

A Gift of Culture to Battered Palmyra

In an extraordinary act of culture and courage, a Russian orchestra performed in the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra recently liberated from the Islamic State, but Western media mocked the event, notes Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Even those with a limited knowledge of Russia may be credited with having heard of St. Petersburg being called the Venice of the North. This is a title it must share with a variety of other claimants famed for their canals, such as Bruges in Belgium, although St. Petersburg has more justification than competing cities given its common architectural roots with the Venice of the South, namely the leading Eighteenth Century Italian architects who contributed greatly to forming its appearance.

To *cognoscenti* there is also another twin city association of St. Petersburg, that of Northern Palmyra. That notion goes back to the age of Catherine the Great, who was likened to the Third Century Queen Zenobia, powerful ruler of the Palmyran Empire, who conquered Egypt and a large swathe of Anatolia. In the time of Pushkin, Russian writers further developed the allusion, drawing more generally upon the reputed beauty and cultural richness of Roman Palmyra.

The links of consciousness did not end there. Later in the Nineteenth Century, St. Petersburg based archeologists were among the Europeans taking part in digs in Palmyra and writing about their adventures.

With this twin city awareness borne by the Russian intelligentsia to this day, it is not so surprising that precisely a St. Petersburg conductor, Valeri Gergiev, thought up the grand gesture, an act of great imagination that was realized on May 5. He brought the Symphony Orchestra of the Mariinsky Theater to Palmyra, recently liberated from the Islamic State by a Russian-backed offensive mounted by the Syrian government.

The orchestra performed a concert of Bach, Shchedrin and Prokofiev in the Roman Amphitheater to celebrate the return of culture to a UNESCO site desecrated by its Islamic State occupiers who over the preceding year held their brutal public executions here. The concert audience consisted of Russian and Syrian troops, Russian Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky, noted Arabist and Director of the Hermitage Museum Mikhail Piotrovsky, local dignitaries, and a contingent of UNESCO representatives.

The event opened with a short speech by Russian President Vladimir Putin carried over a live satellite link from his residence in Sochi. Putin underscored the

courage of those participating in the concert and the will of civilized society to triumph over terror. The entire event was broadcast live on Russian state television and was made available on the web by RT.

As the recording makes clear, this was a world-class performance that featured eminent soloists. The unaccompanied Bach piece for violin was played by a laureate of the International Tchaikovsky Competition, Pavel Miliukov. *Quadrille*, a work by the Mariinsky's house composer Rodion Shchedrin, widower of ballet prima donna Maya Plisetskaya, was performed by cellist Sergei Roldugin. And the choice of a Prokofiev symphony was in line with Gergiev's longstanding efforts to make that great Soviet composer widely known and appreciated at home and abroad.

A Frontline Performance

The concert took place little more than a month after Palmyra was liberated from its Islamic State occupiers and just days after the archeological sites were cleared of mines by Russian military specialists, many of whom were in the audience. Meanwhile, the forces of the Islamic State continue to send missions against Palmyra and its surrounding countryside in attempts to recapture lost ground.

In these circumstances, the action of maestro Gergiev, his orchestra and soloists, the logistics team that moved the orchestra and some 100 tons of telecommunications gear into the war zone, and the broadcasting team who set up the live coverage must be characterized as brave, even daring.

It was also in character for Gergiev. He performed at the front before, as he famously did in 2008 when he brought the orchestra to the capital of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali, just after its liberation from Georgian attackers. But he and his orchestra also perform at home in ways that show similar disregard for their own comfort and incur heightened risks: they regularly bring their music to hard to reach parts of the Russian Federation on grueling tours of the far north and the far east, often taking with them internationally known soloists. Those concerts do not receive the admiring attention of the outside world.

It bears mention that the concert by maestro Gergiev and the Mariinsky orchestra was not a one-off event. It was meant to be the first step in the return of culture and decency to Palmyra. On the next day a follow-on concert featuring a Syrian orchestra and chorus was held in the Roman amphitheater.

Moreover, the Russians did not rush to evacuate their broadcasters and gear, because state television carried a live transmission of this evening concert to Russian viewers late last night.

With all due respect to maestro Gergiev's intention to present a gift of culture to the residents of Palmyra and to convey the promise of return to normal civilian life in a country devastated by civil war and the intervention of foreign fighters, it would be disingenuous to ignore the way the Kremlin and its state television framed the event for consumption in Russia and the wider world.

Call it an exercise in Soft Power, of which it was surely Russia's most successful in many, many years; call it what you will, the concert in Palmyra had a clearly stated political dimension. This "Pray for Palmyra" concert was dedicated to the memory of two heroes, one Syrian, the other Russian. Large photos of both were on either side of the stage.

