

# A 'Free Press' and Double Standards

The Western reaction to last week's terror attacks in Paris has been rife with double standards as U.S. and European politicians and pundits reinvent themselves as purists on freedom of the press and compound the hypocrisy by ignoring the longstanding slaughter in the Middle East, John V. Walsh observes.

By John V. Walsh

To understand the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris last week, we need only invert George W. Bush's 2005 mantra that "We're taking the fight to the terrorists abroad, so we don't have to face them here at home", into the more truthful: "They will continue to attack us over here so long as we slaughter them by the millions over there."

In a word, this is one more instance of blowback, as Ron Paul tells us in his perceptive essay, "[Lessons From Paris.](#)" Among other things Paul points out: "The two Paris shooters had reportedly spent the summer in Syria fighting with the rebels seeking to overthrow Syrian President Assad. But France and the United States have spent nearly four years training and equipping foreign fighters to infiltrate Syria and overthrow Assad! In other words, when it comes to Syria, the two Paris killers were on 'our' side. They may have even used French or US weapons while fighting in Syria."

To grasp the magnitude of the neocolonial savagery of the U.S. and its allies in the Middle East, a catalogue of the recent offenses is a necessary beginning. A partial accounting of Western barbarism is to be found in "[Destructive Western Mideast Policy Makes Radicals](#)" by Muhammad Sahimi.

Sahimi closes his essay by saying, "Indeed, so long as the abuses of the Western dominance of the Islamic world provides the fertile ground for extremist Muslim clerics and preachers to espouse their reactionary interpretations of Islam, a religion of peace and mercy, things will not get any better."

The killings in Paris, horrific as they are, are but pinpricks compared to the vast devastation visited by the West on the Muslim world and indeed on most of the planet over the last centuries of colonialism and neocolonialism which has brought humiliation, genocide and grinding poverty to entire continents and continues to do so.

What has been the response in the West to the attacks in Paris? On what do the apologists for Empire focus in the wake of this act of vengeance for the neocolonialism of the West against the Arab and Muslim world? With utter contempt for history and context, the pundits discuss freedom of speech as the

central issue.

Freedom of speech in France where it is a criminal offense to “deny” the Holocaust of European Jews. Where an anti-Semitic remark, even one overheard in a bistro, can land one in considerable trouble, with loss of one’s job and a fine. Where an offhanded comment cost a writer at *Charlie Hebdo* his job because it was deemed anti-Semitic.

Where the predecessor to *Charlie Hebdo*, *Hari-Kiri Hebdo*, was banned decades back when it took a swipe at Charles DeGaulle, just after his death, resulting in its rechristening itself as *Charlie Hebdo* on reopening. And where anti-Islamic insults in the mass media are just fine.

The most effective riposte to the canard that the attack on Charlie was an attack on freedom of the press has come from Glenn Greenwald in his piece entitled “In Solidarity With A Free Press. Some More Blasphemous Cartoons.” It is illustrated with some of the anti-Islamic hate cartoons that graced the pages of *Charlie* along with a number of others whose publication would be a criminal offense in France and elsewhere in the West.

Be sure to scroll all the way down. The piece should go viral, because the cartoons alone taken in sequence expose the hypocrisy of the Western punditocracy and its masters. *They object to some of the cartoons but not others (the first two), whereas one should object to them all, except for the last eight by the Brazilian cartoonist Latuff.*

Read, look and think. There is genuine fear in the West when it comes to publishing this essay because its points are piercing indeed, imperiling the bubble of hypocrisy.

On then to the grand march on Sunday in Paris, a march which Justin Raimondo rightly calls “March of the Hypocrites.” As Raimondo points out, there are many dimensions to this hypocrisy, but the most deserving of ridicule is perhaps the heinous record that most of the “world leaders” present have when it comes to freedom of the press.

A partial compilation of their abuses of the press has been assembled by Daniel Wickham, a student at the London School of Economics, titled “These ‘staunch defenders’ of the free press are attending today’s solidarity rally in Paris.”

