec. 12 for selecting Florida’s electors.

As for the “legitimacy” issue, Stevens answered Scalia’s rhetoric directly. “Preventing the recount from being completed will inevitably cast a cloud on the legitimacy of the election,” Stevens wrote.

### **Dangerous Journey**

Immediately after the U.S. Supreme Court’s unprecedented injunction, I wrote at Consortiumnews.com that if the high court insisted “on stopping the vote count and handing the presidency to George W. Bush, the United States will have embarked upon a dangerous political journey whose end could affect the future of all mankind.

“For American political institutions to ignore the will of the voters and to wrap partisanship in the judicial robes of the nation’s highest court will almost certainly be followed by greater erosion of political freedom in the United States and eventually elsewhere.

“Illegitimacy and repression are two of history’s most common bedfellows. Perhaps most chilling, at least for the moment, is the now-unavoidable recognition that the U.S. Supreme Court, the country’s final arbiter of justice, has transformed itself into the right wing’s ultimate political weapon. A dark cloud is descending over the nation.”

Three days later, the other shoe from the U.S. Supreme Court was expected to drop. There should have been no real doubt how O’Connor and the other four would rule they clearly had decided that George W. Bush should be President but it was less certain what legal reasoning they would employ.

The mainstream press regarded O’Connor as a sort of “wise woman” beyond the taint of partisanship, but she had a personal as well as political reason for putting Bush in the White House. With her husband ailing from Alzheimer’s disease, O’Connor was contemplating retiring and wanted a Republican appointed as her successor.

Consortiumnews.com political reporter Mollie Dickenson reported that “one of the court’s supposed ‘swing votes,’ Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, is firmly on board

for George W. Bush's victory. According to a knowledgeable source, O'Connor was visibly upset indeed furious when the networks called Florida for Vice President Al Gore on Election Night. 'This is terrible,' she said, giving the impression that she desperately wanted Bush to win."

But one optimist who thought that O'Connor would demand a ruling respectful of democratic principles was Al Gore. Dickenson reported that as late as 4 p.m. on Dec. 12, Gore was making campaign thank-you calls, including one to Sarah Brady, the gun-control advocate whose husband James Brady had been wounded in the 1981 assassination attempt against President Ronald Reagan.

"We're going to win this thing, Sarah," Gore said. "I just have all the faith in the world that Sandra Day O'Connor is going to be with us on this one."

### **An Acrobatic Ruling**

As it turned out, Gore's confidence in O'Connor was misplaced. As the clock ticked toward a midnight deadline for Florida to complete any recount, O'Connor was working with Justice Kennedy to fashion a ruling that would sound principled but still would prevent a full recount and thus guarantee both George W. Bush's inauguration and Republican control over the appointment of future federal judges.

Yet, behind the closed doors of the court chambers, O'Connor and the other four pro-Bush justices were having a harder time than expected coming up with even a marginally plausible legal case. Indeed, outside public view, the five justices tentatively decided on one set of arguments on Dec. 11 but then reversed their thinking nearly 180 degrees heading into the evening of Dec. 12.

*USA Today* disclosed the inside story in a later article that focused on the stress that the *Bush v. Gore* ruling had caused within the court. While sympathetic to the pro-Bush majority, the article by reporter Joan Biskupic explained the court's flip-flop in legal reasoning.

The five justices had been planning to rule for Bush after oral arguments on Dec. 11. The court even sent out for Chinese food for the clerks, so the work could be completed that night, but events took a different turn.

The Dec. 11 legal rationale for stopping the recount was to have been that the Florida Supreme Court had made "new law" when it referenced the state constitution in an initial recount decision rather than simply interpreting state statutes. Even though this pro-Bush argument was highly technical, the rationale at least conformed with conservative principles, supposedly hostile to "judicial activism."

But the Florida Supreme Court threw a wrench into the plan. On the evening of Dec. 11, the state court submitted a revised ruling that deleted the passing reference to the state constitution. The revised state ruling based its reasoning entirely on state statutes that permitted recounts in close elections.

The revision drew little attention from the national press, but it created a crisis within the U.S. Supreme Court's majority. Justices O'Connor and Kennedy no longer felt they could agree with the "new law" rationale for striking down the recount, though Rehnquist, Scalia and Thomas still were prepared to use that argument despite the altered reasoning from the state court.

Searching for a new rationale, O'Connor and Kennedy veered off in a different direction. Through the day of Dec. 12, the pair worked on an opinion arguing that the Florida Supreme Court had failed to set consistent standards for the recount and that the disparate county-by-county standards constituted a violation of the "equal protection" rules of the Fourteenth Amendment. But this argument was so thin and so tendentious that Kennedy reportedly had trouble committing it to writing with good reason.

To anyone who had followed the Florida election, it was clear that varied standards already had been applied throughout the state. Wealthier precincts had benefited from optical voting machines that were simple to use and eliminated nearly all errors, while poorer precincts where many African-Americans and retired Jews lived were stuck with outmoded punch-card systems with far higher error rates. Some Republican counties also had conducted manual recounts on their own and those totals were part of the tallies giving Bush a tiny lead.

The suspended statewide recount, even if there were slight variations of standards regarding "intent of the voters," was designed to reduce these disparities and thus bring the results closer to equality.

Applying the "equal protection" provision, as planned by O'Connor and Kennedy, turned the Fourteenth Amendment on its head, guaranteeing less equality than would occur if the recount went forward. Plus, the losers in this perverse application of the Fourteenth Amendment would include African-Americans whose legal rights the amendment had been created to protect.

Further, if one were to follow the O'Connor-Kennedy position to its logical conclusion, the only fair outcome would have been to throw out Florida's presidential election in total. After all, Florida's disparate standards were being judged unconstitutional, and without some form of recount to eliminate those disparities, the entire statewide results would violate the Fourteenth Amendment.

That, however, would have left Al Gore with a majority of the remaining electoral votes nationwide. Clearly, the five pro-Bush justices had no intention of letting their “logic” lead to that result.

### **A Catch-22**

Beyond the stretched logic of O’Connor-Kennedy was the readiness of Rehnquist, Scalia and Thomas to sign on to the revamped opinion that was almost completely at odds with their own legal rationale for blocking the recount in the first place. On the night of Dec. 11, that trio was ready to bar the recount because the Florida Supreme Court had created “new law.” A day later, they agreed to bar the recount because the Florida Supreme Court had *not* created “new law,” the establishment of precise statewide recount standards.

The pro-Bush justices had devised a Catch-22. If the Florida Supreme Court set clearer standards, they would be struck down as creating “new law.” Yet, if the state court didn’t set clearer standards, that would be struck down as violating the “equal protection” principle. Heads Bush wins; tails Gore loses.

Never before in American history had U.S. Supreme Court justices exploited their extraordinary powers as brazenly to advance such clearly partisan interests as did these five justices.

The *Bush v. Gore* decision was finally released at 10 p.m., Dec. 12, just two hours before the deadline for completing the recount. After having delayed any remedy up to the deadline, the five pro-Bush justices then demanded that any revised plan and recount be finished in 120 minutes, a patently impossible task.

In a dissenting opinion, Justice Stevens said the majority’s action in blocking the Florida recount “can only lend credence to the most cynical appraisal of the work of judges throughout the land.”

Justices Stephen Breyer and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, appointees of President Bill Clinton, said in another dissent, “Although we may never know with complete certainty the identity of the winner of this year’s presidential election, the identity of the loser is perfectly clear. It is the nation’s confidence in the judge as an impartial guardian of the rule of law.”

Tacitly recognizing the nonsensical nature of its own ruling, the majority barred the *Bush v. Gore* decision from ever being cited as a precedent in any other case. It was a one-time deal to put Bush in the White House.

The next day, Al Gore whose final national plurality by then had grown to about 540,000 votes, more than the winning margins for Kennedy in 1960 or Nixon in 1968 conceded Election 2000 to George W. Bush.



After Gore's concession, Justice Thomas told a group of high school students that partisan considerations played a "zero" part in the court's decisions. Later, asked whether Thomas's assessment was accurate, Rehnquist answered, "Absolutely."

