the weekly
Standard

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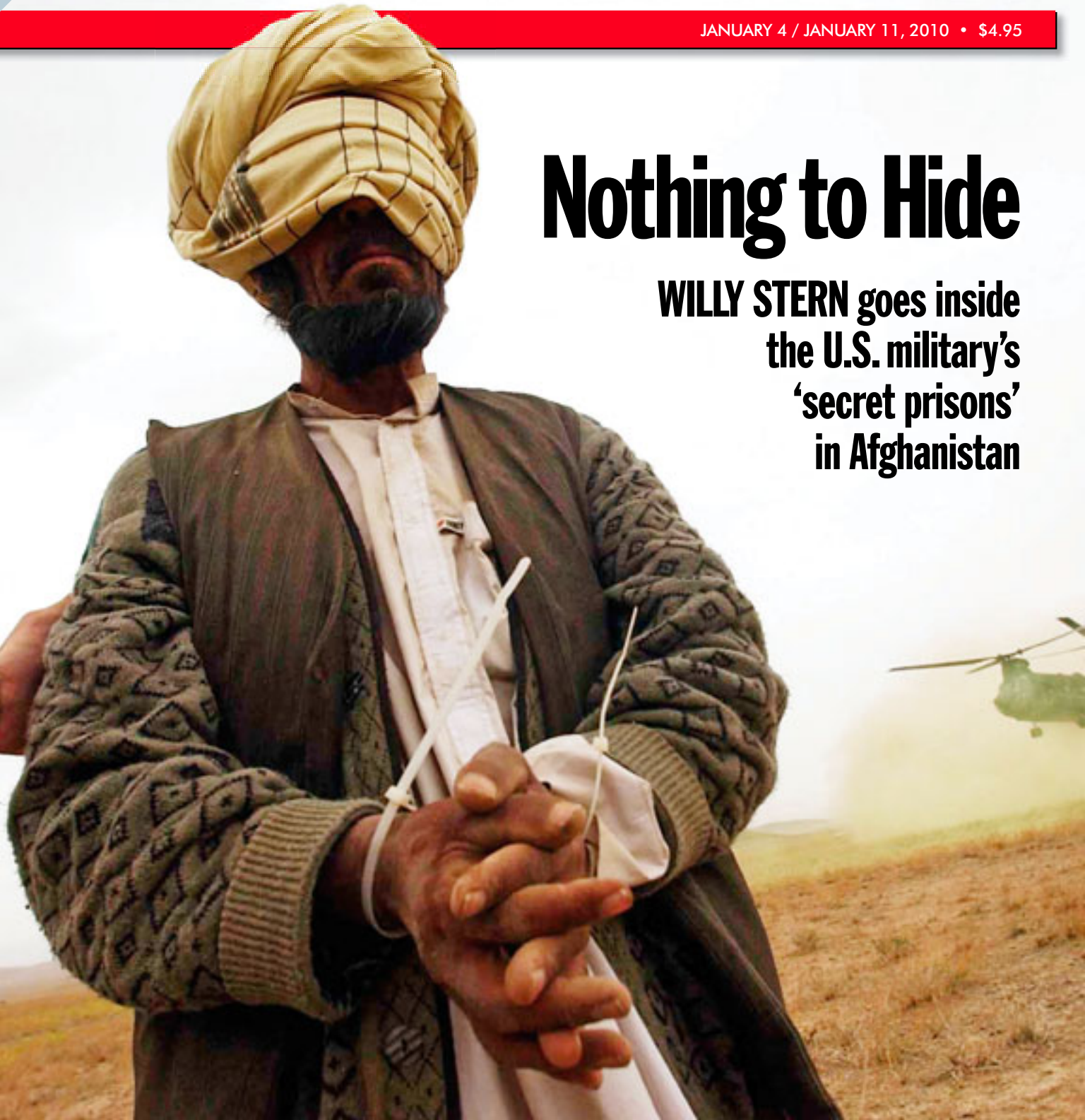

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WILLY STERN goes inside the U.S. military's 'secret prisons' in Afghanistan

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[1] Al Gore Speech at The George Washington University, Washington, D.C., November 5, 2009. These quotations are based on an audio recording provided by Politics and Prose, Washington, D.C., http://politics-prose.com.

THIS IS A COMBINED ISSUE. THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE WEEKLY STANDARD WILL APPEAR IN TWO WEEKS.

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January 4 / January 11, 2010 • Volume 15, Number 16

COVER BY DARREN MCCOLLESTER / GETTY IMAGES

‘Run to the Fire’

Lt. Col. Billy McCullough of the 1/5 Marines presents a Mameluke provided by Spirit of America to a local leader in Nawa, Afghanistan.

The Scrapbook wanted to give some of its space this holiday season to an email from our friend Jim Hake, founder and chairman of Spirit of America. This terrific nonprofit supports our troops’ efforts on the front lines by supplying materiel they judge will be helpful in accomplishing their mission.

“The photo above,” writes Hake, “shows Lieutenant Colonel Billy McCullough, Battalion Commander of the 1/5 Marines in Nawa, Afghanistan. The Marines in Nawa have made great progress in the last 6 months. McCullough is presenting the Marines ceremonial sword—the Mameluke—to local Afghan leaders who have been working cooperatively with the Marines. This is one of the ways relationships are reinforced on the front lines. Because of [support from our donors], Spirit of America was able to provide the swords when they were needed.

“A few days ago I received an email from a Marine captain asking if we could provide 20 treadle-powered sewing machines. They’ll be used to help women in Nawa, Afghanistan and build upon the gains of the 1/5 Marines.

“You may recall that years ago we provided swords (www.spiritofamerica.net/site/blog/912) and sewing machines (www.spiritofamerica.net/projects/16) to help the Marines in Anbar Province, Iraq. That was before and during the ‘Anbar Awakening’ and the surge—when the situation in Iraq was difficult and challenging, as Afghanistan is today.

“Speaking of the Marines in Anbar Province. . . . In 2004, the 1st Marine Division invited me to visit them in Iraq to explore how Spirit of America could increase our support. Before going I was required to participate in a one-day training session at Camp Pendleton.

“At the end of the day, I was briefed by a young lieutenant. He asked if I knew what to do if anyone started shooting at us. Figuring that the Marines would know where to take cover, I said, ‘I’ll do what the Marines do.’ The lieutenant gave me a strange look and said, ‘No. The Marines are going to run *to* the fire. *You* are going to run away.’

“I’ve never forgotten what the lieutenant said. The Marines run to the fire—meaning they don’t shrink from the tough or unwanted situation. They do what needs to be done no matter how hard it is. They ‘run to the fire.’ I’ve come to understand this is an ethos that applies broadly—not only to Marines in combat.

“Afghanistan is a tough situation, even for those not serving. Here at home there is ample pessimism and disagreement. Many prefer to avoid the subject entirely. And there is no easy solution. The situation is difficult but we are not powerless. We can help our troops succeed and come home sooner and safer. This is our time to ‘run to the fire’ and do what needs to be done.”

The Scrapbook can vouch for the tremendously important work Jim Hake and Spirit of America are doing. You can learn more about their mission (and contribute!) at www.spiritofamerica.net. ♦

China Screws Obama?

An interesting leftwing critique of China's part in the Copenhagen farce appeared last week in the *Guardian*. Obama fans will be inclined to embrace it, because it exonerates their hero from blame for the "failure" (from the global warmists' point of view) to secure a U.N. climate change treaty. The Scrapbook embraces it because it rings true.

> China wrecked the talks, intentionally humiliated Barack Obama, and insisted on an awful "deal" so western leaders would walk away carrying the blame. How do I know this? Because I was in the room and saw it happen [writes Mark Lynas]. . . . China's strategy was simple: block the open negotiations for two weeks, and then ensure that the closed-door deal made it look as if the West had failed the world's poor once again. And sure enough, the aid agencies, civil society movements and environmental groups all took the bait. The failure was "the inevitable result of rich countries refusing adequately and fairly to shoulder their overwhelming responsibility," said Christian Aid. "Rich countries have bullied developing nations," fumed Friends of the Earth International. All very predictable, but the complete opposite of the truth.

Lynas continues: "Sudan behaves at the talks as a puppet of China; one of a number of countries that relieve the Chinese delegation of having to fight its battles in open sessions. . . . China gutted the deal behind the scenes, and then left its proxies to savage it in public."

The *Guardian*'s contributor is violating a taboo, of course, as he acknowledges: "[Climate] campaign groups never blame developing countries for failure; this is an iron rule that is never broken." Indeed, if The Scrapbook may resurrect a phrase, "they always blame America first." ♦

'National Affairs,' Number 2

Feeling bereft when you've finished the latest issue of The Weekly Standard? Need something else stimulating to read? The Scrapbook has just the thing for you.

The new quarterly journal *National Affairs*, edited by Scrapbook friend and Weekly Standard contributor Yuval Levin (see his article with James C. Capretta on page 9 of this issue), debuted last September with a spectacular initial issue. That's now been followed by—dare we say—an even better second issue. Read James Q. Wilson on blame and responsibility in our criminal justice system; Nicole Gelinas on pro-market regulation of our financial industry ("Too Big Not To Fail"); Diana Schaub on baseball and the American spirit; Jim Manzi on how to balance social cohesion and economic innovation ("Keeping America's Edge"); Eric Cohen on "The Moral Realism of Irving Kristol"; and much more. To sample or to order, go to nationalaffairs.com. And enjoy. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'There was a time, a decade ago, Patti Smith said, that she did not want to make a film about herself. 'To me the idea seems sort of conceited,' she said in an interview. 'I felt, even though I was 50 years old at the time, too young to do a documentary. I hadn't done enough work yet to merit a documentary.' It turns out

that being followed around by a camera for more than a decade can help one overcome shyness. On Dec. 30, Ms. Smith's 63rd birthday, PBS will broadcast . . . " ("A Legend as Muse: Patti Smith Fills Role" *New York Times*, December 20). ♦

Rudy Boschwitz, Art Critic

THE SCRAPBOOK was happy to hear from Rudy Boschwitz, former senator from Minnesota, and is pleased to pass on his comment on the art accompanying Michael Pakenham's review of the new book on U.S. Grant in our December 21 issue:

"As an admirer of President Grant, I think the new biography by Joan Waugh sounds wonderful. But I hope the artistic representation of Grant & Lee at Appomattox in THE WEEKLY STANDARD was not in the book. It showed Grant in polished boots and dress uniform. Actually he came in off the field in 'unpressed jacket and mud-spattered trousers' (McFeely, p. 219)

—also described as 'scruffy army-blue clothing' (p. 216). Nor was it a good resemblance of Lee, a tall aristocrat who arrived in an immaculate uniform with a sword. Poor Lee. He looks kind of scrawny in your picture, with no sword in sight." ♦

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Rage Against the Machine

My wife, back from walking the dog in a rainstorm, was drying her wet sox by the electric space heater in my attic office. I told her to be careful.

"Careful of what?" she said.

"Well," I said, "the space heater."

"What about it?"

What do you mean, what about it? Drop a newspaper next to a space heater and you'll burn the house down. Lean something metal alongside and it could pass through the grate, short the circuit, and burn the house down. Kick it over inadvertently, ditto. In fact, all it really takes to burn the house down with a space heater is to operate the thing normally until the iron in the grate gets hot enough to send the floorboards up in flame.

To anyone who grew up in a suburban-style house in the 1970s, mere ownership of a space heater was a form of insanity. We used to read about them on the front page of the *Boston Herald* all winter long. "Xmas Tragedy in HUB Tenement" the headline would read, over a picture of fire trucks and—in an inset on the lower right—the charred space heater that was to blame. Space heaters were like syphilis—something poor people acquired through their own incorrigible foolishness, and then died of.

But every appliance was unreliable back then. People got electrocuted by toasters and concussed by refrigerators. They had their heads gashed by the corners of air conditioners and their hands minced by malfunctioning blenders and Disposalls. There were exposed nails, nuts, blades, and levers practically everywhere, good for ripping the sleeve off a shirt or poking an eye out. In the 1970s a screen door was a creaking slab of cheaply made, raw-edged steel. At our house, by the end of the summer, the bottom of our front hallway would have blood stains from the skin it had carved off the Achilles tendons of unsuspecting kids from all over the neighborhood.

It was the apotheosis of the industrial age. For about a hundred years, the goal had been to mechanize every corner of domestic life. Quite naturally, by the time I was a boy, households were primarily places for equipment. The humans who happened to be there were interlopers, and subject to almost nonstop industrial accidents. Every other day or so, you'd hear a bloodcurdling oath from some corner of the house. That part of the hippie ethos that urged people to get rid of their mechanized junk—their dishwashers and televisions and cars—has always been music to my ears.

HAL MAYFORTH

But sometime when I wasn't looking, appliances became safe, efficient, and well made. Mankind somehow got the upper hand. A 1975 trash compactor does not even belong to the same family as a 2010 iPod. It is not that houses are any less full of contraptions than they used to be—it is only that now they are shaped to human comfort.

Consider the modest can opener. Back in the day, a can opener was rough and awkward. Opening a can of beans, your odds of drawing blood were about 1-in-4. I remember my astonishment the first time I went into a fancy kitchenware store—in Baltimore, around 1990—and saw a Zyliss can-opener. What a revelation. Modeled to the human hand, locking easily onto the can, and actually designed to open it effortlessly.

That is why my wife, not quite so dim as I about what is going on in the world, was less terrified of our space heater. It has no grill but a thin mesh of alloy covered with Teflon so it won't catch fire even if you put it on a stack of kindling. Tip it over and it shuts off. And, since it's Chinese-made, the whole unit costs about a dollar and forty-nine cents.

As with so many other changes in our consumerist life, it's hard to tell why this one came about and what it means. Are everyday objects getting more elegant? Or are we all living more like poor people? Is it that Reagan put an end to screw-you socialism, with the shoddy workmanship that was its hallmark? Or is it that those hippies who now design our appliances and clog our statute books with regulation put an end to soulless, every-man-for-himself capitalism? Is it that our own culture is, actually, deep down, as anti-humanistic as people used to say, and that the Chinese, even in the aftermath of Maoism, have a better sense of human needs? Or are today's appliances designed for the benefit of those who lost a limb on older models back in the 1970s?

Christopher Caldwell

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2009: Could Have Been Worse

We survived 2009.

Without minimizing the damage that's been done—yes, we're aware of a minor piece of health care legislation whose passage looks likely—we can take some reassurance from this: The Obama administration (so far) hasn't succeeded in doing too much damage to the American economy. Major parts of American society and the American polity are resisting the allure of a slide into European decadence. The climate change fearmongers are increasingly discredited, and Copenhagen was a farce.

What's more, our soldiers' remarkable achievements in 2007-08 in Iraq aren't being frittered away, and General Stanley McChrystal is getting more troops to try to achieve a similar outcome in Afghanistan. The Iranian regime looks shakier than it did a year ago—though no thanks go to the Obama administration on this one. Gitmo is still open, and most of the detainees are still there. In foreign policy in particular, the Obama administration has been mugged by reality. The question, as the late Mike Scully once put it, is whether they will have the nerve to press charges.

The American public seem to have decided—personal goodwill toward the man notwithstanding—that President Obama is not doing a particularly good job, that more big government liberalism is the last thing we need, and that, yes, American exceptionalism isn't a bad thing or an out-of-date idea.

So our Man of the Year is the American citizen. He's sensible, resistant to being herded around like a sheep, and invigorated with, in the words of *Federalist* 39, "that honorable determination which animates every votary of freedom, to rest all our political experiments on the capacity of mankind for self-government." (Needless to say, our Man of the Year includes many women—it's striking how much of the resistance to Obamaism has come from spirited American women.)

Resistance is admirable, but it's not enough. It needs to be accompanied by a winning political and governing agenda. Indeed, one might say that the success of our political experiment in self-government depends on the right today having a compelling agenda for the future.

The good news is we've seen promising work which begins to lay out the first elements of that agenda. Admittedly some of the ideas are in tension with one another (as the elements of any sensible political agenda are), but it's striking that there is invigorating, fresh, and sometimes deep thinking in all of the conservative camps—libertarian, traditionalist, neoconservative.

Of course, as conservatives, we also know many of the very best ideas are old ideas. And I'm struck by how many people are rediscovering Hayek's *The Fatal Conceit*, Irving Kristol's *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, or Tocqueville's account of soft despotism in *Democracy in America*. There seems to be a renewed interest in learning from these works and adapting their lessons to our time. As Whittaker Chambers put it at the close of his last letter to Bill Buckley, "Each age finds its own language for an eternal meaning."

Chambers wrote those words on April 9, 1961—at the beginning of what turned out to be a tumultuous decade of change, much of it for the worse. These next years may feature similar upheaval. Perhaps we conservatives will simply end up standing athwart the history of this decade yelling "Stop!" Or it might turn out that this next decade could prove as eventful as the 1960s—but in a very different way. It could be the decade in which conservatives re-create the institutions of a free society as effectively as the left damaged them almost half a century ago, and during which the 9/11 generation ennobles the meaning of America as fundamentally as the Baby Boomers tried to degrade it.

Meanwhile, it sure would be nice to defeat that health care bill.

—William Kristol

2010: Regime Change in Iran

As a candidate, Barack Obama pledged to meet with leaders of rogue states "without preconditions." He said the foreign policy of the United States had become too aggressive, even domineering, under George W. Bush. We had made too many demands and spent too much time lecturing and too little time listening. An Obama administration would use "smart power" to change all of that. Iran would be the first and most urgent test.

The new president started early.

"To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect," he said in his Inaugural Address, employing language he would use

repeatedly about Iran over his first year in office. "To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist."

The speech was an extended hand. And the response was a clenched fist. "Obama is the hand of Satan in a new sleeve," said a spokesman for Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader. "The Great Satan now has a black face."

Obama was not discouraged. He offered best wishes on the Iranian New Year in March, promising "engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect." His administration then proposed face-to-face meetings to discuss nuclear issues. Obama wrote directly to Khamenei in May, renewing the offers of friendship. When the regime brazenly stole the presidential election in June, Obama refused to question the results. (White House spokesman Robert Gibbs would later call Ahmadinejad the "elected leader" of Iran.) And when the regime violently cracked down on the nationwide postelection protests—jailing some opposition leaders and killing others—Obama worried primarily about any perception of U.S. "meddling" in internal Iranian disputes and repeated the American commitment to engagement. When Iran failed to meet a September deadline for answers on nuclear negotiations, Obama gave them until the end of the year. When Obama announced that Iran was building a secret uranium enrichment facility at Qom, which could have no peaceful uses, he coupled his announcement with an offer for more talks.

GARY LOCKE

And on it went.

As often as not, Iran failed to respond to these goodwill gestures. And when it did, the responses were uniformly negative and usually hostile. Khamenei accused Obama of following the "crooked ways" of George W. Bush. Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declared that Iran was "running the show" on nuclear issues and vowed that Iran would "never negotiate" about its nuclear program. The Iranian government accused the Obama administration of orchestrating the opposition rallies and mocked his private missives. And last week, when the Obama administration reminded the Iranian regime of the new deadline for negotiations, Ahmadinejad dismissed the gentle chiding, saying: "They say we have given Iran until the end of the Christian year. Who are they anyway? It is we who have given them an opportunity." The international community, he added, can give "as many deadlines as they want, we don't care."

The problem, it turns out, was not George W. Bush. It wasn't a lack of American goodwill or our failure to acknowledge mistakes or our underdeveloped national listening skills. The problem is the Iranian regime.

This should have been clear from the beginning, and should have been glaringly obvious after the fraudulent election and the deadly response to the brave Iranians who questioned the results. There were plenty of clues: an Iranian president who routinely denies the Holocaust and threatens to annihilate Israel; a long record of using terrorism as an instrument of state power; the provision of safe haven to senior al Qaeda leaders in the months and years after the 9/11 attacks; and a policy, approved at the highest levels of the Iranian leadership, of trying to kill Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan.

What should now be clear, even to the letter-writers of the Obama administration, is that the only way to solve the problem is to change the regime. Obama missed a unique opportunity to undermine the regime after the elections this summer, when it was as fragile as it has been since the 1979 revolution. It may well be too late, but there are still things the leader of the free world should do.

The president has signaled that his patience with Iranian intransigence will end with the close of 2009. It's time for Obama to signal a dramatic change in strategy. Quickly and decisively after the New Year, he should do four things: (1) Make clear that he is on the side of the Iranian opposition and will do everything he can to add to their strength. (2) Enact the toughest possible sanctions on Iran—especially targeting refining capabilities—with broad international support if available, but with as many allies as will go along or unilaterally, if not. (3) Make clear that he will be taking a zero tolerance view of Iranian support for terrorism, including the deliberate targeting of U.S. diplomatic and military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan. (4) Make clear that the use of force to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons isn't off the table, and order the military to be ready to act should it become necessary.

In 2009, we tried to engage the Iranian regime. In 2010, let's try to change it.

—Stephen F. Hayes

A Fine Mess

The substance of the Reid bill is as bad as the process that produced it.

