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FUKUSHIMA: 6 YEARS ON BY JOHN LA FORGE

A NEW FEMINISM IN LATIN AMERICA BY LAURA CARLSEN

CLOSING THE DOOR TO DIPLOMACY BY MELVIN GOODMAN

A NEW BUBBLE ECONOMY BY MIKE WHITNEY



# CounterPunch

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"Game of Phones" by Nick Roney

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In Memory of  
Alexander Cockburn  
1941–2012

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Payback

Jeffrey,

Over the years, I waisted an inordinate amount of time reading your garbage brain-dead commie online trash rag. I also contributed a total of 10\$. I will never recover my time or my dignity, but would you send the money back?

*Ben*

## HRC Resistance Lives

I've received a couple of reminders that my subscription has expired and renewal emails have been blocked. I have decided not to renew or receive news updates, for the following reasons:

During the election it became clear that a significant number of your contributors were adamantly opposed to Hillary Clinton, almost to the point of hysteria. The consensus sentiment was clearly for Bernie Sanders or else instant, complete political revolution. The general tone of these contributors after the nominations were announced was: let-the-country-go-to-hell-in-a-handbasket-then-all-those-fools-will-come-over-to-our-side. NO THEY WON'T. Further, there probably won't be any more elections given the direction the current so-called President is going in.

I do not wish to stifle political dissent. Have at it. But this kind of toxic nihilism is an influence that I don't need in my life.

I received one print issue of *CounterPunch* magazine. There was a letter to the editor from one Thomas William Baxter "with no regrets" entitled Baby Boomer Doom. Baxter paints

Baby Boomers as lazy SOB's sitting on their asses spending their retirement millions. Let me tell you that we Baby Boomers worked those asses off in jobs we hated for bosses that gave us ulcers and high blood pressure just so we could get health insurance and (in some cases) a pension to supplement Social Security. And plenty of us are working now politically to resist and protest a future that will lock the next generations out of any possible outcome other than abject poverty and dire existence in a poisoned environment.

If that correspondent is the demographic you're going for, I want no part of it.

*Thank you for your time.  
Mary Smith*

## CounterTrump

You should just change the Web site name to CounterTrump instead of Counterpunch.

The site used to be impartial, now it is just a Trump hate fest.

*Regards,  
John Shakour*

## Greetings from Belize

People of CounterPunch, Your articles are very valuable for us down here in Belize, which is south of Mexico and east of Guatemala. I publish a newspaper (AMANDALA) which is 47 years old and the leading newspaper in Belize.

We are left of center, and environmentalists, which makes us dangerous in this Guatemala/Honduras region. Thanks for counterpunch, and best wishes to you.

*Evan X Hyde*

## Bannon's Acid Test

I don't get the big uproar over Steve Bannon's other house, the one down in Florida with the acid damaged hot tub. Who doesn't own an extra house in another state where you dis-pose of your enemies? What's the big deal. I mean, sheesh, what are you supposed to do, off someone in your \*own\* home in the state where you \*live\*. Pretty routine stuff here.

*Kurt Thompson*

## All About the Miners

In the new pro-coal miner era, West Virginia is moving swiftly toward eliminating mine safety inspections. This is funny if it were not so serious. Where is Don Blankenship? Oh yeah, right now sitting for a measly year for killing 29 miners when he was facing thirty. Out in May, he'll enjoy his millions in retirement, lives of disposable labor a small price to pay.

*Chris Zinda*

## The MSNBC Possé

Rachel Maddow and the rest of the MSNBC possé are totally in the pocket of the Democratic Party. I watch, against their bias, along with PBS and BBC. Can't watch the other "Lying, Enemy, Alt-Media". Pisses me off too much. My skills in Critical Media Studies have long been tested. These days I expend my efforts tactically.

*Mile Mendenhall*

## It Was Your Idea, Donald!

Trump should be reminded of his admiring words about Scotland's health care system on the Letterman Show back in 2015 and told that universal health care in the US is his idea

and that he would be the most popular, bigly President ever if he pulled it off. Maybe THAT'S the right way to deal with him?

*Brian Foley*

## CIA Drones

The drone campaign in Yemen under Obama operated under the cover story that it was the Yemeni Air Force bombing their citizens. JSOC had an open relationship with the CIA during first term Obama's campaign against Pakistan/North Waziristan as well. Trump's relaxation of CIA drone strike rules doesn't look like new powers to me, just less money and energy spent denying the powers the CIA has had all along. Instead it sounds like more boxing off longstanding imperial policy as Trump policy alone, supporting the liberal "OMG we miss you so much Obama!" message.

*Norman Molter*

## The Saudi Business

A proper review of Trump's Saudi weapons deal would begin by acknowledging that the sale of U.S. arms to Saudi Arabia is big business. During the span of the Bush and Obama administrations, total U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia increased by nearly 97 percent. The U.S. has offered \$115 billion in arms sales to Saudi Arabia during the Obama administration.

*Denise Monaghan*

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## ROAMING CHARGES

# The ICEmen Cometh

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

**T**he doorbell rang on a dreary afternoon in late February. On the porch, huddling against a lashing Oregon rain, stood my friend Javier (not his real name). “Something has happened, Jeffrey, and maybe you can help,” he said. “We don’t know what to do.”

I’ve known Javier for five years. He and his family live across the river in King City, where he runs a small landscaping business. Javier is from Oaxaca, Mexico. He came to Oregon in 1992 as a touring musician, playing keyboards and guitar in a salsa band. He is now married and has two teenage boys, both born in Oregon. Javier is not a U.S. citizen. He doesn’t have a green card.

The story Javier tells is harrowing. Earlier in the day, two vans carrying migrant workers bound for the fields of the Willamette Valley were pulled over by four black SUVs outside of the small town of Woodburn. ICE officers, dressed in black military gear, ordered all of the passengers out of the vans at gunpoint. The men and women were ordered to lay facedown on the ground. Each of them were then cuffed and searched. Their wallets taken and examined. One by one, the workers were told to stand. Then their photographs were taken on iPads. They were asked their names, date of birth, place of birth and whether they were U.S. citizens. Those who said no were asked to show their green cards and work visas.

After thirty minutes of interrogation, the ICE officers released about half of the workers and told them they were free to go. However, eleven men were placed under arrest, placed in ICE SUVs and taken away.

“Jeffrey, four of these men go to our

church,” Javier told me, his voice quivering. “I know them. These are good men. None of them have ever been in trouble before. All of them have kids here and family that depend on them.”

Javier told me that most of the workers had immigrated to the U.S. in the last few years. They came not from Mexico, but from Guatemala and Honduras. “Things are bad there, very bad,” he said. “They were fleeing violence that made it impossible to live there.”

The men worked in flower fields, planting and harvesting tulips, daffodils, irises and dahlias in the rich alluvial soils of Oregon’s Willamette Valley. Arduous, back-breaking labor done in miserable conditions for miserly wages and no benefits.

“No one knows where they are or why they were taken. They aren’t criminals. They are hard workers. The families are scared. We don’t know what to do.”

I didn’t know what to do either. In fact, I felt as helpless at that moment as Javier. Except I wasn’t trapped in his impossible, even Kafkaesque predicament. Javier couldn’t inquire about the fate of his friends without placing himself and his family in extreme jeopardy.

I gave Javier the phone numbers of two Oregon lawyers who specialize in immigration cases and told him to call *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste*, the fearless immigration rights group based in Woodburn. Then I called ICE.

The ICE field office in Portland confirmed that arrests had been made in Woodburn earlier in the day. The agent I spoke to described the raid as a “targeted enforcement operation.”

She told me that the ICE officers had warrants for two men who had prior arrests on their records. If there were only two warrants, I asked, why were 11 people detained? She refused to answer that question. I then asked about the detention of Javier’s four friends, none of whom had criminal records. She said that most of the detained men had been transferred to an ICE detention jail in Tacoma, Washington, nearly 200 miles north on I-5. The Northwest Detention Center is a notorious private prison run for ICE by the GEO Group, formerly known as Whackenhut, where inmates have lingered for years without hearings and others have been viciously beaten by guards in retaliation for complaining about the horrid conditions in the facility.

I found out later that the ICE raid had missed its targets, two Mexican men with drug trafficking convictions. Sonia Sanchez, an immigration rights lawyer I talked to, said that the warrants were probably used as a pretext to stop any vehicle thought to contain fieldworkers in the valley. “They don’t need much of an excuse to stop you or arrest you,” Sanchez said. It later emerged that only three of the men detained in the Woodburn raid had any criminal record: one had committed a domestic battery, two others had been cited for drunk driving.

By the next afternoon, I had tracked Javier’s friends to the Northwest Detention Center and received their case numbers. As Javier had told me, none of the men had any arrests or convictions on their records. Despite Trump’s repeated claim that the ICE raids sweeping the country are only targeting those with criminal rap-sheets, 8 of the 11 men seized by ICE in Woodburn were cited only for illegal entry into the United States. They now face deportation back to Guatemala and Honduras, leaving their families in an agonizing limbo.

“How could this happen, Jeffrey?” Javier asked. “What did they do to deserve this?” I had no answer. I still don’t. **CP**



## EMPIRE BURLESQUE

# The Lawless Roads

BY CHRIS FLOYD

**T**here are no laws of history. Well, maybe just one, enunciated by that underwear-peddling song-and-dance man recently awarded a Nobel Prize: “When you think you’ve lost everything, you find out you can always lose a little more.” But in general, it’s hard to apply a methodical, scientific structure to a process that is, in its essence—and perhaps in its entirety—just “one damn thing after another.”

That doesn’t stop people from hunting Vico-like for over-arching laws, however. I’m not speaking here of the useful insights that can be gleaned from looking at resonant circumstances and patterns of behaviors that recur in similar but never identical forms throughout the course of human affairs, but of elaborations that claim to find a telos—a goal, an inevitable culmination—in history.

Most of the time, this telos-tracking is a relatively harmless peccadillo, one of the myriad mental gyrations we perform in our attempts to bring meaning to our brief and chaotic traversal of an existence which, to quote the underwear guy again, “seems like some dirty trick.”

Musing on the *ricorso* while buying a can of baked beans at the grocery store won’t disturb the peace of the citizenry. But if some goober with, shall we say, a paucity of neuronal connections gets captivated by a crackpot notion of history’s endpoint and how we should get there, come hell or high water—and then that same goober suddenly finds himself in the cockpit of an engine of global destruction, well then, my friends, we got trouble right here in River City ... and everywhere else.

I speak, of course, of the bullshit theory that has captured the scrunched-

up, fear-ridden, flatulent little brainpans of Steve Bannon. Yes, the weird arrested adolescent whose third-rate intellect has been lauded by the *New York Times* and other opinion-makers as a mind of Machiavellian subtlety: you know, the “smartest guy in the room,” as these carny barkers who push their political palookas to the top of the greasy pole are always called by awestruck pundits whose knowledge of history and politics extends no further than the last news cycle. (Recall how the absurd Colonel Tom Parker manqué Karl Rove was lauded as a super-genius for years, just like the egregious dimbulb James Carville before him and the wonky wanker David Axelrod after him.)

*The Times* can always be counted on to dig up old classmates or business associates of these luminaries who will spout the same clichés. “He reads everything.” “We could never keep up with him.” “I hated everything he said, but he always won every debate; he was just too good, too fast, too sharp.” I swear the *Times* must keep an actual template—or maybe a Mad Libs page—to fill in the blanks after every election for a profile of the newest campaign “mastermind.”

Bannon—a Goldman-Sachs/Hollywood elitist who looks like a monstrous assemblage of every over-masturbated, basement-dwelling ‘Gamergate’ troll who ever lived—is famously enamored of an obscure historical theory which says that every 70 or 80 years or so, the world goes through some cataclysmic war or catastrophe, such as World War II, that allows the zeitgeist to be remade by those bold enough to seize the day. Shagbag Stevie thinks the time is ripe for a new global conflagration that will purge the world

of Mooslums, darkies, Messicans and libtards – plus all that Enlightenment science and humanism malarkey – and usher in a new age of blood-and-soil nationalism guided by ... well, by over-masturbated, basement-dwelling Gamergate trolls, I guess.

It’s drivel, yes – but a little drivel goes a long way in a feeble mind. And by some improbable quirk of history – or rather, by millions of sugar-daddy dollars from far-right fund manager Robert Mercer, who bankrolled Bannon’s alt-right media empire as well as the Trump campaign—instead of boring barkeeps in a Pomona strip mall with his clap-trap, Bannon is now sitting at the very centre of world power, pouring apocalyptic poison into the ear of the mobbed-up casino boss who controls the most destructive, far-reaching military force ever assembled on this planet. Like few cranks in human history, Bannon has both the means and opportunity to try to bring his nutball nightmare to fruition.

Can Shagbag pull it off? Looking at the gaggle of witless goobers in Trump’s inner circle—not to mention the oily oligarchs in his Cabinet who are doing very nicely without a global cataclysm, thank you—you’d be tempted to say the chances are slim. And you’d probably be right. Then again, the trackless wastes of history have produced many wildly improbable scenarios before –often fuelled by “cranks” who believed they were riding the telos to its pre-destined end. And none of them had anything as remotely powerful as the instrument Bannon now has in his hands.

So who knows? He may yet prod Trump—whom he has called a “blunt instrument” for bringing about the apotheosis of the trolls—into shattering the “arc of history” into a thousand pieces and plunging us into a reign of darkness.

After all, there’s no law against it. **CP**



## EXIT STRATEGIES

# The Intransigence of the Left

BY YVETTE CARNELL

It was during the primary contest between Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton that I first found myself becoming increasingly exasperated with leftists. Their claim that the Democratic Party exists only to capitulate to the Republican Party is true, so I too would've preferred that Sanders mount a third party campaign against the corporate con game that is the Democratic Party. That didn't happen though. And among too many leftists, what happened next was an incessant reiteration of reasons why Bernie "Sheepdog" Sanders was a fraud and a huckster.

The accusation bubbling up from the ideological left – that the Sanders candidacy was Obama all over again – began to take shape almost as soon as Sanders announced his bid for the presidency. The charge was both true *and* false. It was true in that Sanders was the new piper of the Democratic Party, electrifying new voters who would inevitably be pressured to support Hillary Clinton's corporatist candidacy. It was false in that Sanders, who eschewed Wall Street money, was identical to Obama, so flush with Wall Street cash that he set a new fundraising record (Obama's record was later broken by Mitt Romney). Furthermore, Bernie Sanders normalized redistributive conversations and made income inequality a central point of debate in our political discourse. The idea that Obama and Sanders were interchangeable as candidates was the beginning of my understanding of the left's inclination toward distortion and broad oversimplification.

What I felt during the primaries – a grinding annoyance at adolescent jibes originating from the ideological left – is resurfacing with the election of President Donald Trump. While lost

liberals gather around the campfire of "resistance", which usually means destroying Trump golf courses or tuning in nightly to Rachel Maddow for another episode of Russia-gate, some on the left seem to have found comfort in the red hot fury of ideological purity.

Leftists are certainly justified in their refusal to remain silent in the face of both white supremacy and capital's intentional devaluation of the quality of life for workers. Add to that the eventual replacement of jobs with robots, a problem for which none of our politicians has an answer, and it's easy to assume that our enemies are easily knowable and evoke, as George W. Bush did in the rush to war in Iraq, that everyone's either with you or against you. Leftists should think twice before cozing up to Dubya's ultimatums though, especially considering the resultant polarization.

Bush pushed forward with rhetorical war mongering because he was deliberately narrowing the ideological space available for political debate. Leftists aren't intentionally stifling debate, but the otherization of everyone who hasn't read *Das Kapital* from cover to cover ends with the same result; ostracization.

Leftists are actually not without solutions either. They just don't share them with anyone except other leftists. It's a habitual exercise in preaching to the proverbial choir. The leftist online community often acts as more of an ongoing book exchange on past socialist movements than an answer to 21st century globalism. To those making unpopular challenges to the prevailing narrative, the rebuke is clear: You have no place here. The way forward is through a team of books spanning Eugene Debs through Antonio Gramsci. Get to

reading or get out. In my own quest to assess the impact of illegal immigration on unskilled Black workers, I've been met with mostly insults and smears. I suspect I'm not alone.

