

# CounterPunch

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AGENTS OF APARTHEID BY DAVID PRICE

JEFFERSON: FOUNDING FATHER OF WHITE SUPREMACY BY NED AND CONSTANCE SUBLETTE

TREASURY BOMB BY PETER LEE

MUTUALLY ASSURED TERROR BY JENNIFER LOEWENSTEIN

FUKUSHIMA MON AMOUR BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR



# CounterPunch

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## Cover Image: Fukushima Mon Amour by Nick Roney

In Memory of  
Alexander Cockburn  
1941-2012



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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Hillary the Hawk

I just finished Diana Johnstone's scathing book on Hillary, Queen of Chaos. It's one of the best political biographies I've read. It exposes Mrs. Clinton as a dangerous and self-righteous hawk. In practice, she is little different from the Neo-Cons of the Bush years. But her justifications for war are more seductive. She uses the banner of human rights to conceal war crimes.

*Margaret Packard  
Des Moines, Iowa*

## Suck Up, Kick Down

Henry Giroux's piece is the best thing I've read on Trump. Even more remarkable than having an ethnic cleansing candidate doing so well in America (see Roth,

Phillip, "The Plot Against America") is the fact that so many people are following this guy. I mean, even those who agree with him should pause because of who he is--a rich asshole who inherited money and then multiplied it with government largesse. Our new national motto seems to be, "Suck Up; Kick Down."

*Elliott Gorn  
Author of "Mother Jones: The  
Most Dangerous Woman in  
America"*

## Why I Joined

I've joined - thank you! - with keen hopes, because I have just now read - via a link in Beyond Nuclear - Linda Pentz Gunter's Nov 20 article in your Broadsheet. Her comments on Monibot

confirm entirely my own serious critique of his conclusions about the "Energy Gap" in his book; and her remarks about James Hansen I think are timely and - sadly - well put. As a former Particle Physicist I have come to see Nuclear power as a dangerously mis-placed option. Martin Ryle's simple observation, standing one Summer's afternoon on the Coton Footpath, 30 years ago, "Engineering has not caught up," still in my view, totally and most urgently apply. I look forward to sharing the debate!

*Edmund ssf (latter day me-  
daeval Franciscan monk.....!)*

## Years of War?

Is "years of war" in Syria and Iraq really the best America can do? In Syria it has pow-

erful Western and regional allies and at least partial or potential cooperation from Russia, China, Iran and, yes, Bashar al-Assad himself.

One reason why the Iraqi army, fully backed up by the West apart from ground troops, cannot defeat Isis is that it was broken up by the US after Saddam Hussein was overthrown. There seems to be a grave danger of essentially the same thing happening in Syria. David Cameron has acknowledged that the Syrian army must lead the ground assault on Isis in their country when it finally comes. However he also says that Assad must step down and the Syrian army be reformed first. There seems a high probability that these conditions will never be met. If it becomes clear that they are making further progress impossible then they should be abandoned.

*Brendan O'Brien  
London*

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Dear CounterPunchers,

Thank you to all of our readers who have contributed. Traditionally, our plea to our print subscribers goes out in Mid-November, while we put out our begging bowl online a bit earlier. We met our online fundraising goals, but we know that our print-only subscribers will continue to send in donations the old fashioned way, by check, through December and into January. For well over 20 years now, the subscribers to our print magazine have been our mainstay - the line-item on our budget that we can count on! If you haven't had the chance to send in your check, we urge you to take a moment to send whatever you can. Every bit counts!

We're not grant farmers, and we don't have a battery of foundations backing us, nor a platoon of big donors spoon feeding us. We rely solely on our subscriptions and generous donations from our readers. Your support is deeply appreciated. Unlike many other outfits, we don't hit you up for money every month ... or even every three months. When we ask, it is because we really need your support. For over 20 years, we have proved our worth. We've built CounterPunch into an intelligent, vital and radical presence around the world. Now, after the tireless efforts of Andrew Nofsinger, with Jeffrey and Joshua, the new CounterPunch website was introduced this summer and a newer, tech-savvy generation of readers can access CounterPunch wherever they go on mobile friendly versions of the website. The CounterPunch podcast allows CounterPunchers to supplement their reading with poignant interviews by Eric Draitser, even when their hands are dirty in the garden. But we can only move forward with your financial support. There's no safety net for us. CounterPunch is run by a dedicated skeleton crew. We're a lean operation with no waste to prune. Every dollar you can manage is crucial to our survival. So, please, help as much as you can.

*Your CounterPunch Crew: Jeffrey St. Clair, Becky Grant, Joshua Frank, Deva Wheeler, Nat St. Clair*



## ROAMING CHARGES

# Fukushima Mon Amour

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Is the crisis in Fukushima over or just beginning? You might be forgiven for scratching your head about that one, given that news from the radiation zone faded from the headlines years ago. Amid this information void, the history of the world's worst nuclear event has been swamped under pernicious myths spread by nuclear hucksters.

In brief, the revised story of the Fukushima meltdown goes something like this: the Daiichi facility was struck by an unprecedented event, unlikely to be repeated; the failsafe systems worked; the meltdown was swiftly halted; the spread of radioactive contamination contained and remediated; no lives or illnesses resulted from the crisis.

One of the first to shoot his mouth off was Paddy Reagan, a professor of Nuclear Physics at the University of Surrey: "We had a doomsday earthquake in a country with 55 nuclear power stations and they all shut down perfectly, although three have had problems since. This was a huge earthquake, and as a test of the resilience and robustness of nuclear plants it seems they have withstood the effects very well."

For atomic zealots, the Fukushima meltdown did not represent a cautionary tale, but served as an exemplar of the safety, efficiency and durability of nuclear power. A case of Fukushima Mon Amour. Such extreme revisionism is to be expected from hired guns for Big Atom, especially at a moment of grave peril for their economic fortunes. More surreal is the killer compact between the nuclear industry and some high-profile environmentalists, which reached a feverish pitch at the Paris Climate Conference this fall. Freelance nuclear shills such as the odious James Hansen and the clownish George Monbiot, who have left carbon

footprints that would humble Godzilla by jetting across the world promoting nuclear energy as a kind of technological *deus ex machina* for the apocalyptic threat of climate change. Hansen has gone so far as to charge that "opposition to nuclear power threatens the future of humanity." Shamefully, many greens now promote nuclear power as a kind ecological lesser-evilism.

There's nothing new about this kind of rationalization for the doomsday machines. The survival of nuclear power has always depended on the willing suspension of disbelief. In the terrifying post-Hiroshima age, most people intuitively detected the symbiotic linkage between nuclear weapons and nuclear power and those fears had to be doused. As a consequence, the nuclear industrial complex concocted the fairy tale of the peaceful atom, zealously promoted by one of the most devious conmen of our time: Edward "H-Bomb" Teller.

After ratting out Robert Oppenheimer as a peacenik and security risk, Teller set up shop in his lair at the Lawrence Livermore Labs and rapidly began designing uses for nuclear power and bombs as industrial engines to propel the post-World War II economy. One of the first mad schemes to come off of Teller's drafting board was Operation Chariot, a plan to excavate a deep water harbor at Cape Thornton, near the Inuit village of Point Hope, Alaska, by using controlled (sic) detonations of hydrogen bombs.

In 1958, Teller, the real life model for Terry Southern's character Dr. Strangelove, devised a plan for atomic fracking. Working with the Richfield Oil Company, Teller plotted to detonate 100 atomic bombs in northern Alberta to extract oil from the Athabasca tar sands. The plan, which went by

the name Project Oilsands, was only quashed when intelligence agencies got word that Soviet spies had infiltrated the Canadian oil industry.

Frustrated by the Canadians' failure of nerve, Teller soon turned his attentions to the American West. First he tried to sell the water-hungry Californians on a scheme to explode more than 20 nuclear bombs to carve a trench in the western Sacramento Valley to canal more water to San Francisco. Wiser heads prevailed.

Teller resurfaced with a scheme to set off 30 kiloton nuclear bombs 6,000 feet below the surface of the Colorado Plateau, vowing that these mantle-cracking explosions would "stimulate" the flow of natural gas. The gas was indeed stimulated, but it also turned out to be highly radioactive.

In 1957 Teller became the first scientist to posit that the burning of fossil fuels would inevitably yield a climate-altering greenhouse effect, which would feature mega-storms, prolonged droughts and melting ice-caps. His solution? Replace the energy created by coal and gas-fired plants with a global network of nuclear power plants.

There are currently 460 or so operating nukes, some chugging along far past their expiration dates, coughing up 10 percent of global energy demands. Teller's green disciples want to see nuclear power's total share swell to 50 percent, which would mean the construction of roughly 2100 new atomic water-boilers from Mogadishu to Kathmandu. What are the odds of all of those cranking up without a hitch?

Meanwhile, back at Fukushima, unnoticed by the global press corps, the first blood cancers (Myelogenous leukemia) linked to radiation exposure are being detected in children and cleanup workers. And off the coast of Oregon and California *every* Bluefin tuna caught in the last year has tested positive for radioactive Cesium 137. The eco-radioactive future has arrived. Don't worry. It only has a half-life of 30.7 years. **CP**



## MIDDLE EAST NOTES

# Mutually Assured Terror

BY JENNIFER LOEWENSTEIN

The attacks in Paris on 13 November had hundreds of thousands of us riveted to our television screens in horror. The attackers killed at least 130 people, “soft targets”, or innocent civilians. It is fair to assume that most of these people were out to relax and enjoy themselves on a Friday evening after the work week. They weren’t huddling in fear in their homes with the electricity out, shivering from the late fall temperatures, wondering when they’d eat their next meal, trying to plan a way to escape, or trying to predict the next bombing raids by Syrian, Russian, US, British, or French forces - or waiting for the next wave of violence perpetrated by ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria).

The French people have, mercifully, been spared the fate of the Syrians. Half of France’s population is not internally displaced from its homes nor among millions of refugees streaming out of the country with no place to go in the wake of relentless, often arbitrary violence between its government and allies, and radical Islamist groups - also supported by outsiders - of which ISIS is the most entrenched and dangerous.

France was nevertheless the most recent Western target of ISIS, (also known as ISIL or Da’esh in Arabic), responsible as well for the downing of a Russian airliner over the Sinai Peninsula on Oct. 31st killing all 224 people aboard in revenge for Russian President Vladimir Putin’s decision to lend military support to Syria’s Assad regime; for the deadly bombing on Nov. 12th of a Shi’a neighborhood in Beirut that killed 43 people and wounded over 200; for deadly attacks on Egyptian military forces and political targets in Cairo and the Sinai Peninsula that left dozens of civilians dead; for the Nov. 25th bombing of a bus of presidential

guards in Tunis that killed 12; for two devastating massacres of non-violent demonstrators against the war in Syria that killed over 100 people in Turkey this fall.

It is no surprise that ISIS has recently appeared in Yemen to attack its self-proclaimed enemies there, contributing to the carnage Saudi and Western-backed coalition partners have wrought against the poorest nation in the Arab world, created a humanitarian catastrophe, and cutting down dozens of civilians each day: at least 3,000 Yemeni civilians have been killed in the last 8 months alone.

ISIS targeted France because of French airstrikes against its strongholds in Syria and because of France’s role in the coalition of forces aligned against it. France, as some people may remember, also has a bloody history of occupation and oppression in Syria - and Algeria where deep wounds have yet to heal. France, in other words, was not randomly targeted.

Neither was Beirut: ISIS planned the Beirut bombing to sow sectarian strife in Lebanon, to show that it could hit “soft targets” in selected neighborhoods, and as a message to Hizbullah, the Shi’a resistance group and political party backing Bashar al-Assad’s government in the ongoing Syrian Civil War. Compared to the outcry over the Paris attacks, the Beirut and other ISIS bombings have received scant attention in Western media sources, unsurprising since the amount of attention paid to most crimes is, in general, dependent upon the perceived status of the victim. Social media sources generated a great deal of outrage over the disparity in coverage nevertheless, a welcome sign indeed.

On the same day as the terror attacks

on Paris, 13 November 2015, two ISIS bombs exploded in Baghdad targeting Shi’a Muslims. Twenty-six people died and scores of others were wounded. A brief, barely noticeable, paragraph on these bombings was tucked into a corner of the next day’s New York Times international section, otherwise crammed full of reporting on the Paris attacks including giant headlines announcing the atrocity.