### **Shielding Bush**

Once those five Republican justices handed the White House to their fellow Republican the poorly qualified Bush other representatives of the Establishment stepped in to shield Bush's fragile "legitimacy." Major U.S. news outlets did their part to conceal the reality of the electoral fraud. Especially after the 9/11 attacks, senior editors closed ranks around the bumbling Bush and even misreported the findings of their own recount of the disputed Florida ballots.

When the news outlets finally got around to publishing their findings in November 2001, they intentionally buried the lede, i.e. that the wrong guy was in the White House. Instead, they focused on two hypothetical partial recounts that would have still left Bush with a tiny plurality. Yet, the only tally that should have mattered was the will of the Florida voters as reflected in the ballots considered legal under state law.

So, not only was history altered by the unjustified intervention of O'Connor and her four collaborators, but history was then willfully miswritten by the New York Times, the Washington Post, CNN and other news heavyweights. "Study of Disputed Florida Ballots Finds Justices Did Not Cast the Deciding Vote," the New York Times declared. "Florida Recounts Would Have Favored Bush" exclaimed the Washington Post.

The Post's Page One article was followed by a sidebar from media critic Howard Kurtz, who took the Bush-victory spin one cycle further, with a story headlined, "George W. Bush, Now More Than Ever." Kurtz ridiculed as "conspiracy theorists" those who had expected to learn that Gore had actually won.

"The conspiracy theorists have been out in force, convinced that the media were covering up the Florida election results to protect President Bush," Kurtz wrote. "That gets put to rest today, with the finding by eight news organizations that Bush would have beaten Gore under both of the recount plans being considered at the time."

Kurtz also mocked those who believed that winning an election fairly, based on the will of the voters, was all that important in a democracy. "Now the question is: How many people still care about the election deadlock that last fall felt like the story of the century and now faintly echoes like some distant Civil War battle?" he wrote.

But, Kurtz's sarcasm aside, a close reading of the actual findings buried by the big newspapers on inside pages or included as part of a statistical chart revealed that the Page One stories were misleading, if not outright false. The reality was that Al Gore actually had been the choice of Florida's voters if all legally cast votes were counted. By any chad measure hanging, dimpled or fully punched through Gore would have won Florida and thus the White House.

Gore won even if one ignored the 15,000 to 25,000 votes that *USA Today* estimated Gore lost because of illegally designed "butterfly ballots," or the hundreds of predominantly African-American voters who were falsely identified by the state as felons and turned away from the polls. Gore won even if there were no adjustment for Bush's windfall of about 290 votes from improperly counted military absentee ballots where lax standards were applied to Republican counties and strict standards to Democratic ones.

Put differently, George W. Bush was not the choice of Florida's voters anymore than he had been the choice of the American people who cast a half million more ballots for Gore than Bush nationwide. Yet, possibly for reasons of patriotism or out of fear of criticism if they had written "Gore Won" leads, the news organizations that financed the Florida ballot study structured their stories on the ballot review to indicate that Bush was the legitimate winner.

In effect, the elite media's judgment was "Bush won, get over it." Only "Gore partisans" as both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* called critics of the official Florida election tallies would insist on looking at the fine print.

### **Seeing the Numbers**

While "Bush Won" was the short-hand theme of nearly all the news stories on Nov. 12, 2001, it was still a bit jarring to go beyond the Page One articles or CNN's headlines and read the actual results of the statewide review of 175,010 disputed ballots. "Full Review Favors Gore," the *Washington Post* stated in a box on Page 10, showing that under all standards applied to the ballots, Gore came out on top. The *New York Times*' graphic revealed the same outcome.

Counting fully punched chads and limited marks on optical ballots, Gore won by 115 votes. With any dimple or optical mark, Gore won by 107 votes. With one corner of a chad detached or any optical mark, Gore won by 60 votes. Applying the standards set by each county, Gore won by 171 votes.

Beyond getting the story wrong, the major U.S. newspapers acted as if it was their duty to convince the American people that Bush really was elected legitimately. Within one or two hours of posting a story at Consortiumnews.com challenging the big media's version of the recount, I received an irate phone

call from New York Times media writer Felicity Barringer.

In an “interview” which was more like a cross-examination, Barringer argued that my story had unfairly impugned the journalistic integrity of then-Times executive editor Howell Raines. Barringer seemed to have been on the lookout for any deviant point of view that questioned the “Bush Won” conventional wisdom.

Now, more than a decade later, after the calamity of George W. Bush’s presidency should be apparent to any thinking human being, the “swing vote” on the U.S. Supreme Court the supposedly fair-minded justice whom Gore had expected to stand up for the democratic process admits that “maybe” a mistake was made.

**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](#)).**

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## Ray McGovern on Consortiumnews

Ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern has been crisscrossing the United States, with an occasional detour to Europe, speaking to groups concerned about U.S. foreign policy, but he took time to send in this letter urging readers to help Consortiumnews [meet its spring fundraising goal](#).

Ray McGovern’s Letter to Editor Robert Parry

When I’m on the road talking with university students, faith groups and just plain Outside-the-Beltway Americans, it strikes me what a unique institution Consortiumnews has become over the past 18 years. It operates inside the Washington Beltway but it has avoided being co-opted by Washington’s facile conventional wisdom.

The Web site has shown me (and not only me) what gutsy professional journalism looks like. To say that Consortiumnews distinguishes itself in comparison to the ever-diminishing “mainstream media” might be construed as damning with faint praise, but what a difference!

I’ve learned a lot about real aggressive journalism and how its high standards of proof differ even from the “current intelligence” analysis/reporting on which I cut my teeth beginning 50 years ago.

And I don’t just mean the rigors of sourcing and the relentless search for

confirmation. I mean the other kinds of stuff Consortiumnews does like your own enterprise in finding explosive material in boxes stacked up in places like an abandoned ladies room off the parking garage of the Rayburn House Office Building.

During my almost three-decade CIA-analyst incarnation it was different. Among other things, I did not have to dig and dig. Copious source material on my area (initially Soviet foreign policy) was dropped into my wooden in-box six or more times a day by a courier from our Operations Center pushing a shopping cart. Except for the required schmoozing with an occasional academic, diplomat or military type, I could have sat quite comfortably on my derriere all day to just read and write.

Your recent reminder of how Washington keeps dissing Russian intelligence when it tries to cooperate with the U.S. was helpful not to mention other recent scoops from more normal (but often neglected) places like the presidential libraries of George H. W. Bush, Ronald Reagan, and Lyndon Johnson.

Those articles have changed how we understand modern history, revealing, for instance, how George H.W. Bush's White House orchestrated the Iran-Contra cover-up; how Reagan gave a green light to genocide in Guatemala; and how Johnson sat on evidence of Richard Nixon's Vietnam War "treason."

On a more personal note, as you know I worked (often at close remove) for George H. W. Bush when he was CIA director, and then briefed him every other morning during his first four years as Vice President. And Bobby Gates worked for me for two years in the early Seventies, when I was chief of the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch. I thought I knew them both well; Gates I saw as corrupt from the get-go (and said so in his "efficiency report"); Bush well I just didn't know much beneath his respectful mien, his clear interest in our reporting, and his great sense of humor.

What I could never figure out was why Bush expended so much political capital in 1991 twisting senatorial arms to get Gates confirmed as CIA director – **despite** Gates's involvement in Iran-Contra. That the reason was **because** of his deep complicity in Iran-Contra, I'm ashamed to admit, never occurred to me.

Having read your stuff, now I know. Gates knew where most, if not all, of the bodies were buried, so to speak, on Iran-Contra. He also knew how deeply Bush himself was involved. And so, in Bush's eyes, Gates was desperately needed to fill the optimal position from which to cover it all up. Which he did.

Without Consortiumnews, the American people also wouldn't know about LBJ's national security adviser Walt Rostow's curious instruction "don't open this

envelope for 50 years” to conceal papers showing how Nixon persuaded the South Vietnamese, right before the 1968 election, to spurn peace talks that could have ended the Vietnam War and avoided four more years of bloodshed.

The mainstream news media never wants to explicitly acknowledge these well-documented scoops after all, how embarrassing would that be! but I have noticed that some of these realities still manage to seep into an expanded (and corrected) narrative of American history.