I am not bashing the community that I once considered myself a part of. I just believe that having no political home to speak of has had unintended consequences on the ideological left. If leftists don't want Bernie Sanders as their candidate, then they must *be* Bernie Sanders. By that I mean they must invigorate and mobilize Americans in large numbers. I'm not sure how that's accomplished through beleaguered withdrawal from an American political system already on the brink. I'm not sure how that's accomplished through political tactics that are no longer applicable in a surveillance state that sees and hears everything. I don't know how that's possible by placing all opposition in the same basket of deplorables.

Just as there were people like me who supported Sanders and viewed him as a necessary step in America's political education rather than a savior, there are Trump supporters who *still* view him not as a threat, but as the only anti-establishment leader with the moxie to disrupt the two party system. Veteran journalist Seymour Hersch even described Trump as a "circuit breaker" who raises doubts about the viability of the current political system.

During a time when voters are either desperately searching for a feasible solution to the two party system or opting out altogether, it increasingly seems like the only people capable of changing the system are those who are least likely to do so. This not only explains the rise of Trump, but forecasts more clouds gathering on the horizon. **CP**





## GRASPING AT STRAWS

# Is Yellen Planning to Burst the Trump Bubble?

BY MIKE WHITNEY

**T**he cardinal rule of central banking is: Don't raise rates when the economy is in a slump. It's a simple rule, but it's one that the Fed follows religiously. But these are extraordinary times and the Fed has had to adjust its policies accordingly.

Since Donald Trump was elected President on November 8, 2016, the Dow Jones Industrial Average has gained nearly 2,000 points while the NASDAQ and S&P 500 have followed close behind. All three major indices remain at record-high levels and have added more than \$3 trillion dollars in market cap. The meteoric rise in equities prices represents the biggest post-election day surge in history. And it doesn't stop there. Skyrocketing stocks are just one facet of a much larger phenomenon, that is, the rekindling of hope among the American people.

For the first time in nearly a decade, people are genuinely optimistic about the future. According to a recent survey in Gallup, "Americans expressed more positivity about the U.S. economy... than they have at any other time during the nine years that Gallup has been tracking the U.S. Economic Confidence Index." These results seem to conflict with the political turmoil that has overtaken Washington and the anti-Trump protests that have broken out across the country. They also seem at odds with the President's economic plan that provides lavish tax cuts for corporations and uber-wealthy households, but very little for low income families or struggling blue collar workers. So why is everyone so optimistic about the future?

It's a mystery to me, but it's definitely having an impact on the Fed's

decision-making.

How do we know that? Because the economy is progressively losing steam but the Fed is preparing to raise interest rates. It doesn't make any sense at all. Even so, traders currently put the chances of a March rate-hike at 75 percent which means that Wall Street thinks it's a slam dunk. The reason investors are so confident that the Fed will boost rates is because a number of Fed governors have recently made hawkish statements to the media signaling their determination to tighten monetary policy. Here's what Fed Chairwoman Janet Yellen said earlier in March:

"At our meeting later this month, the committee will evaluate whether employment and inflation are continuing to evolve in line with our expectations, in which case a further adjustment of the federal funds rate would likely be appropriate."

So if the wheels don't fall off the appcart by the mid-March, up go interest rates. Notice how Yellen focuses on employment and inflation instead of growth. That's because the employment data has been relatively steady even though record numbers of working age men have thrown in the towel and left the workforce altogether. And, yes, there has been a modest uptick in inflation that supports her argument to bump rates, but what Yellen fails to mention is that the economy—which grew at a—miserable 1.6 percent for all of 2016—has progressively gotten worse.

In its original forecast for the first quarter of 2017, the Atlanta Fed predicted the U.S. economy would grow at a respectable 2.8 percent. But that was

February's reading. As of March 7, the Fed lowered its projection to a dreary 1.3 percent. In other words, the economy is starting to stall just as the Fed is planning to raise rates.

In the Fed's defense, inflation has begun to rise. The Consumer Price Index (CPI), which measures the increase in prices for a basket of goods and services, rose by a robust 0.6% in January. Rising prices are something to keep an eye on, but they are definitely not what's driving the policy. What's driving the policy can be summarized in two words: Irrational exuberance.

Investor enthusiasm has sent stocks into orbit which has the Fed confused and worried. As Yellen said in a press conference: "members expressed concern that the low level of implied volatility in equity markets appeared inconsistent with the considerable uncertainty attending the outlook." In other words, Yellen can't understand why stocks keep rising when Trump hasn't even provided the details of his economic plan yet. So while the Fed abhors the idea of pricking bubbles with rate hikes, that's exactly what they plan to do.

Keep in mind, the Fed's zero rates and liquidity programs have already lifted the Dow Jones from its March 9, 2009 low of 6,547 points, to a mighty 20,906 on March 8, 2017, a humongous gain of 14,359 points. The Fed's reflation program has been a huge success, but now Yellen wants to ease her foot off the gas so stock prices stay within the Fed's projected flightpath. None of this has anything to do with the Fed's mandate of "price stability and full employment". The Fed's tinkering is strictly designed to put stocks on a gradual upward trajectory rather than a short-quick surge followed by a crash.

It's just the latest example of how the Fed uses its rate-tweaking strategies to boost profits for its wealthy constituents, the 1 percent. Basically, the Fed is the operations manager at the heart of the capital-distribution system. It's job is to make sure the equipment stays oiled and runs smoothly. **CP**

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# BORDERZONE NOTES

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## Latin America's Women-led Movements and New Feminism

BY LAURA CARLSEN

**L**ess than a week before International Women's Day a year ago, Honduran military men trained by the Pentagon burst into her home and assassinated Berta Cáceres. Feminist, environmentalist, and anti-imperialist, a charismatic organizer and a staunch opponent of the megaprojects that stole the land and poisoned the earth of indigenous peoples, Berta was the epitome of everything the henchmen of capitalism loathed and feared.

Berta Cáceres pioneered a new generation of women leaders in Latin America. These new leaders live the "intersectionality" between class, race and gender not as lines that crisscross, but in each breath they take. Berta's leadership was recognized worldwide for how she emphasized uniting struggles. She passed on to her children and members of her organization COPINH the Lenca indigenous worldview and conviction that Mother Earth must be protected, an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist analysis that provides a framework to understand the attacks on her land and people by linking them to the national and global context, and a firm belief in the power of international solidarity to confront an international system. She insisted that environmental activism means standing up to patriarchal forces that destroy the planet, and that defense of territory is defense of women's rights because

patriarchy claims woman's bodies as its territory.

This way of viewing feminism as an integral part of the battle for survival—as a people, as a species, as women—has given new life to feminism at a time when the second wave of mostly white, middle to upper-class feminists seems to have crashed on the shoals of neoliberalism. These women-led battles, not just in Latin America but throughout the Global South, provide the vitality and diversity and relevance that feminism needs to take a permanent and prominent place in every freedom movement on earth.

Lolita Chávez Ixcaquic, a Maya K'iche' leader in Guatemala, refers to "the other feminisms that are arising among the women of indigenous peoples." "We talk about the autonomy of our peoples," she says, "and also the need for autonomy within autonomy. Because in my community there is a patriarchy, and sometimes it's worse than other barriers because it's so intimate."

Being on the front line in anti-capitalist battles to defend land and rights catapults women across the region into leadership and forges new definitions. This transformation in the women themselves and in the role and practice of feminism is key to the future, and purposely overlooked by liberal feminism.

There's no single way to characterize

new feminisms in Latin America, but most begin with two basic elements: victims who refuse to be victims and upholding the value of life. That sounds basic, but it's the most fundamental and radical challenge to the system today, and a dangerous one that has led to assassinations and constant attacks on women leaders. Indigenous women are at the heart of this challenge because they suffer the triple discrimination of being poor, indigenous and women, but also because deep indigenous values of connection confront the individualism and consumer culture that time after time have absorbed U.S. and European feminism.

Those connections fuel Mayan women's organizing. "We get strength from many principles, among them reciprocity—you are me and I am you. That strengthens us as women and the connection with life and the network we're all part of," Lolita stated in an interview with Just Associates. "As part of that web, we have to have territories free of corporations and free of violence against women, to empower us to move toward the full significance of life."

Garifuna leader Miriam Miranda notes that the emphasis on community means no aspect can be temporarily shelved or ignored. "All organized movements—peasants, workers, indigenous peoples, LGTB—have to incorporate reclaiming community, communality. Especially the anti-patriarchal struggle, but also anti-racist organizing, because it's useless to fight for an anti-patriarchal system if we still have racist and discriminatory acts against people who are not like us." As a Black indigenous feminist, she and her organization on the Atlantic coast of Honduras collectively take on all at once, every single day.

Simply defending life in a system that kills has generated new women-led movements never envisioned just a decade ago. In Mexico, thousands of women have organized to search for children and other loved ones

disappeared in the nation's disastrous "war on drugs". In local groups across the country, women, and to a lesser degree men, got together and began by spending countless hours in government offices pressing officials for serious investigations, prosecutions and information on their cases. They usually got nowhere. Now demands on the government continue, but many have turned to going out into the fields with sticks and shovels to search themselves, building grassroots alliances for autonomous action. From the pain of losing a child, they've learned to defend rights, file grievances, speak in public, and lead movements. Many might not call themselves feminists, but they recognize real changes in their roles.

"I used to be a housewife, but after August 28, 2008 I was totally thrown off track, because [the disappearance of my sons] was a drastic life change," Maria Herrera, leader of nationwide organization of family members of the disappeared, said in a recent interview.

"It changes your life completely, but fortunately these changes that came about so tragically have also made us understand that as people, as women, we can't be defeated... The pain that I'm suffering, and not just me, but thousands of women—mothers wives daughters—far from scaring us away, has given us the courage and the strength to fight back and move forward." Maria Herrera has become an internationally known critic of the drug war and the Mexican government, bringing thousands into a movement for profound social change. Women have taken on all the cases of the disappeared as their own and risked their lives going up against organized crime and corrupt government officials.

The Central American Mothers who travel through Mexico searching for missing migrants each year go through the same transformation from the private sphere to the public sphere, from individual grief to shared outrage and action. When I asked why women are more likely than men to organize,

a founder of one of the groups replied that a mother will risk her own life to find a son or daughter and never gives up hope. Fathers feel they've failed to protect and tend to withdraw to shelter those who remain. So traditional patriarchal roles push women into breaking out of those same roles—not the first time in the history of feminism we've seen that paradox.

Throughout the region, millions of women worldwide took part in the 2017 March 8 Women's Strike against macho violence, by either refusing to work, to buy, to engage in sexual relations, to attend school or by going to demonstrations. The idea for the global mobilization began in Argentina with the "Ni Una Menos" (not one less) marches following the brutal rape and murder of a young woman, and with the Ni Una Más (not one more) demonstrations against femicide in Mexico. Young women outraged by the lack of security and the sexist aggression in their societies turned out in events that bypassed traditional feminist organizations and marked a new generation of feminist activism.

Argentineans marched with a slogan that translates roughly as "For the Missing". The communiqué states: "We're missing the women political prisoners, the persecuted, the assassinated in Latin America for defending our land and resources. We're missing women in prison for minor offenses that criminalize forms of surviving, while corporate crimes and drug trafficking go unpunished because they benefit capital. We're missing the dead and those imprisoned for unsafe abortions. We're missing the disappeared."

This isn't just a laundry list of victims; it's the new constellation of feminist issues.

Shortly after Trump's election, the *New York Times* ran an op-ed entitled: "Feminism Lost: Now What?" The article argued that when Hillary Clinton's campaign went down in flames it marked a major defeat for feminism—the destruction of the

dream of inaugurating the nation's first woman president and shattering the glass ceiling. Not only that, anti-feminism in its rudest and most blatant expression in decades won, helped not in small part by white women's vote.

There's been some soul-searching, beyond the post-electoral post-mortems, on what went wrong, but the real question is: What feminism are they talking about? Hillary Clinton popularized the phrase "Women's rights are human rights", ushering in a paradigm shift toward mainstreaming women's issues. That's exactly the problem. Latin American feminisms are very clear that they'll never get where they want to be by giving the current system a gender makeover.

Clinton stood for the kind of patriarchal militarism, intervention and corporate privilege that sustains the same system other feminisms are determined to defeat. In her autobiography, she wrote openly about maneuvering with Mexican Foreign Relations Secretary Patricia Espinosa to keep the Honduran coup regime in charge. As she worked behind the scenes to institutionalize the coup without bringing back the elected president, Mel Zelaya, Honduran "Feminists in resistance" marched in the streets daily as a pillar of the pro-democracy movement. Cáceres cited Clinton's statement often to show the central role of the U.S. government in perpetuating the coup d'état in Honduras. She later became a victim of the coup legacy.

The NYT op-ed concludes, "The challenge for the women's movement is to persuade more of the electorate that feminism is not merely a luxury for the privileged or the province only of liberals." Even the phrasing is condescending. It's not about persuading people to vote feminist. And it's high time to examine the implicit concepts of who does the persuading and who are the potential persuaded.

For feminism to become the emancipative movement it was meant to be, the roles have to be reversed. It's not

about consciousness-raising any more, as if the veil must just be stripped from the eyes of those who fail to see things the way we see them. It's about creating the spaces for dialogue without imposition that recognize class and other differences and allow for new understandings and new models to emerge. That doesn't mean accommodating or justifying the virulent sexism and racism that became acceptable in U.S. political discourse with this election, but it does mean forging new paths that provide a way out that isn't based on hatred and division, or privilege and repression.

It's about giving the lead to the new feminisms that are developing out of head-on opposition to the global system from the women whose very lives are a testimony to how oppressions fit together and resistance is emancipation. U.S. feminism's bad rap

exists because a phony feminism has comfortably installed itself within the system and seeks to hold back the new feminisms that challenge its privilege.

Feminism will never defeat the Trump patriarchal revival in the U.S. or the resurgence in the rest of the world unless it embraces its nature as profoundly anti-systemic. As the system becomes more deadly and alienating, women's defense of life and their stands against impunity present a radical challenge. Whether the new feminisms call themselves feminist or not, their anti-systemic actions directly confront patriarchal violence institutionalized in the state and expressed in society on every level—from the homes, to the streets, to the legislatures.

Feminists everywhere should be joining these challenges. **CP**

now show that more than 80% of the Catalan population supports it. In the Catalan parliament the figure is around 60% and, predictably, in the Spanish parliament, only 26%. This almost-constant mobilization goes back to July 2010 when some 1.5 million people marched under a banner saying, *Som una nació, nosaltres decidim* (We Are a Nation. We Will Decide), although they were really protesting about the Spanish Constitutional Court's hostile ruling on Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy.

In 2003, the Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC), the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) and Initiative for Catalonia Greens – United and Alternative Left (ICV-EUA) formed a tripartite government, one of its aims being to draft a new Statute of Autonomy. By 2005, when Pasqual Maragall (PSC) was President of Catalonia, the first draft was ready and the Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero (of the Spanish socialist party PSOE) undertook to give his support to the Statute once it was passed by the Parliament of Catalonia, as happened a few months later with a large majority, including the conservative nationalist party Convergence and Union (CiU). On October 5 the Statute was presented to the Spanish parliament where it was drastically cut, allegedly to bring it into line with the Spanish Constitution.

On March 30, 2006 the “brushed up” (as Felipe González's former deputy prime minister Alfonso Guerra dismissively described it) Statute was approved by the Spanish parliament. On June 18, in a referendum on the final text held in Catalonia, a majority voted in favor. On July 31 the right-wing Spanish People's Party (PP) filed an objection of unconstitutionality against 114 articles and 12 regulations, arguing that the Statute represented a “clandestine constitutional reform” and even a “parallel constitution”.

