

CounterPunch

BLIND FAITH IN DRONES BY TOM BARRY

BIG BANG THEORY IN NORTH KOREA BY PETER LEE

NOTES OF A HOLLYWOOD SCREENWRITER BY JOHN ESKOW

AFGHANISTAN: THE GARDEN OF EMPIRE BY JULIEN MERCILLE



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The cover image, Blind Faith in Drones, by Nick Roney is an homage to the infamous cover for the one-and-only Blind Faith LP (1969) by photographer Bob Seidemann, which was ultimately censored in the US.



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The classless hipsterism on display in Lena Dunham's smash HBO show "Girls."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Telling It Like It Is

As we approach the 10th anniversary of the launch of the Iraq war, I am reminded how much I learned from Alex Cockburn in those days (as Jeffrey St Clair could attest)—about telling it like it is, and about offering a historical explanation even when it seemed too much. There is now an imposed amnesia about imperial war aims, about the fact that many opposed the war on grounds that came to pass, and about the sheer suffering about the war. Good to remember this as the war drums beat for the next cannibalistic feast.

*Vijay Prashad
Dehli*

Catch Us If You Can

Great article by St. Clair on censorship and Alexander Cockburn. Nothing more satisfying than seeing 'em jumping and trying to catch us and roast us alive!

Best regards,

*Andre Vltchek
Kenya*

Human Rights Watch

Garry Leech's terrific piece on the biases of Human Rights Watch is one of the best articles I've ever read. Thank you for the splendid work you guys are doing.

*Lynda Brayer
Jerusalem*

New Pope Same Church

Pope Bergoglio is going to do to Francis of Assisi what Wojtyła did to liberation theology.

*Mark Solomon
San Francisco*

Rachel's Legacy

Thanks so much for the beautiful tribute to Rachel Corrie and her parents by Tom Wright and Therese Saliba. While her death was a tragedy, the legacy she left behind is a testament to the truth of what she believed in and gave her life for.

*Deborah Emin
New York City*

Bond and the Recession

Kim Nicolini's review of Skyfall actually makes me want to watch a Bond film. My favorite sentence: "There are no illusions of prosperity in this climate where people are losing their jobs, their homes, their medical benefits, and even their televisions."

*Terry Owen
Tuscon*

Obama and The Lesser Evil

I often meet people who have no problem with Obama. He's not a lesser evil for everyone. The things he's doing are not lesser evils for him, either. I'm convinced that he completely believes in what he does, and that marginalizing or destroying the left-liberals is one of his goals. He's an heir of Mayor

Daley the first, after all, and an ally of Daley II.

*John Emerson
Oregon*

Pipelines and The Public Trust

The whole debate over the Keystone XL Pipeline is happening without anyone saying that the public trust doctrine is actually part of the law of the land (and water, etc...). Some things can't be "traded."

*Michael Warburton
Berkeley, California*

The Air We Breathe

Re: Mountaintop Removal. We are told by the US Geological Survey not to eat anything from our gardens! And this is from the mining dust you can't see, not the stuff you can. Over a million acres are contaminated, and people still

eat from their gardens. No wonder West Virginia has the nation's highest mortality rates.

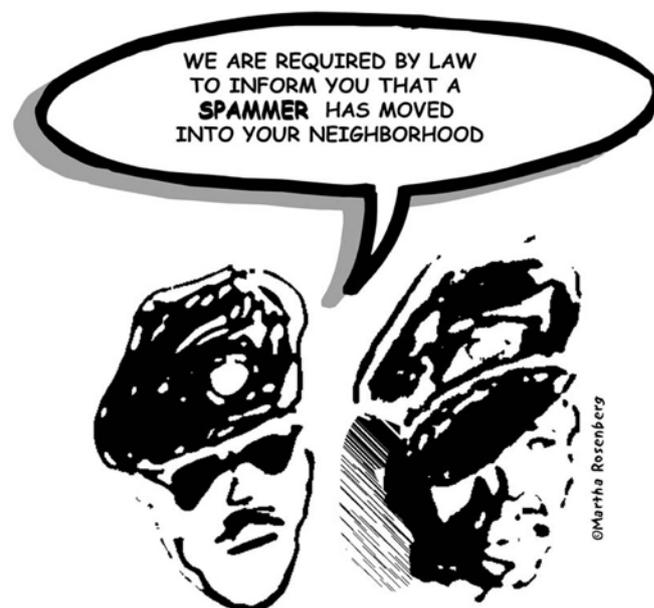
*Mike Roselle
Rock Creek, West Virginia*

Dark Star

Tom Clifford's piece on the new pope is so brilliant. I just sat in on a group of women who were blathering about the new pope as if there were a new star in the heavens, and as usual, I made the only acid comment: "He's a Jesuit; if he is left wing, he is a communist and an atheist, if he is right wing he is a fascist and a pig." I am pretty sure the hand-spinning group I belong to are going to ask me to leave. At least I kept the discussion lively.

*Virginia McLaughlin
Los Angeles*

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ROAMING CHARGES

Designer Protests in DC

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

The scene was striking for its dissonance. Fifty activists massed in front of the White House, some of them sitting, others tied to the iron fence, most of them smiling, all decorous looking, not a Black Blocker or Earth First!er in the viewshed. The leaders of this micro-occupation of the sidewalk held a black banner featuring Obama's campaign logo, the one with the blue "O" and the curving red stripes that looks like a pipeline snaking across Kansas. The message read, prosaically: "Lead on Climate: Reject the KXL Pipeline." Cameras whirred frantically, most aimed at the radiant face of Daryl Hannah, as DC police moved in to politely ask the crowd to disperse. The crowd politely declined. The Rubicon had been crossed. For the first time in 120 years, a Sierra Club official, executive director Mike Brune, was going to get arrested for an act of civil (and the emphasis here is decisively on civil) disobedience.

Brune had sought special dispensation for the arrest from the Sierra Club board, a one-day exemption to the Club's firm policy against non-violent civil disobedience. The Board assented. One might ask, what took them so long? One might also ask, why now? Is the Keystone Pipeline a more horrific ecological crime than oil drilling in grizzly habitat on the border of Glacier National Park or the gunning down of 350 wolves a year in the outback of Idaho? Hardly. The Keystone Pipeline is one of many noxious conduits of tar sand oil from Canada, vile, certainly, but standard practice for Big Oil.

The Sierra Club has an image problem. Brune's designer arrest can be partially interpreted as a craven attempt to efface the stain of the Club's recent dalliance with Chesapeake Energy,

one of the largest natural gas companies on the continent and a pioneer in the environmentally malign enterprise of hydraulic fracturing or "fracking". Between 2007 and 2010, Chesapeake Energy secretly funneled nearly \$30 million to the Sierra Club to advocate the virtues of natural gas as a so-called "bridge" fuel. Bridge to where is yet to be determined. By the time this subornment was disclosed, the funders of the environmental movement had turned decisively against fracking for gas and the even more malicious methods used to extract shale oil. The Sierra Club had to rehabilitate itself to stay in the good graces of the Pew Charitable Trusts and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who had lavished \$50 million on the Club's sputtering Beyond Coal Campaign.

As the cops strolled in to begin their vanity arrests, they soon confronted the inscrutable commander of these delicately chained bodies, Bill McKibben, leader of the massively funded 350.Org. McKibben had repeatedly referred to this as the environmental movement's "lunch counter moment," making an odious comparison to the Civil Rights movement's courageous occupation of the "white's only" spaces across the landscape of the Jim Crow era, acts of genuine defiance that were often viciously suppressed by truncheons, fists and snarling dogs.

But McKibben made no attempt to stand his ground. He allowed the PlastiCuffs that tied his thin wrists to the fence to be decorously snapped. He didn't resist arrest; instead he craved it. This was a well-orchestrated photo-op moment. He was escorted to the police van, driven to the precinct station, booked, handed a \$100 fine and released. An hour later, McKibben was

Tweeting about how cool it was to be arrested with civil rights legend Julian Bond. But are you really engaged in civil disobedience if you can Tweet your own arrest?

Beyond the fabric of self-congratulation, what's really going on here? The mandarins of Big Green blocked nothing, not even entry to the White House grounds. It was a purely symbolic protest, but signifying what? Directed at whom? Even Derrida would have a hard time decoding the meaning of a demonstration that so effusively supported the person it supposedly targeted.

Of course, Obama, who was in North Carolina during the designer arrests, had no such problem. He correctly divined the impotence on display. In a matter of weeks, he delivered a State of the Union Address pledging to expedite oil and gas drilling on public lands and off-shore sites, nominated pro-nuke and pro-fracking zealots to head the EPA and Department of Energy.

Predictably, the Sierra Club, which now functions as little more than an applause machine for the administration, praised both the State of the Union address and the dubious appointments to EPA and Energy. Here we have what Jean-Paul Sartre called "the mirage of an opposition."

Then the coup de grâce: the State Department issued its final report endorsing the pipeline an ecologically-benign sluice toward economic prosperity. This was swiftly followed by an order from the White House to the EPA demanding that the agency withdraw the stern new standards on greenhouse gas emissions from powerplants.

So Obama is set to screw Gang Green on the Keystone XL Pipeline. But, like Pavlovian Lapdogs, the Enviro Pros will lick their wounds, cash a few checks and within two weeks be back to issuing press releases touting him as the Greenest President of All Time. Rest assured, Obama feels terrible about these setbacks and will move decisively to fix them in his third term. **CP**



GRASPING AT STRAWS

Apres Chavez

BY MIKE WHITNEY

During his 13 years as president of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez initiated critical reforms that cut poverty in half, eliminated illiteracy, nationalized key industries, reduced inequality, provided health care for all Venezuelans, and raised living standards across the board. Is it any wonder why Washington hated him? Is it any wonder why the Bush administration tried to topple Chavez in multiple coups or, why the western media demonised the former paratrooper as a “dictator” and “populist demagogue”?

Washington has always despised democratically elected leaders who try to make life easier for working people. Chavez was particularly loathed because his redistributionist policies diverted a sizable chunk of the country’s oil revenues to social programs aimed at improving conditions for the poor, the sick and the elderly. That’s why political elites in the US decided that the brash Chavez had to go: he was setting a bad example for other Latin American leaders who might be tempted to launch similar programs in their own countries. As it happens, others have followed in Chavez’s footsteps, which has pushed the continent further to the left and increased the prospects for regional integration. This is Washington’s worst nightmare, a coalition of Latin American states operating in their own best interests while refusing to take orders from mucky-mucks in the US. Chavez was largely responsible for this development.

Chavez used his power as chief executive to reign in big finance. He pushed through legislation that defined banking as “a public service” and “required that banks in Venezuela contribute more to social programs, housing construction efforts, and other social

needs.” According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Chavez’s new law stipulates that “5% of pre-tax profits of all banks be dedicated solely to projects elaborated by communal councils. 10% of a banks capital must also be put into a fund to pay for wages and pensions in case of bankruptcy.” In other words, banks in Venezuela are required to hand over 5 percent of their profits for social programs for the poor and needy. Meanwhile, in the US, President Barack Obama hasn’t lifted finger to help anyone except his rich Wall Street buddies in 5 years.

Under Chavez’s rule the gap between rich and poor has narrowed, the rule of law has strengthened, unemployment has dropped precipitously (from 15.2% in 1998 to 6.4% in 2012), extreme poverty has been slashed by 70 percent, public school enrollment has ballooned to 92.3 percent, infant mortality has been cut in half, 700,000 homes have been built for low income families since 1999, malnutrition has virtually vanished, and the economy is growing at a robust 5.6 percent clip. Oh yeah, and five million children now get free meals through Chavez’s School Feeding Program which provides a nutritious diet for many pre-teens who would otherwise go hungry. So while President Obama has been figuring out new and creative ways to strangle vital social programs for the sick and destitute, Chavez was raising the minimum wage, shoring up the flagging pension system, and “providing assistance to disadvantaged communities in the United States by providing fuel at subsidized rates.”