The Syrian being honored was Dr. Khaled Asaad, director of the Palmyra museum complex who in August 2015, at age 81, was brutally executed, beheaded by the Islamic State militants. The presence at the concert of Hermitage director Mikhail Piotrovsky was a direct counterpoint to the missing Syrian scholar and administrator. Piotrovsky symbolized the ongoing and future participation of Russian art restorers in bringing Palmyra back to its pre-war status as a center of research for orientalists and a major tourist attraction.

A Russian Hero

The Russian being honored was Lieutenant Alexander Prokhorenko, Russia's national hero of the Syrian campaign, the special forces officer working behind enemy lines on the Palmyra front who, when surrounded by jihadists, called in Russian jet strikes on his own position and knowingly paid with his life while taking out an enemy detachment.

Prokhorenko's body was eventually recovered and returned to Russia where it was given the highest state honors. His funeral in his native Orenburg region was held on May 6. Russian television news coverage of the Palmyra concert was back-to-back with video reportage of the honor guard receiving Prokhorenko's coffin.

Though some British newspapers had described Prokhorenko as a Russian "Rambo" and some Western military experts saluted the selfless heroism of this fellow professional soldier, Russian state television chose to feature a more personal response. We were shown an elderly French couple who had sent their family medals for World War II resistance heroism to the parents of Prokhorenko via the Russian diplomatic service as their expression of solidarity. The couple was invited to Russia by President Putin and met with the grieving parents of Russia's hero, as we saw on television.

More broadly, the date for the Mariinsky concert in Palmyra was surely chosen with an eye to the May 9 Victory in Europe celebrations across Russia. The

concert was a gift to the Russian nation for its popular if skeptical support of the military intervention in Syria. The people saw on their screens the fruits of Russian-Syrian military cooperation, and in particular images of the secular and friendly Syria that Russian diplomacy has backed with blood and national wealth.

They saw the first step in what will be a long process of reconstruction, preparing the way for the return of refugees and displaced persons. All of this is a direct reproach to the European Union's handling of the migrant crisis. Europe, like the United States, has at best stood by and at worst aided and abetted the Gulf States and Turkey in their interventions in the Syrian civil war, greatly strengthening the terrorist forces and prolonged the fighting awaiting the collapse of the Assad regime, notwithstanding all the havoc that resulted for the Syrian population.

Western mainstream media coverage of the Mariinsky Symphony Orchestra's concert in Palmyra runs the full range from merely tendentious and sour grapes to overtly hostile and malicious commentary.

U.S. media coverage was meager. The online edition of *Time* magazine was short, concentrated on the facts and avoided politically colored adjectives. To its credit, we were told that the concert was led "by renowned Russian conductor Valery Gergiev." The presence in the audience of UNESCO dignitaries was noted.

The New York Times was less cautious, more inflammatory. Its editors chose a headline that sought to deprive the event of any serious merit: "Russian Orchestra Plays in Palmyra Ruins as Strikes Kill 28." This linkage of two separate news items may be described as the "Washington narrative" because it shows up in many other derogatory press accounts of the concert.

What shred of journalistic integrity the *Times* managed to produce appears at the very end of the article, when the author admits that: "it was not immediately clear who carried out the attack on the camp in Idlib province where some 2,000 internally displaced people had taken shelter from the fighting in nearby Aleppo and Hama provinces over the past year."

And the closing words are that it is "too early to say if Assad's forces carried out the attack." But the intended damage to the credibility of the Russian cultural mission to Palmyra was already done up front.

The New Cold War

Probably the most toxic U.S. reporting on the concert was from Radio Svoboda, the old Cold War bullhorn directed against Russia with U.S. government funding. Here at the outset we are told about the cellist Roldugin, the "close friend of

Russian President Vladimir Putin” who was revealed in the Panama Papers scandal as the owner of an offshore company engaged in “shady transactions.”

But then the article switches over entirely to a story broadcast by Sky News two days earlier alleging that Palmyra was handed over to Syrian government troops by the Islamic State in accordance with agreements reached between the Islamic State and the Assad regime. The propaganda point was that Assad was supposedly in cahoots with the jihadists. The notion of Russian participation in the city’s liberation is off the radar screen.

British media were more attentive to the concert in Palmyra but, with one or two exceptions, no friendlier than their American *confrères*. *The Guardian* was entirely aligned with the Washington narrative. Valery Gergiev is portrayed as the “Kremlin favourite.” Moreover, we read that “Gergiev, the former principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, is a controversial and outspoken supporter of Putin.”

In this light, we are reminded about Gergiev’s 2008 concert in Ossetia. I note parenthetically what *The Guardian* omitted in their rush to marginalize the maestro: that Gergiev is now the principal conductor of the Munich Philharmonic as well as artistic director of the Mariinsky.

The Guardian also reminds us that featured cellist Sergei Roldugin is “Vladimir Putin’s best friend” and that “the Panama Papers revealed that Roldugin was the beneficiary of hundreds of millions of dollars in offshore deals.”

