

Obama's Double Talk on Palestine

At the United Nations, President Barack Obama tried to square the circle of U.S. support for democracy and freedom across the Middle East with his threat to veto statehood for the Palestinians, a cause he championed just last year. In an open letter to the President, author Marc H. Ellis critiques Obama's depressing double talk.

By Marc H. Ellis

Let's face it, President Obama, your speech to the United Nations this week was all fluff, domestic political gist for the 2012 American election cycle. I refer here especially to the issue of Palestinian statehood.

Mr. President, you have been accused of being too professorial. I know that politicians have to be elected or reelected to be successful.

Thoughtful people sitting on the political sidelines have to cut politicians slack. Still, if I may, I bemoan your lackluster performance on a variety of issues. You seem to be unwilling to play political hard ball on the issues facing our country.

Yes, I know things could be worse. Yes, I can imagine one of the Republican front-runners, say Rick Perry, giving the United Nation's speech after being elected President in 2012.

Yes, I remember President George W. Bush. I live in Texas. I can imagine President Rick Perry. I hear you loud and clear. I should be careful when I criticize.

Still, I have a basic question for you. And I ask you this as a Jew.

Even factoring in the political spin necessary to navigate the American political scene, do you really believe your own words on Palestine statehood?

I am fascinated, Mr. President. Your discussion about Palestinian statehood mostly revolves around the state of Israel, Jewish history and the Holocaust. Why is that? I listened to your words with interest:

But understand this as well: America's commitment to Israel's security is unshakable. Our friendship with Israel is deep and enduring. And so we believe that any lasting peace must acknowledge the very real security concerns that Israel faces every single day.

Let us be honest with ourselves: Israel is surrounded by neighbors that have

waged repeated wars against it. Israel's citizens have been killed by rockets fired at their houses and suicide bombs on their buses.

Israel's children come of age knowing that throughout the region, other children are taught to hate them. Israel, a small country of less than eight million people, look(s) out at a world where leaders of much larger nations threaten to wipe it off the map.

The Jewish people carry the burden of centuries of exile and persecution, and fresh memories of knowing that six million people were killed simply because of who they are.

Those are facts. They cannot be denied.

The Jewish people have forged a successful state in their historic homeland. Israel deserves recognition. It deserves normal relations with its neighbors.

And friends of the Palestinians do them no favors by ignoring this truth, just as friends of Israel must recognize the need to pursue a two-state solution with a secure Israel next to an independent Palestine.

I read the rest of your speech as well. Closing my eyes for a moment, I picture you in your professorial mode. I hear you lecturing, from the Jewish perspective, about why Israel is important to Jews.

You recite what has almost become rote in my community. You are right when you speak about centuries of exile and persecution, the devastation of the Holocaust and the return to our ancient homeland.

Then you turn to the Palestinians. I listen with anticipation. But Mr. President, I am disappointed. It seems that in your historical rendering Jews, the Holocaust and Jewish history simply land on the Palestinians. Or rather there is Jewish history and then there are Palestinians who also deserve a state.

That Jews dislocated Palestinians and took their land seems incidental to you. In fact, you never mention this. You don't use the term "ethnic cleansing," what happened to the Palestinians in the creation of the state of Israel.

For you, Mr. President, Palestinians and Palestine are problems to be dealt with. I didn't get the sense from your lecture that there is a flesh and blood issue that needs exposure and redress. Like what was necessary for Jews. Like what is still necessary for Jews.

It seems your presidential chalk board is filled with Jews and Jewish history. When you come to Palestinians, you turn to the board and write:

“Problem.”

Since you came back to the “problem” several times, in my mind’s eye you circle it as well. Then you return to your main subject: Jewish history.

Rockets falling into Israel from Gaza. Mr. President, have you forgotten Operation Cast Lead, Israel’s invasion of Gaza just after you were elected president?

Arabs demeaning Israel. You should accompany me on one of my lecture tours. You would hear what Jews and non-Jewish American audiences have to say about Arabs, Muslims and Palestinians. In unguarded moments and often in public, have you listened in on the discussion about Palestinians in “the only democracy in the Middle East,” our great ally, Israel?

Mr. President – and with all due respect – may I say clearly that you do not speak for me or many other Jews who do not think that “something” happened to Palestinians simply as a byproduct of Jewish history. We don’t think that Palestinians exist without a history or without a destiny in their own land. Indeed, as you say, it could be worse, Mr. President. But perhaps it already is. When I heard your words I thought that the end had come. I held my head in my hands – Jewish history couldn’t have to come to this.

I wanted to shut your words out. I wanted you to speak about other things that you know more about or at least are closer to your heart. I wanted something other than the political spin cycle.

Yes, Jews do carry centuries of exile and persecution. European Jews did suffer six million slaughtered. I know this as a Jew. I grew up with these memories.

But Mr. President, as a child learning of our history, I never imagined that Jews would use these centuries of exile and persecution, our six million dead, as a blunt instrument against another people. Never. Not even in my wildest imagination. No!

Hearing you I thought of how things end. How Jewish history has ended – in ethnic cleansing and occupation.

But, Mr. President, this can also be our beginning. That beginning will only come when the truth is told by Jews and Palestinians together. And yes, perhaps one day, by the President of the United States of America.

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Goodbye to International Law

Though the World War II victors promised that the Nuremberg principles would apply not just to the Nazis but to everyone, today's reality is that international law follows two standards: a lenient one for the West and its friends and a stringent variant for adversaries. This hypocrisy is now being institutionalized, Lawrence Davidson notes.

By Lawrence Davidson

Back in February, I wrote an analysis on the subject of Universal Jurisdiction, which began:

“One of the really progressive acts that followed the end of World War II was the establishment of the principle of universal jurisdiction (UJ). UJ is a legal process that allows states that are signatories to various international treaties and conventions (such as the Geneva conventions) to prosecute alleged violators of these treaties, even when these violations are committed outside the country's borders.

“This is particularly so if it can be demonstrated that the home government of the accused has no intention of bringing them to trial for the alleged offense. The assumption behind this principle is that the crime committed is so egregious as to be seen as a crime against humanity at large.

“In the wake of the Nazi Holocaust and other such crimes against humanity, UJ was accepted as a necessary and positive legal step by almost all Western nations.”

It has been 66 years since the end of World War II and the memory of the concentration camps has faded (except when invoked as a political tool by Zionists). Nor has the subsequent holocausts such as those in Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia been sufficient to keep the issue of crimes against humanity front and center in the governmental minds of the great powers.

The historical fact is that such truly horrible crimes committed at the edges of the European world or beyond have never been seen as symbolically important in the same way the Nazi holocaust was. And so we cease to pay attention. That allows for the erosion of the safeguards against these crimes such as UJ.

Now we have proof of this process of erosion. On Sept. 15, Great Britain changed its UJ law to allow the government, in the person of the Director of Public Prosecutions, to veto any arrest warrant referencing universal jurisdiction

issued by a British judge.

What that means is that when crimes against humanity are committed by representatives of a power friendly to Britain, the government can negate any risk of arrest for those persons while visiting British soil. This happens to be the British government's response to warrants issued for the arrest of Israeli personages such as former foreign minister Lzipi Livni in 2009.

The British UJ law exists by virtue of Great Britain being a signatory to the Fourth Geneva Convention but that does not seem to matter. For the sake of friendly relations with Israel, the British government is willing to render its obligations under international law moot.

Of course, the British government does not explain its actions that way. Justice Secretary Kenneth Clarke insists that the government is "clear about our international obligations." This change in the law is simply designed to "ensure ... that universal jurisdiction cases are only proceeded with on the basis of solid evidence that is likely to lead to successful prosecution."

The fact that Israeli crimes against the Palestinians are among the best documented seems not to be part of Clarke's judicial world. Indeed, according to Matthew Gould, Britain's ambassador to Israel, warrants issued against Israelis for war crimes and crimes against humanity are only "abuses" of Britain's judicial system carried out "for political reasons."

Double Standards

In truth, what the British government has done is institutionalize double standards.