How do you like that; Chavez was providing free heating oil to struggling families in the US who’ve slipped through the country’s tattered

safety net. And, that’s not all, according to journalists Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers: “Wealth inequality in Venezuela is half of what it is in the United States. It is rated ‘the fifth-happiest nation in the world’ by Gallup... Venezuelans are very happy with their democracy. On average, they gave their own democracy a score of seven out of ten while the Latin American average was 5.8. Meanwhile, 57 percent of Venezuelans reported being happy with their democracy compared to an average for Latin American countries of 38 percent.”

All of this reflects positively on Chavez, the man who was reelected as president 4 times in near-landslide victories that have been called the “fairest elections anywhere.”

Of course, now that Chavez is dead, his critics are saying that the economy has been horribly mismanaged and is headed for a fall. But is this true or just another fiction conjured up by his enemies? According to a recent report by economists Mark Weisbrot and Jake Johnston titled “Venezuela’s Economic Recovery: Is it Sustainable?” (Center for Economic and Policy Research):

“Venezuela has about 500 billion barrels of oil, according to the U.S. geological survey estimates, the largest in the world. Its proven reserves are about 300 billion barrels. The country is currently using about 1 billion barrels of those reserves per year. So long as political stability is maintained—and it has been since the government got control of the national oil industry in 2003—Venezuela will have the ability, with reasonable macroeconomic policies, to maintain solid rates of economic growth.”

In other words, it should be smooth sailing for the Venezuelan people provided that their new “post Hugo” government can keep Washington’s greasy mitts off their oil and provided that they continue to support Chavez’s progressive social programs. Of course, that could be a lot harder now that Chavez is gone. **CP**



DESERT POST

Bigger, Faster, More

BY CHRISTOPHER KETCHAM

My friend and occasional CounterPuncher Morris Berman argues compellingly in his latest book, *Why America Failed: The Roots of Imperial Decline*, that the citizens of the empire—you, me, and the rest of America—will not be reformed of our profligate grabby ways. There will be no sustainable future, no America chastened to meet the exigencies of resource exhaustion. As a culture of hustlers—on the make, on the move, looking for the angle, buying, selling, consuming, amassing the good life in trinkets and bling—we are bound inexorably, says Berman, for the hustler’s death: the one in which the drunk collapses in the gutter, the addict spews his last vomitus, the gambler sells his daughter’s cooch for a bet.

Berman’s book is delightfully depressing for many reasons, not least of which is that, after reviewing the “ubiquitous sleaze” of America’s 400-year hustling culture, he refuses to land on a high hopeful note in the pivotal last chapter—you know, the archetypal one in such books, demanded by publishing houses to sell copies to a deluded public, where the author summons a phony (nay, sleazy) smile and delivers can-do bromides as one-liners (Ten Ways We Can...!) for how to fix what the preceding 250 pages convincingly declared unfixable.

The problem is that Euro-American civilization was a business civilization from day one, and it was little else. Its goal, writes Berman, “is and always has been an ever-expanding economy—affluence—and endless technological innovation—‘progress’...American life is many things,” he writes, “but ultimately it’s a life without a heart, not really a life for human beings.”

“Business is the very soul of an American,” observed author Francis Grund, who had immigrated to the U.S. in 1826. But it was a perverted type of business the American was after: “he pursues it, not as a means of procuring for himself and his family the necessary comforts of life, but as the fountain of all human felicity.” Thus you have de Tocqueville by 1831 remarking on the “national character of the Americans” that “they have sought the value of everything in this world only in the answer to this single question: how much money will it bring in?”

“[T]he squalid cash interpretation put on the word success,” said William James, “is our national disease.” Henry Adams pronounced the U.S. “more avaricious than any other Nation that ever existed.” Richard Hofstadter concluded we were born as “a democracy in cupidity.”

As it was, so shall it be. The dominant hustling culture, our peculiar genetic curse, will not be overcome. You can’t expect a people to throw off the chains of 400 years of history soaked in ubiquitous sleaze.

At times, however, the hustler paradigm has been resisted (to little effect) by intellectuals and writers in what Berman calls the alternative tradition in American life. Berman’s roll call of rebels includes Thoreau, Emerson, Poe, Melville, Adams, the two James’s (Henry and William), Thorstein Veblen, Lewis Mumford; and, later, a generation of mid-20th century thinkers who issued devastating broadsides against the acquisitive life: Erich Fromm (*The Sane Society*), Vance Packard (*The Hidden Persuaders*, *The Status Seekers*), John Kenneth Galbraith (*The Affluent Society*), Paul Goodman (*Growing Up Absurd*). “All of these

[later] writers wanted Americans to have loftier goals, to have real meaning in their lives beyond the latest toaster,” writes Berman. “All of them wrote best-selling books; Packard’s work was literally off the charts. Americans read, nodded in agreement, and then went out and bought a second car and a truckload of appliances.”

When Jimmy Carter in 1979 sat before the American television audience and scolded about “self-indulgence and consumption,” he too was advocating in the alternative tradition—and he paid the price.

“Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns,” said Carter. “We’ve learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose....Down that road lies a mistaken idea of freedom, the right to grasp for ourselves some advantage over others.”

Carter called for a “restoration of American values,” but of course, as Berman snickers in pointing out, there *could be no restoration*. Carter had pegged in his jeremiad exactly the nature of American values.

Members of Congress took to the floor after the speech to question the man’s sanity. Voters, duly offended, kicked Carter to the curb, gunned the engines, elected Mr. Morning in America, and goddamnit we restored values—by inaugurating an era of self-indulgence and consumption like none other in the history of Euro-American civilization.

We are still effectively living in the Reagan Era—no president since has dared question the emptiness, the sheer stupidity, of the piling up of material goods—and its end will come only once the hustling life hits the wall of our making.

Think climate change, peak oil, peak everything. The death will be long and slow and, as with the addict and the drunk heading for bottom, sad and painful and ugly and not a little disgusting. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

This is Not the Age of Defeat

BY CHRIS FLOYD

This is the age of loss, not the age of defeat.

Drone strikes, kill lists, murderers and torturers approved for high office. Austerity for the poor, record profits for the rich.

Truth-tellers shackled, liars lauded, ignorance exalted, cruelty and callousness gilded with righteous piety. Everywhere, goodness is driven to its knees, and this brutality is not decried but celebrated.

As in that age of iron that lowered over our forbears during the dark night of the Thirties, you see faces once thought kind and kindred turn suddenly feral.

Fear is behind it, but not just fear: also a self-hatred for what fear has turned them into, a self-hatred that cannot be borne and so is turned outward, *thrown* outward, into harsh projections of hatefulness, violence and desolation.

The avid embrace of what was once denounced, or the sad but “savvy” acceptance of the “lesser evil”: this is what we see at every turn today among ourselves, among those we thought were our own, and sometimes, maybe—when the lowering is darkest, heaviest—in mirrors as we pass. When the lowering is darkest, when the soul is lost. In them. In us.

This is the age of loss—but it is not the age of defeat.

What do you think goodness is? Some commodity, a material substance that can be wasted utterly, atomized, made inert?

Do you think it is a thing, that can be destroyed, organic matter that can die?

Do you think it is an idea that can lose its force, its coherence, its context, can be rendered quaint or antiquated by time’s passing, or by any suppression

or negation?

What do you think goodness is?

Goodness is like fire: it is a *process* not an entity, not even a mental entity: it is *process*, it is *relation*, it exists only in the moment of its enacting, in the moment of ignition, of *relation*, where matter and energy become one, become nothing, become all.

Goodness is *like* fire, but it is not fire, because the matter it feeds upon is existence itself: inexhaustible, in all of its uncountable coalescences of innumerable elements—right down to the quantum switchings in the invisible cores: rising, decaying, recombining, rising again, decaying, recombining, on and on, in every direction, at every level, until the end of whatever time is, if whatever time is has an end.

Fearful, damaged creatures rule us. It is because they are more fearful and damaged than we are that they want to rule, that they aren’t content with mere *images* of projected self-hatred (like so many of their sycophants and followers).

No, they must have the viscera in their hands, smell the overpowering stench of death, hear the wail of suffering, see the damage, the destroyed body that is the image of their own soul.

They think that in this way what is fearful and damaged inside them will be expelled.

But of course, the opposite is true; the hateful damage is only increased, exponentially, the rot grows deeper and deeper inside them.

This is what our politics is, this is what power is: *the maniacal attempt to overcome relation*—to blot it out, stop the endless process, put out the fire, and impose a deadened stasis on the reality that pains them so.

But this is impossible to do, because

the flame of reality cannot be extinguished. Individual points of consciousness can be destroyed—an abysmal, irreplaceable, inconsolable loss—but not the always-changing, rising, falling, recombining *process* that is reality.

What do you think goodness is? Goodness is reality, it is Being itself.

Evil is the attempt to quell reality, to quell goodness, to stop it, arrest it, indefinitely detain it, to beat it, terrorize it into submission, to assassinate it, sequester it, to make it go away somehow and stop reflecting back to us the damaged thing we have become.

But this cannot be done. It cannot be done. Goodness can lose, but it cannot be defeated. It can be balked, but it cannot be quelled.

In every single moment of existence, the choice for goodness is there. Every single moment—the choice. And you can make it at any point, you can begin the process of accepting, enacting, igniting goodness at any point, even the darkest and most degraded.

(And “goodness” here does not mean “goodness” or righteousness or any kind of bloodless, lifeless thing. Goodness is the impulse or action that moves in *relation*, the impulse or action that does not abstract, exploit, dehumanize the other, does not solidify them, but moves, flows in empathetic relation to them. You can have a hell of a good time in that kind of flow.)

In any given age, the lowering clouds can bear down more heavily than in others.

Ours is indeed a very hard age, another age of iron. It is an age of loss, of grievous loss—but it is not the age of defeat.

Reality remains, the process goes on, the choice for goodness is always—*always*—there, no matter what. **CP**



DAYDREAM NATION

Girls, Girls, Girls

BY KRISTIN KOLB

Last summer, a friend sent me a story from the latest issue of *The New Yorker*: “Hey, this made me think of you—it’s by an Oberlin grad remembering her first love—a lanky, asexual, lit-theory-type who wore long johns commando-style and subsisted on beans and rice. They even spent an ambiguous date sitting alone in his room shrooming. Sound familiar?”

Oh yes, it did. The witty story triggered some wistfulness, quickly followed by, “God, I hated that place.”

I had no idea the author, 24-year-old Lena Dunham, was the culture critic’s flavor of the month, with a hit HBO TV show, *Girls*, a multi-million-dollar book deal, and an Obama ad. Fancy!

Vaguely curious and now quite nostalgic, I fired up Netflix to watch *Tiny Furniture*, the film that launched *Girls*. I couldn’t sit through the first 15 minutes. I tried again and made it to 22 minutes. Dunham’s account of the classic post-college identity crisis is so thinly veiled that she cast her famous photographer mom as her famous photographer mom, her prep-school whiz kid sister as her prep-school whiz kid sister, and her whimsical, trust-funded best friend as her, yep, whimsical, trust-funded best friend. It forges a new frontier for arty upper-class narcissism.

And upper class it is. Aura, a fledgling, entitled, liberal arts grad, returns to The City. She lives off her mother and fabricates feeble art. Her connections land a gallery spot for the awkward video she made of herself bikini-clad and splashing around in a fountain back at Oberlin. She quits her bistro job after she gets her first paycheck. The three-digit figure is so low that there really is no point in working, is there? Her best friend, Charlotte, supports her decision. Charlotte liked working at the

bistro for a spell, but she didn’t bother to pick up her paycheck because it was frivolous when she has her daddy’s gold card in her purse. On and on.

Girls really is just *Tiny Furniture* two years later, which really is Lena Dunham two years later. The best friend is the whimsical trust-funded friend in *Girls*. The selfish player with whom Aura has a one night stand of degrading, rough sex in *Tiny Furniture*, is more-or-less, the selfish jerk with whom Hannah has degrading, rough sex during the first season of *Girls*, etc., etc. But, wait, there’s a big difference: Aura (like Lena) is the child of two well-to-do Soho artists in *Tiny Furniture*, but Hannah is the child of two well-off professors in *Girls*.