BY JAMES C. CAPRETTA & YUVAL LEVIN

In the Democrats' rush to pass some kind of health care legislation before public opposition overwhelms them, tactics have long since overtaken substance. Their only remaining goal is to pass a bill, any bill. As the endgame has unfolded, all eyes have been fixed on the unseemly process taking place in the halls of Congress: backroom legislating with rushed votes to minimize scrutiny and public review; secret deals with deep-pocket industries; outright and outlandish vote buying using taxpayer funds; procedural maneuvers to shut off debate and prevent meaningful amendments.

The process has been ugly—so ugly that it has distracted both voters and legislators from the product being cobbled together, which if anything is even worse than assumed. A look at the bill itself—at what exactly will be unleashed on the country if this legislation becomes the law of the land—reveals an appalling disaster in the making, for its own sponsors no less than for the rest of the country.

The litany of conservative concerns is familiar by now, and the latest version of the bill contains the full parade of horribles: massive tax increases in bad economic times, new mandates on employers that will depress hiring, fewer options for families buying insurance, new layers of bureaucracy between doctors and patients, *upward* pressure on premium costs, and a failure to address the causes of exploding health care costs more generally. But this latest iteration of Obamacare is a nightmare not only for conservatives. The fine details don't look much better from the left.

The mix of insurance regulation and subsidies at the center of the various versions of the Democrats' health care bills until this most recent iteration was designed to channel Americans toward a government insurance program of one sort or another. The idea was to end risk-based insurance by making it essentially illegal for insurers to charge people different prices based on their health, age, or preexisting conditions; to force everyone to participate in the system so that the healthy do not wait until they're sick to buy insurance under the new rules; and then to introduce a government-run insurer that, whether through Medicare's negotiating leverage or through various exemptions from market pressures, could undersell private insurers and so offer an attractive "option" to people being pushed out of employer plans into an increasingly expensive individual market.

GARY LOCKE

James C. Capretta is a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and a health policy consultant. Yuval Levin, also a fellow at EPPC, is the editor of National Affairs.

The goal was to get a large swath of the public insured by the government, and so gradually create a socialized insurance system. Conservatives opposed this scheme because they believe a public insurer would not be able to introduce efficiencies that would lower prices. Liberals supported it because they think a public insurer would be more fair and more effective.

But in order to gain 60 votes in the Senate, the Democrats have now had to give up, for all practical purposes, on any version of that public insurer, while leaving the other components of their scheme in place. The result makes no sense whatsoever—not to conservatives, not to liberals, not to anyone. Rather than reform a system that everyone agrees is a failure, it will subsidize that system and compel participation in it—requiring all Americans to pay ever-growing premiums to private insurance companies, most of which are for-profit, while doing essentially nothing about the underlying causes of those rising costs. The thought that, after all of this, a Democratic Congress is going to force Americans to send their premiums to the despised insurance industry and then subsidize that industry to boot has sent the left into such a state of frenzied recriminations it could sink the whole enterprise yet.

And that is by no means the only problem for the left in this bill. The mad rush to pass something obscures a crucial component of the bill's design that could prove very problematic for Democrats. For all of President Obama's insistence that we must have action now, and all the talk by congressional Democrats about the terrible costs of delay, the key components of the Senate bill would actually not go into effect for *four years*. Essentially all of the spending provisions and insurance reforms—including the individual mandate to purchase health insurance, the employer mandate to provide it, the state insurance exchanges, the federal subsidies for coverage, and the Medicaid expansion—would only go into operation in 2014.

The reason for this, as for everything in this fine mess of a bill, is purely tactical: In order to get the Congressional Budget Office to score the cost of the bill below $900 billion over its first ten years (which was President Obama's arbitrary goal), the Democrats had to begin the spending provisions in the fifth year of the ten-year window, while tax collection and Medicare cuts would begin sooner. Some taxes and fees, like those on pharmaceutical companies, would start immediately under the bill. Others, like the surtaxes on medical devices and health insurers (which would result in higher premiums for employers and individuals buying coverage) would take effect in the course of 2010. And several major tax hikes, like the tax on particularly generous employer health plans, the increased Medicare payroll tax on high earners, and limits in allowable deductions for health care expenses, would begin in 2013.

In order to gain 60 votes in the Senate, the Democrats have now had to give up, for all practical purposes, on any version of a public insurer, while leaving the other components of their scheme in place. The result makes no sense whatsoever—not to conservatives, not to liberals, not to anyone. Rather than reform a system that everyone agrees is a failure, it will subsidize that system and compel participation in it.

This timeline of tax and spending implementation corresponds rather awkwardly to the political calendar confronting the Democrats. The new entitlement, insurance rules, and other elements of the plan will not go into effect until well after the 2010 congressional elections and even the next presidential election, but some serious tax hikes will take place by then.

Meanwhile, again to make for a palatable CBO score, the bill envisions radical cuts in Medicare beginning quite soon. For instance, steep cuts in Medicare Advantage start in 2011, which means millions of seniors will begin hearing the bad news in 2010 as their plans withdraw from the program, cut their benefits, or raise their premiums. In addition, the bill assumes other deep cuts in Medicare provider payment rates, including a massive reduction in physician fees scheduled for 2010. These are extremely unlikely actually to occur, as Congress has for decades proven incapable of sustaining serious cuts in Medicare.

But whether the cuts happen or not, they present a major political problem for Democrats in the short term—by the end of 2011, they will either have enacted massive and unpopular Medicare cuts (the proceeds of which will go to a new entitlement, rather than to fix Medicare itself), or they will have failed to enact them and shown the fiscal underpinnings of their health care agenda to have been a sham. Either way, the pain will come almost three years before benefits that might assuage voter concerns begin to flow.

None of this makes the bill any better for the right or the center. It only means that Obamacare has become an equal opportunity fiasco. The Reid bill, which will very likely be the blueprint for the final legislation before the House and Senate in the new year, is an exceptionally ill-designed and misbegotten mess—substantively, strategically, fiscally, and (for its sponsors) politically. About the only good news to be found in the fine print is that even if it passes it will not go into effect for four long years—leaving genuine reformers time to repeal it and start anew. ♦

Going Rogue

Hosein Ali Montazeri, 1922-2009.

BY REUEL MARC GERECHT

When I first encountered the Persian word *mofangi*, I struggled to grasp its meaning. It implies a certain timidity, physical weakness, and awkwardness. Seeking to put some flesh on that definition, my language tutor told me to envision Grand Ayatollah Hosein Ali Montazeri. "He's more than a little *mofangi*," remarked the tutor, expressing the condescension that well-educated, leftwing Iranians often have for the clergy who stole their revolution.

That was in the mid 1980s, and Montazeri was the number two cleric in Iran, a mullah who once passionately believed in exporting Iran's revolutionary tumult and was instrumental in building the institutions of Islam's first theocracy. Yet, unlike his former teacher and friend, the formidable Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Montazeri didn't scare anyone. With his big owlish glasses, squeaky voice, and sartorial dishevelment, Montazeri was clearly a man of the people—to the extent that any accomplished Shiite jurist can be an ordinary man.

Yet in the end Montazeri, who died last week at 87, caused, and will continue to cause, untold trouble for the regime. By the end of his life, he had come to represent the fusion of three unstoppable ideas: that the Islamic Republic as built by Khomeini and led by Khamenei is illegitimate; that only democracy can redeem the republic and save Islam as a vibrant faith capable of shaping society's mores; and that clerics who support Khamenei are intellectual dullards and moral reprobates. It was Montazeri's religious passion, his argumentative rigor, his common-man roots, and his courage that drove the regime nuts. His disciples are everywhere.

No outsider can precisely date an inner change of such consequence, but it appears that Montazeri began to lose his faith in what he'd built when the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) started consuming tens of thousands of young men—the faithful for whom Khomeini never once wept. After Iran's defeat, Khomeini "defrocked" Montazeri for having the temerity to question his execution of thousands of jailed Iranians. Under house arrest, Montazeri became the leader of the dissident clergy.

Fallen from power, Montazeri wrote a six-volume critique of the *velayat-e faqih*, the "regency of the jurisconsult," or "office of supreme leader," which allowed first Khomeini, then Khamenei, dictatorial control of the state. Although Montazeri never took issue with the idea that clerics should have an important role in government, he relentlessly pursued Khamenei for his lack of religious qualifications and for the very idea that the supreme leader is unelected and not subject to law and tradition.

For Montazeri, the Islamic Republic was born in sin because the velayat-e faqih was not prescribed by Shiite tradition. Montazeri put forth the notion, later refined and lethally sharpened by Mohsen Kadivar, a dissident cleric and probably the greatest orator of the opposition, that only religious leaders who are elected possess legitimacy. Iran's religious political system, accordingly, must be transformed into a velayat-e entekhabi-e moqayyadeh, an "elected, limited regency of jurists," where ultimate political power rests with the people and their parliament, and not with mullahs. Montazeri is best seen as an iron prow, crashing into and splintering Khomeini's state. And in Montazeri's wake, democratic dissidents of all stripes—from the religiously inclined to the religion-hostile—have grown strong.

Montazeri's most lasting achievement may prove to be the deepening marriage between religious

REUTERS / MORTEZA NIKOUBAZL

Reuel Marc Gerecht is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard *and a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.*

democrats and increasingly nonreligious, Western-style democrats. He didn't intend this when he first started challenging the regime's legitimacy. But Montazeri evolved, as has the entire Iranian democracy movement—now easily the dominant intellectual force in the country. Indeed, this rapid evolution is perhaps what is most striking about Iran's leading religious democrats—Montazeri, Kadivar, former president Mohammad Khatami (in office 1997-2005), and the lay philosopher/sociologist Abdul Karim Soroush. They have become much more explicitly democratic as they have reflected on the revolution. And they have become more tolerant of dissident ideas and people. On his deathbed, Montazeri remained deeply traditional, yet he was not the man he had been even in 1988 when he expressed his outrage at the casual killing of Iranian "political" prisoners. He had become, in his own very clerical way, a progressive.

And those to the left of Montazeri, which includes almost everyone in Iran's democratic movement, have in turn moved farther left. ("Left" and "right" are tricky terms to apply to the Islamic Republic, but their Western meaning is increasingly apt.) What Khomeini feared most—the satanic whispering of Western ideas that transforms good Holy Law-abiding Muslims into inquisitive, disrespectful devils—is happening. Thirty years of theocracy has been a powerful teacher.

It was just six months ago—on June 11, 2009, the day before the Iranian presidential election—that American officials, government analysts, and a good slice of the journalistic and academic community downplayed the idea of a powerful anti-regime democratic movement in Iran. For these folks, Montazeri was a has-been, if not something of a crank. They saw an Iran where opposing regime loyalists argued essentially about little pieces of the pie, and the population went along for the ride, accepting the regime's inadequacies as it had the failure of Khatami to change the system.

But this analysis was ten years out of date. Behind the scenes, among intellectuals, academics, and an ever-larger slice of the educated youth, the advocates of democracy actually grew stronger as President Khatami got politically stuffed. Montazeri knew this and played on the growing dissatisfaction—which is why he became even more influential in the second decade of his opposition than he had been in the first.

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Iran is an odd place, where old men can become beloved by the young, where youths who don't have a religious bone in their bodie and wouldn't give clerics the time of day, can nevertheless be deeply respectful, even impassioned about, a grand ayatollah who fought the good fight against tyranny.

Montazeri's humanity and religion came together to create in him a profound respect for popular government, with all its enormous flaws (which Montazeri himself bitingly enumerated). What the regime perhaps detested most about Montazeri is that he made arguments and emotional appeals aimed directly at well-educated clerics and peasant believers alike, encouraging their spiritual migration away from Khomeini's state to an imagined new Shiite republic where basic decency could be seen in the conduct of officials. Inspired by experience, inspired by Montazeri, millions of faithful Iranians have put their affections and hopes beyond the reach of the regime.

The massive turnout for Montazeri's funeral, and the palpable nationwide sense of loss, are likely to be just the first tributes that a democratizing Iran will pay to Khomeini's most beloved student. In Iran the dead live on through their disciples, through the honor and duty that the young owe to the old, that the untested owe to the fearless. Once provoked and outraged, Iranians, who often dismissively refer to themselves as sheep, can turn into lions.

Montazeri was one of the lions of modern Iranian history. With his writing and his oratory, he unrelentingly challenged what he'd once held holy. His disciples—the army of Iranian intellectuals who've been for twenty years quietly obliterating the legitimacy of Khomeini's state—and the democratic dissidents who've poured into the streets since June 11, now command the high ground. Though the regime continues to rule because the Revolutionary Guard Corps hasn't (yet) cracked, Khamenei and his office have permanently lost their religious credentials.

With his unrivalled stubbornness and scholarly reach, Montazeri deserves much of the credit for the regime's predicament. Americans, who generally don't have an acute appreciation for Islam's religious authorities or the tumultuous debates about popular sovereignty inside Iran's clergy, owe Montazeri a great debt. Not a lover of the United States, its all-consuming popular culture, or its indefatigable ally in the region (Israel), he would not expect a word of thanks. Nevertheless, we should pay homage where homage is due. He earned it. ♦

The Facilitating Leaks Act

Congress sucks up to the media with a misbegotten 'shield law.'

BY FRED BARNES

The title of the legislation is innocent enough: the Free Flow of Information Act. The motivation behind it is a seemingly worthy one. It would give anyone in the media a shield—special protection—against being forced to reveal the names of confidential sources of information. And the result would be more and more information flowing freely to the American people, satisfying their right to know.

The organized media—the Newspaper Association of America, the American Society of News Editors, CNN, NPR, the *New York Times*, etc.—are wildly enthusiastic about the bill. No surprise there. It was approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee in mid-December, and chances are it will pass the Senate in 2010. A similar measure was approved by the House last March.

Yet despite the warm sentiments associated with it, the bill would do far more harm than good. Unless seriously cleaned up, it would have a distinctly negative effect on the federal government's ability to protect sensitive national security information from being disclosed in the media. It would encourage leaks of classified information.

Rather than making it easier to learn the identity of a leaker—or of someone who knew of plans for an imminent terrorist attack—the bill would significantly raise the government's burden in seeking a media person's source of information. I use the term "media person" on purpose, for the bill has such a broad and elastic definition of who's in the media that Democratic senator Dianne Feinstein of California said members of the Judiciary Committee would qualify. Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois, the Democratic whip, said his press secretary would, too.

It's not as if critical, top secret information isn't already flowing to the media at a record pace. The 'New York Times,' rather than being prosecuted, won a Pulitzer Prize for divulging highly classified information about the government's use of electronic surveillance in the war on terrorism.

Feinstein and Durbin sought to limit the privilege of not disclosing sources to reporters for legitimate media outlets. This included student journalists. Their amendment was defeated. Durbin voted against the bill, the only Democrat on the committee to do so.

The bill transforms federal judges into arbiters of what information might threaten America's national security. In this regard, the opinion of defense and intelligence officials would be given mere "appropriate deference." Depending on the judge, that could be little, if any, deference. Jon Kyl of Arizona, the Senate Republican whip, proposed the advice of government officials be given "substantial weight," as in the Patriot Act. His amendment failed.

The most dangerous part of the bill involves the higher standard the government must meet, in criminal and national security cases, to require someone in the media to name the source of critical, perhaps life-threatening, information. There's a new (and vague) "exhaustion" standard. Officials must have exhausted all alternative ways of getting important information before subpoenaing a media person. There's an "essentiality" standard. The evidence sought from the media must be essential to the government's investigation or prosecution. And who decides? A judge.

The bill goes on and on in this vein. Its thrust is to shelter the media at the expense of national security. Sometimes this is done quite cleverly. For instance, the shield wouldn't apply in cases where the media person actually sees or is involved in a crime. But there's an exception to that exception. The privilege to refuse to identify a source is restored, the bill says, "if the alleged criminal conduct is the act of communicating the documents or information at issue"—in other words, leak cases. A rather large loophole.

You may wonder why Congress is bothering to create a media privilege in federal cases at this time. It's not as if critical, top secret information isn't flowing to the media at a record pace. The *New York Times*, rather than being prosecuted, won a Pulitzer Prize for divulging highly classified information about the government's use of electronic surveillance in the war on terrorism. Nor are federal subpoenas of media persons a common practice.

The shield legislation is "a solution in search of a problem," says Kyl. "There is no demonstrable need for this. It's not as if a big dagger is hanging over anybody's head."

So why is the bill moving toward enactment? One reason is the major media have been lobbying furiously for the legislation, which has lingered in Congress since 2006. What's odd, though, is that the press has scarcely covered the progress of the measure, perhaps because it amounts to

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a special favor granted by politicians. Also, the White House decided an enhanced privilege would be a nice present for the press.

In a rare instance of bipartisanship in Congress, both Democrats and Republicans are currying favor with the media by backing it. Republican senators Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Orrin Hatch of Utah, and Chuck Grassley of Iowa voted for it in the Judiciary Committee. Republican Mike Pence of Indiana was a leading advocate in the House.

Kyl and Republican senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama struggled in vain to correct the flaws in the bill. Sessions describes the bill as "a historic alteration of the separation of powers" since judges would gain authority that belonged previously to the executive branch.

One of Kyl's (unsuccessful) amendments made utter sense. He proposed that media persons who claim the privilege should be required to disclose their source privately to the judge. Should the judge rule against the media person, the name would be revealed. If the judge ruled favorably, it would remain secret.

"In effect, a precondition for invoking the privilege is showing the court that you are willing to comply with the ruling of the court if it is adverse to you," Kyl said at a committee hearing. "You cannot have a heads I win, tails you lose proposition."

Plamegate prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald made a similar point in an op-ed piece in the *Washington Post*. "A threshold question lawmakers should ask is whether reporters will obey the law if it is enacted. They should ask because the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press calls for a shield law while urging journalists to defy the law when a court upholds a subpoena for source information."

The fate of another Kyl amendment showed how far Congress is willing to go to coddle the media. He said the shield should be denied if the media person hasn't promised confidentiality to the source. That struck me as a no-brainer. But after a brief discussion, it was voted down. ♦

The Two Americas

Obama's is smaller.

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

Was 2009 the dawn of a new liberal era? Or was it, rather, the apogee of Democratic power (for now)? In November 2008, when Barack Obama was elected president, liberals weren't content to say his sweeping victory was due to public disapproval of President Bush and the deepening recession. They insisted the electorate had been transformed. The country had changed, in a fundamental way.

Gone were the angry white folks who had let the GOP run things, off and on, for a generation. A rainbow coalition of progressive, technologically savvy Millennial voters had arrived on the scene. America, we were told, was salivating at the prospect of a "new era of liberal reform." Obama was Lincoln, FDR, and Kennedy all rolled into one. He was, moreover, the liberal Reagan. His ascendance signaled not only the end of conservative power but a decisive lurch to the left.

The events of the last year have exposed this argument as false. The United States remains a closely divided nation that trends center-right. Self-identified conservatives outnumber liberals two-to-one. In December, 76 percent of respondents told Rasmussen Reports that they prefer a free-market economy to one managed by government. While Obama remains personally popular, his job approval has steadily declined to less than 50 percent in the Pew, *USA Today*/Gallup, and *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News polls.

And though the national Republican party remains unpopular, the GOP has nevertheless pulled within striking distance of the Democrats in the generic congressional ballot. In 2009, pro-life conservative Republicans won gubernatorial races in Virginia and New Jersey—two Obama states. An energetic right-wing protest movement has emerged, seemingly out of nowhere, to give voice to Americans upset at the political class.

Obama's domestic program is exceedingly unpopular. The public disapproves of the president's bailouts, stimulus, health care reform, and cap and trade policies, not to mention his decision to close the terrorist prison at Guantánamo Bay. Such disapproval, however, has led to a paradox. Because Democrats know they likely will suffer an electoral rebuke in 2010, they have moved even more quickly to enact their unwelcome agenda.

In their view, after all, 2009 could be the high-water mark of the New New Deal; better seize the moment. Democrats in Congress, therefore, have passed major pieces of complex legislation, with significant effects on the American economy, against public opinion and on party-line votes. They might as well be lemmings, marching to the cliff.

The backlash against Obama's partisan liberal agenda has led to some surprising numbers. The December NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll found the Tea Party movement has a higher approval rating than either the Democrats or the GOP. A recent Fox News poll found a majority of respondents preferred "doing nothing" to signing the Democratic health care bills into law. In another December survey, Public Policy Polling found that—this is not a joke—voters prefer Obama to George W. Bush by only a six-point margin.

Liberals have dismissed these polls, of course. Obama's sagging popularity,

Matthew Continetti is associate editor of The Weekly Standard *and author, most recently, of* The Persecution of Sarah Palin *(Penguin/Sentinel).*

they say, has nothing to do with his liberalism. Unemployment is the sole factor. Granted, high unemployment is a factor. But it is not the only one. It cannot be a coincidence, for example, that Obama's job approval began to really slide at the very moment Congress took up the health care debate.

Meanwhile, liberals ascribe the unpopularity of their policies solely to right-wing "smears" and "lies." The idea that the opposition might be arguing in good faith, that it might hold legitimate criticisms, cannot be countenanced. Some ulterior motive—greed, nuttery, racism, etc.—is always at work. These are excuses, however. Saying there is something wrong with your opponent's character is a convenient way to escape from dealing with his reasoning. It is also a good way to escape from reality.