The consequences of the *Charlie Hebdo* affair are all too certain. It will strengthen the hand of those who are clamoring for more military involvement by the Empire in the Middle East.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, in an interview

reported on Fox, made it quite clear that “we” would have to do “more.” He describes a great “arc” of terrorism running from Pakistan to Nigeria and perhaps beyond where the U.S. would have to increase its operations and vigilance.

He was almost smiling with satisfaction. More money will surely come his way and the way of the entire Military Industrial Congressional Complex. (Dempsey cautioned that “we” are already doing “a lot,” but “more” is the order of the day.)

The head of the National Security Agency was also clamoring for “more,” to spy on you and me, dear reader. When these imperial potentates spoke I could hear the anguished cries of the Muslim peoples to be submitted to more attacks and bloodshed in the great “arc” that Dempsey was drooling over “patrolling.”

But this reaction may yet prove the undoing of the Empire. For the U.S., already gone mad with imperial arrogance and overreach, is being goaded to further frenzy by its client, the apartheid state of Israel, a European colonial settler state itself. Hence the U.S. is becoming ever more stuck to the Middle Eastern tar baby.

That gives breathing room for Russia and China and the rest of the developing world to grow and assert their independence from the Empire. The great crime is that the peoples of the Middle East are absorbing the lion’s share of the blows dealt by the Empire. Our job in the West is to get the U.S. out of the Middle East and to end the perpetual economic and military wars of the Empire across the planet.

As Mikhail Gorbachev and others have pointed out, the alternative is surely WWIII.

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## NYC’s Riptides of Free Speech

Amid Western government’s sudden enthusiasm for free speech, no matter how offensive, there is the angry police reaction in New York City to protests against some police officers killing an unarmed black man by blaming the protesters for a deranged man’s shooting of two policemen, as Michael Winship describes.

By Michael Winship

Here in New York City, the past few weeks have been fraught. First, in early December, protesters took to the streets to protest a Staten Island grand jury's decision not to indict a policeman involved in the choking death of African-American Eric Garner. The police were attempting to place Garner under arrest for selling loose cigarettes.

The protests made cops angry, especially because of certain anti-police chants and an assault during one of the demonstrations against two police lieutenants on the Brooklyn Bridge. But their anger escalated into fury on Dec. 20 when two officers were gunned down in their patrol car by a deranged assailant from out-of-town who may have thought he was exacting revenge for police killings of African-American men.

The police response has been a work slowdown although they've denied it that's just beginning to end, and acts of disrespect directed against New York's Mayor Bill de Blasio. He was booed by spectators at a recent police academy graduation, but the main gesture of contempt has been police turning their backs to the mayor at the funerals of the two murdered officers, Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu.

Such actions began the night of the killings when de Blasio and Police Commissioner William Bratton entered a media briefing at the Brooklyn hospital where the two policemen had been brought after the shootings, but really, they were the latest in a series of attacks on the liberal Democratic mayor that began during his election campaign in 2013. Some have alleged that the latest of these are being orchestrated by police union officials coordinating with Republican allies.

At his own press conference outside the hospital, Patrick Lynch, the man who organized the back-turning, president of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA), the largest of the city's police unions, blamed the deaths on the mayor and on demonstrators who had been protesting the grand jury decision not to indict the policeman involved in the death of Eric Garner.

Lynch referred to them as "Those that incited violence on the street, under the guise of protest," and those "that tried to tear down what New York City police officers did every day." He continued, "That blood on the hands starts on the steps of City Hall, in the office of the mayor."

The homicides and the Brooklyn Bridge assault are serious crimes. But here's the thing: the right of free speech the police are angry about when it comes to the demonstrators is precisely the same right of free speech they're using to harass

de Blasio. And it's that same ideal of free speech, no matter how noxious it might seem, for which those police in Paris died last week.

Noxious is just what Patrick Lynch's talk of blood-covered hands was, demagoguery to exploit what he saw as an opportunity to rally public sentiment on behalf of the police and against the protesters.

