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Top 25 Censored Stories of 2007



#1 Future of Internet Debate Ignored by Media

Sources:

[Buzzflash.com](#), July 18, 2005

Title: “Web of Deceit: How Internet Freedom Got the Federal Ax, and Why Corporate News Censored the Story”

Author: Elliot D. Cohen, Ph.D.

Student Researchers: Lauren Powell, Brett Forest, and Zoe Huffman

Faculty Evaluator: Andrew Roth, Ph.D.

Throughout 2005 and 2006, a large underground debate raged regarding the future of the Internet. More recently referred to as “network neutrality,” the issue has become a tug of war with cable companies on the one hand and consumers and Internet service providers on the other. Yet despite important legislative proposals and Supreme Court decisions throughout 2005, the issue was almost completely ignored in the headlines until 2006.¹ And, except for occasional coverage on CNBC’s Kudlow & Kramer, mainstream television remains hands-off to this day (June 2006).²

Most coverage of the issue framed it as an argument over regulation—but the term “regulation” in this case is somewhat misleading. Groups advocating for “net neutrality” are not promoting regulation of internet content. What they want is a legal mandate forcing cable companies to allow internet service providers (ISPs) free access to their cable lines (called a “common carriage” agreement). This was the model used for dial-up internet, and it is the way content providers want to keep it. They also want to make sure that cable companies cannot screen or interrupt internet content without a court order.

Those in favor of net neutrality say that lack of government regulation simply means that cable lines will be regulated by the cable companies themselves. ISPs will have to pay a hefty service fee for the right to use cable lines (making internet services more expensive). Those who could pay more would get better access; those who could not pay would be left behind. Cable companies could also decide to filter Internet content at will.

On the other side, cable company supporters say that a great deal of time and money was spent laying cable lines and expanding their speed and quality.³ They claim that allowing ISPs free access would deny cable companies the ability to recoup their investments, and maintain that cable providers should be allowed to charge. Not doing so, they predict, would discourage competition and innovation within the cable industry.

Cable supporters like the AT&T-sponsored Hands Off the Internet website assert that common carriage legislation would lead to higher prices and months of legal wrangling. They maintain that such legislation fixes a problem that doesn't exist and scoff at concerns that phone and cable companies will use their position to limit access based on fees as groundless. Though cable companies deny plans to block content providers without cause, there are a number of examples of cable-initiated discrimination.

In March 2005, the FCC settled a case against a North Carolina-based telephone company that was blocking the ability of its customers to use voice-over-Internet calling services instead of (the more expensive) phone lines.⁴ In August 2005, a Canadian cable company blocked access to a site that supported the cable union in a labor dispute.⁵ In February 2006, Cox Communications denied customers access to the Craig's List website. Though Cox claims that it was simply a security error, it was discovered that Cox ran a classified service that competes with Craig's List.⁶

In June of 1999, the Ninth District Court ruled that AT&T would have to open its cable network to ISPs (AT&T v. City of Portland). The court said that Internet transmissions, interactive, two-way exchanges, were telecommunication offerings, not a cable information service (like CNN) that sends data one way. This decision was overturned on appeal a year later.

Recent court decisions have extended the cable company agenda further. On June 27, 2005, The United States Supreme Court ruled that cable corporations like Comcast and Verizon were not required to share their lines with rival ISPs (National Cable & Telecommunications Association vs. Brand X Internet Services).⁷ Cable companies would not have to offer common carriage agreements for cable lines the way that telephone companies have for phone lines.

According to Dr. Elliot Cohen, the decision accepted the FCC assertion that cable modem service is not a two-way telecommunications offering, but a one-way information service, completely overturning the 1999 ruling. Meanwhile, telephone companies charge that such a decision gives an unfair advantage to cable companies and are requesting that they be released from their common carriage requirement as well.