The truth is that the liberal great awakening was always a fantasy. "What's really exceptional at this stage of Obama's presidency," writes Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Center, "is the extent to which the public has moved in a conservative direction on a range of issues." That movement, Kohut observes, is coming not only from "wingers" but from independents and the center, as well. "Pew Research surveys throughout the year have found a downward slope in support both for an activist government generally and for a strong safety net for the needy, in particular."

Nor is the rightward shift limited to issues related to the size of government. Public support for labor unions, for instance, is at an all-time low. Support for gun control is declining. So is support for abortion rights. The share of the public that believes there is "solid evidence" of climate change has fallen from 70 percent to 57 percent. In an earlier survey, released in May, Pew found that only 49 percent of Americans are willing to "pay higher prices in order to protect the environment." No wonder those who support putting a price on carbon are downplaying the environmental angle and emphasizing "energy independence" instead.

Conservative strength is also apparent when you look at the parties. The talk about a divided GOP is exaggerated. True, some Republican strategists and bloggers, mainly based in Washington, are uncomfortable with the party's populist turn. But they are in the minority. In their unified opposition to the Obama agenda, the Republicans have drawn a clear ideological distinction with the Democrats. The GOP's chief strategic problem is finding a way to convince the Tea Party movement and anti-Obama independents that it's okay to vote for Republicans again. The GOP, in other words, has to incorporate new voters and regain the confidence of some old ones.

The Democrats, by contrast, have to prevent their coalition from dissolving. Conservative House Democrats are beginning to retire. And one of them, Alabama congressman Parker Griffith, defected to the GOP last week. At the same time, Obama faces an incipient revolt on his left. The man who drew so much support from the Netroots during the Democratic primary fight has rebuffed the left on three major issues. He has ignored populist calls to break up the banks and reject the Too Big To Fail regulatory model. He has committed additional American troops to the war in Afghanistan. He has agreed to jettison the public option and Medicare buy-in in order to secure the votes of moderate Democratic senators for the health bills.

So far, the left's disappointment hasn't persuaded Democrats in Congress to break with the president. If the malaise persists, however, the activists and enthusiasts who turned out to vote in 2008 may decide to stay home in 2010. Which would make Republicans extremely happy.

You won't find it in the "year in review" features in the papers and newsweeklies, but the story of 2009 was that a young, attractive, postpartisan presidential candidate decided to govern as a partisan liberal. The results have been declining public support, bad legislation, demoralized lefties, and a resurgent conservative movement. The gap between the American people and those who govern them from Washington, D.C., is widening.

It turns out John Edwards had a point: There really are two Americas. There's the America of the "expert" schemers, planners, and centralizers inside the Beltway, who think they know what's good for the people, whether the people like it or not. And there's the America of just about everyone else. They are no doubt the ones Irving Kristol had in mind when he wrote, "The common people in such a democracy are not uncommonly wise, but their experience tends to make them uncommonly sensible." ♦

A Bad First Draft

Journalists make a hash of the decade that was.

BY PHILIP TERZIAN

Journalists, long on confidence but chronically short of knowledge, have been lately offering end-of-decade summations. The fact that the first decade of the 21st century doesn't actually end until this time next year hasn't slowed them down; and there's universal agreement that this was, as Andy Serwer wrote in *Time*, "the decade from hell."

No doubt, deep in the bowels of the Time-Life Building in Manhattan, where neither *Life* nor *Time* exists in the form they did when the building was constructed—and where neither may survive once the decade really does end—the sense of gloom must be palpable. The past decade was an epoch of "neglect," "greed," "self-interest," "deferral of responsibility," and, not least, the two presidential terms of George W. Bush. As "historian H.W. Brands of the University of Texas" points out, the Glass-Steagall Act was repealed in 1999—"an unfortunate tipping point of deregulation"—and so, according to Serwer, our first order of business in the new decade should be to "enact a 21st century version of Glass-Steagall." Then there was Hurricane Katrina. "An act of God, right?" asks Serwer. "Not really."

A few blocks away, at *New York* magazine, Michael Hirschorn points out that the dying decade was the era "when the bottom fell out of just about everything, including the idea of authority itself." This was because "we've had to tolerate the Bush presidency, born amid what was essentially a Supreme Court coup," which saddled America "with arguably the worst president in history." No explanation or comparison—or argument, really: Just an assertion of "Bush insanity," an entertaining list of scandals and oddities having nothing to do with George W. Bush, and the concluding wisdom that "the fear now is that no one is in charge. That we are all adrift in a vast, roiling sea, the contours of which none of us can fully discern."

Across town at the *New York Times*, reporter David Segal chose the expedient of telephoning sages, such as Carmen Reinhart, author of *This Time Is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly*, who predicts that "this will be remembered as the era when the North went South," and Stanford futurist Paul Saffo, who reminds us that "realities have consistently outpaced our wildest imaginings." David Brin, a science fiction writer, "looks at the '00s as a great lost opportunity, the decade when 'the drug high of self-righteousness poisoned our inherent American joy in pragmatic problem solving.' We missed the chance to solve the problem of global warming [and] to fix our crumbling infrastructure." Worst of all, "we were sidetracked by our response to 9/11, which [Brin] considers stupid and costly."

And so on. Readers who find these analyses disconcerting, perhaps even juvenile in tone, will have good reason to do so: End-of-year/end-of-decade summaries have a tendency to allow dyspeptic journalists to unleash their inner Lewis H. Lapham, their H.L. Menckenesque dismissals of contemporary foibles, Gore Vidaloid lamentations for lost Edens, Neil Postman-like surveys of cultural devastation, H.G. Wellsian predictions of a ravaged planet.

In fact, there is an entertaining sameness to these eloquent summaries. You would have read the same complaints about our failure to repair the crumbling infrastructure in 1989, or solve the problem of global cooling in 1979, or the drug-high of self-righteousness in 1959. The idea of authority itself was effectively destroyed by 1969, the tipping point of deregulation arrived in 1929, and anytime between 1945 and 1991 you could have read a confident assertion that our response to the Cold War was stupid and costly. (There is a partisan element at play, to be sure: Ronald Reagan's prosperity yielded the decade of greed, which Bill Clinton's did not; and Jimmy Carter was never described as the worst president in history.)

The other problem is that dividing history into decades is convenient for numerical purposes, and that's about it. As viewers of *Mad Men* must surely realize, what we think of as the sixties did not begin until that decade was at least half over, and the previous *fin-de-siècle* cycle lasted until 1914. Sometimes decades end on schedule—the twenties with the 1929 crash, and the thirties with the 1939 German invasion of Poland—but the meaning of these terms is ambiguous at best. The twenties was not a carefree epoch of raccoon coats and bathtub gin for the devastated farmers of the Midwest, and not every American dropped acid and marched against the Vietnam war in the sixties. The seventies began when the draft was ended (1973), or maybe at Kent State (1970), or perhaps with the death of Karen Ann Quinlan (1975).

It is reasonable to argue that the 21st century began on September 11, 2001—or perhaps more precisely, that the nineties ended on that date. But such journalistic categories tell us very little about anything. As a cultural/historical matter, when did the 19th century begin? With the end of the 18th century (1801), at Waterloo (1815), or the accession of Victoria (1837)? Have the currents of the 20th century receded, is history divisible into chronological chunks? Not even Michael Hirschorn knows the answer to that. ♦

Philip Terzian, literary editor of The Weekly Standard*, is author of the forthcoming* Architects of Power: Roosevelt, Eisenhower and the American Century *(Encounter Books).*

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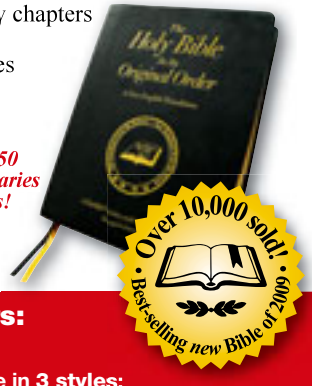

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Inside Our 'Secret' Afghan Prisons

A Navy SEAL and a Harvard-trained lawyer take charge of U.S. detention policy.

By Willy Stern

Kabul, Afghanistan

Amanula is a cold-blooded killer. But the 26-year-old unemployed tractor driver doesn't look the part. Rail thin with spindly arms, Amanula wears his black hair long, and his unkempt bangs often hang over his eyes. When you can see them, his coal-black eyes reveal a sad and contemplative man, resigned to his fate.

Like most villagers in craggy, dirt-poor Paktika province in southeastern Afghanistan, Amanula is illiterate. The local mullah in Waza Khawa encouraged this young Pashtun to join in the fight against the infidels. On a crisp day in November, Amanula and three companions rode their Honda motorbikes high into the mountains to attack an American convoy. He was already a veteran of such lethal missions and had been on three in the previous month alone. His small unit carried a lot of weaponry to the fight: dynamite, a pressure plate IED trigger, a heavy machine gun, AK-47 assault rifles, a Chinese grenade, and even a rocket launcher.

Their target was a convoy of American military vehicles snaking their way through the treacherous mountain passes not far from the Pakistan border. Amanula's team quietly set up its deadly ambush. The morning was crystal clear—and eerily quiet.

Then a U.S. Army Apache attack helicopter escorting the convoy spotted Amanula's crouching team and let loose with a hail of 30-caliber machine gun fire. Within seconds, two of Amanula's accomplices were dead, sliced to bits. A bullet entered Amanula's forearm and lodged in his bicep. Dazed with pain, he clutched his AK-47 for comfort. Within minutes, he heard an American soldier—an Army sergeant actually—screaming at him in a language he didn't understand. He put his hands over his head, the universal sign of surrender. His last surviving colleague made a different choice and aimed the rocket launcher at the young American soldier. The insurgent was rapidly dispatched by the sergeant's M249 machine gun.

The sergeant faced a decision as old as war itself. He had captured an enemy combatant and had to do something with him. The options haven't changed much since Alexander the Great rampaged through Afghanistan in 329 B.C.: Let the enemy go and give him the chance to kill you tomorrow; execute him on the spot; or give him quarter and take him prisoner. In keeping with U.S. policy, the recognized laws of armed conflict, and all sense of civilized society, the sergeant took option three. In short order, he disarmed Amanula, put flex cuffs on his wrists, and gave him emergency medical care, actually stemming the bleeding by using Amanula's torn white shirt to bandage his arm. The soldier called for a Medevac helicopter and, within 35 minutes, Amanula found himself under a doctor's care at an American forward operating base, some 25 miles northward. Amanula had become a "detainee," held legally as an enduring security threat in a war zone. After his medical treatment, he was moved to a small detention facility at another forward operating base.

The facility where Amanula was held is known in military parlance as a Field Detention Site (FDS). Both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have run breathless stories in recent weeks alleging that there exist secret facilities in Afghanistan operating outside the rule of law—although the correspondents were far from certain just what facilities they were writing about. No matter. "Afghans Detail Detention in 'Black Jail' at U.S. Base" read the *Times*'s headline. The *Post* featured two Afghan teenagers who said they had been "beaten by American guards, photographed naked, deprived of sleep and held in solitary confinement in concrete cells for at least two weeks while undergoing daily interrogation about their alleged

Willy Stern, an adjunct professor at Vanderbilt University's Law School, embedded with Task Force 435 in Afghanistan in December 2009.

A cell block at the infamous Pol-i-Charkhi prison refurbished with funds provided by U.S. taxpayers

links to the Taliban." Rashid, 15, claimed "his interrogator forced him to look at pornography alongside a photograph of his mother."

I have been in two Field Detention Sites, and there was absolutely nothing "black" about them. They are spartan, to be sure, with the detainees housed in small, private cells built out of simple plywood inside a nondescript and unlabeled container. (Many American soldiers sleep in similar containers.) The interrogation rooms are similar—a small table with three chairs, also fashioned out of plywood, much like what your local Cub Scout troop would bang out during a carpentry project.

There are five or six such cells in each facility. One site that I visited was empty; the other had a single detainee. This is typical. Detainees are given a mat, blanket, and three meals, at least one of which is hot. On one cell wall is a single piece of white paper with handwritten directions and a simple picture indicating the direction to face to pray towards Mecca. On another wall is part of the Geneva Conventions translated into Dari and Pashto. A prayer mat and bottled water are provided. Detainees are given medical treatment. Lights stay on 24/7—there is no individual lighting for each cell—but that practice is common in any U.S. prison where there is need for frequent safety and security checks. (The one detainee I saw was sleeping soundly on a cushioned mat, under a thick brown blanket, despite the lights being on. A half-drunk bottle of water and his white Kandahari hat were on the floor, next to his shoes.)

Amanula's testimony contrasts with the stories in the *Times* and *Post*. Amanula was given a private room at the FDS—while his American captors slept in bunk beds, 20-to-a-canvas tent—and interviewed thoroughly by a trained Army interrogator, working through an Afghan translator. The interrogator hardly looked like a U.S. soldier; he wore jeans, longish hair, and a thick beard. Under questioning in accord with Army Field Manual rules, Amanula provided his captors with a wealth of intelligence about other terrorist cells operating in the area. He gave up the names of specific Taliban members in the region, details of the techniques used by the insurgents, even mullahs and mosques who were working with the Taliban.

Within a few days, Amanula was relocated to a larger detention facility, the Bagram Theater Internment Facility (BTIF). Located on Bagram Airfield, the large military base north of Kabul at the base of the Hindu Kush, the

BTIF sits inside a large yellow hangar built by the Soviets in the early 1980s. Last week the BTIF was closed, and all detainees transferred to the new $60 million Detention Facility in Parwan (DFIP)—also located at Bagram.

So why are the mainstream media, human rights groups, and civil libertarians all bent out of shape about the Field Detention Sites? Attribute it to the secrecy. The locations of the FDSs are secret. This is just plain common sense in a war zone. How else can you maintain operational security? Why tell the bad guys—who, after all, are trying to kill our soldiers—where their friends are being held? Some of these facilities are out in the hinterlands where our forces are stretched thin. Public knowledge of the FDS locations would put both our soldiers and the detainees at risk. But for reporters from the *Times* and the *Post*, secrecy means there must be something illegal going on.

Group cell at the $60 million Detention Facility in Parwan

But the Defense Department takes the secrecy a little too far, generally not allowing any media access to the facilities or even letting them be discussed on-the-record. This policy breeds conspiracy theories, gives rise to outlandish conjecture, and presents an alluring news hook for every muckraking scribe who is all too willing to publish detainees' uncorroborated tales of abuse.

There's a good chance that this less-than-necessary secretiveness will pass away in 2010. So far in Afghanistan the Field Detention Sites have been under the command of whichever military unit controlled that battle space. But in early January, Joint Task Force 435, a unit stood up last September and focused entirely on detentions and interrogations, will assume control over almost all of the American-run detention facilities in Afghanistan. And General Stanley McChrystal's counterinsurgency strategy puts a premium on winning Afghan hearts and minds as much as defeating the Taliban on the battlefield.

An enlightened and tough, if frazzled and sleep-deprived group, Task Force 435 is heavy on scholarly attorneys and counterinsurgency gurus. Its mantras are transparency and accountability. During two weeks embedded with 435, I was taken to two "secret" Field Detention Sites, two Afghan prisons—including the infamous Pol-i-Charkhi—and a counternarcotics detention facility. I saw hundreds of detainees—not just in their cells but wandering the halls of the cell blocks and out in the recreation yards. I saw conjugal visit huts (made of hardened mud, but certainly private enough) and visited with a detainee being treated for diabetes in the medical unit.

I met dozens of detainees, was often invited back into their group cells for tea (I always declined), and made chitchat with those who had some English. Did any complain of abuse? No. Is this proof that here is no abuse? Of course not, but it's a pretty decent indicator. I was briefed on classified detainee files—on the condition that actual names not be used in print—and was allowed to interview a wide array of prison employees, including interrogators, guards, wardens, and even a psychologist. Most of these interviews were unmonitored, including on-the-record and unofficial talks with two translators who work in the interrogation rooms. I asked for details on a juvenile detainee, and they were immediately provided. Planned trips to visit prisons in Herat and Kandahar were cancelled because of bad weather and the limitations military aircraft face with low cloud cover hanging over the Afghan mountain ranges.

The brain trust of this new openness is Vice Admiral Bob Harward, who heads up Task Force 435, and his deputy, Brigadier General Mark Martins. Harward, a hard-charging Navy SEAL, is a legend in the Special Forces community. (He has a long scar down his left cheek—"from a knife fight" he says without elaborating.) An engaging commander, Harward, 53, cusses like the sailor he is when hanging with the troops but can produce an admiral's spit-

and-polish when needed—an engaging combination in a commander. He seems not to have an ounce of body fat and combines decent Farsi with a strategic mind.

Martins, 49, is another hard-charger. He was valedictorian of his West Point class, a Rhodes Scholar who earned a First at Oxford, and a magna cum laude graduate of Harvard Law School. The Seal and the Solicitor are less of an odd couple than one might think. For one, they are both gifted athletes (Martins has run the Marine Corps Marathon in 2:44) and exude an easy command presence. And they urgently want to upgrade the detentions and interrogations situation in Afghanistan. As Harward notes: "Perception is reality."

They both talk a lot about transparency—you hear that word about 50 times a day—but aren't able fully to practice what they preach. Official DoD policy mostly prohibits taking media into the large detention facility at Bagram, and does not allow public discussion of the even more secretive detention facility at Bagram: the Temporary Screening Facility (TSF). The Joint Special Operations Command apparently controls the TSF today; there's been no public indication to date when or how it will come under Task Force 435's oversight. Asked how he can preach transparency and yet not oversee the TSF, Harward declines to even acknowledge the facility's existence. Instead, he says, "I've been made responsible for all detention operations in Afghanistan, and I fully intend to fulfill that mission." There's little doubt that Harward and Martins are lobbying tactfully behind the scenes to gain oversight of the facility.

General Mark Martins and Admiral Bob Harward atop Gharib Gahr hill outside Kabul

And make no mistake: Task Force 435's mission is essential. General Stanley McChrystal laid out the issue fairly starkly in his August assessment of the Afghan war:

> There are more insurgents per square foot in corrections facilities than anywhere else in Afghanistan. Unchecked, Taliban/Al Qaeda leaders patiently coordinate and plan, unconcerned with interference from prison personnel or the military.

Detainees have cell phones, money, and influence. They control wide swaths of the Afghan prisons today, and they are radicalizing the other inmates.

FIELD DETENTION SITES

Despite the regular flow of stories about torture and black sites, few members of the press have been inside any of the Afghan prisons or attempted to understand the country's detainee structure. There are four separate parts to it, which in theory can take an insurgent from the battlefield through rehabilitation back into society: the Field Detention Sites; the Bagram Theater Internment Facility, which has just been replaced by the DFIP; the Temporary Screening Facility; and the Afghan-run correctional system.

There are nine FDSs in Afghanistan, mostly located in the southern and eastern parts of the country, where the insurgency is strongest. They are on forward operating bases, residing in unmarked containers. Scores of soldiers walk by them every day and have no idea what's on the other side of the metal wall. They all have a small entrance area where IDs are checked. In addition to five or six cells—divided by no more than a thick piece of plywood—most have a medical room, an open area, a small recreation yard, and an interview room. Adjacent to the interview room is another small room with a one-way mirror for observation purposes.

The interrogators, who all work in plainclothes, have done intensive 18-week interrogation courses and stick to the 19 approved methods of interrogation in the Army Field Manual (the law since the Detainee Treatment Act was passed in 2005). None of these methods includes torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. This gets hammered home hard throughout the American-run prisons.

The Red Cross can visit these facilities but does not have access to the detainees. Many of the detainees are released after initial interrogations and screenings to determine their status. The U.S. military has no obligation at this point to report their whereabouts to the Red Cross, but if they are held longer, the Red Cross is informed.

Nobody displays names or ranks on their uniforms inside an FDS. Special Forces operators, whose work is often clouded in secrecy and who use fake names, even

with a visiting general, staff many of the tiny facilities. But "we have absolutely nothing to hide from anybody," says Colonel John Garrity, the straight-talking military police officer in charge of the large Bagram detention facility, as well as the man responsible for investigating any charges of abuse at the FDSs.

> I'm not supposed to talk policy but if I had my way, we'd open up every damn facility to the media and anybody else who wanted to have a look. These are quality facilities run by trained professionals. You'll find worse problems at prisons in the U.S., but the secrecy here creates crazy myths. We have nothing—absolutely nothing—to hide from anybody. I am proud of our facilities and so would anybody else who has spent time inside them.

The policy of secrecy is clearly eating away at Colonel Garrity—and with good reason.

The average stay of a detainee at an FDS is six days. Some are released almost immediately, others are transferred to the Afghan police, and the rest begin moving within 10 days to the larger facilities at Bagram. Amanula was transferred to Bagram seven days after surrendering.

THE BAGRAM THEATER INTERNMENT FACILITY

Until last week, when the DFIP came on line, detainees sent to Bagram went to the Bagram Theater Internment Facility (BTIF). This facility held about 720 detainees. By comparison, at the height of the 2007 surge, we had some 27,000 detainees locked up in Iraq, and during the British campaign in Malaya from 1948 to 1960—the counterinsurgency oft cited as the most successful—nearly half-a-million people from a much smaller population pool were detained.