One sentence on the Baghdad bombings read, “Since the emergence of Islamic State extremists, attacks in Baghdad have taken place almost daily, with roadside bombs, suicide blasts and assassinations targeting Iraqi forces and government officials, causing significant civilian casualties” (my italics). ISIS attacks have killed well over a thousand of people in Iraq and Syria over the past three years.

I saw no statistics, however, on the far greater number of deaths caused by “coalition airstrikes”, military aid, funding, and training supplied to the two key sides in the Syrian Civil War with a full understanding of their purpose and effects by the United States, Britain, France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and, more recently, by Russia.

One might expect that the near daily massacres in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq by ISIS would receive critical attention here, especially given the role the United States played in creating and incubating it. Then again, the role we played in paving the way for ISIS has discouraged our mainstream news from mentioning such attacks. This helps explain why so many Americans react with shock and disbelief when foreign terrorists attack Western targets.

The mostly French revelers out on a Friday night after the work week, from all different backgrounds and of all ages, were sitting in cafes and restaurants, walking casually along the streets eager to see meet up with friends. Some were looking forward to hearing live music at the Bataclan concert hall in Paris’ upscale 11th arrondissement.

Soccer fans, especially those going

to the game, including the French Prime Minister, Francois Hollande, must have been full of excitement for the important match between France and Germany. What should have been a "normal" Friday night in Paris, something many of us would love to enjoy, turned instead into a nightmare. At least 9 ISIS-linked individuals had cynically planned to destroy a festive Parisian evening by turning Paris into a war zone.

"This is for Syria!" shouted one of the attackers, according some bystanders. ISIS' quick of claim responsibility for the killings before the night was over is a grim reminder of its murderous ideology. Hundreds of thousands

of people came out within the next week to stand in solidarity with France against the evils of ISIS. Heartfelt sympathy poured out from all over the world for the French victims, a welcome and appropriate response to the unjustifiable, savage killings by ISIS.

Although the absence of equal sympathy and global tributes for ISIS' non-French victims is and was disturbing, even more so is the absence of reporting on the unrelenting daily terror experienced, above all, by civilians across the Middle East and Southwest Asia. This terror with its ever escalating death tolls perpetrated by France, the United States, Britain, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and other key powers on Syrians, Iraqis, Yemenis, Kurds, Afghans, and others, goes unmentioned. Worse, it is mostly absent from the critically important context we need in order to make sense

of what is going on.

Are the peoples of these countries supposed to endure routine terror committed against them by a toxic assortment of perpetrators in complete silence? Are the barrel bombings, cluster bombs, hellfire missiles, sporadic or sustained machine-gunnings, special operations forces' attacks, firestorms, deafening sounds of build-ings, shops, markets and homes blasted



PHOTO: AFP.

apart by non-stop fighter planes and drone bombardments, and the unspeakable, final outcries of men, women, and children in their death throes expected to elicit no response to the perpetrators of these acts among witnesses and survivors?

Syria is destroyed. Half its population has been displaced or is fleeing the country. ISIS and other extremist groups gain members, some of them deranged by the injustices wrought upon them by outside powers.

It should come as no surprise that plans for counteroffensives, with their comparatively limited consequences, should be committed by "Islamic" fascists against nations whose governments are targeting them. They should, however, never - as with ongoing military-terrorist and proxy slaughter campaigns against them - be sanctioned.

Stepped up military offensives and subsequent patriotic or ideological fervor against any enemy will intensify and ensure the cycle of mutually assured terrorism. They will erode popular and national security, and create a social environment conducive to a sanctioned, if gradual, withdrawal of civil liberties and, with them, fundamental human rights.

Serious concern for the security of the vastly superior numbers of people caught up in vicious imperial and hegemonic struggles would de-escalate these manufactured conflicts as would sufficient, unfettered humanitarian aid and serious, unabated negotiations

by the key parties involved. Welcome sanctuary for desperate refugees would provide temporary relief and gratitude for millions of families especially if it were offered by the major perpetrators of these nightmarish scenarios.

The crux of the matter is that conflicts manufactured and driven by, above all, the United States, its clients, and the arms industry's merchants of death with whom they are irrevocably bound take precedence over public opinion and popular demands worldwide. Freedom, justice, and democracy are the greatest casualties of the quest for power, the greatest lies of war, vanity, and greed, and the most distorted ideals in whose name millions of people will continue to starve, suffer, and die. **CP**





## EMPIRE BURLESQUE

# Seeing Ghosts in Syria

BY CHRIS FLOYD

Just hours after the UK Parliament's vote to bomb Syria on December 2, four British jets were scrambling from their base in Cyprus, on their way to strike oilfields held by ISIS. The launch point, Akrotiri, one of two UK bases on the island, was apt: Cyprus was one of the last colonies acquired by Britain — formally annexed in 1925, as the tidal wave of the Empire's "late Victorian holocausts" was slowly beginning to ebb away. Now it serves the Empire's withered rump as Britain joins France's continuing attacks on its own former "protectorate," Syria.

The Cyprus-based operation is an extension of Britain's ongoing bombing campaign in its former colony — sorry, "mandate" — of Iraq: three former Ottoman provinces jammed together by London after its betrayal of the Arab forces it used as cannon fodder during the First World War, promising them liberation then dividing up their lands with the French. It took a savage bombing campaign against what Winston Churchill liked to call the "recalcitrant tribes" of the region before it was "pacified" into acquiescence — and laid open for exploitation of its oil. This was 95 years ago; and except for the technology — and the now-longer reach of the recalcitrant tribes — not much has changed.

Vast interests in oil and natural gas — both existing and potential — are in play behind the strutting moralizers striking poses in Parliament, the White House and the Elysee. (And in the Kremlin too, of course.) Competing pipelines — one favoring the West, undercutting Russia, the other bolstering Moscow and Tehran — are in the mix. (No points for guessing which one Assad decided to back, just before he stopped being a Hillary-

praised "reformer" and became the new Saddam.) Now, as then, the imposition of Western dominance over the region — regardless of its form and nomenclature: colony, protectorate, ally, partner — also remains a paramount concern.

The fierce recalcitrants of ISIS take a back seat to these higher strategic goals. Although Britain's rather pip-squeaky addition to the vast tonnage of ordnance that the US and France are raining down on Syria is, we're told, a vital part of the allied effort to "defeat ISIS militarily," it's plain that this defeat is in no way a priority of our modern Churchills. If "defeating ISIS" really was their top strategic priority, then of course they would make common cause with all the forces now fighting the group — the Syrian army, Iran, Hizbollah, the Kurds — while cutting off ISIS's supply-and-oil lifelines through Turkey and stopping the powerful financial institutions who are profitably washing ISIS's money through their well-appointed boardrooms.

This is not happening because defeating ISIS — or quelling terrorism, for that matter — is not their main goal in Syria. Imposing regime change, for power and profit, is. ISIS plays an ambiguous role in this, as both hindrance and help. Although they are the most powerful force trying to unseat Assad, their very public brutality — continually amplified by the West's own fearmongering media/political class — means they can't be used as the chief "liberators" of Damascus. On the other hand, ISIS keeps Assad tied down and weakened, which neatly serves our leaders' purposes.

What's more, ISIS has already been instrumental in yet another regime change sought by Washington: the ouster of Iraqi PM Nouri al-Maliki.

(Yes, the man who took charge after the previous regime change imposed by Washington.) Barack Obama — to his credit, I guess — was very open about this. As he told an ever-fawning Thomas Friedman in August 2014: the reason "we did not just start taking a bunch of airstrikes all across Iraq as soon as [ISIS] came in was because that would have taken the pressure off of al-Maliki."

Washington didn't find him useful anymore — he was "corrupt" (although of course he was a piker compared to the multi-trillion-dollar corruption of Washington's Terror War complex), he was too close to Iran, he was too "sectarian" (i.e., he was the inevitable product of the American occupation's hideous policy of hardening Iraq's sectarian differences in a replay of the British Empire's tried-and-true 'divide and conquer' strategy) — so he had to go. ISIS was thus allowed to grow — conquer cities, seize oilfields, murder civilians — in order to force Iraq to change its government.

Now, having failed to dislodge Assad from power early on and impose a more compliant regime in Damascus, our leaders have decided that the dismemberment of Syria is now their next best option. Multi-sided, hydra-headed, interminable, intractable conflict — plus continued radicalization and intermittent terrorist attacks — will be the only result of the outside military interventions in Syria, just as it was in Iraq and Libya. (And Somalia and Yemen.)

But if we've learned anything in the course of this wretched 21st century of ours, it's that history no longer exists. Or rather, it exists, but like a ghost few can see, exerting no pressure on our contextless present, informing no decisions, providing no nuance to public understanding. What happened in the last decade, last year, last week -- much less a hundred years ago -- melts into air, into thin air, leaving a baseless fabric that our politicians and their paymasters shape with their lies and manipulations. **CP**





## GRASPING AT STRAWS

# Imagine a New World Order

BY MIKE WHITNEY

Imagine if the Paris attacks were more destructive than they had been. Imagine if the terrorists had targeted the main monuments and landmarks across the city: the Louvre, the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame Cathedral. Imagine if the attacks had not ended after a few hours, but dragged on for four-and-a-half agonizing years of sporadic violence and death. Imagine if the perpetrators of the attacks were mainly foreign-born jihadis that had been recruited by the various western Intelligence agencies from far-flung places like Chechnya, Kosovo, Libya and Saudi Arabia. Imagine if these extremists were funded, armed and trained by foreign governments that wanted to topple President François Hollande so they could install their own puppet regime and splinter the country into smaller regions run by local warlords or religious fanatics.

Imagine if half of Paris had been reduced to rubble forcing most of the city's population to flee to safer locations outside the country where they were treated like subhumans and corralled into refugee centers that resembled German concentration camps. Imagine if the war precipitated a "staggering humanitarian disaster" that forced tens of thousands of refugees to live in leaky tents and ramshackle shanties spread across the countryside and along the highways.

Imagine if the entire western media characterized the terrorists as "rebels" or "the anti-Hollande opposition" and dignified their terrorism as part of a "civil war" or as a struggle for "liberation".

Imagine if Spain allowed the U.S. and NATO to use its airfields to bomb parts of France provided they allow Madrid

to annex Provence to establish a "safe zone" where terrorists could take refuge until they were ready to rejoin the battle to establish an Islamic Caliphate across all of France.

Imagine if the U.S. used Spanish airbases to bomb critical civilian infrastructure in France; bridges, highways, train stations, military bases, hospitals, schools, power plants, government buildings, and water treatment plants, like the one the U.S. blew up in Syria on December 1 after President Obama delivered a speech to leaders at the Paris Climate Summit where he expressed his eagerness to reach a "political settlement" that would "bring the civil war to an end." Hours later, U.S. warplanes bombed a water treatment plant in northern Syria that cut water supplies to 3.5 million civilians. Those same people had been living without lights and heat since the U.S. bombed their main power station three weeks earlier. Imagine how outraged the French people would be if the U.S. used similar tactics in Paris.

Imagine if all government services had to be suspended or terminated due to the ongoing conflict. Imagine if the garbage started piling up in front of the Grand Palais and the Musée d'Orsay, and the capital experienced sudden outbreaks of cholera, hepatitis A, typhoid and other water-borne diseases.

Imagine if France was not targeted for anything that Hollande had done, but because powerful elites in Washington wanted to redraw the map of southern Europe to better serve the geopolitical interests of its multinational constituents.

Now imagine that a new coalition of nation's emerged that was determined to fight the terrorists, prevent Hollande

from being removed, and restore security across the country. Imagine that the leader of that coalition had also been a victim of U.S. aggression and had withstood withering attacks on its currency, its markets, and its primary source of revenue. Imagine this country, Russia, had seen its economy thrust into recession after punitive sanctions had been imposed for resisting Washington's efforts to encircle it with military bases and to topple Moscow-friendly governments on its western flank. Having felt the full-force of Uncle Sam's hybrid war, Russia still decided to defend France, although at great risk to itself. Russia's leaders realized that if Washington's model of using Sunni militants to remove Hollande succeeded, then that same model would be used in Lebanon, Iran and eventually Russia. So the Kremlin drew a red line around France and decided that it would do whatever was necessary to roll back the terrorist onslaught, to reestablish the sovereign independence of the state, and to stop the U.S. from achieving its dystopian dream of a unipolar world order.