Just imagine what would happen if the head of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassem Brigades (Hamas's military wing) flew into Heathrow to see some sick friend. The British Zionists would have a judge issue a warrant within the hour and the British government would enforce it without question.

Now imagine that at about the same time Israeli Major General Yoav Galant arrived. Galant was Israel's Chief of Staff during Operation Cast Lead and publicly stated that the operation turned Gaza into an "ideal training zone" to test new weapons that were often themselves banned under international law.

With this new qualification of the UJ law, nothing at all would happen to Galant. And that double standard is absolutely in place "for political reasons."

This is a disastrous precedent because other countries will almost certainly

follow the British example. However, it is not the only case of erosion of international law.

The international law referencing behavior on the high seas has recently been called into question and guess who forced that issue. Israel again. This is function of the fact that all the major powers, and the UN as well, proved willing to let the Israelis off the hook for attacking an unarmed Turkish vessel in international waters and killing nine passengers.

Only Turkey has taken a stand for international law.

Then there is the U.S. corruption of the International Criminal Court (see my analysis [“International Law and the Problem of Enforcement”](#) posted on June 4) and finally the repeated use of a U.S. veto at the Security Council to protect its ally again Israel when that country violates international law by moving its own population into occupied territory and commits daily crimes against the Palestinians.

Generally speaking, *if it is a great power or allied to one*, a state can do just about any horrible thing it wants as long as it does it to its own citizens and within its own borders. Thus, if Hitler, as chancellor of a great power, had just stuck to killing every last German Jew, communist, retarded person, etc. he almost certainly would have gotten away with it.

That is the power of sovereignty.

If Saddam Hussein, as a U.S. ally, had confined himself to killing Iraqi Kurds and Shiites by the tens of thousands, no one would have intervened. But in both of these cases the dictators made the mistake of incurring the wrath of great powers by crossing a border for reasons other than blatant self-defense.

Now the Israelis have shown that this criterion (sticking to your own territory when you do your killing) to be an arbitrary one. They cross borders all the time (as does their great power patron). My guess is that, unlike Iraq, the Israelis could have invaded Kuwait and gotten away with it!

That is because they are more than just protected by the United States. Washington does not control its ally, its ally controls Washington.

Israeli front organizations such as AIPAC control the information flow and dictate relevant Middle East foreign policy to the government of the “greatest power on earth.” That is why joint resolutions, standing ovations for the likes of Netanyahu, and such stupid proclamations as [“Israel has the right to annex the West Bank”](#) flow uninterrupted from the halls of Congress.

It is odd. The only thing that stands between all of us and the next holocaust is international law and treaty provisions such as universal jurisdiction.

But who cares? Not the U.S. or British governments and not the Zionists. No. Memory fades and double standards are, after all, a universal human failing.

So it is just a matter of time before it happens all over again. Not in some faraway place like the Balkans or Africa or the Far East, but once more right here in the West. Just as if the primary civilian disaster of World War II never happened.

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'Pro-Life' Government Kills Troy Davis

People around the world were gripped by the grim drama of Troy Davis's execution by authorities in Georgia, after the state clemency board brushed aside grave doubts about his murder conviction and the U.S. Supreme Court rebuffed his final appeal. American peace activist David Swanson followed the ups and downs of those final hours.

By David Swanson

Wednesday evening, when the news was mistakenly announced that Troy Davis would not be killed, the crowd that I was with erupted with joy and with the enthusiastic realization that we all were capable of believing that something good had been done by our government.

I was at the dedication of the Howard Zinn room in the new Busboys and Poets restaurant in Hyattsville, Maryland.

Some of us had been assigned to read selections from the late Zinn's "Voices of a People's History of the United States." I was asked to read John Brown's courtroom speech in which he said:

"Now if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children, and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I submit: so let it be

done!”

Brown had used violence. I condemn it. Brown was not submitting. He'd been captured. But he also said this:

“[H]ad I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great, or in behalf of any of their friends, either father, mother, brother, sister, wife, or children, or any of that class, and suffered and sacrificed what I have in this interference, it would have been all right, and every man in this Court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment.”

Had Troy Davis been able to afford an expensive lawyer. Had Troy Davis been white. Had Troy Davis lived in a different state or a different nation.

Davis was again told he would be killed. He was again told that he might not be. He was again told that he would be killed. And finally, he was killed by chemical injection while strapped down to prevent writhing.

Observers observed. And those of us who had left the restaurant to go and protest in front of the U.S. Supreme Court wailed in pain, while the world reacted as it reacted to the killing of Sacco and Vanzetti, and as it has reacted to each of our governments' million acts of barbarism down through the years.

Over in Texas another man was governmentally killed, thus creating the possibility for even louder applause when that state's governor's total scalp-count is next announced.

Meanwhile, large numbers of people are killed in our wars, wars our President announced Wednesday morning are waged on behalf of peace. Where is Amnesty International? Where is the NAACP? Are those people killed in wars less human?

What about those our government has tortured to death? Does the manner in which they are killed make them more lamentable than those killed with bombs, just as chemical injection is deemed less lamentable than electrocution?

Our government now kills, as a rule, rather than taking prisoners. And it kills with unmanned drones. It also kicks in doors at night and disappears people.

We know a little about assassination teams that have operated in Afghanistan in recent years, teams including Special Forces, CIA, and mercenaries. I have good reason to believe – although I cannot now say why – that such teams have also operated on U.S. soil.

But isn't killing, even on Afghan soil, just as evil? Should it matter where, or

who, or why, or how?

Aren't the lost opportunities to save lives when our money all goes to wars and Wall Street just as murderous? Medicare cuts kill. Unclean air kills. Pretending Social Security is in trouble kills. Pushing our elders into the poor house kills. Polluting our environment kills.

Our government's status as pro-life is in grave doubt. Its title as the greatest purveyor of violence in the world remains in place.

We can't prosecute Supreme Court justices because we have no Justice Department. We can't impeach Supreme Court justices, because we have no Congress. What can we do?

One thing that I think we can and must do is recognize that, if for that one moment we believed Troy Davis might be spared, then we believe in our hearts that victory is possible. And because we believe that, we have a responsibility to work for it.

We can do that by building as large a presence as possible to occupy Washington, D.C., beginning October 6th – <http://october2011.org>

David Swanson is the author of *War Is A Lie*. (This story originally appeared at <http://warisacrime.org>.)

Running from Right-Wing Clowns

By the late 1970s, there was a serious national debate about the blood-soaked Vietnam War, but then came Ronald Reagan rebranding it a "noble cause" and right-wing accusations against critics who "blame America first," followed by the panicked retreat of everyone wanting to be part of the mainstream, as Phil Rockstroh observes.

By Phil Rockstroh

Why is it that self-termed progressives are in full retreat (and have been for decades) from the witless army of angry clowns and hack illusionists of the U.S. right-wing?

One contributing factor involves the sterile cultivation of the persona of the "reasonable liberal," a type favored and rewarded by the status quo-protective power brokers of the Democratic Party and by corporate media organizations that

find useful his trait of rendering himself feckless (e.g., the current occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue) by the passion-annihilating (but self-serving) device of his preening amiability?

But in so doing, the self-gelded liberal has sacrificed libido and discarded sacred vehemence for careerist privilege. Worse, the rest of us are advised to follow suit that, in order to gain credibility, one must slouch towards center-hugging irrelevance.

We are counseled that in order to navigate this age of corporate dominance that one's irascible apprehensions and unruly aspirations must be suppressed, for such passions are deemed too radical for mainstream sensibilities, and are therefore regarded as impractical as they are untoward by the crackpot realists of the corporate bottom line whose dictates dominate the political discourse and economic arrangements of our time.

"Prune down [a human being's] extravagance, sober him, and you undo him."

—William James

Yet these self-termed "realists," by means of their ad hoc machinations and hidden-in-plain-sight schemes, are responsible for the creation, promotion and maintenance of a financial system (and its attendant economic, political and ecological consequences) that is as sound as the flight plan of Icarus.