Finally, *The Guardian* tells its readers that among the foreigners present at the concert were representatives from Zimbabwe, China and Serbia. They pointedly omitted that they were present in a UNESCO delegation which also included Europeans.

The BBC online coverage carries many of the anti-Putin, anti-Russian tendentious adjectives, reminders and omissions that we have seen above. But it goes the extra mile by quoting UK Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond’s extraordinary comment that the concert was “a tasteless attempt to distract attention from the continued suffering of millions of Syrians. It shows that there are no depths to which the regime will not sink.”

From the BBC quote, it is not clear whether the Minister had in mind Putin’s or Assad’s regime’s plumbing the depths, but his intention to slander the Russians is obvious.

The BBC also carried a more balanced separate report from their bureau chief in Moscow, Steve Rosenberg. He saw that the message from Moscow was that Russia is a force for good, whereas Western officials “remain suspicious of Russia’s

intentions.” Otherwise Rosenberg just repeats the same hurtful innuendos that we have seen above: the connection between Rodulgin and the Panama Papers, the Gergiev concert in Tskhinvali in 2008.

To every generalization there is always an exception, and as happens from time to time it is the British tabloids that show more common sense and decency than the high-style outlets of the political class.

The heading given to the article on the concert in the online edition of *The Daily Mail* says it all: “Culture and civilization return to Palmyra: Russian orchestra performs concert in the ancient Roman amphitheatre for the first time since ISIS used it to carry out public executions in Syria.” The editors wisely included a click-on video recording of the concert, allowing their readers to judge for themselves.

In summary, the Information War that the West has been waging against Russia is going full tilt. It is an unpardonable error of judgment to speak of a new Cold War as something that lies ahead, just around the corner. We are in the midst of it, and it will take enormous luck or a change of leaders for the better if we are to avoid a hot war.

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America's Two-Faced Policy on Iran

The Obama administration seeks to demonize Iran – along with Russia and China – while also demanding their help in areas of U.S. interest, an approach that is both disingenuous and dangerous, as former British diplomat Alastair Crooke explains.

By Alastair Crooke

In an article entitled “Why America needs Iran in Iraq,” former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad argues that “the chaos in Baghdad, culminating in the temporary occupation of the parliament by followers of Shiite Islamist cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, is undermining the war against the Islamic State; weakening Iraq's economy; and accelerating the country's disintegration.

“Without cooperation between the United States, Iran and Iraq's top Shiite cleric, Ayatollah Sistani, the crisis could very well lead to the collapse of

the entire political system set up in Iraq during the temporary U.S. occupation ... To prevent this, Washington needs Tehran's help. And Iran should be as motivated to seek stability [in Iraq] as much as Washington, because" Khalilzad asserts, "Iran, currently is losing favour in Iraq."

Putting aside the questionable implication that Iran might somehow, through co-operation with America, raise its standing amongst Iraqis, Khalilzad's presumption that Iran should now attend to America's needs in Iraq, coupled with Secretary of State John Kerry's insistence that Iran should help America to end the conflict in Syria too, throw into sharp relief the paradox inherent at the heart of U.S. diplomacy towards Iran, Russia (and China also).

This approach has been dubbed the "middle way" by former special adviser to the Assistant Secretary of State, Jeremy Shapiro: the U.S. Administration has no desire for an all-out confrontation with these three states. They are militarily hard nuts, and there is not much appetite for yet more military confrontation amongst a weary and wary American public (to the continuing frustration of the neocons).

More prosaically, the global financial system is now so brittle, so delicately poised, that it is not at all certain that the prospect of conflict would give the lift to America's flagging economy that war generally is supposed to give. It might just snap the financial system, instead – hence the Middle Way.

Shapiro points out the obvious contradiction to this two-track approach: the U.S. no longer can ignore such powerful states. Its window of absolute, unchallenged, uni-polar power has passed. *America needs the help of these states*, but at the same time, it seeks precisely to counter these states' potential to rival or limit American power in any way.

And America simply ignores the core complaints that fuel the tensions between itself and these states. It simply declines to address them. Shapiro concludes that this foreign policy approach is unsustainable, and bound to fail: "This dual-track approach, condemning Russia [or Iran] as an aggressor one day, [whilst] seeking to work with Moscow [or Tehran] the next ... would [ultimately] force ever-greater confrontation."

The 'Middle Way'

In a sense, the U.S. approach towards Iran seems to be mirroring the so-called "middle way" policy which the U.S. Administration pursues towards Russia, whereby the putative "reset" with Russia was set aside (when President Vladimir Putin assumed the Presidency for the second time), and Obama – rather than seek outright confrontation with Russia – ruled that America however, would only co-

operate with Russia when it suited it, but the U.S. would not deign to address Russia's core issues of its "outsider" status in Europe, or its containment in Asia – or its concerns about a global order that was being used to corner Russia and to crush dissenter states who refused to enter the global order on America's terms alone.