Legislation

On June 8, the House rejected legislation (HR 5273) that would have prevented phone and cable companies from selling preferential treatment on their networks for delivery of video and other data-heavy applications. It also passed the Communications Opportunity, Promotion, and Enhancement (COPE) Act (HR 5252), which supporters said would encourage innovation and the construction of more high-speed Internet lines. Internet neutrality advocates say it will allow phone and cable companies to cherry-pick customers in wealthy neighborhoods while eliminating the current requirement demanded by most local governments that cable TV companies serve low-income and minority areas as well. 8

Comment: As of June 2006, the COPE Act is in the Senate. Supporters say the bill supports innovation and freedom of choice. Internet neutrality advocates say that its passage would forever compromise the Internet. Giant cable companies would attain a monopoly on high-speed, cable Internet. They would prevent poorer citizens from broadband access, while monitoring and controlling the content of information that can be accessed.

Notes

1. "Keeping a Democratic Web," The New York Times, May 2, 2006.
2. Jim Goldman, Larry Kudlow, and Phil Lebeau, "Panelists Michael Powell, Mike Holland, Neil Weinberg, John Augustine and Pablo Perez-Fernandez discuss markets," Kudlow & Company CNBC, March 6, 2006.
3. <http://www.Handsofftheinternet.com>.
4. Michael Geist, "Telus breaks Net Providers' cardinal rule: Telecom company blocks access to site supporting union in labour dispute," Ottawa Citizen, August 4, 2005.
5. Jonathan Krim, "Renewed Warning of Bandwidth Hoarding," The Washington Post, November 24, 2005.
6. David A. Utter, "Craigslist Blocked By Cox Interactive," <http://www.Webpronews.com>, June 7, 2006.
7. Yuki Noguchi, "Cable Firms Don't Have to Share Networks, Court Rules," Washington Post, June 28, 2005.
8. "Last week in Congress / How our representatives voted," Buffalo News (New York), June 11, 2006.

UPDATE BY ELLIOT D. COHEN, PH.D.

Despite the fact that the Court's decision in Brand X marks the beginning of the end for a robust, democratic Internet, there has been a virtual MSM blackout in covering it. As a result of this decision, the legal stage has been set for further corporate control. Currently pending in Congress is the "Communications Opportunity, Promotion, and Enhancement Act of 2006" (HR 5252), fueled by strong telecom corporate lobbies and introduced by Congressman Joe Barton (R-TX). This Act, which fails to adequately protect an open and neutral Internet, includes a "Title II—Enforcement of Broadband Policy Statement" that gives the FCC "exclusive authority to adjudicate any complaint alleging a violation of the broadband policy statement or the principles incorporated therein." With the passage of this provision, courts will have scant authority to challenge and overturn FCC decisions regarding broadband. Since under current FCC Chair Kevin Martin, the FCC is moving toward still further deregulation of telecom and media companies, the likely consequence is the thickening of the plot to increase corporate control of the Internet. In particular, behemoth telecom corporations like Comcast, Verizon, and AT&T want to set up toll booths on the Internet. If these companies get their way, content providers with deep pockets will be afforded optimum bandwidth while the rest of us will be left spinning in cyberspace. No longer will everyone enjoy an equal voice in the freest and most comprehensive democratic forum ever devised by humankind.

As might be expected, none of these new developments are being addressed by the MSM. Among media activist organizations attempting to stop the gutting of the free Internet is The Free Press (<http://www.freepress.net/>), which now has an aggressive "Save the Internet" campaign.

#2 Halliburton Charged with Selling Nuclear Technologies to Iran

Source:

Global Research.ca, August 5, 2005

Title: "Halliburton Secretly Doing Business With Key Member of Iran's Nuclear Team"

Author: Jason Leopold

Faculty Evaluator: Catherine Nelson

Student Researchers: Kristine Medeiros and Pia Herr

According to journalist Jason Leopold, sources at former Cheney company Halliburton allege that, as recently as January of 2005, Halliburton sold key components for a nuclear reactor to an Iranian oil development company. Leopold says his Halliburton sources have intimate knowledge of the business dealings of both Halliburton and Oriental Oil Kish, one of Iran's largest private oil companies.

Additionally, throughout 2004 and 2005, Halliburton worked closely with Cyrus Nasser, the vice chairman of the board of directors of Iran-based Oriental Oil Kish, to develop oil projects in Iran. Nasser is also a key member of Iran's nuclear development team. Nasser was interrogated by Iranian authorities in late July 2005 for allegedly providing Halliburton with Iran's nuclear secrets. Iranian government officials charged Nasser with accepting as much as \$1 million in bribes from Halliburton for this information.