The BTIF was actually two facilities enclosed in one space behind walls and concertina wire. The larger of the two facilities, inside the former Soviet hangar, held two matching sets of 16 group cells (detainees sleep about 20 to a cell), as well as interrogation booths, and medical facilities. Prisoners lived in open cages with wire mesh tops for easy inspection by guards. Guards walked on a long wooden platform that runs above the cages, and a bright yellow sign on the raised platform reads "No Female Guards Beyond This Point."

In both the shuttered BTIF and the new DFIP there is at least one open latrine per cell and a group shower area with individual stalls. Detainees wear bright orange jumpsuits—making it awfully hard for them to escape unnoticed—as a sign of shame, and white caps. When it's cold (and it was cold in Afghanistan in December), they are issued blue knit caps. They have access to bottled water. When they have drunk a bottle, they may exchange it for a full one. This is a necessary security protocol as detainees have been known to cut the bottles in half and use them as weapons, or even to scoop up and throw feces at the guards. If their behavior warrants, they are rewarded with juice boxes, the same ones (apple, orange, pineapple) that are served in the dining facilities on the military base.

Prisoners have access to 40-inch HDTVs. Recently a soccer game was being shown, and when the camera panned to a crowd shot, a woman with much exposed skin came into view, jumping up and down. The shot offended many of the Muslim detainees, yet seemed to give furtive pleasure to others.

There were no windows and therefore no natural light for the detainees inside the massive BTIF hangar, a legitimate source of concern to Red Cross inspectors and a problem corrected at the new DFIP. In back of the hanger was what the troops call the "K-Span"—a hundred-foot-long Quonset hut where the hardcases were housed in segregation cells.

At least half the guards at the BTIF have had feces thrown at them, a standard way for detainees to act out, according to Chief Matthew Lacy, a Navy Guard Force commander. Corporal Kevin Johnson, 18, told me, "Yesterday, I had a guy throw urine on me, but he then apologized to me and said it was meant for another guard." (Johnson in less than five months at the BTIF has taught himself Pashto, the language of most of the detainees he looks after.) Some detainees regularly call the black MPs "niggers." The MPs, who work 12-hour shifts, complain frequently about their long hours but not about the abuse they take. They are trained not to respond to such taunting, and any claim of guard abuse is documented and investigated.

The average detainee stay at the facility is 24 months. The average weight gain is 36 pounds. For most, it is the first time in their lives they have had adequate food and access to health care. Most arrive illiterate, and many depart with elementary reading skills after taking classes in the facility. This is an effective counterinsurgency tactic; giving an insurgent the ability to read allows him access to a wider world than the narrow radical Islamic society in which most were raised. The ability to pursue independent thought should not be underestimated in this tribal society.

The clampdown on the media at Bagram hasn't just encouraged negative stories but has kept positive coverage under wraps. An internal U.S. Army document—self-serving, to be sure—reveals much decent treatment at the BTIF. There is the detainee diagnosed by an American doctor with pancreatic cancer and given compassionate release so he could spend his last days with his family. Before he

left, the dying man of his own accord went from cell to cell in the facility telling his fellow detainees how decent his captors had been. Or take the young Army specialist from Missouri who oversees the segregation cells in the K-Span. He and the eight men under his care sing to each other in Pashto at bedtime, the melodies carrying through the metal cell doors. He continues his serenade each night until every detainee is asleep.

There were abuses at the BTIF in the early years of the Afghan conflict. At least two Afghans died in U.S. custody. Task Force 435 absolutely won't talk about it, but multiple interviews with other military officials, translators, private contractors, consultants, and prison experts paint a grim picture. The CIA conducted these early interrogations. Some interrogators were cowboys, and many of the military police units in the facilities in the early years were reservists—with limited training—who followed the lead of the confident CIA guys. Apparently, when CIA operators left for the day, some would tell the reservists "to soften 'em up for us before tomorrow." There is no evidence that such abuse continues today with a trained guard force.

Task Force 435 visits a cell block at Jalalabad prison

DETENTION FACILITY IN PARWAN

Colonel Garrity was granted permission to show the unopened facility to the media in mid-November, and scores of articles and photos—some glowing, some skeptical—appeared. It's a modern wonder, replete with huge cells, basketball hoops in the recreation yard, expensive optometrist equipment, a state-of-the-art X-ray machine, and a large vocational-technical training area to help with the detainee's reintegration to society. In a bizarre twist, after the detainees are transferred in early 2010, they will have far nicer digs than the soldiers who guard them. The soldiers will continue to live in cramped canvas tents and walk long distances outside through mud to get to the latrine or shower.

The new facility has great public relations value and will aid the 435's quest for transparency. But the DFIP is also so overdone as to be borderline ridiculous. The ultimate plan is to hand over management of the facility to the Afghans, and it's a safe bet that the power tools and medical equipment will quickly be stolen and sold. What are the chances that the modern surveillance cameras and integrated computer system will still work in 10 years in this third-world country where many farmers still use oxen and Iron Age tools? A clear sign that the facility is not sustainable: The power outlets at the 40-acre facility run on the American 110-volt system, not the Afghan grid.

The detainees at the DFIP are carefully screened. A small fraction—the hard cases—are being designated for fledgling deradicalization programs. Experts are studying similar programs in places like Saudi Arabia and Singapore to adapt them for the Afghan culture. Reintegration programs—vocational training, literacy programs, etc.—will be broadly administered to almost the entire population according to individual plans drawn up for each detainee.

"But reintegration plans are still very much in the early stages," reports Marisa Porges, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations with an expertise in the rehabilitation of terrorists. She's just back from visiting the facilities in Afghanistan. Efforts are underway, says Porges, "to both design and implement programs simultaneously, which is a good sign and shows they're being aggressive." For example, moderate mullahs are working with the detainees.

THE TEMPORARY SCREENING FACILITY

This is the site that doesn't officially exist. Nobody on Task Force 435 will acknowledge it. No matter. It does exist, and it is at Bagram Airfield. It's the controversial facility over which Admiral Harward is apparently seeking jurisdiction.

The TSF, though, is hardly as sinister as it sounds. Military operations in Afghanistan legitimately require what is essentially a way station for detainees who are being

screened before they are released or transferred (either to the large Bagram detention facility or directly to the Afghan prison system). It is here that Special Operations Forces interrogate detainees, just as they do at the Field Detention Sites. The Joint Special Forces Command, which reportedly runs the secret facility, is less interested in transparency than in maintaining operational and tactical secrecy in wartime. There are valid arguments on both sides of the issue, a fact not lost on Harward or Martins. While transparency is needed to win Afghan hearts and minds and is a key component of McChrystal's counterinsurgency strategy, it can also aid the insurgents by revealing surveillance techniques. (I've learned of many such techniques—clever but not illegal—in my time here.) If you were a Special Forces interrogator doing your job just fine would you really want another layer of bureaucrats—including a bunch of uptight lawyers—looking over your shoulder?

But many Pashtuns in southern Afghanistan cite disappearances into the "occupier's black jail" as a good reason to pick up an AK-47 and fight the Karzai government, or try to blow up our troops on patrol. That's the reason transparency makes good sense today. It's the smart way to stop alienating the population.

THE AFGHAN PRISONS

After capture and screening, many detainees are transferred into the Afghan criminal justice system for prosecution. I visited three Afghan-run prisons—Pol-i-Charkhi in eastern Kabul just beyond the Kabul River; the Jalalabad Prison in eastern Afghanistan on the corridor leading to the Khyber Pass; and Kabul's new Counter-Narcotics Justice Center.

Compare Pol-i-Charkhi or Jalalabad with a prison in Kentucky and the Afghan facilities look downright awful. Prisoners are cramped up to 18 to a small cell. The sewage system is often no more than a hole in the floor to an open trench, reliant on gravity to move the mess downhill and away from the cells. Hundreds of people were lined up outside Pol-i-Charkhi on visiting day, many with wheelbarrows piled high with food since food service inside is largely nil. At the Jalalabad Prison, the inmates sleep inside but the guards are forced to sleep outside, even in the snow, due to lack of funds to build even a single guard shack.

But compare these facilities with prisons in Africa or elsewhere in central Asia, and they look okay. There are lots of Americans floating around the facilities—corrections consultants hired by the State Department and even U.S. marshals with crew cuts and blue windbreakers. They work hard to assure proper standards. And there isn't any evidence of the torture, beatings, whippings, and rape that are standard fare in third-world prisons.

Pol-i-Charkhi has a past. It's estimated that the Afghan Communists executed 27,000 people in this hellhole—mostly political enemies—after the Soviet invasion in 1979. The main facility is built on a pin-wheel design, with the cell units forming the spokes of the wheel. I walked through one such block where the general population was housed, as well as through an open recreation yard. Dozens of prisoners could have easily walked up and attacked me. Instead, they wanted to shake hands and share tea.

To be sure, there is a separate facility at Pol-i-Charkhi, called the U-10, where the most dangerous prisoners are held. It is here that you'll find the Taliban leaders who led a riot and took over two cell blocks in 2008. Still even these violent prisoners wander freely around their cell block, meandering among the bright red garbage cans that dot the long second-floor hallway. The day I visited, several wanted to practice their English; they were polite, to be sure—and no doubt knew the consequences of creating trouble. The U-10 facility is on par with any maximum-security prison in the United States, in large part because Western contractors built it, and U.S. taxpayers fund it. It's worth noting the United States has already spent $16 million to refurbish and update Pol-i-Charkhi, one cell block at a time. Construction of a vocational tech-training center—part of Task Force 435's reintegration strategy—was underway when I visited.

There are bright spots in the Afghan system. The women's prison at Jalalabad is spacious, with doe-eyed children frolicking in the courtyard on a blue swing set, slide, and seesaw. There's also a small classroom and a huge pile of American toys—think Spiderman dolls—donated by aid groups in the United States.

Then there's the recently built Counter-Narcotics Justice Center. Inmates sleep two-to-a-room on bunk beds, and every cell has its own semi-private bathroom area. The cells I saw were clean—with toothbrushes and toothpaste left out on a shelf. A modern kitchen and industrial-sized laundry round out the facility. The recreation yard, though, isn't much to see. It's outdoors, to be sure, but is nothing more than a long narrow cage where detainees squatted on their haunches, huddled under wool blankets to ward off the winter air. Still, the facility is so nice that many accused criminals with political connections pull strings to win admission.

Corruption is a constant aspect of the Afghan prison system. Sarah Chayes, author of a brilliant book on the guileful nature of Afghan politics post-Taliban, *Punishment of Virtue*, believes that corruption takes at least three forms in the prison system. (Chayes, who has lived in Kandahar for the last seven years working to rebuild homes and establish an agricultural collective, serves as a special adviser to the NATO military command.) First of all, she says, top Afghan

officials strive to have their rivals or enemies sent to prison and the best way of achieving this is by deliberately providing inaccurate information to international military or intelligence officers. Second, imprisonment in Afghanistan is often simply a kidnapping racket, with releases obtained for a "bribe." Finally, Chayes notes that corrupt officials and other criminals with ties to those at the summit of the Afghan government use their pull to get out of jail.

Task Force 435 has no real power within the Afghan prison system, and so the corruption will remain. Another weak link in the chain is the corruption of the greater Afghan judicial system, notes General Martins—judges, policemen, guards, etc. But the task force must play the hand it's been dealt. They don't complain—at least not much.

Conjugal huts at Jalalabad prison in eastern Afghanistan

One of Task Force 435's most serious challenges is in its efforts to deradicalize detainees and reintegrate them into Afghan society.

Take the case of 16-year-old Abul-Aziz—the lone juvenile in detention at BTIF today. Educated in a radical madrassa in Pakistan and effectively an orphan, he's a quick study. (When he was picked up in September, Abul-Aziz was already proficient in four languages.) It quickly became apparent that the babyfaced Abul-Aziz had regular contact with senior members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)—a terrorist group operating in Afghanistan, knew the exact location of IMU safe houses, and had received advanced combat training. Although it's legal to hold him under the laws of armed conflict, he's still just a kid. On the day he was picked up, he was trying to get his cell phone fixed and went into a village to have his photo taken before a Muslim holiday. Can he be deradicalized? This is the sort of question that Admiral Harward and General Martins are trying to tackle.

With others, there is virtually no hope of getting them to lay down their arms. Agha-Gul is a senior Taliban commander with a shaved head and thick black beard. He was nabbed in late 2005 in a Kabul taxicab with $13,000 in Euros and British pounds. A courier who traveled among Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Europe, Agha-Gul has ties to multiple attacks on coalition forces. He was entirely uncooperative during interrogations and will likely be held indefinitely as "an enduring security threat."

Since 2002, about 4,000 individuals have been detained; more than 2,500 have been released. Task Force 435 would like to release many more. General Martins can often be found in his windowless office after midnight scouring detainee files for clues that could lead to eventual reintegration. "Information that reveals apparent motives for violence," he says, "is often helpful in developing a reintegration plan or path for an individual detainee." Martins is thorough. He also looks at the circumstances of the capture, the strength of evidence, local community and tribal history, sectarian and political dimensions, the detainee's cooperation, his behavior in detention and even the willingness of his home village to have a detainee back.

But before any detainees are released, they appear before a controversial body known as a Detainee Review Board (DRB). This panel of three field-grade military officers conducts administrative hearings for each detainee. The detainee does not have access to a civilian lawyer, but is instead guided both before and during his hearing by a military officer who advocates on his behalf. Human rights groups contend this is wrong.

But as one task force officer notes:

> I would hate to have on my conscience the deaths of well-intentioned but naïve civil liberties lawyers who've been beheaded by Taliban while scouring Kunar province for evidence of their clients' innocence. So we may be in for some criticism on this score in the end. There are some things that require common sense, and armed conflict is one of them.

At least a third of the nation's 34 provinces are in armed conflict. A lot of folks are getting killed. In any event, as required by law and policy, every detainee receives an in-

Family members waiting outside Pol-i-Charkhi prison on visiting day

person hearing before the DRB within 60 days of arrival at Bagram and gets a further review every six months.

The DRB is required to consider all "reasonably available" evidence, a qualifier easy to understand in a war zone where collecting evidence often exposes soldiers and Marines to getting killed. The military is also required to chase down all exculpatory leads offered by a detainee who claims he was unjustly nabbed. It's not a perfect system, but it is not a terrible one either.

How can we tell if we are winning this war? One litmus test is the complex case of a detainee named Jalaludin. Relatively well educated—he completed the 11th grade—the 35-year-old had a well-paying job as the number two officer on a security detail. His job was to protect the construction workers who were building a much-needed road through Kunar Province in eastern Afghanistan. This area is a stronghold of Hezb-e-Islami insurgents. (The U.S. taxpayer is funding the road, one of thousands of such reconstruction projects here that get little coverage.)

Although Jalaludin was not directly involved in attacks on coalition forces in his area, he allowed the Taliban to sneak its fighters and weapons through his security checkpoints and, worse, he had advance knowledge of terrorist attacks on coalition forces that he failed to report—hardly acceptable behavior for a top-level security officer. He was arrested based on strong evidence and quickly admitted his guilt. He now is held at the DFIP and says he desperately misses his family.

We know of Jalaludin and his uncertain future only because the new task force on detentions believes the U.S. military has nothing to hide and saw the value in opening up its doors to a visiting scribe. It's a gamble, to be sure, but a good one. In a country where virtually every issue is shrouded in uncertainty, bedeviled by deadly complexity and riddled with corruption, this much is certain: The good faith, soundness, and humanity of Joint Task Force 435's mission are unassailable. The men and women of 435 are committed to a humane and open detentions system, one that is rooted in the rule of law and grounded in basic American values.

Will these become Jalaludin's values? After all, says Martin, he wasn't

> a trigger puller or actually part of the insurgent force. I've looked carefully at the evidence and spoken directly with Jalaludin. I think he's an accidental guerrilla, someone drawn into the larger conflict by influences that have little to do with the larger political struggle.

Martins thinks Jalaludin is "an important case study" since "he appears to represent a class of current detainees who, if swayed not to oppose the government, could be decisive in isolating insurgent groups and ending the armed conflict."

Ultimately, this broader conflict will be won not only on the battlefield, but also in the hearts and minds of men like Jalaludin. If he comes over to our side we'll know we're winning the war. ♦

Secondhand Hate

Another step downhill for modern liberalism

By Noemie Emery

"They have ardent supporters who are nearly hysterical at the very election of President Barack Obama," Senator Sheldon Whitehouse roared about his Republican opponents in the closing hours of the Senate health care debate on December 20. "The birthers, the fanatics, the people running around in right-wing militia and Aryan support groups. It is unbearable to them that President Barack Obama should exist." Two weeks earlier, Majority Leader Harry Reid likened opponents of his bill to those who opposed the end of slavery. On August 10, met by angry protesters at a town hall meeting, Michigan Democrat John Dingell told journalists, "The last time I had to confront something like this was when I voted for the civil rights bill and my opponent voted against it. At that time, we had a lot of Ku Klux Klan folks and white supremacists and folks in white sheets and other things running around."

For years now, those on the left have conflated resistance to any item of their agenda—high taxes, extravagant spending, laxity on crime, what have you—with motives of a dark nature: racism, nativism, fear of "the other," and various species of "hate." Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, a reaction to overregulation, stagflation, and the foreign policy failures and weakness of one James Earl Carter, was described as the bigots' revenge for the civil rights era. The midterm elections of 1994, a reaction against Hillarycare and the Clintons' malfeasance, were seen as a Confederate renaissance. After Bill Clinton was impeached for lies under oath (and terminal tackiness), his allies floated the theory that some of the votes against him came from Southern conservatives, because he was friendly to blacks. (As the "first black president"—*vide* Toni Morrison—Clinton was fond of this sort of rhetorical legerdemain until 2008, when his wife ran against a real black for president, and these tactics were turned against him.)

But it was the appearance in 2009 of the real first black president that lifted this theme to a whole new level: The left, which invented first "hate speech" (opinions they didn't like) and then "hate crimes" (crimes judged less on the criminal's actions than on what he was presumed to be thinking), has now gone on to its epiphany, which is "hate" defined not by your words or deeds but by what other people have decided you really think. "Hate" is no longer what you do or say, but what a liberal says that you think and projects on to you. You are punished for what someone else claims you were thinking. It hardly makes sense, but it does serve a political purpose. You could call it Secondhand Hate.

For years now, the left has conflated resistance to any item of its agenda—high taxes, extravagant spending, laxity on crime, what have you—with motives of a dark nature.

Case number one was *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd, who was listening to Barack Obama's September 9 health care speech before Congress, when Congressman Joe Wilson burst out "You lie!" at the president. Everyone, starting with the congressman himself, agreed this was a breach of manners. But Dowd heard something more—a voice shouting, "You lie, boy!" This voice, of course, was in Dowd's head, not Wilson's, but she managed to convince a number of people that it had popped from his brain into hers. MSNBC's Chris Matthews was one of those who seemed to believe this had happened: "She sort of heard the word, almost sub-audibly, that word we don't like." Marc Ambinder at the *Atlantic* also believed this, and added his own voice, which was very long-winded: "This voice tells me [Obama's opponents are] motivated by tremendous anxiety about the direction of history, and how it seems to be moving away from them—white, traditional, bounded—and toward something else—global, multicolored, unbounded, experimental. This is the Silent Majority, the neo-Bircherite majority, the reactionary id that resents affirmative action, ethnic integration, and

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gays." At *Salon*, Joan Walsh said, "Wilson's shriek [it was more like a mutter] served as an exclamation point on an undeniable trend: Obama steadily lost support among white voters during this long, hot summer of hate."

Could Obama's support have dwindled because middle America had become estranged, then appalled, by the spiraling deficits and Obama's health care proposal? Certainly not. It was because the right wing somehow "blackened Obama," informing people who might not have noticed that the president was not all that white. "I started thinking opponents were blackening Obama back in July, after the racial drama of the Sotomayor hearings," Walsh said. In fact, that "racial drama," such as it was, was the work of Democrats who stressed Sotomayor's ethnic background to appeal to Hispanic voters. But to Walsh it evoked the ethnic background of Barack Obama, which must have ticked off—again—all those evil conservatives. "There's no denying, he got blacker to a segment of the white population," Walsh asserted.

Really? By Walsh's logic, Obama must have been light beige through much of the summer of 2008 (when he held a slight point lead over McCain), then become a bit browner after the Republican convention (when McCain led by a bit), then lightened again at the financial meltdown in mid-September, and become moon-like in his paleness by Election Day, when he carved out a seven-point win. From then, he must have turned pearl-white by his Inauguration, at which point he was approved of even by people who voted against him and basked in favorable ratings of nearly 70 percent. Then, in late spring, he once more grew darker, a trend that continues. Or perhaps his approval ratings simply fell because he was a man trying to govern from the left in what is and remains a center-right country? Perish the thought.