After months of ferocious combat, the Russian-led coalition had made significant gains, notably the liberation of a critical airbase that had been held by al Qaida-linked forces for more than two years. And while it began to look like the U.S. scheme to topple Hollande had failed, Washington showed no sign of relenting in its quest to remove the French president or to eventually partition France according to its original plan. Washington remains as determined as ever to continue its crusade despite the setbacks in France. U.S. foreign policy doesn't change because of temporary battlefield failures. Adjustments are made, and the drive to dominate resumes. Even so, the conflict in France represents the most significant political development since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The make-shift Russian-led coalition has rolled a log in front U.S. ambitions to rule the world through force of arms. One can only hope that the resistance grows and flourishes. **CP**

# Agents of Apartheid

## RUTH FIRST AND THE FBI'S HISTORICAL ROLE OF ENFORCING INEQUALITY

By David Price

A few years ago I filed Freedom of Information Act requests for FBI, CIA, and US State Department files held on the murdered anti-apartheid activist, Ruth First. My interest in Ruth First was initially raised because so much of the research she did for her activist writings was based on anthropological forms of participant observations. She researched her books and articles by living amongst the people she wrote about, and her analysis brought the sort of bottom-up perspectives gifted ethnographers strive to produce. Some of her approach appears to have come from her personality, but some of it also came from her academic training at the University of the Witwatersrand in the 1940s, which included anthropology courses; and she later wrote about the formative impact on her life of doing field research for her books and articles documenting the brutalities of her Apartheid.

Ruth First was born in Johannesburg in 1925, to immigrants Tilly and Julius First, whose socialist political orientation shaped her early critique of apartheid. As a university student, Ruth First's exposure to sociological critiques of power relations and anthropological methods of bottom-up inquiry shaped elements of her later work. She joined the Communist Party and helped form an activist group known as the Federation of Progressive Students, which challenged the basic assumptions of apartheid. She worked as a social worker, labor union organizer, taught in black schools, and learned the craft of writing reporting for various newspapers including the Communist Party's Johannesburg paper *The Guardian*. Though *The Guardian* was banned in 1951, she created new journalistic outlets to publish important series of articles showing South Africans and the world the realities of apartheid. Her investigative journalism often involved simple, but dangerous, through stints of fieldwork observation she spent significant stretches time in rural settings, documenting the daily degradations of life in South Africa. She also chronicled problems facing the African National Congress (ANC).

As the leadership of the ANC came under increasing attack by the South African government, her husband, Joe Slovo, was imprisoned and charged with treason in 1952. Despite such risks, Ruth continued to publish important investigative pieces, and during 1961 she conducted extensive fieldwork for her book, *South West Africa*, which combined journalistic, ethnographic and historical research to document the evils of settler colonialism. She was arrested in August 1963, two

months after the arrest of Nelson Mandela and other ANC leadership. She was held in solitary confinement for 117 days under South Africa's 90 day detention act, after her release, she lived in England and elsewhere, fighting apartheid in exile for the rest of her life. In 1977 she became the Director of Research at the Center for African Studies in Mozambique, where she continued to write and she became a focal point for international critiques of apartheid, until she was assassinated by a mail bomb sent to her by South African government operatives on August 17, 1982.

In 2007, former Special Branch and South African Bureau for State Security (BOSS) agent, Petrus Swanepoel, self-published a remarkable memoir, *Really Inside Boss*, which details South Africa's extensive surveillance and harassment protocols and it sheds important light on how the state security apparatus focused on activist writers like First. It also details some of the ways that the CIA and other security agencies interfaced with apartheid. One section Swanepoel's book describe his security force's clumsy efforts to follow Ruth First while she did conducted interviews for her 1963 book *South West Africa*.

Swanepoel described how one morning in Windhoek he became aware of Ruth First, who he described as "a strange woman in town, or rather a woman who was acting strangely"—asking locals political questions. He followed her as she visited "newspapers, the archives, the Administration Buildings and the very liberal American, Robert Mize, who was bishop of the Anglican Church in Windhoek [South West Africa; which became Namibia in 1990]. In fact, Robert Mize's house was her office. She lived in the Stadrt Windhoek Hotel, but when she was not out visiting, asking questions and giving us the jitters, she was at the bishop's house, doing God knows what." BOSS assigned three local detectives to follow First, but she spotted and ditched them. Later, with help from some local residents, BOSS operatives followed her. At one point Swanepoel himself followed her to her hotel, where he pretended to nonchalantly read a newspaper in the lobby until she confronted him, and asked him what "do you think you're doing?" He sheepishly replied, "I suppose you might say I'm trying to follow you." When she asked him why he was following her, Swanepoel told her it was because she was a well-known communist working on a book. She admitted she was working on a book, but she assured him her work had nothing to do with the Communist Party, then asking, "so will you and your men kindly stop making fools of yourselves and embarrassing me?"

Swanepoel replied that he "could not promise anything, but if she gave me her word that she was not doing 'communist work,' we would try to be more discreet. 'Well I've already told you that what I am doing has nothing to do with communism, with communists or with the Soviet Union.' (And she was right)."

Years later when he read her account of his bungled surveil-

lance in her book, *South West Africa*, Swanepoel was relieved that First had not identified him by name as she mocked his efforts, writing:

“The detectives on duty that first week-end wore shorts and rugby socks, and childish smiles on their faces as, in the prowling police car, they outdistanced me, the footslogger, on the way to an appointment. In the beginning there were two, later four, and even five and six on duty, working in pairs, padding along the pavement six paces behind me, or on the opposite side of the road, sitting at the next table of the open-air coffee house. There was, this time, no midnight thump on the door. On the contrary, there was even an uncomfortable air worn by the more intelligent of the detectives, as it became obvious that talks to White town councilors and Herero Chiefs, businessmen and administration servants, with walks down main streets and to historical monuments, constituted a normal enough programme for a visiting journalist.

But the scrutiny never faltered: the trail to the dry-cleaner and the shoemaker, the skulking next to the telephone booth, both ends of the road and every exit of the hotel patrolled, detectives following me to the airport, to the post office to buy stamps, watching me at breakfast, interviewing people I had seen—“What does she want from you?”

Rather than frightening away prospective local interviewees, the Special Branch’s obvious surveillance had the opposite impact. First observed that while some whites became reticent to talk to her because of the surveillance, the “Africans were bursting to talk” showing solidarity with her and willingness to share their story with one taking such risks.

Swanepoel’s also wrote, that unbeknownst to First, the publication of her book, *South West Africa*, was indirectly subsidized with CIA funds. This was because the Penguin African Libraries series that published the book received funds from the Congress for Cultural Freedom; which was exposed as a CIA front in 1966, three years after *South West Africa* was published. If true, this reflects the 1960s CIA’s desire to use funding to establish links (even ironic links) to a broad range of individuals and groups, not on the work First produced. Agent Swanepoel also described discovering that another later revealed CIA front, the Farfield Foundation, financed the *Cultural Events in Africa* newsletter, an African news transcription service, and travel in Africa for anthropologists and other academics. Given the extent of the CIA’s covert funding of foundations and publishing projects, the funding of work countering regimes backed by the CIA was not unusual in this period and stands as marker of the breadth of CIA infiltration than it detracts from First’s work.

The documents released to me by the FBI indicate the American government maintained an interest in Ruth First’s political work, and expressed concerns, and increased surveillance as her activism and writings became increasingly well-known and her work brought her into contact with Americans. The responses to my FOIA requests for records

on First were similar to those I’ve received for other requests: State claimed it had no records, the CIA used exemption claims to avoid meaningfully responding, and the FBI reported that it had relevant records that originated at an “other governmental agency”—a designation that often involves the CIA. Almost two years after receiving this initial response, this still unidentified “other agency” released these records to the FBI, who forwarded partially redacted versions of these files to me. The documents released on Ruth First are a mix of reports and memos originating at the FBI and at other, unidentified, governmental agencies—most likely the State Department and CIA. Backchannel intelligence sharing between the CIA and South African intelligence services is well documented. The CIA provided intelligence to the South African government for decades, including direct intelligence used in the capture of Nelson Mandela, and this relationship between the CIA and South Africa continued even after US sanctions against Pretoria were adopted as US federal law in 1986.

The first series of partially redacted FBI documents originated from March and April 1955. These included a redacted “registered airmail” letter from J. Edgar Hoover to an individual, only identified in the un-redacted portions of the file as “My dear Commissioner.” The first seven lines of the letter are completely redacted, but portions of Hoover’s released response suggest the FBI was responding to a request for information from Bureau files on Ruth First. An internal FBI note typed at the bottom of this document reads: “NOTE: Classified Secret to conform with incoming. [FBI files] reflect First is an active Communist in South Africa but no indication she has ever been in U.S., or in contact with anyone in U.S. Internal Security Section unable to identify P.T.I. on basis info furnished.”

The FBI’s interest in Ruth First from half a world away, is one indication just how much activism matters. Hoover’s concerns about First were multiple. The Bureau’s history of racism and discrimination is well documented; Hoover’s agents routinely investigated and harassed activists for racial equality as Communists, regardless of whether they were or not; that Ruth First was a Communist and that her writings and activism could impact American activists for racial equality increased Hoover’s concerns. While her communist affiliation was enough to garner the FBI’s attentions, the FBI’s dossier shows the Bureau more concerned with the possibility that she would raise awareness of the brutalities of apartheid than it was she might recruit communists while visiting the U.S., or corresponding with Americans.

During the early to mid-Twentieth Century, the FBI played a significant role limiting what foreign ideas the American public should be exposed to by international visitors. For decades the FBI worked in tandem with the anti-communist head of the State Department’s Passport Division, Ruth Shipley, who for played a crucial role in deciding which

Americans could travel abroad. Through such means, the FBI regulated American's travel abroad, and who could travel to, or live within the United States.

A quarter century ago, Tim Weiner wrote an investigative series in the Philadelphia Inquirer disclosing that the FBI and INS maintained a blacklist of over 367,000 people barred entry to the United States. Weiner found that ninety-six percent of those names were tacked onto the list for ideological reasons," and many of the names were writers or activists. That the FBI felt threatened by Ruth First's work is one measure of the impact of her work. In the pages of *CounterPunch* I've published several pieces using FBI and CIA file show how the FBI worked with the INS to try and secretly keep radical writers like Alexander Cockburn and Andre Gunder Frank out of the country. With context, Hoover's correspondence about First can be seen as part of an ongoing campaign to limit American's contact with radical voices.

Four months after J. Edgar Hoover's initial memo, he again wrote his "Dear Commissioner" passing along information on Ruth First gathered from the FBI's New York Office. This partially redacted document included references to an FBI file on the "Infiltration of United Nations by Subversive American Citizens, Internal Security, Racial"—reflecting the FBI longstanding claim that American employees within the UN adopting anti-colonialist or anti-racist positions were communists. New York City FBI agents sent Hoover a September 25, 1949 article published in the Communist Party's newspaper, *The Worker*, written by Ruth First on the "African Slave Market." Hoover forwarded this, and other redacted information expressing his "desire to cooperate in all matters of mutual interest." Hoover was not concerned about the revelations in First's article that South African labor markets

were effectively a form of modern slavery, his concerns that her anti-racist views could damage the American status quo. Another SECRET FBI memo from this period had the subject headings: "RUTH FIRST, aka: Mrs. RUTH SLOVO, POLICE COOPERATION, FOREIGN MISCELLANEOUS" and included inquiries pertaining to someone [redacted] linked to the Press Trust of India, apparently living in New York City, and an American economist known to her who had taught in Russia; both of whom had links to Ruth First.



RUTH FIRST IN PRISON.

Ruth First's FBI file indicates the FBI received several telegrams pertaining to her in mid-December 1970 relating to concerns within the FBI and other agencies that she would be traveling to the United States. One National Security Council staff member from this period described her "as a communist and the wife of a member of the Communist Party of South Africa," living in London in exile from South Africa, and reported that she planned on visiting the United States to appear on a National Education Television (NET) "discussion-type program" as part of a television series

on South Africa. The FBI expressed concerns that she would bring her critique to American audiences. FBI investigations revealed that the program was the Boston based program, *The Advocates*, produced by Millie Teichols. The FBI learned that Ruth First had applied for a visa. Notes in her file the FBI destroyed further FBI records from this period.