And Obama did little to drawback the NATO missile-march towards Russia's borders (ostensibly, it may be recalled, to save Europe *from Iranian missiles*).

Ostensibly, too, the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) could have been America's "reset" with Iran. Some, including a number of prominent Iranian politicians, thought it was.

But National Security Advisor Susan Rice was very explicit to Jeffrey Goldberg in *The Atlantic* that this was never intended: "It is assumed, at least among his critics, that Obama sought the Iran deal because he has a vision of a historic American-Persian rapprochement. But his desire for the nuclear agreement was born of pessimism as much as it was of optimism.

"The Iran deal was never primarily about trying to open a new era of relations between the U.S. and Iran," Susan Rice told [Goldberg]. "It was far more pragmatic and minimalist. The aim was very simply to make a dangerous country substantially less dangerous. No one had any expectation that Iran would be a more benign actor."

And so, we see a similar pattern, the possibility of a real "reset" with Iran is pre-meditatively set aside (as per Rice), whilst the dual-track approach of condemning Iran for its ballistic missile tests (which have nothing to do with JCPOA), and its support for Hizbullah, are condemned one day, whilst Iran's help in Iraq and Syria is being demanded on the next day.

At the same time, Iran's core dispute with the U.S. – its complaints that exclusion from the international financial system is not being ameliorated as JCPOA was supposed so to do – are not being addressed. Rather they are being met with a shrug that implies "did they really expect anything else?"

Well, some (but by no means all) Iranian politicians had done just that: they had raised the Iranian public's expectations that *all* sanctions – other than specific U.S. sanctions – would be lifted. They rather bet their credibility on it, as it were, and may pay a political price eventually.

And as NATO deploys a further 4,000 troops in the Baltic states and Poland, on Russia's border, so too the U.S. Congress continues its figurative advance on Iran's frontiers.

Here is Iran's (conservative) *Keyhan* newspaper: "The draft of a new resolution has been presented to the US Congress in which Iran is accused of creating tension in the Persian Gulf, and the US Government has been urged to confront Iran and impose new sanctions against our country. Randy Forbes, a Republican member of the US House of Representatives, has drafted a resolution, which if passed by the Congress, condemns *Iran's military presence in the Persian Gulf as a provocation*" (emphasis added)

Shapiro's specific warning about the "middle way" approach was that "political and bureaucratic factors on both sides would force ever-greater confrontation." But this is not the only risk, nor does it even constitute being the biggest risk (besides that of having undermined those in Iran and Russia who had put their "hat in the ring" of contemplating *Entente* with the United State).

America's Bad Faith

Rather, it is by making this policy approach quite general to those states which have taken on themselves the burden of being the symbol for a non-Western, alternative vision (Russia, Iran and China, *inter alia*), that a perceived breach of *the spirit* of the JCPOA (at the least), will have wider repercussions.

Russia and China both spent political capital in order to help persuade Iran to sign up to the JCPOA: Will they not wonder whether America is to be trusted? China has complicated negotiations in hand with America on trade and financial issues, whilst Russia has been trying to resolve ballistic missile, as well as Ukraine sanctions issues, with America.

Is it not a straw in the wind for the consequences to this policy when a prominent Russian commentator, Fyodor Lukyanov, who is not at all hostile to rapprochement with the West, writes in *End of the G8 Era* that using Russia's prospective inclusion in the G8 as an instrument of pressure on Russia is pointless?:

"The G8 reflected a certain period of history when Russia really wanted to be integrated into the so-called Extended West. Why it did not happen? Something went wrong? This is another topic. The most important thing is that it did not happen at all ... it seemed (in the 1990s) that this membership would not mean just participation in yet another club, but a strategic decision aimed at the future.

"However, the desirable future did not come, and probably won't come. It is obvious now, that the world does not develop in the direction of the Western model. So, now we have what we have, and there is no reason to restore the G8."

May this general sentiment come to be reflected in Iran too, as the sanctions-

lifting issue drags on? Did the U.S. then “win one over Iran” through the JCPOA accord – as the shrugs of U.S. shoulders at Iranian complaints, might imply? Was Iran just naïve? Did they really think that the U.S. was simply going to empower Iran financially?

It is pretty clear that the Supreme Leader understood the situation precisely – he had, after all some experience of U.S. non-compliance with agreements from the Lebanese hostage negotiations of the 1980s.

But what has Iran lost by the JCPOA? A few Iranians may have had their fingers burned in the process, but Iran achieved three important things: the world now knows that it was not Iran that was the impediment to a nuclear deal; the deal has transformed Iran’s public image – and created an opening – with the rest of the world (including Europe); and it has, in the process, constructed and strengthened strategic political and economic ties with Russia and China.