Although the revised Statute had been approved by both Spanish and Catalan parliaments as well as a refer-

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## EUROZONE NOTES

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# Wanted: Democracy in One Small Corner of Roiling Europe

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK

**E**urope's in a mess. The para-fascists are vociferously gaining ground in Germany, Hungary, France, Poland, Holland and Austria. The calamity of Brexit drags on. The Mediterranean, cradle of European culture, *Mare Nostrum*, has become *Mare Mortum*, a watery grave for more than 5,000 refugees in 2016 and threatening to claim even more in 2017. Greece is still being crushed by the EU's economic barbarism. The inequality gap between the rich and the rest yawns ever wider. With all this di-

saster, one small Catalan drama might be lost from sight: the incredible trial of a former president and two ministers of the Generalitat (Autonomous Government) of Catalonia, accused of disobedience because they called a non-binding referendum in November 2014. The court's ruling is still pending. Naturally, this outlandish (in every sense of the word) story has antecedents.

After years of massive mobilization for the right to self-determination (now called the “right to decide”), surveys

endum, only one judge of the twelve of the Constitutional Court opposed the PP's appeal. Once it was admitted, the PP forced another judge to recuse himself on the grounds that he had once worked on a report for the Catalan Government. This gave the majority to conservative Spanish nationalists and allowed blatant party-based instrumentalization of the law. Several judges were due to retire the following November but no replacement occurred. In the end, the court consisted of only ten of the twelve required judges, four of them in their twelfth year when the Constitution stipulates that their mandates are nine years. Early leaks revealed that the

situation in which articles in the Statute of Autonomy of Andalusia copied from the Catalan Statute of 2006 are still in force today although the Constitutional Court has ruled that they are unconstitutional in the Catalan case (coffee for some, bitter dregs for others).

The biggest protests since July 2010 happen every year on 11 September, Catalonia's national day, a date also dolorously remembered in the United States and Chile. The Catalan 9/11 goes back to 1714 when the Bourbons won the so-called War of Succession and embarked on a campaign of Spanishization. The 9/11 demonstrations now number, depending on the source, between several hundred

it up: "Independence isn't on trial here. Democracy is on trial". Whatever one's opinion of Mas & Co (and we're far from fans) one must agree with him this time. The attack on democracy has reached Trumpish depths of folly. Also on trial is Carme Forcadell, President of the Catalan parliament, and several members of the parliamentary Bureau, while legal proceedings have begun against 400-plus mayors and councilors from around Catalonia, among other reasons, for not flying the Spanish flag and supporting the ballot on November 9. Now the Spanish government is threatening to resort to Article 155 of the Constitution, a veritable tinderbox allowing the state to take all "measures

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## **Europe is floundering in its own morass and Spain's intransigence will only aggravate the disarray. Catalonia's incendiary part in the debacle is to keep a spark of democracy burning in the ruins.**

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Statute had been cut again, especially regarding self-government and recognition of Catalonia as a nation (which could only be within "the only and indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation", i.e. not at all).

The Supreme Court ruling on June 28, 2010—the PP's judicial coup—declared totally or partially unconstitutional fourteen articles of the text approved by the Spanish parliament and ratified in the referendum. Javier Pérez Royo, professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Seville, wrote, "This is why there is no Territorial Constitution in Catalonia and why we do not have a legally tidy way of being able to integrate Catalonia into the [Spanish] state. Not even the possibility of reforming the Constitution is possible now." The territorial issue is that, in this Constitution, all regions are to be treated similarly in a "coffee-for-all" home-rule, giving rise to the bizarre

thousand and more than a million: this in a population of little more than 7.5 million, including minors.

On November 9, 2014 a referendum was held in Catalonia, taking as its legal basis the 2006 Statute of Autonomy and the Law on Consultations passed by the Catalan Parliament in September 2014. The questions were, "Do you want Catalonia to become a state?" and (only in the case of an affirmative answer), "Do you want this State to be independent?" More than 2.3 million legally registered residents in Catalonia voted, with 80.8% for the Yes-Yes option.

This brings us back to the present trial. A former President of Catalonia, Artur Mas, a former Vice-president and former Minister for Education appeared in Catalonia's High Court accused of disobedience and wrongdoing as public officials for having organized the symbolic ballot on November 9, 2014. Artur Mas summed

necessary" to ensure compliance, including the use of force.

In Catalonia, upholders of the monarchy, the unity of Spain and the 1978 Constitution are right-wing and centrist, while self-determination is supported by right and left, pro-independence groups, confederalists and federalists (in the proper sense of agreement between equals, a necessary clarification since "federalist" is a PSC buzzword in its ham-fisted attempts to block any democratic demand for self-determination). The ambiguous 1978 Spanish Constitution—"more artifice than edifice" (as Pierre Vilar described the State of autonomous regions)—and regime are totally antagonistic to self-determination in Catalonia. Although self-determination clearly has majority support, the pro-independence movement doesn't (40% to 50%) so why—and even Bloomberg and The Economist have asked this—can't the

PP, PSOE and the powers-that-be wanting to conserve the status quo solve the problem democratically with a legal referendum like the Scottish one, with procedural and deliberative guarantees? Answer: the 1978 Constitution sanctifies the unity of Spain in cast-iron terms thus achieving a perfect stalemate. Catalan society is not recognized as a political subject. Indeed, the jurist Pedro Cruz Villalón notes that the conception of unity latent in Article 2 is “something prior to and, accordingly, superior to the Constitution itself as well as the whole legal system.”

The former King of Spain, Juan Carlos I claimed in a much-commented interview on French TV, “A few days before he died, Franco took my hand and asked, ‘Your Highness, the only thing I ask is that you preserve the unity of Spain.’ He didn’t say do this or do that. No, it was the unity of Spain. The rest... And, if you think about it, this means many things.” Yes, it means “many things”. One of them is that Franco’s legacy is key to understanding what is still happening in Catalonia and the Kingdom of Spain. For example, the young Mallorcan rapper Valtonyc has just been fined and sent to prison for three and a half years for *lèse-majesté* (“I don’t know if he [Juan Carlos I] was killing elephants or whoring”) and “threatening” lyrics. Meanwhile, the present king’s brother-in-law, Iñaki Urdangarín, sentenced to six years and three months in prison after being found guilty in a major corruption scandal, has been let off and, full of smiles, has returned to his golden exile in Geneva. His wife, Princess Cristina, was absolved because she is only a woman and didn’t know what hubby was up to. The putrid legal system is a source of great scorn and anger. If a Eurobarometer survey of April 2016 showed that only 30% of the Spanish population believed in the independence of the judiciary, the figure would be rock-bottom now. With a new referendum being organized in Catalonia, increasingly darker threats from the Spanish government, naturally citing its monarchist Constitution, augur a conflictive year.

The very nature of the Kingdom of Spain (described by the poet Jaime Gil de Biedma as an “old and inefficient” land), whether it is a nation or a group of nations, is disputed. With its creaking political structure, still Francoist in many ways, rampant corruption, and a two-party clientele system with no effective mechanisms of control, Spain is a long way, politically if not geographically, from a Catalonia which has always had a tradition of mass-based progressive politics. It’s no accident that in occupied Barcelona of 1939 a famous poster proclaimed this two-country difference: “Ha llegado España” (Spain has come).

Yet Spain and Catalonia are painfully entangled. The “Catalan question” is really a “Spanish question”, laying bare the Spanish state’s inability to accept its plurality. Any advance in Spanish democratization is inseparable from finding a solution to the “Catalan problem” (a term dating back to the 1880s). The problem is not just linguistic, although

Franco’s banning of Catalan in the public sphere still rankles. Politically speaking, Spain and Catalonia are chalk and cheese. More than “identity”, what is at stake for Catalans is political representation. The “revolt of the Catalans” is democratic because most believe that the Spanish state “does not represent us” (without this necessarily denying what is often a dual identity).

Europe is floundering in its own morass and Spain’s intransigence will only aggravate the disarray. Catalonia’s incendiary part in the debacle is trying to keep a spark of democracy burning in the ruins of the Old Continent’s ignominy. **CP**

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## Trump’s Grand Strategy and the Coming War on Iran

BY DAN GLAZEBROOK

In his 2009 book *The Next 100 Years*, George Friedman, of intelligence analysts STRATFOR pointed out, at the risk of stating the obvious, that “the United States is, historically, a warlike country”. But the number crunching that followed was particularly revealing. “The United States has been at war for about 10% of its existence” he wrote, adding that this only included major wars, not “minor conflicts like the Spanish-American war or Desert Storm” (the latter ‘minor conflict’ killing over 80,000 Iraqis). He continued: “during the twentieth century, the United States was at war 15% of the time. In the second half of the twentieth century, it was 22% of the time. And since the beginning of the twenty first century, in 2001, the United States has been constantly at war. War is central to the American experience, and its frequency is constantly increasing. It is built into American culture and deeply rooted in American geopolitics.”

The truth of this statement was revealed in a now notorious interview with former Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, General Wesley Clark, by *Democracy Now!* in March 2007. In this interview, Clark revealed, for the first time, the existence of a top-secret memo circulating in the Pentagon, issued by the U.S. Defence Department in the weeks following the 9/11 attacks. This memo, he said, “describes how we’re going to take out seven countries in five years, starting with Iraq, and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and, finishing off, Iran.” The 9/11 attack was being used as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to destroy every regional power with the potential to challenge US-British-Israeli hegemony in the entire Middle East/ North African/ Red Sea region.

The West’s war juggernaut has been rolling through this list ever since, though never without resistance. The US suffered over 35,000 casualties in Iraq, according to official figures, including over 4000 fatalities, with the true fallout (including, for example, trauma-related mental problems and suicides)



likely to be far, far higher. The military and financial costs of this war, and the backlash it provoked, meant that different methods were adopted for the other targeted nations. The attack on Lebanon, when it came in 2006, was launched by Israel rather than the US - but it, too, did not go as planned. Rather than the hoped-for destruction of Hezbollah, it resulted in a victory for the group and a skyrocketing of its popularity across the entire region. Others on the list, however, have indeed been 'taken out'. The same year as the Lebanon invasion, Somalia—then on the verge of coming under one single central authority for the first time since 1991 - was destabilized by a U.S.-sponsored Ethiopian invasion, followed five years later by another invasion by British client state Kenya, ensuring the civil war has continued to rage to this day. Then in 2011, after years spent arming the country's various armed factions, the U.S. oversaw the breakup of Sudan. The new breakaway republic of South Sudan almost immediately collapsed into civil war, and is now undergoing what has been officially declared the world's first famine in six years. And in 2011, too, the NATO bombardment of Libya, in coordination with Al Qaeda splinter group the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and the Qatari armed forces, led to the collapse of the Libyan state. Libya, too, remains at war, with the various pro-NATO rebel groups now fighting one another for control.

Indeed, Libya provided the blueprint for what was supposed to take place in Syria—a violent, sectarian insurgency, armed, trained and sponsored by the West and its Gulf allies, overthrowing state authority with NATO air support if necessary. It didn't turn out this way, of course, and the victory of Syrian government forces in Aleppo last December marks what many now see as the decisive defeat of this latest attempt at 'regime change'. And this defeat is in no small part down to the final country on that list - Iran.

It was, after all, Iran that provided the experienced, battle-hardened troops which—alongside their proteges, Hezbollah, and the Syrian Arab Army itself—acted as the ground forces against the West's proxies. As a result, Iran's influence in Syria has been cemented, as it had already been in Iraq following 2003, and is likely to be even further following the defeat of ISIS in Mosul. As Iranian-Canadian analyst Shahr Shahidsaless has written, "Iran challenges U.S. hegemony in every corner of the region. The fall of Aleppo was a clear manifestation of the decline of American influence in the region and the emergence of a new order in which Iran will play a major role as a regional power."

For U.S. war planners, this growing influence only pushes Iran even further up the target list. George Friedman, discussing the US invasion of Iraq, wrote that whilst "there is no question" it was "clumsy, graceless and in many ways unsophisticated", nevertheless "on a broader, more strategic level, that does not matter. So long as the Muslims are fighting each other, the United States has won its war". However, he adds a

warning: the instability engendered by the war "does raise the possibility of a Muslim nation-state taking advantage of the instability, and therefore the weaknesses within other states, to assert itself as a regional power". In the eyes of many US strategists, this is precisely what Iran has done. Regardless of the fact that Iran's only Arab ally Syria was, until the NATO-backed insurgency began in 2011, a beacon of stability in the region, and that Iran has been attempting to restore its stability since then, an influential faction within the US is intent on blaming Iran for all the region's woes. And it is precisely this faction that has just come to power under Trump.

If there is one thing that unites 'Team Trump', it is their hostility to Iran, their hatred of the Iran nuclear deal, and their willingness—or even eagerness—to go to war with Iran. Secretary of Defence General Mattis told his Senate confirmation hearing that "Iranian malign influence in the region is growing. Iran is the biggest destabilizing force in the Middle East and its policies are contrary to our interests." Last April, at a speech in Washington DC, Mattis clearly stated that he would prioritise 'dealing with' Iran ahead of tackling Al Qaeda and ISIS: "The Iranian regime, in my mind, is the single most enduring threat to stability and peace in the Middle East," he said. "For all the talk of ISIS and Al Qaida everywhere right now... they're a very serious threat. But nothing is as serious in the long term enduring ramifications, in terms of stability and prosperity and some hope for a better future for the young people out there, than Iran." Indeed, his speech went on to attempt to actually pin the rise of ISIS on Iran. "I consider ISIS nothing more than an excuse for Iran to continue its mischief. Iran is not an enemy of ISIS; they have a lot to gain from the turmoil that ISIS creates." "What," he asked, "is the one country in the Middle East that has not been attacked by ISIS? One. And it's Iran. That is just more than happenstance, I'm sure." This is a little conspiratorial, even by Trump's standards. But Mattis' approach is not untypical of the new administration.

Michael Flynn, Trump's original National Security Advisor, recently forced to resign over his contacts with Russia, has been a vocal and consistent advocate of 'regime change' in Iran. His 2016 book, *The Field of Fight*, described Iran as the head of "an international alliance of evil countries" which "extends from North Korea and China to Russia, Iran, Syria, Cuba, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Nicaragua", with Iran itself "the linchpin of this alliance, its centerpiece." At the time of the 2012 attack on the CIA compound in Benghazi, Flynn was head of the Defence Intelligence Agency. But, according to the *New York Times*, Flynn's focus at the time was not on tracking the culprits but instead on obsessively ordering his staff to find a nonexistent 'Iran connection' to the attacks. The NYT noted that they found "no evidence of any links" but "the general's stubborn insistence reminded some officials at the agency of how the Bush administration had once relentlessly sought to connect Saddam Hussein and Iraq to the

September 11th 2001, attacks”.

Mike Pompeo, the new CIA director shares Flynn’s views. He has called for “trashing the nuclear agreement”, arguing that it “strengthens Muslim extremists”.

This list goes on. Vice President Mike Pence has called Iran the “leading state sponsor of terrorism” and promised to “rip up the Iran deal” on the campaign trail, going further than even Trump himself had at the time. John Bolton, who advised Trump on foreign policy during the campaign has repeatedly called for Iran to be bombed. Other Iran hawks in Trump’s team include Jeff Sessions (Attorney General), Rick Perry (Secretary of Energy), Ben Carson (Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development), Nikki Haley (U.S. Ambassador the United Nations), Tom Price (Health & Human Services Secretary), and Ryan Zinke (Secretary of the Interior).

And their rhetoric is increasingly warlike. Already, following a missile test fully in line with Iran’s commitments under the nuclear deal, Trump’s administration has stepped up sanctions against Iran (a move it called an “initial step”), declaring that the country is now “on notice” and “playing with fire”. As Rasool Nafisi, an Iran expert at Washington DC’s Strayer University, has said, the new U.S. government appear to be “itching for some kind of conflict in the Middle East, and especially against Iran, given all the rhetoric they used during the election campaign.” If the nuclear deal unravels, such a war is far from unlikely - and according to Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Evseev, a defence analyst at the Commonwealth of Independent States, Trump is pushing for exactly this: “The U.S. can’t block this agreement because it is supported by the corresponding resolution of the UN Security Council and is a multipartite deal. However it will try to create conditions so that the deal cannot be implemented”, he told Sputnik.. And, as Shahir Shahidsaless has convincingly argued, “The collapse of the nuclear deal will inevitably push the Trump administration into conflict with Iran”. This is because whatever act of U.S. belligerence (such as restored sanctions) actually buries the deal will force Iran to take a defiant stand in response, such as, for example, renewing its uranium enrichment programme. To such a move, the US would ultimately respond with force.