Last week, the “Citizens Response” in Dallas to the George W. Bush “Lie-Bury” asked me to keynote the first speech (by Kathy Kelly) while introducing her via Skype. I shuddered at the thought. Why? Because one thing has become abundantly clear over the last decade; i. e., available time is ALWAYS a problem when one is asked to list the lies of Bush junior and I would have all of 15 minutes.

Your article examining Bush’s long string of bad and dishonest judgments made my task much simpler. I know that many of my friends assembled in Dallas to protest Bush’s celebration regularly read Consortiumnews and the many other Web sites that pick up and re-run our stuff.

So I rested easy in the assumption that many had already read your no-holds-barred commentary: “Let me take a crack at what I would have done if I were in Bush’s shoes or what I think he should have done.” By laying that all out, you spared me from having to devote any of my precious 15 minutes to it.

Consortiumnews is also distinctive, inasmuch as it publishes not only rigorous investigative journalism but also the thoughtful analyses of former intelligence analyst colleagues with whom I was proud to have served – the work of top-tier analysts like Mel Goodman, Paul R. Pillar and Elizabeth Murray as well as the incisive (and often brutally candid) commentaries of religious scholars, like Dan Maguire, Paul Surlis and Howard Bess.

And, though I’ll be writing mostly just speeches over the next few weeks, as I visit other parts of the country “on tour,” I look forward to contributing more of my own articles, too.

Earlier this month, I celebrated the 50th anniversary of my start as a CIA analyst. Out of that perspective, I have to say that at no time have things been so, well, “interesting,” and crucial. Once again our fellow citizens are being misled malnourished as they are on the thin gruel of the Fawning Corporate Media. It is in such times, especially, that I consider it a privilege to write for, as well as learn from, Consortiumnews.

Will the United States stumble into another war (or two) as we approach the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of World War I a war virtually no one wanted? Check out

the parallels between today and historian Christopher Clark's depiction of 1913 in his best-selling book: *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*.

There are challenging days ahead and a solid foundation of reliable information from Consortiumnews will remain a must.

Ray McGovern

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## Forever Pounding the War Drum

Official Washington's "tough-guy-ism" eschewing diplomacy in favor of military force has slammed the United States into a series of foreign-policy disasters, such as the Iraq War. But key promoters keep denouncing anyone favoring less aggression as an "isolationist," as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

Former Senators Joseph Lieberman and Jon Kyl, identified as co-chairs of the American Internationalism Project at the American Enterprise Institute, [offered the other day a statement](#) of what they mean by American internationalism. Their piece exhorts us to resist "calls from Democrats and Republicans alike for neo-isolationist policies" and instead to "accept both the burdens and the benefits of a robust internationalism."

The image of bipartisanship is clearly important to the Republican Kyl and the Democrat-cum-independent Lieberman, the latter of whom when still in the Senate was one of the Three Amigos along with John McCain and Lindsey Graham.

The rhetoric of Lieberman and Kyl about not withdrawing from the world sounds

fine as far as it goes, but it does not go very far. Their one-dimensional treatment of their subject, in which everything gets reduced to a simple but grand choice of the United States playing or not playing a major role in world affairs, is divorced from the real policy choices the nation confronts and from any distinction among the varied policy tools available to it.

A ghost from the past about which they warn, the isolationism that constituted a significant and influential current of opinion in the United States between the two world wars of the Twentieth Century, is today less of a ghost than a straw man.

It would mean favoring severe cutbacks in military capability such as those that occurred after World War I *and* a withdrawal from global diplomacy reminiscent of staying out of the League of Nations *and* autarkic economic policies reminiscent of the Smoot-Hawley tariff. Whoever may represent this combination of views today is, for better or worse, on the fringe.

Maybe the compression required to fit thoughts into an op-ed is a factor, but to argue in a single breath, as Lieberman and Kyl do, against both “diplomatic retrenchment” and “military budget cuts” is to seem oblivious to the main lines of contention in policy debates on hot topics of the day such as Syria, Iran and much else.

Some of the most prominent divisions of opinion pit those who would emphasize the diplomatic tool against those who would rely on the military one. Neither side is isolationist; the issue is one of what is the best way to be an internationalist.

Lieberman and Kyl do not get into such current policy choices. One is left to wonder whether when they argue against diplomatic retrenchment and in favor of “a robust international economic and political presence” they would favor, say, the sort of U.S. diplomatic and political effort required to achieve a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement and creation of a Palestinian state. One would have reason to doubt that they do. Or how about vigorous U.S.-led diplomacy aimed at a political resolution of the Syrian civil war? There is also reason to doubt they would favor that.

Their simplified version of internationalism that conflates multiple dimensions and foreign policy instruments into one leads to what can only be described as bad analysis. To talk reproachfully about the “slashing” of defense spending after the Soviet Union collapsed before the September 11th attacks “reminded us of the risks of assuming that peace will always prevail” suggests that a Cold War superpower and a terrorist group should be met by the same level and type of military capabilities.

They make a similar mistake in criticizing “proposed cuts in aid and military strength” and having a “small footprint” in the world as negatively affecting “our ability to deter the threats posed by Iran, North Korea, Syria, a more assertive China, al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations and individuals.” With some of those adversaries a large footprint has been more of a provocation than a deterrent and, in the case of al-Qaeda, has even been a goal of the adversary.

This sort of talk from Lieberman and Kyl is, at a minimum, unhelpful to public understanding of real choices and real foreign policy problems. But they may have a further agenda, in which their talk is not just sloppy and oversimplified analysis but serves a more specific purpose for them.

The purpose might be gleaned from some of the positions earlier taken by the former senators and by the Three Amigos, who seem never to have met a war they didn’t like. If their principal purpose is to push for more rather than less military spending and more rather than less use of the U.S. military, it is useful to argue that opponents of their positions are “isolationists” bent on repeating mistakes of the past.

The argument obscures the fact that many of those opponents have at least as robust an internationalist perspective as Lieberman and Kyl do, even though they have different ideas about where and how to use different foreign policy tools.

We need to be wary not so much of a new isolationism as we do of arguments that use the label isolationism to confuse and obscure.

**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.)**

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## The Boston Marathon Over-Reaction

The intense response to the Boston Marathon bombings including a government shutdown of metropolitan Boston and hysterical national news coverage sent troubling messages, both on civil liberties and the U.S. susceptibility to terrorist-inspired disruptions, says Independent Institute’s Ivan Eland.

By Ivan Eland



The bomb attack on innocent civilians and subsequent shooting of two law enforcement officials was a reprehensible act of terrorism, but the saturation media coverage and resulting societal frenzy is unwarranted and actually harmful. Apparently, the lone surviving terrorist, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, told the FBI, before receiving notice of his Miranda rights, that he and his brother had acted alone and that no other plots were afoot.

That this was a "lone wolf" (in this case wolves) attack that had little outside support from a major terrorist group had become likely long before the younger Tsarnaev admitted it. The first clue was the crude nature of the bombs, which were pipe bombs or used mere gunpowder combined with pressure cookers and simple timers. The bombers may have learned how to build them from looking at jihadist websites on the Internet.

Second, the hapless terrorists had no escape plan from the marathon and apparently stayed around to watch the carnage, oblivious to the plethora of security and media cameras focused on the finish line. In the ensuing days, the bombers not only stayed around the Boston area, but instead of laying low, went after the police. Finally, the amateur terrorists carjacked a vehicle, apparently told the owner of their future plans of causing mayhem in New York City and after the owner escaped were tracked by police from the GPS in a cell phone.

Although law enforcement authorities don't like to admit it, because it undermines their effort to hype the terrorist threat to get more money and personnel "lone wolf" terrorists pose a much lesser threat than highly trained organized terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. Yes, even morons can kill four people, and we are probably lucky it wasn't more, but effective mass casualty attacks, such as those on 9/11, require more training, skill, support, and, well, luck to pull off.

That is why the sensational media coverage of the incident in Boston was unwarranted. The accidental explosion at a fertilizer plant in Texas occurring at roughly the same time killed more people and yet was a back-page story. To pay attention, the American media and public apparently need a diabolical villain on U.S. soil.