Oriental Oil Kish dealings with Halliburton first became public knowledge in January 2005 when the company announced that it had subcontracted parts of the South Pars gas-drilling project to Halliburton Products and Services, a subsidiary of Dallas-based Halliburton that is registered to the Cayman Islands. Following the announcement, Halliburton claimed that the South Pars gas field project in Tehran would be its last project in Iran. According to a BBC report, Halliburton, which took thirty to forty million dollars from its Iranian operations in 2003, "was winding down its work due to a poor business environment."

However, Halliburton has a long history of doing business in Iran, starting as early as 1995, while Vice President Cheney was chief executive of the company. Leopold quotes a February 2001 report published in the Wall Street Journal, "Halliburton Products and Services Ltd., works behind an unmarked door on the ninth floor of a new north Tehran tower block. A brochure declares that the company was registered in 1975 in the Cayman Islands, is based in the Persian Gulf sheikdom of Dubai and is "non-American." But like the sign over the receptionist's head, the brochure bears the company's name and red emblem, and offers services from Halliburton units around the world." Moreover mail sent to the company's offices in Tehran and the Cayman Islands is forwarded directly to its Dallas headquarters.

In an attempt to curtail Halliburton and other U.S. companies from engaging in business dealings with rogue nations such as Libya, Iran, and Syria, an amendment was approved in the Senate on July 26, 2005. The amendment, sponsored by Senator Susan Collins R-Maine, would penalize companies that continue to skirt U.S. law by setting up offshore subsidiaries as a way to legally conduct and avoid U.S. sanctions under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

A letter, drafted by trade groups representing corporate executives, vehemently objected to the amendment, saying it would lead to further hatred and perhaps incite terrorist attacks on the U.S. and "greatly strain relations with the United States primary trading partners." The letter warned that, "Foreign governments view U.S. efforts to dictate their foreign and commercial policy as violations of sovereignty often leading them to adopt retaliatory measures more at odds with U.S. goals."

Collins supports the legislation, stating, "It prevents U.S. corporations from creating a shell company somewhere else in order to do business with rogue, terror-sponsoring nations such as Syria and Iran. The bottom line is that if a U.S. company is evading sanctions to do business with one of these countries, they are helping to prop up countries that support terrorism—most often aimed against America."

UPDATE BY JASON LEOPOLD

During a trip to the Middle East in March 1996, Vice President Dick Cheney told a group of mostly U.S. businessmen that Congress should ease sanctions in Iran and Libya to foster better relationships, a statement that, in hindsight, is completely hypocritical considering the Bush administration's foreign policy.

"Let me make a generalized statement about a trend I see in the U.S. Congress that I find disturbing, that applies not only with respect to the Iranian situation but a number of others as well," Cheney said. "I think we Americans sometimes make mistakes . . . There seems to be an assumption that somehow we know what's best for everybody else and that we are going to use our economic clout to get everybody else to live the way we would like."

Cheney was the chief executive of Halliburton Corporation at the time he uttered those words. It was Cheney who directed Halliburton toward aggressive business dealings with Iran—in violation of U.S. law—in the mid-1990s, which continued through 2005 and is the reason Iran has the capability to enrich weapons-grade uranium.

It was Halliburton's secret sale of uranium enrichment program off the ground, according to a three-year investigation that includes interviews conducted with more than a dozen current and former Halliburton employees.

If the U.S. ends up engaged in a war with Iran in the future, Cheney and Halliburton will bear the brunt of the blame. But this shouldn't come as a shock to anyone who has been following Halliburton's business activities over the past decade. The company has a long, documented history of violating U.S. sanctions and conducting business with so-called rogue nations.

No, what's disturbing about these facts is how little attention it has received from the mainstream media. But the public record speaks for itself, as do the thousands of pages of documents obtained by various federal agencies that show how Halliburton's business dealings in Iran helped fund terrorist activities there—including the country's nuclear enrichment program.