This, then, is the direction in which the U.S. is moving: towards an all out confrontation with Iran, the last country on Wesley Clark’s list. But they face a major problem. Russia.

In August 2013, when the U.S. and Britain were declaring that airstrikes against Syrian government targets were imminent, Russia immediately sent three warships to the Mediterranean, stepped up their shipments of powerful anti-aircraft missiles to Syria, and made it very clear that they were standing by the Syrian government. This would not be a repeat of 2011 Libya: NATO planes would be shot down, and body bags would flow back home. In the end, Britain and the US backed down. Just over two years later, in September 2015, Russia launched its own military intervention in Syria, at the request of the Syrian government, giving renewed

momentum to the push-back against Western-backed insurgents. The US-British war plan for Syria was in tatters, and the lesson was clear: taking out governments supported by Russia is extremely difficult.

Herein lies the purpose of the much-touted ‘Trump-Putin deal’ that is supposedly in the pipeline. Trump and co know very well that Russian acquiescence will be



*Naval exercises by Iranian Republican Guard. Photo: Sayyed Shaham-Odin Vajedi CC: 4.0.*

key to the success of any future attack on Iran. Even without Russian support, a war on Iran will not be easy; with Russian support, Iran, like Syria, may well emerge triumphant. At the very least, the cost, in blood and treasure, of attacking an Iran backed by Russia would make it political suicide. Breaking the alliance between Iran and Russia is therefore crucial to the next phase of the U.S. war. And time is of the essence, as Iran is learning from Russia all the time. As the Institute for the Study of War have noted, “Iranian military cooperation with Russia in Syria is dramatically increasing Tehran’s ability to plan and conduct complex conventional operations. Iranians are learning by seeing and by doing, and are consciously trying to capture lessons-learned in Syria for use throughout their military and para-military forces. Iran is fielding a conventional force capability to complement and in some cases supplant its reliance on asymmetric means of combat. Russia is assisting Iran’s military leadership conduct this effort. It is introducing Iran and its proxies to signature Russian campaign-design concepts such as cauldron battles, multiple simultaneous and successive operations, and frontal

aviation in Syria.

These concepts are the fruit of almost a century of advanced Soviet and Russian thought and hard-won experience in conventional military operations. This knowledge-transfer can help the Iranian military advance its understanding of conventional war far more rapidly than it might otherwise be able to do. It can help Iran become a formidable conventional military power in the Middle East in relatively short order, permanently changing the balance of power and the security environment in the region...Iranian conventional military capabilities will continue to increase rapidly as long as Russian and Iranian forces continue to operate alongside each other in Syria simply by learning the best practices for developing, deploying, and using such forces in combat. Russia is poised to teach Iran additional methods of warfare as it prepares for the next phase of the pro-regime campaign in Syria.” The report concludes that “The U.S. and its regional partners must recognize that the deep Russo-Iranian military cooperation in Syria is in itself a major threat to the balance of power within the Middle East.”

This, then, is the grand strategy that so many commentators have failed to discern in the Trump administration: to break the Russian-Iranian alliance and effectively buy Russian acquiescence for the forthcoming U.S./Israeli/ British attack on Iran.

Of course, such a strategy does, at first, sound absurd. Iran and Russia—as Flynn himself noted in despair—are allies. They have just emerged as triumphant partners in the battle to thwart regime change in Syria, and Russia has already provided Iran with the powerful S-300 anti-aircraft missile system that so put the jitters up NATO when it arrived in Syria in 2013. Moreover, last August, Russia moved the air-bases used for its Syria operations from southern Russia to Iran, in what the National Interest called “an expression of Russian solidarity with Iran”.

Yet Trump has a lot to offer Russia in return for its ending this ‘solidarity’. Most obviously, he could lift sanctions. Russia’s economy was plunged into recession in 2015 following the onset of U.S.-E.U. sanctions the previous year, which coincided with a collapse in the global price of oil, Russia’s major export. Russia has been keen to downplay the impact of sanctions, but even Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev has admitted that they have cost the country tens of billions of dollars. Trump is particularly well placed to offer Russia lucrative deals, especially in the oil sector, should these sanctions be lifted. Trump’s Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, former CEO of ExxonMobil, already signed a deal with Russian state-owned oil firm Rosneft estimated to be worth up to \$500 billion back in 2012. The comprehensive agreement covered Arctic and Black Sea oil exploration and development, as well as providing Rosneft with a 30% share in Exxon projects in Texas and the Gulf of Mexico; it also promised to transfer technology developed in hard-to-access parts

of America to western Siberia, to allow Russia to tap into an estimated 1.7 billion barrels of light oil currently trapped in non-porous rock. “In terms of its ambitions”, said Russia’s deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin at the time, the project, “exceeds sending man into outer space or flying to the moon”. But U.S. sanctions imposed following the Russian annexation of Crimea put the deal on ice. Lifting them would allow the Exxon-Rosneft project to finally go ahead, potentially reversing Russia’s dwindling economic woes. Tillerson, unsurprisingly, is on record as being opposed to the sanctions. His \$218million personal stake in ExxonMobil would immediately ramp up in value were the 2012 deal to be unfrozen.

Trump has, indeed, already stated that he would be willing to reconsider sanctions if Moscow “was really helping us” to achieve U.S. policy goals.

However, lifting sanctions requires some, at least nominal, resolution of the Ukraine conflict, as this was ostensibly the reason for imposing them in the first place. Interestingly, it emerged this February that two of Trump’s close colleagues—his personal lawyer Michael Cohen and business associate Felix Sater—had discussed a proposal to lift Russian sanctions and recognise Russian sovereignty over Crimea, in exchange for a withdrawal of Russian forces from eastern Ukraine, with an opposition politician in Ukraine last year.

Lifting sanctions and easing tension in Ukraine might well be tempting enough for Putin to consider ditching his Iranian allies. But Trump has much more than this to offer: ending NATO expansion (for example, by persuading Senate Republicans to vote against Montenegrin membership later this year), pulling back NATO forces from Eastern Europe (easily justified following any deal over Ukraine), ending calls for regime change in Syria and even military cooperation there against Al Qaeda and ISIS.

And Trump not only has carrots aplenty—he also has sticks. From this point of view, the supposed split in the administration, between supposedly ‘pro-’ and ‘anti-’ Russian figures actually works to Trump’s advantage, providing him with not only ‘good cops’ like Tillerson, willing to cooperate and negotiate with Russia, but also bad cops (like Russia ‘hawk’ HR McMaster) who illustrate Trump’s willingness to continue with NATO expansion, ramp up sanctions, and push Russia into a crippling arms race should they refuse to play ball.

Ultimately, of course, any Russian decision to sell out its Iranian ally would be utterly self-defeating. China would be next, and ultimately Russia would find itself totally isolated once the U.S. finally set its sights on them. Ultimately, there are no shared interests between the U.S. and Russia—whatever goodies might be dangled beneath their eyes. **CP**

**DAN GLAZEBROOK** is currently crowdfunding to finance his second book; you can order an advance copy here: <http://fundrazr.com/c1CSnd>.

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# Trump's National Security Team

## Closing the Door to Diplomacy

BY MELVIN GOODMAN

The first hundred days have presented a daunting challenge for most presidents in the post-World War II era, and the presidency of Donald Trump is certainly no exception. In the first hundred days, John F. Kennedy made the horrendous decision to invade Cuba; Lyndon B. Johnson expanded the U.S. military presence in Vietnam; Bill Clinton mishandled the Somali situation that culminated in the disaster of Black Hawk Down; and George W. Bush was on the cusp of a crisis with China before Secretary of State Colin Powell pulled the president's fat out of the fire. But no presidential administration in U.S. history has started with such disarray and chaos as this one.

Donald Trump entered the White House with no background, no experience, no understanding, and no obvious curiosity about international relations. As a result, the major elements of his stewardship, to include personnel, policy, politics, and process, contain a high degree of uncertainty and even confusion. Various authoritarian leaders around the world, including Philippines' President Duterte, Egyptian President al-Sisi, and even North Korean President Kim Jong-un, have offered welcoming remarks to the new American president. Conversely, traditional allies and friends, including European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Mexico, and even Australia, have expressed uncertainty about the future of both bilateral and multilateral affairs.

### Personnel

The national security team, the most questionable and least qualified of the post-war era, has raised immediate concerns about Donald Trump's judgment. Trump's authoritarian style during the campaign attracted an authoritarian following. Thus, it was no surprise that he selected an authoritarian national security team, dominated by retired general officers and military academy graduates. His predecessor, President Barack Obama, appointed too many military officers to positions that should have been held by civilians, such as national security adviser, national intelligence tsar, CIA director, and several ambassadors, but Donald Trump has gone overboard in ignoring the Founding Fathers' commitment to civilian control of the military.

The appointment of general officers as national security adviser (Michael Flynn initially and then H.R. McMaster), secretary of defense (Jim Mattis), and secretary of homeland security (John Kelly) compromises the need to ensure mili-

tary subordination to civilian political authority. General officers have command experience as well as operational and tactical expertise, but they are typically lacking in strategic geopolitical insight, which requires second and third order thinking that depends on international experience. I base that assessment on my own experience of 18 years as a member of the faculty of the National War College, where I taught Army colonels and Navy captains, several of whom became chairman or members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Overall, these officers had a deep understanding of military issues, but rarely displayed a command of geopolitical developments, let alone an understanding of the non-military tools of strategic statecraft.

In the first several weeks of the Trump administration, the liabilities of these three generals became manifest. Any actuary would have anticipated a short run for Flynn as the head of the National Security Council; his was a particularly controversial selection because of his conspiratorial thinking and his mishandling of the Defense Intelligence Agency, which led to his forced retirement from the service in 2014. But who would have expected that his lies to Vice President Mike Pence and other high-level White House officials about his conversations with Russian Ambassador Sergei Kislyak, which violated the 1799 Logan Act, would have forced his resignation less than a month into the Trump presidency. Is it possible that an intelligence officer such as Flynn didn't know that conversations with the Russian ambassador would be recorded by the National Security Agency?

Another general was named to take his place, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, who had never served a tour of duty at the Pentagon or in Washington, but who will be responsible for coordinating the positions of putatively high-powered secretaries of state, defense, and treasury. None of these individuals has an institutional memory for geopolitical decision making over the past several decades or an understanding of strategic statecraft. McMaster is best known for his book, *Derelection of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam*. In that book, McMaster falsely argued that the Joint Chiefs failed to tell the truth to the White House regarding the need for greater force. In actual fact, it was the failure of the Joint Chiefs to know or seek the truth regarding Vietnam, which was a fool's errand from the start.

Meanwhile, Generals Mattis and Kelly have not distinguished themselves in the administration's first days as secretaries of defense and homeland security, respectively. General Kelly was AWOL in the disastrous declaration of the President's Muslim Ban in February, which was overturned by a unanimous decision of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. Kelley clumsily handled the crackdown on immigrants. Trump's immigration and refugee policies are based entirely on fear, creating chaos at home and abroad.

Trump went out of his way to humiliate Secretary of

Defense Mattis by traveling to the Pentagon to announce the Muslim Ban, even though the secretary had made it clear in the confirmation process that he favored cooperation with Muslim states to deal with the problem of radical Islamic terrorism and was opposed to vilifying the Muslim community.

The remaining appointments to the national security team also lacked the requisite sophistication and open-mindedness needed for decision making. The appointment of Rep. Michael Pompeo (R-KS), a graduate of West Point, to be director of the Central Intelligence Agency was particularly worrisome. Like Flynn, Pompeo is a polemicist and Islamophobe who favors a Muslim ban and opposes the international nuclear accord with Iran. Trump's visit to CIA headquarters the day after his inauguration pointed to politicization of an institution that has been compromised by two previous veterans of Capitol Hill, Rep. Porter Goss and George Tenet, the staff chief of the Senate intelligence committee during the controversial confirmation of Robert Gates, who politicized intelligence for CIA director William Casey throughout the 1980s.

Pompeo, who regretted the end to torture and abuse, showed his true colors upon arrival at CIA headquarters, when he named Gina Haspel as his deputy. Haspel, a veteran of the CIA's National Clandestine Service and known to her colleagues as "Bloody Gina," was a leading player in torture and abuse as well as extraordinary renditions. She ran the secret prison in Thailand, where Abu Zubaydah was waterboarded 83 times. Haspel sent the cable that ordered the destruction of the 92 torture tapes that documented the torture. Acting CIA director Michael Morell, a senior fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School who favors targeted killings by drones, cleared Haspel of "any wrongdoing" in the tapes destruction.

The appointment of former senator Dan Coats as the Director of National Intelligence brings into the decision making circle another player without a background in strategic intelligence. He was selected primarily because of his neoconservative views in the domestic arena. Coats is a pro-life evangelical, who is opposed to both abortion and gay marriage. In the 1990s, he helped draft the cynical "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy that the Clinton administration supported. There is no reason to expect that either Pompeo or Coats will be willing to tell truth to power, the major responsibility of the intelligence community.

The only important "civilian" voice at the National Security Council will be that of Rex Tillerson, the former chief of Exxon, who is totally lacking in experience or understanding of geopolitical matters that don't deal with the extraction of gas and oil resources. His confirmation testimony was laughable for its irrelevance and superficiality; his first trip abroad to Germany brought guffaws from his foreign counterparts; and his State Department has become a Lilliputian member of the national security team. Once the preeminent voice of U.S.

foreign policy, the State Department no longer gives regular press briefings, which have been customary for the past 65 years, and has been silent while the president himself walked away from the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, and assigned a major role for Israeli-Palestinian talks to the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

Tillerson doesn't even attend White House meetings with foreign leaders, and has little contact with the president or the national security advisor. His choice for a deputy, Elliot Abrams, was blocked by the president himself. Abrams received a presidential pardon on Christmas Eve, 1992; supported the Iraq War; and opposed diplomatic negotiations with Iran and North Korea, but Trump blocked the appointment because Abrams wasn't sufficiently loyal.

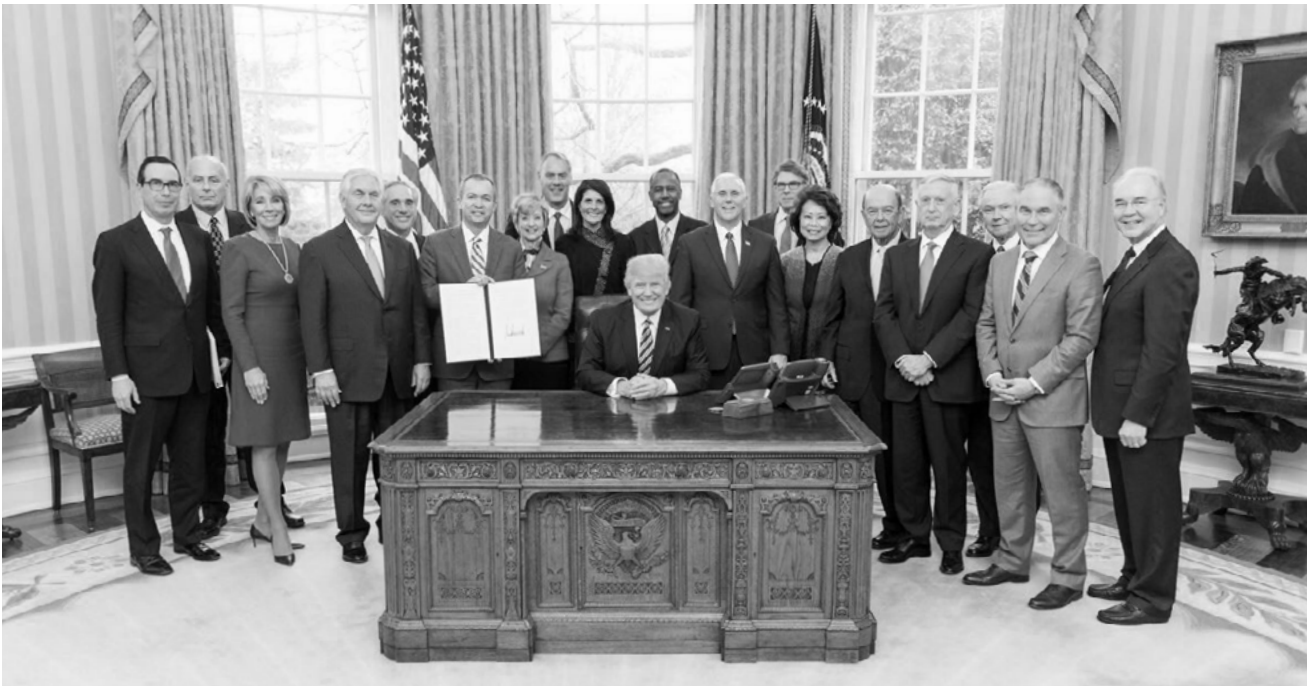
Tillerson, without any experienced staffers at his side, immediately conducted a purge of the department's upper ranks, probably at the direction of the White House. As a result, the key aides around Tillerson can't fill the knowledge gaps for the secretary of state; one is a former aide to New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, another is a former press secretary for Newt Gingrich, a third worked at Fox News before joining the Trump campaign. This is an embarrassment that has diplomats aghast throughout the international community. None of them expressed any opposition to the huge budget cuts that Trump is imposing on the State Department.