First does not appear to have been on *The Advocates*, but did attend the National Youth Conference in St. Louis, Missouri in 1971, but the FBI continues to show concerns that she might come to the U.S. A March 1971 FBI memo summarized biographical info on Ruth First, focusing on her being Jewish and married to Communist Joseph Slovo, studied social work and worked in the offices of the Communist Party in Johannesburg until the party was banned, then working

as a journalist for The Guardian. Following her arrest in 1964, she lived in exile in England, where “she immediately linked with known Communists, joined the [Anti-Apartheid Movement] and attended several known Communist meetings in Rome and Holland.” Further FBI correspondence indicated the FBI monitoring her February 1972 trip to the United States, with further FBI inquiries to the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

The FBI approached the Public Relations Office of WGBH-TV, seeking information on their program, *The Advocates*, and on First. The FBI learned that *The Advocates* received grants from the Ford Foundation and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting; the program’s format was described as “a pair of skilled spokesmen present strong cases for each side under the guidance of a well-informed moderator. Each advocate uses a full range of media to make the most powerful persuasive, and dramatic case. He may incorporate actual evidence, expert witnesses, documentary films, and even live dramatization of it makes a point most effectively.” The FBI appeared concerned about a format allowing unfiltered radical views. The FBI reported that Ruth First had not participated in the two previous 1970 programs on South Africa.

The FBI recorded Ruth First’s presence at the Second World Black Power Conference (AKA International Conference on racism and War. Her FBI file indicates another U.S. governmental agency generated reports, with withheld pages, during this period. A string of FBI memos from the Political Liaison Section of the American Embassy, London pertaining to First’s Spring of 1974 application for a U.S. non-immigrant visa application. One memo reports FBI interviews with someone who had “noting to add to Mrs. Slovo’s admission of membership in the Young Communist League in South Africa from 1943 to 1946 and the Communist Party of South Africa from 1946 to 1950.” This non-immigrant visa application led the FBI to look into their existing records, finding reports on a talk she presented at the University of Denver on May Day 1974.

On August 18, 1982, Ruth First was killed by a mail bomb in Maputo, Mozambique. The bomb arrived as she was organizing an international UNESCO sponsored academic conference in Maputo bringing Western academics to discuss the problems of Apartheid and neocolonial Africa. Her FBI file contains an August 20, 1982 teletype report titled “Allegations Of U.S. Link In First Killing” (the headline of a Rand Daily Mail wire news story) which largely consists of wire service accounts detailing published news stories on her assassination, including news speculations that the mail bomb had been delivered to her inside a package sent from the USAID funded South Africa Development Information/Documentation Exchange (SADEX). News reports in her FBI file quoted the Portuguese News Agency as reporting “that despite the alleged SADEX address, Mozambican authorities were ‘not reduced in the conviction that South Africa’s Secret

Service was entirely responsible for the killing.’ It quoted an unidentified sources as saying the possibility could not be excluded that South African agents used SADEX mailing service to embarrass the U.S. government.”

A decade and a half later, in testimony given to South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission South African agent provocateur, Craig Williamson, admitted to ordering the assassination of Ruth First because her activism threatened the security of the South African state. Williamson, a one-time Major in the South African police force, in 1970 infiltrated the African National Congress (ANC) by using contacts at the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF) of Geneva, connections which he used to fund South African students—who he would “befriend” and use as unwitting intelligence sources for the South African war on the ANC. He used the IUEF to fund the establishment of the South African News Agency, which spied on the ANC while spreading anti-ANC propaganda. In 2000, the Amnesty Committee of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission granted amnesty to Craig Williamson and Roger Raven for their roles in the murder of Ruth First. The Commission found that they had received sanctions from the minister of police for the murder as part of a campaign to destabilize the African National Congress, and therefore, qualified for amnesty.

In South Africa and internationally, there remains some ambivalence surrounding the outcomes of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings. There’s ample research showing that the process helped the country move forward in ways that avoided a tide of what seemed to be an otherwise inevitable bloodbath of retribution. Yet, the substitution of the drama of admission and contrition without punishment, and the formal granting of broad immunity for the confessed murders and lesser crimes committed over decades of white rule leaves open questions of justice. Still, in principle, the truth and reconciliation process was a positive development, needed for South Africa to move forward. I know this on a gut level, and have read enough academic analysis of the difficult but positive outcomes of this process to understand this is a viable route for post-revolutionary justice. While I intellectually understand this, something hit me hard when I was researching online, looking up news reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing that granted amnesty to Ruth First’s confessed killers. I found a report in the New Zealand press detailing the amnesty for her killers, but it was a small addition to the end of the account that I found myself returning to in my thoughts.

After describing the commission’s decision to grant amnesty to Williamson and Raven, Ruth First’s assassins, the story described the outcome of another individual coming before the commission. The commission decided to not grant immunity to another security police operative, Michael Bellingan, for the theft of checks in the mail of a union group he monitored, and for the murder of his wife—who he

claimed was going to leak information of his intelligence operations to the ANC, and that “he decided to kill her because she was a security risk.”

I understand the logic of the commission’s decision to not grant immunity to this other killer, having concluded this murder was likely not carried out as an act of political violence of the sort protected by the commission. Yet, this contrast in a single, simple, news story bares open the contradictions of a system setting free admitted state agents of oppression, whose acts prolonged the living hell of a national majority, while simple murderers and check-thieves were tried as criminals.

During two decades of archival and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) research into the lives writers, anthropologists, and range of activists working in social movements struggling for social change, I’ve found some identifiable recurrent patterns within the records of surveillance and efforts to stifle various democratic movements for social change. While different regimes develop different tactics or surveillance practices, with some agencies very openly monitoring and attempting to frighten activists in ways that marginalize them as dissidents and mark them as so socially contaminated that they are removed from the normal boundaries of societies, while other surveillance strategies are less obvious and remain unknown at the time.

The released portions of Ruth First’s FBI file shown American governmental agencies maintaining records on her political activities, and upon receiving word that she might be coming to the United States to be interviewed by public media, or to participate in academic conferences, the FBI passed along their information to other unidentified governmental agencies—who appear most likely to include the CIA and Department of State.

Historian Alan Wieder argues that the South African government chose to kill her during a conference gathering activist scholars focusing on the crimes of the South African government, “because they knew that ideas are important” and because she had organized this conference challenging the legitimacy of the South African state. Journalist Joseph Hanlon, argued that her murder was meant to scare off academics, telling them “they should not attend conferences like the one Ruth organized, and they should not support or practice research or teaching that calls for socialist transformations.” These FBI records affirm that activism matters, and the FBI’s concerns over Ruth First’s contact with academics and the general public is one measure of the power and significance of her work. **CP**

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## THE FOUNDING FATHER OF WHITE SUPREMACY MR. JEFFERSON’S FINAL SOLUTION

By Ned and Constance Sublette

As peace negotiations got under way at the end of the War of Independence, some French aristocrats remained in North America, where they were the toast of society. The Marquis de Chastellux, a major general at Yorktown under Rochambeau, took Jefferson up on his invitation to visit him at Monticello in April 1782, where Jefferson was living in what he said was retirement from public affairs. Chastellux remained at Monticello for four days with his entourage of ten, six of whom were servants.

Martha Wayles Jefferson had to provide hospitality for them. She had been pregnant almost constantly for ten years, throughout the war, and though she was, in Chastellux’s description, “amiable,” she was in the habit of retiring early and seems to have been depressed, as she was, in Chastellux’s words, “expecting her confinement at any moment” in the pregnancy that would finally kill her. Chastellux and Jefferson stayed up after Mrs. Jefferson had gone to bed, talking about, among other topics, their mutual enthusiasm for the poems of Ossian.

Martha gave birth in May for the last time, and died in September. Jefferson, who attended her for four months continually as she declined, was prostrate with grief on his wife’s death. This has provided a dramatic scene in many Jefferson biographies, though his obvious agency in her repeated pregnancies has often gone circumspectly unmentioned.

There is no clue in Jefferson’s papers that he saw himself as playing any part in his wife’s death through continual impregnation in the face of her continually weakening condition, despite Jefferson’s clear awareness of the mechanics of sexual reproduction. Nor was Jefferson unaware of what we now call family planning, as per his description of Native American women in Notes on the State of Virginia: “The women very frequently attending the men in their parties of war and of hunting, child-bearing becomes extremely inconvenient to them. It is said, therefore, that they have learnt the practice of procuring abortion by the use of some vegetable; and that it even extends to prevent conception for a considerable time after.”

On her deathbed, according to the later recollections of the enslaved women who attended her while dying, she exacted an oath from Jefferson never to remarry, which would have compromised their daughters’ inheritance. But we don’t know what Martha Wayles Jefferson thought, confined to die in her

bed on that isolated mountaintop. Jefferson, so conscious of his own immortality through writing, burned her letters, thus erasing her voice from historical memory. We have not even a picture of her.

The forlorn widower returned to public life, accepting the appointment to serve the presidentless, moneyless American Confederation as U.S. Minister Plenipotentiary—basically, the trade representative—to France in 1784, where he remained until 1789. John Adams, who unlike Jefferson was an experienced diplomat, performed the same function in London. Chastellux, who helped get Jefferson's daughter Patsy into a good school in Paris, published in 1786 an account of his travels that helped promote the Jefferson mystique in France—an

early flash of the enduring legend of the mountaintop sage of Monticello. In it, he noted the abject condition of Virginia's poor whites and connected it to the Virginia slaveowners' desire for "increase":

Humanity  
[suffers]  
from the  
state of  
poverty in  
which a great

number of white people live in Virginia. It is in this state, for the first time since I crossed the sea, that I have seen poor people. For, among these rich plantations where the Negro alone is wretched, one often finds miserable huts inhabited by whites, whose wane looks and ragged garments bespeak poverty. . . I have since learned that all these useless lands and those immense estates, with which Virginia is still covered, have their proprietors. Nothing is more common than to see them possessing five or six thousand acres of land, but exploiting only as much of it as their Negroes can cultivate. Yet they will not give away or even sell the smallest portion of it, because they are attached to their possessions and always hope to eventually increase the numbers of their Negroes.

In Paris, where printing was much cheaper than in America, Jefferson in 1785 privately published *Notes on the State of Virginia*, first drafted in 1781 as an answer on the part of Virginia to a questionnaire put to the various states by

François de Barbé-Marbois, the secretary of the French legation to the United States. The only book Jefferson ever published, it was intended to pitch the wonders of his state to the wealthy French. Jefferson printed two hundred copies privately and semi-anonymously (the author was "M. [Monsieur] J\*\*\*") for individual distribution in elite circles only. When he sent one to James Madison, he wrote, perhaps disingenuously, "I shall only send over a very few copies to particular friends in confidence and burn the rest . . . in no case do I propose to admit them to go to the public at large." But they did.

A French bookseller who acquired a copy after its owner unexpectedly died jobbed it out to a "hiringling translator" and published it in French in 1786. The book was favorably


reviewed in the *Mercure de France*, who proclaimed the barely anonymous author a philosophe. Jefferson, who disliked the translation, then allowed his English version to be published in London the following year.

In composing what amounted to an intellectual investment prospectus for the state he represented, Jefferson faced the problem of having to explain to the

French why the enslaved of his country would never be freed. Most of his friends in France were abolitionists who expected the postrevolutionary United States to bring slavery to an end. But Jefferson's Virginia countrymen overwhelmingly had no intention of ever freeing their slaves and thus losing their property, and were touchy about the issue.

Jefferson did not make the true argument, which would have been that he and all his relatives, friends, and constituents would be paupers without slaves. Rather, his justification was that the "negro" was inferior—something he seems to have truly believed—and moreover dangerous, and therefore had to be kept in a state of slavery for everybody's good. This problem, as Jefferson insisted throughout his career, was due not to the greed of the colonists themselves, but to British insistence on imposing slavery on the colonies in the first place, leaving the wealthy of Virginia no choice, so went the story, but to soldier on with their white man's burden of ever-increasing human property.