As Obama's grandiose plans created a predictable political reaction, which first took form in the tea party movement, his sympathizers in the media theorized that racism, which had been in abeyance for the six months around the election, had re-reared its mean head. Paul Waldman wrote in the *American Prospect*, "It's becoming clear that the presence of a black man in the Oval Office, combined with the increasingly diverse makeup of the American public . . . is causing some . . . to see terrible threats in things they cared very little about a year ago." Cynthia Tucker of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* opined on the basis of no evidence that between "45 to 65 percent" of the tea party protesters were driven by racial hysteria. *Time*'s Joe Klein looked at people protesting taxes and spending, bailouts and czars, deficits in the trillions, and discerned fear of Hispanics spreading like wildfire in the white working class. "They're seeing Latinos . . . move into the neighborhoods. They're seeing South Asians . . . running a lot of businesses. They're seeing intermarriage . . . all these things that they find threatening. . . . They believe that the America that they knew, which was always kind of a myth, has disappeared." While Tucker and Klein dismissed the stated policy concerns of the dissidents as utterly meaningless, Michael Lind, writing for *Salon*, said they had always been code words for prejudice: "From the beginning, attempts to create a universal welfare state in the U.S. have been thwarted by the fears of voters that they will be taxed to subsidize other Americans who are unlike them in race. . . . Racial resentments undoubtedly explain the use of 'redistribution' and 'socialism' as code words by John McCain, Sarah Palin, and Republican working-class mascot 'Joe the Plumber' during the 2008 presidential campaign."

The attempt to cast former governor Palin—an Alaskan born in Idaho and raised in the northernmost state of the Union—as the titular head of what the left thinks of as the neo-Confederate wing of the Republican party is one of the stranger contortions of the Secondhand Hate movement. The fact that her book tour drew a largely white fan base was viewed as revelatory by some. "They look like a white crowd to me," Chris Matthews said, viewing the footage of fans in Grand Rapids lined up for her autograph. "Not that there's anything wrong with it, but it is pretty monochromatic up there. . . . I think there is a tribal aspect to this thing . . . white vs. other people. . . . She is pretty smart about this." What was "smart," by Matthews's reckoning, was her saying that the Fort Hood mass killer, a Muslim with a record of inflammatory comments regarding jihad and its merits, should have been "profiled" because of "what his radical beliefs were" and dismissed from the armed forces. Matthews saw this as code for rousing hatred. "Profiling has a particular meaning," he said to his panel, which concurred with his findings. "Everybody knows what profiling is. It's driving while black."

Kathleen Parker, a columnist who can't stand Palin or Southern conservatives, lost no time in tying the two in one package, making the belle of the tundra the natural heir to Nixon's Southern strategy, with its ambience of "sweat, cigar smoke, and rage." In an August 2009 column, Parker asserted that that same Southern rage returned in the fall of 2008, "stimulated by a pretty gal with a mocking little wink. Sarah Palin may not have realized what she was doing, but Southerners weaned on Harper Lee heard the dog whistle . . . a sense of a resurgent Old South and all the attendant pathologies of festering hate and

fear." This was catnip for Matthews, who asked Parker if Palin was "a poster girl for racism. . . . Is Sarah the dog whistle that says, yeah, that's what it's all about?"

This line of "analysis" was presaged by Timothy Noah of *Slate*, who argued on August 4, 2008, that references to Obama's "skinniness" (or his big ears) were racist, since they directed attention to his physical being, one characteristic of which is his color. "When white people are invited to think about Obama's physical appearance, the principal attribute they're likely to dwell on is his dark skin." Noah titled this aperçu "When 'Skinny' Means 'Black.'" By his logic, almost anything could be construed to mean "black." In other words, there was nothing that a critic might say about Obama that could not be interpreted as a racist attack on him. When Noah first wrote this, he was ridiculed widely. But not, it now is apparent, ridiculed widely enough.

Timothy Noah titled this aperçu 'When "Skinny" Means "Black."' By his logic, almost anything could be construed to mean 'black.'

The most conclusive rejoinder to the contention that "socialism" is a racist code word comes from a poll taken by the Democracy Corps (the firm founded by James Carville and Paul Begala), which delivered the verdict that while tea party protesters were insane by the partisan standards of Bill Clinton's backers, the protesters' concerns were what they said they were—taxes and spending; the expansion of government—and were not about race. The pollsters began discussions among older, white, and conservative voters and found "race was barely raised, [and] certainly not what was bothering them." Indeed, some tea partiers "talked about feeling some pride at [Obama's] election." Their flashpoint wasn't his race, but liberals' claim that racism was their motive. "The charge that opposition to Obama is racially motivated," the pollsters noted, "bothered conservative Republicans and independents alike. . . . [They] could not let it go and returned to the issue." They believed "the racism charge is being used to prevent them from stand[ing] up to Obama and his agenda. They see no difference in the opposition Obama faces and the opposition other liberals have faced." What's more, "they freely volunteered without any prompting that [Obama himself] was not part of this effort" to tar them—and focused their anger on Obama's media supporters instead.

Liberals fixate on the GOP's Southern strategy of the 1960s as the key to the modern Republican party, and for a time Nixon did court the Dixiecrats. But by 1980 the Reagans and Kemps had remade the party on a new set of issues and had formed new coalitions. Those active in the '60s and '70s are now in *their* sixties and seventies. Younger conservatives (which means most of them) grew up with integration, and take it for granted. They are obsessed not with race but with their causes and principles, oppose all who attack them, and embrace warmly and without reservation all who embrace their own causes. They venerate Thomas Sowell. They embrace Clarence Thomas (and his white wife), embrace Jeb Bush (and his Latina wife), support Marco Rubio against Charles Crist in Florida, and elect Bobby Jindal in Louisiana, which is as deep in the South as it gets. But to Obama's acolytes, the Old South is eternal. And so, when it's useful, are all of its old wars.

Liberals might take the political battles of the last year as they are—an ardent struggle over size-of-government and other first principles—but the emotional payoff would be nowhere near as satisfying. Why have a routine tug of war over taxes when you can replay a great moral drama, casting yourselves as the just and the righteous, and your foes as the ignorant and benighted rabble you know in your hearts that they are?

How large a part does pure condescension play in this story? Anyone wondering might take a look at these words of Joe Klein:

> Teabaggers . . . are primarily working-class, largely rural, and elderly white people . . . freaked by the economy . . . also freaked by the government spending . . . that was necessary to avoid a financial collapse. (I'm not sure Keynes is taught in very many American high schools.) But most of all, they are freaked by an amorphous feeling that the America they imagined they were living in—Sarah Palin's fantasy America—is a different place now, changing for the worse, overrun by furriners of all sorts: Latinos, South Asians, East Asians, homosexuals . . . to say nothing of liberated, uppity, blacks.

Poor addled things, clinging to "God and guns out of bitterness." What a good thing that we are so much better, that we can see what they can't in their motives; can read hatred of "furriners" into a call for less government spending, and flip the association of the word "boy"—in connection with Barack Obama—into Joe Wilson's mind from our own. And then, having made them both haters and hateful, we can proceed to despise them, with all the insularity of which we claim they are guilty.

This is a farcical tic, not a serious argument: nothing but secondhand hate. ♦

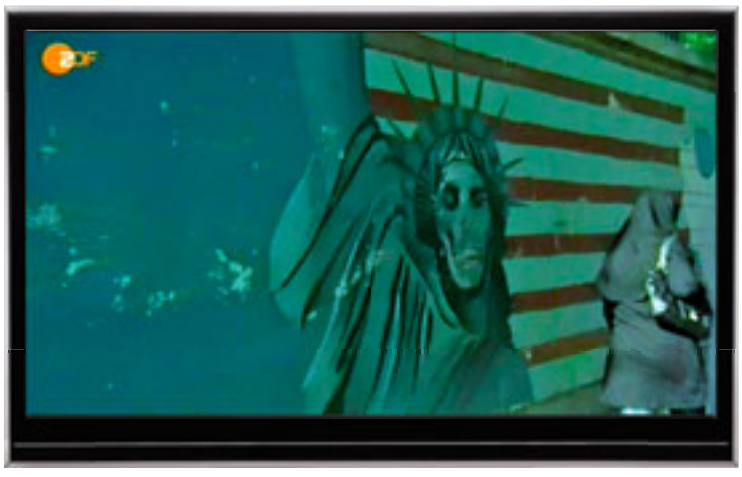
America the Baleful

A German view of the nuclear threat . . . from the United States

By John Rosenthal

Germany has finally discovered the nuclear threat. For years, German politicians and press played down American concerns about the nuclear ambitions of, first, the Iraq of Saddam Hussein and, later, the Iran of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

This past summer, however, the German public television network ZDF shook up the seasonal television doldrums with a sensational three-part documentary titled simply *The Bomb*. Broadcast over three evenings in late July and early August, it was hosted (and co-written) by ZDF's star primetime news anchor, the ever dour Claus Kleber. The tone of the 132-minute documentary is downright apocalyptic, promising nothing less than the "end of the world" if the nuclear issue is not tackled swiftly. To emphasize the urgency, each episode begins with a countdown recited by small children from around the world and interspersed with images of missiles and jet-fighters and mushroom clouds—and then a control panel switch being turned to "launch."



Anti-American murals in Tehran (above and at right) as seen in ZDF's documentary 'The Bomb'

The Bomb would appear to be good news for transatlantic relations and the prospects of forming a united European-American front against Iran, North Korea, and other potential nuclear proliferators.

Unless, that is, one watches it.

For the overriding message of *The Bomb* is that the nuclear threat is not constituted by Iran, North Korea, and other potential rogue possessors of nuclear weapons, but by the *established* nuclear powers and first and foremost by the United States. According to the odd sort of nuclear theology proposed by the film, it is the United States that committed the original sin by developing the first nuclear weapons, and the current risk of proliferation is merely the consequence of America's transgression.

The viewer gets a first hint of this tenet barely two minutes into the film. Kleber is touring New York harbor with a police patrol boat assigned to protect the city from potential nuclear terror attacks. "The consequences of the Manhattan Project, the construction of the first bomb, come back to haunt its inventors—as a weapon of terror," Kleber intones.

The consequences of the Manhattan Project? It is as if the Manhattan Project occurred in a vacuum rather than in the midst of the Second World War, with America racing to beat Nazi Germany to the bomb.

Later on in part one, Kleber sits down in Islamabad with Hendrina Kahn, the wife of the world's most notorious proliferator of nuclear know-how: A.Q. Khan. Asked about the possibility of extremists taking control of the Pakistani government—and hence of its nuclear arsenal—Hendrina observes matter-of-factly, "but that's the way it is with nuclear weapons." Then, striking a schoolmarmish pose, she responds with a question of her own. "But who is the only country that has used them?" she asks, "You tell me." Far from in any way challenging the pertinence of the question, *The Bomb* both underscores it and provides the answer by immediately cutting to a map of the United States.

The map is superimposed on images of snow-dusted

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American prairie rolling by a car window. Kleber is on his way to the nuclear weapons facility at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana. As if dutifully following the instructions of Hendrina Kahn, he is going to view the root of the evil. As his car rolls up to four heavily armed soldiers guarding the gates of the missile command center, Kleber notes that the motto of the base is "extreme weapons, extreme standards." "Absolute perfection," he continues, "from carrying out the order for the apocalypse to the security check of the rare visitor."

The style of Kleber's interviews with military personnel resembles that of Sacha Baron Cohen's fictional television journalist Borat—but without the humor. The interviews are set-ups. Kleber has a point to make about the evil of American nuclear power and the unsuspecting servicemen and women are mere props. Thus, in one particularly creepy sequence, Kleber stares into space with a bored expression as his guide, Lieutenant Colonel David Stone, enumerates various physical features of the underground command module. Then, all of a sudden, Kleber cuts to the chase: "But you don't have any decisions to make, right? You are all just a tool of a political decision that is made far above your heads, and you are personally not responsible for anything."

As the narration has only just specified that the political decision in question would unleash "the apocalypse," the question is loaded. Reared on guilt-ridden debates about the personal responsibility of German soldiers in Nazi war crimes—the famous "just taking orders" motif—it is even more obviously loaded for a German audience.

"That is absolutely right," a wide-eyed Stone replies.

Watching the two-person team in the command module practicing a launch drill, Kleber observes that "stress and routine convert young soldiers into machines." The remark is especially heavy with contempt given that Kleber has only just finished interviewing the two soldiers about their personal reasons for volunteering for the duty.

Base commander Colonel Michael Fortney attempts to explain to Kleber the rationale for the existence of the facility, noting, reasonably enough, that nuclear weapons "cannot be uninvented," that "the genie cannot be put back in the bottle." But he might as well be talking to a wall. The common sense of the American officer cannot dampen the religious fervor of the German anchorman. A glum-looking Kleber is next shown staring through a chain-link fence at the concrete top of the command center. "For years I have tried to understand the doctrine of [nuclear] deterrence from books," Kleber intones, "and then a concrete cover in the Montana prairie makes clear to me what it means. We have truly constructed the gates to Hell." Viewers may be forgiven for failing to comprehend just how a slab of concrete could have provoked Kleber's epiphany. But they will, in any case, have understood that the "we" is merely a figure of speech. In ZDF's *The Bomb*, there is just one guilty party.

If the segment in Montana is characterized by palpable disdain for the American military personnel and their mission, the long segment in Tehran displays empathy and even unabashed admiration for Iran's nuclear "achievements." Over images of a high-tech Iranian nuclear installation and yellow-cake being spun in a giant vat, Kleber comments:

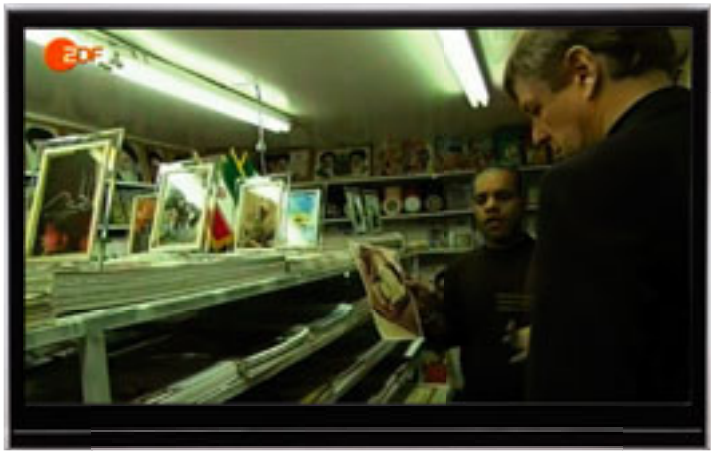
> It is almost incomprehensible that such installations could have come into being in spite of all the sanctions. Against the opposition of almost the entire world, [the Iranians] have further developed the processing [of nuclear fuel]. Quality work, made in Iran.

"George Bush dared to include Iran in the Axis of Evil: the ancient and cultured nation of Iran," Kleber continues, before adding with a dash of *schadenfreude*: "They showed him." Instead of being an entirely predictable outcome of the weakness of the U.N. sanctions regime, the progress of the Iranian nuclear program is stylized by Kleber and ZDF into an "almost incomprehensible" demonstration of the greatness of Iranian civilization.

Kleber's amazement is all the more unwarranted in light of Germany's large role in blocking harsher sanctions. In September 2007, Germany reportedly broke ranks with its Western allies in the "P5+1" group (the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council plus

Germany) and opposed sanctions aimed at forcing Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment activities. At around the same time, French president Nicolas Sarkozy was pitching a plan for the EU independently to apply sanctions on Iran. Under the Sarkozy proposal, the EU states would bypass the U.N. Security Council and form a sort of economic "coalition of the willing" with the United States. This proposal too was opposed by Germany.

Germany's recalcitrance is especially significant given the crucial importance of its products to the Iranian economy. According to official statistics, Germany is Iran's second largest supplier of imports, trailing only the United Arab Emirates. Since the UAE is known to serve as a transit country for imports ultimately originating elsewhere, Germany is presumably in fact Iran's largest supplier. (In November 2007, the German ambassador to Tehran, Herbert Honsowitz, told Iran's Press TV that "a significant part" of German exports to Iran were being routed via the UAE.) Just as important as the volume is the largely industrial nature of the goods exported to Iran by Germany. Given Iranian industry's well-known preference for the "made in Germany" label, there is reason to doubt that the high-tech robots and machine tools shown in the ZDF documentary were in fact "made in Iran," as Kleber admiringly suggests. As it so happens, in December 2007 the German wire service ddp, citing intelligence sources, reported that an Iranian smuggling ring was acquiring prohibited dual-use technologies from German suppliers.



Claus Kleber in a shop in Tehran (above and at right) that sells graphic images of atrocities and 'martyrs,' from ZDF's 'The Bomb'

"For his nuclear program, Ahmadinejad can always play the national card," Kleber says over images of the Iranian president reviewing a military parade: "This is to say, the memory that Iraq invaded Iran"—and then after a dramatic pause—"with American help." The "with American help" is tossed out without any substantiation or explanation. The viewer is given no idea in what the alleged American help is supposed to have consisted. What we do know, however, is that the Iranians themselves received American help: the covert arms shipments at the heart of the Iran-contra scandal. The film makes no mention of this fact.

"The war began in 1980 and lasted eight terrible years. No one here has forgotten," Kleber continues. "This is so deeply entrenched in the national consciousness that with words alone a Barack Obama cannot smooth over it." Smooth over what? Again, the insinuation is that America was somehow responsible for Iranian suffering. In case anyone might miss the point, Kleber narrates these words as he is seen walking past a mural of Lady Liberty with a death's head on the background of the American flag. The viewer is even treated to a close-up.

Over images of mourners reciting prayers in a cemetery near the Imam Khomeini Mausoleum, Kleber remarks that he has "never seen so many young people in a military graveyard." "The oath that Iran must never again be permitted to be so defenseless is also their oath." Moments later, he is visiting a small shop in Tehran that sells portraits of Iranian "martyrs" and graphic images of victims of atrocities. "That's horrible," Kleber notes dryly, as a shop clerk shows him a photo of a decapitated body, "Nobody wants to see that." "People have to know what happened to our fighters on the front," the shop clerk explains. "The American criminals with their helpers and the Iraqis committed these crimes against our sons." Far be it from Kleber to disagree, let alone to ask just how Americans were supposed to have been involved in the unfortunate man's beheading.

Kleber does wonder vaguely what it would mean "if such fanaticism was armed with nuclear weapons" and, over images of yet another anti-American mural in Tehran, he notes that "a country that glorifies martyrdom cannot do without enemies." At no point, however, does he suggest that a nuclear Iran might pose a specific threat to any other country. The Iranian regime's virulent hostility to Israel, for example, is never mentioned. While the camera repeatedly dwells on the regime's anti-American propaganda, Kleber and his crew appear somehow to have missed the anti-Israeli murals in Tehran. The overall effect of the segment, moreover, is to suggest that Iran's enemies are by no means imaginary and that its pursuit of nuclear weapons is not in fact driven by fanaticism, but rather by rational self-interest.

Since America and the other traditional nuclear powers are identified by *The Bomb* as being at the metaphysical root of the problem, it follows, of course, that the elimination of the nuclear threat must begin with *their* disarmament. On the view of Kleber and ZDF, nuclear proliferation is merely a secondary issue and it will apparently take care of itself once the established nuclear powers take the plunge into denuclearization. America is clearly invited to jump first.

"It is only a matter of time and of place when and where the next Hiroshima happens," Kleber says in concluding part one of the series,

> For sixty years, nuclear bombs were under control to some extent. But now the dams are breaking. We can still stop the danger. But to do so, the world must really change its way of thinking. And it is the big powers that must start.

In part three, subtitled "Ending the Madness," Kleber interviews outgoing IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei. "I can't continue with a straight face to go and tell those who do not have nuclear weapons that I need to tighten the screws and have better verification," ElBaradei tells him,

> while the established nuclear powers are modernizing their arsenals and saying, "The world is a dangerous place, we need our weapons." This system of have-nots and all-powerfuls is not sustainable.

"Are you saying," Kleber asks, "that if the old nuclear powers, like Russia and America, do not renounce their weapons, this could mean the end of the world?" "Absolutely," ElBaradei responds. Or at least in the German voiceover, ElBaradei appears to be assenting to a proposition of downright apocalyptic significance. The interview is conducted in English, however, and Kleber's actual words are audible. What he in fact asked ElBaradei is whether there "will not be a sustainable system."

Henry Kissinger is repeatedly trotted out by the ZDF producers as a sort of unimpeachable star witness on behalf of their disarmament agenda: unimpeachable because, as Kleber reminds us, he was once himself a hawk. On ZDF's account, he has in the meanwhile done an "astounding about-face." There is little evidence, however, of any about-face in what Kissinger actually says to Kleber. In keeping with his recent statements in the American press, he emphasizes the dangers posed by proliferators, not any ostensible danger emanating from the established nuclear powers—much less any supposed need for the latter unilaterally to disarm.