Counter to his spurious accusations are the simple facts about race and the police that so many journalists and non-partisan investigators have uncovered. For example, ProPublica reported, "Young black males in recent years were at a far greater risk of being shot dead by police than their white counterparts 21 times greater." A Reuters survey of 25 current and retired black NYPD officers found, "All but one said that, when off duty and out of uniform, they had been victims of racial profiling."

"The officers said this included being pulled over for no reason, having their heads slammed against their cars, getting guns brandished in their faces, being thrown into prison vans and experiencing stop and frisks while shopping. The majority of the officers said they had been pulled over multiple times while driving. Five had had guns pulled on them."

How further to explain Lynch's bombastic rhetoric? Well, for one thing, it conveniently comes as the city and the PBA remain at a negotiating impasse, both sides without a contract since 2010 and binding arbitration soon to begin. "Continents Apart on Pay Issues" that was the headline in the civil employees weekly newspaper *The Chief* on Dec. 22.

Mention this coincidence, however, and Lynch and his associates tend to scream bloody murder, quite literally it seems. For another, Lynch's polarizing polemics come as he prepares to run for reelection this spring to what would be his fifth consecutive term. No one is likely to successfully take him on now; as Kenneth Sherrill, an emeritus political science professor, told New York Metro, "A challenger saying he'll be nicer to the mayor can't get him very far."

Some perspective is helpful, too. David Firestone at *The Guardian* writes, "Only New York City has ever experienced decades of sustained militancy by its police unions." And as Commissioner Bratton asked *Bloomberg News*, "Can you point out to me one mayor that has not been battling with the police unions in the last 50 years? It's nothing new, it's part of life and it's part of politics and it is what it is. This is New York City. We voice our concerns and we voice our opinions."

We do indeed, which makes Lynch's bullying complaints and accusations about the anti-police protests all the more vexing, especially as all members of the

police force take an oath when they are sworn in to uphold the Constitution of the United States, freedom of speech included, no matter which side of an issue any individual cop is on and no matter how obnoxious he or she may think the opposing viewpoint is.

I have lived in New York City for more than 40 years. We have an extraordinary police force facing extraordinary pressures and danger. They always have come running when I needed them.

On 9/11, two policemen from my neighborhood precinct died trying to save lives at the World Trade Center: Officer James Leahy and Detective Danny Richards, a member of the Bomb Squad. Another, Sergeant Edward Thompson died in March 2008 of lung cancer, very possibly contracted from the weeks he spent working on The Pile, the mountain of debris at Ground Zero so carefully sifted for remains.

Over more than four decades in the city, my interactions with police have been routine. But I also know that because I am white, I am nowhere near as likely to be challenged or harassed as others are; nor have I had the conversation that Mayor de Blasio had with his mixed-race son, "The Talk" that so many men and women of color have with their kids about how to behave around police.

So we live a world of conundrum. We expect the police to protect and not harm us; in return, they expect our respect regardless of any transgressions. Satirists like the cartoonists of *Charlie Hebdo* actively seek to offend the core beliefs of others, sometimes just for the hell of it, sometimes with or without common sense, but we defend their freedom to make us mad or laugh.

World leaders descend on Paris to decry the suppression of speech while committing that very same sin in their own backyards. As the sign of one of those in Sunday's Paris demonstrations read: "I'm marching but I'm conscious of the confusion and hypocrisy of the situation."

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## Savage Atrocity Reported in Nigeria

**Exclusive:** Islamist terrorists shocked the world with the killing of 17 people in Paris, but a possibly larger atrocity occurred a continent away in Nigeria where Boko Haram insurgents may have slaughtered as many as 2,000 in a remote village, reports Don North.

By Don North

With the world's attention centered on Paris last week as terrorists killed 17 people, Boko Haram militants may have slaughtered as many as 2,000 people in assaults on Baga, a remote village of 10,000 in the northeast corner of Nigeria's Borno State on the shores of Lake Chad.