It's not an oversimplification to say that Jefferson despised



**R**UN away from the subscriber  
in *Albemarle*, a Mulatto slave called *Sandy*,  
about 35 years of age, his stature is rather low,  
inclining to corpulence, and his complexion light;  
he is a shoemaker by trade, in which he uses his  
left hand principally, can do coarse carpenters  
work, and is something of a horse jockey; he is  
greatly addicted to drink, and when drunk is insol-  
ent and disorderly, in his conversation he swears  
much, and in his behaviour is artful and knavish. He took with  
him a white horse, much scarred with traces, of which it is ex-  
pected he will endeavour to dispose; he also carried his shoe-  
makers tools, and will probably endeavour to get employment that  
way. Whoever conveys the said slave to me, in *Albemarle*, shall  
have 40 s. reward, if taken up within the county, 4 l. if elsewhere  
within the colony, and 10 l. if in any other colony. from  
**THOMAS JEFFERSON.**

RUNAWAY SLAVE AD PLACED BY THOMAS JEFFERSON.



blackness. The most inflammatory quote from Notes has been frequently reprinted in recent years after being largely overlooked, and we too will include it for purposes of clarity, with apologies to the reader:

[T]he difference [of “the negro”] is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of color in the one preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil of black which covers the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgment in favor of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan for the black woman over those of his own species.

With his evocation of “the Oranootan” copulating with black women, Jefferson provides an early instance of the fundamental racist trope that Felipe Smith in *American Body Politics* calls the ape libel. Because “negroes” were an inferior “race,” Jefferson argued, they could not be freed. To do so would require their immediate deportation, he insisted, in order to avoid the amalgamation that would stain the purity he detected in the white “race”:

This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people . . . The [Roman] slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his master. But with us [in America] a second is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture.

The notion of “racism” did not yet exist; the French term *racisme* was coined in the late nineteenth century. But if this call to maintain purity of blood is not racism, the word has no meaning. James Madison, who never freed any of his slaves in life or death, was a racist of the same stripe, who believed abolition impossible because of “the physical peculiarities of those held in bondage, which preclude their incorporation with the white population.”

With *Notes of the State of Virginia*, Jefferson definitively established himself as a founding theorist of white supremacy in America, laying out in condensed form key points of racialized thought that pro-slavery writers would consistently reaffirm and that would echo in the cant of modern-day white supremacists. He linked his ideas to a deportation scheme that was, in effect, a foolproof way to avoid ending slavery, though he didn’t package it like that. Quite the contrary: he pitched his impossible project as the only way slavery could

be ended.

Jefferson insisted that manumission required the immediate deportation of the emancipated. This would be necessary, Jefferson explained, in order to avoid “convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.” To avoid this conjectured race war of annihilation, emancipation required what is now called ethnic cleansing: Jefferson stamped that demand with a founder’s seal and a philosopher’s sigh.

The reviewer for the *Mercure* waxed enthusiastic about Jefferson’s solution for the problem of slavery. That Jefferson would consider emancipation under any circumstances and would speak badly of slavery, even in abstract terms, was enough to trip the hair-trigger anger of many American slaveowners, which is perhaps why he had wanted to keep the book off the general market. It cost him some political support, especially in South Carolina.

Jefferson’s plan was to deport flotillas of black youth, in wave after wave, year after year. He would “by degrees, send the whole of that population from among us,” until the “race” itself was gone, and simultaneously replace them with white immigrant laborers—a plan for total removal that did not acknowledge the presence in the United States of free people of color. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he proposed:

...they should continue with their parents to a certain age, then be brought up, at the public expence, to tillage, arts or sciences, according to their geniusses, till the females should be eighteen, and the males twenty-one years of age, when they should be colonized to such place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper, sending them out with arms, implements of household and of the handicraft arts, feeds, pairs of the useful domestic animals, &c. to declare them a free and independant people, and extend to them our alliance and protection, till they shall have acquired strength; and to send vessels at the same time to other parts of the world for an equal number of white inhabitants; to induce whom to migrate hither, proper encouragements were to be proposed.

To better understand what Jefferson had in mind, we flash forward to a February 4, 1824, letter he wrote to Jared Sparks, the Unitarian minister who published the *North American Review*. In it, the eighty-year-old Jefferson outlined a scheme for accomplishing the “colonization” that would rid the United States of its proliferating African Americans once and for all, before they got any more numerous, and proposed a timetable for accomplishing the expulsion of about a sixth of the nation’s population:

...there are in the US. a million and a half of people of colour in slavery. to send off the whole of these at once nobody conceives to be practicable for us, or expedient

for them. let us take 25. years for it's accomplishment, within which time they will be doubled. their estimated value as property, in the first place, (for actual property has been lawfully vested in that form, and who can lawfully take it from the possessors?) at an average of 200.D. each, young and old, would amount to 600. millions of Dollars, which must be paid or lost by somebody.

Jefferson went on to propose the creation of a fund, financed by the sale of western lands, for purchasing infants on the cheap, raising them as wards of the state, and deporting them—to “St. Domingo” (he did not ever use the name “Haiti”). But, he suggested:

...the estimated value of the new-born infant is so low, (say 12 ½ Dollars) that it would probably be yielded by the owner gratis, and would thus reduce the 600,000,000 millions [sic] of Dollars, the first head of expence, to 37 millions & a half. leaving only the expense of nourishment while with the mother, and of transportation.

Jefferson calculated that though it would take twenty-five years to accomplish the entire project, by the last nine years, the number of “breeders” (he used the word) would have diminished considerably. He imagined a fleet of fifty vessels recursively sailing away full of black youth and coming back empty for more until every last one of them was gone:

...suppose the whole annual increase to be of 60 thousand effective births, 50 vessels of 400 tons burthen each, constantly employed in that short run, would carry off the increase of every year, & the old stock would die off in the ordinary course of nature, lessening from the commencement until it's final disappearance. in this way no violation of private right is proposed.

The “private right” Jefferson was talking about was, of course, that of all those men who were created equal. Black people did not have “private right.” But separating them from their children was not all that bad, thought Jefferson, because, as he explained in Notes:

Their griefs are transient. Those numberless afflictions, which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy or in wrath, are less felt, and sooner forgotten with them. In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection.

This was the classic rationalization for minimizing the damage caused by systematically destroying African American families, and it was a libel: being simple creatures, they'd get over it. Accordingly, Jefferson concluded his letter to Sparks: “The separation of infants from their mothers . . . would produce some scruples of humanity. But this would be

straining at a gnat, and swallowing a camel.” Were the United States not purged of its black people soon, Jefferson warned Sparks, the demographics guaranteed armed slave resistance: “A million and a half are within [slaveowners'] control; but six millions, (which a majority of those now living will see them attain,) and one million of these fighting men, will say, ‘we will not go.’ ” This did in fact happen, though the numbers were different: there were four million enslaved African Americans in 1860, not six million; and there were officially 186,097 soldiers and sailors who fought in the US Army and Navy against the Confederacy, in effect saying, “we will not go.”

Confiscate all African American children from their mothers and ship them off to thrive or die: that was Jefferson's vision of a final solution for the Negro problem. Presumably such a massive expulsion as Jefferson contemplated would have required a fully totalitarian state apparatus to implement, and would have resulted in the death of many of the deported; mortality rates were high in the few miserable “colonization” attempts that were made.

Jefferson had not suddenly gone mad in his dotage. This had been his idea all along, as he explained to Sparks: “This was the result of my reflections on the subject five and forty years ago, and I have never yet been able to conceive any other practicable plan. It was sketched in the Notes on Virginia, under the fourteenth query.” If this kind of massive deportation couldn't be achieved, he insisted throughout his career, emancipation could not take place. This conviction would be strengthened by the Haitian Revolution that erupted in 1791 and by Gabriel's unenacted rebellion of 1800, and would be taken as gospel by pro-slavery Southerners. It would spur the founding of the American Colonization Society, whose ostensible mission was to deport all free people of color.

Having outlined the “physical” reason for exile in Notes, Jefferson proceeded to the “moral” reason, pursuant to which he described a long list of inferiorities attributed to “them,” which we will not quote here. A mere seventy-five years later, as Southern states left the Union, pro-secessionist radicals argued to their unconvinced countrymen some of the same points as Jefferson's: the “negro” was inferior and not the equal of whites; emancipation would result in a race war to the death, or in the purity of the white race being sullied by the horror of mongrelization; and slaveowners' property rights must be respected. **CP**

This essay is adapted from Chapter 21 of *The American Slave Coast: A History of the Slave-Breeding Industry* (Lawrence Hill Books).

**NED SUBLETTE** IS THE AUTHOR OF *CUBA AND ITS MUSIC* AND *THE WORLD THAT MADE NEW ORLEANS*.

**CONSTANCE SUBLETTE** IS THE AUTHOR OF THREE NOVELS AND EDITED THE ANTHOLOGY *NOT OF WOMAN BORN*.

# Financial Coercion From North Korea to Iran

## The Treasury's Bomb

By Peter Lee

On June 2, 2014, pundits and bureaucrats gathered in Washington to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Treasury Department's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence (OTFI), and its successful "weaponization" of the Treasury Department's regulatory mechanism to target, not malefactors in Iran, North Korea, Sudan, etc., but their enablers in offshore banks.

The sanctioneers were on the cusp of one of their greatest achievements, a titanic judgment of \$8.9 billion dollars against the French bank BNP Paribas for shuffling around funds of sanctioned regimes in Sudan, Iran, and Cuba, which was announced on June 19 of that year.

Triumph was in the air. A host of political luminaries—Jack Lew, Treasury Department Secretary, ex-NSA chief Keith Alexander, White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, former National Security Advisors Tom Donilon & Stephen Hadley, and Jane Harman (who used to be the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee), assisted by celebrity moderators David Sanger of the *New York Times* and Andrea Mitchell of NBC—gathered at the Center for Strategic and International Studies to discuss further and more perfect application of the OTFI weapon against Iran.

They also took a nostalgic look back at the humble origins of the office in a forgotten campaign against a tiny bank in Macao, Banco Delta Asia (BDA).

They came not to praise the BDA campaign, but to bury it...in bullshit.

Stephen Hadley, George W. Bush's National Security Advisor, told the audience, "In 2005...in Banco Delta Asia...we cut North Korea out of the financial system...ultimately it led them to come in 2007 to negotiate a follow-on agreement which in the end of the day was never implemented."

This "BDA sanctions worked" line was echoed by the *Washington Post's* Anna Fifield:

By sanctioning Banco Delta Asia, a small bank based in Macau that handled North Korean money, the United States effectively cut off North Korea's access to the international financial system. That brought Pyongyang back to the nuclear negotiating table.

This version of events only works if time travels backwards, something that modern physics quite hasn't worked out yet. And it's a version that obscures an understanding of profound flaws in the Bush era OTFI regime, and how President Obama

addressed them in his Iran campaign.

What actually happened was this:

In September 2005, the U.S. Treasury Department issued a notification designating Banco Delta Asia, a mom-and-pop outfit in Macau that did business with various North Korean entities, as a "bank of money laundering concern", in effect telling international banks not to do business with BDA pending completion of an investigation. Result: a run on the bank and its takeover by Macanese regulators.

North Korea, which had some \$25 million in government and other deposits in the bank frozen as a result, denounced this action as a U.S. sanction, and demanded it be rolled back. When the U.S. refused, the North Koreans boycotted the nuclear negotiations for 14 months.

In October 2006, North Korea detonated its first nuclear device.

The United States and North Korea resumed talks in February 2007 and the U.S. agreed to unfreeze the funds. Talks eventually resumed at the same place they were in 2005—except North Korea had the bomb.

That's not what success looks like.

Misremembering BDA was necessary because it was not only a spectacular fiasco, but because it was the centerpiece of a concerted hardliner campaign of diplomatic sabotage and insubordination. For several months, the world's only superpower was at war with itself as hardliners and moderates battled over the implementation of President Bush's North Korea policy.

The battle continues today as the hardliners attempt to spin success into failure and insubordination into obedience.

In the early years of the George W. Bush administration, foreign policy became dominated by advocates of "counter-proliferation" i.e. active measures to destroy hostile WMD states. As Vice President Cheney put it, "We don't negotiate with evil. We defeat it."