When a nation displays this degree of a noxious mixture of mass ignorance and official mendacity, an age of peace and plenty becomes as possible as holding a tea dance in a tsunami.

Yet facing folly is difficult. Stunned by the implications of one's mistakes and misapprehensions, initially, one will reel in the direction of a familiar road — or be seized by an impulse to retreat from the casuistry-sundering fury of the larger world.

Yet, as Thomas Paine averred, "A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of being right." And as Albert Camus counseled, "Freedom is the right not to lie."

With this in mind, shall we blunder off-road into the landscape of unquestioned narratives?

For example, the following is a topic, when broached, that rarely fails to incur the manipulative rage of the perpetually adrenaline intoxicated right and causes liberals to drop to their knees in penance for sins never committed:

The questioning of this culture's reverential, unflagging "support of our

troops” blunderbuss and attendant comic book hero-level palaver, such as, “all good Americans stand firm in our support of our troops and our war against the forces of international terrorism.”

A bit of personal perspective as to why I demur: Forty-eight years ago, this month, four young girls were murdered in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham Alabama. At the time of the tragedy, I was a child living in Birmingham.

I remember the event to this day. My father, freelancing as a photojournalist at the time, arrived on the scene not long after the blast. I remember him coming home shaken and pale. The event is seared into my memory ... how the blind hatred of the vicious can erupt into daily life and inflict irreparable harm and abiding sorrow.

Accordingly, this is why I cannot abide U.S. wars of imperium e.g., its Shock and Awe bombing campaigns the same modus operandi of those despicable, redneck bombers .

The dead of Iraq, Central Asia and Libya were no more responsible for committing acts of terrorism against the people of the U.S. than those little girls, readying for a choir performance in the basement of that church in Alabama, were guilty of any crime perpetrated against the “white race.”

Moreover, the attacks staged on 9/11/2001 did not “change everything.” The event merely sped up the trajectory of the national security state/military industrial complex towards the landfill of history.

For more than a century, whether the propagandists of U.S. Empire promulgate the subterfuge of fighting “to make the world safe for democracy” or defending against “the evil empire,” or waging a “war on terror” – the objective remains, to secure resources for the U.S. homeland.

And that is what we, the populace of empire, can “thank a veteran” for providing.

From the Blue Coats at Wounded Knee to the baby-faced tools of imperium at My Lai and Fallujah to the predator drones scouring Central Asia, the U.S. is the single largest perpetrator of terrorism worldwide.

As all the while, guilty by their complicity citizens of the U.S. sit on their sofas, oblivious or unmoved by any event transpiring beyond their self-circumscribed field of reference.

There should be a monument erected to the tragic legacy wrought by the acts of

terrorism at “Ground Zero” – and it should be a statue representing a willfully ignorant fat-ass sitting on his couch, TV remote in hand, Cheetos crumbs stippled in the folds of his mouth.

Granted, Lower Manhattan took a tragic hit, a decade ago, and many people suffered as a result (I know I live a couple of neighborhoods upwind) but none worse than the people of Iraq and Central Asia.

Somehow, I suspected (and was proven sadly correct) that their experiences would not be evoked, as part of the 9/11 hagiography foisted and verbal monuments cast to sacred victimhood, as part of the official ceremony commemorating the event.

Moreover, not long after 9/11, an attack was launched from Lower Manhattan that collapsed the global economy. I, for one, would like to hear a bit more about that.

By parroting the self-serving hagiography of 9/11/01, as well as, “I support the warrior, but not the war” type fallacies, liberals continue to play right into the sustaining narratives of the national security state.

Case in point, the empty, oft-heard, liberal pundit assertion, “My idea for a 9/11 tribute would involve bringing our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan home, with proper benefits.”

Nonsense. Worse than nonsense: Precious, cloying, self-congratulatory piffle. The statement is axiomatic of the feckless calls and specious cries common to that species of walking cliché known as “troop-supporting” liberals.

As far as I’m concerned, “our troops” human delivery systems of U.S. government sanctified terrorism can walk home that way, maybe, they might learn something about the larger world, other than their mission to kill the people they happen upon without question, and then share with their fellow belligerently ignorant countrymen what they learned about life (its sacred quality) on their long, Odysseusian journey home.

Apropos, reasonable liberals counsel such declarations serve as “bad public relation” tactics. “Don’t you realize that you risk alienating Middle America? Remember, the reactionary fallout created by the radicalism of the 1960s?”

The fact is: The passionate questioning of the entire war effort in Southeast Asia, the role of soldiers included, helped to bring an end to the war and factored into the soldiers’ rebellion at the later stages of the protracted conflict.

In increasing numbers, the conscripts began to refuse to kill and die for a

dubious cause ... they went hippie on the ass of the military state.

The activist Left ended the war; self-serving liberals blew the peace.

The "bad PR" involving "spitting on the troops" was after the fact, rightwing confabulation promulgated to intimidate liberals into shamed silence, and, of course, liberals being liberals, it worked.

True to form, they "distanced" themselves from the "troop-demoralizing radicals of the irrational left." In reality, they fled in fear from arrays of rightwing created straw men.

PR itself is the dubious craft of professional lying corporate-era legerdemain. In fact, the craft is the opposite of the resonate truth carried by deepening poetry, poignant prose and challenging political speech the near exclusive domain of the Left in the 1960s.

You ask what makes me sigh, old friend

What makes me shudder so

I shudder and I sigh to think

That even Cicero

And many-minded Homer were

Mad as the mist and snow.

—William Bulter Yeats, except from Mad As The Mist And Snow

The inspired, enduring (very threatening to some) art, music and political action of the era were not the result of liberal accommodation and compromise. Antithetically, the cause of peace and justice (briefly) made some headway despite liberals not because of them.

As a famous literary drunk once quipped, "Rome wasn't burned in a day." Change will not come with a victim-centered view of the world ... including viewing the nation's toxically innocent, economic conscripts as mere victims of circumstance.

Yes, young people make stupid choices but treating them as victims does not serve them or the nation well.

"Liberal compassion" should not be extended to countenancing acts of mass murderer. Time and time again, liberals play into rightist propaganda, by allowing the discussion of U.S. militarism to be framed as exclusively pertaining to the sacrifices of individual soldiers, whose fates, in the larger context of events, have been appropriated a device of imperial plunder.

By truckling to this narrative, liberals play into the propaganda of those who

prosper by the homicidal designs of the present day U.S. military state.

Instead, let us endeavor to disabuse the culture of the delusion that there exists noble sacrifice in the act of killing and dying for the agendas of empire.

When an individual U.S. soldier begins to stagger in the direction of his own humanity (renouncing his complicity in the death-sustained system, as many did during the Vietnam era) then we should open our arms and embrace him with a fierce compassion.

On a personal basis, my family had little money. And I made many self-destructive choices, but I also had tenacious mentors who challenged me ... called me on my destructive nonsense pointing out the bulwark of denial and hubris that sustained its shabby, ad hoc structure.

Making a home in being lost, I took up residence in the enduring structure of poetry, literature and music Whitman, Kerouac, Rilke, Dylan, the Allman Brothers, Leonard Cohen, Iggy Pop, Joe Strummer, and others too numerous to name taught me to question, as the expression went, "everything."

This is not rocket science; this is far more important; this is the essential subject matter that informs the propulsion and guidance systems of the human heart. Withal, instruct the young how to build and inhabit the structure of a cogent argument and to navigate a soul-suffused landscape of poignant verse, lyric, and insight.

To do so, one must not shy away from confrontation. During the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War era, before the Left was manipulated into fearing the libido borne of sacred vehemence, stupid opinions were not coddled; they were challenged.

Feelings were hurt. Egos were bruised. But an illegal war was shortened and a number of (long-overdue) rights were granted.

[]Having come
the bitter way to better prayer, we have
the sweetness of ripening. How sweet
to know you by the signs of this world!
—Wendel Berry, excerpt from "Ripening"

At present, among the things we can ill afford are fantasy-prone kids, duped into believing modern soldiering bestows nobility and involves heroic sacrifice.