What’s the Russian proverb? Repetition is the mother of invention, I suppose.

Thankfully, an episode of *Girls* is only 20 minutes long. So I watched the pilot. Hannah is cut off her from parent’s prodigious dole after two years of post-collegial support. But she pulls a fast one. One night, the dutiful daughter shows up at their place high on poppy tea and fakes fainting due to her desperate finances. She even steals the housekeeper’s tip for petty cash on her way out the door. Gosh, *Girls* is so adorable.

The core characters in *Girls* magically pay the bills in New York City working minimum-wage hipster jobs. Hannah is a barista (subsidized by her parents). Her actor boyfriend (really more of a fuck buddy) lives off the \$800 his grandmother sends him every month. Yes, \$800. In present-day Brooklyn. Perhaps he also found some magic beans on the streets of Greenpoint, grew a beanstalk, and ran off with some golden eggs to present to

his landlord. Who knows?

This is not to say that Lena Dunham is not smart, witty and talented. Her *New Yorker* story was charming, for one. But I have just about as much interest in watching the romps of some wealthy kids on *Girls* as I do following the ennui of some oil-rich Texans on *Dallas*. It would be different if these smart, attractive women with impish sex lives had student loans to pay. That could be riveting.

Let’s think positive. Perhaps *Girls* will spark a reaction of new class consciousness among young women who have to work real jobs to pay the rent. The show already has spawned critiques ad nauseam about the shallow, miniscule world of spoiled white kids it portrays.

That was, in a way, my case. In college, I was surrounded by an army of Lenas. Half of the student body was Lena—affluent, navel-gazing New Yorkers disinterested in political change, disinterested in everything, really, except themselves.

I ate, slept, studied, smoked, and bathed with the Lenas. But I was the only one in my class (that I knew of, at least) who was a first-generation college student. It was a big deal for me to get a scholarship to such an elite school (It cost a mere \$30,000 a year to attend way back in the early 1990s.) Meanwhile, the Lenas—who didn’t know who Sally Mae was—were fretting over their deep, art rocker boyfriends and reading Susie Bright. Suddenly, class contrasts were vivid to me.

I left liberal arts college politically radicalized and reading Studs Terkel—and with great relief. I might have obsessed over my boy dramas almost as much as any Lena, and smirked a bit at Susie Sexpert, but Girl-y I was not. I had not a chance in hell at that dream world. My life was forever indentured to Sallie Mae.

Thanks, Lena, for reminding me from whence I came. **CP**

Big Bang Theory in North Korea

BY PETER LEE

North Korea's nuclear program just got real.

And the US non-proliferation strategy for North Korea looks pretty much bankrupt.

On December 12, 2012, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (or DPRK) got a legitimate rocket/long range missile off the pad in a successful launch which put some kind of satellite into orbit.

On February 12, 2013, the DPRK conducted a successful nuclear test, convincing foreign experts that the DPRK had learned from its previous fizzle and is well on its way to downsizing its nuclear devices until they are small enough to put on top of a missile and become a serious strategic headache for the region, and for the United States.

So, we have a genuine North Korea nuclear weapons problem.

President Obama received his Nobel Peace Prize for his anticipated future contributions to the perfection of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime.

But the United States has run out of alluring carrots and intimidating sticks adequate to convince North Korea of the strategic wisdom of abandoning its program. Viewing US-North Korean relations primarily through the lens of nuclear non-proliferation is a recipe for futility.

To a certain extent, President Obama can only blame himself for the impasse.

The big news in non-proliferation during the Obama administration has not been the North Korean circus of provocation or the endless ritual flagellation of Iran over its suspected nuclear weapons ambitions.

It was the death of Libya's Muammar Qaddafi.

In the rush to delegitimize and dehumanize Qaddafi in preparation for his NATO and Gulf Cooperation Council facilitated overthrow and murder, it is conveniently and necessarily forgotten that he was the poster child for voluntary nuclear de-proliferation.

In response to the intimidating example of the US invasion of Iraq, in 2003 Qaddafi abandoned his nascent A-bomb ambitions in a carefully choreographed and expensive tango with the United States and Great Britain, revealing and decommissioning Libya's nuclear and chemical weapons programs and, in the same year, privatizing much of the Libyan oil industry so that foreign majors could invest \$40 billion and slurp at the trough of sweet Libyan crude. In order to close the books on the Lockerbie bombing, the Libyan government paid over \$2 billion in compensation (without admitting guilt) as "the price for peace".

This was not some casual understanding scribbled on a napkin in a noisy bar. Libya's return to the family of legiti-

mate nations was enshrined with the national and international legal rigmarole that underpins the "rules-based" system particularly cherished by the Obama administration, and included: Libya's signature of the onerous IAEA "additional protocol"; supervised removal of its highly enriched uranium; the creation of a \$1.5 billion special fund by Libya so US-Libyan relations could be normalized under a Comprehensive Settlement Agreement; and the restoration of formal government-to-government contacts and the US provision of economic assistance for Libyan education, training, and counterterrorism initiatives by both the George W. Bush and Obama administrations.

However, nuclear rapprochement and the attendant legal frou-frou did not buy Mr. Qaddafi enough Western good will or respect for Libyan sovereignty to shield his regime from the toxic enmity of Gulf oil sheiks, the hyperenthusiasm of French intellectuals, and the casual opportunism of the United States itself.

North Korea pursued a different path.

In contrast to Libya's disastrous foray into denuclearization, the North Korean leadership, when faced with the threat of US pre-emptive war on WMD/Axis of Evil grounds by President Bush, announced the existence of their clandestine program and doggedly pursued the weaponization of plutonium fuel and a separate highly-enriched uranium program in the teeth of international sanctions and covert Bush administration initiatives that constituted an effective policy of regime change on the cheap.

After the threat of regime change by the George W. Bush administration receded, North Korea did express hopes, recorded in Wikileaks, that the program could be bartered for a non-aggression pact with the Obama administration.

With limited diplomatic avenues open to him, Kim unburdened himself in 2009 to his Mongolian interlocutors on the issue of the United States (Mongolia and North Korea shared a history as USSR clients who got dumped in 1989; however, Mongolia pivoted toward democracy and the United States, and Kim was well aware any message he gave them would make its way to Washington):

"The DPRK side said what is most important is for the United States and the DPRK to come up with a "common language," a "non-aggression agreement," and establishment of diplomatic relations. Kim stated if the sides can take such measures, then denuclearization will be possible and easy, and that relations with Japan and the ROK will normalize thereafter."

...

"Kim asked the Mongolians to support a U.S.-DPRK dialogue (Sukhee described Kim as "enthusiastic" at this point), and he stated "there are no eternal enemies in this world."

However, those hopes—and the illusion that rapprochement might translate into meaningful and unconditional

acknowledgment of the DPRK's right to exist and US forbearance in the case of an internal political crisis—fell victim to the Obama administration's policy of "strategic patience" (setting aside the North Korean portfolio and letting the confrontational policies of South Korean president and hardliner Lee Myung-bak run their course) and clearly went out the window with the Libya intervention in Spring 2012.

As the West and GCC dropped the hammer on Qaddafi, North Korea's KCNA news agency declared:

"The present Libyan crisis teaches the international community a serious lesson.

It was fully exposed before the world that "Libya's nuclear dismantlement" much touted by the U.S. in the past turned out to be a mode of aggression whereby the latter coaxed the former with such sweet words as "guarantee of security" and "improvement of relations" to disarm itself and then swallowed it up by force."

With the benefit of Iraq and Libya-assisted hindsight, the DPRK regime still believes it made the right decision in sticking to its nuclear weapons strategy, as a post-test commentary by government news agency KCNA in February 2013 makes clear:

"The tragic consequences in those countries which abandoned halfway their nuclear programs, yielding to the high-handed practices and pressure of the U.S. in recent years, clearly prove that the DPRK was very far-sighted and just when it made the option."

Better hold onto those nukes, come what may, appears to be the North Korean conclusion.

Despite the central position non-proliferation holds in the Obama *weltanschauung* and defiant talk from the State Department, it looks like the United States is going to have to learn to live with a nuclear North Korea, moreover a nuclear North Korea working overtime to perfect its weapons and missile capabilities.

South Korea's Yonhap News Agency reported some blunt words from a leading US security think tank: "As a U.S. policy priority, denuclearization of North Korea is a policy corpse—it is dead," said Larry Niksch, a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). "The United States needs a new strategy toward North Korea that ends the current priority to denuclearization."

This bitter pill is sweetened by the remarkable fact that North Korea is desperately, nakedly seeking rapprochement with the United States through, of all things, its ludicrous nuclear exhibitionism.

Whenever North Korea is planning a nuclear test, it informs the United States ahead of time, thereby accentuating the central role it has reserved for the United States in the nuclear drama, and pointedly humiliating South Korea and Japan—which are forced to rely on US notification instead of the courtesy of a direct call from Pyongyang.

And even as North Korea provokes the world with video mashups depicting a young DPRK citizen contentedly dreaming of the nuclear annihilation of the West, the regime's desire for rapprochement with the United States is clearly on display.

The DPRK Foreign Ministry's official statement on the occasion of the February 12 nuclear test lays out North Korea's ambitions for the relationship:

"The U.S., though belatedly, should choose between the two options: To respect the DPRK's right to satellite launch and open a phase of detente and stability or to keep to its wrong road leading to the explosive situation by persistently pursuing its hostile policy toward the DPRK."

Its public non-proliferation intransigence notwithstanding, the Obama administration apparently recognizes the nature of

the North Korean nuclear conundrum and, while publicly hectoring the DPRK, is quietly moving beyond the non-proliferation *cul de sac* to pursue engagement under the rubric of "Track II".

The Obama has carefully maintained engagement with North Korea through the DPRK's UN delegation a.k.a. "the New York channel" despite the vicissitudes of the overall relationship, exchanged low-key quasi-official visits, and supported (if not endorsed) delegations to Pyongyang of peaceable retired public affairs worthies led by former President Carter. North Korean officials have visited Google, Home Depot, Citibank, Bloomberg, and other US corporate heavyweights and Eric Schmidt of Google paid a public visit to Pyongyang just before the 2013 nuclear test to tout the global information agenda.

In addition, according to Japan's Asahi Shimbun, high



North Korean missile. Photo: KNS.

Obama administration security officials visited North Korea on three secret missions in 2011 and 2012, presumably to establish communication with the post Kim Jung-il leadership team as Dear Leader's health declined. The US teams flew into Pyongyang via military flights originating in Guam, thereby keeping details of the visits secret from Japan and the ROK—a subterfuge presumably not appreciated by our two allies. According to Asahi, one flight also carried bulldozers, sparking speculation that joint efforts to recover the remains of US soldiers—a channel of engagement employed with Vietnam as well as North Korea—were going on.

In 2013, informal US-DPRK diplomacy is apparently still a two-way street, even after the supposedly unacceptable outrage of the February 12 nuclear test.

Recently, the DPRK witnessed the magnificently surreal spectacle of the Harlem Globetrotters, led by tattooed frontman Dennis Rodman, arriving to perform for—and party with—new supremo Kim Jung-eun in Pyongyang.

Rodman and his delegation received the finest treatment the DPRK could provide, as can be gleaned from KCNA's news feed:

“The dear respected Marshal Kim Jong Un, together with his wife Ri Sol Ju, came to the gymnasium to watch the game. The players and audience broke into thunderous cheers, greatly excited to see the game together with Kim Jong Un. Dennis Rodman went up to the auditorium to bow to Kim Jong Un. Warmly welcoming him, Kim Jong Un let him sit next to him.”

...

“Then a mixed game of DPRK and American players took place amid elated atmosphere.

Divided into red and white teams, the players carried out fierce seesaw battle.”

...

“During breaks, women's brass band presented glamorous rhythmic formations.

National dances by Korean women artistes and a demonstration performance of Taekwon-Do players added to the cheerful mood.

Korean basketball players played the game well with American players of their teams in a coordinated way by fully displaying their techniques. American players made a good job of the game to give good impressions to the audience.”