When I asked Wendy Hall, a spokeswoman for Halliburton, a couple of years ago if Halliburton would stop doing business with Iran because of concerns that the company helped fund terrorism she said, "No." "We believe that decisions as to the nature of such governments and their actions are better made by governmental authorities and international entities such as the United Nations as opposed to individual persons or companies," Hall said. "Putting politics aside, we and our affiliates operate in countries to the extent it is legally permissible, where our customers are active as they expect us to provide oilfield services support to their international operations. "We do not always agree with policies or actions of governments in every place that we do business and make no excuses for their behaviors. Due to the long-term nature of our business and the inevitability of political and social change, it is neither prudent nor appropriate for our company to establish our own country-by-country foreign policy."

Halliburton first started doing business in Iran as early as 1995, while Vice President Cheney was chief executive of the company and in possible violation of U.S. sanctions.

An executive order signed by former President Bill Clinton in March 1995 prohibits "new investments (in Iran) by U.S. persons, including commitment of funds or other assets." It also bars U.S. companies from performing services "that would benefit the Iranian oil industry" and provide Iran with the financial means to engage in terrorist activity.

When Bush and Cheney came into office in 2001, their administration decided it would not punish foreign oil and gas companies that invest in those countries. The sanctions imposed on countries like Iran and Libya before Bush became president were blasted by Cheney, who gave frequent speeches on the need for U.S. companies to compete with their foreign competitors, despite claims that those countries may have ties to terrorism.

"I think we'd be better off if we, in fact, backed off those sanctions (on Iran), didn't try to impose secondary boycotts on companies . . . trying to do business over there . . . and instead started to rebuild those relationships," Cheney said during a 1998 business trip to Sydney, Australia, according to Australia's Illawarra Mercury newspaper.

#3 Oceans of the World in Extreme Danger

Source:

Mother Jones, March /April, 2006

Title: The Fate of the Ocean

Author: Julia Whitty

Faculty Evaluator: Dolly Freidel

Student Researcher: Charlene Jones

Oceanic problems once found on a local scale are now pandemic. Data from oceanography, marine biology, meteorology, fishery science, and glaciology reveal that the seas are changing in ominous ways. A vortex of cause and effect wrought by global environmental dilemmas is changing the ocean from a watery horizon with assorted regional troubles to a global system in alarming distress.

According to oceanographers the oceans are one, with currents linking the seas and regulating climate. Sea temperature and chemistry changes, along with contamination and reckless fishing practices, intertwine to imperil the world's largest communal life source.

In 2005, researchers from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography and the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory found clear evidence the ocean is quickly warming. They discovered that the top half-mile of the ocean has warmed dramatically in the past forty years as a result of human-induced greenhouse gases.

One manifestation of this warming is the melting of the Arctic. A shrinking ratio of ice to water has set off a feedback loop, accelerating the increase in water surfaces that promote further warming and melting. With polar waters growing fresher and tropical seas saltier, the cycle of evaporation and precipitation has quickened, further invigorating the greenhouse effect. The ocean's currents are reacting to this freshening, causing a critical conveyor that carries warm upper waters into Europe's northern latitudes to slow by one third since 1957, bolstering fears of a shut down and cataclysmic climate change. This accelerating cycle of cause and effect will be difficult, if not impossible, to reverse.

Atmospheric litter is also altering sea chemistry, as thousands of toxic compounds poison marine creatures and devastate propagation. The ocean has absorbed an estimated 118 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide since the onset of the Industrial Revolution, with 20 to 25 tons being added to the atmosphere daily. Increasing acidity from rising levels of CO₂ is changing the ocean's PH balance. Studies indicate that the shells and skeletons possessed by everything from reef-building corals to mollusks and plankton begin to dissolve within forty-eight hours of exposure to the acidity expected in the ocean by 2050. Coral reefs will almost certainly disappear and, even more worrisome, so will plankton.

Phytoplankton absorb greenhouse gases, manufacture oxygen, and are the primary producers of the marine food web. Mercury pollution enters the food web via coal and chemical industry waste, oxidizes in the atmosphere, and settles to the sea bottom. There it is consumed, delivering mercury to each subsequent link in the food chain, until predators such as tuna or whales carry levels of mercury as much as one million times that of the waters around them. The Gulf of Mexico has the highest mercury levels ever recorded, with an average of ten tons of mercury coming down the Mississippi River every year, and another ton added by offshore drilling.