Also on the back pages at the same time were 185 Nigerians killed in an incident involving the organized Islamist terrorist group, Boko Haram, and the uncovering of an organized al-Qaeda plot to derail a train in Canada. These more serious incidents were underreported because the U.S. media, reflecting Americans' demand for news, realize that they don't care much if there are no U.S. casualties (the same is true in foreign wars, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where the American public and media insist on meticulous counting of and showing

photos of American war dead but don't pressure the U.S. military to account for the much more numerous indigenous casualties).

The overwrought, around-the-clock media coverage (or the potential for it) of events such as the Boston Marathon bombing leads local, state and federal officials to overreact in their response. The authorities completely shut down the city of Boston and some suburbs, requiring people to stay inside. However, during similar "lone wolf" sniper attacks in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. in 2002, authorities made no effort to close down those suburbs or the city.

One might say that no bomb attacks occurred in Washington, whereas they did in Boston, but authorities in the Washington area didn't know that the snipers, at least one with readily apparent military training, didn't have that up their sleeves too. Also, during the 9/11 attacks, by an order of magnitude, the most serious and lethal terrorist attack by a small group in history, killing almost 3,000 people, Washington and New York weren't shut down and people weren't confined to what amounts to house arrest.

In fact, this author was walking around the ghost town of downtown Washington doing media interviews putting the attacks in perspective, as smoke rose from the Pentagon. One wonders how many people died in the Boston area because they felt discouraged from going outside to hospitals to treat what turned out to be life threatening medical problems of natural causes, probably many more than the five killed in the bombings and subsequent shootings (counting one of the suspects, Tamerlan Tsarnaev).

Requiring all people to stay in their homes when their chances of getting killed by a terrorist are still remote not only could threaten their well-being or their lives but also threatens their liberties and is exactly what the terrorists want.

Thomas Menino, the mayor of Boston, admitted that a goal of the marathon bombers, as with most terrorists, was disruption. Thus, closing the city helped the terrorists achieve one of their goals. The intense media coverage helps them achieve another, getting publicity. Such excess publicity often leads to copycat terrorists, who seek the limelight, and shows more dangerous, organized terror groups that American society is vulnerable to disruption.

In such crises, the media and public often take their cues from government officials. Hying the threat from feckless terrorists and draconian responses, such as a lockdown of a major metropolitan area, by officials lead to hysterical responses on the part of the media and public.

Yet officials, usually looking to show they are doing something decisive about

the problem and to gain more authority and resources, have few incentives to put the threat in perspective and take measured responses that minimize restriction of civil liberties. After all, the average American has about the same chance of being killed by a terrorist as being killed by an asteroid hitting the earth (and less of a chance than being killed by lightning). In Boston, perhaps the odds were slightly greater, but not by much.

**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.**

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## Obama Drifts Toward Syrian War

**Exclusive:** Black flags of Islamic extremism are flying over “liberated” zones in Syria as hard-line fundamentalists take control of the uprising. Yet, Official Washington continues to demand the overthrow of the secular Assad regime, rather than consider a power-sharing compromise, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

For several years now, President Barack Obama has resisted demands from neocons, Republicans and hawkish Democrats that he intervene militarily in Iran and Syria, but he also has failed to negotiate seriously with those two governments, thus making a drift toward war more likely.

In 2012, there appeared to be a chance for a breakthrough both in talks with Iran over its nuclear program and with Syria’s Assad regime over a power-sharing arrangement with the country’s disaffected Sunni majority. Some people involved in those initiatives thought that after the U.S. election, a victorious Obama would have the political space to make concessions as well as demands. Then, when nothing happened, some thought he was waiting to install a new national security team and didn’t want to risk Senate obstruction of his nominations.

However, now it looks as if Obama simply has reverted to a more traditional (or default) foreign policy approach to the Middle East shuttle diplomacy by Secretary of State John Kerry regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and provision of more military aid to “allies” through Defense Secretary Chuck

Hagel.

So, 2013 could represent another lost opportunity, when the United States turned its back on creative strategies that could deliver peace and thus risked a drift toward war. Something similar occurred in 1989 when President George H.W. Bush rebuffed a proposal from Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev for a power-sharing arrangement to bring the brutal Afghan civil war to an end.

Instead of working with Gorbachev, Bush listened to deputy national security adviser Robert Gates and other hardliners who believed, incorrectly, that the CIA-backed Afghan mujahedeen would quickly overthrow Najibullah's communist regime in Kabul after the Soviets withdrew the last of their troops in February 1989.

Najibullah was far from an ideal negotiating partner, but his government was secular, had a workable bureaucracy and advanced the rights of women. The mujahedeen though touted by U.S. propaganda as "freedom-fighters" actually represented some of Afghanistan's most reactionary elements, pushing a medievalist version of Islam, engaging in gruesome treatment of captives, and demanding the cruel subjugation of women.

The triumphalist choice by Bush and Gates, insisting on a clear-cut victory by the Muj over the Soviet-backed Najibullah, proved disastrous in a variety of ways: first, the mujahedeen failed to win on the expected Bush-Gates timetable; second, their cause degenerated into mindless brutality; third, the chaos opened the door to the Taliban, which took power in 1996 (and then murdered Najibullah); and fourth, a pathway was cleared for al-Qaeda to use Afghanistan as a base for terrorism. [For details, see Robert Parry's [America's Stolen Narrative](#).]

### **Obama's Dilemma**

A similar dilemma confronts Obama in 2013, with the neocons and many other pundits hectoring him to intervene militarily to overthrow the secular regime of Bashar al-Assad, who generally represents Syrian minorities, including his own Alawite religion (an offshoot of Shiite Islam) and Christians from the Armenian diaspora.

Assad's principal opponents are from Syria's majority Sunni community which resents the favoritism toward the Alawites and other minorities. However, as the Sunni uprising gained strength over the past two years, radical Islamist groups emerged as the most effective fighters and now dominate rebel-controlled territory.

This radicalization of the Sunni uprising can be traced to the Islamist

tendencies of its chief benefactors, especially Saudi Arabia's fundamentalist Sunni monarchy, which played a comparable role when it funneled hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid, through Pakistan, to the most right-wing elements of the Afghan mujahedeen.

Today, the Saudis are supplying weapons to hard-line Syrian rebels, via Turkey and Jordan, with comparable results, spurring a fight-to-the-death between Assad's repressive secularists and the murderous Sunni fundamentalists. This reality was highlighted by the New York Times on Sunday, reporting the spread of Islamist rule across "liberated" sectors of Syria.

"Across Syria, rebel-held areas are dotted with Islamic courts staffed by lawyers and clerics, and by fighting brigades led by extremists," wrote Times correspondent Ben Hubbard. "Even the Supreme Military Council, the umbrella rebel organization whose formation the West had hoped would sideline radical groups, is stocked with commanders who want to infuse Islamic law into a future Syrian government.

"Nowhere in rebel-controlled Syria is there a secular fighting force to speak of."

With the black flags of Islamic extremism flying across rebel-held parts of Syria and with no matching militancy among the anti-Assad secularists the West can expect that the overthrow of Assad will lead to either the sort of violent chaos that enveloped Libya after the ouster and murder of Muammar Gaddafi or perhaps worse an Afghan-style outcome with Islamists allied with al-Qaeda in the heart of the Middle East.

Given those prospects, the best-of-the-bad solutions might be to work with the Russians and even the Iranians to negotiate a power-sharing coalition between Assad's group and the more moderate Sunni factions. That, however, might require concessions from Obama and other Western leaders who have demanded Assad's removal.

Obama faces intense opposition in Official Washington toward any concessions on Syria or Iran. The pundits from Fox News to the neocon Washington Post to some hosts on liberal MSNBC are clamoring for action. They complain that Obama should have intervened militarily much sooner and now after reports that Syria may have used chemical weapons in a limited fashion Obama has no choice but to take aggressive action.

Virtually no one will countenance a counter-narrative that Obama's big mistake was in not pressing for a negotiated solution two years ago. Back then, Washington's conventional wisdom was that the Syrian uprising had to be

supported, that Assad had to go, and that any idea of compromise had to be rejected. As in 1989 with Afghanistan, triumphalism prevailed regarding Syria.

So, facing a difficult reelection in 2012, Obama finessed the Syrian issue. Yet, even after he won a second term, he has remained frozen in inaction. Now it looks as if he is simply dragging his feet as he is pushed and pulled toward another disastrous Mideast war.