...

And the magnificent outcome (which, if I recall correctly from the exhibition at my high school, is characteristic of all Harlem Globetrotter games):

“The game ended in a draw 110:110.”

Both Rodman and Kim were apparently captivated by their encounter, with Rodman declaring that Kim was a “really awesome guy”. The whirlwind of activity continued with a

visit to the mausoleums of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jung-il, and a trip to the Rungna Dolphinarium.

The message Kim wanted to deliver via Dennis Rodman:

“He asked me to give Obama something to say and do one thing. He wants Obama to do one thing, call him.”

It is in this context of persistent wooing by North Korea that its nuclear provocations can best be understood.

From the North Korean perspective, continued nuclear and missile tests are not signs of increased belligerence toward the United States; they are demonstrations of the North Korean determination not to let the US focus drift away from détente to non-proliferation posturing and neglect of the fragile DPRK relationship for the sake of its robust security and economic alliance with Japan and South Korea or vital ties with the PRC.

For the US, the escalating parade of successful tests accentuates the pressing need for effective engagement between the US and the DPRK before North Korea achieves the technological breakthroughs that will give it a meaningful strategic nuclear weapons capability.

Unfortunately, abandoning America's obsession with non-proliferation in the matter of North Korea is not, in Globetrotter-speak, a slam dunk.

Beyond the significant political costs and genuine risks involved in accepting North Korea as a nuclear weapons state, there is the awkward question of managing the nuclear expectations and disappointments of America's key North Asian allies, South Korea and Japan.

Nuclear non-proliferation, in addition to serving the Obama administration as an overarching organizing principle for its conduct of foreign policy—and acquisition of pleasing baubles like the Nobel Peace Prize—is one of the cornerstones of the US security regime in East Asia, especially as it pertains to maintaining good order in the US-Japan-South Korea alliance.

The United States recognize that, if South Korea and Japan become nuclear weapons-capable in response to the North Korean program, the US security umbrella becomes less of a shield and more of an unwelcome restraint.

In the worst case, Japan might turn into something like Israel, an (alleged) nuclear weapons power that has been the tail that wags the U.S. dog i.e. engages in regional brinkmanship confident that the United States will have no alternative but to support its wayward, nuke-packing ally.

Japan is perhaps only a few phone calls away from becoming an acknowledged nuclear weapons state.

Thanks to some rather dubious US strategic decisions, Japan was allowed to retain the spent fuel rods—and the plutonium extracted from them—from its US-sponsored civilian nuclear program on the pretext that it needed to “close the fuel cycle” i.e. make its own arrangements to process its rods to assure its energy security. As a result, it has a healthy

stock of ten tons of plutonium metal in-country and another 36 tons or so at reprocessing facilities in Europe. Combine that with a civilian rocket program that loses money but is able to launch payloads of up to 4.6 tons into space, Japan is a nuclear weapons/ICBM power *in ovo* ready to pop out of its shell on demand.

There is interesting speculation that Iran modeled its nuclear activity—and strategy of tiptoeing up to the weaponization line while maintaining deniability—on Japan's program. Which perhaps makes it significant that the pro-US Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Yukio Amano, who is giving Iran fits over its dubious nuclear intentions, is a veteran of the Japanese nuclear non-proliferation bureaucracy.

comes up for renewal in 2014, no matter what happens in the DPRK.

In the worst case, South Korea and Japan respond to a U.S. failure to denuclearize North Korea by accelerating their programs to control their own security destinies, nuclear or otherwise, and sidelining US leadership.

In order to justify its fragile nuclear weapons monopoly among the democratic nations of the Pacific, therefore, the United States has to make an ostentatious show of its seriousness in compelling North Korea to denuclearize.

So, even as the US quietly recognizes the futility of trying to get the DPRK to denuclearize voluntarily, the United States engages in continual sanctions kabuki at the United Nations, and ostentatiously bullyrags the People's Republic



Kim Jong-un Photo: KNS.

South Korea is also playing the nuclear weapons/missile game, launching its first successful rocket from ROK soil on January 30, 2013, just days before the North Korean nuclear test. South Korea, unlike Japan, however, is fully enmeshed in the US-led non-proliferation regime and would have to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and abrogate the Atomic Energy Agreement it signed with the US in 1973 in which it undertook not to extract plutonium from its spent nuclear fuel or enrich uranium.

These obstacles to a ROK nuclear weapons program do not please conservative South Korean politicians, who wish to push for South Korea's right to reprocess its plutonium rods—just like North Korea and Japan do. However, the United States is keen to keep the nuclear genie in the bottle and it is difficult to conceive that the Obama administration would agree to let South Korea get the right to process and retain weapons-grade material when the AEA agreement

of China for its unwillingness to perfect the economic blockade of North Korea by cutting off vital access to Chinese aid, markets, and financial facilities. (The PRC, which has learned to tolerate a nuclear North Korea but is unwilling to live with an imploded regime on its doorstep, has pointedly declined to oblige.)

However, the North Korean dilemma does not appear to be an insoluble problem for the United States.

There is one scenario that might reconcile South Korea and Japan to abandonment of the non-proliferation paradigm for dealing with North Korea—if the North Korean regime survived but shifted toward the Western economic camp, sticking it to China in the process.

Myanmar (Burma) and, to a lesser extent, Vietnam are exemplars of this approach.

Myanmar shared pariah status, a close relationship to China, and even an alleged nascent nuclear program a.k.a.

the Bungle in the Jungle, with North Korea.

In 2012, Myanmar made an overt play for rapprochement with the United States by releasing Aung San Suu Kyi from detention and stopping a high-profile China-funded hydroelectric project, the Myitsone Dam. President Obama put US-Myanmar relations on the path toward normalcy—which includes the longed-for return of Coca Cola—and South Korean and Japanese businesses are also piling into the country in search of fresh opportunities.

On the occasion of the re-establishment of high-level contacts between South Korea and Myanmar in 2012 (contacts that were terminated in 1983, when North Korean agents tried to assassinate the president of South Korea while he was visiting Yangon), the ROK's presidential secretary stated:

“We want to tell North Korea that it must learn a lesson from Myanmar to cooperate with the international community and receive aid for development.”

North Korea, whose historic patron was the Soviet Union, not the PRC, has an even more prickly attitude than Myanmar toward China's aggressive economic colonization of its human and natural resources, and is a promising candidate for such geostrategic blandishments.

With South Korea's hardline president, Lee Myungbak, termed out and a new, probably more moderate president, Park Geun-hye, taking office, the prospects for profitable Western engagement with North Korea are improving...if President Obama can set aside the non-proliferation fetish and accept North Korea as a nuclear power.

This is admittedly a politically daunting task given the barrage of sanctions and righteous outrage America has orchestrated on the issue over the last decade, especially when coupled with the realization that tolerating the North Korean program even tacitly means that Japanese and South Korean moves toward nuclear weaponization become more likely.

But the alternative is simply a grinding crisis with few prospects of resolution, the likelihood that Japan and South Korea will respond independently and uncontrollably to the risk and opportunity represented by the US inability to denuclearize the DPRK, and the expectation that the crisis will escalate accordingly.

Maybe President Obama should give back his non-proliferation Peace Prize to the Nobel Committee in order to jumpstart the North Korean process.

Maybe in a couple years, he will be able to receive a new, more genuine Peace Prize for reconciliation on the Korean peninsula to replace it. **CP**

PETER LEE edits *China Matters*.

Mission Creep: Blind Faith in Drones

BY TOM BARRY

Drones are proliferating—in overseas military operations, CIA clandestine missions, border security surveillance, domestic law enforcement, natural emergency responses, and overseas drug-interdiction. As drones proliferate, the lines that once constitutionally and legally separated national security, drug control, and domestic law enforcement are fading.

Technological advances require change and adaptations. As a type of new technological species that has suddenly appeared in our midst, it's no surprise that society and government are playing catch up. Different drone breeds and hybrids are spreading around the globe and at home. Meanwhile, citizen advocates, rights groups, and political leaders hurry behind, frantically calling for new regularly frameworks to gain a measure of control over drone proliferation.

Drones are proliferating so rapidly that there is still no commonly accepted formal name for the new species—which are formally classified, variously, as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), Unmanned Aerial Systems (US, Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPAs), or simply Unmanned Systems.

Whether they are aerial, ground, or aquatic robotic systems, drones mark the latest species in a continuum in development of weapons and spying systems.

The model names given by their military contractors reflect their threat to other species, notably humans. Looking down on us and sometimes striking are Predators, Global Hawks, Hunters, and Scan Eagles. In contrast, the names of other smaller breeds—Killer Bees, Dragon Flies, Wasps, Moths, Tarantulas, etc.—indicate how close and pesky other drone species can be.

Not all drones are baptized with the names from the natural world. Some bear more traditionally militaristic and mythical tags, like the Reapers, Avengers, Hunters, Dragon Eyes, Guardians, and Sentinels.

Seeking to communicate their new high-tech power and possibilities, drone manufacturers and their government buyers reach to myths and the gods for their handles: Hermes, Pegasus, Gorgon Stare, and Vampire.

The main distinctive feature of the drone species is that they are unmanned craft. Yet drones are often armed and dangerous—some with Hellfire or the lighter-weight Griffin missiles, while others that specialize in law enforcement can zoom in with Tasers. In conflict zones, they prey on targets, searching, hunting, and destroying. Other predator drone species, like those that patrol our borders, are also on the hunt—for immigrants and drugs.

The military and intelligence sectors of Israel and the United States have—in close collaboration with military contractors—been the leading drone breeders, although scores of other major and small powers are also breeding and deploy-

ing drones. Historically, drones have been deployed primarily on national security missions—both in direct war-fighting as “hunter-killers,” or on Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions.

The declaration by President George W. Bush on 20 September 2001 of a global “crusade” in the form of a “war on terrorism” set off drone proliferation, although the US Air Force and intelligence sector had been developing Predator drones for ISR missions since the early 1990s and for targeted killings since the late 1990s.

Following closely behind the government-sponsored development of Predator drones for military missions has been the use of Predators and Predator variants for homeland security missions. Soon after the opening of the Department of Homeland Security in March 2003, General Atomics began collaborating with the DHS’s Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to deploy unarmed Predators for Border Security. Immediately following ten days in October 2003 of demonstration flights in Arizona, CBP signed its first in a series of sole-source contracts with General Atomics.

Drone strikes and ISR operations were part of what the Pentagon and CIA called the “Global War on Terror.” President Obama called an end to that war in March 2009, but the drone strikes and other clandestine operations march on as part of what this administration calls “Overseas Contingency Operations.”

The Leading Edge of Drone Operation in the Homeland

CBP states its drone program is made up of the “leading edge of border security technology.” What is more, CBP’s Office of Air and Marine (OAM) boasts that its homeland security drone program is also on the leading edge of “shaping the US policy debate” and constitutes “the leading edge deployment of US in the national airspace.”

It’s no idle boast. The DHS fleet of seven Predators and three Guardians (a marine-surveillance variant of the Predator developed for CBP by General Atomics) stand at the vanguard of drone deployment for domestic ISR missions, and DHS has provided grants to local law enforcement agencies to acquire small UAVs while also pushing the Federal Aviation Administration to open national airspace to CBP

drones.

Since 2004, when CBP first started using these unmanned flying machines, CBP has steadily expanded the scope of its mission for drones. First, the Predators were deployed for “border security” on the US-Mexico border, but congressional members from Michigan and North Dakota successfully pressured DHS to deploy Predators to “secure the northern border.”

With its three Guardians, CBP/OAM has again reached beyond the land borders to join the Coast Guard, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the US Northern and Southern Commands to engage in drug interdiction operations throughout the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, and in the Pacific. What were initially considered to be instruments of “border security” have become fully engaged in the war on drugs. (The Obama administration also declared an

end to the “war on drugs,” transitioning in 2011 to what the White House calls the “Combat against Transnational Criminal Organizations.)