It is thus left to the chainsmoking German elder statesmen Helmut Schmidt to sum up the message of the film. Asked about the potential for a nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan, Schmidt responds:

> The issue has me worried. But as I see it, the ultimate cause of the problem is to be found neither among the Indians nor among the Pakistanis—nor even among the Israelis. As I see it, the ultimate cause is to be found among the five nuclear powers that all at the same time have a veto in the U.N. Security Council. By virtue of their nuclear weapons and by virtue of their veto, they are raised up far above the other nearly 200 sovereign states in the world. *Far* above the others. Their privileged position made it possible for them to draft this nonproliferation treaty—they did that collectively—and to place it on the table before all the others [and to demand]: "please sign here." The ultimate cause, however, is that they have not themselves done what the treaty requires of *them*: namely, to negotiate with the aim of achieving nuclear disarmament.

It should be recalled that the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council to which Schmidt refers were also the five major Allied powers that defeated the Axis in World War II. On the other hand, one of the supposedly underprivileged states that, on Schmidt's account, was pressured into renouncing its right to nuclear weapons was, of course, the postwar Federal Republic of Germany. The former Wehrmacht officer Schmidt was the country's minister of defense when West Germany signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1969. He would become chancellor five years later. It is hardly surprising that a film that propagates such a resentment-laden view of the NPT would display sympathy for the nuclear aspirations of Iran.

According to conventional wisdom, the divisions in the P5+1 group are a matter of West versus East. But as the very designation P5+1 ought to remind us, there is another more substantial division affecting the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program: namely, to paraphrase ElBaradei, between the P5 nuclear "haves" consecrated by the NPT and the "have-nots."

As haves, all the P5 powers, including Russia and China, share an objective and obvious interest in preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons and thus crashing their still relatively exclusive club. As a have-not, Germany does not. Indeed, that Germany has, in effect, adopted the role of champion of the nuclear have-nots is one of the main theses of a heavily documented new book on German-Iranian relations by political scientist—and Weekly Standard contributor—Matthias Küntzel. (The book is thus far available only in German.)

If ZDF's proselytism for nuclear disarmament sounds oddly similar to the tenor of recent pronouncements by a certain American politician, it is no accident. In ZDF's theological narrative of sin and impending apocalypse, Barack Obama is clearly assigned the role of redeemer. "We had ignored the nuclear threat," Kleber intones at the start of part one over images of Taliban fighters and Osama bin Laden, "A dangerous mistake, which has perhaps now been recognized only just in time." And then cut to a clip of Barack Obama solemnly declaring in Prague in April 2009: "The world must stand together to prevent the spread of these weapons."

We *ignored* the nuclear threat? In light of eight years of a Bush administration that placed combating nuclear proliferation at the very center of its foreign policy agenda, the claim is as mindboggling as it is revisionist. The full effect of the voiceover and images is even more perverse. The Bush administration constantly warned of the special dangers of rogue nuclear states joining forces with terrorist organizations.

But the actual meaning of the phrase becomes clearer once we realize that the nuclear threat in question is not in fact the threat posed by proliferation, but rather that ostensibly represented by the very *existence* of nuclear weapons—including those in the possession of the United States. Thus, part three likewise starts with Obama and the very same speech in Prague. Now, however, the real novelty of Obama's speech is brought into focus. "The world is moving towards nuclear conflict in more places than ever before," Kleber intones as the camera pans over a crowd milling around in Hradcany Square. "Without leadership," he continues. And then after a slight pause: "Until now." At which point we are looking at the face of Obama.

"The existence of thousands of nuclear weapons is the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War," Obama says. "So today, I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons." "As the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act," he continues. (In the actual speech, this phrase in fact preceded Obama's pledge.) Obama's remark about America's "moral responsibility," in effect, completes a thought introduced by Kleber in the segment in Tehran: the suggestion that "words alone" cannot undo the harm caused by America's alleged acts of aggression against Iran. If not words, then what? Obama's Prague speech provides the answer: America must disarm—as penance for its previous "crimes."

The Bomb concludes with yet another Obama speech: then-candidate Obama's July 2008 address in Berlin. The speech is portrayed by ZDF as a sort of Sermon on the Mount in which the antinuclear messiah begins his earthly ministry. "It began among us," Kleber says proudly, "in Berlin." "This is the moment when we must renew the goal of a world without nuclear weapons," Obama tells the cheering throngs. "This is the moment to begin the work of seeking the peace of a world without nuclear weapons." The words seemed so otherworldly at the time that they were hardly even noticed by American commentators. But they were not so novel for Germans. For ZDF's myth of Obama as prophet of a "redeemed" nuclear-free world is just that: a myth. It may well have begun in Berlin. But it did not begin with Obama.

"The danger of a dramatic propagation of nuclear-armed states and the associated massive loss of security underscore the need to stick to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction." Those words were spoken in Berlin two years before Obama's speech, by then German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The occasion was a conference organized by Steinmeier's Social Democratic party (SPD) on the topic of "Achieving Peace through Disarmament."

Discussions underway at the U.N. would shortly give rise to the new P5+1 format for negotiations with Iran. Just one week earlier, in conversation with the news weekly *Der Spiegel*, Steinmeier made it clear that the German perspective on the issue was hugely different from that of the P5 powers. "We are for the effective application of the Non-Proliferation Treaty," Steinmeier told *Der Spiegel* (May 17, 2006):

> The treaty contains a promise by the atomic powers to disarm, and we should put pressure on them to do so. Consequently, I am in fact of the opinion that beyond the current conflict with Iran, we need to review the worldwide situation of nuclear armament.

Thereafter Steinmeier ceaselessly beat the drum for nuclear disarmament. In keeping with the thesis of his party comrade Schmidt, moreover, he would always take pains to suggest a "close connection" (as he put it in a speech at

Harvard University in 2008) between disarmament and nonproliferation. "If we emphasize and insist on nonproliferation, at the same time we must create a new dynamic in favor of nuclear disarmament," he stated in a declaration issued on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the IAEA. "Only if the possessors of nuclear weapons disarm will others be prepared to do without them in the long term."

By shifting the burden onto the established nuclear powers, Steinmeier provided an obvious escape hatch for Iran in the ongoing negotiations on its nuclear program. After all, on Steinmeier's account, the P5 powers were not complying with their obligations either. "We have put disarmament back on the international agenda," Steinmeier proudly told the *Kölnische Rundschau* in early July 2008, three weeks before Obama's Berlin speech.

Steinmeier has a brief cameo in *The Bomb*. The film touts his "concrete plan" for an international nuclear fuel bank, which would ostensibly render the nuclear programs of countries like North Korea and Iran superfluous. "But before such a way out is even conceivable," Kleber notes, "the great powers must take the first step and themselves disarm."

Helmut Schmidt appearing in 'The Bomb'

Obama's disarmament rhetoric is taken over wholesale from the nuclear disarmament campaign launched by Steinmeier and the German SPD. In Obama's usage, however, it is shorn of the argumentation that makes explicit the grave implications for international efforts to prevent an Iranian bomb. It is likewise, of course, removed from the specific German context of historical resentments and strategic interests that lends some sense to such rhetoric. From the point of view of American interests and sensibilities, it clearly makes no sense at all. It is undoubtedly on account of this disembodied, selfless character that Obama's own disarmament campaign has taken on the trappings of a quasi-religious mission.

If there is good news for Americans—or indeed for anyone concerned about halting Iran's emergence as a nuclear power—it is that the SPD went down to a crushing defeat to Angela Merkel and her Christian Democrats in September's general elections. With Steinmeier as the party's candidate for chancellor, the SPD garnered merely 23 percent of the vote: the party's worst result in the postwar era. As a consequence, Chancellor Merkel has been able to forgo the Social Democrats as coalition partners, and Steinmeier is now in the opposition. In her new coalition—with the Free Democratic party (FDP)—Chancellor Merkel should have greater control over German foreign policy, and she is perhaps the most genuinely Atlanticist politician in all of Germany. Her stated positions on the Iranian nuclear program are hardline not only by German standards, but also by American.

German governments, however, come and go. The German state remains, and an underlying strain of hostility to American power is firmly anchored in German state institutions and cuts across the German political spectrum. Inasmuch as it is a publicly funded network, ZDF's *The Bomb* is itself evidence of this. Only days before the elections, the series was awarded the German television prize for "Best News Report."

Further symptomatic evidence is provided by the Berlin address at which the Christian Democrats and Free Democrats negotiated the contract that forms the basis for their coalition. The meetings took place at the Berlin offices of the German state of North-Rhine Westphalia on . . . Hiroshima Street.

Germany's new foreign minister, FDP chief Guido Westerwelle, has embraced the "goal of a world without nuclear weapons" in terms that are barely distinguishable from those of his predecessor. He has even called for all American nuclear warheads to be removed from German territory as "Germany's contribution" to achieving this goal. In the past, Westerwelle had also gone on record as opposing further economic sanctions on Iran. The coalition contract, however, states the government's preparedness to adopt harsher sanctions "if necessary," and during a recent trip to Israel, Westerwelle signaled his adherence to this line.

It remains to be seen whether Chancellor Merkel will be able to refocus German policy on the specific and immediate threat of a nuclear Iran. The domestic resistance to any such reorientation of German policy would inevitably be great. And why should the chancellor even try, after all, when the current administration in Washington appears to share ZDF's view of the nuclear threat and is asking nothing of her? ♦

Patrick Stewart, Alec Guinness in 'Smiley's People' (1982)

War With Mirrors

Britain and its secretive service

BY HARVEY KLEHR

This monumental history of Britain's MI5, published to mark the centennial of its founding, offers dozens of fascinating tales of successes and failures in counterespionage, countersubversion, and counterterrorism by an institution tasked to "defend the realm." Perhaps inevitably, as an authorized history, it includes a great many details about its bureaucratic intrigues and reorganizations that most general readers can safely skip while enjoying the details—many new—about the spies, saboteurs, and terrorists against whom MI5 has contended.

Harvey Klehr is the Andrew W. Mellon professor of politics and history at Emory and the author, most recently, of Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America.

Christopher Andrew is Britain's foremost historian of espionage, the author of many works on intelligence, years ago selected to collaborate with KGB defectors like Oleg Gordievsky and Vassily Mitrokhin to produce illuminating tales of Soviet operations directed against the West. He was given extensive, but apparently not unfettered, access to MI5 files, with recent activities dealing with terrorism being most restricted. Andrew notes that, after extensive discussion, a limited number of details were excised on grounds of national security.

Defend the Realm
The Authorized History of MI5
by Christopher Andrew
Knopf, 1,056 pp., $40

Both MI5, the Security Service, and SIS (MI6, the Secret Intelligence Service) were created in 1909 originally as one organization within Military Intelligence. While SIS was designed to operate abroad, spying on other nations, MI5's major focus was on thwarting domestic espionage and sabotage. With relatively few resources, its first head, Vernon Kell, who served from its inception until 1940, parlayed close cooperation with local police and an extensive system of mail intercepts to disrupt totally the German espionage apparatus during World War I: Virtually all their agents were caught, and most executed at the Tower of London. German efforts to recruit members of the Irish Republican Army, Indians, and Egyptians living in Great Britain were likewise foiled.

Nor did the Germans fare any better during 1939-45. British code breakers enabled MI5 to identify every spy oper-

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ating in the country, arrest them, execute some, and turn the others into double agents. Under the direction of John Masterman, MI5 ran 120 such agents in the famous "Double Cross" system. The decryptions demonstrated that the Germans enthusiastically accepted the disinformation they were being fed by such legendary and eccentric agents as Eddie Chapman, a career criminal, or by Lily Sergueiev, "Treasure," who went on strike to protest British refusal to bring her beloved dog from Gibraltar to England and then threatened to expose her activities to the Nazis after the pooch died in exile. (Nor were agents the only strange personalities; one of the intelligence officers involved in the deception operations was a transvestite briefly arrested in Madrid while dressed as a woman.)

Soviet espionage and the threat of Communist subversion presented a longer-lasting and more intractable problem. While domestic fascists were only an occasional nuisance, the Communist party of Great Britain (CPGB) played a significant role in sectors of the labor movement and, at various times, within the Labour party itself. Because the Communist International was actively engaged in efforts to foment industrial unrest, particularly in the 1920s and early '30s, MI5 faced a delicate balancing act to convince Labour governments that some of their allies had ties to the Soviet Union. From Ramsay MacDonald to Harold Wilson, Labour prime ministers often questioned whether the Security Service was exaggerating the Communist threat. In fact, it rarely did.

MI5 developed extensive and often impeccable information about both the activities of the Communist party and Soviet espionage. One source was its long-term wiretapping of CPGB headquarters. Even though the party periodically conducted thorough searches, it never discovered the tap, which provided a continuing window on its activities and plans, enabling MI5 to identify union leaders cooperating with the CPGB and its plans to pressure or bring down governments through disruptive strikes. Particularly in the 1930s, Maxwell Knight, who directed MI5's penetration agents, supervised infiltrators who reported on party activities and, in one case (Olga Gray), was selected by Percy Glading, a high-ranking party official, to assist him in operating a spy ring at the Woolwich Arsenal. One Spanish Civil War veteran recruited to spy by the KGB confessed but refused to name his subagents. After being released from prison, he visited CPGB headquarters and, unaware that it was bugged, named them to his party comrades—and to MI5.

For most of its history, MI5 operated in a kind of legal limbo. Not authorized by statute, it first was a division of Military Intelligence and later reported to the Home Office and other cabinet departments (as the Security Service). Its very existence was never officially admitted, and its directors were not answerable to parliament. Many of its practices, like the ability to open private mail and to install wiretaps, were granted, not judicially, but by Home Office warrants, which for many years allowed agents to monitor the activities of suspicious persons, including not only suspected spies, but union leaders suspected of cooperating with the CPGB, aliens, and others. Surreptitious entries into the home of one undercover Communist official netted more than 50,000 documents. By 1952, it had identified more than 90 percent of the CPGB membership. It monitored Soviet payments to the Communist party. It checked on crypto-Communists—Labour party backbenchers secretly allied with the party—and occasionally passed along information to Labour leaders anxious to purge them. In the 1970s it also monitored the Militant Tendency, a Trotskyist organization dedicated to infiltrating Labour.

Sir Roger Hollis

KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

Alongside its successes, however, MI5 badly bungled several of the most successful Soviet penetrations of the British government. Its small staff before World War II meant that it never followed up on Melita Norwood, whose name turned up in the Woolwich Arsenal case and whom an informant in the CPGB said was "a mysterious character" involved in underground work. Norwood continued her espionage activities, becoming the KGB's longest-serving British agent, providing vital information about Britain's atomic bomb project after she obtained a job as secretary to its director. Klaus Fuchs had undergone three separate security checks. Before he was hired to work on Britain's atomic bomb project after the war, counterintelligence officials concluded that evidence about his Communist ties was circumstantial.

Sometimes its recommendations were ignored. During the war it informed the government that 57 Communists had access to government secrets, including three working on the atomic bomb, and urged that they be fired or transferred to nonclassified work. While Winston Churchill agreed, his security advisers persuaded him that such a move was unwise, or might upset the Russians. Andrew does not provide their names but it is likely they included such spies as Allan Nunn May and Engelbert Broda.

MI5's most egregious blunder was to miss a number of clues pointing to the most destructive group of Soviet spies ever recruited in Britain. The Cambridge Five—Kim Philby, Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess, John Cairncross, and Anthony Blunt—were not unearthed until years after the war. First recruited in the 1930s, they occupied a variety of strategic positions from which they fed the KGB a steady stream of valuable intelligence. Philby directed SIS's Soviet counterintelligence section and was British intelligence liaison in

Washington after World War II. Maclean held key positions in the Foreign Office, including second-in-command at the embassy in Washington. Cairncross was a cabinet secretary with access to atomic secrets. Blunt worked at MI5 itself during the war and handed over more than 1,700 documents. Burgess was employed at the BBC and at MI5. Muddled clues given by the Soviet defector Walter Krivitsky that, in hindsight, referred to Philby and Maclean were overlooked or misinterpreted.

Although Fuchs and Maclean were eventually exposed by Venona decryptions, it was American counterintelligence that first learned their identities from messages about their activities in the United States. The British were handicapped because there had been far fewer messages sent from London during World War II, since the government had allowed the Soviet embassy to radio messages to Moscow. Kim Philby's access to all the Venona material allowed him to warn Maclean, and he and Burgess fled to Moscow. Although convinced that Philby and Blunt had spied, the lack of hard evidence meant that they could not be prosecuted.

Andrew details how bureaucratic tangles and procedures handicapped investigators: Those with access to Venona material often kept it secret from others who might have put the pieces together. Nor was it just decrypted messages. British security officials working in the United States had evidence about physicist Bruno Pontecorvo's Communist ties but never transmitted it to London. He later fled to Moscow. Beginning in the mid-1950s the British largely abandoned work on Venona, erroneously concluding that not much more of value could be uncovered. Years later they discovered that it included information about a less damaging, but still significant, Oxford ring of spies.

Such blunders inevitably led to suspicions that it was not incompetence or bureaucratic mishaps that had prevented the exposure of spies. For years, in the 1960s, MI5 was roiled by a spy hunt orchestrated by Peter Wright, a high-ranking officer who concluded that either Roger Hollis, head of MI5 during 1956-65, or his chief deputy had been a long-term Soviet penetration agent. The spectacle of an intelligence agency investigating its own head, although it did not become widely known until an embittered Wright went public in 1984, damaged morale and perturbed governments. Subsequent efforts by the British government to prevent publication of Wright's memoir on grounds that it violated the Official Secrets Act only fed the perception that the KGB had achieved a spy agency's fondest dream: recruiting the head of its enemy's counterespionage service. (One of Wright's journalistic allies, 95-year-old Chapman Pincher, just this year published yet another long indictment of Hollis.)

Although he does not directly confront the evidence that Hollis hid connections with several Communists, Andrew demonstrates that for many years in the 1930s and early '40s he was the most aggressive voice within MI5 for pursuing potential Communist spies. He concludes unequivocally that Hollis was innocent. MI5 did not realize it had identified all the Soviet moles because of some of the paranoiac charges of Soviet defector Anatoli Golitsin and an exaggerated belief in the foresightedness and sophistication of the KGB, which made its own share of errors and misjudgments—not the least of which was concluding during World War II that Philby and his colleagues were actually working for the British. Andrew's argument will hardly settle the Hollis case, but certainly will give pause to anyone who thinks that Peter Wright could be trusted to report honestly on his own agency's activities, much less those of the KGB.

Just as American intelligence agencies were deeply wounded by public revelations of their activities in the 1970s, MI5 faced unwelcome scrutiny in the 1980s. Public charges by ex-officers that it engaged in political surveillance caused an uproar. One member of parliament, Ian Mikardo, claimed Britain was becoming just as repressive as the Soviet Union. (Ironically, he himself had been a Soviet agent prior to 1967.) One of the most explosive of Peter Wright's claims was that a cabal of MI5 officers had mounted a plot to bring down Harold Wilson's government, convinced that he was a KGB asset. The truth, Andrew contends, was much less sensational. MI5 did have a file on Wilson since, as a private businessman, he had frequent trade contacts with the Soviet Union. There was also concern about several of his friends who were suspected of ties to the KGB. Wilson did countermand one warrant to bug a leftwing MP, later identified as a KGB agent, delaying his discovery by a decade; but there is no evidence that Wilson was ever recruited by the KGB or that there was any kind of plot against him. By the 1980s, in fact, as a result of the defection of such high-ranking KGB officers as Oleg Gordievsky and the expulsion of more than a hundred KGB officers in 1971, Soviet operations in Great Britain were severely compromised.

The long tradition that the MI5 was answerable only to the executive ended in the 1980s. Under pressure from the European Court of Human Rights, which required statutory laws to justify such practices as wiretapping, embarrassed by the Wright affair and its revelations, dogged by outrage from former prime ministers who had encouraged wiretapping of labor militants but now preferred to pretend that it had all occurred because of an overly aggressive security service, MI5 agreed to a legislative charter which, for the first time, defined its responsibilities. It became a more public institution, and its first female director general, Stella Rimington, became a media figure.

In the last few decades its chief preoccupation became counterterrorism. That had been its major focus immediately after World War II. One reason that MI5 was slow to focus on communism immediately after the defeat of Nazism was that its main focus during 1946-48 was Zionist extremism. As the fate of Palestine played out, the Stern Gang and the Irgun resorted to assassination and bombings in both the Middle East and Europe to pressure the British government. MI5 disrupted a number of plots; one bomb planted at Whitehall failed to detonate. One of its sources was Teddy Kollek, the future mayor of Jerusalem, who headed the Jewish Agency's Intelligence Department, which coop-

erated in efforts to prevent terrorism.

Counterterrorism again became a major preoccupation in the 1970s with the rise of the Irish Republican Army and its more lethal split-off, the Provisional IRA. MI5 developed clear evidence of extensive Libyan provision of weapons and money flowing to both groups. Despite success in identifying all of the Provisional IRA's leadership, most of its activists, and many of its planned operations, MI5 was unable to develop enough legally admissible evidence to support successful prosecutions of the bulk of those responsible for the bombing campaigns.

By the turn of the century, transnational Islamic terrorism had replaced Irish extremism as MI5's chief problem. Like the Communist issue, combating it was complicated by a large domestic population sympathetic to some of the aims, if not the means, of the militants. And despite convicting dozens of would-be terrorists, MI5, like all Western counterintelligence agencies, faced the chilling thought that just one failure could mean horrific casualties—such as incurred in the July 2005 London subway bombings. ♦

B&A

Pen Pals

What draws writers together in fraternity?