Yet, the Baga massacre prompted few protests, editorials, condemnations or much notice from world leaders – and not even a rebuke from the ineffectual Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, who sent his condolences to the French but made no comment on the Boko Haram atrocities.

Instead, President Jonathan's chief spokesman for the Nigerian Department of Defense downplayed the shocking reports, apparently for political reasons because of the upcoming elections just five weeks away in which Jonathan's handling of the Boko Haram insurgency is a central issue.

At a press conference in the Nigerian capital of Abuja, the spokesman, Major General Chris Olukolade, declared that no more than 150 persons, including many Boko Haram insurgents, were killed in the Baga fighting. "Unfortunately, the figure of 2,000 killed is now being bandied about in the media as if it has been authenticated. It cannot be true," Olukolade said.

Given Baga's remoteness and the dangers facing journalists and human rights investigators who venture into Boko Haram territory hard evidence of the massacre has been difficult to secure, with information mostly coming from terrified refugees fleeing the area and from generally unreliable government sources.

But Amnesty International, decrying Boko Haram's "deadliest act," reported that as many as 2,000 soldiers and civilians were killed in two raids on Baga by insurgents armed with assault rifles and grenade launchers. Amnesty International said most of the dead were women, children and the elderly who could not flee in time.

A [CNN report](#) cited information from residents and local authorities who described attacks starting on Jan. 3 and continuing throughout the weekend, with the Islamist militants spraying bullets as they arrived in trucks and armored vehicles. Boko Haram fighters on motorcycles then pursued residents who fled into the bush, firing indiscriminately, CNN reported.

Hundreds of bodies were reported strewn in Baga's streets and adjacent jungle after the raids, with people who hid in their homes burned alive.

BBC [cited](#) Muhammad Abba Gava, a spokesman for a vigilante group that fights Boko

Haram, as saying his group gave up on trying to count all the bodies. "No one could attend to the corpses and even the seriously injured ones who may have died by now," he said, adding: "The human carnage perpetrated by Boko Haram terrorists in Baga was enormous."

A multinational military base was located in Baga, but days before the attack the troops from Cameroon, Niger and Chad withdrew with no explanation, leaving only the Nigerian Army defending the village and soon routed by the attacks.

Military hardware abandoned at the base was reportedly seized by the insurgents and when reinforcements did not arrive, Boko Haram attacked again last Wednesday targeting the remaining residents. Even civilian vigilante groups that have recently been effective against the insurgents were overwhelmed, according to reports.

In Geneva on Tuesday, the United Nations Humanitarian Affairs Office estimated that 11,320 Nigerians have fled the Baga area since the attacks and taken refuge in neighboring Chad.

### **History of Division**

Nigeria, an oil-rich western African nation of 174 million people, is divided by extreme disparities in wealth as well as by religion with a mostly Christian south and Muslim north. Over the past few months, Nigeria's economy also has been reeling due to the collapse of oil prices.

While the conflict between the Nigerian government and the Boko Haram rebels has received only spotty attention from the world's news media, the one exception was the global outrage last April over Boko Haram's kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok. Though more than 50 escaped, the fate of the rest has remained a mystery even as their plight was highlighted by international women's rights advocates, including U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama.

According to some reports, the girls who remained captives may have been separated and hidden in the remote Boko Haram base in the Sambisa forest or across the border in Chad and Cameroon.

I recently spent several months as a visiting professor of journalism at the American University of Nigeria in Yola, just a few hours drive from the frontlines of the conflict. Using sources from the database in the AUN library as well as consulting several of Nigeria's more responsible newspapers, local security advisers and diplomatic sources I was able to trace the history of the Muslim fundamentalist group Boko Haram back to its origins 34 years ago.

Its genesis began with a handful of Muslim clerics who followed the extremist



Islam of the Saudi Arabian Wahhabis and Salafists. Boko Haram morphed slowly into its form today feeding on the poverty and illiteracy of northern Nigeria to form its ideology of fundamentalism and hatred. Nigeria also has a long history of religious strife.