Even the selection of an ambassador to the United Nations was mishandled, leading to the appointment of Governor Nikki Haley, who may soon make Sarah Palin sound like Henry A. Kissinger. In her very first public statement as ambassador, Haley chilled her international counterparts with this salvo: "For those who don't have our back, we're taking names," which she repurposed with the hashtag: #TakingNames. Like the president, she relies heavily on her Twitter account, posting selfies with her husband and, in the wake of the North Korean missile launch in February, a message about her admiration for 1980s rock star Joan Jett.

## Policy and Politics

On January 31, 2017, Donald Tusk, the head of the European Council, identified the three greatest threats to European security: Russia, international terrorism, and U.S. national security policy (*italics added*). There is no historical precedent for the European branding of the United States as a security threat. But in the wake of Trump's labeling of NATO as "obsolete," the rough handling of U.S. neighbors and allies in exchanges between heads of state; and the flirtation with Vladimir Putin's Russia, there is good reason for European anxiety about the direction of U.S. policy. In the first thirty days, Vice President Pence, Secretary of State Tillerson, and Secretary of Defense Mattis were sent to Europe to calm European nerves regarding the intentions and actions of an unpredictable president.

Meanwhile, international opinion was shaped and shaken



*Donald Trump's cabinet. Photo: White House.*

by Trump's threats to send U.S. military forces to Mexico to deal with the "bad hombres" there, and by his brusque and insulting comments to Australian Prime Minister Turnbull. (Ironically, in two of his final international calls as president, Barack Obama appealed to both Turnbull and British Prime Minister Theresa May to "mentor" Trump.)

Trump is threatening severe changes to every aspect of U.S. foreign policy, including nuclear policy as well as arms control and disarmament policy. Instead of traditional U.S. support for non-proliferation, which has been part and parcel of U.S. policy for the past fifty years, Trump has invited South Korea, Japan, and Saudi Arabia to develop their own nuclear inventories in order to safeguard their national interests. Conversely, former national security advisor Flynn put Iran "on notice," whatever that may mean, for conducting a [failed] missile test that was not in violation of the Iran nuclear accord or any UN resolution.

Trump has demonstrated no understanding of the contribution of allies and alliances to U.S. national security, and has appointed no one to educate him. When asked if he believed that the United States gains anything from its bases in East Asia, Trump responded "I don't think so."

Instead of paying at least lip service to the needs of Israel and the Arab states, Trump has gone overboard on behalf of Israel, appointing a hard-line ambassador to Tel Aviv, promising to move the embassy to Jerusalem, and making his first international phone call to Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu. Netanyahu, for his part, is so confident of U.S. support that he immediately announced 5,500 new housing units in occupied territory, a violation of Geneva

Conventions. Netanyahu's visit to Washington in February led to a reversal of three decades of U.S. support for a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians.

Trump is facing his greatest challenge in trying to change policy toward Russia. Last month's resignation of Flynn turned on his inappropriate and presumably illegal contacts with the Russian ambassador in Washington, and his deceit in conversations with the Vice President. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has had to recuse himself from the investigation of Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election because he lied in his confirmation hearing about his own contacts with the Russian ambassador. Trump's unusual handling of America's Russian problem has no support from his national security team, except for counselor Steve Bannon, who appears to have the most important voice in the White House for U.S. national security policy.

Trump's speech to the Congress in March reinforced his militarism, brandishing a commitment to greater defense spending and military activity. Although the United States is the only global military power in existence and outspends the entire global community in military and intelligence spending, Trump wants to expand the Army and the Marines; build more ships and planes; and increase nuclear forces, which would add at least \$100 billion annually to defense spending in his four-year term, although the United States is the only nation in the world that can actually project power far from its borders.

Increased defense spending by Reagan and Bush did great harm to the U.S. economy; Trump's defense spending combined with promised tax cuts will do even more. The fact that



the military budget has steadily increased in recent years as the budgets for such diplomatic agencies as the Department of State and the Agency for International Development decline will further militarize U.S. foreign policy and ultimately reduce U.S. influence in the global arena.

## Process and Politics

Thirty years ago, Trump published an open letter in the *New York Times* that stated “There’s nothing wrong with America’s Foreign Defense Policy that a little backbone can’t cure.” And several days after his inauguration, Trump’s in-house lawyer and chief of international negotiations, Jason Greenblatt, told a European diplomat that “we are business people. We are not going to govern this country with diplomatic niceties. We are going to govern it as a business.”

In fact, the “business” of foreign policy decision making should be relatively easy for the United States because of its geographic and physical security. Two oceans provide security east and west; two benign neighbors provide security north and south. No other major player in the international arena has that kind of safety. The collapse of the Berlin Wall, the Warsaw Pact, and the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 brought an additional measure of security, but the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations largely squandered that advantage over the past 25 years. Thus far the disarray and chaos of the Trump administration has allowed no time for serious consideration of substantive matters, which threaten to create genuine problems for U.S. national security.

Until now, the security architecture that has been in place since President Harry Truman’s National Security Act of 1947, which created the Department of Defense, the National Security Council, and the CIA, has been relatively stable and allowed for programmatic approaches to political, economic, and even military challenges. The term “national security calculus,” which refers to the challenges and opportunities confronting the United States as well as the instruments that can be brought to bear in dealing with them, was similar in both Democratic and Republican administrations. But Trump’s authoritarian style and his random approach to policy have complicated the process, and created bewilderment at home and abroad. His flawed handling of the Muslim ban exposed his failure to understand the checks and balances in the system. Overall, there has been no evidence of a process for conceptualizing and implementing foreign policy, which is the challenge confronting General McMaster, who has never had a tour of duty in Washington or even the Pentagon, and will remain on active duty as the national security adviser.

Trump’s random and counterproductive style has been on display in telephone communications with heads of state as well as in his juvenile and awkward use of his Twitter account that has kept his senior staff on alert to errors and blunders. The decision to mount a controversial raid into Yemen was made at a dinner meeting, and not in a conventional setting

within the NSC. His handling of the North Korean missile test in February was decided at an *al fresco* “situation room” at his Florida country club, where he was surrounded by assorted guests and foreign waiters. The Muslim ban was not vetted through the Cabinet or the national security bureaucracy; it created a logistic and political nightmare that the judicial process had to correct.

Trump’s reorganization of the NSC demoted the director of the CIA and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and gave an unusual elevation to a political advisor, Steve Bannon, who has argued that “our big belief, one of our central organizing principles..., is that we’re at war [with the Islamic community].” Bannon believes that the United States is facing an international alliance of evil countries and movements that is working to destroy us.” Can we count on the generals to moderate Bannon’s views?

## Bottom Line

Trump is not the first president to lie to the American people. Lyndon Johnson was known for his “credibility gap,” and Richard Nixon lied about every aspect of his Vietnam policy for years. The troubling aspect of Trump’s lies is that he appears to believe them in a pathological way. Foreign heads of state and diplomats are certainly taking due note of this personality trait, which has already been noted in various capitals around the world. The president of Mexico cancelled a trip to Washington less than 24 hours after an acrimonious telephone exchange with Trump, which was followed by the American president’s imperious demands on Twitter the same day that a high-level Mexican delegation arrived in Washington to improve the bilateral atmospherics. Senior Russian intelligence officers recently prepared a psychological profile of Trump as a guide for Russian President Putin. Maybe Wikileaks will share this document.

“Alternative facts” and “incomplete information” may be par for the course in domestic politics, but they will cause fundamental problems in the global arena. The global community has closely followed the course of these activities, and paid particular notice to Trump’s branding of the mainstream media as the “enemy of the people.” The rise of the alt-Right in the United States has been noted in international media for its opposition to immigration, gun control, and the campaign that demands that “Black Lives Matter.” U.S. influence in the global arena will surely decline as a result.

*Wag the Dog*, a black comedy film in the 1990s, featured an American president who tried to distract the electorate from a sex scandal by hiring a Hollywood film producer to construct a fake war with Albania. The film was released one month before the outbreak of the Monica Lewinsky scandal and the Clinton administration’s subsequent bombing of a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. In view of the apocalyptic madness of Trump’s closest advisor, Steve Bannon, who has produced a series of disorienting documentaries, such coun-

tries as North Korea and Iran would be well advised to keep their heads below their breast plates.

For the past 70 years, the United States has pursued foreign policy in a bipartisan fashion, which typically found the nation in support of a stable international system that would support American policies and ideals. There was a Hamiltonian approach to the global security and financial architecture that found the United States at the center of all major diplomatic developments. For the first time since the end of World War II, the commander-in-chief has taken a nihilistic approach to governance that criticizes and disavows national and international norms, and is devoid of ideas about stabilizing international and domestic governance. We are in dangerous uncharted waters. **CP**

**MELVIN GOODMAN** is a former CIA analyst and author of *Whistleblower at the CIA*.

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## Do Citizen Movements Have a Grand Opportunity in the U.S. – Mexico Crisis?

BY KENT PATERSON

Corporate globalization, immigration battles, human rights violations and indigenous resistance all stoked vigorous cross-border citizen movements touching Mexico and the United States during the 1990s and into the 2000s.

Though undergoing ebbs and flows, joint campaigns opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), environmental contamination along a common border and the Ciudad Juarez femicides. Solidarity movements were inspired by the 1994 Mayan Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, the massive 2006 immigrant May Day actions launched in the United States but also replicated in Mexico and Central America, and the forced disappearance of 43 male students from the Ayotzinapa rural teacher college in the Mexican state of Guerrero in 2014.

In 2017, propelled by the policies of new U.S. President Donald Trump, cross-border movements are making a comeback.

“Many such efforts continue and must be deepened in the face of new challenges like the Trump administration, said Camilo Perez Bustillo, executive director of the Human Rights Center at the University of Dayton in Ohio. Perez Bustillo, who also coordinates the secretariat of the International Tribunal of Conscience of Peoples in Movement (ITC), helped organize the September 2015 citizen hearing in New York on Ayotzinapa.

According to Perez Bustillo, the New York hearing “drew heavily on the experience” of the Mexican chapter of the

Permanent People’s Tribunal (an initiative spawned by the historic Bertrand Russell hearings on the Vietnam War) which gathered testimony across the Mexican Republic between 2011 and 2014 on human rights violations implicating the Mexican and U.S. governments, foreign corporations and organized criminal networks. The international human rights attorney said the global movement in support of the Ayotzinapa students would continue with an event planned at the southern Mexican college later this year.

### The Context in Mexico

Although the issues catalyzing the new surge in U.S.-Mexico activism are similar in nature to previous times, the big difference is that the stakes are higher. Another new element is that significant but not necessarily decisive differences are flaring between elites in Mexico and the United States, once united behind NAFTA and the Washington Consensus in which the Mexican State was at least a junior partner the U.S.-initiated drug war and crack downs on Central American migrants passing through Mexico to El Norte.

Thanks to Trump, the Mexican media is devoting unparalleled attention to the lot of migrants in the U.S. who the Mexican daily newspaper *La Jornada* calls “the first line of reaction of Mexico.” Two people named Guadalupe have become media symbols of the new era. The first is deported Arizona resident Guadalupe Garcia, who had lived in the United States since she was 14 and raised a family now left behind in gringolandia. The second is a 45-year-old man, Guadalupe Olivas, who committed suicide last month by leaping off a bridge in Tijuana reportedly after being deported from the U.S. for the third time.

In a revival of Mexican nationalism not seen in years, outrage over the new U.S. president and his policies is resounding in virtually every sector of Mexican society, dramatized by the symbolic burning of the border wall at the inauguration of the 2017 edition of the Veracruz Carnaval.

In an unprecedented act, Pena Nieto greeted a group of deportees arriving February 7 at the Mexico City airport with the words “You are not alone.”

Leaders of the PRI, PAN and PRD political parties are conferring with Mexican immigrants and sympathetic U.S. politicians, while Mexico’s federal, state and local governments are pledging more consular, legal and financial support to immigrants facing deportation and deportees struggling to get back on their feet.

Additionally, Mexican universities have reached agreements with U.S. counterparts to mutually support students who might confront immigration troubles.

Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, leader of the center-left Morena party who is the early front-runner for the Mexican presidency in 2018, made a February 12 speech in the heart of Los Angeles’s historic Mexican community in which he

weaved together a political program of Mexican nationalism abroad with social reform at home.

But Trump took the Oval Office at a politically delicate moment in Mexico, where mass rejection of President Enrique Peña Nieto was already steaming when a January 1 gasoline price hike of 20 percent known as the *gasolinazo* sent tens of thousands of demonstrators into the streets; protesters feared that higher gasoline prices would trigger inflation in other basic commodities.

“Everything is going up—tortillas, meat and milk products,” said Teresa Guerra, general secretary of the Puerto Vallarta branch of the Telephone Workers of the Mexican Republic, at a recent march. “The worst of the crisis is yet to come if we don’t act now to change things.”

The Trump-Peña Nieto contradiction was played out in polemical February 12 demonstrations in Mexican cities originally planned against Trump policies but soon splattered with denunciations of the Mexican government as well. Suddenly, Mexican social activists were grappling with a political dynamic that shifted after Trump assumed the presidency.

Praising anti-Trump demonstrations north of the border, Fernando Sanchez and Jose Ignacio Vallejo, Puerto Vallarta residents active in the anti-*gasolinazo* movement, agree Trump’s attacks on Mexican migrants and xenophobia are creating fear and terror in U.S. Latino communities but also maintain the official focus on Trump is a smokescreen to divert attention away from internal problems.

“We believe that if we are well on the inside, there won’t be a necessity for Mexicans to migrate to other countries, especially the U.S.,” Sanchez says.

Juan Villegas, another anti-*gasolinazo* activist in Puerto Vallarta, isn’t impressed by Mexican politicians traveling to the United States.

“Politics in Mexico is made by Mexican women and men, and not in the U.S.,” he says. “This is opportunism and hypocrisy. (Officials) haven’t done anything for their people at home. It’s about political and economic interests.”

Arguably, Trump deflected attention from another big issue in Mexico: the delayed but pending passage of a law that would give legal *carte blanche* to the intervention of a Mexican military long involved in combating organized crime gangs and others deemed threats to national security.

Quoted in *La Jornada*, Mexican Defense Secretary Salvador Cienfuegos insisted that the proposed law would not mean “the institutionalization of soldiers in public security or its militarization,” but critics were quick to counter that the Peña Nieto administration measure does legally authorize the deployment of soldiers in a crime fighting and investigative capacity, activities not recognized by the Mexican Constitution and therefore technically illegal.