Instead, the times call for brave misfits, encouraged to embrace rejection by a

dysfunctional society and primed to endure the inherent bumps and buffeting inflicted from a culture that has gathered into the formation of a flying wedge of self-destructive, crash-fated crazy.

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Afghan Raids Target Taliban Families

As the Afghan War drags on and surviving Taliban commanders prove elusive U.S. forces are targeting friends and families, according to a new study, Gareth Porter reports for Inter Press Service.

By Gareth Porter

U.S. Special Operations Forces have been increasingly aiming their night-time raids, which have been the primary cause of Afghan anger at the U.S. military presence, at civilian non-combatants in order to exploit their possible intelligence value, according to a new study published by the Open Society Foundation and The Liaison Office.

The study provides new evidence of the degree to which the criteria used for targeting of individuals in night raids and for seizing them during raids have been loosened to include people who have not been identified as insurgents.

Based on interviews with current and former U.S. military officials with knowledge of the strategic thinking behind the raids, as well as Afghans who have been caught up in the raids, the authors of the study write that large numbers of civilians are being detained for brief periods of time merely to find out what they know about local insurgents a practice the authors suggest may violate the Geneva Conventions on warfare.

A military officer who had approved night raids told one of the authors that targeting individuals believed to know one of the insurgents is a key factor in planning the raids. "If you can't get the guy you want," said the officer, "you get the guy who knows him."

Even when people who are known to be civilians have not been targeted in a given raid, they have been detained when found on the compound of the target, on the

ground that a person's involvement in the insurgency "is not always clear until questioned," according to military officer who has been involved in operational questions surrounding the raids interviewed for the report.

Raids prompted by the desire for intelligence can result in the deaths of civilians. The Afghan Analysts Network, a group of independent researchers based in Kabul, investigated a series of night raids in Nangarhar province in October-November 2010, and found that the raids were all targeting people who had met with a local religious cleric who was believed to be the Taliban shadow province governor.

Two civilians were killed in those raids when family members came to the defense of their relatives.

The report notes that many Afghans interviewed said night-time operations had targeted a number of compounds simultaneously, in some cases covering entire villages.

In a village in Qui Tapa district of Konduz province, SOF units, accompanied by Afghan army troops, conducted a raid that detained 80 to 100 people, according to the report. The interviewees said a masked informant pointed out those people to be taken a U.S. base to be interrogated.

The idea of using military operations to round up civilians to exploit their presumed knowledge of the insurgency has a long history in the U.S.-NATO war in Afghanistan.

The Pentagon official in charge of detainee affairs until the end of 2005 told IPS that concerns about "over-broad detention" in Afghanistan – meaning the practice of sweeping up large numbers of civilians – were countered by pressures for "more aggressive detention operations."

As then head of NATO intelligence in Afghanistan, Canadian Brig. Gen. Jim Ferron, explained in a newspaper interview in May 2007, "The detainees are detained for a reason. They have information we need."

It is not clear that civilians actually provide important intelligence on insurgents, however. The civilian victims of night raids are family and friends of Taliban fighters and commanders, who have no incentive to provide information that would make it easier for SOF units to track them down.

But another factor inclines the Special Operations Forces commanders in Afghanistan to focus more on people for whom the evidence of involvement in the insurgency is weak or nonexistent, according to the new report.

After taking heavy losses, in 2010, Taliban commanders at district level and above are increasingly residing in Pakistan rather than in towns in Afghanistan where they can be more easily targeted.

Without those targets on their lists, SOF units in Afghanistan may have had to choose between going after more civilians or reducing the number of operations. And the growth in the number of operations and the statistics on alleged insurgents killed or captured are a key measure of the relevance of SOF units.

An average of 19 raids per night were conducted during the period from December 2010 through February 2011, according to data published by Reuters last February. But a senior U.S. military adviser interviewed for the report in April 2011 said that as many as 40 raids were taking place in a single night.

A military officer involved in the night raids told an author of the study that there were no longer enough mid- to high-level commanders still active in Afghanistan to justify the present high rate of raids, and many raids were now likely to be targeting people who are known not to be insurgents but who might know something about specific insurgents.

Other officers interviewed for the report denied that contention, however, claiming there were still plenty of commanders left to target.

The report suggests that it is dangerous to detain family members in particular in order to exploit their knowledge of relatives in the insurgency, because it further inflames an already angry population across the country.

"If that is the criteria, they might as well arrest all southerners," said one Afghan journalist living in Kandahar. "The person who is an active Taliban is either my uncle, cousin (or) nephew"

Based on interviews with residents in villages where raids have taken place in the past several months, the report concludes that communities "see raids as deliberately targeting and harassing civilians, in order to discourage communities from providing food and shelter to insurgents, or to pressure them to supply intelligence on the insurgency."

Most of those civilians targeted or swept up in night raids are released within a few days, according to the report.

That assessment is consistent with the revelation, reported by IPS in September 2010, that roughly 90 percent of the individuals who were said by ISAF in August 2010 to have been "captured insurgents" were in fact released either within two weeks of initial detention or within a few months after being sent to Parwan detention facility.

The authors of the report conclude that deliberately targeting and rounding up civilians who are not suspected of being insurgents merely to exploit possible intelligence value “may constitute an arbitrary deprivation of liberty” and thus “inhumane treatment” in violation of Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions.

The report suggests there is “anecdotal” evidence that the targeting for the raids has become more accurate. But that anecdotal evidence appears to be contradicted by other anecdotal evidence that the targeting has become more indiscriminate in deliberately targeting civilians.

Gareth Porter is an investigative historian and journalist specializing in U.S. national security policy. The paperback edition of his latest book, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam*, was published in 2006.

A Death-Row Drama in Georgia

Georgia’s planned execution of Troy Davis, set for Wednesday, is drawing protests from around the world because of grave doubts that he actually committed the murder of an off-duty policeman 22 years ago. Dennis Bernstein explores the case in an interview with the NAACP’s Benjamin Todd Jealous.

By Dennis Bernstein

Georgia’s planned execution of Troy Davis, set for Wednesday, is drawing protests from around the world because of grave doubts that he actually committed the murder of an off-duty policeman 22 years ago. Dennis Bernstein explores the case in an interview with the NAACP’s Benjamin Todd Jealous.

If the State of Georgia has its way, Troy Anthony Davis will be executed for a murder that a growing mountain of evidence suggests he did not commit. Davis is set to be executed on Wednesday unless the Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole votes to commute his sentence.

The Georgia Board heard testimony from the government and the defense on Monday during a formal clemency hearing, and will announce the results on Tuesday.

Davis was convicted on the basis of witness testimony in which seven of the nine original witnesses have recanted or made major changes in their testimony. Other witnesses have also come forward casting doubt on Davis’s guilt. Davis has faced down three previous execution dates.

At last count, over 800,000 people have signed a petition calling for Davis's death sentence to be commuted.

The following is an interview I conducted last Thursday with Benjamin Todd Jealous, president and CEO of the NAACP, about the potential Georgia state slaying of a man who appears to be innocent. Jealous has also served as president of the Rosenberg Foundation, and Director of the U.S. Human Rights Program at Amnesty International.

DB: You said recently, after reviewing the evidence that you were convinced that Troy Davis is an innocent man. You said: "It is appalling to me that with so much doubt surrounding the case, Mr. Davis is set to be executed." Well, Troy Davis is set to be murdered by the state, in a few days, and there remains very little time. You say you are appalled by the situation. What do you find most appalling, why do you believe that the state is about to murder an innocent man?

BTJ: Twenty-two years ago, there was a tragedy in the state of Georgia. An off duty officer, trying to do his duty and keep the community safe was killed as he tried to protect a homeless man.

There were multiple suspects, but eventually nine people came forward and said that one man did it. They said that Troy Davis did it. And those nine voices put him on death row. There was no physical evidence. Troy maintained his innocence, as he has for over two decades. There were lots of rumors in the community. But the nine folks who came forward all pointed to Troy.

Fast forward to where we are today, seven of those folks now say that they lied. The folks who were there, of those seven the ones who were actually there, who weren't just coerced into saying what they said by the cops as three of them claim to have been, or just lied outright.