Some of the most virulent conflicts were those stirred up by Muhammad Marwa, a Muslim preacher from Cameroon who settled in Kano, a large city in north-central Nigeria, and attracted many followers. Marwa's objective was the purification of Islam and establishing Sharia law. He raged against Western education and its products.

His bitter condemnation of the Nigerian state led to him being known as Maitatsine, a Hausa word for "he who damns." In 1982, a government crackdown on Maitatsine and his followers led to violent riots that killed some 4,000 residents of Kano, including Maitatsine. But his movement lived on and in the following year resulted in continued riots in which 1,000 more were killed.

The mantle of Maitatsine was picked up by a charismatic preacher named Mohammed Yusuf in Maidiguri, capital of the Borno state. He had studied in Saudi Arabia and demanded justice for the poor through Sharia law. He was well-educated, spoke English and lived lavishly with four wives and drove a Mercedes-Benz. Yusuf was often arrested, but always released through the intervention of politically powerful friends.

A spellbinding speaker, Yusuf denounced modern ideas of evolution, round earth and even the evaporation of water. His group, fashioned after Afghanistan's Taliban, began to be referred to by Nigerian journalists as Boko Haram, which translates as "Western education is forbidden," because of the group's rejection of the West's ideas.

The most recent spark for violence between Boko Haram and the government came in late 2009 when police watching a funeral procession through the streets of Maidiguri saw many mourners riding motorcycles without helmets which was a rule the police were determined to enforce. Boko Haram members resisted, as one must remove traditional Islamic caps to wear a helmet. The police attacked the funeral procession to arrest those not wearing helmets. Three died. Riots erupted.

A few days later, the police surrounded Yusuf's compound, arrested him and took him to the station. To make sure Yusuf was not released again by his supporters, he was executed. In the days following Yusuf's murder, riots continued and the police killed many of his followers including family members, racking up a death toll of over 1,000. The aftermath of Yusuf's murder was captured on a cell phone video and broadcast over northern Nigeria, assuring his status as a martyr and

giving impetus to Boko Haram.

Yusuf had initially believed that an Islamic state based on Sharia law could be achieved without violence. His deputy and successor, Abubakar Shekau, argued that success would require an armed struggle and the group increasingly resorted to the murder of their critics and opponents. He normally communicates through videos speaking in Hausa and Arabic and the occasional English phrase. In one of his public videos he said, "I enjoy killing anyone God commands me to kill the way I enjoy killing chickens and rams."

### **Military/Political Failures**

The flames of the terrorist insurgency are being fed by a failure of Nigerian security forces, the army and police to effectively stem the violence. The once respected Nigerian military forces are often blamed for ineffective battles with the insurgents, but demoralized Nigerian soldiers claim they lack food and ammunition and are often outnumbered and outgunned by Boko Haram. Over one hundred Nigerian Army officers and men are awaiting death sentences by firing squad for alleged mutiny and desertion.

Seventy percent of Borno State is now controlled by Boko Haram and the insurgents' occupation of villages surrounding the state capital city Maiduguri is now complete, putting Boko Haram in position to press an attack on Maiduguri, a city of over 1 million and recently home to many of the 1.6 million refugees displaced by Boko Haram.

The insurgents are believed to want Maiduguri as their capital of a new Caliphate state because of its central role in the founding of Boko Haram last decade. It has a largely Muslim population but also a substantial Christian community.

Bishop Oliver Dashe Doeme, the Catholic Bishop of Maiduguri, has been a reliable source of information for me on Boko Haram and the siege of his city. The Bishop regularly visits villages decimated by Boko Haram. He also has been an outspoken critic of the Nigerian Army and President Goodluck Jonathan.