In a recent weekly column critiquing the proposed law published in the Guerrero daily *El Sur*, the non-governmental Tlachinollan Human Rights Center of the Mountain noted

the persistent if not increasing narco violence in Guerrero in spite of the deployment of soldiers and marines ostensibly for the purpose of restoring order. Tlachinollan further cited human rights violations committed by members of the Mexican military in Guerrero as far back as the 1970s that resulted in recommendations or mandatory sentences from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

Urging a new conception of security, Tlachinollan said “it’s imperative to reduce the participation of the army in police activities.”

## The Accent on Trump

Meanwhile, politicians and other social actors are pressing the Mexican government to take a stronger stand against the Trump administration, a demand that’s growing in the wake of the recent visit of U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly to Mexico.

For its part, the Archdiocese of Mexico City recently blasted the Mexican government for exhibiting fear and “submission” to Washington. As border wall rhetoric intensifies in Washington, Chihuahua Senator Patricio Martinez is even urging a revisit of U.S. territorial violations of 19th century treaties he claims could place two million acres rightfully belonging to Mexico on the wrong side of the line. At a recent Senate session attended by Geronimo Gutierrez, the new Mexican ambassador to the U.S., Martinez insisted that before issues like the border wall are taken up with Trump administration a question has to be properly resolved: “What is the border?”

Perez Bustillo, however, warned that the “Mexican government is very poorly positioned to take on the defense of the rights of Mexicans in the U.S. because of its disastrous human rights record at home.” The Mexican state, he said, wields “the same apparatus and mechanisms of the Mexican consulates in the U.S. that supposedly will now deepen their defense of Mexican immigrants,” but constitutes the same institutions that “that harass and seek to coopt those same communities when they organize and mobilize in solidarity with the victims of cases like the 43 missing students in Ayotzinpa or others affected by Mexican state terror.”

In Guerrero, where the 43 students disappeared at the hands of security forces, another journalist dedicated to reporting on violence and state-connected organized crime, Cecilio Pineda, was murdered March 2.

Viewed from the perspective of many activists, effective resistance to the Trump administration’s immigrant and other Mexico policies can only come from below. If contemporary Mexican politics is a minefield packed with thousands of bomblets, and politicians are falling over themselves to denounce Trump, questions demanding urgent attention are on the table. What role do grassroots movements play in the remake of U.S.-Mexico relations? What prospects if any do

citizen movements have in influencing the course of relations between two neighboring countries, to the benefit of popular sectors? Can geographically dispersed movements broaden their agenda while not losing their *raison d'être*?

Reinvigorated cross-border citizen movements are already unfolding on two key fronts—immigration and the renegotiation of NAFTA, and examples abound.

## Immigrant Rights

Forging common action has an organic advantage in that immigrant communities in the U.S. typically have relatives and friends back home. Expressing a binding solidarity with indigenous Oaxacan immigrants in the U.S., especially California, an estimated 2,000 members of the binational Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations (FIOB) staged a February march in Oaxaca City both against Trump and the gasolinazo.

The dual-themed action challenged the admonitions of former Mexican President Vicente Fox and others that Trump and not internal grievances is the real issue at hand in Mexico today.

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**“Virtually every corner  
of Mexico and the US  
is becoming a front for  
struggles.”**

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A California-Mexico Dreamers network, consisting of young people who were brought to the United States as children and deemed eligible for the former Obama administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, is getting off the ground in March, according to Dr. Armando Vazquez-Ramos, founder of the non-profit California -Mexico Studies Center in Long Beach and a longtime immigrant advocate. The effort could expand “if we secure funding and engage the network to carry up the project,” Vazquez-Ramos said in an e-mail.

Directly connecting politics in the U.S. and Mexico, Vazquez-Ramos and his colleagues are promoting the non-partisan voter registration of Mexico-born Dreamers, who remain citizens in their country of birth, so the U.S. residents could vote in the 2018 Mexican presidential election as a step toward creating a “political base” next year in Mexico, where the concerns of migrants in El Norte have usually been neglected south of the border—at least until now.

Vazquez-Ramos cheered February's Day without Latinos and Immigrants in the United States, an almost spontaneously organized day of work stoppages that's viewed as a prelude

to bigger actions to come. “...there will be a great mobilization for May Day and in coordination with activists in Mexico as well,” he said. “Certainly I believe that we will be joining that effort in a big way.”

Denouncing the assault on immigrants as part of a worldwide crisis of capitalism, the Chiapas-based Zapatistas have called on their supporters to support migrants by offering shelter and sustenance, providing legal assistance, organizing festivals and mobilizations, and staging boycotts.

“It is our duty to support and to offer solidarity wherever we are,” the Zapatista leadership said in a statement. “The moment has arrived to create solidarity committees with criminalized and persecuted humanity. Now more than ever, your house is our house.”

Generating debate are campaigns promoted by Mexican social media activists to boycott U.S. businesses operating in their country while buying Mexican-made products. Emerging this winter in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, the Adios McAllen movement appeared to have had some initial impact in convincing citizens not to shop in their Texas sister city across the Rio Grande, but an on-the-ground boycott of the type carried out by the United Farm Workers Union or the anti-Coors movement in the United States during the 1970s has yet to emerge in Mexico.

## NAFTA

While the border wall and immigration are two aspects of Trump's Mexico policy getting the most attention, a scrapped or tweaked North American Free Trade Agreement will likely be the centerpiece of the new, testy Washington-Mexico City relationship as 2017 moves forward.

NAFTA has not only boosted the bottom line of U.S. Fortune 500 corporations, but greatly expanded the financial horizons of Mexican companies like cement giant Cemex, bread giant Bimbo and Carlos Slim's various enterprises. Most recently, Mexico has opened its oil and gas fields to foreign investment. In short, the Mexican elite has gold riding on NAFTA.

As NAFTA negotiations crank up, networks of U.S. and Mexican activists are rekindling their ties in a renewed effort to assure working class and other popular interests are not sold down the river again.

“If NAFTA's renegotiation is dominated by the same corporate elites that gave us NAFTA in the first place, things could become even worse for working families, public health and the environment in all three countries,” said Aaron Lehmer-Chang, Director of the California Trade Justice Coalition (CTJC).

“Simply stating he will renegotiate NAFTA tells us nothing about whether President Trump will stand up for workers and the environment. The real question is if he will replace them with better trade policies or just more corporate power-grabs.”

In the lead-up to the NAFTA talks, the CTJC is hosting

town halls in California where participants can help formulate a people's program on trilateral trade. According to Lehmer-Chang, the coalition is working with Canadian and Mexican partners to advance common goals. The CTJC's member organizations include the California Nurses Association, Friends of the Earth, Global Exchange and the California Labor Federation, among others.

A consensus is emerging in Mexico that Trump is the wake up call for the nation to diversify its economic relationships (80 percent of Mexican exports go the U.S.), expand ties with Latin America and rebuild the internal economy at home. But in the neo-liberal capitalism that reigns mighty in modern Mexico such general goals don't translate into the same means and ends for all. As they say, "the devil is in the details."

When it became clear that Trump was moving to abandon the current version of NAFTA, the Mexican government convened big business leaders to craft Mexican negotiation positions. Smaller business and popular sectors, however, have so far not been summoned to the table. Itzel Coria, for example, a young woman who represents small mezcal producers in Guerrero, said her enterprise had not received such an invitation.

As a small business that produces 5,000 liters of trendy mezcal each year, the Othli artesanal brand finds it difficult to comply with export sanitary regulations, costly certification requirements, hefty taxes and higher expenses stemming in part from the gasolinazo, Coria said. "We had planned to export, but we have to comply with many regulations. More than anything it is the process to obtain certification," she said. "We haven't started (mass) exportation because the business is still very local. Sometimes we send orders to other Mexican states, but not big orders."

The bottom line? NAFTA isn't written for people like Itzel Coria and Guerrero's artesanal mezcal producers.

Ideologically wedded to the premises of free trade and the free flow of capital, the Pena Nieto administration is on record that it will not accept the reinstitution of tariffs as part of a refried NAFTA.

Mexican Secretary of Agriculture Jose Calzada estimates national exports of avocados and other agricultural products earn \$30 billion a year, a money stream bigger than individual revenues from petroleum, migrant remittances and international tourism. Speaking on Milenio television, Calzada rejected reopening the agricultural section of NAFTA.

"The agricultural part of NAFTA is not broken," Calzada declared.

### **"Why touch it?"**

Small farmers in the Authentic Countryside Front (FAC) and other rural organizations heavily disagree with Calzada.

In a sarcastically-toned statement, the FAC thanked Trump for ditching the "genocidal and abusive" Trans-Pacific

Partnership and implored him to do the same with NAFTA.

"...the only option is for Mexico to open the road to its own economic independence of inclusive development with a clear, defined national industrial, agricultural and educational policy and abandon the project that has converted it into an assembly-for-export country," separately wrote analyst Ana Maria Aragones in *La Jornada*.

Different forces are sketching the outlines of a new policy program. Delivered at national January 31 demonstrations against the gasolinazo and other Pena Nieto policies, the ten-point "Let's Build the Future of Mexico" manifesto proposes a thorough political and economic overhaul of the country, including renegotiating NAFTA's agricultural chapter. The manifesto was endorsed by the National Telephone Workers Union and dozens of other unions and grassroots organizations.

### **A New Internationalism?**

A glance at fight-backs against U.S. and Mexican government policies during the first quarter of 2017 reveals a creative tapestry of tactics including street protest and highway blockades, occupations of border crossings, immigrant sanctuary declarations, self-defense committees, tax resistance, legal action, calls for boycotts, and more. In Mexico, the popular movement has not succeeded in reversing the 20 percent gas price hike, but the mass protests from below could be credited for curbing another large, government-sanctioned price increase that was expected in February.

Virtually every corner of Mexico and the United States, including the corridors of the United Nations, is becoming a front for struggles. And if anything, human rights battles are only likely to intensify on both sides of the border.

In the months ahead the movements will be tested in their ability to not only coordinate actions but also achieve real impacts in arenas including NAFTA, where a strategic opportunity exists to condition economic relationships with immigration, labor, environmental and human rights concerns. The broader issues were raised by activists during the original NAFTA negotiations more than a quarter century ago but U.S. and Mexican negotiators eventually shunted social concerns aside, tossing instead non-enforceable labor and environmental side agreements to the critics. The results are for all to see. Will the same outcome be repeated in 2017?

"Isn't now the time to see that the old and forgotten ghost of internationalism returns to the scene?" wrote Ilan Semo, a columnist for *La Jornada*. "The essence of internationalism consisted of the idea that the struggles of the excluded parts of one country corresponded to the interests of the excluded ones of the other, and there was no remedy other than supporting one another." **CP**

**KENT PATERSON** is an independent journalist who covers issues in the U.S./Mexico border region.

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# Crises Worthy and Otherwise

## Terror Scare vs. Climate Change

BY BEN DEBNEY

Donald Trump began his first week in office by fulfilling his campaign pledge to declare a ban on immigration from predominantly Muslim countries he associates with terrorism—Syria, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, though he neglected to name a single country where he has business interests. The ban has since been blocked in the courts. Unnamed was Saudi Arabia, ironic given the role of the Saudi Royal Family in spreading Wahabism, the version of Islam that has been so instrumental in fueling fundamentalism. The cognitive dissonance attached to Trump's patently selective concern based on his business interests (no doubt also influenced by other concerns like the interest of the US in the petrodollar regime) was only part of the more generalized cognitive dissonance surrounding terrorist narratives that has tended to characterize the moral panic over terrorism better called the Terror Scare (aspects of which are discussed in Gershon Shafir, ed, *Lessons and Legacies of the War on Terror*, Routledge).

Another area where this cognitive dissonance was evident was the gag order Donald Trump signed immediately after his inauguration for federal government departments including the EPA, one mandating political review of scientific reports prior to release. The intent of this order to suppress and deny the science surrounding climate change had been made unmistakably clear by the removal of any mention of climate change from the White House website as it was changed over to reflect the policies of the incoming executive. In this case as in that of the Muslim Ban, the cognitive dissonance seemed to derive in the main from Trump's propensity to tilt at manufactured, invented or imaging threats while actual tangible ones were permitted to continue and exacerbate without acknowledgement, much less question or challenge (in 2012, Trump infamously tweeted that 'The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive'). Some crises are worthier than others depending on their serviceability to power and in inverse proportion to their relation to messy concepts like empiricism, causality and science.

As if to demonstrate, only a few days after the Muslim Ban came into effect, 27-year-old Alexandre Bissonnette, a university student known for his white supremacist sympathies, opened fire in a mosque in Quebec City, killing six and wounding nineteen. He has since been charged with five counts of attempted murder. While Justin Trudeau immediately denounced Bissonnette as a terrorist, the typically

bellicose 'not-sure-whether-internet-troll-or' POTUS was uncharacteristically silent, even though the social dynamics at play in Canadian society are to all intents and purposes identical not only to the United States, but the west writ large. Trump's telling silence spoke loudly to the cognitive dissonance of associating terrorism with exterior threats, since the terror perpetrated in Quebec City was homegrown — as has been the majority of the acts of terror perpetrated in the US since 9/11.

Even after the Quebec City shootings and before the victims of that tragedy are even buried, Trump continues to focus solely on Muslims as potential sources of terrorism, his next step being to rename the US government's counter-extremism program from 'Countering Violent Extremism' programme to 'Countering Radical Islamic Extremism' — and before the bodies of the victims of Alexandre Bissonnette were even in the ground at that. Trump's militant ignorance, the dominant narratives surrounding terrorism prevalent in the decade and a half since 2001 continue to be belied by the facts, which belie the self-serving, self-vs-other binary logic that enables the shifting of blame onto some convenient scapegoat or other, as well as the invocation of double standards that put sanctions on various policies, attitudes and behaviours only when not carried out by us. Not very coincidentally, the same is also true of his attitude towards global warming.

Where terrorism is concerned, on the first count is the nature of terror historically as a function of state power. During the latter phase of the French Revolution, for example, the Jacobins used the terror of the guillotine as a weapon to neutralise opposition to their power in the name of putting down threats to the nation. On this occasion, the logic of 'if you think for yourself, the enemies of France and the revolution win' served to shift the blame for the problems caused by the autocratic style of Robespierre and the Jacobins onto anyone who dared acknowledge them. The Bolsheviks applied the same logic to silence critics of their power as enemies of the revolution, a logic employed by Trotsky against the rebellious Kronstadt sailors, and then by Stalin, who instigated a panic in the same vein in the aftermath of the 1934 assassination of Sergei Kirov, this time paradoxically enough against the Trotskyists who had used the same rationale to persecute enemies of their own power previously. Failing to understand this account in no small part for the inability of the radical left to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past and to rise above the thinking that produced them.

Just as the Jacobin reaction produced the Committee for Public Safety (to keep members of the public safe who weren't put to the guillotine, at least) and the Great Terror, so too did the Bolshevik reaction produce the Stalinist cabal, the Great Purge and the Moscow Show Trials. While some prefer to focus on the personality of Stalin as the root cause for the decent of the Soviet Union into totalitarianism the





*Edge of Ekstrom Ice Shelf, Antarctica. Photo: Hannes Grobe, CC: SA-2.5.*

rooting out of dissent beginning with Lenin in the name of defending the revolution from exterior perils (if you think for yourself the Tsarist reaction wins) might also be considered fertile soil for his rise to power and the terror that followed. In each instance the playing of the victim associated with the construction of the mythology of an external threat, be it enemies of the nation, tsarists and capitalists or terrorists, blaming of the victim by associated dissenters and others in the way as agents of the constructed threat, and the 'if you think for yourself the evildoers win' logic characteristic of moral disengagement, the collective term understood in social psychology for mechanisms of blame-shifting.