But the ones amongst those seven who actually said that they saw the killer, they said that the killer is one of the two suspects who have not recanted. Some of the seven say that they lied because they were afraid of him. This man's name is Sylvester Coles.

And so here we are, twenty years later, Troy has had three execution dates, this is now his fourth. This one appears to be his final. It goes to the Board of Pardons and Parole on Monday.

In front of them are letters from not just Archbishop Tutu, or the Pope himself, or from former President Jimmy Carter, sort of favorite son of Georgia, but also from Bill Sessions, former head of the FBI, Roy Thompson, number two in the Department of Justice, under George W. Bush, Tim Lewis, former U.S. court of appeals judge appointed by President Bush one, and so forth.

And so this is not about sort of what's left or right, it's about what's correct. And what's correct is that when it appears that our justice system is about to execute somebody who is innocent, we all stand up and say "No."

DB: Let's go back to the seven out of nine witnesses that recanted. You said Mr. Sylvester Coles was one of the two witnesses that did not recant, and tried to intimidate others into silence

BTJ: Yes.

DB: Now how does a prosecution tolerate a situation where you have a witness intimidating other witnesses? What do we know about the prosecution's process here in terms of how a witness, who may well have been the murderer, can get away with intimidating other witnesses in a state murder case. Help us understand more about that.

BTJ: Let's go to the psychology of the moment. In cases like this where an officer has been killed there is often a lot of pressure to find the killer quickly, at any cost. And so once a mindset developed, it was very quickly, within a day amongst Savannah P.D. that Troy Davis was it..

They quickly made the facts fit that conclusion, rather than make the conclusion fit the facts. And so you see a very kind of, powerful rush to judgment.

When you listen to the witnesses who have come forward, recanted their testimony, or folks who were silent at the time, some of them minors still in their parent's house, and the parents wouldn't let them talk. They say that people were afraid of Sylvester Coles.

You know that it was very clear to people that they needed to lie on his behalf, and they say that they did because they feared him. Or in some cases, they did, like in three cases, they said they lied because the cops coerced them.

All in all, that's Savannah of that era, it's that is and really today is a very problematic law enforcement culture. Savannah is one of 159 counties in Georgia. And yet about three out of ten death row exonerations in the state come from that county. All of them black men. This is a county in which it seems, that in some instances, any black man will do.

And that's why this is such an urgent case for justice. It's why its got such wide spread attention. It is why it has caused so much doubt, again from the former head of the FBI to the Pope, and we at the NWACP who have been involved in this case for years are very clear, this is an exceptional case, and therefore we're calling the people you go to our web site nwacp.org, sign the petition.

Or simply pull out your cell phone and dial 62227, type the word "troy" and that will sign you on. And you know, right now we're about 600,000 people, we're trying to get up to over one million. We're working with Amnesty, ACLU, a bunch of other groups, change.org.

But the easiest thing you can do is pull out your cell phone, just dial 62227 type the word "troy" that will sign you on, and make sure your voice is heard. When our country is stumbling towards executing an innocent person it is incumbent on every citizen to stand up and let their voice be heard.

DB: Now I don't want to belabor the point Mr. Jealous, but if you have a witness who is able to intimidate other witnesses, in the context of a murder prosecution, it seems to pollute the process. I'd like to understand more about how this process could be allowed to go forward and how the prosecutors and the police wouldn't know that this other guy is a potential suspect.

BTJ: What is more difficult to understand is how now that it's all out there, the D.A. standing silently, signing the death warrant, even though the federal court said that the case against Mr. Troy is far from iron clad.

Even though, you know, we have reason to believe that if it came in front of the D.A. today he himself has come to the conclusion that he would not bring it to a death penalty case; why he isn't reopening the case, why he isn't saying to the judge "Vacate the death warrant, let's reopen the case and make sure we have the right person behind bars."

The reality is, those of us who are interested in justice aren't just interested in making sure the wrong person doesn't get executed. We also have to be interested in making sure that the right person is behind bars.

Too many of our poor communities are not just are far from murder free zones, they become free to murder zones. Where it's very easy for the actual killer to get away with the crime. And this is just one more of those cases, the tragic thing is in this case, we actually put somebody in for the crime.

It was the wrong person, and now he may be killed by our state and, therefore, by all of us as taxpayers, if you will, next Wednesday.

DB: And also, if in fact he is not the murderer, the murderer goes free.

BTJ: The murderer has been free for 22 years.

DB: Now in his statement to the NWACP this year, Barack Obama said "The causes that you champion are the ones that drew me to public office in the first place, and they are the ones that sustain me every day in this office." I haven't heard

the President speaking out on this issue, trying to save the life of this innocent man. Has the NWACP reached out to him, why the silence?

BTJ: You know, there is nothing the President of the United States can do in a state court case. If it was federal courts, we'd be focused on him, like we're focused on the state of Georgia and the Board of Pardons and Paroles. But it's not a federal case, it's a state case.

President Obama gets these issues; one the reasons why so many people in the human rights community became fans of his when he was in the state legislature is that he championed legislation to make it illegal, and basically impossible for cops to torture witnesses and violently abuse witnesses, and put cameras into interrogation rooms.

Make sure that every interrogation entered into court had to be videotaped, and so forth. And so we have a president who gets it and we have a Department of Justice that gets it.

DB: Alright, finally for you sir, what is at the core of this case? What does it mean, what will it mean if the United States of America, and the state of Georgia executes an innocent man. What does that say about the system and about what's happening here in this country?

BTJ: If Troy Davis is executed, no one should be ever able to lie again and say that our country does not execute innocent people. We saw it with Odell in Virginia, we saw it with Graham in Texas. We know mathematically that there have to have been many more given all of the exonerations; there is a wave of DNA, releasing people from prison and from death row that's been going on for the last decade or more.

And so, the reality is that we as a country have to come to terms with the fact that we are the only country in the West that still does this. And that we do it, quite frankly, with an unexpectedly high degree of error

DB: And poor people, and people of color, are the ones who end up you know, when you go into the prisons, when you look at death row, it's like white people don't do these kinds of things.

BTJ: Well, I mean when you go into, what you see is a disproportionate of black, you see that it's almost exclusively poor, you do see a lot of white people on death row. They are all poor white people. And the reality is that when you actually look at the exonerations they are even more disproportionately black men.

In other words, the bar that this country sets for convicting a black man seems

to be much lower than it is, even for a poor white person.

And so in reality, yeah absolutely, you know, who gets executed in this country has less to do with what they did, and more to do with where they live, which side of the tracks they were born on, what color they are, even what gender they are. We are much more reluctant to execute women even when they commit the same crime.

So yeah, it's grossly unfair, but the reality is that today, and for the next several days, what we are focused on, really it doesn't matter whether you support the death penalty or not.

Everybody in this country, no matter what they feel about the issue, should be completely opposed to us executing somebody when there is such a wide shadow of doubt as there is in the Troy Davis case. That's why if you text "troy" to 62227 you are not saying how you feel about the issue, it's just saying don't execute a man who didn't do the crime.

Dennis Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net. You can get in touch with the author at dbernstein@igc.org.

A Christian Reflection on 9/11

The tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks stirred up some powerful and painful memories of that day and the 3,000 victims. But the Rev. Howard Bess says his Christian faith has compelled him to think also about the carnage that followed and whether any war is "just."

By the Rev. Howard Bess

I too looked at the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2011, with horror. No one needs to remind me of what happened on that day.

We received a phone call from our daughter about the plane that crashed into the first tower of the Trade Center. Quickly I turned on the television in time to watch in live time another plane assaulting the second tower. I could not believe what my eyes were reporting.

Over the next few hours the magnitude of the terrorist attack unfolded. The Pentagon! Yet another plane, apparently headed for the White House, crashed in Pennsylvania. The estimates of the people killed kept climbing, taking several

days for the count to become accurate.

I live more than 3,000 miles from the crime scenes. There is no way that I can claim to understand fully the pain and anger of those who lived near the crime scenes and who had family members, loved ones and neighbors who were killed.