The mission creep of homeland security drones is a department-wide problem arising in large part from the lack of any coherent definition of “homeland security.” Similarly, DHS has never bothered to

define what it means by “border security.” Nor does CBP have “performance measures” to evaluate its progress in securing the border—and in the case of the homeland security drones to evaluate their effectiveness.

Most of the concern about the domestic deployment of drones by DHS has focused on the crossover to law-enforcement that threaten privacy and civil rights—and without more regulations in place will accelerate the transition to what critics call a “surveillance society.” Also worth public attention and congressional review is the increasing interface between border drones and national security and military operations.

The prevalence of military jargon used by CBP officials—such as “defense in depth” and “situational awareness”—points to at least a rhetorical overlapping of border control and military strategy. Another sign of the increasing coincidence between CBP/OAM drone program and the military is that the commanders and deputies of OAM are retired military officers.



Predator Drone. Photo: US Air Force.

The vague concepts of homeland security and border security facilitate the creep of the CBP/OAM drone program. Nothing appears off-limits as to how these Predators and Guardians may be used at home or in the “near abroad”—in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America.

In a presentation to the National Defense Industrial Association in October 2012, OAM chief Michael Kostelnik explained other ways in which the “US are the leading edge of homeland security.” As these “US operations continue to expand and mature,” the homeland security drone program is providing “rapid contingency deployment supports” for “federal/state/local missions.” What is more, the “CBP US deployment vision strengthens national security response capability.”

Michael Kostelnik, who DHS hired in 2005 to direct OAM, rose to the rank of Major General in the US Air Force, and as director of the Air—had a direct role in Air Force’s central role in developing the Predator and then arming it with Hellfire missiles. So, it is easy to understand how the retired Major General—who left OAM in December 2012—regarded the US program he directed as the leading edge in the integration of homeland security, border security, public safety, and national security. Typical of his big picture concept of homeland security, Kostelnik told the Defense Systems Journal that OAM had the most advanced US fleet operators who could, at a moment’s notice, be “CHOP’ed”—Change in Operational Command—to military control.

In January 2013, CBP brought in another retired military officer to direct OAM. Like Kostelnik, Randolph Alles, the new OAM director, was also a point person for UAVs as a major general in the US Marine Corps.

Role of the Military in Domestic Drone Deployment

Clearly, DHS takes a broad view of the scope of drone operations. Yet DHS is not alone in breaking down the barriers that have traditionally—and constitutionally—separated domestic law enforcement and national security operations. The Pentagon could easily dispute CBP’s contention that its UAV program represents the leading edge in the opening up the homeland to drones.

The Congressional Caucus on Unmanned Systems, which was founded in 2009 by Rep. Buck McKeon (R-Calif.), has encouraged the Pentagon to work with the Federal Aviation Agency to open national airspace to military and other UAVs. Currently, military drones are restricted to defined military airspace around military bases, unless operating with special waivers or COAs (Certificates of Authorization) issued by the FAA. Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.), a leading member of the drone caucus, sponsored an amendment to the National Department of Defense Authorization Act of 2009 that authorized the creation of an interagency US Executive Committee under Pentagon sponsorship to in-

crease drone access to national airspace.

“It is vital for DOD and the FAA to collaborate closely to achieve progress in gaining access for unmanned aerial systems to the National Airspace System to support military requirements,” stated the Hunter amendment to the 2009 National Defense Authorization Act. With the Pentagon in the lead, the US Executive Committee aims to “enable increased and ultimately routine access of Federal UAVs engaged in public aircraft operations into the NAS to support operational, training, development, and research requirements of FAA, DOD, DHS, and NASA.”

In its Final Report to Congress on Access to National Airspace by Unmanned Aerial Systems (October 2010), the office of the Undersecretary of Defense noted that the Hunter amendment “recommended that the DOD and the FAA form an Executive Committee to act as a focal point for resolution of issues on matters of policy and procedures relating to US access to the National Airspace System (NAS).” Furthermore, “The sense of Congress was that progress has been lagging in the integration of US into the NAS for operational training, operational support to the Combatant Commanders, and support to domestic authorities in emergencies and natural disasters.”

The Pentagon has its own motivations for increasing UAV access to the national airspace, including expanding the airspace available for drone training operations. In addition to training, in its October 2010 report DOD set forth its objectives: the DOD needs to be able to respond rapidly to operational tasking, typically from a COCOM such as the United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM). Many of these tasked missions relate to homeland defense, homeland security, and defense support to civilian authorities. This includes border and port surveillance, maritime operations, counter-drug operations, and disaster or special event support.

The US military has an expanding UAV presence within the nation’s borders, and it is eager to expand the airspace available for training and other missions. The 2010 report of the newly created UAV Executive Committee reported that the Pentagon was projecting that the number of UAV units or squadrons based in the continental United States will increase to 197 in 2015 from 146 in 2009, while the number of bases where these units are stationed will increase 62%—from 63 to 105 bases.

The Pentagon insists that opening the national airspace to drones is essential to the “sustainability” of the continued development of the US military’s UAV capacity. In its April 2012 Report on Future Unmanned Aerial Systems Training, Operations, and Sustainability, the Pentagon clearly states its case and its strategy for complete access to national airspace by military UAVs: “This need for airspace access to test new systems, train operators, and conduct continental United States)-based missions has quickly exceeded the current airspace available for military operations. The situation will only

be exacerbated as units return from overseas contingencies.”

According to DOD, “The end state will be routine NAS access comparable to manned aircraft for all DOD US operational, training, and support missions.” In its Unmanned Systems Integrated Roadmap FY2011-2036, the Pentagon insisted that “having robust US Airspace Integration capabilities for all classes of US airspace is fundamental to flexible worldwide US deployment.”

Predators Join Air National Guard in Many States

This expansive vision for DHS drones—linking of borders security, homeland security, public safety, and national security—is paralleled by the rapid integration of Predator drones into the state-level Air National Guard units. Testifying in Congress in 2006, Thomas Cassidy, founder and executive director of General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, briefed senators on the range of Predator deployments—from overseas war-fighting missions (involving 70 General Atomics contract pilots and crew) to border security missions to the rapid integration of Predators into the state-based Air National Guard units.

According to Cassidy, “The US Air Force is standing up 15 new Air National Guard Predator and Predator B squadrons throughout the United States. These aircraft must fly where they are needed, which may include border protection missions. But they will be operating in probably 12 different states.”

The procurement of Predators by National Guard units since 2005 occurred with no public debate or congressional discussion—and no media coverage. Unlike the Air Force reserve units, the Air Force guard units are operational mostly within the United State in response to orders by state governors and occasionally with direct Pentagon support for domestic missions. This integration of Predator drones into Air National Guard units across the country has not been accompanied by the issuance of enforceable guidelines and restrictions to protect the privacy and civil rights of US residents whose activities are recorded in Predator video streams.

According to the National Guard Bureau, the Air Guard currently includes seven states with UAV units with an eighth state in the process of including a drone unit. Budget cuts at DOD and by state governments have resulted in the closure and shrinking of many state-based Air Guard units. However, an increasing number of the Air National Guard units (as distinct from Air Force reserves) that remain active are downsizing their fighter planes and adding UAV units, mainly Predator drones. As manned aircraft age and retire, the Air Guard units with UAVs could soon double to 15 or 16, according to National Guard officials, especially as Predators and other UAVs are increasingly brought home from war-fighting missions abroad.

Drone Mission Bring DOD and DHS Together

DHS has not released operational data about CBP/OAM drone operations. Therefore, the extent of the participation of DHS drones in domestic and international operations is unknown. But statements by CBP officials and media reports from the Caribbean point to a rapidly expanding participation of DHS Guardian UAVs in drug-interdiction and other unspecified operations as far south as Panama.

According to OAM chief Kostelnik, CBP planned a “Spring 2011 deployment of the Guardian to a Central American country in association with Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-South) based at the naval station in Key West, Florida.

JIATF-South is a subordinate command to the United States Southern Command (USOUTHCOM), whose geographical purview includes the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. In mid-2012, CBP/OAM participated in a JIATF-South collaborative venture called “Operation Caribbean Focus” that involved flight over the Caribbean Sea and nations in the region—with the Dominican Republic acting as the regional host for the Guardian operations, which CBP/OAM considers a “prototype for future transit zone USdeployments.”

CBP says that OAM drones have not been deployed within Mexico, but notes that “OAM works in collaboration with the Government of Mexico in addressing border security issues,” without specifying the form and objectives of this collaboration. As part of the US global drug war and as an extension of border security, unarmed drones are also crossing the border into Mexico. The US Northern Command has acknowledged that the US military does fly a \$38-million Global Hawk drone into Mexico to assist the Mexico’s war against the drug cartels.

Since its creation in 2003 DHS has adopted military and security frameworks for its immigration and border control programs. This is especially evident in its drone program, which, like many other DHS agencies, is directed by former military officers. However, as the drone program clearly demonstrates, the actual operations, while framed as security missions, are entirely focused on hunting down illegal immigrants and seizing meager sums of marijuana.

The post-9/11 attention to “homeland security,” “border security,” and “national defense” (defense of the homeland by the military) has contributed to the continuing erosion of the dividing lines between domestic and military affairs, between public safety and national security. **CP**

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Afghanistan: The Garden of Empires

BY JULIEN MERCILLE

Afghanistan is sometimes referred to as the “graveyard of empires” because throughout history, big powers have attempted, unsuccessfully, to invade and control it—and the ongoing US adventure may well provide another example. However, Afghanistan can already be labeled as the “garden of empire,” given that the US/NATO occupation has resulted in a drastic increase in drug production.

Opium production in Afghanistan skyrocketed from 185 tons to 8,200 tons between 2001 and 2007. Most commentary glosses over Washington’s large share of responsibility for this dramatic expansion while magnifying the Taliban’s role, which available data indicates is relatively minor. Also, identifying drugs as a main cause behind the growth of the insurgency absolves the United States and NATO of their own role in fomenting it: the very presence of foreign troops in the country as well as their destructive attacks on civilians are significant factors behind increases in popular support for, or tolerance of, the Taliban. In fact, as a recent UNODC report notes, reducing drug production would have only a “minimal impact on the insurgency’s strategic threat,” because the Taliban receive “significant funding from private donors all over the world,” a contribution that “dwarfs” drug money.

A UNODC report entitled *Addiction, Crime and Insurgency: The Transnational Threat of Afghan Opium* provides a good example of the conventional view of the Taliban’s role in drug trafficking. It claims that they draw some \$125 million annually from narcotics, resulting in the “perfect storm” of drugs and terrorism heading toward Central Asia and endangering its energy resources. UNODC maintains that when they were in power in the second half of the 1990s, the Taliban earned about \$75–100 million per year from drugs, but since 2005 this figure has risen to \$125 million. Although this is presented as a significant increase, the Taliban play a lesser role in the opium economy than the report would have us believe as they capture only a small share of its total value. Moreover, drug money is likely a secondary source of funding for them: UNODC itself estimates that only 10 percent to 15 percent of Taliban funding is drawn from drugs and 85 percent comes from “non-opium sources” such as private donations.

The total revenue generated by opiates within Afghanistan is about \$3 billion per year. According to UNODC data, the Taliban get only about 5 percent of this sum. Farmers selling their opium harvest to traffickers get 20 percent. And the remaining 75 percent?

Al-Qaeda? No: the report specifies that it “does not appear to have a direct role in the Afghan opiates trade,” although it may participate in “low-level drugs and/or arms smuggling” along the Pakistani border. Instead, the remaining 75 percent

is captured by traffickers, government officials, the police, and local and regional power brokers—in short, many of the groups now supported or tolerated by the United States and NATO are important actors in the drug trade.

Therefore, claims that “Taliban insurgents are earning astonishingly large profits off the opium trade” are misleading. Nevertheless, UNODC insists on the Taliban-drugs connection but pays less attention to individuals and groups supported or tolerated by Washington. The agency seems to be acting as an enabler of coalition policies in Afghanistan: when asked what percentage of total drug income in Afghanistan is captured by government officials, the UNODC official who supervised the above report quickly replied: “We don’t do that, I don’t know.”