But most important of all, the rift *within* Iran that stemmed from the sense amongst some Iranian orientations, that President Ahmadinejad’s rhetoric was a principal obstacle to normalizing with the West, *has been addressed*: an Iranian government, with a Western-friendly face, has been given, and seen to have been given, the full chance to negotiate a solution to the nuclear issue. Whatever the final outcome, that boil has been lanced.

No, the Iranian leadership has not been naïve.

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Unfair Attack on UK’s Labour Party

The British Labour Party is under attack for “anti-Semitism” because a few of its members have made remarks critical of Israel and Zionism, but this assault is an abuse of a very serious accusation, says Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

How do you misuse a racial prejudice? At first glance this ought to appear to be an absurd question. Racial prejudices already constitute the distortion of perception and emotion. Nevertheless, when a particular prejudice has a distinct pedigree and an age-old definition, and then is purposely exploited

(particularly by those purporting to represent its victims) solely for political gain, the issue of misuse becomes anything but absurd.

The racial prejudice in question is anti-Semitism, one of the most devastating of bigotries and responsible for untold misery. It has always been defined as hatred of Jews as Jews. This hatred is underpinned by a vast number of historical myths and fantastic conspiracy theories, but at its core, what we have here is close to pure racism – a Jew is bad not because of what he or she has done, but because of some racial taint.

Now here is the complicated part. This age-old definition has been reformulated by an ideologically driven sub-set of Jewry – Zionists – for political purposes. The Zionists have declared that there is no difference between the State of Israel and the worldwide community of Jews and therefore, if you are opposed to Israel you are anti-Semitic.

This identification of Israel and the Jews en masse is historically, demographically and certainly religiously false. But no matter, the Zionists shout this redefinition loudly and endlessly. And, by backing their claim with political pressure and a lot of money, they have managed to get it accepted in some Western political circles. This, then, is what constitutes the misuse for political purposes of a dangerous racial prejudice.

Having laid this foundation, the Zionists are now using this bastardized concept of anti-Semitism as a weapon against those critical of not the Jews as a group, but the political state of Israel, its policies and behaviors, which are, themselves, racist and barbaric. Indeed, it is Israeli behavior, specifically toward the Palestinians, that has encouraged a revival of anti-Semitism after more than a half a century of quiescence – thus the very striking irony of the Zionist insistence that opposition to Israeli racist policies is itself a racial prejudice.

Attack on the British Labour Party

There are many examples of this Zionist perversion, but the latest one is a full-blown attack on those members of the British Labour Party who are critical of Israel yet not of Jews as such. Charley Allan, a columnist for the British paper *Morning Star*, has described the resulting atmosphere as a “witch hunt.” Below are two examples of isolated statements made by Labour Party members which have caused a purposefully exaggerated brouhaha over the issue of anti-Semitism.

In late April, it was revealed that Naseem Shah, the Labour MP for Bradford West, had posted on her Facebook account a map that showed Israel transferred to within the borders of the U.S. She labeled it as “a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” Shah’s posting, which she sourced from the website of the Jewish-American scholar Norman Finkelstein, was made at the height of Israel’s 2014 invasion of Gaza and pre-dated her election to Parliament.

While the suggestion of the wholesale transference of Israel to the U.S. is but a fantasy, associating the U.S. and Israel certainly has an underlying logic. The United States is Israel’s major protector and financier. The U.S. Congress treats Israel as a privileged 51st state. And, most of those who emigrate from Israel go to the U.S.

Accusations that Shah’s post was an anti-Semitic attack on Jewry were belatedly raised, leading to her suspension from the Labour Party pending an investigation. She subsequently, and rather abjectly, apologized.

Nonetheless, the fact is that *Ms. Shah’s display of the map was not anti-Semitic at all*. It was not an attack on Jews as such, and there is no evidence that it was motivated by a hatred of Jews. What is really objectionable is the Zionist effort to perversely manipulate the post as if it really was anti-Semitism, in order to attack those opposed to their own racist political ideology.

The second example concerns the veteran Labour Party leader Ken Livingstone, who is also a former mayor of London. In late April, Livingstone stated on a British radio program that “Hitler was a Zionist” whose policy was that “the Jews should be moved to Israel.” Now this is certainly not a true statement.

What is true is that Hitler wanted the Jews out of Germany. Up until 1938 they could leave that country (albeit without any possessions) if they could find another country that would let them in (which wasn’t easy). During this time Hitler did not particularly care where the German Jews went, and most who did have the foresight to leave did not go to Palestine.

Though historically inaccurate, *Livingstone’s statement was not anti-Semitic*. Its principal subject was Hitler and the Zionist movement, and, again, there is no evidence that it was motivated by hatred of Jews. Nonetheless, for making his statement Livingstone has been accused of being anti-Semitic, and he too has been suspended from the Labour Party pending an investigation.

