

A Voiceless Left Faces History's Monster

Despite all its armed might and long history of conquests, America remains a perpetually frightened country without a strong movement to protest this imperialism and warmongering, notes poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

Rumors of war and the lexicon of war permeate the culture of empires, and the U.S. empire is not an exception. In a concomitant manner, the specter of violent death pervades the imagery of the U.S. entertainment industry and stalks the citizens' dreams.

Present circumstances merge with the sleeping monster of history: Close your eyes and images of cross burnings, lynchings, mountains of bison skulls, flaring veils of napalm, and blooming mushroom clouds rise from within.

All the bristling, military armaments of the Pentagon cannot turn back the raging storm.

The mere existence of vast arrays of weapons, deployed or not, does great harm to the soul of a nation. U.S. Americans are fearful, day and night. We would not feel secure even if we ensconced ourselves in an armory.

An empire, built on the backs of slaves, both actual and de facto, with its expansion across the continent expedited by genocide, has conjured internal Furies – raging apparitions, borne of the nation's collective soul and of nature's fury, that cannot be repelled by weapons of any make.

Amid the empire of the feckless, we on the Left have been rendered all but voiceless. We wander in a wasteland of resentment, marginalized, denied a voice in cultural discourse. Online, we gibber and snarl at each other and curse our predicament like Dante's figures of the damned in pits of the Inferno. By all indications, we are bereft of the knowledge of where and how to even begin the dialog.

Yet: Recently, by a resounding margin, Venezuelans vote to retain socialism. (The nation's citizenry are fully cognizant that U.S. imperialist subterfuge is the root of their nation's troubles.)

Concurrently, polls of former citizens of the fallen USSR reveal, the majority favor delivering capitalism to the landfill of history and reestablishing communism. (Unlike all too many U.S. Americans, they know they have been bamboozled.)

Although: Across Europe, the hard, racist right is in ascendancy. A predictable phenomenon, due to liberalism's serial betrayals of the middle and laboring classes in behalf of their capitalist vampire benefactors. The more undiluted the form of capitalism – the greater the levels of deprivation and attendant fear and displaced anger evinced by a power-bereft citizenry. The only factors that have saved capitalism from itself, on an historical basis, have been measures of progressive reform and piecemeal, socialist policies.

Benefiting Few, Exploiting Many

And that is the reality that frightens the capitalist over-class and motivates them to set into action their scheming, prevaricating operatives and propaganda-banding shit-kickers. To wit, their ruthlessness knows no limit in regard to preventing capitalism's exploited multitudes from gaining an even glancing degree of awareness of: The system was, from the get-go, designed to benefit a ruthless few and to the detriment of the many.

Thus we discover, the reason capitalism's elite invest so much time, effort, and money rigging the game, from the political structure to mass media. It is the reason one could never have an honest dialog with the beneficiaries of the system. Where would be the profit for them in risking their litany of lies being countered and their false mythos exposed as the life-negating fraud that it is? Honesty and openness were not among the factors that enabled the capitalist elite to ascend to a position of dominance.

Willful and belligerent ignorance comprises the brick and mortar of the capitalist system's mental architecture; the structure stands on a foundation of lies. But the phenomenon presents dissidents with an opportunity because what appears to be an implacable barrier is but a collective mirage, a vapor of the mass mind. What appears to be an all-powerful system is but a group hallucination, a joint dream of interior phantoms. This is the reason, when we attempt to fight back, we appear to be flailing into empty air.

To dissipate the undead nightmare, we must reimagine the image and do so from within the living landscape of the imagination; otherwise, we are mistaking a mirage for terra firma.

As for myself, I'm a member of the Nambia Liberation Army. The calling of a poet is to make the invisible visible.

Of course, the flaming orange, ambulatory dumpster fire Trump should be mocked for proclaiming that there exists on planet earth a nation called Nambia. The man has the range of knowledge of some bar-stool blowhard, the insufferable type who begins almost every wit-defiant declaration with "irregardless" or

“actually” before launching into a false narrative based on a inane premise misinformed by a belligerently obtuse, fact-resistant Weltanschauung.

Deluded Slaves

The same applies to toxic innocent types who believe capitalist (so called) democracies exist to respond to the will of the citizenry. Who would have chosen for high office the sleazy, craven, and sub-cretinous gallery of grotesques known as the Western political class? Only slaves who have been convinced that the clank and clatter of their shackles is the very song of freedom would argue that this extant, waking nightmare arrived as a matter of choice.

Attendant to the deception: The notion that the dismal circumstance will recede by the banishment of Donald Trump from the scene. Trump is merely a representation of one of the genera of imps squatting in the dark recesses of capitalism’s forsaken soul. He is the very embodiment of a crackpot realist.

Crackpot realist types, as is the case with Trump, view and present themselves as emissaries from “the real world,” as steely-nerved men of action. The breed has a compulsion to bandy dismissive declarations, such as, “that is just mere talk. I offer real world solutions.” And, in the magniloquent lingua franca of Trump, he possesses the “best” (crackpot) mindset and he, and he alone, will deliver the bestly of the bestest of real-world solutions.