Mainstream commentary blames the size of the narcotics industry and much of what goes wrong in Afghanistan partly on corruption. But to focus on bad apples in the Afghan government and police misses the systemic responsibility of the United States and NATO for the dramatic expansion of opiates production since 2001 and for their support of numerous corrupt individuals in power. The United States attacked Afghanistan in association with Northern Alliance warlords and drug lords and showered them with weapons, millions of dollars, and diplomatic support. The empowerment and enrichment of those individuals enabled them to tax and protect opium traffickers, leading to the quick resumption of narcotics production after the hiatus of the 2000–2001 Taliban ban, as many observers have documented. Ahmed Rashid has written that the whole Afghan Interior Ministry “became a major protector of drug traffickers, and Karzai refused to clean it out. As warlord militias were demobilized and disarmed by the UN, commanders found new positions in the Interior Ministry and continued to provide protection to drug traffickers.” The United States was not interested in cleaning Afghanistan of drug traffickers either. Thus, to blame “corruption” and “criminals” for the current state of affairs is to ignore the direct and predictable effects of US policies, which have followed a historical pattern of toleration and protection of strongmen involved in narcotics.

In 2004, Afghan forces found an enormous cache of heroin in a truck near Kandahar, but both Wali Karzai, the president’s brother, and an aide to President Karzai called the commander of the group that had made the discovery to tell him to release the drugs and the truck. Two years later, American and Afghan counternarcotics forces seize more than 110 pounds of heroin near Kabul, which US investigators said were linked to Wali Karzai. But Wali Karzai was only the tip of the iceberg, as a former CIA officer asserted that virtually “every significant Afghan figure has had brushes with the drug trade.” In private, American officials acknowledge ties with drug-linked Afghan figures. A Wikileaks cable recounting US officials’ meetings with Wali Karzai in September 2009 and February 2010 stated that

while “we must deal with AWK [Ahmed Wali Karzai] as the head of the Provincial Council, he is widely understood to be corrupt and a narcotics trafficker.” But in public, the ties are denied. As Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said: “We should not condemn Ahmed Wali Karzai or damage our critical relations with his brother, President Karzai, on the basis of newspaper articles or rumors.”

Of the annual \$65 billion global market for opiates, only 5 to 10 percent (\$3 to \$5 billion) is estimated to be laundered by informal banking systems, while two-thirds (\$40 to \$45 billion) is available for laundering through the formal banking system. A recent UNODC report estimated that about \$220 billion of drug money is laundered annually through the financial system. However, only about 0.2 percent of all laundered criminal money is seized and frozen, as governments have other priorities than regulating the banking industry, which benefits from this extra liquidity.

US Counternarcotics Policy

Until about 2005, American policy in Afghanistan was, by and large, not concerned with drugs. General Tommy Franks, who led the initial attack, declared in 2002 that US troops would stay clear of drug interdiction and that resolving narcotics problems was up to Afghans and civilians. When Donald Rumsfeld was asked in 2003 what the United States was doing about narcotics in Helmand, he replied: “You ask what we’re going to do and the answer is, I don’t really know.” A US military spokesman at Bagram base, Sergeant Major Harrison Sarles, stated: “We’re not a drug task force. That’s not part of our mission.” Moreover, the DEA had only two agents in Afghanistan in 2003 and didn’t open an office in the country until 2004.

Several reasons explain the early opposition to counternarcotics on the part of the White House and the military. First, Afghanistan was attacked to show that Washington should not be challenged, and destroying poppy crops and heroin labs contributes nothing in this respect. Therefore, there is no reason why any effort should have been directed toward that task. In late 2005, Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry, then commander of US forces in Afghanistan, made it clear that “drugs are bad, but his orders were that drugs were not a priority of the US

military in Afghanistan.” Furthermore, Washington’s most important target at that time was Iraq, whose oil resources and strategic location in the Persian Gulf region ensured that it would take priority.

Second, many of the United States’ local Afghan allies were involved in trafficking, from which they drew money and power. Destroying drug labs and poppy fields would have been, in effect, a direct blow to American operations and proxy fighters on the ground. As Western diplomats conceded at the time, “without money from drugs, our friendly warlords can’t pay their militias. It’s as simple as that.” According to James Risen, this explains why the Pentagon and the White House refused to bomb the 25 or so drug facilities that the CIA had identified on its maps in 2001. Similarly, in 2005, the Pentagon denied all but 3 of 26 DEA requests for airlifts. Barnett Rubin summarized the US attitude well when he

wrote in 2004 that when “he visits Afghanistan, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld meets military commanders whom Afghans know as the godfathers of drug trafficking. The message has been clear: Help fight the Taliban and no one will interfere with your trafficking.” As a result, US military officials closed their eyes to the trade. An Army Green Beret said he was “specifically ordered to ignore heroin and opium when he and his unit discovered them on patrol.” A US



Marines in poppy field, Helmond Province, Afghanistan.
Photo: US Marine Corps.

Senate report mentioned that “congressional committees received reports that US forces were refusing to disrupt drug sales and shipments and rebuffing requests from the Drug Enforcement Administration for reinforcements to go after major drug kingpins.”

Third, the Department of Defense thought that eradicating crops would upset farmers and hurt attempts at winning Afghan hearts and minds. Indeed, since 2001, the Taliban have sought to capitalize on resentment caused by eradication schemes. For example, in Helmand “they appear to have offered protection to the farmers targeted by eradication” and in Kandahar “they were even reported to have offered financial assistance to farmers whose fields were being eradicated, in exchange for support in fighting against the government.” Thus, it is far from certain that eliminating drugs would weaken the insurgency. In fact, the opposite is more likely, as it would only add to the opposition already generated by

NATO operations in the country, as noted by a well-informed analyst: “As the conflict progressed, victims of abuses by both Afghan and foreign troops and of the side-effects of US reliance on air power began to represent another important source of recruits for the Taliban.”

From 2004, counternarcotics started slowly moving up the US agenda. In 2005, Washington developed its first counternarcotics strategy for Afghanistan, composed of five pillars: elimination/eradication, interdiction, justice reform, public information, and alternative livelihoods (although the pillars were not weighted equally: alternative development was relatively neglected, while eradication/elimination was the priority). The Afghan government incorporated this strategy into its own 2006 National Drug Control Strategy, which was later updated and integrated into its National Development Strategy in 2008. Around 2005, counternarcotics operations were still relatively isolated from the broader counterinsurgency strategy. Nevertheless, the Pentagon started to consider the possibility of getting involved in counterdrug missions and issued new guidelines authorizing the military to “move antidrug agents by helicopters and cargo planes and assist in planning missions and uncovering targets,” among other things. A number of counternarcotics units were set up, such as Task Force 333 (a covert squad of special agents) and the Central Poppy Eradication Force, an Afghan team trained by the American private contractor Dyncorp at a cost of \$50 million and supervised by the United States through the Afghan Ministry of the Interior, where Washington’s main contact was Lieutenant General Mohammad Daoud. It didn’t seem to be a problem that Daoud was “an ex-warlord from the north who was reputed to have major connections with the drug trade.”

Since 2007, the United States has intensified its counternarcotics efforts and sought to integrate them more closely with the counterinsurgency campaign. In particular, in late 2008, the Pentagon changed its rules of engagement to permit US troops to target traffickers allied with insurgents and terrorists, and soldiers were allowed to accompany and protect counternarcotics operations run by Americans and Afghans. This shift was also adopted by NATO, whose members were allowed to participate in interdiction missions.

Since 2009, the Obama administration’s strategy has de-emphasized eradication by ending support for the Afghan central eradication force while focusing on interdiction and the destruction of heroin labs, based on the reasoning that this “would more precisely target the drug-insurgency nexus.” A focus on rural development has also been announced because, as Richard Holbrooke declared, eradication is a “waste of money,” it alienates farmers, and it “might destroy some acreage, but it didn’t reduce the amount of money the Taliban got by one dollar. It just helped the Taliban.” The number of permanent DEA agents in Afghanistan has increased from 13 to over 80 in 2011 and the Pentagon has es-

tablished a Combined Joint Interagency Task Force-Nexus in Kandahar to provide coordination support and intelligence for DEA interdiction missions and ISAF counterinsurgency operations that target insurgents with links to the drug trade.

Overall, an interesting question is to explain the emergence, intensification and militarization of US counternarcotics operations in Afghanistan. Although such a discussion remains somewhat speculative, what follows discusses possible reasons that may account for the evolution of the anti-drug strategy over time. Some have pointed to the resignation of Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense in 2006. Rumsfeld had always been strongly opposed to military involvement in drug control and thus his departure is thought to have contributed to a “sea change” in the Department of Defense’s attitude, which then became more engaged in counternarcotics. However, the significance of staff changes should be downplayed when explaining the broad outlines of policy. It is not as if Rumsfeld had prevented single-handedly an army of drug warriors in the US government from carrying out counternarcotics operations in Afghanistan. As seen above, there were clear strategic reasons for the lack of military involvement in counternarcotics in the years immediately after 2001.

Congressional pressures have also been identified as a reason. This political pressure, the argument goes, eventually led the Pentagon and CIA to accept publicly that the insurgency was funded by drugs and to approve the 2005 counternarcotics strategy. Indeed, in 2004–05, a host of critical pieces in the media urged more action in light of the large 2004 opium harvest. For example, Henry Hyde, Illinois Republican, stated that there was “a clear need at this stage for military action against the opium storage dumps and heroin laboratories” and that if the military did not get involved, the United States would need to send “troops from places like Turkey to take on this challenge.” The Democrats also pitched in, as when John Kerry criticized Bush for failing to eliminate narcotics in Afghanistan.

Such explanations might be correct in terms of immediate causes, in that congressional pressures and debates contributed to putting the issue on policymakers’ agenda and generating media coverage. However, they beg the question of why the narcotics issue became a more prominent debate within government circles in the first place? Some have pointed to the explosion of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan and the political pressures it has generated in the United States to do something about the problem. For example, Ahmed Rashid noted how the greater emphasis on drugs in US policy from 2005 onwards was prompted in part by the fact that it had become too obvious that Afghan poppy cultivation was getting out of control. The United States could less easily afford to be seen as doing nothing, for public relations purposes. The 2004 massive opium harvest embarrassed Washington and London enough for them to begin

addressing narcotics more seriously: farmland under poppy cultivation had just increased by 64 percent and for the first time poppies were cultivated in all 34 of Afghanistan's provinces. Similarly, opium production rose to 6,100 tons in 2006 and to 8,200 tons in 2007, the highest amount ever recorded, and Afghanistan now accounted for 93 percent of global heroin production. The skyrocketing of drug production in 2006 and 2007, publicized in UNODC reports, could not be ignored indefinitely.

There is probably some truth to this interpretation. Even if drug control is not a US objective, the discourse that has been created around the issue has acquired a force of its own. Therefore, when poppy cultivation spread in Afghanistan to a point that it became difficult to ignore, Washington was forced to make some gesture seemingly addressing the problem, otherwise, its image as a government allegedly concerned with drug harms could have been tarnished.

Finally, another possible reason is that from 2004–05, it became useful politically to talk about a war on drugs to make the resurgent Taliban look evil by associating them with narcotics. Indeed, the intensification of counternarcotics rhetoric and operations “took place against the backdrop of an upsurge in armed opposition” to the US-backed Afghan government. That is to say, whereas in the years immediately after 2001, the drug trade was largely controlled by US allies (warlords), from the time the Taliban reemerged as a significant force partly financed by drugs, narcotics became an issue that could be used to cast a negative light on them. Indeed, it is interesting that since 2004, the intensification of drug war rhetoric has grown in parallel with the rise of the insurgency.