It would seem that the present Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, is running scared, tossing out members like Shah and Livingstone, rather than counterattacking against Zionist offensive with the truth – that the charge of anti-Semitism is being improperly exploited for political purposes.

Corbyn himself, who is of the left wing of the party, and has repeatedly expressed sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians, is probably among the real targets of this campaign of intimidation. It seems that the right wing of the party has joined up with the British Zionists to run Corbyn out of office using, or rather misusing, the charge of anti-Semitism.

Despite what amounts to ever-present paranoia in some circles, there are no signs of a future Holocaust in the making. That does not mean that history holds no important lessons for the Jews. It certainly does.

The primary lesson is that the Jews, like other minority groups, need to protect their collective interests by maintaining strong support for universal civil and human rights, as well as the rule of law both domestically and internationally. However, there is another lesson the past, and specifically the Holocaust, ought to have taught us: *that it is dangerously counterproductive to engage in a defense of group interests that involves the persecution of others.*

To the extent that they have followed this path, the Zionists have failed to learn from history.

Therefore, it is not the Jews as a people who are remiss. It is only those who have abandoned the protections of civil and human rights and now flout international law in favor of a cruel nationalist policy. The Zionist claim that they have pursue this path to protect the Jewish people is highly suspect for, since its founding, Israel has always been the most dangerous place a Jew can reside.

We are led to the conclusion expressed by Professor Stephen Bronner in a deeply insightful work entitled *The Bigot*. "Disentangling genuine prejudice from a legitimate critique of Israeli territorial ambitions should be the aim of all progressive inquiry into the problem of anti-Jewish bigotry."

That critique of Israel's behavior is not only legitimate, but central to future peace in the Middle East.

Zionism is an ideology gone seriously astray. And the use of the charge of anti-Semitism as a weapon against its critics is a dangerous exploitation of that age-old bigotry as well as a betrayal of the lessons of history.

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China Closes the Innovation Gap

While the U.S. expands spending on wars and “regime changes” – and slashes its budget for science and infrastructure – China is making different choices, now rapidly closing the gap on scientific innovation, writes John V. Walsh.

By John V. Walsh

The headline reads, “The Rapid Rise of a Research Nation: China’s economic boom is mirrored by its similarly meteoric rise in high quality science.” This was not a headline in *People’s Daily* or *China Daily* but in the most prestigious of Western scientific publications, *Nature*.

The 38 pages, which follow that headline in a special Supplement to the journal *Nature*, tell us that China is now second in the world in high *quality* science publications and growing fast. This certainly contradicts the Western, dare I say racist, stereotype of the hardworking, but unimaginative, Asian drudge, dutifully churning out mounds of low-quality work.

But how can we know that claim about China is true? Are we dealing here with release of data by the Chinese government, which, again according to Western stereotype, produces little but fabrications? (This writer has not found that to be the case, but there is merit in using sources that are immune to Western prejudices.)

Before considering the evidence for *Nature’s* claim of high quality Chinese science, we should ask of what significance is it to the layman? Just this, as the U.S. continues its belligerent “pivot to Asia,” which has been designed by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, President Barack Obama and the foreign policy Elite to confront China, we should know what our leaders are getting us into.

Two pillars of a country’s power (supporting the hard, soft and military varieties) are its economy and its technology. Since late in 2014 China has been the world’s largest economy according to the International Monetary Fund, using the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) metric. It continues to grow at about 7 percent – or “only” 7 percent as the Western media are fond of telling us although no Western nation comes near that rate of growth.

Now China appears to be on the cusp of becoming the world’s foremost Research and Development (R&D) engine. And that pushes the Chinese economy forward even more rapidly, for technology and science are the driving forces for modern economic development.

We would do well to remember that the last time that the U.S. confronted China directly in armed conflict was the Korean War. When the U.S., using the United Nations as cover, advanced all the way to the border with China, the Yalu river, China entered the war and the U.S. was driven back south to the 38th parallel. The result was restoration of the *status quo ante bellum*, with Korea divided in the way it remains to this day. At that time China was weak and backward; now it is strong and advanced.

Historical Domination

In a broader historical context, for the last 500 years the West has been in the dirty business of invading and colonizing the rest of the planet. This process continues today in the form of neocolonialism, most recently with U.S. wars, “regime change” ops and sanctions aimed at resisting nations.

In this entire 500-year period, the West has always enjoyed technological superiority in such encounters, and that has been one of the keys to its success at domination. Some would say that technology was *the* key to subjugation of the planet by the West.

We can envisage the Toledo steel armor and swords of the original conquistadores from 1492 onward to the titanic aircraft carriers of the U.S. lumbering around the South China Sea today. But the advance of science and technology in China means that this will not long remain the case. In fact that day may have passed already for all practical purposes.