Along with mercury, the Mississippi delivers nitrogen (often from fertilizers). Nitrogen stimulates plant and bacterial growth in the water that consume oxygen, creating a condition known as hypoxia, or dead zones. Dead zones occur wherever oceanic oxygen is depleted below the level necessary to sustain marine life. A sizable portion of the Gulf of Mexico has become a dead zone—the largest such area in the U.S. and the second largest on the planet, measuring nearly 8,000 square miles in 2001. It is no coincidence that almost all of the nearly 150 (and counting) dead zones on earth lay at the mouths of rivers. Nearly fifty fester off U.S. coasts. While most are caused by river-borne nitrogen, fossil fuel-burning plants help create this condition, as does phosphorous from human sewage and nitrogen emissions from auto exhaust.

Meanwhile, since its peak in 2000, the global wild fish harvest has begun a sharp decline despite progress in seagoing technologies and intensified fishing. So-called efficiencies in fishing have stimulated unprecedented decimation of sealife. Long-lining, in which a single boat sets line across sixty or more miles of ocean, each baited with up to 10,000 hooks, captures at least 25 percent unwanted catch. With an estimated 2 billion hooks set each year, as much as 88 billion pounds of life a year is thrown back to the ocean either dead or dying. Additionally, trawlers drag nets across every square inch of the continental shelves every two years. Fishing the sea floor like a bulldozer, they level an area 150 times larger than all forest clearcuts each year and destroy seafloor ecosystems. Aquaculture is no better, since three pounds of wild fish are caught to feed every pound of farmed salmon. A 2003 study out of Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia concluded, based on data dating from the 1950s, that in the wake of decades of such onslaught only 10 percent of all large fish (tuna, swordfish) and ground fish (cod, hake, flounder) are left anywhere in the ocean.

Other sea nurseries are also threatened. Fifteen percent of seagrass beds have disappeared in the last ten years, depriving juvenile fish, manatees, and sea turtles of critical habitats. Kelp beds are also dying at alarming rates.

While at no time in history has science taught more about how the earth's life-support systems work, the maelstrom of human assault on the seas continues. If human failure in governance of the world's largest public domain is not reversed quickly, the ocean will soon and surely reach a point of no return.

Comment:

After release of the Pew Oceans Commission report, U.S. media, most notably The Washington Post and National Public Radio in 2003 and 2004, covered several stories regarding impending threats to the ocean, recommendations for protection, and President Bush's response. However, media treatment of the collective acceleration of ocean damage and cross-pollination of harm was left to Julia Whitty in her lengthy feature. In April of 2006, Time Magazine presented an in-depth article about earth at "the tipping point," describing the planet as an overworked organism fighting the consequences of global climate change on shore and sea. In her Mother Jones article, Whitty presented a look at global illness by directly examining the ocean as earth's circulatory, respiratory, and reproductive system.

Following up on "The Last Days of the Ocean," Mother Jones has produced "Ocean Voyager," an innovative web-based adventure that includes videos, audio interviews with key players, webcams, and links to informative web pages created by more than twenty organizations. The site is a tour of various ocean trouble spots around the world, which highlights solutions and suggests actions that can be taken to help make a difference.

UPDATE BY JULIA WHITTY

This story is awash with new developments. Scientists are currently publishing at an unprecedented rate their observations—not just predictions—on the rapid changes underway on our ocean planet. First and foremost, the year 2005 turned out to be the warmest year on record. This reinforces other data showing the earth has grown hotter in the past 400 years, and possibly in the past 2,000 years. A study out of the National Center for Atmospheric Research found ocean temperatures in the tropical North Atlantic in 2005 nearly two degrees Fahrenheit above normal; this turned out to be the predominant catalyst for the monstrous 2005 hurricane season—the most violent season ever seen.

The news from the polar ice is no better. A joint NASA/University of Kansas study in Science (02/06) reveals that Greenland's glaciers are surging towards the sea and melting more than twice as fast as ten years ago. This further endangers the critical balance of the North Atlantic meridional overturning circulation, which holds our climate stable. Meanwhile, in March, the British Antarctic Survey announced their findings that the "global warming signature" of the Antarctic is three times larger than what we're seeing elsewhere on Earth—the first proof of broadscale climate change across the southern continent.