In sum, while from 2001 to 2005, drugs were simply not part of the US agenda in Afghanistan, since 2005, there has been more talk about drug control, and more counternarcotics operations have taken place. However, this does not mean that the United States is moving closer to conducting a real war on drugs. It is not the intensification of militaristic counterdrug missions per se that makes a drug war real, but the implementation of strategies known to reduce drug problems. On that count, Washington has failed. Further, the United States has continued to support allies involved in trafficking, and Obama stated explicitly that his drug war is instrumental in fighting the insurgency and not about eliminating drugs per se. Indeed, in 2009, his administration presented its new approach to narcotics and elaborated a target list of 50 “major drug traffickers who help finance the insurgency” to be killed or captured by the military. Therefore, if traffickers help the Taliban, they will be attacked—but if they support government forces, they apparently will be left alone. This suggests that the drug war is used to target enemies. **CP**

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Tales of a Hollywood Screenwriter Big Screens, Small Screens and American Stories

BY JOHN ESKOW

If this story was a Coming Attractions trailer running in a megaplex theater, the narrator's rolling baritone would be intoning: “In a world...where ex-college radicals could green-light huge movies...where dope-smoking libertines could create dark visions of America ...a small band of rebels fought to change America forever through film. But a sinister power was closing in on them...”

We'd start the actual movie with that most-dreaded of screenwriting techniques: a flashback. We're at Warner Brothers Studio in Burbank, sometime in the mid-1980s. Moments ago I watched a studio executive bend over his enormous mahogany desk to carve lines of cocaine along the wood-grain, snorting two hefty servings before offering me the remaining—and slightly thinner—ones. It was an outlaw rush to get high in these august offices, where in the 30s and 40s the legendary Warner Brothers themselves had built the Hollywood mythos of our youth. But the dope-taking was more for the bonding ritual than the actual dopamine rush. We were there to work—me as a screenwriter, the studio executive as, well, a studio executive—and the pre-meeting coke-snorting was a ceremony designed to confirm our mutual youth, daring, and privilege.

On this day, though, the coke was too good, and that particular meeting dissolved into edgy giggles.

Later that same afternoon I met with a higher-ranking Warners' vice-president—the affable and bear-like Mark Rosenberg. Like me, and a few other executives—like Sean Daniel at Universal—Rosenberg was a veteran of the antiwar left. As befit our common passion but separate roles, Rosenberg was a powerful SDS leader, while I'd been a street Yippie; not surprising that he'd morphed into an industry powerhouse in LA, while I still functioned as an outsider, living in New York and making brief smash-and-grab forays out to Hollywood. While no stranger to the party-life himself, Rosenberg was plagued by health problems, including diabetes—he would casually jab his belly with an insulin-spike right in the middle of giving you script-notes—but his focus never seemed to waver from the creative task at hand.

On this day he was to give me a screenwriting lesson that has stood me in good stead to this day.

Before I describe the specific lesson, I have to place it in a bigger context. Back then—in a period that roughly begins with the success of *Easy Rider* in 1969, and ends sometime in the mid-90s—writers, directors, actors and studio executives operated from the exhilaration of knowing that we controlled the world's most powerful medium—and that we could weaponize it. We held the firepower of Hollywood in our hands,

and we could use it to create new sensations and perceptions, not just in America but around the world. Having come of age in the 60s and 70s—having fought against the Vietnam War, against racism, and for social justice across the board—we weren't stoning the castle any more: we were inside the castle now. Though none of us were actually Marxists, we were joyfully "seizing the means of production"—in this case, the dream-making machinery of American film.

Movies, like rock-and-roll, had shaped us from childhood. The streetwise cool of Humphrey Bogart, Jean-Paul Belmondo, and Steve McQueen...the erotics of Monroe and Bardot...it all helped us navigate through adolescence. But as we grew into our twenties, the lessons turned more pointed, the teaching more exciting. With specific movie genres serving as "the means of production," we saw how Orson Welles took a pulp novel like *Touch of Evil* and transformed it into a savage film-noir critique of unchecked police authority. The bloody-minded clarity of *The Wild Bunch*—a Western that changed forever how we saw Vietnam—demanded we

ways. After years of working as a bar-band musician, I wrote a novel about that grimy but soulful world, which was optioned by United Artists. I was then engaged to adapt it as a movie—which, like most commissioned projects, never came to fruition, sucked as it was into the vortex of corporate failure that was triggered by Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate*. But suddenly I was flying out to Hollywood, and all those years of watching and loving movies—and learning from them—were being put to use.

As I gave myself a crash-course in screenwriting, I soon fixed on two wildly different heroes: the above-mentioned Terry Southern, and Franco Solinas, an Italian leftist who had written films as disparate as the cinema-verite *Battle Of Algiers* and the spaghetti-western *The Big Gundown*. Terry Southern for his (still-unmatched) ability to eviscerate American hypocrisy via comedy; and Franco Solinas for the gift he shared with the great Sergio Leone, of finding the radical political narrative hidden in the sagas of the American West.

The very stories and themes that kept my generation addicted to Hollywood movies—and to the glorious ritual of sharing them with strangers in the dark—have now been scaled down for flatscreen TVs, to be watched in solitude.”

challenge John Wayne, both as a mythical figure and a living man who cheered on the war effort and referred to Mexicans as “our little brown brothers.” Kubrick's *2001* used sci-fi to create a dazzling vision of man's scientific genius devouring itself. Even a comedy—like Mel Brooks' *The Producers*, which was a critical and box-office flop at the time—showed us how America's middlebrow culture could absorb the most heinous crimes of the 20th century and excrete them back as shlock. Most revolutionary of all was *Dr. Strangelove*, the Kubrick/Southern black comedy that nuked forever the false consciousness that could rationalize genocide as “acceptable.”

TV, of course, was beneath contempt. TV was the living proof of Mel Brooks' thesis: it actually did produce *Hogan's Heroes*, a Nazi sitcom! Even John F Kennedy's FCC Commissioner, Newton Minow, had described TV as “a vast wasteland.” It was good for sports, and fun to goof on when you were stoned—maybe a cheesy sci-fi movie, with the tint and color purposely distorted into a psychedelic lightshow. Sure, there'd been *The Twilight Zone*, and Johnny Carson was cool, but you never heard a writer, actor or director express the slightest desire to work in the medium.

Like everyone I knew, I was movie-crazy, but I never planned to become a screenwriter. I was seduced into it side-

Clearly, the secret was to zero in on a commercial genre, write movies that worked on their own crowd-pleasing terms, and subvert those genres from within.

And here we circle back to Mark Rosenberg, and the storytelling lesson I learned that afternoon, while the last grains of Warner Brothers' cocaine sifted down through my sinuses.

Strangely enough—for a committed leftist—Mark was raving about *Rambo*. No—not the Sylvester Stallone slaughter-fest that became a worldwide hit, but the David Morrell novel on which it was (very loosely) based. At one point, Rosenberg told me, he'd convinced Warner Brothers to option the book, titled *First Blood*, but the project had fallen through at his studio and taken another direction. Strolling around his huge, opulent office suite now, in a creative reverie, so passionate he was actually starting to sweat, Rosenberg told me how radically different the book was from the movie—not just different, he said, but dead opposite.

Hard as it may be to believe for those of us who've only seen *Rambo* the movie, the novel itself is pro-veteran but intensely anti-military. It begins with a scene that blazes in my memory even though I've never read it—I only have Rosenberg's description of it. John Rambo, troubled veteran just home from Vietnam, looks like a hippie to the local citi-

zens whose country he's been "defending." He walks into a diner and orders coffee. But the owner—who can't see the veteran beneath the long hair—refuses to serve the "hippie." Rambo repeats his order, louder. Eventually, the man who owns the diner has the cops kick Rambo out into the cold... and from there all hell breaks loose: a manhunt, massive shootouts, tragedy for all the main characters.

"Do you see the genius of that storytelling?" said Rosenberg. "Everything would have been perfectly fine...if they had just served him that one cup of coffee! That's what movies are about—that one cup of coffee that sets everything else in action! Without that one cup of coffee at the start, the shootout at the end means nothing!"

Writing it now, twenty-five years later, with Mark Rosenberg long dead, I'm still struck by how savvy his perception was—and by how desperately important it was to him. For at the historical moment when we—as a writer and a studio executive—were being given a chance to "seize the means of production," we'd be rank failures if we seized them clumsily...No, we'd be worse than rank failures—we'd be traitors to the causes we cared so much about.

That was how much movies meant to us. And not just to those of us actively working in the business. None of our friends would dream of missing the latest Scorsese, Kurosawa, or Coppola film on its opening weekend. Restaurants and bars were full of boozy arguments about the new Fellini. Mass-market magazines like *Premiere*, devoted solely to the movie-making process, sprang up; and for the first time, weekend grosses became front-page news. TV critics who were laughably unequipped to understand the actual workings of the business—like Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel—were hosting highly-rated review shows. People were so fascinated by movies that simply going to them was not enough. They wanted to crawl inside movies, to experience the world from the other side of the screen: "Truth," as Godard said, "at twenty-four frames a second."

And then came the nineties.

It's a long story, and one for another day. But we all felt the sea-change. When was the last time you felt absolutely compelled to see a movie on opening day? Or cared enough about a film to argue with someone about it? *Django Unchained* inspired some fights, OK, and that's fine, but they were depressing arguments that petered out with no winner.

But if you're like many people of my generation, or younger—the demographic that grew up movie-crazy, and then, around the turn of the century, got all-too-movie-sane—you probably do care enough about a TV show to be absolutely sure you're tuned in for it. Maybe it's *Breaking Bad*, maybe it's *Homeland*. It was probably *The Sopranos*, maybe *The Wire*, or even *Sons of Anarchy*...over the past 25 years, the list of bold TV shows is rich and varied. And these shows have three things in common:

One, they all speak to dark and haunting American

themes; two, they all make brilliant use of that "one-cup-of-coffee" means of storytelling, and therefore work on pure genre terms; and three, they are far too radical—politically, artistically, or both—to be produced by movie studios.

Nowadays, the studios will throw us all the comic-book adaptations, video-game adaptations, fairytale adaptations we could possibly want. As one anonymous Internet wit said recently, soon they'll be adapting breakfast cereals: Johnny Depp *is* Cap'n Crunch! They give us 3-D wonderments, and maybe even the occasional laugh. But the very stories that kept my generation addicted to Hollywood movies—and to the glorious ritual of sharing them with strangers in the dark—have now been scaled down for flat-screen TVs, to be watched in solitude, or in small groups.

Mark Rosenberg would've loved the audacity of *Breaking Bad*, which compels us to keep watching with its dark genre twists, while also telling us something really terrifying about American capitalism in decline. Walter White, its main figure, is way too antiheroic for a modern-day studio film. And look at the story's take-off point: a shmucky chemistry teacher is diagnosed with a fast-metastasizing cancer. Given America's hellish "health care" system, the "hero" knows he will bequeath his family nothing but poverty and grief...so he launches a to provide for them by cooking huge amounts of crystal meth in his few remaining weeks. And that one decision trips off a cycle of death and horror.

It doesn't happen by accident: Vince Gilligan, the creator of *Breaking Bad*, began with a vision that could only work on cable TV these days: "We take Mister Chips and gradually turn him into Scarface."

Just as the diner-owner should've served Rambo that cup of coffee, the American body-politic should've given Walter White a single-payer medicine program. By denying it to him, they loosed a plague upon their own children.

The genre story-telling of *Breaking Bad* is strong as anything Robert Towne or William Goldman were doing back in the days when movies mattered. But the Townes and Goldmans of tomorrow want to create their own *Breaking Bad*, not their own *Chinatown*. Because any studio executive of 2013 would toss the *Chinatown* screenplay into the trash after three pages.

So as the opportunity to stun, to challenge, to illuminate, has moved from the big-screen world to the small-screen world, the creative talent has moved with it.