On the second count is the specific history of U.S. support for terror regimes in Latin America, Asia and Mesopotamia. As Noam Chomsky, Edward Herman and many others have since documented in exhaustive detail, support for fascism and state terrorism has been the rule of U.S. foreign policy since the end of the Second World War, when the United States found itself the global military and economic hegemon, a position it has coveted ever since. Examples include countries like Iran in 1953, where the government of Mohammad Mossadegh, an opponent of anglo-imperialism, was overthrown with crucial CIA support for the Shah, later overthrown in turn as a shameless puppet of U.S. oil imperialism by the 1979 revolution, and Guatemala in 1954, where nepotistic links between the directors of the United

Fruit Company and the US political establishment were exploited to entreaty a CIA-directed coup against the government of Jacobo Arbenz, whose attempts to treat the chronic poverty of previous regimes under the sway of United Fruit was anathema to the preferential treatment to which it was accustomed.

As Greg Grandin has pointed out, U.S.-sponsored state terrorism in Latin America amounted to a workshop for imperial state terrorism worldwide. Dozens of examples abound, not least of which being that of Salvador Allende in Chile, overthrown in a CIA-backed coup on 11 September 1973. Installed in his stead on this most historically ironic of dates was Augusto Pinochet, one of the most bloodthirsty thugs in all of Latin America (and who, as Naomi Klein has pointed out, were allowed to use his country as a Shock Doctrine lab for the economic fundamentalisms associated with neoliberalism that have since become standard fare). The reasons the US supported fascist state terrorism in the third world is well understood, and was articulated in unmistakable terms by George Kennan, a leading internal planner who declared in 1946 that

We have about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population. This disparity is particularly great as between ourselves and the peoples of Asia. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships that

will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and daydreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. We should cease to talk about vague and unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.

While doing a disservice to those unfortunate enough to find themselves in the training grounds of imperial state terrorism, Kennan's candor does history a service insofar as his comments reveal the understanding of the political establishment that crisis exists primarily in terms of threats to privilege. Narratives around terrorism reflect similar understandings. While the imposition around the globe of the neoliberal *morés* tested in Pinochet's Chile has had devastating consequences for billions of people, thrusting the mass of humanity ever deeper into poverty, misery and alienation while expediting a massive shift of wealth upwards to the archetypal 1%, the dominant narratives around terrorism tells us that the primary threat to civilization is terrorism—and very specific kind at that. It tells us the following in essence:

The vested interests of the transnational corporate elite and the common good of the whole world are one and the same.

What appears on the surface as imperial aggression over oil is in fact the defense of our interests from those who want to do harm to the common good.

Islamic fundamentalists and refugees fleeing wars over oil are responsible for global warming.

We must have war or we will have chaos. All of these statements are patently absurd. They are also the logical conclusion of narratives built on what sociologists researching moral panics call 'the production of deviance.' This refers to the production or manufacture of crises revolving around deviant threats where the characteristically subjective concept of 'deviance' is defined as the antithesis of privilege, which is 'normal,' and imposed on public discourse through, in this case, corporate media domination of mass communication (ideological hegemony). Characteristic of the production of deviance are the high drama and overblown theatrics of ideologically induced hysteria; in the case of the Terror Scare, deviance production is responsible for turning 'terrorist' into an all-consuming identity that defies proactive attempts to understand underlying motivations that, in other circumstances, might be addressed by cooler heads more effectively and with less outrages against international law and human rights. Scare mongering, in seeking to rationalize the scapegoating of a billion Muslims for the social, economic and environmental consequences of neoliberalism as the late capitalist expression of the injustices in irrationality inherent to the system, are in this sense merely the practical fulfill-

ment of the 'straight power concepts' Kennan prescribed five to six decades ago.

To the extent that Trump's islamophobia serves the same scapegoating function and embodies the same straight power concepts, it might be said to perform the role of what historian Frank Van Nuys has called the 'national safety valve' of popular racism. In this vein, Australian academic Ghassan Hage has infuriated alt-righters by asking 'Is Islamophobia responsible for global warming?', the defensive reactions of those to whom his question refers unintentionally providing an answer. If racism is a national safety valve for social tensions created by institutional injustices and irrationalities, and the dynamics of deviance production at the core of Islamophobia are dominant features of American history (and arguably of many other periods of history), this begs the question as to the difference between Republican and Democrat administrations. Obama did, after all, reject Keystone XL and was, at least on the rhetorical level, an opponent of prejudice. Some insight into this comes to us via the HBO documentary *The Newburgh Sting*, which documents the 2009 arrest by the FBI of four men from Newburgh, NY and subsequent conviction on terrorism-related charges following an attempt to bomb two Jewish temples in the Bronx.

As *The Newburgh Sting* reveals, prior to trial the FBI presented the case as open and shut to a subservient media, which duly passed them as fact in a grand exercise in deviance production and sensationalism. What the FBI claimed was a cell they had surveilled in the lead up to an attack was in fact however one lead by an informant himself facing fraud charges. The FBI financed the activities of the cell through this informant, and supplied the (inert) bombs and missiles for the attack that their own informant had planned. The four men arrested as conspirators didn't know each other previously and could only be persuaded to participate after being promised cars, holidays and \$250,000—an effective strategy for recruitment from the black underclass, and a particularly effective strategy for one cell member whose brother had a cancerous tumor and no health insurance. According to the sister of both these men, the informant 'told David they need more people,' but to 'make sure they're Muslims'—they would need to be for it to be a Muslim conspiracy when they were caught.

For their part, the recruits are recorded on surveillance video making diabolical threats such as, 'We don't want to hurt nobody . . . We want to just destroy property. We don't want to take no lives,' and 'we ain't for taking no lives; the life you save could be your own.' Such comments seem to account for the fact that the group acted at night, out-of-hours, though not before the FBI informant had taken them from New York to Connecticut to collect inert bombs and missiles, having needed to cross state lines for the group's actions to become a federal offense under terrorism statutes! At the arrest, the NYPD brought out 100 officers, a

semi-trailer, an armored tank, the bomb squad and the Joint Terrorism Task Force to collect what they knew very well were inert materials—and which, it turns, out, hadn't even turned on when the four were arrested. None of the above facts made it into the media that evening.

However, as the dissenting judge in the trial that followed wrote;

The government agent supplied a design and gave it form, so that the agent rather than the defendant inspired the crime, provoked it, planned it, financed it, equipped it and furnished the time and targets. There simply was no evidence of predisposition under our settled definition of the term . . . The government made them terrorists. I am not proud of my government for what it did in this case.

David A. Lewis, a federal defender who represented one of the Newburgh Four, added that the government, in the name of the war on terrorism, 'wasted its time and resources making criminals of men who would never have been terrorists and posed no danger if simply left alone.' Making criminals out of ordinary men, however, was anything but a waste of time and resources from the point of view of the manufacture of consent through the production of deviance, all the more so now that Trump has answered Obama's immigration raids with his own (according to Fortune more than 2 million people were deported under the previous administration, including a record of more than 409,000 in 2012). If history is any indication, the same will be true after Trump is replaced, and so on. This tells us something of why *The Newburgh Sting* was only one of several such episodes, Glenn Greenwald asking pertinently in *The Intercept*, 'Why Does the FBI Have to Manufacture its Own Plots if Terrorism and ISIS Are Such Grave Threats?' (2/15). The candor of George Kennan suggests that if deviant threats don't exist, they need to be invented, for the people must have a bogeyman to fear and hate—be they terrorists, liberals, feminists, communists, witches, refugees, immigrants, drug addicts, minorities, or some other convenient target or stereotype. Meanwhile Voltaire rolls in his grave, knowing it doesn't matter a great deal to the functioning of anglo-empire whether the figurehead at the top is nasty or nice.

As noted above, if the socially and economically marginalized population of Newburgh, NY, are responsible for the effects of neoliberalism that made them vulnerable to FBI entrapment, then by the same logic they must be responsible for climate change, for poverty and environmental destruction are products of the same thing. Naomi Klein points out in her Edward Saïd Memorial Lecture, 'The Violence of Othering in a Warming World,' that this kind of attitude is a necessary facet of the divide between worth and unworthy crises; scapegoating and othering, defined as 'disregarding, essentialising, denuding the humanity of another culture, people or geographical region.' Not only is the value of Othering, Klein points out, that 'once the other has been

firmly established, the ground is softened for any transgression: violent expulsion, land theft, occupation, invasion,' but the whole point of Othering, of deviance production, is that 'the other doesn't have the same rights, the same humanity, as those making the distinction,' be they refugees fleeing global-warming fueled war in Syria, the victims of Hurricane Katrina, the 36 million starving in East Africa, or the marginalized citizens of Newburgh caught in an FBI trap.

What does this have to do with climate change? Perhaps everything . . . This kind of recklessness would have been functionally impossible without institutional racism, even if only latent. It would have been impossible without Orientalism, without all the potent tools on offer that allow the powerful to discount the lives of the less powerful. These tools—of ranking the relative value of humans—are what allow the writing off of entire nations and ancient cultures. And they are what allowed for the digging up of all that carbon to begin with.

Sadly, space prevents us from exploring this history further, though lately it has been examined very usefully by researchers such as Silvia Federici (*Caliban and the Witch*), Jason W. Moore (*Capitalism in the Web of Life*) and Michael Perelman (*The Invention of Capitalism*). What remains is the fact that deviance production, Othering, moral panicking, persecution of scapegoats, blame-shifting and manufacture of false crises have played pivotal roles in creating and maintaining the world from which actual crises have been borne (as Federici reveals, the European Witch Hunts played a vital role in the emergence of capitalism). The paradox of worthy crises alongside unworthy crises can be accounted for as the difference between those that provide ideological pretexts for state terror in defense of class privileges, and those that result from a system that prioritises the maintenance of privilege over the common good and socializes costs while privatizing benefits to that end, and that tend towards exposing the system for what it is.

Having been captured by the transnational, neofeudal corporate oligarchy responsible for creating global warming in the first place, electoral systems based on a two-party duopoly can be counted on to maintain, to one degree or another and in one style or another, hysterical preoccupation with unworthy crises and casual indifference or militant ignorance towards the worthy. As Klein points out, 'The wealthiest people in the wealthiest countries in the world think they are going to be OK, that someone else is going to eat the biggest risks, that even when climate change turns up on their doorstep, they will be taken care of.' To assume otherwise is to assume that the class of sociopaths who spawned Trump and Clinton, who collectively are as privileged as they are predatory, care deeply and passionately about the lives of those they are in the midst of making scapegoats for it all. **CP**

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# Fukushima Six Years On

BY JOHN LAForge

March 11 marked the 6th anniversary of the world's worst nuclear reactor disaster: the 2011 meltdown of three large power reactors on the Pacific Coast of Japan—Fukushima Daiichi—following a staggering 9.0 magnitude earthquake—the biggest in recorded Japanese history—and its 50-foot tsunami. The “station blackout” or total loss of electric power and cooling in six reactors, and the consequent hydrogen explosions and uncontrolled overheating and “melt-through” of three reactors, has resulted in the most devastating and complicated radiation catastrophe in history.

Fukushima is regularly misreported as less drastic than the single-reactor catastrophe at Chernobyl, in Ukraine, in 1986. But France's Institute for Radiological Protection and Nuclear Safety, reported five years ago that Fukushima was already the biggest single spill of man-made radioactive materials into the marine environment ever seen or recorded. At least 300 tons of highly contaminated runoff have poured daily into the Pacific ever since.

Dr. Helen Caldicott says in the documentary short *Fukushima: Beyond Urgent*, that aired Feb. 13 says, “Japan is by orders of magnitude many times worse than Chernobyl.” In *Crisis Without End* (2014), Caldicott warned: “The Fukushima disaster is not over and will not end for many millennia. The radioactive fallout, which has covered vast swaths of Japan, will remain toxic for hundreds of thousands of years. It cannot simply be ‘cleaned up,’ and it will continue to contaminate food, humans, and animals.”

The disaster of “Fukushima squared” (earthquake + tsunami + station blackout, times three melted reactor cores) was caused by deliberate decisions made by General Electric, Tokyo Electric Power Co. and the government: to build reactors in earthquake zones; to place emergency back-up generators in flood-prone basements; and to ignore long-standing warnings about inadequate seawall protection.

For these reasons, Nukewatch never calls what's happened at Fukushima an accident. Rather, we believe with Mayor Tamotsu Baba, of the town of Namie, who said in August 2011 that his “people were unnecessarily exposed...” and that the government's withholding of warnings about radioactive fallout was comparable to “murder.”

Radiation-caused illnesses, cancers and fatalities that result from reactor disasters (Windscale in England, Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania, Chernobyl in Ukraine, and Fukushima) are scientifically predictable and known in advance. Researcher Arnie Gunderson noted two years ago that “Two reports recently released in Japan, one by Japanese medical professionals and the second from Tokyo Electric Power Corp., acknowledged that there will be numerous cancers in Japan, much greater than normal, due to the ra-

dioactive discharges from the triple meltdown at Fukushima Daiichi... I believe, as do many of my colleagues, that there will be at least 100,000 and as many as one million more cancers in Japan's future as a result of this meltdown... The second report received from Japan proves that the incidence of thyroid cancer is approximately 230 times higher than normal in Fukushima Prefecture... So what's the bottom line? The cancers already occurring in Japan are just the tip of the iceberg. I'm sorry to say that the worst is yet to come.”

Japanese authorities now overseeing Fukushima's disaster response are pressuring citizens to live in or return to areas that are contaminated with up to four times the annual radiation exposure allowed in similarly contaminated areas around Chernobyl. Thousands of Japanese incinerators are burning thousands of tons of contaminated debris collected in clean-up efforts—spreading radiation to the winds; and millions of tons of related debris will reportedly be used in road construction throughout Japan, exposing highway workers and nearby residents to long-term radiation risks.

On this somber anniversary, we remember the 19,000 people killed by the tsunami, the 160,000 evacuees who fled radiation zones contaminated by wreckage, and the infants, children and parents who endlessly endure examinations and treatments for thyroid problems stemming from the disaster.

The total cost of decommissioning the destroyed reactor complex and providing compensation to victims has repeatedly doubled. A December 2016 estimate puts the cost at \$250 billion.

*The Japan Times* reported this February that “Scientists still don't have all the information they need for a cleanup that the government estimates will take four decades.... It is not yet known if the fuel melted into or through the containment vessel's concrete floor, and determining the fuel's radioactivity and location is crucial to inventing the technology to remove the melted fuel.”

According to Dr. Shuzo Takemoto, a professor of Geophysics at Kyoto University, “The problem of Unit 2... If it should encounter a big earth tremor, it will be destroyed and scatter the remaining nuclear fuel and its debris, making the Tokyo metropolitan area uninhabitable. The Tokyo Olympics in 2020 will then be utterly out of the question.”

Dr. Caldicott wrote this February, “should there be an earthquake greater than 7 on the Richter scale, it is very possible that ... structures could collapse, leading to a massive release of radiation as the building falls on the molten core[s] beneath.”

## “Voluntary” evacuees to lose housing support

Some 27,000 so-called “voluntary evacuees”—people who fled their homes in areas beyond mandatory evacuation zones after the disaster began—were to lose their six-year-old housing subsidies at the end of March, 2017.

Thousands of Japanese, wary of government assurances



IAEA inspectors visit Fukushima nuclear plant. Photo: IAEA.

that radiation was limited to official exclusion zones, chose to leave their homes. Many families reported suffering health problems beyond the officially contaminated area, including nose bleeds and nausea.

A local Fukushima Prefecture government spokesman told the news agency AFP that areas not covered by the original evacuation orders have been deemed safe, so housing subsidies were no longer necessary. "The environment is safe for leading a normal life and that means we are no longer in a position to provide temporary housing," he told AFP.

Greenpeace has said "This amounts to economic coercion of those individuals and families that are victims of a nuclear disaster they had no part in creating. The group called on the Japanese government to cease its return policy, provide full financial support to evacuees, and "allow citizens to decide whether to return or relocate free from duress."

Groundwater from the mountains behind Fukushima gushes into the quake-smashed reactor foundations, pours over the melted fuel and becomes highly contaminated. This water then runs to the Pacific Ocean which is undergoing the largest radiation dump in recorded history.