Contact with Maiduguri is difficult as there are only a few hours of electric power each day and Internet communication is intermittent. But the Bishop sent me the following e-mail: "We thank God that we are able to reach the new year among the living. I celebrated new year masses in Mubi (a village recently captured by Boko Haram) and good number of our members have come back. I was amazed by the faith of our people. In all the parishes I went, people came out in great numbers to welcome me.

"But the Boko Haram members are still on the rampage. You have heard what

happened in Baga. Even though the group has been repelled one wonders for how long we will continue like this. Yet, we trust that God will not let his children down. He is our ultimate hope. We trust that one day God will put an end to this terrorism.”

Bishop Dashe has organized a program of aid and rehabilitation for the hundreds of widows and orphans of those killed in Baga and other villages under siege by Boko Haram.

“The widows suffer a lot once the husbands are gone,” says Bishop Dashe. “Our major target is to help them take care of their children, for many of them are left with six to ten children with no work and they need assistance.”

The Baga attack was not the only terrorist atrocity in Nigeria last week. On Saturday, in the main Maiduguri market, a girl around ten years old had explosives detonated that were strapped around her body, killing 16 and injuring 27. It is not known if she triggered the explosion herself or if it was remotely detonated by others nearby.

To the west of Borno in Yobe State, two female suicide bombers rode three-wheeled bikes into the market in Potiskum and detonated explosive vests killing five and injuring more than 40. In November, another female suicide bomber killed 48 young boys in a Potiskum school.

Boko Haram has recently sent scores of women as suicide bombers into areas where crowds gather. They are believed to be the women taken prisoner in raids by the insurgents and children of Boko Haram insurgents. Although it has not yet been proven, some of the female bombers may be girls kidnapped from a school in Chibok last April.

### **Anger at Washington**

Tensions in the U.S.-Nigeria relationship are at their highest level in years. Western diplomatic sources in the Nigerian capital Abuja told me a vigorous U.S. response to Nigerian requests for aid in tracking the kidnapped Chibok girls was apparently thwarted when “actionable intelligence” from drone flights was turned over to Nigerian military commanders but ignored.

The lack of response was blamed on mutual mistrust between U.S. and Nigerian officials. American military officers did not include raw intelligence data because they believed that Boko Haram had infiltrated the Nigerian security services.

Fifty U.S. Army Special Forces trainers started work last July with a battalion of Nigerian Army troops, most of them recruits who were not associated with the

army's questionable human rights record. But after several months training and before the troops started training with "crew served weapons," the training was halted as it could not be decided who would supply the weapons.

After an impasse of two months, the U.S. sent an official letter to the Nigerian government suggesting the training be resumed. The result: the American team was ordered to leave Nigeria.

Nigerian government officials angered by what they say is a lack of American military aid despite U.S. promises are reported to have sought training for their troops from Russian Special Forces. A deal for 12 attack helicopters is being negotiated by the Nigerian government with the Czech Republic and Belarus.

France, Britain and the U.S. had been Nigeria's main military partners, but gradually backed off from Nigeria's quirky and corrupt military which could be prickly about meeting conditions for military assistance, giving Western trainers full access to military bases and improving their human rights record.

James Hall, a retired Colonel and former U.K military attaché, recently told the BBC that the sale of military equipment to Nigeria is prohibited by U.K. law because of the army's human rights abuses. Similarly in the U.S., the Leahy Amendment is a human rights law sponsored by Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont that prohibits providing military aid to units violating human rights "with impunity."

## **Presidential Election**

The Baga attacks come just five weeks before Nigerian presidential elections which are likely to lead to more bloodshed and thus further threaten the country's stability. The election is scheduled for Feb. 14 with the incumbent Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) led by President Jonathan, a southern Christian, facing General Mohammadu Buhari, a northern Muslim of the All Progressive Congress (APC).

The PDP has won every election since Nigeria went from military to democratic rule in 1999, but the APC formed last year from a coalition of opposition parties, now threatens that dominance.

In the last election in 2011, violence left more than 800 people dead in the 12 northern states. There are indications that this year's campaign could see severe violence as well. Illegal weapons are flooding the country and many politicians have armed their supporters.