What this means for us as a culture is not for me to say. But as a writer who longs to connect—and who still wants to write challenging stories about America—I look down at my appointment book and I know very well what it means for me: my next six meetings are all with TV producers. **CP**

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CULTURE & REVIEWS

Left Noir

BY RON JACOBS

The novel is generally acknowledged to be a bourgeois form of literature. It wasn't until there were enough literate people with time for leisurely reading that this entertainment came along. The crime novel reflects the bourgeois obsession with order and usually represents the concerns of that class. There is a crime against an individual that shakes up bourgeois society. A detective from the police force or a private investigator hunts down the perpetrator through a series of clues, makes the arrest and all is set well again. Agatha Christie's novels are perfect examples of this. Then there are the tough guy novels featuring men like Mike Hammer. In this type of story, the protagonist easily forsakes the niceties of bourgeois society in his crime solving. Naturally, this alienates the police and the bourgeoisie, but he still gets the job done, captures (or kills) the criminal, and allows the middle class to get on with their lives. This representation is occasionally turned around and the protectors of order—the police and courts—are the criminals and by association so is the system they work for. This is noir. Noir does not pretend that the society their protagonists operate in is worth saving. It's just the only one we have. This is where the novels of a few current writers exist, and where mine are intentionally placed.

Writing about Italian noir for *World Literature Today* critic Madison J. Davis noted:

“The traditional mystery, deriving from Poe's “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and evolving through Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie to contemporary practitioners like Carolyn G. Hart and Simon Brett, requires a certain faith in the legal system—or at

least in a measure of justice parceled out to those who commit crimes. We live, however, in a skeptical world, in which even those who enjoy the puzzles and deductions of the traditional whodunit cannot see them as realistic. The events of the twentieth century have cracked, often splintered, our faith in the legal system and the triumph of justice, even in the good ole U. S. of A.”

I would argue that the twenty-first century has brought us beyond even the skepticism Davis acknowledges. Indeed, skepticism seems almost quaint, when we read about hundreds of men being released from prison because they were jailed they for crimes they did not commit. Their incarceration was not due to a mistake, but a conscious decision by authorities to match a crime to the victim they chose. Every time news like this comes out, the credibility of the police as protectors of society diminishes. When working people see their friends and children going to prison for drug offenses while the wealthy usually avoid doing time, their perception of the legal system being rigged in favor of the wealthy and powerful is reinforced. Since the police are the most obvious representatives of that system (and the individuals most citizens encounter) they are no longer perceived as much more than enforcers of the rights of the wealthy and powerful. This perception, long held by those considered The Other in society, is now part of the common parlance. Indeed, television crime shows assume this in their portrayals of police departments and individual cops. Certain series, most notably David Simon's depressingly exquisite take on the corruption rampant in an entire city's political and legal system called *The Wire*, create a world where the incorruptible individual has

no place.

This does not mean that the police don't enjoy at least tacit support by a majority of the population; it does mean that the number of people who believe the police are not above criminality is much diminished from just a few decades ago. The abuse of power by police during the protests of the 1960s and onwards; the revelations of individual cops like New York's Serpico regarding corruption and illegal arrests (among other things); the militarization of most police forces in cities and towns large and small; and the continued abrogation of civil liberties in the name of the war on drugs and the war on terrorism. All of these make the line between the police and the criminals they supposedly oppose very thin. Despite the multitude of cop shows on television attempting to present police as protectors of order and the innocent and even the presence of movies like Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry series (which serve as propaganda for authoritarianism), many residents of modern society are convinced the police are not there for their sake.

Nor is the legal system. Occasionally a clever lawyer is able to keep an innocent person out of prison—in real life and in fiction. Indeed, certain authors have made a good living writing legal thrillers that feature these kinds of stories. More often than not, however, the police and the courts conspire to convict the accused no matter what. It's not that the conspiracy is intentional; it's just how the system works. Police arrest a person for a crime and the courts do the rest. Without a good attorney—something very few can afford—the suspect's options are very limited. If one adds a cop with a grudge, a judge with an agenda, or a politician with a law and order platform to the equation, that person in the docket does not stand a chance.

A few decades ago I was charged with “possession with the intent to sell” because I was sitting in a car when an acquaintance sold a small amount of

marijuana to an undercover cop. This all went down not long after the state I was living in had passed a law that rendered the U.S. Constitution's prohibition on unreasonable search and seizure null and void. Anyone who was in the vicinity of anything having to do with illegal drugs was as culpable as the person actually involved with the drugs. So, since I was in the car when the drug deal occurred, I was also involved in the sale. When I showed up at court on the charge, I asked my public defender if I should challenge the charge and plead not guilty. His response was simple. If I challenged the charge I would not win. He advised me to take a plea deal and do community service. I took his advice. The law was

those who listen to the Rolling Stones) that calls every cop a criminal, this contradiction is even clearer.

Back to that incorruptible individual. Most noir features a private investigator. Like the accused, he or she is an individual who lives on the edges of the law. In a world where the law itself can be unjust, only those not in debt to the system designed to bring justice can find that justice. Most often the investigator is one who works for hire with a set of morals that are immutable. In certain cases, like two of the novels in my 1970s trilogy, the investigators are regular folks determined to help a friend. Still, they are not without faults. Alcohol is often a vice these characters deal with. Most recently, in Thomas

sole task is surviving no matter what it takes. Usually extremely poor, only occasionally employed in conventional jobs, and existing literally outside of society, the lumpen are the truly dangerous ones in the bourgeoisie's midst. They provide respectable society with their entertainments such as illegal drugs and sex, but must be controlled at all cost. The investigator's position in society is closer to that of the lumpen than to any other stratum. He or she understands the justice of the streets is often not the justice of the courtroom. Of course, this position outside of society means there is nothing to lose in fighting the wealthy and powerful.

Mandel published his book before capitalism's latest phase was truly un-

Most noir features a private investigator, who lives on the edges of the law. In a world where the law itself can be unjust, only those not in debt to the system can find justice.

not interested in justice, just in throwing people in jail.

Much anti-capitalist and antiwar activity is already labeled criminal in an imperial society. This in itself means that characters participating in activities that fall into this category are already suspect. Meanwhile, the forces of law and order trying to stifle such characters have a leeway not provided the citizen, no matter what he or she is involved in. The often violent reaction of the authorities to the Occupy Wall Street protests in Fall 2011 provides a recent example of this fact. A greater contradiction occurs when the forces of authority engage in criminal behavior in the pursuit of the forces aligned against the rulers the police are hired to protect. A further complication comes into play when criminal actions by the police are ignored or sanctioned while criminal acts by the targets of the authorities are not. In a line quite familiar to most rock and roll fans (especially

Pynchon's foray into the genre with a book titled *Inherent Vice*, his private eye smokes a lot of marijuana. Early on, many of the so-called tough guys like Mike Hammer were sexist and racist. As the genre has evolved, so have the investigators. Like the society they operate in, today's investigators include Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and women.

Today's noir fiction is the story of a system and society in decline. Marxist Ernest Mandel published a book on crime fiction in 1986 titled *Delightful Murder*. In this book, Mandel looks at the genesis and development of crime fiction. We see the development of the criminal from a lone individual whose exploits shock and dismay, but whom heroic police agents can capture. As capitalism moves into its monopoly phase, the lone criminal remains a problem, yet the real problem developing is an entire class of criminals. These are what Marx labeled the lumpenproletariat: that part of society whose

derway. That is, neoliberalism. This stage of monopoly capitalism is the nightmare that Rosa Luxembourgh warned us about. Financiers who produce no product run the world. Instead of creating work, their actions profit from the destruction of jobs and the impoverishment of millions. They launder the millions made by international drug lords while financing politicians who want to build more prisons and lock up those who use the drugs. As far as the financiers are concerned, the working class itself is now a criminal class. Yet, we know better. It is the financiers and their class that are the true criminals. Still, they go free while workers go to jail for the crime of being poor. The conspiracy of the super rich is not an accident. They built the world that way.

Writers can choose to point this out or they can go along with the status quo. Good crime fiction on a neoliberal planet chooses the former. The task of

those who write these tales is to point the finger at the true criminals. The police are only heroes when they bust the big guys. The system can only be just when it turns on its own. At this juncture in time, this only seems to happen in stories. **CP**

This essay appears as a foreword to Jacobs' new novel *All the Sinners, Saints*.

They Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

BY LEE BALLINGER

In 1943, sixteen-year-old Johnny Bragg was given six consecutive life sentences to be served at the Tennessee State Prison in Nashville. As an illiterate black teenager in a segregated prison in a segregated state, Bragg began his sentence with three strikes against him. But he had a talent for singing and he put together a vocal group, the Prisonaires. They began by performing at the prison and then went on to have a most unlikely career in music. Still convicts, they had hit records (recorded at fabled Sun Studios in Memphis with Sam Phillips) and one radio show on a country station and another on an R&B station. The Prisonaires performed many times at VIP functions at the governor's mansion (where Elvis Presley once joined them when they sang their hit "Just Walkin' in the Rain"). Despite certain privileges, they hardly lived an easy life. One of Johnny Bragg's jobs was to remove the dead bodies from the electric chair, which was in frequent use in execution-happy Tennessee.

The Prisonaires were part of a music-rich environment at Tennessee State Prison. Warden James Edwards often brought in well-known musical acts such as Louis Jordan, Ernest Tubbs, Muddy Waters, Red Foley, Roy Acuff, and Gene Autry to perform for the inmates. This was part of a broader social reform program shared by Edwards and his political ally, Frank Clement, who was elected governor in

1953. According to Jay Warner's book about the Prisonaires, *Just Walkin' in the Rain*: "Many astute political figures knew desegregation was coming inevitably. The new, post-war industrial economy couldn't function with the old agrarian models. This was the political and moral reality that Clement stepped into as the state's new governor."

Clement was one of the first politicians with a vision of a post-cotton "New South." He established a statewide system of vocational schools, a student loan program, increases in welfare benefits, and made free textbooks available to all students K-12. With Clement's approval, warden Edwards created an employment bureau at the prison to find work for inmates when their sentences were completed. All of this, along with timid steps toward integration, was bitterly resisted by the Klan and others who had a stake in the old order. The visibility of the Prisonaires helped the governor to popularize his political agenda and he made sure that the connection between the two was made in press stories about the group.

By the fall of 1958, the now ex-warden Edwards found a different vehicle for the New South agenda when he became the personnel director at a Ford plant located only three hundred yards from the prison. Many ex-cons found their way to the assembly lines.

The tradition of prison concerts continued and spread, sometimes as a political act inspired by the ferment of the 1960s and 1970s. The most notable of these were Johnny Cash's Folsom Prison concert in 1968 and B.B. King's 1970 show at the Cook County jail where, reminiscent of Bragg's job of bringing out the dead, the bluesman performed on a stage where convicts were once hanged.

By the mid-1970s, Cash had stopped playing prison shows due to his frustration with the glacial pace of prison reform. But however glaring the inadequacies of rehabilitation programs at that time, they did exist and more often than not there were jobs available on

the outside for prisoners upon their release.

The momentum of that era did not last. There have only been a handful of prison shows by well-known musicians in the 21st century, mostly by artists who feel a direct connection to doing time. When Metallica played San Quentin in 2003, singer James Hetfield spoke convincingly about how being in a band was the only reason he wasn't in the yard as a convict that day. In 2006 R&B star Lyfe Jennings played RICI prison in Ohio, a joint where he had once done time. Today, Jail Guitar Doors, which takes its name from a 1978 Clash song about musician Wayne Kramer's imprisonment, brings shows into prisons and donates instruments for the use of inmates. Ex-con Kramer helps run the organization.

The lack of prison concerts is only one reflection of the end of any pretense of rehabilitation in what is now a corrections industry. Absent any recognition of the humanity of America's 2.7 million prisoners, recreation and education programs that once might have kept inmates healthy as they prepared for life on the outside have been eliminated. The prisons themselves now often contain factories and other workplaces. There can be no rehabilitation when the jobs are moving inside while opportunities to work on the outside are shrinking (according to the New York Times, 5.6 million American manufacturing jobs have been lost since 2000). The world has no place but prison for the men and women currently incarcerated in the United States.

It would be unthinkable today for prisoners to go outside the walls to make records, have radio shows, or perform for a governor. Yet music, whether heard via a microchip, the inmates own hands, hearts, and feet, or even occasionally by outsiders, can help keep hope alive until we figure out how to base our society on compassion instead of control. **CP**

LEE BALLINGER co-edits *Rock and Rap Confidential*.

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All the Sinners, Saints

by Ron Jacobs

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