And North Korea, as a charter member of the Axis of Evil, became a focus of hardliner ambitions.

First, the "Agreed Framework" program of diplomatic engagement with North Korea on its nuclear issues, inherited from the Clinton administration and detested by the hardliners, was to be terminated.

Second, a unilateral program of diplomatic isolation and financial strangulation would be implemented in the pursuit of regime change, neutralizing the conciliatory outreach to North Korea championed by the president of the Republic of Korea at the time, Roh Moo-hyun.

The ROK's flow of financial aid to engage and appease Pyongyang infuriated the hardliners, with good reason. In 2000, in order to secure a peace summit—and subsequently a Nobel Peace Prize--the president of South Korea, Kim Dae-jung, arranged for \$500 million dollars to be sent to North Korea—via Macau.

One can assume that Kim Jung-il spent that money on his

nuclear deterrent, and not just on cars and cognac for his generals.

The OTFI weapon was central to anti-diplomacy and economic warfare. And it relied on an obscure part of the Patriot Act, Section 311.

Section 311 gave the Treasury Department the authority to cut off banks from the U.S. financial system if it found them to be involved in terrorist financing.

Section 311 rulings were uniquely seductive because they were internal Treasury proceedings: unilateral, devoid of due process, and completely discretionary, a Star Chamber for finance. Foreign banks had no right to a hearing or to confront their accusers; they could only petition. On the grounds of national security, Treasury could provide evidence *in camera* and *ex parte* i.e. secretly, giving the accused no chance to rebut. And the rulings did not even need evidentiary rigor; a mere finding of “concern,” as in the BDA case, was sufficient for Western banks to sever correspondent relationships with any bank that might have a whiff of scandal.

In September 2005 Treasury issued its ruling against BDA. US negotiators refused to include discussion of the issue in their talks with North Korea on the grounds that this was a US domestic regulatory act, not a sanction against North Korea. The North Koreans walked out and the Six Party talks on denuclearization ended.

Subsequently, OTFI officials roamed the earth on the financial warfare front, visiting jurisdictions as diverse as Mongolia and Bulgaria to present dossiers on North Korean misbehavior to local banking officials and threaten their banks with the prospect of sanctions if they took North Korean business.

Given the signal failure of the North Korea counter-proliferation strategy, which actually augmented instead of reduced the world’s supply of nuclear weapons, the architects of the BDA initiative have vociferously claimed that the motive for the BDA designation (and the behind-the-scenes global anti-North Korea campaign) was simple carrot-and-stick diplomacy...and that State, not Treasury, blew it by prematurely throwing aside the OTFI stick.

This is apparently not true.

I had the opportunity to talk with Lawrence Wilkerson, chief of staff to Colin Powell when Powell was Secretary of State. According to Wilkerson, there was indeed a “dual track” (diplomacy plus financial pressure against the North Korean regime under the Illicit Activities Initiative) strategy at first, but it was hijacked by the hardliners once Powell left office at the end of 2004:

*LW:... I believe that once we had gone, John Bolton and others put the IAI to use as a stand-alone policy to attempt to force regime change in Pyongyang by drying up the money with which Kim Jong-il essentially kept his generals happy.*

PL: Was the BDA investigation part of the plan? Was the North Korean walkout in 2005 a contingency you had planned for?

*LW: No. [In President Bush’s second term] other people, John Bolton, Bob Joseph took away the dual track. They lusted after it, got ahold of it [the IAI], went whole hog [to use it to destabilize North Korea].*

Indeed, it is clear that the primary purpose of the Treasury designation was to sabotage US diplomatic engagement with North Korea, both at the outset in 2005, and in the interminable endgame in 2007.

The BDA affair betrays its roots in a culture of regime change. Patriot Act Section 311 was conceived in crude terms as a sledgehammer that US could wield unilaterally. As is the case with many unilateral weapons of the George W. Bush administration, it was wielded neither wisely nor honestly.

Unsurprisingly, the case against BDA turned out to be complete and utter crap.

As the architects of the designation have subsequently admitted, BDA was chosen as a target because it could be safely imploded without doing harm to the global or regional banking system. But the explicit purpose of Patriot Act 311 was to protect U.S. financial system. How to justify a U.S. Treasury Department action against this tiny, distant bank?

The chosen pretext was the infamous “Supernote” canard—the accusation that North Korea was printing perfect, virtually undetectable forgeries of the U.S. \$100 note and depositing them in BDA, and this debasement of the currency represented a threat to the integrity of the U.S. financial system.

The Supernote boondoggle deserves a book to itself, but I can refer readers to the superb reporting of McClatchy’s Kevin Hall on this issue. Suffice it to say, the total amount of Supernotes circulating is miniscule, it is perhaps more probable that they are being counterfeited by the CIA than Pyongyang, and if Pyongyang was printing or buying them and then laundering them, they weren’t depositing them at BDA.

How do we know? Because the only cases of forged notes at BDA had been voluntarily reported to the Macau authorities by BDA itself—in 1994, eleven years before the designation—and since that discovery, BDA had sent all large cash deposits across the bay to be examined by Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank prior to acceptance.

Eventually, the Macanese financial authority, in receipt of an Ernst & Young audit that gave a clean bill of health to BDA on the Supernote issue, defied the US Treasury Department and allowed the bank’s chairman, Stanley Au, to resume control of the bank.

After the North Korean bomb test in October 2006, the hardliners were put on the defensive.

Bush administration North Korea policy had been conceived in a spirit of defiant unilateralism. Therefore, it is not too surprising that, when President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice criss-crossed the globe looking for support for escalating confrontation with North Korea after the test, they found no support for tougher UN sanctions pre-

mised on a “coercive inspections” ploy similar to the one that bedeviled Saddam Hussein just before the invasion.

Far from heeding the Bush call to isolate North Korea, the representatives of the ROK government under President Roh were actually carrying suitcases filled with hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash to the North Korean border at the time to keep the engagement process going...and advertising their activities in the press.

With little international support and politically hammered by a pasting in the November 2006 mid-term elections,



KIM JUNG UN PHOTO: ABC

President Bush yielded to Secretary of State Rice’s recommendation to return to engagement. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill met with North Korean representatives in Berlin, restarted the Six Party Talks, and announced that the BDA funds matter would be “resolved” “within 30 days” of the agreement, i.e. March 14, 2007 as a confidence-building measure.

But it didn’t happen.

Instead, on March 14—the deadline for “resolving” the BDA matter and keeping the ball rolling with the North Koreans--Treasury instead announced its “final rule” (that would wrap up the investigatory process triggered by the preliminary ruling), reaffirming its preliminary finding and declaring that BDA was “a bank of money laundering concern.”

As a result, no banks would touch the BDA money, it stayed in Macau, the United States missed its deadline for un-

freezing the funds, and the North Koreans, in return slow-walked the “tit” (dismantling of its reactor) it had promised for the BDA funds “tat”.

However, the Six Party Talks didn’t break down, to the disappointment, I expect, of the hardliners.

Instead, intense pressure was applied to the hardliners to stop obstructing the BDA funds...and they furiously resisted, coming up with a variety of reasons why the funds could not be returned to North Korea.

The central argument was that the Patriot Act 311 designation was irreversible. Juan Zarante, the first chief of OTFI, reached for the double metaphor to sell this assertion in his book, in *Treasury’s War: the unleashing of a new era of financial warfare*:

What few outside of Treasury understood was that it was impossible to put the genie fully back in the bottle. The Section 311 action had unleashed the private sector to isolate rogue North Korean behavior—like antibodies in the international financial system, rejecting the virus of North Korean contact and business. Our move against BDA had been an act of systematic inoculation, not a singular political act that could be easily reversed. ..That was a lesson Chris Hill and the State Department would learn the hard way. [pp-253-4]

No sale. The BDA rule was a discretionary decision by the Treasury Department—indeed, the discretionary, unilateral character of the designation was central to its appeal to the hardliners—and it could be rescinded.

In discussing the case of a Latvian bank, Treasury announced:

If a financial institution that is the object of a proposed section 311 special measure is determined to no longer be of primary money laundering concern, **we have the authority to withdraw the finding** and to withdraw any related proposal to impose a special measure. [emphasis added]

The same is true for final rules, of the sort Treasury issued on March 14, 2007. Two have been revoked.

Nevertheless, Treasury refused to budge. As Chris Hill and the State Department learned “the hard way.”

When participants involved in the Six Party Talks insisted that a representative of the Treasury Department go to Macau, and then to Beijing, to unblock the funds, he didn't get the job done.

It isn't clear what was said in Asia during the two futile weeks of jaw-jaw, but local reporting indicated that the Treasury Department official in question, Daniel Glaser, the No. 2 at OTFI, may have tried to further impede the release of funds by threatening to escalate the campaign by initiating criminal proceedings against BDA executives for knowingly laundering money (the final rule had posited shoddy controls, not conspiracy).

In any case, Treasury obstruction became the focus of the fury of the participants in the Six Party Talks, including the State Department.

Zarante gave Glaser's side of the story:

Without a clear idea of how American financial power had been used in this case [State Department personnel] found it all too easy to ascribe underhanded bureaucratic, personal, or political motives to Treasury officials...

At last Glaser broke down in tears... he could not be consoled... When Levey heard Glaser's shaking voice and his account of what had happened, he was livid... Secretary Rice then instructed Chris Hill to apologize and fix the mess.

Color me unsurprised at State's assessment of Treasury's motives... or that Glaser's only available riposte was to break down in tears and appeal to his superiors.

Things got even uglier.

Treasury pushed the responsibility for finding a bank willing to handle the funds to State. State, unable to provide a reassuring waiver from Treasury, failed to line up an American bank and twisted in the wind for weeks... and weeks.

The hardliners sought to multiply State's difficulties and kill the deal.

John Bolton accused the State Department of secretly colluding with Kim Jung-il on the return of the funds.

The hardliners' allies in Congress floated a suggestion that State Department officials (i.e., Christopher Hill) might be indicted for money laundering for attempting to arrange the transfer.

In the midst of this ruckus, a classic media moment occurred.

Christopher Hill appeared on NPR's Morning Edition and fielded this solemn question from Steve Inskeep:

"Do you think you have found North Koreans you can look in the eye and trust?" Another moment of media gold, during a State Department press conference on June 5, 2007:

QUESTION: Can we then conclude that using this 311

section of the Patriot Act is like a far more powerful tool than anybody imagined? That it's one that people just can't turn off once you turn it on?

MR. MCCORMACK: It is a powerful tool.

Indeed. At that moment, the US was in default of its undertaking to return the BDA funds by about 25 days, thanks to the gyrations of the hardliners and the Treasury Department.

A flurry of chaff filled the media to obscure the fact that Treasury was sabotaging the BDA resolution: attempts to blame the Macanese, demands that North Korea set up a humanitarian fund regulated by the PRC, proposals that only some of the money should be unfrozen, insistence that the North Koreans should be forced to come to Macau to pick up the deposits in cash...

In the end, in June 2007, a good three months past the originally negotiated deadline, the world's only superpower found a way not to obstruct the remittance of \$25 million dollars from BDA to North Korea—via the Federal Reserve (the only US bank immune to Treasury regulatory penalties and therefore not in need of a waiver) and a Russian bank in Vladivostok.

All in all, a remarkable exercise in defiance against Condoleezza Rice and Christopher Hill by the Treasury Department that is also, since the State Department was acting with the authority of President Bush to negotiate with North Korea, a remarkable piece of insubordination. I suspect Treasury may not have had the cojones to act by itself without high-placed encouragement from the Office of the Vice President and, perhaps, the National Security Advisor.

And the consequences?

Not too bad, for the protagonists. President Obama was much enamored of the Treasury weapon as a tool against Iran and retained the current leadership of OTFI when he entered office in 2009. In fact, other than Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Stuart Levey, the head of OTFI, was the highest retained Bush official in the new order.

Notably, President Obama deployed the OTFI weapon within the context of multilateral diplomacy (remember, he got his Nobel Prize for "non-proliferation", in a rebuke to the Bush's administration's focus on unilateral "counter-proliferation") and tied US actions to UN sanctions, not discretionary interpretations of 311 violations by the Treasury Department.