Analysts also say the contest will be close with President Jonathan vulnerable over his handling of Nigeria's endemic corruption and his inability to counter

Boko Haram's violence.

On the campaign trail, opposition candidate Buhari recently asked, "Shall we continue in a situation where 250 of our daughters have been abducted and the government has been unable to rescue them or provide credible information about what steps they are taking?"

Last week, two campaign buses adorned with photos of President Jonathan were set ablaze by angry youths in Jos, a large city in central Nigeria.

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## CIA-Friendly Jury Seen in Sterling Trial

Accused leaker and ex-CIA officer Jeffrey Sterling may face an uphill battle for acquittal as a northern Virginia federal court empanelled a jury that seemed generally sympathetic to the U.S. intelligence community, reports Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

When the trial of former CIA officer Jeffrey Sterling got underway Tuesday in Northern Virginia, prospective jurors made routine references to "three-letter agencies" and alphabet-soup categories of security clearances. In an area where vast partnerships between intelligence agencies and private contractors saturate everyday life, the jury pool was bound to please the prosecution.

In a U.S. District Court that boasts a "rocket docket," the selection of 14 jurors was swift, with the process lasting under three hours. Along the way, Judge Leonie M. Brinkema asked more than a dozen possible jurors whether their personal connections to the CIA or other intel agencies would interfere with her announced quest for an "absolutely open mind."

From what I could tell, none of those with direct connections to intelligence agencies ended up in the jury box. But affinities with agencies like the CIA seemed implicit in the courtroom. Throughout the jury selection, there was scarcely a hint that activities of those agencies might merit disapproval.

Just how familiar was the jury pool with critiques of the CIA? Hard to say, but

here's one indicator: When Brinkema asked for a show of hands among the prospective jurors, nearly 100 in the room, to indicate how many had read James Risen's bestselling book *State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration*, a grand total of zero hands went up.

That book, with its tough investigative reporting that exposed malfeasance, incompetence, cruelty and mendacity in the CIA's leadership, is at the core of the case against Sterling. He's charged with giving the author classified information, about the CIA's Operation Merlin, a dangerous maneuver that provided flawed nuclear weapon blueprints to the Iranian government in 2000.

Sterling was one of the few African American case officers to work for the CIA. He is now faced with a jury of his ostensible peers that includes no African Americans. (Twelve of the jurors are white. Two others appear to be of Asian and Middle Eastern ancestry.)

From the outset, in January 2011, when the Department of Justice announced an indictment against Sterling with ten counts, seven under the Espionage Act, the official attack on his character was classic defamation of a whistleblower. The government denounced Sterling for "underlying selfish and vindictive motivations," and unsuccessfully tried to persuade a judge that he should be jailed pending trial because it was "incomprehensible to believe that [Sterling] will not retaliate in the same deliberate, methodical, vindictive manner."

Fast forward four years, to Tuesday afternoon, when prosecuting attorney James Trump told the jury in the government's opening statement that Sterling had committed crimes of betrayal due to his "anger, bitterness, selfishness."

The Obama Justice Department's theory of the case is that Sterling became vengeful against the agency when he failed to win a legal complaint against it for racial discrimination.

A lot of smoke will be blowing through the U.S. District Court in Alexandria during the next few weeks. The Obama administration remains in overdrive, tanked up to send Jeffrey Sterling to prison for a long time. The CIA hierarchy, now operating with enormous impunity, is clearly eager to see him punished in a big way.

The CIA's allies in the Justice Department are insisting in the courtroom that Sterling could not possibly have had valid concerns when he blew the whistle on Operation Merlin by going to the Senate Intelligence Committee about it in 2003. Along the way, the government is eager to throw mud at Risen's reporting, which concluded that Merlin "may have been one of the most reckless operations in the modern history of the CIA."

*Norman Solomon is the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy and the author of War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death. He is a co-founder of RootsAction.org. [This article was originally published at ExposeFacts.org.]*

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