So we would be well advised to know what sort of predicament our Elite are creating for us with their “pivot to Asia.”

Let us turn to the evidence. How do we know with a high level of confidence that China has succeeded so impressively in its science and technology? The information comes from *Nature* Index (NatureIndex.com), a product of the journal *Nature*. Perhaps relatively few laymen are aware of *Nature*, but virtually every working scientist regards it as one of the most outstanding of scientific publications, a reputation well deserved.

As but one example, the original paper by Watson and Crick on the double helical structure of DNA, along with the paper, by Maurice Wilkins and Rosalind Franklin, providing the data that led to the Watson-Crick structure, appeared in *Nature*.

Nature is published by Elsevier, which has been around for a good long time. Elsevier, headquartered in the Netherlands at the time, published Galileo’s “Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems” smuggled out of Italy to escape Vatican suppression while Galileo was under house arrest. Descartes was

also published by Elsevier. The list goes on over the centuries.

Measuring Progress

Now dear reader, you will have to bear with me for a few brief paragraphs to describe how NatureIndex makes the determination of *quality* in science. It is all spelled out in great detail at NatureIndex.com. NatureIndex is built on a database of all the original articles published in 68 of the highest quality scientific journals in the world listed [here](#). The selection of those journals is done by a group of prominent active research scientists listed [here](#). All the selected journals are based in the West as are all but a handful of the selecting scientists.

In a given year at the moment approximately 60,000 original articles appear in these journals. Each author of the 60,000 papers is given a score based on the number of these articles to which he or she has made a contribution. This number is called the Fractional Index (FC). For technical reasons the FC has to be weighted for certain disciplines giving rise to another number, the Weighted Fractional Index (WFC) for each scientist.

Add up the WFC's for all the scientists in China appearing in the list of contributors in a given year and you have the WFC for the nation of China. The same can be done for any other country. It is as simple as that.

Basically the WFC is a metric for quality because the journals chosen to be part of the Index are those that publish the very best science as best as it can be determined at the moment. Publication of a paper in these journals is a highly competitive business, and every scientist wants to publish his or her best work in them.

The WFC is no bureaucratic or governmental measure. Each article that appears has been reviewed and accepted, usually by at least three scientists acting completely independently, and in fact not even knowing who their fellow reviewers of a given manuscript are. That means we have at least 180,000 independent reviews per year.

And then there are the many more articles rejected by these reviewing scientists. That means the WFC for the countries surveyed is determined by hundreds of thousands of independent reviews each year! They all act independently of one another. Adam Smith would love the model.

This author has been involved for a lifetime in such scientific reviews, as both reviewer and reviewed. The reviews are generally tough, honest and mostly fair. And in general the more prestigious the publication, the more demanding the review.

Again the bottom line is the WFC for each of the countries surveyed. The higher the WFC, the higher the quality of the country's total output. For the 12 months of 2015 the U.S. had the number one WFC by far. But second was China. (The order of the top 20 is: U.S., China, Germany, UK, Japan, France, Canada, Switzerland, South Korea, Italy, Spain, Australia, India, Netherlands, Israel, Sweden, Singapore, Taiwan, Russia, Belgium.)

Nature magazine began analyzing China's output in 2012 and it recently (December, 2015) published a hard copy Supplement summarizing the Index in which the WFC for China for the period 2012 to 2014 was assessed. There is much of interest in the 38 pages of this Supplement. It contains evaluations of the science by region, institution (which includes both academia and corporations) and city. The awe of those who prepared the supplement for the advances in Chinese science is palpable in the Supplement.

Changing Places

For those interested in comparisons, as we should well be if we wish to know accurately our place in the world, the following paragraph from the NatureIndex Supplement is striking: "But what sets China apart is its WFC. While China's contribution (to the global total) grew 37% from 2012 through 2014, the United States saw a 4% drop over the same period."

That paragraph should be read and reread by those who would dismiss the development of China as "merely" quantitative or completely fake.

Moreover, the decline in the WFC of the U.S. comes as no surprise to researchers in the U.S., my colleagues, who have watched many laboratories close and talented investigators forced to quit as federal funding failed to keep pace with expenses. It is sad indeed to watch this tragedy unfold, with all the attendant waste of talent, training and education.

To return to the Nature Index Supplement for China for 2012-2014, here are excerpts from the opening section, which convey much of the magnitude and significance of China's accomplishment:

"China has ambitious plans to source as much as 15% of its energy from renewable resources by 2020, at the same time its economy is expected to slow (to 6.8 -7.0 percent per year. JW). It also aspires to be the next space superpower while facing major health and environment challenges, such as an ageing population and water shortages. (China also has set as a goal the total elimination of poverty and the creation of a 'moderately prosperous society' by 2020. JW)

"The Chinese government knows that surmounting these challenges while achieving its goals can only be accomplished through science. Indeed, China is pegging its

future prosperity on a knowledge-based economy, underpinned by research and innovation. For a country that invented paper, gunpowder and the compass, such lofty ambitions could be realized. This year (2015) pharmacologist Tu Youyou became the first Chinese researcher to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine for helping to discover a new drug for malaria that has saved millions of lives.”