**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](#)).**

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## Dr. King's Timeless Call for Justice

Placing bombs among civilians as happened at the Boston Marathon is an inexcusable act, but Americans invite future violence when they ignore how their government's acts of brutality abroad drive people to extremism, a half-century-old lesson from Martin Luther King Jr., as Jose-Antonio Orosco recalls.

By Jose-Antonio Orosco

April 16 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail," which is now a classic document in American history and compelling testimony to the power of nonviolence and the struggle for equality.

Just a day before the anniversary, the Boston Marathon was marred by a horrific event, the placing of two crude but deadly bombs among the crowd near the finish line. At first glance, it may seem there is very little to connect the two: what does a document dealing with civil rights have to do with a terrorist bombing?

We ought to remember that, for decades, African Americans lived under constant threat of terrorist violence at the hands of white supremacist groups such as the KKK. Those that were not victims of physical lynchings often had to live with the psychological scars of being treated as second-class citizens.

Few people could understand, King wrote, how heartbreaking it is to explain to one's own children why they can't attend an amusement park because of segregation, or to try to come up with an answer to the question "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?" that will not somehow harden that child's heart forever.

In his letter, Dr. King tries to remind moderate white Americans who were concerned about marches and rallies getting out of hand that, in staging demonstrations around the country, civil rights activists were not trying to stir up trouble. Instead, they were trying to deal with the trouble that already existed in the United States and was overlooked by most people.

In using nonviolent civil disobedience, the activists were not attempting to create tension, but to find a way to give expression to the anger and “hidden tension” that boiled underneath the thin layer of normalcy generated by racist segregation. He called upon people to deal with the underlying causes of violence and not traffic in “a superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects.”

Toward the end of his life, King taught us that our world is rife with various injustices, racism, militarism, poverty, and a culture of competitive materialism, that damage the flourishing of millions of people around the world and are the causes for much misery and anger.

For many of those suffering those conditions, violence seems to be the only way to give voice to their frustrations. King did not mean to justify the use of violence, but only to explain why so many people in despair might be tempted to pick up the gun or the bomb.

Some of the first responders in Boston commented that the scene at the finish line looked like a war-zone. Media commentators pointed out that on the same day that the marathon bombings occurred there were several terrible explosions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Such observations ought not to diminish the pain and suffering of the victims in Boston, but to remind us, as King did in his letter, that there is but a thin veneer of civilization over a world plagued with misery.

The task of people of good conscience, King would counsel, is not to dismiss the perpetrators of violence by pathologizing them as “crazy,” but to take a good, hard look at how the world’s institutions are structured to reward war and aggression.

Terrorists ought to be brought to account and victims deserve compassion; but justice means more than punishment. It also means we have to consider how to think about building a world in which “in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine.”

**Jose-Antonio Orosco is Associate Professor of Philosophy and the director of the Peace Studies program at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon.**

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# The Blowback from Interventionism

American foreign policy remains locked in a cycle of violence, with the Obama administration failing to escape the neocon insistence on a swaggering “tough-guy-ism” abroad. That reliance on military intervention also comes with the cost of “blowback,” as ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman notes.

By Melvin A. Goodman

The United States and the Central Intelligence Agency have never acknowledged the potential for “blowback,” or negative fallout, from their military and covert actions. Yet, the Watergate burglary by the veterans of the Bay of Pigs was an obvious example of blowback. CIA’s support for the anti-Soviet mujahedeen in the 1980s proved particularly damaging, because the mujahedeen provided weaponry to fuel conflicts in the Balkans and the Sudan and trained the terrorists who would attack us at home, including the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993.

Former CIA Director Robert Gates may believe that support to the mujahedeen was the CIA’s “greatest success,” but don’t tell that to U.S. soldiers and Marines in Afghanistan who have had to deal with former mujahedeen forces, such as the Haqqani and Hekmatyar networks, for the past decade. The United States inadvertently created, trained, and sustained an infrastructure of terror that exported terror wrapped in the language of religious war.

Now we are dealing with an updated version of “blowback,” a series of terrorist attacks in the United States where perpetrators claim their inspiration is the U.S. “war on Islam.” They cite the use of U.S. military power and CIA operations in Muslim countries. The surviving Boston Marathon bomber, who contends that he acted to counter U.S. policies in Iraq and Afghanistan, is the latest example.

But he is one of many. Osama bin Laden claimed that he targeted the United States because of the “occupation” of Saudi Arabia and its holy places by the U.S. military. Faisal Shahzad, a Pakistani immigrant who went to college in Connecticut, said he left a S.U.V. packed with explosives in Times Square because of U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan. Major Nidal Malik Hasan killed 13 people at Fort Hood, Texas in 2009 because of U.S. military strikes in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan-American, planned a suicide attack on New York City’s subway system because of the U.S. role in Afghanistan.

The attack on the Benghazi consulate last year focused on the U.S. intelligence



platform in eastern Libya. The groups claiming responsibility for the Benghazi attack had been targeted by U.S. intelligence throughout Southwest Asia and North Africa. Any U.S. intelligence component is a likely target of the wrath of militant and terrorist organizations because of the CIA's key role in the "war on terror" and the increasingly widespread use of drone aircraft.

The United States has been single-minded and narrow-minded in dealing with terrorism, believing that a unilateral use of military power would provide the best protection for its interests. We have used unwieldy military instruments, such as armed drones, to counter the threat.

There is increased evidence that the militarization of U.S. foreign policy and the increased operational tempo of the U.S. military itself is creating many more terrorists and insurgents than it is destroying. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld acknowledged this fact ten years ago, and more recently the former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, did the same.

A Yemeni activist told a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee on April 23 that a single drone strike creates a greater hatred of the United States than the actions of Yemeni insurgents.

Just as a bipartisan panel in the 1950s, the Doolittle Committee, declared that there were "no rules" in the global competition with the Soviet Union and that "hitherto acceptable norms of human conduct do not apply," which led to the misuse of the CIA and a series of misbegotten covert actions from the 1950s to the early 1970s, the "war on terror" became the justification for another surge in illegal CIA activities, including the use of torture and abuse, secret prisons and extraordinary renditions. These tactics raise important moral and humanitarian questions and compromise the strategic quest for international stability.

The "creativity" of the United States in using the CIA as a military weapon has not been matched by the use of diplomacy in the international arena. At the outset of his first term, President Barack Obama sent strong signals regarding the need for diplomacy and conciliation as opposed to President George W. Bush's emphasis on military force and covert action.

President Obama even named three so-called tsars for diplomatic dealings with the Middle East (George Mitchell), Iran (Dennis Roth), and Afghanistan-Pakistan (Richard Holbrooke). It was soon obvious that the tsars were isolated and ignored within Hillary Clinton's Department of State and General James Jones's National Security Council.

The example of Holbrooke was particularly revealing because, unlike his colleagues, Holbrooke had actual ideas about using a prisoner exchange to get the Taliban to talks similar to the Dayton talks for Bosnia or Rambouillet for Kosovo in the 1990s. But the Pentagon backed by congressional conservatives opposed any prisoner release that would possibly lead to putting Taliban fighters back on the battlefield. The Pentagon is even dragging its heels in implementing further withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan.

The end of the Cold War dramatically widened the area of diplomacy and conciliation in U.S. foreign policy, but three presidents over a 20-year period chose to ignore the opportunity.

President Bill Clinton ignored signs of conciliation from Iran, and instead of “anchoring” Russia to the Western security architecture, he enlarged the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

President George W. Bush abrogated the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the core of strategic deterrence, in order to deploy a national missile defense that does not work, and then manipulated specious intelligence to lead the country into an unnecessary and immoral war against Iraq.

President Obama ignored a credible signal from North Korea for the start of a diplomatic dialogue, and has relied on sanctions and coercion in dealing with Iran’s nuclear program. His administration has ignored fundamental questions of law and morality in the “war on terror.”

At home, the Obama administration prosecutes whistleblowers; allowed solitary confinement for Bradley Manning; failed to close Guantanamo; and has endorsed a National Defense Authorization Act that permits indefinite detention of U.S. citizens.