BY JAMES SEATON

Edward Alexander can be a devastating polemicist, as his 1989 essay on Edward Said, "Professor of Terror," memorably demonstrated. Much of the appeal of his most recent book, however, derives from his willingness to subordinate the expression of his own views to careful, dispassionate presentations of a series of "literary friendships"—notably that of Lionel Trilling and Irving Howe, but also Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill, D.H. Lawrence and Bertrand Russell, Theodore Roethke and Robert Heilman, and finally, George Eliot and Emanuel Deutsch.

Lionel Trilling and Irving Howe
And Other Stories of Literary Friendship
by Edward Alexander
Transaction, 134 pp., $34.95

These odd couples come together and sometimes break up over the often conflicting claims of science and religion, criticism and poetry, reason and imagination, but Alexander's purpose is not to push a thesis for one side or the other. If he has a thesis, it is to suggest that attempts at reconciliation of the opposing claims of, say, reason and imagination, are preferable to assertions of the absolute superiority of one side or the other. His studies reveal how George Eliot and Emanuel Deutsch, Robert Heilman and Theodore Roethke, and eventually Lionel Trilling and Irving Howe, achieved varying degrees of personal and intellectual reconciliation, while Carlyle and Mill, like Lawrence and Russell, did not.

The young Mary Ann Evans, contemptuous of religion in general, judged that "everything specifically Jewish is of a low grade" and even speculated that "extermination" might be the inevitable fate of "the Hebrew Caucasian." The mature George Eliot, however, provided in *Daniel Deronda* one of the most powerful and most sympathetic depictions of Jewish life and aspirations ever written. Gertrude Himmelfarb's recent study, *The Jewish Odyssey of George Eliot* explores the intellectual and emotional journey of the novelist; but Alexander's short essay, subtitled "The Novelist and Her Rabbi," focuses on the "rabbi," Emanuel Deutsch, whose meeting with Eliot in 1866 marked "the real turning point" in her attitude toward Jews and Judaism.

Deutsch was a scholar equally at home with Plato and the Talmud, "a living embodiment of Arnold's ideal union of Hebraism and Hellenism." Deutsch died in 1873 after suffering three years of excruciating pain from cancer, before *Daniel Deronda* was written, and before he could finish his long-planned work on the Talmud. Deutsch was tempted to commit suicide in the years before his death, not only because of his physical suffering but because he despaired at having accomplished so little. Alexander writes that "the only lasting effect that Deutsch's labors had was on George Eliot's writing about Jews and Zionism."

Yet the one "lasting effect" of his work turned out to be significant indeed: In her last novel Eliot "endowed Deutsch with a life beyond life in the fictional character of . . . Mordecai," while *Daniel Deronda* itself has, for more than a century, elicited sympathy and understanding for Jewish life in a venue where those qualities have been frequently in short supply—English literature.

Robert Heilman was one of the first Northerners to embrace the New Criticism first developed by Southern agrarians like John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren, while the poet Theodore Roethke "was contemptuous of literary critics," definitely including what he called "the constipated agrarians, and the other enemies of life." The two met when Heilman left Louisiana State, where he had been a colleague of Warren and Cleanth Brooks, to become chairman of the English department at the University of Washington, where Roethke was teaching poetry. Alexander observes that "Roethke intensely disliked academics as a class, and academic administrators in particular: they were all stupid or crooked or both."

Eventually, however, Roethke came to appreciate Heilman's willingness to stand up for the poet on the numerous occasions when what Alexander calls "the

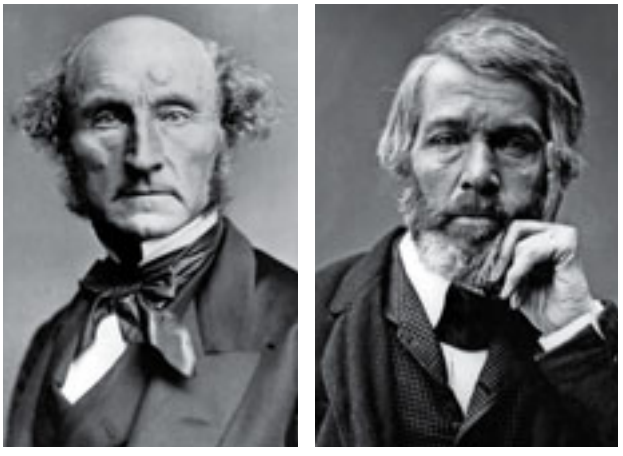
James Seaton, a professor of English at Michigan State, is the editor of The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy and Character and Opinion in the United States.

turbulence of Roethke's mental illness" forced him to miss classes and, repeatedly, entire terms. Defending Roethke's sick leaves with pay to the university's provost in 1959, Heilman wrote "one of the most remarkable letters ever written by a university administrator, a perfect blend of… moral clarity, rhetorical nimbleness, and shrewd pragmatism." Emphasizing how Roethke's reputation as a poet had grown while he was at Washington, Heilman first appealed to the provost "in the most materialistic terms," arguing that "no one else has given us so much free public relations of the most excellent sort." At the same time, he noted that poetry is "one of the oldest creative arts," and asserted that the university, in supporting a poet like Roethke, was "helping to create a certain type of human being and thereby contributing to the quality of American civilization itself."

These sentiments were not just rhetoric for the occasion. Toward the end of his long life, Heilman reflected that, in Roethke, "I felt something that, I came in time to know, was to be called greatness."

The brief friendships Alexander chronicles between Carlyle and Mill, and between Lawrence and Russell, did not end with such mutual respect. Alexander does suggest that whatever the literary achievements of Carlyle and Lawrence, it would be imprudent to trust their political judgments, given their shared "anti-Semitism … love of autocrats and fondness for dictatorship." In contrast, Mill and Russell seem models of prudence—though Russell's undeniable intelligence and commitment to reason did not always prevent him from making unreasonable political judgments of his own. During World War I, for example, Russell worked out a "philosophy of social reconstruction" that called for both "world government" and the "abolition of private property," as well as the elimination of "patriotism, national loyalty, and established religion"—without, of course, explaining how such revolutionary changes might be effected without adding to the violence already engulfing Europe.

Russell was not nearly radical enough for Lawrence, however, since the philosopher failed to recognize the superiority of "blood-consciousness" to reason and foolishly (in Lawrence's view) "seemed still to cling to democracy." Mill broke with Carlyle when, in 1849, Carlyle published an "apologia for slavery" that presented those with African blood as "animal-like blockheads with graceful bodies, who should obey superior beings." Here Alexander's sympathies are with Mill, but he does note that earlier expressions of Carlyle's racism had not aroused similar scruples: "His racism had previously been directed against Jews and therefore gone unnoticed by Mill."



John Stuart Mill, Thomas Carlyle

What was it that drew Mill to Carlyle in the first place, or Russell to Lawrence? Alexander wisely does not attempt an answer, hoping instead that his discussion "may shed some light on the paradox whereby the liberal and rationalist readers and critics of modern literature have so often found themselves in thrall to writers … whose reactionary politics and mystical inclinations were diametrically opposed to their own."

It would be a mistake, he suggests, to simply reject the claims of the imagination and poetry in favor of reason and science. Alexander finds in Mill's willingness to believe, at least for a time, that Carlyle had access to truths unknown to him, not a foolish credulity but a wise skepticism about the ability of Benthamite reason to explain the universe:

> Here Mill shows himself to be not only the opposite of the dogmatic prophet Carlyle but also the opposite of the dogmatic liberal: He allows that Carlyle may see things by a light invisible to him, but does not therefore assume that light to be darkness.

Trilling offered Mill as a model in the preface to *The Liberal Imagination*, citing his respect not for Carlyle but for Samuel Coleridge. Trilling noted that "Mill urged liberals to read Coleridge" just because Coleridge "stood in critical opposition to the liberalism of the day." Mill turned to Coleridge, Trilling asserts, for much the same reasons he himself turned to the modernist poets and novelists—none of them political liberals and some downright reactionaries—to "recall liberals to a sense of variousness and possibility."

Around 1950, when *The Liberal Imagination* was published, Irving Howe was more likely to feel that liberals were already too inclined to indulge their "sense of variousness" rather than move in one definite direction—left. In 1954 Howe attacked Trilling, among others, in "This Age of Conformity," an essay that, as Alexander observes, lamented the failure of American intellectuals to embrace "a life dedicated to values that cannot be realized by a commercial civilization"—in other words, their failure to embrace socialism.

Yet Alexander finds a common element in Trilling's liberalism and Howe's socialism: Trilling's "critique of liberalism was analogous to [Howe's] own socialist critique of socialism, a Third Way that made both men anathema to, respectively, liberal fundamentalists and dogmatic socialists." And even though Howe's most important work of literary criticism, *Politics and the Novel*, takes issue with Trilling's interpretations of particular writers such as Henry James and George Orwell, Alexander observes that the work as a whole "confirms Trilling's assertion that critics of a progressive cast of mind are attracted precisely to those high priests

LEFT: LONDON STEREOSCOPIC COMPANY / GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT: HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

of modernism who are either indifferent or hostile to progressive ideas." Far from applauding only novels sympathetic to the left, Howe argues that the "greatest of all political novels" is one whose condemnation of political radicalism is unqualified and unrelenting: Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*.

The moral and cultural assumptions Trilling and Howe shared could be taken for granted in the 1950s, but when these came under attack in the '60s, the liberal and the socialist both reaffirmed their commitment to what Howe called "the preservation of the cultural heritage." Equally repulsed by a New Left whose ingredients Alexander sums up as a "lethal combination of Stalinism and native American know-nothingism," each replied in his own way. Howe wrote "direct and cogent responses to the depredations and attempted coups of the New Left" while, in *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Trilling analyzed the ideas through which the modernist ideal of authenticity had led to the contemporary "glorification of insanity," leaving the political implications of this "glorification" for readers to work out on their own.

Religion in general and Judaism in particular were elements of the cultural heritage about which both Trilling and Howe remained ambivalent. Neither was a believer, but neither was entirely comfortable with the resolutely secularist worldview their intellectual commitments seemed to entail. Trilling's great hero of the intellect was Sigmund Freud, doubts about whose doctrines Trilling never permitted himself and whose views on religion are summed up in *The Future of an Illusion*. Trilling explicitly rejected the suggestion that his intellectual stance had anything to do with his Jewish heritage. He claimed in a 1949 *Commentary* symposium that expressions of anti-Semitism in English literature posed no particular issue for him, while Howe in the same symposium wrote that "gross caricatures of Jews in English literature make it impossible for one to be totally at ease with its tradition." It was Howe, the leftwing socialist, who found sustenance in the Jewish past and did what he could as a writer to keep it alive.

In one of his finest insights, however, Alexander notes that it is Trilling's prose, not Howe's, that conveys the oblique suggestion that the world and human beings are mysterious and complicated, beyond even the understanding of a Sigmund Freud. Trilling gives us, Alexander asserts, "more than a revision of the dominant liberalism of our times, more than a chastened commitment to mind, and more than a heightened awareness of literature as a criticism of life. What he gives us is a sense of yearning toward something beyond any of these." ♦

B&A

Early Americans

Shrewd observations on wisdom about the past.

BY JAMES BOWMAN

Edmund S. Morgan, the Sterling professor of history emeritus at Yale, must surely know more about American colonial history in New England than any man alive. The author of numerous previous volumes, including *The Puritan Family*, *The Puritan Dilemma*, *The Birth of the Republic, 1763-89*, and *The Challenge of the American Revolution*, Morgan has now, aged 93, put together a book of his essays titled to stand as the culmination of his career and a compendium of wisdom gleaned from a very long lifetime spent in the study of history in the old-fashioned sense—that is, history as an attempt to understand the past rather than to impose the historian's ideology upon it.

American Heroes
Profiles of Men and Women Who Shaped Early America
by Edmund S. Morgan
Norton, 304 pp., $27.95

Edmund S. Morgan

Though he is not the least bit showy or obviously polemical about it, there are provocations to the prevailing ethos of historical studies on nearly every page of this volume. Here he is, for example, writing of the gentle Arawaks of the Caribbean, met by Christopher Columbus in the first "encounter" between the Old World and the New:

> That the Indians were destroyed by Spanish greed is true. But greed is simply one of the uglier names we give to the driving force of modern civilization. We usually prefer less pejorative names for it. Call it the profit motive, or free enterprise, or the work ethic, or the American way, or, as the Spanish did, civility. Before we become too outraged at the behavior of Columbus and his followers, before we identify ourselves too easily with the lovable Arawaks, we have to ask whether we could really get along without greed and everything that goes with it. Yes, a few of us, a few eccentrics, might manage to live for a time like the Arawaks. But the modern world could not have put up with the Arawaks any more than the Spanish could. The story moves us, offends us, but perhaps the more so because we have to recognize ourselves not in the Arawaks but in Columbus and his followers.

This strikes me as so profoundly true that its acceptance as truth must make the whole ramshackle structure of ideologized history fall to the ground. No wonder he tucks it away in the previously unpublished essay, "The Conquerors," that opens the volume. No wonder it is previously unpublished!

In the same vein is an essay from

James Bowman, resident scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, is the author of Honor: A History *and* Media Madness.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

1958 titled "The Unyielding Indian," which is also a rebuke to the simple moral melodrama favored by so many historians and other *bien pensants* these days to describe the interaction between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of the Americas. This essay concentrates on the Indian tribes of what is now the United States and points out that the bloodiness of our ancestors' encounter with them is to a large extent owing to the Indians' refusal to follow the course of most conquered and technologically outclassed peoples and assimilate or adapt to the change that Europeans brought to the continent. Ironically, this "extraordinary refusal to accept the manners and methods of a people who were obviously more powerful than they" was a product of qualities that are now thought to be distinctively American.

All the most typical of Indian characteristics, writes Morgan, "add up to a single quality, which has been given various names. The Massachusetts General Court, for example . . . called it 'a malicious, surley, and revengeful spirit.' But the more positive epithet of 'individualism' will also apply." And seeing the Indians as individualists "may help us to understand not only why the Indian refused to join us but also why we have admired and hated him for his refusal. The Indian in his individualism displayed virtues to which Americans, and indeed all Christians, have traditionally paid homage. An indifference to the things of this world, a genuine respect for human dignity, a passionate attachment to human freedom—these are virtues we all revere." It is not surprising, then, that "we are irritated, annoyed, and even infuriated by men who exhibit our values better than we do" but who at the same time are savages—barbarians.

None of this should be taken to mean that Morgan is a conservative, however; far from it. He has a decidedly liberal point of view, and even takes some gratuitous swipes of a very familiar kind at our previous president and his administration. Moreover, for the most part, he takes a pretty dim view of the traditional heroes of American history—though George Washington and Benjamin Franklin come in for a good deal better treatment than the grudging praise he accords, for example, Columbus. Most of his heroes are outliers and mavericks, but he also has words of understanding and sympathy for many of those whose lives embodied the errors and misapprehensions of their time—even the judges at the Salem witch trials, who are compared favorably with some of their more dogmatic spiritual descendants.

He is especially sympathetic to the Puritans of New England without sharing many (if any) of the beliefs that they thought necessary for the health of their immortal souls. His essay on "The Puritans and Sex" should be required reading for those who use the words "Puritan" or "Puritanical" to signify a hostility to sexual intercourse. For the Puritan attitude, as he points out, begins in "horror at 'that Popish conceit of the Excellency of Virginity.'" He quotes one Puritan divine as writing—naturally, from the masculine point of view—that "Women are Creatures without which there is no comfortable Living for man: it is true of them what is wont to be said of Governments, *That bad ones are better than none:* They are a sort of Blasphemers then who dispise and decry them, and call them *a necessary Evil*, for they are *a necessary Good*."

Morgan also offers a rather witty summary of another reverend's opinion that the "Use of the Marriage Bed" is "founded in mans Nature" and that, consequently, any withdrawal from sexual intercourse upon the part of husband or wife "Denies all reliefe in Wedlock unto Human necessity: and sends it for supply unto Beastiality when God gives not the gift of Continency." "In other words," Morgan summarizes, "sexual intercourse was a human necessity and marriage the only proper supply for it." Well, that's one thing it means.

Morgan also helps us to understand what he calls the "socioreligious theory of criminology" as adumbrated by Governor Winthrop of Massachusetts. This was the view that the whole community might be punished by God for the sins of individuals among it, which was the justification for keeping a close watch on people's moral behavior. The theory may have been mistaken, but it is worth something to understand what otherwise we might simply condemn out of hand.

Typical is his treatment of Michael Wigglesworth, "The Puritan's Puritan," who is acknowledged to live up, if any man ever did, to the popular caricature of Puritanism but yet without sacrificing his right to be understood. Wigglesworth may have been "a living embodiment of the caricature," but he also showed how

> Every social institution existed for the Puritan by virtue of a special covenant with God in which the members had promised obedience to the laws of God. Consequently every Puritan was bound to obey God not merely as a sanctified man (in order to prove to himself that he was saved) but as a member of every group to which he belonged.

Morgan gets "at the origin of [Wigglesworth's] hostility to pleasure and at the central meaning of Puritanism as Wigglesworth exemplifies it: the belief that fallen man inevitably estimates too highly the creatures and things of this world, including himself." That, too, is why, "the Puritan was not exactly hostile to pleasure, but his suspicion was so close to hostility that it often amounted to the same thing."

The essay on Washington and Franklin, "The Power of Negative Thinking," sums up Morgan's own sort of wisdom. Like them, he has a "talent for getting things done by not doing the obvious, a talent for recognizing when *not* doing something was better than doing it, even when doing it was what everyone else wanted." Of Washington and Franklin, he writes that "their deliberate refusals to do things, employed to great advantage in serving their country, originated in a personal ambition to gain honor and reputation of a higher order than most people aspired to"—a quality which showed an appreciation as rare then as it is now of "the distinction between fame and vanity." Like his heroes, Morgan has refused to take the easy and crowd-pleasing route to scholarly fame, but his fame is likely to be the more impressive and long-lasting as a result. ♦

B&A

Orientation

Old China seen through the lenses of the New.

BY SOPHIE RICHARDSON

Charles Horner advances a number of different ideas in his new book, but the central one is this question: Which historical referents are used by China's current leadership to justify current positions or policies, or to predict the future?

Central to his thesis is the possibility that a Chinese intellectual writing in this day and age can—unlike his predecessors—"contemplate China's current and anticipated weight in the world [with] . . . a reasonable expectation of national success rather than one of national disaster." In other words, Horner seeks to explore "the new past of old China."

These 'pasts' include a rewriting of Yuan dynasty history not as one of subjugation by the Mongols, nor as part of someone else's empire. Instead, that era is now portrayed as an early indication that an affluent, coherent regime based in China could, in fact, rule effectively. The Ming dynasty is no longer depicted as one of crude, brutal rule, but rather, the current scholarship on that era "makes it appear not merely grand and innovative, but grand and innovative in ways that seem wholly connected to China's contemporary circumstances." Here Horner cites the origins of Chinese capitalism, an increasingly urban civilization, and of strategic thinking, including the Chinese explorer Zheng He, whose voyages are now being aggressively marketed by the Chinese government as precedent for China's "peaceful rise" and "going out" strategies. The Qing dynasty is now heralded for significant cultural advances, citizen involvement in the state, and a multiethnic society.

Rising China and Its Postmodern Fate
Memories of Empire in a New Global Context
by Charles Horner
Georgia, 232 pp., $34.95

Of course, most governments and their agents have a healthy appetite for revisionism, so to the extent Horner is trying to advance a theory one does question why the origins of *this* policy can be found in *that* era's history. And a few of the connections appear somewhat tenuous, particularly in the chapter on Mao, where glimmerings of Communist revolution and strategic behavior are seen in everything from the game *go* to the literary classic *The Water Margin*. This is not necessarily wrong, but it becomes more difficult to grasp what the particular referents are and are not.

There are a number of compelling subthemes. One is Horner's description, in an effort to frame the central question, of his own experiences studying China, and trying to discern what his contemporary Chinese counterparts would have been taught. He reminds us why we should respect the first generation of modern China scholars—Derk Bodde, John Melby, He Bingdi—and understand what kinds of information they did and did not have access to. This is a brief but evocative and effective reminder of what scholars can, at their respective times and places in history, know about China.

Another theme concerns the practice in China of historiography, which according to Horner is counterintuitive in a number of respects. Think history is written by the winners, and born of a sense of validation and triumphalism? Think again. Horner describes the laborious practice by which a new dynasty would assess and document the failings of its predecessor, typically in an effort to avoid those mistakes and justify its own rule.

And think history is written by historians, free of interference? No, Horner reminds us: Through the end of the Qing Dynasty the task was, in fact, reserved to the state itself, not to independent thinkers. Mao, writes Horner, "pushed the practice of using the past to serve current political purposes to the extreme" and Chinese historians' emancipation from state control did not begin until after the Cultural Revolution.