However, I and every other American who loves our country were horrified, angered, bewildered, and left wondering what might and should come next.

My religious convictions kicked into gear. Jesus from Nazareth, the one I call Lord and the Christ of God, made some very plain and clear statements:

“You have heard it said ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,’ but I say to you ‘do not resist an evil doer. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well.’ ”

Jesus also said we are to love our enemies.

This standard became embedded in the early Christian churches. Paul wrote, “Bless those who persecute you. Bless them and do not curse them. repay no one evil for evil.”

While dying on the cross, Jesus made a simple request of God, “Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

The words that Jesus spoke about vengeance and his plea while being murdered are so plain that the follower of Jesus cannot sidestep them or deny them. Does the person who identifies himself/herself as *Christian* set aside the plain teachings of Jesus when placed in a difficult and trying position?

In response to the 9/11 attacks, the leadership of the United States made decisions about who was responsible and what action should be taken. Now ten years later the United States armed forces have killed far more than were killed by terrorists on 9/11.

The 9/11 attacks left a small section of New York City and the Pentagon in Washington DC in shambles. The United States armed forces have left two whole nations in the Middle East in destructive chaos.

At the tenth anniversary of 9/11, I sorrowed once again for the 3,000 lives lost and the destruction that was vented on my country. I sorrowed both as an American and as a Christian.

Then I reflected on the past 10 years and the path that my country chose. Through my American eyes, I saw poor decisions and unwise actions. Through my

eyes as a devout Christian, I saw the disaster of returning evil for evil.

Christians have faced this dilemma for centuries. For the first three centuries of Christian church history, our path was reasonably clear. Christians, for the most part, chose the clear teachings of Jesus about war and violence.

Then Christians found favor with the Roman Emperor, Constantine in the Fourth Century A.D. The embrace of Constantine produced a different kind of Christian and Christians found the corruption of power.

For 1,700 years, Christians have scandalized the Gospel of Christ with a love affair with power. Christians have pursued the role of ruler rather than the role of servant.

Christians have rationalized their involvement with violence, war and destruction. They exchanged *return no one evil for evil* for a mess of pottage called *evil must be stopped*.

The most sophisticated rationalization was the Just War Theory developed by Augustine, who died in 430 A.D. For a period of time I embraced Augustine's rules that replaced clear teaching by Jesus. But I have observed that Augustine's Just War rules have been used to justify every war that Christians have decided to pursue for centuries.

As a matter of conscience, I have parted ways with Augustine. I do not believe there is such a thing as a just war.

My reflections on 9/11 have intensified my commitment to Jesus Christ as my unquestioned first commitment. I am a follower of Jesus first. I am an American second. That does not mean that I seek to make America a Christian nation. But I do embrace my responsibility to be a witness about a better way to my beloved country.

Every person killed on 9/11, every American soldier who has died or been wounded in the Middle East, every terrorist, every combatant in this long war, and every innocent person who has died as collateral damage are equally loved and valued by the God I seek to serve.

My heart aches for the victims of 9/11, but the ache extends much further.

The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska. His email address is hdbss@mtaonline.net.

The Lost Innocence of 9/11

Perhaps it was inevitable in America's self-absorbed culture that the tragedy of 9/11 would be politicized and counter-politicized, forged into a weapon by ideological forces to wield against their enemies in the never-ending "culture wars." But Michael Winship laments how that process has tarnished the memories and heroism of those who died.

By Michael Winship

A long time ago, I helped produce for public television an annual year's end interview with New York City Mayor Ed Koch. We always shot it in a private room at Windows on the World, the restaurant on top of the north tower of the World Trade Center, with a spectacular view toward the Empire State Building.

From that height, at the end of a sunny winter's day you could see the lengthened shadows of the two towers stretch diagonally all the way across lower Manhattan, up and east to Stuyvesant Town.

One time, we were taken up to the roof, where the big transmitting antenna was. Around the perimeter was a gutter, some two to three feet wide and three feet deep or so – for the window cleaning apparatus that went up and down the sides of the building, I think.

Some of our production crew got into that well, knelt down, held onto the inner lip of the gutter and had their pictures taken. From a still camera's perspective, you could make it appear as if you were hanging from the edge of the tower. It seemed funny at the time.

Two decades later, on that awful morning in 2001, I threw on a pair of shorts and a tee shirt and ran to the corner after my then-wife buzzed from downstairs that the World Trade Center was on fire. We stood on the corner looking down Greenwich Street. She left for her newsroom, I watched for a few more minutes, and as I turned to return home, the second plane hit.

The flames, the blizzard of paper, the sounds of sirens and church bells, the flyers taped to every wall looking for missing loved ones, and finally, of course, the overpowering smells that lingered in our air for weeks – I have so many memories and stories, many of which I've recounted before, all of them so puny in comparison to the accounts of heroism, bravery and tragedy that over the last week or two once again have filled the media.

But I remember a week later, when television microwave trucks from around the

world still stretched down the West Side Highway as far as you could see.

At one corner was a French anchorman, who I gathered was something of a superstar back home. Excited French tourists were bunched around, thrusting their cameras, waiting their turns for a Kodak moment with him.

Three and four at a time, he spread his arms around the visitors, grinning broadly and carefully posing everyone to make sure billows of smoke from the wreckage would be prominent in the background. With apologies to France, and thank you for the Statue of Liberty, but I really felt like giving him a punch.

For so long after 9/11, we gazed southward and the sky was empty where the original Trade Center once stood. I used to think there should be some vast chalk outline in the sky, showing where the twin towers had been, like the silhouette TV detectives draw of the spot where the murder victim fell.

These days, when I walk across my Manhattan intersection and look down Seventh Avenue, I can see One World Trade Center going up. As you've seen during the coverage of this week's tenth anniversary, they've reached 80 plus stories; its glass sheathing rises part of the way to the top, construction lights twinkle at night on the unfinished floors above.

Eventually, the structure will be 108 stories with an illuminated mast that will lift it to a height of, yes, 1776 feet, but along the way they've abandoned the title Freedom Tower for fear of scaring away renters and provoking terrorists. I think of the ten years that have passed, remember other 9/11 anniversaries and wonder what else has been abandoned as well.

On the first anniversary, I made the rounds: the tributes at Ground Zero, then a memorial service at the Episcopalian Church of St. Luke in the Fields on Hudson Street, where the weeping of victims' families and friends pierced the heart. I attended a ceremony in Washington Square for the flight crews; doves were released for each of their lost lives.

The second year I was working and didn't plan a visit, but as a friend from out of town and I sat on my roof that night, staring downtown at the twin shafts of light that shine each year in tribute, he asked if we could go.

We strolled around the banks of searchlights that created the two bright columns pointing into the sky and as we walked, a woman ran by, smudging the site with burning sage, trying to cleanse it of the evil that had happened there.

The next three years, I went to Ground Zero or attended other memorials, but on the fifth anniversary, when I arrived downtown the scene seemed, sadly, more circus-like.

The families of the victims were largely protected from it but those of us just outside were subjected to pitchmen and hangers-on, a man dressed in a bird suit urging passersby to "Have a Kind Day," and everywhere, the "truthers" in their black tee-shirts, thrusting in your face brochures and DVD's pitching every sinister conspiracy they believe caused the towers to fall, except, of course, the one that actually brought them down.

Last year, on a train home from Boston, where the two flights that hit the towers originated, I watched the Tribute in Light from a distance, its shafts of illumination piercing the dark above the faraway Manhattan skyline. And this year I stayed at home and watched on television as the official memorial was opened, songs were sung and the 2,750 names were read aloud once again.

I did go down to Ground Zero on Wednesday, walking through the rain and mist to Church and Vesey Streets, the intersection at which One World Trade Center is rising. The majority of the sidewalk traffic seemed equally divided among groups of business people, construction workers and tourists.

I stopped by St. Paul's Chapel, where ten years ago first responders and other emergency personnel slept, exhausted, in the church's pews between hours of recovery work on the smoldering mountain of death and debris.