After the Pentagon was attacked on 9/11, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld told his closest advisers to “go massive sweep it all up, things related and not.” Going massive has meant the use of an even blunter military instrument to stabilize a lawless tribal region in Southwest Asia that has been causing trouble for the past 150 years.

Pakistan has used U.S. money and support to fund the regrouping of the Afghan Taliban, thus assuring defeat in any counter-insurgency. The U.S. policy of extraordinary renditions created a virtual global network for torture and abuse that involved dozens of countries in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

Military tools will not solve the myriad problems that include India vs. Pakistan; Afghanistan vs. Pakistan; Iran vs. Afghanistan, nor defuse the powder kegs that exist in Central Asia. The long-term commitment of military forces and

money has further destabilized the region, and contributed to the violence aimed at U.S. forces and even the United States itself.

We cannot occupy the entire world. The sooner we close certain doors and turn the keys over to key regional actors, the better off we will be.

**Melvin A. Goodman is a former CIA senior analyst and the author of the forthcoming *"National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism"* (City Lights Publishers, January 2013). [A version of this article previously appeared at Counterpunch and is republished with the author's permission.]**

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## The Special-Interest Congress

Special interests with lots of money continue to be heard in Congress; the average citizen not so much. Thus, corporate tax breaks are protected while programs to help people and build the country are cut, as Bill Moyers and Michael Winship explain.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

If you want to see why the public approval rating of Congress is down in the sub-arctic range, an icy 15 percent by last count, all you have to do is take a quick look at how the House and Senate pay worship at the altar of corporations, banks and other special interests at the expense of public aspirations and need.

Traditionally, political scientists have taught their students that there are two schools of thought about how a legislator should get the job done. One is to vote aye or nay on a bill by following the will of his or her constituency, doing what they say they want. The other is to represent them as that legislator sees fit, acting in the best interest of the voters, whether they like it or not.

But our current Congress, as cranky and inert as an obnoxious old uncle who refuses to move from his easy chair, never went to either of those schools. Its members rarely have the voter in mind at all, unless, of course, that voter's a cash-laden heavy hitter with the clout to keep an incumbent on the leash and comfortably in office.

How else to explain a Congress that still adamantly refuses to do anything, despite some 90 percent of the American public being in favor of background checks for gun purchases and a healthy majority favoring other gun-control

measures?

Last week, they ignored the pleas of Newtown families and the siege of violence in Boston and yielded once again to the fanatical rants of Wayne LaPierre and the National Rifle Association. In just the first three months of this year, as it shoved back against the renewed push for controls, the NRA spent a record \$800,000 keeping congressional members in line.

And how else to explain why corporate tax breaks have more than doubled in the last 25 years? Or why the Senate and House recently gutted the STOCK Act requiring disclosure of financial transactions by White House staff and members of Congress and their staffs and prohibiting them from insider trading?

It was passed into law and signed by President Obama last year an election year with great self-congratulation from all involved. But fears allegedly arose that there might be security risks for some in the Executive Branch if their financial business was known.

That concern was examined by the Columbia Journalism Review, which “consulted four cybersecurity experts from leading think tanks and private security consultancies. Each came to the same conclusion: that Congress’s rationale for scrapping the financial disclosure rules was bogus.”

Nonetheless, the House and Senate leapt at the opportunity to eviscerate key sections of the STOCK Act when almost no one was watching. And the President signed it.

Then there’s the fertilizer plant in West, Texas, where last week, fire and explosion killed at least 15, 11 of them first responders, and injured more than 200. The Reuters news service reported that the factory “had last year been storing 1,350 times the amount of ammonium nitrate that would normally trigger safety oversight by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.”

Why wasn’t Homeland Security on top of this? For one thing, the company was required to tell the department, and didn’t. For another, budget cuts demanded by Congress mean there aren’t enough personnel available for spot inspections.

Same goes for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration OSHA. The plant hadn’t been inspected in nearly 30 years, and there are so few OSHA inspectors in Texas that it would take 98 years for them to take a look at each workplace in the state once.

According to the non-partisan reform group Public Campaign, “Already only able to conduct 40,000 workplace inspections a year in a country with seven million worksites, OSHA will see its budget cut by an additional 8.2 percent this year

on account of the sequester.”

Twelve members of Congress want to make a bad situation even worse, sponsoring the industry-backed General Duty Clarification Act; its banal title hiding that, as reported by Tim Murphy at *Mother Jones* magazine, “The bill is designed to sap the Environmental Protection Agency of its powers to regulate safety and security at major chemical sites, as prescribed by the Clean Air Act.”

“‘We call that the Koch brothers bill,’ Greenpeace legislative director Rick Hind says, because the bill’s sponsor, GOP Rep. Mike Pompeo, represents the conservative megadonors’ home city of Wichita, Kansas. (The sponsor of the sister legislation in the senate, GOP Sen. Pat Roberts, represents the Kochs’ home state of Kansas.) The brothers have huge investments in fertilizer production, and Hind thinks they’ll ultimately get what they want, whether or not the bill becomes law.”

No coincidence, perhaps, that the sponsors of the House bill and Senator Roberts, Public Campaign reports, “have collectively taken over \$670,000 from the chemical manufacturing industry over their careers.” Since 2011, the industry has spent \$85.1 million lobbying.

Congress quietly acquiesces as the regulations meant for our safety are whittled away. The progressive website ThinkProgress notes that even though food-related infections, which kill 3,000 and sicken 48 million Americans each year, rose last year, congressional and White House budget cuts may mean up to 600 fewer food inspectors at meat and poultry plants, leaving it up to the industry to police itself. That rot you’re smelling isn’t just some bad hamburger.

It’s true that 92 percent of Americans say, yes, reducing the deficit and spending cuts are important, but all on their own the people have figured out cuts that make more sense than anything Congress and its corporate puppeteers want to hear about.

Mattea Kramer, research director at the National Priorities Project, says “a strong majority”, 73 percent of us ,want a reduced reliance on fossil fuels, and 50 percent want something done about climate change. A carbon tax would help with both, and raise an estimated \$125 billion every year. Response from Congress: crickets.

Fifty-eight percent of the U.S., according to Gallup, wants “major cuts in military and defense spending,” the average American favoring a reduction of 18 percent. Good luck, the Pentagon and defense contractors already are bellowing about the puny 1.6 percent reduction called for in the new White House budget.

Mattea Kramer writes that Americans for Tax Fairness, a coalition of 280

organizations, has “identified 10-year budgetary savings of \$2.8 trillion simply by limiting or eliminating a plethora of high-income and corporate tax loopholes.”

Congress is busily revising the tax code as we speak but how many of those loopholes and other perks like credits and deductions do you bet will go away?

Not many, if the lobbying industry has anything to do with it. The House Ways and Means Committee has 11 working groups considering rewrites and according to the congressional newspaper *The Hill*, they’re quietly meeting with lobbyists and other interests “deep pocketed players” all the time.

Keep your eye on who’s donating to the re-election campaigns of each of those working group members as we move toward the midterms next year.

Over on the Senate side, *The New York Times* recently reported those seeking to cut taxes and hang onto their incentives as the code is revised have found one strategy that seems to work hire firms that employ former aides to Democratic Senator Max Baucus, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee.

The *Times* analyzed lobbying files and found at least 28 of his ex-staffers “have lobbied on tax issues during the Obama administration more than any other current member of Congress.”

Reporter Eric Lipton writes, “Many of those lobbyists have already saved their clients millions, in some cases, billions, of dollars after Mr. Baucus backed their requests to extend certain corporate tax perks, provisions that were adopted as part of the so-called fiscal cliff legislation in January.”

Senator Baucus’s spokesman was quick to say that his boss regularly rejects requests as well, but the fact is, he added, “Oftentimes good policy can indirectly benefit someone. That doesn’t mean it shouldn’t be done.”

Just so. Which is why, for example, Senator Mitch McConnell, the Republican minority leader who likes to complain about the current tax code’s four million words of red tape seven times the length of *War and Peace*, will doubtless support tightening loopholes, right?

A January report from Public Campaign Action Fund, found that, “Companies that lobbied against bringing jobs back to America and ending tax breaks for offshoring have given McConnell one million dollars to win his elections and look out for their interests.” In other words: don’t hold your breath.