This should be quite enough to convince the reader of the extent, rapidity and quality of science in China. But is there corroborative data for the Nature Index study? Yes, from our own U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). The NSF released an assessment of China’s R&D in January 2016 entitled: “U.S. science and technology leadership increasingly challenged by advances in Asia: China is now the second largest performer of research and development.”

This assessment is drawn from Science and Engineering Indicators, 2016, which is in turn produced by the National Science Board (NSB) a leadership body of the NSF whose 25 members are presidential appointees. The assessment is worth reading in full, but the bottom line is the following:

“According to *Indicators 2016*, China is now the second-largest performer of R&D, accounting for 20 percent of global R&D as compared to the United States, which accounts for 27 percent.”

That means of course that China now produces almost three-fourths as much R&D as the U.S., if we are to believe the NSF’s figures, and China’s output is growing fast. Here are some other quotes from the NSF assessment:

“Between 2003 and 2013, China ramped up its R&D investments at an average of 19.5 percent annually, greatly exceeding that of the U.S. China made its increases despite the Great Recession. (This last indicates to this writer a deep commitment to R&D.)

“China has also made significant strides in S&E (Science and Engineering) education, which is critical to supporting R&D as well as knowledge and technology-intensive industries. China is the world’s number-one producer of undergraduates with degrees in science and engineering. These fields account for 49 percent of all bachelor’s degrees awarded in China, compared to 33 percent of all bachelor’s degrees the U.S. awards.

“In 2012, students in China earned about 23 percent of the world’s 6 million first University degrees in S&E. Students in the European Union earned about 12 percent and those in the U.S. accounted for about 9 percent of these degrees. (Note that China is now producing more undergraduate degrees in S&E than the U.S. and the European Union combined, i.e., more than the entire “West.” jw)

“The number of S&E graduate degrees awarded in China is also increasing. However, the U.S. continues to award the largest number of S&E doctorates and remains the destination of choice for internationally mobile students.” (But with the enormous numbers of undergraduate S&E degrees awarded in China, it would seem to be only a matter of time before graduate degrees follow. jw)

U.S. Retrenchment

Now let us see what the NSF has to say about the growth rate of R&D in the U.S., something it knows probably better than anyone else. Again we quote:

“Federal investment in both academic and business sector R&D has declined in recent years, reflecting the effects of the end of the investments of ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act), the advent of the Budget Control Act, and increased pressure on the discretionary portion of the federal budget.

“Since the Great Recession, substantial, real R&D growth annually – ahead of the pace of U.S. GDP – has not returned. Inflation-adjusted growth in total U.S. R&D averaged only 0.8 percent annually over the 2008-13 period, behind the 1.2 percent annual average for U.S. GDP.

” ‘Decreased federal investment is negatively impacting our nation’s research universities,’ said Kelvin Droegemeier, NSB vice chair and vice president for research at the University of Oklahoma. ‘Our universities conduct 51 percent of the nation’s basic research and train the next generation of STEM-capable workers. Federal support is essential to developing the new knowledge and human capital that allows the U.S. to innovate and be at the forefront of S&T.’”

I would pull from this quotation one phrase that is of special significance for the decline in federal funding for R&D, to wit “*increased pressure on the discretionary portion of the federal budget.*” Discretionary spending excludes earned benefits, principally Social Security and Medicare which are in the non-discretionary category.

Do I have to tell readers that the biggest portion of the federal discretionary budget is the Pentagon? According to OMB the military consumed 55 percent of the federal discretionary budget in 2015 whereas science got 3 percent!!

“International Affairs” also received 3 percent. In other words, the U.S. is building -and using – vast amounts of instruments of destruction while China is building up its scientific and technical enterprise.

I have outlined the facts and evidence for China’s great leap forward in science and technology. In the light of China’s impressive record in both economic development and in R&D, should the U.S. not terminate its bellicose pivot to the Western Pacific and seek a peaceful win-win relationship with China?

The reality reviewed here suggests that confrontation with China belongs to the colonial and neocolonial past, which for China ended decisively in 1949. The U.S. establishment must recognize that reality or court disaster for America and the world.

Correction: *Nature* is published by Nature Publishing Group, not Elsevier as stated. The Nature Index data base, however, includes prominent journals published by Elsevier. The essential point is that *Nature* is one of most prestigious publications in the world and many would rank it as number one.

Details on the rather complicated pyramid of publishing entities responsible for *Nature* nowadays can be found [here](#).

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