One of the author's real contributions is to describe the delicate dance ongoing since the beginning of the reform era, in which Chinese historians have been able to explore their past more freely, reestablish independent scholarly institutions, and have contact with their counterparts outside China. And yet some of those historians remain influenced by the prevailing political winds: Zheng He may have been a great explorer, but some contemporary historians believe he is a liability rather than an asset, as his actions could be construed as gunboat diplomacy, or imperialism. Other historians' analysis takes them in the other direction; Horner cites one scholar's equation of sanitized versions of the Boxer Rebellion with Japan's omission of its less admirable acts in modern history as a contributing factor to the closure of a popular scholarly journal in 2006.

As Horner writes in his chapter on the Qing, "the study of . . . epochs in Chinese history may prove highly subversive, precisely because it is very edifying." The uneasy relationship between authoritarianism—be it the Mongols or the crumbling Qing or resurgent Maoists—and reconstructions of Chinese history remains one of the most consistent phenomena in China's past, present, and likely future. ♦

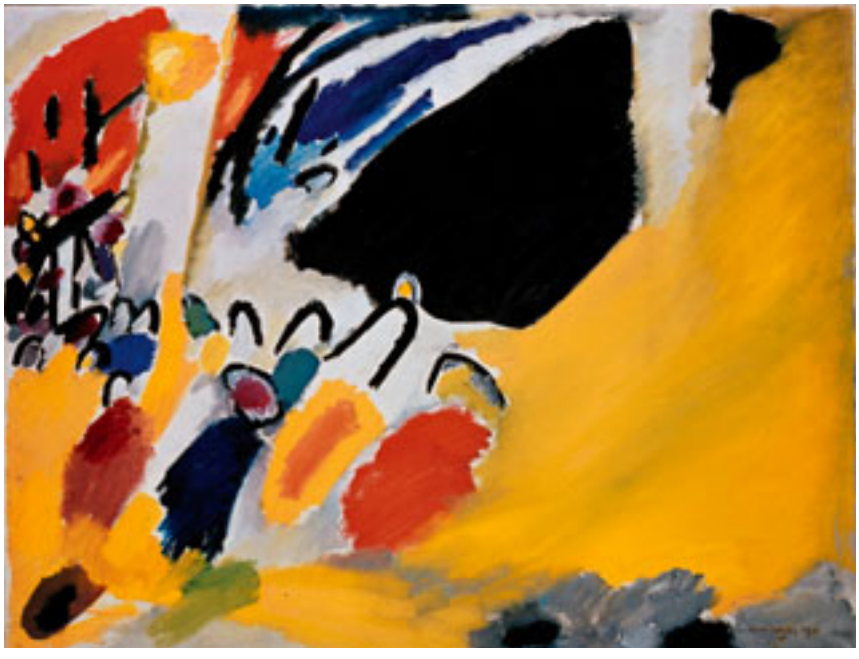
Sophie Richardson, Asia advocacy director at Human Rights Watch, is the author of China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

B&A

Late Mastery

The marriage of art and humanity in Kandinsky.

BY JAMES GARDNER



'Impression III (Concert)' (1911)

If Wassily Kandinsky had lived only as long as Raphael and Caravaggio, he wouldn't merit so much as a footnote in the history of art. Indeed, before he turned 30, his one act of artistic initiative—as far as we know—was to buy a paint box at the age of 10. Born in Moscow to an affluent family of the upper middle class, Kandinsky (1866-1944) trained in law and then in economics and then in ethnology—anything, it seems, but art.

So it must have felt like a bolt from the blue when he decided, in 1897, to take up the great cause of painting. He moved to Schwabing, the bohemian district of Munich, and signed up for instruction with the Slovenian artist Anton Azhbe. A new and uneven show at the Guggenheim celebrates his subsequent achievement over a career of almost 50 years, a career that began in the late 1890s, amid the dream fugues of late symbolism, and ended after the liberation of Paris, amid the angularity of geometric abstraction.

Kandinsky
Guggenheim Museum
Through January 13, 2010

Unlike the landmark exhibition that the Guggenheim mounted in the early 1980s, over five years and in three installments, this exhibition does not seem to indulge any curatorial or scholarly illusions about its underlying consequence. The Guggenheim (together with the Städtische Galerie in Munich and the Centre Pompidou in Paris) has mounted this exhibition for much the same reason that orchestras play Beethoven: Simply put, that is what people want and expect from them.

Indeed, the Guggenheim itself began life, under Baroness Hilla Rebay, as the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, its primary purpose being to promulgate the art and philosophy of Wassily Kandinsky. And yet, the present display lacks the focus of the Guggenheim retrospectives of the early '80s. More or less a crowd-pleaser, it passes in quick and somewhat arbitrary review of Kandinsky's long career, paying more attention to his later years than to his beginnings. Let it also be said that, in the rough and tumble selection of paintings on display, some weaker works appear alongside masterpieces that exemplify the general strength and confidence that define his art. "Lyrical," from early in 1911, feels rather slight while, in the nearly contemporary "Impression III (Concert)," a fine spray of yellow appears to have slipped away from the artist's control.

Although it does not celebrate or make much of the fact, this exhibition roughly coincides with the centennial of Kandinsky's creation, in his Schwabing studio in 1910, of the first abstract paintings in the history of art—at least according to his account. This was the goal to which the most advanced critics had been groping for almost half a century.

"All art is constantly aspiring to the condition of music," Walter Pater famously said in 1877, by which he meant the elimination of content in the pursuit of pure form. Half a generation later, the French painter Maurice Denis—all of 19 years old at the time—defined a painting, for the first time, as "a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order."

But if Denis, like a few other artists of his day, could see the promised land of abstract art, it was Kandinsky who not only took us there, but did so with a definitive and resounding mastery that has rarely been equaled and has never been surpassed. In so doing, he flung wide open the *arcana imperii* of visual art, with the astounding discovery that form could exist without content. This was the pictorial equivalent of splitting the atom. By comparison, Picasso's cubistic fracturing of reality

James Gardner, the former architecture critic for the New York Sun*, recently translated the* Christiad of Marco Girolamo Vida *(Harvard).*

into tiny facets—despite its huge but fugitive influence—amounted to little more than a distraction.

Of course, Kandinsky did not start out as an abstract painter. If this show were less of a celebration and more of a scholarly exhibition, and if it were not reliant mainly on the extensive but fortuitous holdings of the three institutions that have mounted it, more attention would have been paid to the interesting question of the artist's early evolution. His first known efforts, like "Trysting Place" (1901), are almost academic exercises. But by the time the Guggenheim takes up the tale in 1907, Kandinsky's "Motley Life" has fully embraced the liberties of expressionism. In this painting's evocation of traditional Russian life, it is true, Kandinsky retains an illustrator's attachment to the subject depicted. What is remarkable is the sovereign authority with which he already uses paint and composes his image.

By 1909 Kandinsky, in Paris and Murnau, has rejected the child-like fabulism of "Motley Life" and, with his expressionistic simplification of forms, and his volatile sense of color, rejoins the mainstream of modern art. The traces of cubistic geometry—which had been nothing more than a flirtation in him—now melt away, and in their place is a riot of primary and secondary colors—still childlike in their force and directness—and yet so sophisticated that they embody what used to be called "the grand manner." And this, perhaps inadvertently, is the dominant theme that emerges from the Guggenheim exhibition.

Kandinsky would seem to be an odd exemplar of this grand manner, or grand style, as Sir Joshua Reynolds and Matthew Arnold called it. The term is generally ascribed to an obviously if not explicitly aristocratic context and to a classical attitude, as found in the art and poetry of Raphael and Homer, for example, rather than Michelangelo and Euripides. By contrast, Kandinsky was a committed modernist whose orgiastic exuberation of forms and colors seems more Dionysian than Apollonian. In addition, like many sensitive souls of his generation, he was moved to embrace, in the darkened chambers of Madame Blavatsky, the gnostic certainties of theosophy. For him, certain colors and forms had the power to move men, through beauty, to that state of spiritual elevation that was the guiding principle and unwavering ambition of his art.

And yet, once he attained artistic maturity, certainly by 1910, the year of his first abstractions, he revealed himself, in all the varied styles that appear at the Guggenheim, to be an absolute master. What common quality could possibly link the fabulous "Blue Rider" of 1903 (not in the show) with the unbending geometric precision of "Several Circles," from 1926, circles of many hues set against a severe nocturnal ground? And what links that fine work with the frantic anarchy of the four early abstractions of the year 1914, painted for Edwin R. Campbell and now in the Museum of Modern Art? And what, finally, unites those works with the ideograms, perfectly drawn and quite inscrutable, that make up his final, surrealist-inspired works?

In the great generality of Kandinsky's art, mastery itself becomes the message, a mastery of means to an end that suggests the attainment of the spiritual elevation that he felt to be art's highest aim. And that mastery, by the very nature of its competence, is a kind of classicism, a transcendence of all that is contingent and extraneous. In its definitiveness and consistency, it is the true 20th-century equivalent of the Grand Manner in culture.

But such mastery is far more than merely a technical accomplishment. For there was, without doubt, a real greatness to Kandinsky. Even at his most airheaded and quixotic, in his theosophical exultations in color and pure form, Kandinsky exhibits, in both his art and his life, a loftiness of aspiration and an unconquerable nobility of character that are without parallel among the motley array of geniuses, mediocrities, and outright quacks whom we have to thank for modern and postmodern art. Rather, we must cast a retrospective glance on the likes of Monet and Ingres for his equal in combining technical brilliance, amplitude, and elevated humanity. ♦

B&A

Alicia's Keys

The dangerous combination of women and pianos.

BY JOE QUEENAN

Since my late teens I have had a deep fear of women lurking behind pianos. This is probably because of early exposure to the work of Nina Simone. Dubbed—not without justification—the High Priestess of Soul, Simone was an imperious, striking-looking woman who would take up her position behind her grand piano, compose herself for a few moments, and then bang out one anguished song after another. Her repertoire ranged from the lacerating Jacques Brel ballad "Ne Me Quitte Pas" to the heart-rending "Wild Is the Wind" to the defiant "Mississippi Goddam." Most of the songs dealt with how horrible men were, especially white men.

A signature moment in Simone's show was when she would half-sing, half-expectorate the classic Kurt Weill/Bertolt Brecht tune "Pirate Jenny," a first-person account of an aspiring female buccaneer's desire to avenge herself on all the men who had ever done her wrong. Enthroned

Joe Queenan is the author, most recently, of Closing Time: A Memoir.

menacingly behind those mighty 88s, Simone would literally morph into Jenny, gazing triumphantly at a pile of freshly minted corpses, her eyes roaming over the audience in a way that made you feel she was addressing you directly. Even though I was still a callow youth, and had not yet done any women wrong, I already knew that, in the fullness of time, I would. So, apparently, did she. I can still see her lips curled into a vindictive, emasculating sneer as her eyes transfixed me: *You bastard. You heartless, conscienceless bastard.*

Had Simone been the only female keyboardist to provoke such an intense level of personal discomfort, my musical tastes might have evolved in an entirely different direction. Alas, she was not. Not long after I saw Simone I attended a concert given by Laura Nyro at the University of Pennsylvania's pocket-sized Irvine Auditorium. Like Simone, Nyro was a regal, emotionally distant type, sheathed entirely in black, a Bronx-based Morticia. Not all of Nyro's songs were depressing, and not all of them were about the man who done her wrong. But enough of them did fall into this angry, retributive category to make me feel uncomfortable, particularly as I was attending the concert with a woman who had good reason to believe I would one day do her wrong—in all likelihood, later that same day.

The Nyro concert sealed the matter for me, and from that point on, I tried as hard as possible to avoid women armed with pianos. Or let me clarify this by saying that I avoided female *singers* ensconced behind pianos; classical pianists like Alicia de la Rocha, Mitsuko Uchida, Hélène Grimaud, and the fabulous Labeque sisters didn't scare me one bit. Nor did singers like Janis Joplin or Tina Turner or Grace Slick or Carmen McRae or Patti Smith or Chrissie Hynde or even Stevie Nicks, who never strayed very far from the mike stand. But if the female vocalist in question gave even the slightest indication that she was going to versify while tickling the ivories, she would have to do so without me. Whether it was Christine McVie or Joni Mitchell or Diana Krall or Alicia Keys, I gave them all a wide berth. I knew the hammer was coming down.

I am aware that my fear of women armed with pianos is an unusual phobia. Most people, if they fear musicians at all, reserve their angst for steel drummers or zither players or ironic *a capella* groups belting out "Purple Haze" and "Stairway to Heaven." More sophisticated types head for the exits at the first sign that the jazz quartet is revving up for the 19-minute bass solo on "Someday My Prince Will Come." Perhaps the most dreaded musician of all is the willowy male brandishing an acoustic guitar—the pop cultural equivalent of a mortar launcher—and warbling "Heart of Gold," "Horse with No Name," or "Tears in Heaven." Young men like these have made every *ruelle*, every *piazza*, every arcade, and every subway platform from 42nd Street to Montparnasse-Bienvenue a house of abject horror.

Most people, if they fear musicians at all, reserve their angst for steel drummers or zither players or ironic a capella groups belting out 'Purple Haze' and 'Stairway to Heaven.'

But here we are talking about amateur musicians—and amateurs, in and of themselves, are creatures to be loathed, feared, and shunned. The phobia that I am talking about, veering in an entirely different direction, embraces incontestably talented performers, everyone from Tori Amos to Blossom Dearie to Madeleine Peyroux to Norah Jones. Not for one moment am I suggesting that these women are anything less than brilliant. I am not even saying that I dislike them personally. I am merely saying that they scare me.

Concertgoers live in fear of the official, choreographed "lull" during an otherwise miraculous performance. No one wants to be in the room when Keith croaks "Happy" and "Slipping Away" in the middle of the Stones' show while Mick takes a breather. Hard-core jazz *aficionados*—a group in whose number I have been proud to include myself ever since I learned to spell "aficionado" and stopped referring to myself as a "jazz buff"—would leave the room when the aging Duke Ellington launched into the saccharine, emaciated, Lawrence Welkean, just-plain-awful "Satin Doll." Sinatra purists felt the same way when Ol' Blue Eyes would slow down his show to do "My Way," a tune the chairman of the board himself eventually came to despise once he realized it would be sung eulogistically at every hard-driving dentist's funeral and every purchasing manager's cremation until the end of time. My breaking point has always been when the seemingly harmless chantoozey, poised innocuously behind the microphone, starts making her way toward the piano. That's my cue to get the hell out.

Not long ago I had an opportunity to see the remarkable young artist Taylor Swift at Madison Square Garden. It was a very fine show indeed; but as it wended its way toward the big wind-up, the lithe, likable Swift suddenly put down her guitar and started to mosey over to the piano. That's when I hightailed it right out of there. The next day, I read in the papers that, after manning her battle station, the precocious 19-year-old, sporting emotional scars beyond her years, sang her own vengeful anthem "You're Not Sorry," followed by Justin Timberlake's equally vindictive "What Goes Around . . . Comes Around." But I didn't need anybody to tell me that. I could hear it coming a mile away. ♦

B&A

Bridges to Somewhere

Tragic story, indelible lesson, underrated star.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

It is startling to think that, even though he has been in the movies for four decades and received his first Oscar nomination 38 years ago, Jeff Bridges is only five years away from collecting Social Security. He remains the human personification of the adjective "boyish," as in boyish charm, boyish energy, boyish wit, boyish immaturity. (After all, he is still "Jeff.") He has never been the actor directors call on if they need someone to embody the kinds of qualities we associate with the word "manly"—self-sacrifice, physical bravery, stoicism, fortitude. A Jeff Bridges character may have many virtues, but being a grown-up isn't one of them.

In his many offhandedly brilliant performances—from the callow quarterback Duane in *The Last Picture Show* (1971) to the over-garrulous would-be pulp novelist in *Hearts of the West* (a little-known gem from 1975) to a New Orleans aristocrat interested in body building in *Stay Hungry* (1976) to the emotionally dead cocktail pianist in *The Fabulous Baker Boys* (1989) to the ultimate Los Angeles beach bum stoner in *The Big Lebowski* (1998)—Bridges has made it his life's work to detail the luxurious benefits and emotional costs of being an American boy, no matter his age. And now, in a fine new film called *Crazy Heart* that will almost certainly win him an Oscar as best actor in March, the Bridges boy hits bottom.

You've seen *Crazy Heart* before. There's a section of *Tender Mercies* here, a swatch of *The Wrestler* there, and a bit of *One Trick Pony*, all sewn together with a thread from *The Lost Weekend*. We meet up with a 57-year-old down-on-his-luck country singer named Bad Blake as he pulls up to his latest and worst-ever gig in his 1978 Ford Silverado: He's due to play the lounge of a bowling alley in an entirely unpicturesque New Mexico town.

Crazy Heart
Directed by Scott Cooper

Bad never quite reached the first rank as a performer, but he is universally considered a brilliant songwriter. "I used to be somebody," he warbles in the movie's first song, "but now I'm somebody else." Bad hasn't been able to come up with a new tune in three years, as his alcoholism has (we infer) begun to rob him of his wits.

Bridges looks like every country singer from the 1970s rolled into one, and when he sings he sounds like them too. Bad Blake has an easy and unforced professionalism; no matter what, he tells someone, he has never missed a show, though he might have to run backstage and vomit during one of them.

Crazy Heart asks—like all dramas about a drunk—whether this splendid wreck can be saved from himself. He has the usual encounter with a doctor who tells him he's given his body all the beating it can take and that if he doesn't quit drinking and smoking he's going to die. And he comes upon a lovely young woman (Maggie Gyllenhaal) with an adorable child who seem together to offer the promise of a new life. Add to this the sudden encouragement of his onetime protégé, the country superstar Tommy Sweet (Colin Farrell), and Bad Blake might be on the way back.

It is to the credit of Scott Cooper, a young actor who has done a bravura job writing and directing his first film (based on a 1987 novel by Thomas Cobb), that he doesn't make it anywhere near as easy for Bad Blake as *Tender Mercies* made it for Robert Duvall's similarly troubled country singer, who straightens up and flies right almost immediately. (To be fair, *Tender Mercies* is a movie about the mysterious workings of redemption, about what happens after someone goes on the wagon; but even so, giving up the sauce doesn't seem much of a strain for Duvall's Mac Sledge.) All the good news in the world can't keep Bad from the bottle.

The detail work in *Crazy Heart* is beautifully rendered: the look of Bad's guitar, the Spanish soap operas Bad watches on motel TVs because, after spending a lifetime in motel rooms, they are the only things he hasn't seen. The supporting performances are beautifully rendered too, particularly the wonderful turn by the hothead Irish actor Colin Farrell, unrecognizably sweet and authoritative as the sideman-turned-superstar who wants to repay an old emotional debt. (Robert Duvall, who was one of the producers, has a small part as Bad's only friend, and he makes you miss his increasingly rare presence on the screen even more.)

But the movie *is* Bridges, who is in nearly every shot. And what he brings to the part, a particular quality that only he could bring, is that Bad is just a boy nearing 60—charming, winning, entirely undisciplined, oddly guileless, living from hour to hour, unable to control his desire for instant gratification. He may have a devastated body ruined by hard living, but that is the result of a failure to mature. Ultimately, then, the dramatic question of the touching and understated *Crazy Heart*—and it is the central dramatic question behind the indelible career of Jeff Bridges—is not whether Bad Blake will sober up, but whether he will become a man before he kills himself by staying a boy. ♦

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

"President Obama has written a personal letter to North Korean leader Kim Jong Il that was delivered by the administration's special envoy for North Korea during a visit to Pyongyang last week."
—Washington Post, *December 16, 2009*

THE WHITE HOUSE

December 9, 2009

Honorable Kim Jong Il
Baekdu Mountain Resort & Casino
Baekdu Mountain, Yanggang-Do Province
Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Dear Dear Leader:

First off, may I call you Kim? (Is that short for Kimberly or Kimball?) You can call me Barry. I am writing this letter to urge your return to the six-nation talks regarding your nuclear ambitions. Considering my soaring rhetoric was able to sway more than 66 million Americans to elect me president, I think this is worth a try. So get ready to be swooned like you've never been swooned before!

You see, Kim, there is something happening. Change is happening. And that change is you and your choosing hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord. We are standing on the precipice, between North and South, East and West. But in the change we seek, there's not a North Korea and a South Korea, but simply a Korea. There's not an Eastern Hemisphere and a Western Hemisphere, but a sphere.

I am telling you what you need to know. Not what you want to hear. And that is, with great power comes great responsibility.

Make no mistake about what we're up against. Our planet is in peril. But can we come to an understanding over your nation's needs and the world's concerns over nuclear proliferation? Yes, we can. Can we come to an agreement that will unite North and South Korea? Yes, we can. (Though it's not surprising those South Koreans get bitter. They cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them—like, say, the Japanese—or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations.)

You say you've been waiting for a president who will listen to your needs. But what you must realize, Dear Leader, Dear Friend, is that you are the one you've been waiting for. (applause)

See you at the next six-party talks.

In friendship,

Barack H. Obama
President of the United States

P.S. If you agree to meet, there's a reasonable chance the oceans will cease to rise and our planet will begin to heal. Plus, I'll give you a fist-bump.