No wonder the biggest newspaper in his native Kentucky said in a recent editorial that McConnell “has long ceased to serve the state, instead serving

the corporate interests he counts on for contributions and leading obstruction that continues to plague Congress.”

Sadly, such is the way of Washington, home of the scheme and the fraud, where the unbreakable chain between money and governance weighs heavy and drags us ever deeper into a sinkhole of inaction and mediocrity.

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## It's the Media, Stupid!

**Exclusive:** Rich right-wingers, including the Koch Brothers and Rupert Murdoch, are eying the purchase of the Los Angeles Times and other major regional newspapers to create an even bigger platform for their propaganda, a media strategy that dates back several decades, as Robert Parry explains.

By Robert Parry

The U.S. news media was never “liberal.” At most, you could say there were periods in the not-too-distant past when the major newspapers did a better job of getting the facts straight. There also was an “underground” press which published some scoops that the mainstream media avoided.

So, reporters revealed the evils of racial segregation in the 1950s and 1960s; war correspondents exposed some of the cruel violence of the Vietnam War in the late 1960s; major newspapers defied the U.S. government in printing the leaked history of that war in 1971; the Washington Post uncovered some (though clearly not all) of Richard Nixon’s political crimes in 1972-74; and the New York Times led the way in publicizing some of the CIA’s dirty history in the mid-1970s.

While such work surely offended the Right and many parts of the Establishment, the stories had a common element: they were true. They were not, in that sense, “liberal” or “conservative” or “centrist.” They were simply accurate and they helped spur America’s other democratic institutions to life, from protests in the streets to pressures on the courts to citizens lobbying government officials.

It was that resurgence of participatory democracy that was the real fear for

those who held entrenched power, whether in the segregationist South or inside the wood-paneled rooms of Wall Street banks and big corporations. Thus, there developed a powerful pushback that sought to both hold the line on additional (and possibly even more damaging) disclosures of wrongdoing and to reassert control of the channels of information that influenced how the American people saw the world.

In that context, one of the most effective propaganda strategies was to brand honest journalism as “liberal” and to smear honest journalists as “anti-American.” That way many Americans would doubt the accurate information that they were hearing and discard many real facts as bias.

As a journalist for the Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s, I encountered these hardball tactics while covering the Reagan administration as it sought to manage the perceptions of the American people mostly by hyping external threats (from Managua to Moscow) and demonizing some internal groups (from “welfare queens” to labor unions).

Reagan’s men described one of their central goals as “kicking the Vietnam Syndrome,” that is, the resistance among the American people to be drawn into another overseas conflict based on deceptions.

### **The Air Waves War**

But the key to their success was to gain control of as much of the U.S. news media as possible through direct ownership by like-minded right-wingers or by appeals to senior news executives to adopt a more “patriotic” posture or by intimidation of those who wouldn’t toe the line.

The tactics worked like a charm and were aided by a simultaneous shift on the Left toward selling off or shutting down much of the Vietnam-era “underground” press and instead concentrating on local organizing around local issues, “think globally, act locally,” as the slogan went.

This combination of factors essentially gave the Right and conservative elements of the Establishment dominance of the news. Like an army that controlled the skies, it could fly out and carpet-bomb pretty much anyone who got in the way, whether a politician, a journalist or a citizen. No truth-teller was safe from sudden obliteration.

The Right’s success could be measured at different mileposts in the process, such as the Republican containment of the Iran-Contra scandal in 1987 and President George H.W. Bush’s pronouncement after crushing the out-matched Iraqi army in 1991 that “we’ve kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all.”



This new media reality as it expanded through the 1990s and into the new century meant that the Right could put nearly any propaganda theme into play and count on millions of Americans buying it. Thus, President George W. Bush could make up excuses to invade Iraq in 2003 and face shockingly little media resistance.

Eventually a few voices emerged on the Internet and at some lower-rung news outlets to challenge Bush's case for war but they could be easily discredited or ignored. It took Bush's disastrous handling of the Iraq War and other domestic and foreign crises to finally put a wrench in this right-wing propaganda machine.

However, the overall dynamic hasn't changed. Yes, MSNBC after failing in its attempt to be as right-wing as Fox News veered leftward and found some ratings success in offering "liberal" assessments on domestic politics (though still avoiding any serious challenge to the Establishment's views on foreign policy).

There also are some feisty Internet sites that do challenge the conventional wisdom in support of U.S. interventionism abroad, but nearly all are severely underfunded and have limited reach into the broad American population.

### **Buying Up Newspapers**

And, the likelihood now is that the Right will consolidate its dominance of the U.S. news media in the years ahead. In the very near future, some of the country's most prominent regional newspapers may fall under the control of right-wing ideologues like Rupert Murdoch or the Koch Brothers.

Koch Industries, a privately owned oil and gas giant which has provided the means for Charles and David Koch to lavishly fund libertarian think tanks and Tea Party organizations, is now exploring a bid to buy the Tribune Company's eight regional newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times, the Baltimore Sun, the Orlando Sentinel, the Hartford Courant and the Chicago Tribune, according to [a report in the New York Times last Sunday.](#)

By buying the Tribune newspapers, the Koch Brothers would give themselves another strong platform for delivering volleys of right-wing propaganda and wreaking havoc on political adversaries. I remember in my days covering Capitol Hill being told that what a congressman fears most is the determined opposition of the hometown newspaper.

Another expected bidder, at least for the Los Angeles Times, is media mogul Rupert Murdoch, who already owns Fox News and powerful newspapers in the United Kingdom and the United States, including the Wall Street Journal.

On the other side of the bidding are some liberal-oriented businessmen eyeing the

Los Angeles Times, but it is not clear if they can compete with the fat wallets of the Koch Brothers and Murdoch. The New York Times reported that Koch Industries might have an edge in the competition because it would take over all eight newspapers at once.

Some on the Left mock the idea of investing in the “dinosaur” industry of newspaper publishing and question the value of owning even some of these prestigious names in American journalism. It is certainly true that those newspapers have declined in recent years due to poor management and shifts in advertising dollars.

But they still influence how people in those metropolitan areas learn about the world. The newspapers also help set the news agenda for local TV stations and bloggers. The Baltimore Sun, for instance, produced some of the most important reporting on the Reagan administration’s human rights crimes in Central America, as well as publishing groundbreaking stories about domestic spying under George W. Bush.

Yes, some of these newspapers have disgraced themselves in recent decades, such as the Los Angeles Times’ shameful attacks on journalist Gary Webb after he revived the Reagan administration’s Contra-cocaine scandal in the late 1990s. [See Robert Parry’s [\*Lost History\*](#).]

But Internet sites even ones like Consortiumnews.com with a strong interest in doing investigative journalism lack the financial resources and the editorial support to carry out those kinds of costly investigative projects, at least with any regularity.

Without major investments by honest Americans in honest journalism whether the Old Media of print or the New Media of electronics the United States will continue to drift into a made-up world of right-wing paranoia and pretend facts. And that is a danger for the entire planet.

**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](#)).**

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## America’s Locked-Down Insecurity State

Emerging evidence from the Boston Marathon bombings suggests the brutal attack on innocent civilians was motivated by the fury of two brothers against overseas

crimes of the U.S. government. In that, the martial-law lockdown of Boston may be a glimpse at the future to come, says Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

Life, as lived, moment to moment, in the corporate/consumer state, involves moving between states of tedium, stress, and swoons of mass media and consumer distraction. Therein, one spends a large portion of one's economically beleaguered life attempting to make ends meet and not go mad from the pressure and the boredom.

Where does a nebulous concept such as freedom even enter the picture, except to be a harbinger of an unfocused sense of unease that all too many look to authority to banish? Finding a balance between anxiety and freedom is not something that comes easy to us.

"Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom." — Søren Kierkegaard

In a society beset with a lack of purpose and meaning, it is easy to mistake patriotism, empty self-promotion and jingoism for strength and character, when, in fact, they are anathema.

Weakness compensates by affecting a cretinous swagger. Those who lack a centering core crave power. Beneath it all, quakes one who fears risking intimacy is terror stricken by the vulnerability attendant to risking love. Those who fear the uncertainty inherent to intimacy and freedom perceive a world fraught with ubiquitous danger. They terrorize themselves; therefore, they see terrorists everywhere.