The wooden pews are gone now, stored – just temporarily, I hope – and replaced with folding chairs where visitors come to view mementos of 9/11 and listen to choirs and chamber music.

Instead of the tributes of flowers and stuffed animals that once crowded St. Paul's iron fence, now white ribbons were tied, each marked "Remember to Love." Anyone could add a message to them – in black ink, slightly running from the damp, people had written "RIP to All," "Peace," "Keep on rocking in the free world," or just their names.

I had come downtown for a discussion at the New York County Lawyer's Association, sponsored with the New York Neighbors for American Values. Its subject was "9/11: Refuting Stereotypes and Challenging the Common Wisdom."

Eight panelists and moderator Tom Robbins discussed whether the public had been sufficiently involved in the plans for rebuilding lower Manhattan post-9/11 (no), if officials had recklessly downplayed the health hazards around the site (yes), if the mainstream media adequately reported those dangers (no) and whether post-attack security concerns had escalated intolerance and violated civil liberties (oh yes, indeed).

In fact, a new Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board originally called for by the 9/11 commission report in 2004, its powers even strengthened by Congress

in 2007, has yet to meet.

We seem to have squandered the solidarity and goodwill amongst ourselves that briefly blossomed after the tragic events of 9/11 – not to mention global support – just as unthinkingly as we've spent \$1.2 trillion dollars, according to the National Priorities Project (a nonpartisan, progressive think tank), on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq – money that could have generated thousands of college scholarships; hired firefighters, police officers and teachers; provided low-cost health care for millions.

The renewed patriotism and commitment we felt a decade ago has decayed, sullied by jingoism, xenophobia and paranoid fantasies about race and religion. At the panel, Linda Sarsour of the Arab American Association of New York observed, "What stops another 9/11 is not profiling, but all New Yorkers becoming partners and friends."

We actually had that for a while in those first days and weeks of smoke and ash, those days when the smell of vaporized metal and electrical cable and God knows what else filled our air; so pungent you could taste it.

We lived through those days, and in a decade of memorials we still see flashes of the unity, strength and dedication so necessary for democracy to survive.

But how horrible if the ultimate memorial to 9/11 is not waterfalls and names engraved on bronze or marble but the financial, moral and societal bankruptcy Osama bin Laden and 19 followers armed with box cutters hoped would be our fate.

Michael Winship is senior writing fellow at Demos, president of the Writers Guild of America, East, and former senior writer of "Bill Moyers Journal" on PBS.

Surrendering Liberties After 9/11

After the 9/11 attacks, many Americans were ready to surrender constitutional liberties for an extra measure of security and the Bush administration was more than willing to accept that deal. But the Independent Institute's Ivan Eland says the trade-offs haven't changed much under President Barack Obama.

By Ivan Eland

Documents found in the files of Muammar Gaddafi's intelligence services in Libya, which indicated that the now overthrown dictator cooperated closely with

U.S. rendition of terrorist suspects to his torture chambers, should prompt questions about how much President Barack Obama has improved civil liberties from the bad old days of George W. Bush. Answer: not much.

Obama's first promise in office was to close the infamous and torture-tainted U.S. military prison at Guantanamo within a year, which he abysmally failed to do. Granted, the Republican Congress has blocked the transfer of prisoners from the offshore facility to mainland civilian courts, but Obama, despite his prominent pledge, has failed to make the issue a top priority.

The main reason he hasn't is because politicians of all political stripes read public opinion polls indicating that the American people would rather be safe than free. The politicians should not be surprised by this outcome, because it is they who have scared Americans into preferring "security" at the expense of civil liberties.

So "cleaned up," but still kangaroo, military tribunals will continue to be held at Guantanamo for terrorism suspects. And those are the lucky prisoners; others will be held behind bars without a trial or other rights indefinitely in the perpetual "war on terror" (regardless of whether Obama calls it that or not), a violation of the constitutionally guaranteed doctrine of habeas corpus.

Also, Obama dramatically ended the torture of U.S.-held prisoners but left a loophole for rendering such prisoners to foreign lands under special circumstances.

Since Obama has been reluctant to investigate the horrendous torture and abuse during the Bush administration, a skeptic might wonder whether he is afraid of similar future investigations of his administration for torture in foreign lands under the rendition loophole.

Although assassinations by the CIA are still prohibited by executive order, this has allowed the U.S. military to gobble up the hamstrung intelligence agency's turf. The military's Joint Special Operations Command can carry out targeted killings of even U.S. citizens on the mere suspicion that they might be involved in terrorism.

This is even wider latitude than the government is given to spy on U.S. citizens, which itself has been much loosened by Congress after 9/11. More generally, unconstitutional warrantless government searches have been expanded.

And a U.S. resident was recently charged using the now much more widely used and abused "provision of material support for a terrorist group." His alleged crime: making a video advertising the Pakistani-based group Lashkar-e-Taiba and showing photos of a detainee at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and a naked U.S. prisoner in a

defensive position before American soldiers.

Although Lashkar-e-Taiba is on the U.S. terrorism list, like many of the groups on that list, it doesn't focus attacks on the United States.

Lastly, U.S. law enforcement agencies have misused the detention of "material witnesses" provision by turning it into a scheme of preventive detention, which Congress has rejected. The law was set up to prevent key witnesses from fleeing before a trial, but in the war on terror, it has morphed into a way to hold alleged terrorists that the authorities have insufficient evidence to charge with a crime.

But haven't all of these measures made us safer from terrorism? After all, many people point out that we have not had another cataclysmic terrorist attack since 9/11.

Then again, terrorism was very rare in North America before 9/11. North America, of all continents in the world, because of its political stability, regularly had the fewest attacks.

So saying that we've returned to normalcy after an abnormally lucky (for the terrorists, not for the victims) and sneaky attack says nothing about the effectiveness of the aforementioned liberty-robbing government muscle-flexing.

In fact, even after 9/11, the calculated chance of an American ever being killed by an international terrorist is very remote, one in 80,000 (even this may be high). Thus, perhaps citizens should be more scared of the certainty of their government's unnecessarily draconian measures to "prevent" any such attacks.

And if Americans want to improve those odds, instead of being scared into allowing politicians to take away their liberties, they should pressure them to remove the source of the anti-U.S. terrorists' fury: constant meddling and military interventions in Islamic lands.

Some U.S. interventions may even be popular in a particular Muslim country, such as Libya, but polls indicate that U.S. foreign policy is even less popular in Islamic countries than it was at the end of the Bush administration, continuing to provide a rich incubator for anti-U.S. terrorism.

Thus, Obama's war on terror, expanded from even the aggressive Bush efforts, may in the long run be as counterproductive to the republic as his Bush Lite usurpation of civil liberties.

Ivan Eland is Director of the Center on Peace & Liberty at The Independent Institute. Dr. Eland has spent 15 years working for Congress on national

security issues, including stints as an investigator for the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Principal Defense Analyst at the Congressional Budget Office. His books include *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed*, and *Putting "Defense" Back into U.S. Defense Policy*.

Who Are These People?

Exclusive: When President George W. Bush took aim at Iraq in 2002-03, the smart career play in the U.S. news media was to jump on the pro-war bandwagon and cheer on propaganda about WMD and other excuses for war. Belatedly, the New York Times' Bill Keller admits that mistakes were made, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In commemoration of 9/11, former New York Times executive editor Bill Keller penned a handwringing article in the Sunday magazine explaining why he supported the U.S. invasion of Iraq, while admitting that Iraq "had in the literal sense, almost nothing to do with 9/11" and recognizing that the war has resulted in untold death and misery of its own.

The article, "My Unfinished 9/11 Business," is filled with rationalizations about his post-9/11 feelings and those of other members of what Keller dubbed the "I-Can't-Believe-I'm-a-Hawk Club," pundits and intellectuals who rallied to President George W. Bush's conquest of Iraq as a more fitting response to 9/11 than simply occupying Afghanistan or hunting down al-Qaeda.

Yet what is perhaps most striking about Keller's article is what's not in it. There is not a single reference to international law, or to the fact that Bush undertook the invasion in defiance of a majority on the United Nations Security Council and in violation of longstanding U.S.-enunciated principles against aggressive war.