The OTFI weapon was successfully deployed against European banks dealing with Iran, yielding the big settlement with BNP Paribas and a smaller one, over \$500 million, with Credit Suisse.

Iran finally negotiated a nuclear agreement with the United States *et. al.* Was it brought to its knees by crippling financial sanctions? Or was it driven to exasperation by the exorbitant rents extracted by the PRC thanks to its monopoly on Iran's external financial relations? A bit of both, I suspect.

In Macau, BDA, though permanently barred from US dollar business, is apparently burbling along profitably.

Stuart Levey eventually became chief counsel for HSBC, a bank with more than its share of regulatory concerns. I wonder if they ever showed him the room where they used to vet BDA's greenback deposits.

When we tote up the costs and benefits of OTFI, maybe we can say the United States got the possibility of no bomb in Iran together with the actuality of a real bomb in North Korea.

The final consequence is, of course, China. The PRC was always the ghost at the US sanctions banquet, thanks to its willingness to defy the United States and offer financial recourse to America's enemies.

The architect of the BDA exercise, David Asher, bluntly stated that the purpose of the BDA action was to "kill the chicken to scare the monkeys", especially Bank of China Macau.

A key talking point for OTFI is that the PRC, fearing sanctions against its own banks, put the squeeze on North Korea. In his celebration of OTFI, Juan Zarante makes the somewhat suspect assertion that the PRC supported Treasury in its North Korean jihad [pg. 262].

Not likely. After Treasury issued its final ruling and tried to blow up the deal, the PRC insisted that Treasury representatives come to Asia to clear things up.

On March 21, the PRC Foreign Ministry issued a statement:

In an effort to safeguard the financial stability in the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR), China yesterday demanded the US consult and negotiate with the MSAR government to address the latter's concerns over the issue of Banco Delta Asia (BDA), a Macao-based bank.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao made the remarks at a regular press conference commenting on the frozen capital of North Korea at BDA. ... He urged the US to negotiate with the MSAR government on the issue to maintain Macao's financial and social stability. Spin it whatever way you want. I tend to believe the U.S. still shrinks from the idea of issuing a Section 311 ruling against a major PRC bank.

Zarante's wrap-up of the BDA episode declared: Perhaps the most important lesson was that the Chinese could in fact be moved to follow Treasury's lead and act against their own stated foreign policy and political interests. The predominance of American market dominance and financial power had leap-frogged traditional notions of financial sanctions. It was a lesson the Chinese certainly would not forget. [pg. 259]

True in ways Mr. Zarante perhaps does not fully appreciate. Undoubtedly, the "Chinese" have certainly not "forgotten" their "lesson".

OTFI relies on the fact that global US dollar transactions clear through the Federal Reserve for its legal reach into the vaults of any bank in the world handling US dollars. Over the last decade, the PRC has been working systematically to dis-intermediate the US dollar and the Treasury Department as much as possible from its international financial dealings.

The PRC has concluded bilateral RMB swap arrangements with 28 countries; it has turned the RMB into a convertible currency with trading in Hong Kong and London; it switched its terms of trade with Russia to RMB; and in October of 2017 it debuted its own settlement system, the China International Payment System, so that global partners can do their business in RMB and can clear their transactions quickly and efficiently without touching base in the United States.

The purpose is not to replace the United States as the international reserve currency, in my opinion; it is to provide the PRC and its partners with a parallel global financial network insulated from the US financial sanctions regime.

There's three ways of thinking of the "Treasury bomb".

The first is the North Korea nuke whose birth it midwived.

The second is the precision munitions it loves to deploy against target banks in Europe and Asia.

And the third is the time-delay bomb that may blow up in America's face when the PRC declares itself impervious to US financial coercion, and America's near century-long reign as the world's unquestioned financial hegemon comes to an end.

**CP**

PETER LEE edits China Matters.

## **SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES**

**By Lee Ballinger**

The Patriot Act. The National Security Agency. The prison industrial complex. Most Americans are aware of these actors and how they are stripping them of their rights, their privacy, their ability to function as engaged members of society.

But there are many other thespians in that play. Not necessarily hidden or unknown, but drifting separately on the fringes of the national consciousness, making it difficult to get a full picture of the emerging totalitarianism or to see the breadth of possible alliances bubbling within.

For example, the right to vote, supposedly settled when women and blacks got the franchise, is in danger. As a result of a 2013 lawsuit filed by an Alabama county, the Voting Rights Act has been gutted. On October 6 of this year, Alabama closed drivers license bureaus in 31 of its 67 counties, including every one that is at least 75 per cent black.



Alabama requires a photo ID to vote and now nearly half the state will have problems getting one.

In his 2008 book *Billionaires and Ballot Bandits*, Greg Palast detailed a mostly invisible side of the war against voting in the United States. When Barack Obama ran against John McCain...

- 767,023 provisional ballots were cast and not counted
- 1,451,116 ballots were “spoiled,” not counted
- 488,136 absentee ballots were mailed in but not counted

That’s 2,706,725 votes in the 2008 Presidential election that were not counted. In addition:

- 2,383,587 would-be voters had their registration rejected
- 491,952 voters were registered but were wrongly purged from the rolls
- 320,000 properly registered voters were turned away from the polls because they didn’t have an acceptable ID

In another dangerous attack on voting, the state of Michigan has installed “emergency financial managers” in several cities, including Detroit. This makes the right to vote essentially meaningless. EMFs reign supreme over city councils, school boards, and mayors elected by local voters. On a whim, emergency managers can write up new laws, cancel labor contracts, or sell off public property on the cheap to corporations.

In Benton Harbor, Michigan, the local corporate-friendly EMF has been opposed by a movement led by the Rev. Edward Pinkney. To clear the way for a complete civic takeover by Whirlpool, the city’s most powerful corporation, Pinkney was arrested on charges of changing dates on petitions during a recall election of corporate-backed Mayor James Hightower. Despite a lack of evidence, Pinkney was convicted and is now in prison. Previously, he was incarcerated for quoting the Bible in court.

Pinkney isn’t the only public figure who’s been punished for trying to use the electoral process for the people’s benefit. Despite restrictions on ballot access for all political parties except Democrat and Republican, Green Party Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates Jill Stein and Cheri Honkala were able to get on the ballot in most states in 2012, garnering nearly half a million votes. However, when they attempted to enter the Presidential debates they were arrested and handcuffed to chairs overnight.

The right to vote isn’t the only form of public participation under attack. The aptly named SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) suit is a lawsuit that seeks to silence critics by burdening them with the cost of legal defense until they abandon their opposition.

SLAPP suits have been used against people or groups who speak out against suburban developments that would harm the environment or who try to stop oil pipeline construction. They have been used by landlords against tenants, against those trying to stop foreclosures, and against Radio Shack

employees who filed a class action lawsuit over the issue of unpaid overtime.

The corporations who file SLAPP suits almost never win in court but that’s not their goal. Their aim is to force people to use all their time and money to defend themselves, while sending a message of intimidation to all.

Intimidation also flows through the halls of academe. There has been an explosive growth of the number of part-time adjunct faculty who cannot freely exercise their First Amendment rights without risking their jobs. No matter how long they have worked at an institution, they can be let go without cause at the end of a semester.

In February, the Kansas legislature introduced a bill that would require colleges to prohibit employees who write newspaper opinion columns from including their “official title.” This applies to all faculty, adjunct or tenured. Rep. Virgil Peck, the man who introduced the bill, is a guy who likes to intimidate. During a 2011 appropriations committee meeting, Peck said that illegal immigrants should be shot like feral hogs.

Just two years ago, the Board of Regents at the University of Kansas adopted a social media policy under which administrators are directed to fire employees if their social media posts are deemed “contrary to the best interests of the employer.” University of Kansas professor David Guth was placed on academic leave after tweeting criticism of the National Rifle Association. In North Carolina, lists of public employees who’d been arrested during Moral Monday protests were widely circulated throughout the state by wealthy opponents of Moral Monday. This was a warning shot accompanied by an obvious message: Why are we paying these salaries? Let’s fire them all!

Kansas college teacher Danny Alexander says: “We know we’re being phased out, and paranoia over Kansas social media policies and restrictions on teacher free speech all feed a climate that makes the classroom feel more risky than ever.”

It’s certainly becoming risky to teach about climate change. Despite the inevitability of South Carolina’s recent thousand-year rain, North Carolina, Louisiana and Tennessee have all passed laws designed to undermine the idea that climate change is real, putting pressure on teachers and state employees to give fossil fuels a clean bill of health. In Florida, state environmental officials have been instructed not to use the terms “climate change” or “global warming.” “Sea level rise” is to be described only as “nuisance flooding,” this in the state most susceptible to oceanic catastrophe. North Carolina passed a law which forbids the state to base coastal policies on the prediction of a three-foot sea level rise. That prediction was made by the state’s own Coastal Resources Commission.

In September, *National Geographic*, a nonprofit publication since its inception in 1888, was sold (along with the National Geographic cable channel) for \$725 million to Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch has been one of the most vocal deniers

of climate change. The National Geographic Society's mission includes giving grants to scientists. Will scientists who tell the truth about climate change ever get grants under the new for-profit ownership?

Meanwhile, two young children in Pennsylvania were, according to *The Guardian*, "banned from talking about fracking for the rest of their lives" under terms of a settlement reached by their parents with Range Resources Corp., a major fracker. What on earth would cause mom and dad to make such a deal with the devil? Poverty is often part of such scenarios. For example, in California the five million residents who live within a mile of an oil or gas well have a poverty rate one third higher than the general population.

Going beyond fracking of freedom of expression, Homeland Security and the Border Patrol are, under cover of "protecting ports of entry," interrogating, searching and arresting people in the so-called border zone, which is defined as one hundred miles inland from all U.S. borders. Doctrines of probable cause and freedom from search and seizure have been explicitly tossed out. This is being done primarily in Texas but the legal authority for it extends all around the edges of the country, potentially affecting 200 million people. Two federal courts have already condoned such operations outside the hundred mile zone.

The authority for this suspension of the Constitution comes from Department of Justice regulations that were put in place in 1953 during the Cold War. Other ticking time bombs include the Clinton/Gore administration's Telecom bill, which makes it a crime punishable by up to five years in prison to distribute or promote by any means music that is "obscene, lewd, lascivious, or filthy." The definition of those terms is left up to prosecutors, who are encouraged to go after not just artists or record companies but bloggers and DJs too. Among the 91 Senators who voted for the bill was current Vice-President Joe Biden.

In 2003, under Biden's leadership, Congress passed the RAVE Act (98-0 in the Senate, 400-25 in the House), supposedly to ensure the safety of young party-goers. But the law is not specific to raves and makes the organizers of almost any public event liable for prison time and \$250,000 fines.

We are losing our rights because the economy is changing. When the majority of Americans had good jobs and the rest of the population could survive via the social safety net, the clampdown was more selective, less pervasive, and less violent. The polarization of wealth was not as extreme (corporations even paid taxes) and less effort was required to protect the one per cent.

Today the exponential growth of poverty threatens to create a discontented, ungovernable mass and the result is the rush to a full-blown police state. 49.7 million Americans are now poor and, according to an Associated Press study, nearly 80 per cent of the entire population is "near poverty." Michael Snyder of the *Economic Collapse Blog* estimates the number

of working-age Americans without a job at 102 million. This is certain to get worse a 2013 Oxford Martin School study estimates that 47 per cent of all jobs will be automated over the next twenty years.

Any one of us who is jobless or foreclosed upon or hungry could become a leader of the people. Overnight. So the entire population is now under surveillance. While we have become accustomed to defending our rights mainly through legal or legislative strategies, the noose which tightens daily around our necks should convince us to think outside those boxes. To regain and expand our liberty, we have to face the reality that massive poverty and freedom cannot co-exist. **CP**

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## TALKING WORLD WAR THREE BLUES

By Ron Jacobs

Whenever one writes about the potential trajectory of a war, they run the risk of being very wrong. Once the forces are engaged, there is no telling what will happen. This is perhaps the best practical reason wars should never begin. In the wake of the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and other US targets, several options were seemingly available to find and deal with the perpetrators. At least a few of them did not involve mobilizing for war. Unfortunately, it turned out that war was really the only option ever considered and Afghanistan was invaded within weeks. Less than two years later, US forces were also embroiled in invading and occupying Iraq, a country whose government Washington had been conspiring to overthrow since it outlived its usefulness at the end of the 1980s war between Iran and Iraq. The results of that war are still being tallied. What is known is that over 5000 US forces died in that conflict, somewhere around one million Iraqis lost their lives, the nation's infrastructure remains minimally functional in many parts of the nation, and sections of the countryside remain in a state of war, with Iraqi, US, and other forces battling Daesh (IS) fighters for control of territory.