Recently, a U.S. city was placed in lockdown due to the search for a solitary, 19-year-old suspect. Thirty different law-enforcement agencies were involved. This is the sort of authoritarian overkill that is emblematic of a police state, i.e., all sense of proportion is lost, and conveniently so

Why? Because these bloated, overfunded police agencies have a need to justify their existence. And one means of doing so is to maintain a ramped-up level of fear, by creating a culture-wide, self-resonating feedback loop of hysteria.

Hence, if there exists a perpetual, looming menace to all we hold dear, the operatives of the police state can maintain their authority, and the political class can operate sans public oversight.

The events that followed in the wake of the bombs set off at the Boston Marathon have served as an object lesson in how the police state/militarist madness of authoritarian excess becomes normalized. How belligerently ignorant, sorehead

nationalists and jumpy ninnies will forfeit their rights for the illusion of safety.

Under the tedium, angst and ennui of corporate-state rule, people get high on the adrenal rush induced by the mass media feedback loop. Also, there is the illusion of breaking the spell of alienation and becoming part of a larger order.

It is troubling that the adrenaline-tweaked, news-as-mass-spectacle audience/primed-for-authoritarianism citizenry of the U.S. seems indifferent to, or oblivious of, the following: The test of a free society comes when that society is put under duress, e.g., not allowing the power-besotted, authoritarian freaks in charge to use the acts of a few violent, lost souls as a means to curtail freedom and consolidate unaccountable power for themselves.

The flacks, operatives and enforcers of corporate state/militarist imperium retail in fear, specifically, in false, displaced and exaggerated fears. The collective mind of empire is a house of distortion mirrors wherein appearances cannot be trusted, all sense of proportion is lost. Perception is thrown askew; thus, the most wily, dangerous enemy of all becomes one's own mind.

Minor threats are perceived as looming dangers – a Rumpelstiltskin in Reverse Effect comes into play. Pressing matters are neglected, as obsession with trivia trumps all things. An empire bristles with armaments, indiscriminately, aimed at invisibles.

Misdirected fear is a phantom. You can attempt to strike him all day long but to no end, other than to leave you agitated and spent. Keep at it and you will collapse from exhaustion. This is the way empires meet their end. A giant goes mad, addled by the buzzing of flies he hallucinates a squadron of dragons.

Accordingly, meet your fears, look them in the eye, live among them for a time. Discern whether they consist of an insect buzzing at your windowpane or is a dragon on the roof.

After suffering or witnessing a traumatic event, long after the painful event has passed, one will continue to fear a reoccurrence of the incident. All too often, one becomes locked in a state of hypervigilance installing a police state of the mind, and, in so doing, a lockdown of empathy and imagination comes to pass.

The legacy of a fear-ridden past denudes the future of possibility. Time passes, yet one stands frozen in place, shackled to the singular moment of a trauma that has long since passed. The imagination atrophies; one's ability to love fades.

This is the miserable legacy of occurrences such as the Boston Marathon bombing and the subsequent police-state siege of the city. If you are curious as to why U.S. culture has become increasingly stultifying – why daily life in the nation has been drained of resonance, inspiration and bereft of a vital core – look no further than the emotional blowback borne of the national (in)security state.

It is only when one chooses to dismiss the cracked-brain guardians of perpetual and displaced fear – personal and collective – does one regain the ability to move freely in the world. The shackles upon one's incarcerated heart are broken. One is free to be held in the embrace of the present moment. The future, less circumscribed by an oppressive legacy, can unfold like the dawn of a newborn day.

Experiencing fear does not amount to weakness; instead, when buffeted by fear, courage entails putting one foot in front of the other. Attempting to banish fear from consciousness is not a viable option. It is not possible to obliterate angst and trauma by an evocation of will. Even if they appear to be banished, they will return as kvetching ghosts and keening demons of the mind. Your heart will be haunted by their unaddressed grievances.

How can the U.S. not be a haunted land? The country's blood-soaked soil chants songs of lamentation. Corpse choruses comprised of African slaves and Indigenous People wail out imprecatory hymns from the tormented earth beneath us. As, all the while, the voices of those slaughtered worldwide by our pursuit of empire surround the nation in an enveloping, raging nimbus of accusation. Is it any wonder that we, as a people, are so prone to collective panic?

You cannot outrun a ghost that has taken possession of your heart. You must hear his grievances, grieve with him over the injustices inflicted upon him, then sing him to the next world. And to ensure he will not return to haunt you: You must tell his tale and do it justice.

If you refuse, as we have on a collective basis in the U.S., you will live out your days in a haze of nebulous dread, and the empire's vast armaments and the entire apparatus of the national security/surveillance state will not serve to placate your unease.

Because what is lost to time can never be retrieved, memory is a ghost. This is the reason the past is our constant companion. We hear these ghosts within the melancholic sigh that brings up short a moment of laughter, as ghosts within mourn things irretrievable.

Secrets do not remain buried. Their voices, vaulted just beneath the contours of one's awareness, filter up from the underworld. When we catch a snatch of their

murmurings, inchoate longing transforms into nebulous dread. We panic in the market place at noonday; the heat of eros can only be experienced in acrimony e.g., a nation with millions of unacknowledged Indian dead buried in its soil finds an inexhaustible supply of enemies abroad.

The ground is not solid, when it has been seeded with the restless dead. At any moment, the earth beneath one's feet threatens to give way. What you bury sans ceremony will in turn bury you. The dead will bring you down to their level for a chthonic tãte ã tãte.

Late empire is a charnel house. Within its confines, the dead become one's most ardent suitors. And this is the reason: "Secrets, silent, stony sit in the dark palaces of both our hearts: secrets weary of their tyranny: tyrants willing to be dethroned." James Joyce, Ulysses

It is a dangerous thing to fear the uncertainty inherent to freedom; this is the means by which freedom is exchanged for a sense of false security. As a consequence, one sense of proportion is thrown askew.

For example, an American is ten thousand times more likely to be killed or injured at work than in an act of terrorism (and that does not include the dangers involved in commuting back and forth to and from the workplace and the stress-related pathologies and premature death resultant from life squandered as an economic animal).

How about let's declare a War on Work. Let's have a nationwide mass mobilization for inspired leisure. In this case the terrorists (i.e, the economic terrorists) truly do hate us for our freedoms.

It is a given in human affairs that we will be guided by our misapprehensions of one another. We receive fragments of information through a lens of bias. We stumble through life blinkered by preconceptions. We come upon others whose self-deceptions match our own (in form, of course, but not matching content) and we express bafflement at the extent of their fatuousness.

So it goes with human interactions, from brief encounters to decades in a marriage bed. Yet, when you embrace the impossible nature of it all, a breakthrough of sorts occurs. When you become willing to admit fallibility, to bask in the warm glow of your bafflement, another fallible soul is apt to be drawn to you seeking a communion of restorative confusion.

Comforted by mutual, benign bafflement (a given when confronted with the sublime) each relaxes enough to notice and be drawn close to the mysterious heart of the other.

Although we are convinced we experience anxiety due to the unpredictable nature of life and the impossibility of apprehending the future, what we are often anxious about is the nettling knowledge that the world we cling to is subject to ineluctable forces of change.

Often, the greater the imperative to view the world with new sight, the more blinkered and myopic one's vision becomes. We clutch a handful of dust. Rather than revisiting and remaking the world anew, we spend our hours in desperate devotion to constructing and dwelling in a crumbling mausoleum of doomed conceptions.

Late U.S. Empire is a cult of death. The body count rises in direct proportion to the putrefying, nationalist myths we insist on holding sacrosanct. Ask me about my sense of patriotism, and you will receive only silence because what does not exist cannot speak.

But ask me about my sense of affinity with the whole of humanity – about the golden fire of our imagination that binds us to all things, about the cathedral of our bones that binds us to the sorrows of the earth – only if you desire to risk having your ear bent beyond repair by my soliloquies.

Fate will favor those who maintain their dignity, retain their sense of humor, and struggle to keep alive their sense of beauty, even in ugly times. Hold to your vital center, stay in the vivid moment, if only for the sake of those you love.

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