Yet, outside the feedback loop of those indoctrinated by Calvinist-cum-capitalist conditioning, talk is action. Talk is eros. Deeply depressed people lose both their eros and their voice. Well-written books of prose and poems speak in a penetrating voice. The problem is, all too many of the working class and the poor have been bullied by the dominant order into believing that we have no voice – a voice that is capable of giving rise to the inner self, both lambent of mind and plangent of heart, thus provides agency towards action and gives context to experience. The crackpot realist notion that insists, conversation is a lesser function of humanity amounts to soul-decimating tyranny, and is a product of the Puritan Ethic, a coda for slaves. Words are the handmaiden of action and experience.

Talk is audio architecture and dance. Words are winged yet speak from the bones of the earth. Denied expression, we lose heart; then we lose our humanity. Suggestion for approaching and engaging in propitious dialog: Don’t demand final, definitive answers. The very notion, in an instant, demeans and destroys the potential of unfolding, organic phenomenon.

If you persist, you will have deracinated dialog from its natural habitat – a breathing landscape of infinite mystery. Acceptance of the following is crucial:

Acts of exploration will serve to uncover more questions.

The heart is not a mere pump; it is the hub of imagination; it yearns for experience, thinks in living imagery, and will lead, if followed, into participation mystique. Any attendant answers ... are an after-the-fact phenomenon. Then the scene shifts. The structure of the old order becomes a veil of dust, its dogma, the admonition of a long-dead ghost. A ghost is an uncoupled habit, a self-resonating feedback loop shuffling through a fixated mind, an entity devoid of life thus cannot generate novel questions.

I question; therefore, I reveal signs of life. Yet the questions must remain open-ended, for when you insist on a forced finality, you have arrested and killed the process; you have attempted to render the voluble soul of the world into a didactic corpse.

For the affront, its life-sustaining fire, that suffuses every particle in the cosmos, will respond with the worst of all insults. It will deem you a bore and turn its numinous face away from you.

Speaking of the numinous, with Halloween approaching, our four-and-a-half-year-old donned his Halloween costume and exhorted me to play one of his favorite games i.e., let's pretend.

"When mommy comes in, make her think we've turned into monsters."

Drawing on the Method, I reach down deep within and feel the rage of the besieged earth, thus knowing what my son will come upon later in life: Our humanity is inseparable from the monstrous. To live is to live off death – but, in the case of Late Stage Capitalist humankind, the monster imperative has shifted into runaway, has become a self-resonating feedback loop of destructive impulses.

The kid is transmigrating through an obsession with monsters phase. Making his way through a wilderness of archetypes, he has picked up on an effable truth about his species ... that will take a lifetime to process. All who are aware are wounded by the apprehension. If you do not take hold of the monster within, he will take hold of you. Both on a personal basis as well as the monster we know as human history.

Phil Rockstroh is a poet, lyricist and philosopher bard living, now, in Munich, Germany. He may be contacted: philrockstroh.scribe@gmail.com and at FaceBook: <http://www.facebook.com/phil.rockstroh>

US Tries to Stir Up Trouble for Iran

As President Trump's foreign policy falls deeply under the Israeli-Saudi spell, his Mideast diplomats are stirring up conflict against Iran and drawing a rebuke from Iraq, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

In Iraq, as in Syria, the imminent extinguishing of the mini-state of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) is raising the question of whether U.S. objectives in Iraq really are focused on countering ISIS or will balloon into some other reason to keep American forces there indefinitely.

The most common rationale voiced by those arguing for an indefinite stay is to counter Iranian influence. The rationale echoes larger alarms, being sounded by the Trump administration as well as others, about an Iran that supposedly is on the march and threatening to bring most of the Middle East under its sway. The alarms are filled with unsupported zero-sum assumptions about what any Iranian action or influence means for U.S. interests.

Those tempted to succumb to the alarms as they apply to Iraq should bear in mind two important realities about the Iraqi-Iranian relationship.

The first is that the biggest boost to Iranian influence in Iraq was the U.S. invasion of March 2003. The net effect of the whole costly, unpleasant history of the United States in Iraq – including the initial conquest, later surge, and all the ups and downs of occupation – as far as Iranian influence is concerned is to have made that influence much greater than it ever was while Saddam Hussein was still ruling Iraq.

If Iranian influence were the overriding worry about the Middle East that the rhetoric of the Trump administration makes it out to be, this record strongly suggests that an unending U.S. military expedition would not be a smart way to assuage that worry.

The second key reality is that Iraq and Iran, for reasons of geographic proximity and a bloody history, are necessarily huge factors in each other's security. That fact cannot be shoved aside by outside actors talking about filling vacuums, pursuing their own self-defined rivalries, or imposing zero-sum assumptions that do not correspond to ground truth in the Persian Gulf region.