At the Nuremberg Tribunals after World War II, the chief U.S. prosecutor, Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson, called a war of aggression "not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole."

Jackson also promised that the tribunals, in condemning Nazi officials and their propagandists for engaging in aggressive war and other crimes, were not simply acting out victor's justice but that the same rules would apply to the nations

sitting in judgment.

That, however, has turned out not to be the case. Though Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair undertook the invasion of Iraq without UN approval and under false pretenses, there has been no serious attempt to hold the invaders and their subordinates accountable.

Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and other former U.S. officials have even admitted to ordering acts of torture (such as water-boarding prisoners), again in violation of international law, with little or no expectation that they will be punished. Nor presumably do Keller and other pro-invasion pundits foresee any adverse consequences from their own propagandistic support for the war.

If the Nuremberg principles were to be fully applied to the United States and Great Britain, the propagandists would share the dock with the political and military leaders. But Keller and his fellow "club" members apparently believe their worst punishment should be writing self-obsessed articles about how distraught they are over the war's unintended consequences.

Many Excuses

For Keller's part, his article offers excuses for his war support ranging from his desire to protect his daughter who was born "almost exactly nine months after the attacks" on 9/11 to his accompaniment in his pro-war propaganda by "a large and estimable" group of fellow liberal hawks.

His list included "among others, Thomas Friedman of *The Times*; Fareed Zakaria, of *Newsweek*; George Packer and Jeffrey Goldberg of *The New Yorker*; Richard Cohen of *The Washington Post*; the blogger Andrew Sullivan; Paul Berman of *Dissent*; Christopher Hitchens of just about everywhere; and Kenneth Pollack, the former C.I.A. analyst whose book, *The Threatening Storm*, became the liberal manual on the Iraqi threat."

These "club" members expressed various caveats and concerns about their hawkishness, but their broad support for invading Iraq provided a powerful argument for the Bush administration which, as Keller noted, "was clearly pleased to cite the liberal hawks as evidence that invading Iraq was not just the impetuous act of cowboy neocons."

Indeed, this "liberal-hawk" consensus further marginalized the few skeptics who tried to warn the American people that the WMD evidence was thin to non-existent and that occupying a hostile Arab nation was a fool's errand that would start a new cycle of violence.

As the Iraq invasion was unleashed in March 2003 with all its "shock and awe"

and the killing of young Iraqi soldiers and many civilians, Keller recalled his satisfaction in having taken the side of American military might.

When Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was driven from power three weeks later, Keller said he and nearly all other “club” members were “a little drugged by testosterone. And maybe a little too pleased with ourselves for standing up to evil and defying the caricature of liberals as, to borrow a phrase from those days, brie-eating surrender monkeys.”

Keller does allow that he and his “club” under-estimated the difficulties of installing “democracy” in Iraq and over-estimated the competence of Bush’s team. In retrospect, given the costs in blood and treasure among Americans and Iraqis, he acknowledges that “Operation Iraqi Freedom was a monumental blunder.”

But Keller seems to think that his engagement in this self-aggrandizing self-criticism is punishment enough, not only for him and his fellow “liberal hawks” but apparently for Bush, Cheney, Blair and others who waged this war of aggression.

The fact that Keller doesn’t even mention international law let alone the harsh penalties set aside for those who engage in war crimes like aggressive war suggests that he remains a member in good standing of the “We’re-So-Special-We-Can-Do-Anything Club.”

You may note that most of the “estimable” members of Keller’s hawk club remain highly regarded opinion leaders and some like Friedman, Zakaria and Cohen retain big-dollar perches in the major news media. Keller even got promoted to Times executive editor, arguably the top job in American journalism, *after* the case for war in Iraq was debunked.

Double Standards

Given that many worthy journalists have seen their careers ruined simply because they are accused of failing to meet some perfect standard of journalism for instance, the late Gary Webb and his heroic reporting on Nicaraguan Contra drug trafficking it is striking that almost none of Keller’s club members have suffered professionally at all.

It seems that if you offend the Establishment as Webb did you are held to the most rigorous rules and suffer humiliation and disgrace, deprived of your livelihood and denied employment. (Unable to find work in journalism, Webb eventually committed suicide.)

However, if you go with the flow and are surrounded by enough “estimable” fellow-travelers you are protected from serious consequences for making grievous

mistakes, like falling for lies from ideologues and letting your personal feelings dominate your judgment.

In the months before and after the Iraq invasion, the major U.S. news media, including the New York Times and the Washington Post, were little more than conveyor belts for Bush's pro-war propaganda. In his half-hearted mea culpa on Sunday, Keller admits that some of the Times' pre-war reporting on Iraq's WMD was "notoriously credulous."

But Keller and the Times were essentially part of a bigger propaganda machine that did its best to first justify and then sanitize the war, at least in the early days.

Rather than troubling Americans with gruesome images of mangled and dismembered Iraqi bodies, including many children, the TV networks, in particular, edited the war in ways that helped avoid negativity and gave advertisers the feel-good content that plays best around their products.

Fox News may have pioneered this concept of casting the war in the gauzy light of heroic imagery, where Iraqi soldiers were "goons" and interviews with Americans at war were packaged with "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" as the soundtrack.

But MSNBC carried the idea to even greater lengths with Madison-Avenue-style montages of the Iraq War. One showed U.S. troops in heroic postures moving through Iraq. The segment ended with an American boy surrounded by yellow ribbons for his father at war, and the concluding slogan, "Home of the Brave."

Another MSNBC montage showed happy Iraqis welcoming U.S. troops as liberators and rejoicing at the toppling of Saddam Hussein. These stirring pictures ended with the slogan, "Let Freedom Ring." Left out of these "news" montages were any images of Iraqi death, destruction and despair.

Civilian Deaths

In the conflict's first days, the haste to kill Hussein led Bush to approve the bombing of a restaurant where Hussein was thought to be eating. Though Hussein wasn't there, the restaurant was obliterated and the bodies of more than a dozen civilians, including young children, were pulled from the rubble.

"When the broken body of the 20-year-old woman was brought out torso first, then her head," the Associated Press reported, "her mother started crying uncontrollably, then collapsed." The London Independent cited this restaurant attack as one that represented "a clear breach" of the Geneva Conventions ban on bombing civilian targets.

But the civilian deaths were of little interest to the U.S. news media. "American talking heads, playing the what-if game about Saddam's whereabouts, never seemed to give the issue any thought," wrote Eric Boehlert for [Salon.com](#). "Certainly they did not linger on images of the hellacious human carnage left in the aftermath."

Hundreds of other civilian deaths were equally horrific. Saad Abbas, 34, was wounded in an American bombing raid, but his family sought to shield him from the greater horror. The bombing had killed his three daughters Marwa, 11; Tabarek, 8; and Safia, 5 who had been the center of his life.

"It wasn't just ordinary love," his wife said. "He was crazy about them. It wasn't like other fathers." [NYT, April 14, 2003]

The horror of the war was captured, too, in the fate of 12-year-old Ali Ismaeel Abbas, who lost his two arms when a U.S. missile struck his Baghdad home. Ali's father, his pregnant mother and his siblings were all killed. As he was evacuated to a Kuwaiti hospital, becoming a symbol of U.S. compassion for injured Iraqi civilians, Ali said he would rather die than live without his hands.

For its part, the Bush administration announced that it had no intention of tallying the number of Iraqi civilians who were killed in the war. That has allowed Keller and other war supporters to use low-ball figures for the total he wrote "at least 100,000" in his article although other estimates of excess deaths attributable to the war run into the hundreds of thousands, if not one million or more.

The horrors that have been inflicted and continue to be inflicted on Iraq represent what Justice Jackson meant when he talked about the crime of aggressive war, the unpacking of all the other evils of war.

In that context, a belated half-apology from the likes of Bill Keller for what he calls the "monumental blunder" of the Iraq War rings hollow indeed.

[For more on these topics, see Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a two-book set for the discount price of only \$19. For details, [click here](#).]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](#). His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