Since "The Fate of the Ocean" went to press in Mother Jones magazine, evidence of the politicization of science in the global climate wars has also emerged. In January 2006 NASA's top climate scientist, James Hansen, accused the agency of trying to censor his work. Four months later, Hansen's accusations were echoed by scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as well as by a U.S. Geological Survey scientist working at a NOAA lab, who claimed their work on global climate change was being censored by their departments, as part of a policy of intimidation by the anti-science Bush administration.

Problems for the ocean's wildlife are escalating too. In 2005, biologists from the U.S. Minerals Management Service found polar bears drowned in the waters off Alaska, apparent victims of the disappearing ice. In 2006, U.S. Geological Survey Alaska Science Center researchers found polar bears killing and eating each other in areas where sea ice failed to form that year, leaving the bears bereft of food. In response, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources revised their Red List for polar bears—upgrading them from "conservation dependent" to "vulnerable." In February, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced it would begin reviewing whether polar bears need protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Since my report, the leaders of two influential commissions—the Pew Oceans Commission and the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy—gave Congress, the Bush administration, and our nation's governors a "D+" grade for not moving quickly enough to address their recommendations for restoring health to our nation's oceans.

Most of these stories remain out of view, sunk with cement boots in the backwaters of scientific journals. The media remains unable to discern good science from bad, and gives equal credence to both, when they give any at all. The story of our declining ocean world, and our own future, develops beyond the ken of the public, who forge ahead without altering behavior or goals, and unimpeded by foresight.

#4 Hunger and Homelessness Increasing in the US

Sources:

The New Standard, December 2005

Title: "New Report Shows Increase in Urban Hunger, Homelessness"

Author: Brendan Coyne

OneWorld.net, March, 2006

Title: "US Plan to Eliminate Survey of Needy Families Draws Fire "

Author: Abid Aslam

Faculty Evaluator: Myrna Goodman

Student Researcher: Arlene Ward and Brett Forest

The number of hungry and homeless people in U.S. cities continued to grow in 2005, despite claims of an improved economy. Increased demand for vital services rose as needs of the most destitute went unmet, according to the annual U.S. Conference of Mayors Report, which has documented increasing need since its 1982 inception.

The study measures instances of emergency food and housing assistance in twenty-four U.S. cities and utilizes supplemental information from the U.S. Census and Department of Labor. More than three-quarters of cities surveyed reported increases in demand for food and housing, especially among families. Food aid requests expanded by 12 percent in 2005, while aid center and food bank resources grew by only 7 percent. Service providers estimated 18 percent of requests went unattended. Housing followed a similar trend, as a majority of cities reported an increase in demand for emergency shelter, often going unmet due to lack of resources.

As urban hunger and homelessness increases in America, the Bush administration is planning to eliminate a U.S. survey widely used to improve federal and state programs for low-income and retired Americans, reports Abid Aslam.

President Bush's proposed budget for fiscal 2007, which begins October 2006, includes a Commerce Department plan to eliminate the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). The proposal marks at least the third White House attempt in as many years to do away with federal data collection on politically prickly economic issues.

Founded in 1984, the Census Bureau survey follows American families for a number of years and monitors their use of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Social Security, Medicaid, unemployment insurance, child care, and other health, social service, and education programs.

Some 415 economists and social scientists signed a letter and sent it to Congress, shortly after the February release of Bush's federal budget proposal, urging that the survey be fully funded as it "is the only large-scale survey explicitly designed to analyze the impact of a wide variety of government programs on the well being of American families."

Heather Boushey, economist at the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Economic and Policy Research told Abid Aslam, "We need to know what the effects of these programs are on American families . . . SIPP is designed to do just that." Boushey added that the survey has proved invaluable in tracking the effects of changes in government programs. So much so that the 1996 welfare reform law specifically mentioned the survey as the best means to evaluate the law's effectiveness.

Supporters of the survey elimination say the program costs too much at \$40 million per year. They would kill it in September and eventually replace it with a scaled-down version that would run to \$9.2 million in development costs during the coming fiscal year. Actual data collection would begin in 2009.

Defenders of the survey counter that the cost is justified as SIPP "provides a constant stream of in-depth data that enables government, academic, and independent researchers to evaluate the effectiveness and improve the efficiency of several hundred billion dollars in spending on

social programs," including homeless shelters and emergency food aid.