The extremely costly Iran-Iraq War, begun by Iraq and fought from 1980 to 1988, is the most prominent part of the bloody history and a formative experience for

leaders in both countries. We lack accurate figures on the war's casualties, but deaths numbered in the hundreds of thousands for each country. Using the mid-range of estimates of those killed in the war, the combined death toll was probably somewhere around three-quarters of a million. The war was the deadliest conflict in the Middle East over the past half century.

Desire for Cordial Relations

Against that historical backdrop, it behooves the leaders of both Iraq and Iran to keep their relationship on an even keel. Although the two neighbors still have differing interests, it is in the larger security interest of each to have cordiality prevail over conflict in their bilateral relationship. The governments in both Baghdad and Tehran appear to realize that.

It helps that the two countries have, along with their differing interests, some important parallel interests. Chief among those right now are their interests in quashing ISIS and in not letting Kurdish separatism tear pieces out of each country's sovereign territory. These interests also align with declared U.S. objectives about fighting ISIS and upholding the territorial integrity of Iraq, although this fact often seems to get overlooked in the United States amid the obsession with opposing Iran and confronting it everywhere about everything.

Many countries, including the United States, share a general interest in peace and stability in the Middle East – for numerous reasons, including how the lack of peace and stability encourages the sorts of violent extremism that can have consequences beyond the region. It follows that having more cordiality than conflict in the Iraq-Iran relationship, which was so disastrously explosive in the recent past, also is in the general interest.

That peace and stability inside Iraq is in Iran's interest as much as in other countries' interests gets overlooked amid obsession-related caricatures of Iran that portray it as fomenting instability wherever and whenever it can. Persistent instability in a country with which Iran shares a border of more than 900 miles is not in Iran's interest. It is ironic that this fact seems hard to accept by those who habitually use the term "spread of instability" in opining about security issues in the Middle East.

Iranian leaders also are smart enough, and informed enough about Iraqi affairs, to realize how destabilizing would be narrowly minded sectarian favoritism and how easy it would be to overplay their own hand. However empathetic the Iranians are to their Shia co-religionists, they realize that Sunni-bashing policies do not constitute a formula for stability on their eastern border. They also are aware of Iraqi nationalist (and Arab) sensitivities. They can see such sensitivities even in cleric and militia leader Moqtada al-Sadr, commonly

described as a Shia zealot, who recently made friendly visits to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which are among the chief regional rivals of Iran.

Stirring the Pot

Amid these realities, it is jarring and inappropriate for the United States, in acting out its obsession with seeking confrontation with Iran, to lecture the Iraq government about how the Iranian-supported militias need, in the words of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, "to go home."

It is not surprising that such preaching raised the dander of the Iraqi government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, which pointed out that the militias in question, although armed and trained in part by Iran, consist of Iraqis. Abadi further stated, in response to this U.S. effort to tell the Iraqis how to organize their internal security efforts, "No side has the right to intervene in Iraq's affairs or decide what Iraqis should do."

Abadi later understandably expressed his frustration with the U.S. administration trying to make his country a playing board for Washington's game of seeking confrontation with Iran. Abadi said, "We would like to work with you, both of you [meaning the United States and Iran]. But please don't bring your trouble inside Iraq. You can sort it anywhere else."

Iraqis are contemplating not only how the Iranian-backed militias have done much of the heavy lifting in defeating ISIS in Iraq. They also can see most recently the constructive behind-the-scenes Iranian role in resolving the standoff with the Kurds over Kirkuk and nearby oilfields in a way that advanced the objective of Iraqi territorial integrity and sovereignty with minimal bloodshed.

Abadi's own government can rightly claim most of the credit for this result, and the Prime Minister's domestic political stock has risen as a result. But to the extent any outside player played a positive role, that player was Iran. The United States does not appear to have contributed to the outcome to any comparable degree.

Two basic reasons explain the U.S. obtuseness in failing to recognize and understand the regional geopolitical realities mentioned above. One is the demonization of Iran and fixation on opposing it everywhere on everything, to the exclusion of attention given to the many other facets of security issues in the Middle East.

The other reason is the chronic difficulty that Americans, relatively secure behind two ocean moats, have had in understanding the security problems, and responses to those problems, of nations without similar geographic blessings.

This was the reason that, during the Cold War, “Finlandization” became a U.S. term of derision aimed at countries that deemed it advisable to observe certain policy limits in order to live peaceably as neighbors of the Soviet Union. It is today a reason for failing to appreciate fully how Iraqis analyze what is necessary to live peaceably in their own neighborhood.

Such understanding would come more easily to Americans if they had experienced wars with their North American neighbors that had been as bloody as the Iran-Iraq War. And perhaps such understanding would come if today Iran were lecturing the Canadians and Mexicans about how to organize their internal security and about how they need to reduce U.S. influence.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is author most recently of *Why America Misunderstands the World*. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest’s Web site. Reprinted with author’s permission.)