A deeply trenched and drilled underground wall of ice that was supposed to divert ground water away from the reactors failed. Nuclear Engineering International reported last August 23 that according to experts, "little or no success was recorded in the wall's ability to block the groundwater and the amount reaching the buildings has not changed after the wall was built."

The Pacific covers more than 30% of the Earth's surface, and with a surface area of more 62 million square miles, its basin is larger than the landmass of all the continents combined.

Part of the reason that whole-sea contamination can result

from Fukushima was revealed last February when radiation gauges for the first time got near the melted fuel.

What the Tepco called "astounding" and "unimaginable" levels of radiation were recorded in January and February inside reactor 1. The radiation reading 530 sieverts per hour in January and 650 sieverts/hr on Feb. 9, Tepco said.

News accounts first called this a "spike" in radiation levels, since the highest reading even during the disaster's first days was 73 sieverts/hr.

*The Washington Post* reported that Azby Brown of the citizen science group Safecast, said "It doesn't necessarily signify any alarming change in radiation levels at Fukushima. It's simply the first time they've been measured that far inside the reactor."

On Safecast's website, Brown wrote: "While 530 Sv/hr is the highest measured so far at Fukushima Daiichi, it does not mean that levels there are rising." Kevin Kamps of Beyond Nuclear also said "The 530 sieverts or 53,000 rems per hour has probably been there the whole while since March 2011."

Further, the 530 sievert reading was taken some distance from the melted fuel, so the actual level could be 10 times higher than recorded, according to Hideyuki Ban, of Japan's Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, who spoke to the *Washington Post*.

Dr. Caldicott writes that "These facts illustrate why it will be almost impossible to 'decommission' units 1, 2 and 3 as no one could ever be exposed to such extreme radiation."

Exposure to just one sievert is enough to result in infertility, hair loss and cataracts. According to the National Institute of Radiological Sciences, a mere four sieverts can kill a person. **CP**

**JOHN LAForge** is a co-director of Nukewatch.

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# CULTURE & REVIEWS

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## From Sea to Dying Sea

BY LEE BALLINGER

Unlike the other planets in our solar system, ours is dominated by water. Seventy per cent of the surface of the earth is ocean. Since most of us spend our lives on land we tend to take the oceans for granted, but they play an indispensable role in human existence. The life forms that eventually evolved into homo sapiens first emerged from the sea. Many of the life forms that remain in the sea help to sustain us today.

There is more than evolution at work. Much about the oceans is accidental, including their birth. The most prominent theory as to their origins is that the water in them was delivered by ice-rich asteroids which just happened to hit the Earth.

That water spread across the planet and, along with other subsequent events, defined the edges of the continents we live on today. Those results have shaped human history, from patterns of immigration from our once common home in Ethiopia to the African slave trade to the complex geopolitics of today. The slave trade was fundamentally inter-oceanic, and the seas served as an insurmountable barrier to slaves and indentured servants who otherwise might have just wandered back home.

North American slavery, secure for two hundred years in its isolation, provided the cotton that made industry possible in Europe, which in turn led to the modern world as we know it. That European industry, along with its counterpart in Japan, was destroyed during World War II. Only America's industrial base, protected by oceanic buffers,

survived intact. This allowed the U.S. to dominate the post-war world economically and militarily, a process whose end game may end life on earth, including in the oceans.

Not long after human beings emerged from the sea, they went back to it. It hasn't always been a pleasant reunion. For instance, each year during the 19th century, an average of two hundred fishermen working out of Gloucester, Massachusetts were lost at sea. Four per cent of the town's entire population. During major Grand Banks storms, a hundred men might be lost overnight. On more than one occasion, Newfoundlers awoke to find their beaches strewn with the corpses of those who had died on New England commercial fishing expeditions.

One of the Massachusetts sailors who survived his time at sea was Richard Henry Dana, whose classic memoir, *Two Years Before The Mast*, was published in 1840 (Herman Melville cited it as a major influence on *Moby Dick*).

The term "before the mast" refers to the quarters of the common sailors in the front of the ship. Post-publication, Dana became an attorney, defending sailors and fugitive slaves and helping to found the Free Soil Party.

*Two Years Before The Mast* is filled with the details of the dangerous conditions that were faced by the men on Dana's ship: icebergs, brutal storms, the captain's violent discipline. As for men lost overboard, Dana wrote: "At sea, the man is near you—at your side—you hear his voice, and in an instant he is gone. Nothing but a vacancy shows his loss. It is like losing a limb."

Today, reality TV shows about commercial fishing depict a world of crusty, charismatic sea captains and crews who may work hard and get wet but exult in a love of their job and often hit a lottery of big paydays. Yet commercial fishing

remains by far the most dangerous occupation in the world, not that different from the experiences of Richard Henry Dana, as is confirmed in the excellent book, *Fishers and Plunderers: Theft, Slavery, and Violence at Sea* (Pluto Press) by Alastair Couper, Hance D. Smith, and Bruno Ciceri.

"Fishing vessels often travel a long way from home ports in search of ever dwindling fish stocks, and fish great distances from shore. Perils to vessels include storms, which can produce rogue waves up to 100 feet high."

Global warming has increased the frequency and severity of storms and as a consequence there is an increasing danger of being swept overboard while working on deck. A fisher might get caught by bait hooks and swept away, go overboard after slipping on a wet or icy deck or when lines wrap around legs, or simply be sent to a watery grave by a towering wave.

I know the fear of being washed overboard and the terror that prospect brings. When I was in the Navy, several times in the middle of typhoons our ship would bounce off huge waves until it became impossible to tell where the horizon was. Once when I was the helmsman on the bridge, my ship took a 53 degree roll and I was hanging on for dear life, my feet dangling in the air. Then the captain told me to go out and inspect the life rafts. I didn't think I could survive that so I just went outside, grabbed a fitting, waited ten minutes, then went back onto the bridge and reported that all was well. But at least in the Navy we were inside. The men who fish for a living are often out on deck in the same conditions.

The reality TV shows only hint at reality and even then it is the reality of fishing off the coasts of North America. *Fishers and Plunderers* describes that, but also details what goes on in fishing



fleets in the rest of the world: Inedible food, working up to 72 hours straight without rest, no pay, beatings, vessels capsizing, being abandoned in a foreign country with no money or ID, and even murder on board.

“The United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking interviewed 49 Cambodian workers about working conditions on ‘slave ships.’ They reported daily beatings by the captain and senior crew. 59 per cent of the victims said they had witnessed a boat captain murder a crew member.”

Only the pressures of extreme poverty could drive people to take such jobs.

“On March 25, 2011 Yusril (not his real name) became a slave hired by an Indonesian agency to work on a South Korean flagged fishing vessel. He had put his name on a waiting list nine months earlier and paid an agent fee of \$225. Yusril was to surrender 30 per cent of his salary to the companies. He would be paid nothing for the first three months, and if the job was not finished to the fishing company’s satisfaction Yusril would be sent home and charged \$1,000 for air fare. The meaning of “satisfactory” was left vague. His family would owe “nearly \$3500 if he was to run away from the ship.” He had already submitted title to his land as collateral for the bond. Additionally he had provided the company with names and addresses of his family members. He was 28, his wife was pregnant and he was ‘locked in.’ Yusril had no option but to join the ship under these conditions as he desperately needed the work.”

But sometimes even extreme poverty isn’t enough to recruit a crew so vessel operators press gang men onto their ships at gunpoint, spike their drinks in bars, or abduct children by subduing them with chloroform.

The responses of crews to their brutal conditions can range up to suicide and, in some cases, even mutiny.

“The fishing boat Supaporn sailed from Thailand in May 2011 with a

Burmese crew of seven and a Thai skipper and chief engineer. It caught and transshipped fish at sea for five months. The crew mutinied....killed and threw overboard the bodies of the captain and engineer.”

There is a strong connection between conditions at sea and conditions on land. Per capita fish consumption has increased by 20 per cent over the past two decades. This has led to overfishing and a great increase in the distance fishing vessels travel and the amount of time spent at sea. These factors translate into pressure to work around

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## Only the pressures of extreme poverty could tempt people to take such dangerous jobs.

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the clock in any conditions in order to maximize productivity.

The increase in the number of storms and the size of waves, which greatly increase the danger to crews and people on shore, are a result of the global warming caused by the burning of fossil fuels on land. The sea wreaks its revenge upon us with storms like Hurricane Katrina, whose destructive power was greatly amplified by a rise in sea temperature.

Although at times the oceans are fatal to people, we are closing in on a time when people may be fatal to the oceans. There are a hundred million tons of plastic produced each year in the world and 10 million tons of that winds up in the oceans. The Pacific Trash Vortex in the North Pacific, a plasticized floating garbage dump the size of Texas, is one result.

Pharmaceuticals ingested by humans but not fully processed by our bodies are eventually ending up in the fish we eat. The world’s oceans now contain over four hundred “dead zones,” where there is not enough oxygen to support marine life.

According to a report by Sharon Kelly in DeSmog, the exponential growth of fracking is fueling “a plastic and petrochemical manufacturing rush that environmentalists warn could make smog worse...sicken workers, and expand the plastic trash gyres in the world’s oceans.” American Chemistry Council President Cal Dooley said in a January press release that “Thanks to abundant supplies of natural gas [from fracking], the U.S. chemical industry is investing in new facilities which tend to attract downstream industries that rely on petrochemical products. As of this month, 281 chemical industry projects valued at \$170 billion have been announced, about half of which are completed or under construction.

We control the fate of the oceans yet we do not control them. But we do have control over what we do, over what we think. We need to embrace science but also spirit, learning and teaching our planet’s natural rhythms, be they gentle or fierce. We need to be tree huggers and environmental extremists not because it’s nice or even because it’s the right thing to do, but because we are now on the final slippery slope of life or death for our water-dominated planet.

We must face down the corporations which threaten the safe use of all water everywhere and return our oceans, rivers, and lakes to their original pristine state. Otherwise our grandchildren may live to see the earth return to its pre-oceanic state, a fireball of gas and dust where life cannot exist. **CP**

**LEE BALLINGER’S** new book, *Love and War: My First Thirty Years of Writing*, is available as a free download at [love-andwarbook.com](http://love-andwarbook.com). You can listen to his podcast on YouTube at [Love and War Podcast](http://Love and War Podcast).

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## Stories They Tell A Breakdown of the Oscars

BY ED LEER

My cynical prediction for Best Picture was *La La Land* despite *Moonlight* being the better film. When it appeared that *La La* had won, I scoffed in a “figures” sort of way before the results were overturned due to an envelope snafu and *Moonlight* was the declared the true winner. I was pleasantly surprised as I took a bite of my humble pie. It all seemed so appropriate in this new era of upsets and misinformation. I would not be surprised if the Truthers were hard at work piecing together a conspiracy that the Academy pulled this stunt on purpose to attract much needed attention to an award show whose viewers have steadily declined over the past decade. While this may be taking things too far, it does bring up this notion that the Oscars have less to do with the films themselves than the stories constructed around them.

*Moonlight* is the story of a gay black youth growing up and dealing with his own sexuality, masculinity and race in the culture of a drug-riddled Florida ghetto. The story of the film is Barry Jenkins collaborating with a playwright, Tarell Alvin McCraney, who grew up in the same Florida neighborhood and had similar experiences with drug-addict parents. It was produced on a mere \$1.5 million and has gone on to gross over \$25 million. The Academy loves underdogs and a film that addresses both race and sexuality at a time when both of these are under fire from the current administration only worked in this film’s favor. It’s important to keep in mind the #oscarsowhite controversy the past two years and the damage control the Academy has done in the background.

So what did *La La Land* have in

its corner? For one, it’s a big splashy musical, a deliberate throwback infused with contemporary settings and concerns of artists living in Los Angeles. Past winners such as *The Artist* and *Argo* have proven that the film industry is as vain as its individual parts. To have a film heap praise on old Hollywood while still inspiring debate and controversy bodes well for an Oscar contender. Unfortunately, for an award show that needed to shed its “so white” image, one of the most beloved films of Hollywood happened to be the whitest (with the exception of *Passengers*, whose poster features Chris Pratt and Jennifer Lawrence against a white background). Of course, one could argue that in a time of so much strife and discord, *La La Land* was the perfect breezy piece of entertainment we need.

As happens most years, the Best Picture race boiled down to these two. The other nominees were merely there to fill out the bunch. I was interested in seeing *Hacksaw Ridge* mainly to see the film that Hollywood let Mel Gibson back into its good graces. The true story of a WWII medic who refused to carry a gun in battle, I assumed it was Gibson’s apology for his combative last few years and a directive for peace. What I found instead was the rare pro-war film about a pacifist whose faith and refusal to fight inspires others to go kill with a new sense of religious fervor. If anything, *Hacksaw*’s nomination speaks less of Gibson’s redemption and more to the Academy’s concession to right-leaning viewers who wouldn’t be very interested in an award show honoring films about blacks, gays, and dancing “snowflakes”.

The same can be said of *Hell or High Water*, a film I found to be a dull hodgepodge of other ruralist crime stories about bank robbers, brothers and charmingly racist Texas Rangers. The film gained traction in the waning summer months when the last of blockbuster enthusiasm had dried up and no one expected anything of worth. Like *Moonlight*, it presented itself as a scrap- per of a film, reliant on word of mouth

and what it saw as a compelling story about down and out Americans fighting back against the larger criminals: banks. Coming out before Trump took the election, perhaps we should have looked to the film’s surprise success as a warning. Much like Trump, it built up a good rhetoric of wholesome, world-weary anger and rode it all the way to a Best Picture nomination.

While on the other end of the political and racial spectrum, *Hidden Figures* was just as cliché and superficial in its statement on race in America. Along with *Hacksaw*, the film looks cheap and its commitment to tired dramatics about how to portray Jim Crow racism makes you wonder how it can be held in the same regard as *Moonlight* or *Fences*, which tackles much more complex and interesting questions about race and sexuality in more elegant visual and dramatic terms. But, as the old saying goes, “It’s an honor just to be nominated,” and thereby get a few more weeks in theaters.

Part of the Academy’s effort to shed their whitewashed image was to move many of their eldest, white male members to emeritus status and thereby revoke their voting privileges. At the same time, inducting many younger members of various ethnic groups. In PR terms, this was a smart, calculated move that brought about some fresh blood and a more diverse faces on the nominee cards. The problem is, they haven’t addressed the true divide, which is that most of the films nominated are not particularly interesting. They exist as Oscar Bait.

Where was *Green Room* or 20<sup>th</sup> Century Women, two films that were unanimously loved by critics? Of *Green Room*, some may argue that it was a piece of genre filmmaking that, regardless how entertaining, doesn’t deserve any serious attention from the Academy. Yet that’s not what they were saying a year ago when they showered *Mad Max: Fury Road* with a confounding 10 nominations, including Best Picture. If the film is enough of a visual

spectacle, which is to say cost enough money, it qualifies. What they fail to see is that *Green Room*, an examination of the nation's anger and passivity, says more about American culture now than the filmmaker probably intended. The fact that it was a tightly wound piece of genre clockwork should work in its

All of this is to say that while the Academy seemed to luck out with this year's fake-out Best Picture, and the ensuing press shining even more light on *Moonlight's* win, it may be a short-lived victory. They have put a band-aid on a gaping wound that can't be fixed with PR stunts and token nominations.



Still from *Green Room*.

favor rather than be seen as a flaw.

Unfortunately, the film had no real extra-textual narrative to propel it from its release date back in April to nomination time in January. *Max* had the nifty reputation for being a work of feminism in a sea of misogynistic action films. I had heard this rumor and was surprised when I finally saw the film just how few real ideas it contained. *20th Century Women*, on the other hand is a smart, funny and inclusive work that manages to inject key ideas of feminist theory into what otherwise is a coming of age story, a genre just as formulaic as your average action blockbuster.

What they must do is get over their own story they tell themselves about the prestige and importance inherent in that gold statue. As long as they believe this lie, they will continue to nominate what swirls around the films rather than what's inside them. **CP**

**ED LEER** is a writer and filmmaker based in Los Angeles. Follow him on Twitter: @EdwardMLeer.

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