Afghanistan, too, remains in a state of war. Afghan resistance forces, which the US and Afghan government in Kabul call the Taliban, are retaking regions of the country from

Kabul and US forces. As it has for the past fourteen years, the fighting ebbs and flows according to the seasons and other factors both natural and manmade. Whether or not the resistance forces are truly Taliban is known only to those who are actually participating. From what can be gathered from media sources, it appears that the resistance is a combination of Taliban, local residents protecting their areas, gangsters and drug traffickers protecting their merchandise, and nonaligned forces selling their services to the bidder with the most appealing offer. Even the actual Taliban, however, are not necessarily the same Taliban who were thrown out of Kabul by the US invasion and have been fighting them ever since. Indeed, this Taliban is a new generation of fighters who, according to some stories in the Western media, have developed a political savvy that refrains from enforcing certain religious strictures (forbidding the education of girls and the playing of music, for example) that alienated Afghans before.

Then there are Libya, Syria and Yemen. All three of these countries are far from being the countries they were before the US military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. In the case of Syria and Yemen, these nations find themselves in the throes of civil wars that are notable for their bloodshed and flagrant disregard for civilian lives. In Syria's case, the conflict has been arguably prolonged by the influx of foreign fighters armed via the international arms market, wealthy donors who share their goals, and an unholy conspiracy of national governments from the Gulf sheikdoms to Turkey, Europe and the United States. As for the Syrian government itself, even if only a part of what is reported in western media is true, its bloody disregard for the lives of those in "rebel-held" districts is well documented. In Libya, the 2012 overthrow of the government led by Muammar Gaddafi created a hornet's nest of fundamentalist armed warriors willing to go and fight wherever they are told they are needed. In Yemen, a long running dispute between different ethnic and tribal groups in that nation is now a full blown civil war with one side getting military and financial support from the monarchy in Saudi Arabia.

We are told that the primary enemy in Syria (and Iraq, for now) is something called the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL or ISIS) or Daesh. For my purposes, I will use Daesh. This organization claims to be Islamic and apparently has its most immediate roots in the debacle that followed the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States. However, its history is longer than that. If one were to create a kinship tree of Daesh, it would include virtually every jihadist organization of the past fifty years. Of course, the religious philosophy of groups like Daesh is only a part of what makes such groups appealing to those who join and support it. These groups also play on the economic situation of those it hopes to recruit, their anger at the discrimination they feel in western nations, and their desire for revenge against those who have destroyed

their civilizations. They are the result of decades of imperial intervention, military and otherwise. The very wars and economic imperialism that we were told would bring democracy and peace to these lands are the very same phenomena that inspired the creation and proliferation of the groups Russia and the western nations are sending troops and bomber planes to.

Given this, it is easy to conclude that if war worked Daesh would not exist. Instead, there would be some kind of peace and capitalist democracy across the Arab and Muslim world. Instead, obviously, there is an incredibly brutal and bloody war that could end up involving much of the world and being even bloodier than it already is. But, say those on all sides--those motivated by humanitarian ideals and those motivated by less lofty motives like profit and power--now that the war is engaged what else can we do but join in? Those with humanitarian motives want to stop the bloodshed and despair, while those with other motives want to get their piece of the spoils. At least the latter are honest with themselves and the world. Of course, when the former combine with the latter to convince those of us who want nothing to do with the war to join them, only the devil's henchmen smile.

In the past few weeks, the bedlam in the Middle East has lashed out in Europe and perhaps in the US in the form of terror attacks. Alliances seem to shift ever so slightly, although the opposition of the west to Assad remains fairly strong while Moscow's support for his regime is unwavering. Daesh's fortunes seem to shift and rumors fly about in the media regarding who supports them and who buys the oil the sell. Turkey has unleashed its terror against the Kurds once again and shot down a Russian plane. Washington continues to expend its armaments inventory by bombing Syrians and Iraqis, and Britain has finally joined in the expanding chaos. Hecate laughs ever louder and the war industry's cash registers resound with bloody joy. Refugees of the disaster flee the scene only to find hate, police batons and camps stifling any expressions of welcome by the world's citizens. No one in the West with any power calls for sanctions against those who fund Daesh and other groups intent on their form of religious war; perhaps because those who would be sanctioned are the same as those who provide them with oil, loans and other elements of the neoliberal regimes ruling all.

Alliances shifted plenty before World War One and World War Two. Pope Francis has called this the third world war and criticized those who make war while celebrating peace. I would argue, as so many of us did in decades past, that this third world war has been underway since the end of the second one. Just ask the people of those nations that used to be called the third world. **CP**

**RON JACOBS** IS THE AUTHOR OF "DAYDREAM SUNSET: THE SIXTIES COUNTERCULTURE IN THE SEVENTIES."

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# CULTURE & REVIEWS

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## Sustaining the Spirit in a Godless World: The Films of Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne

By Kim Nicolini

*God is dead, we know it. We're alone, we know it. –Luc Dardenne*

Where do we find hope and redemption in the godless, post-industrial brutality of late capitalism? In the films of Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, it is found inside ourselves and the terms of reality we inhabit. There is no divine intervention, only the world of the real and the choices we make and actions we take within it. We must carve out redemption within the impossible economic odds of the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy by transcending the limits the economy puts on us.

The Dardennes' films are about the cost of survival at a time when survival gets more and more difficult. Unemployment rolls rise; factories close, and the value of the dollar and the Euro decline. The films are portraits of an economy where people are caught in the traffic of economic exchanges and are as disposable as the cheap commodities that surround them. However, as bleak as this view is, the films always contain traces of the fragility of human nature and the potential for redemption in the godless world of capital. The Dardennes show a secular spirituality leaking through the cracks of the very concrete physical world of commerce, traffic and economic despair.

Uncompromisingly realistic portraits of people at odds with their post-industrial working-class Belgian settings, the Dardennes' films focus on a social

system that is as broken as the economy. Characters are casualties of economics and bad choices. They are placed within the realistic environment of working and lower-class Belgium, and they provide intimate studies of a Darwinian economy that promotes survival of the individual at the expense of others. At the heart of the films are economic choices and the repercussions that result from them. The choices include a woman so desperately seeking employment that she sells out the only person in the world who is kind to her (*Rosetta*, 1999), a man selling his own baby son for money (*L'Enfant*, 2005), a woman selling her own body for citizenship (*Lorna's Silence*, 2008), a man dumping his kid at a state orphanage because the child is economically inconvenient (*The Kid With A Bike*, 2011), a young Belgian mother fighting for survival when she learns her employer is pitting her economic stability against her co-workers' self-interest (*Two Days, One Night*, 2014).

These films are about a disposable economy that breeds disposable people, yet the films are effective because they do not beat their economic message over the audience's head. They show, and don't tell. Their cinema is immediate and so real that it flirts with banality.

While the narratives seem extreme, the Dardennes avoid melodrama. Instead, they work in emotional and economic realism with a documentary-like immediacy. The camera follows characters with such relentless pursuit that we feel like we are inhabiting them. This effect is enhanced by the Dardennes' refusal to provide backstory. They throw us into tightly circumscribed dilemmas that make every action and resulting consequences immediate and hyper-real.

Whatever emotional depth is found in the films comes through the characters' expressions and immediate actions.

There are no great revelatory flashbacks. This makes the characters' struggles much more effective because it makes them less easy to label as fictions and to distance ourselves from them. Instead of simple answers, we are given a set of circumstances and watch how the characters respond to them, how they choose to survive and how they must reconcile with the choices they have made.

Their signature austere temporal minimalism has given the Dardennes' films a reputation for lacking in action or being stories in which nothing happens. This is an illusion. Events occur at a microscopic level, from the narrow and economically claustrophobic perspective of the characters. We are witnessing the deterioration of the global economy, as the characters are thrown into their immediate economic circumstances and hit the ground running. The Dardennes' characters are constantly on the move and rarely sit still. They are chasing down stolen bikes, desperately chasing the clock to save a job, hunting for a missing baby, or chasing down citizenship. They are always on the chase for survival in an economy hungry to eat them up.

The camera zooms into the characters' faces for close-ups, asking us to look inside them and experience life through their eyes. The camera often becomes so close that the characters fill the screen to such an extent that we feel overwhelmed by their emotions. The camera, with us by its side, relentlessly tracks the protagonists. The camera fluctuates between close focus on the characters' faces and fast tracking shots as the characters race through an economic environment that is leading them into head-on collisions with disaster.

It makes sense that the characters in these films are always on the move, since traffic of all variety is a key element in all the Dardennes' films. Cars are everywhere, and cash is exchanged at every turn. Mostly set in the Belgium town of Seraing, an industrial town known for its steel factories and

foundries which are now mostly idle, the setting communicates how the new post-industrial economy is at odds with the industrial past and the everyday working and lower class people trying to survive in a world moving too fast for them to get their footing.

The primary exterior soundtrack for Dardennes' films is that of automobiles rushing from here to there. Cars are parked along streets, driving along highways, turning corners, stopped at red lights. Buses and freight trains rumble by. Traffic on freeways moves at high speeds. The vehicles are not romanticized cars of a bygone era. Just like the characters within the films, the cars are of the now—the present day economy. The streets are full of newish small cars from Asia and Europe, the automobiles of a new global economy. They are everyday cars for everyday working people, and they are in motion everywhere.

The Dardennes' methodically craft each scene while seemingly stripping the films of grandiose style. This seeming lack of style is intentional, and it is the Dardennes' style. Their films operate in cinematic naturalism. They strip the commercial veneer from films and resist the fast paced world of commerce in which the films are set. They are not vehicles for mass marketing nor are they places for escape. They provide us glimpses of reality which are not sugar-coated with false beauty, fantasy or special effects.

The films are meticulously constructed. Every single detail in the films—where the characters are placed within the frame, the mise-en-scene,

the tiniest bit of spot color or glimpse of a bit of sunlight or grass—is intentional. Spot color pops up in the most unlikely places giving us an improbable source of visual relief: an orange garbage can, a blue mailbox, a potted plant in the corner of an otherwise dreary apartment. The smallest act,



STILL FROM "TWO DAYS, ONE NIGHT."

such as eating a single boiled egg for dinner, can contain enormous economic significance. The use of ambient light and sound immerses us in the environment of the films and makes the audience feel it experientially.

Other soundscapes provide an aural experience to the films. The sound of characters in motion—feet walking, breathing, gasping, or just the sound of silence; the sounds of people at work—power saws, a steam presser, cash registers and shampoo sinks—provide another layer of sound. There are rarely any moments of quiet in this world. Small details remind us that we are firmly grounded in an economy that revolves around mass communication—cell phones and ATMs seem omnipresent. There are no musical soundtracks. Music is delivered diageitically through CDs and cassette tapes.

The Dardennes' films are built through layers of image, sound, and body. The body is central to how the

films function politically. They are portraits of the body politic, literally and globally. They're about the broader world of capitalism, but more precisely about the individual internalization of capitalism. The camera attaches itself to the bodies of the protagonists and puts the body front and center, but there are

deeper and more complex layers to how the body operates in these films. One of the repeating themes is how the body becomes a kind of wall between human emotions and the world in which the body must survive. The body is a vehicle of survival, but the terms of that survival are often so dire that the body also provides a barrier from feeling.

Dardennes' films may seem dire, but human compassion wins out in the end. Yet compassion and redemption are never overly sentimentalized. They come through in small deeds committed by people who have been pushed to the extreme margins of the social economy. As Luc Dardenne states in the quote above, "God is dead and we're alone." If that is the case, how do we find god when we are alone in a godless world? In the world of the Dardennes, it is found through simple human exchanges, by deciding to put our own self-interests aside to reach out to someone else. It comes when we refuse to be alone but instead become part of collective humanity. **CP**

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