UPDATE BY ABID ASLAM

As of the end of May 2006, hundreds of economists and social scientists remain engaged in a bid to save the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). Ideologically diverse users describe the survey as pioneering and say it has helped to improve the uptake and performance of, and to gauge the effects on American families of changes in public provisions ranging from Medicaid to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and school lunch programs.

A few journalists took notice because users of the data, including the Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), which spearheaded the effort to save SIPP, chose to make some noise. By most accounts, the matter was a simple fight over money: the administration was out to cut any hint of flesh from bureaucratic budgets (perhaps to feed its foreign policy pursuits) but users of the survey wanted the money spent on SIPP because, in their view, the program is valuable and no feasible alternative exists or has been proposed.

That debate remains to be resolved. Lobbyists expect more legislative action in June and among them, CEPR remains available to provide updates. But is it just an isolated budget fight? This is the third time in as many years that the Bush administration has tried—and in the previous two cases, failed under pressure from users and advocates—to strip funding for awkward research. In 2003, it had tried to kill the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Mass Layoff Statistics report, which detailed where workplaces with more than fifty employees closed and what kinds of workers were affected. In 2004 and 2005, it had attempted to drop questions on the hiring and firing of women from employment data collected by the BLS. Hardly big-ticket items on the federal budget, the mass layoffs reports provided federal and state social service agencies with data crucial for planning even as it chronicled job losses and the so-called "jobless recovery." The women's questionnaire uncovered employment discrimination.

In other words, SIPP and the BLS programs are politically prickly. They highlight that, regardless of what some politicians and executives might say, economic and social problems persist and involve real people whose real needs remain to be met. This calls to mind the old line about there being three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics. To be convincing, they must be broadly consistent. If the numbers don't support the narrative, something simply must give. With the livelihoods, life chances, and rights of millions of citizens at stake, these are more than stories about arcane budget wrangles.

#5 High-Tech Genocide in Congo

Sources:

The Taylor Report, March 28, 2005

Title: "The World's Most Neglected Emergency: Phil Taylor talks to Keith Harmon Snow"

Earth First! Journal, August 2005

Title: "High-Tech Genocide"

Author: Sprocket

Z Magazine, March 1, 2006

Title: "Behind the Numbers: Untold Suffering in the Congo"

Authors: Keith Harmon Snow and David Barouski

Faculty Evaluator: Thom Lough

Student Researchers: Deyango Harris and Daniel Turner

The world's most neglected emergency, according to the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, is the ongoing tragedy of the Congo, where six to seven million have died since 1996 as a consequence of invasions and wars sponsored by western powers trying to gain control of the region's mineral wealth. At stake is control of natural resources that are sought by U.S. corporations—diamonds, tin, copper, gold, and more significantly, coltan and niobium, two minerals necessary for production of cell phones and other high-tech electronics; and cobalt, an element essential to nuclear, chemical, aerospace, and defense industries.

Columbo-tantalite, i.e. coltan, is found in three-billion-year-old soils like those in the Rift Valley region of Africa. The tantalum extracted from the coltan ore is used to make tantalum capacitors, tiny components that are essential in managing the flow of current in electronic devices. Eighty percent of the world's coltan reserves are found in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Niobium is another high-tech mineral with a similar story.

Sprocket reports that the high-tech boom of the 1990s caused the price of coltan to skyrocket to nearly \$300 per pound. In 1996 U.S.-sponsored Rwandan and Ugandan forces entered eastern DRC. By 1998 they seized control and moved into strategic mining areas. The Rwandan Army was soon making \$20 million or more a month from coltan mining. Though the price of coltan has fallen, Rwanda maintains its monopoly on coltan and the coltan trade in DRC. Reports of rampant human rights abuses pour out of this mining region.

Coltan makes its way out of the mines to trading posts where foreign traders buy the mineral and ship it abroad, mostly through Rwanda. Firms with the capability turn coltan into the coveted tantalum powder, and then sell the magic powder to Nokia, Motorola, Compaq, Sony, and other manufacturers for use in cell phones and other products.

Keith Harmon Snow emphasizes that any analysis of the geopolitics in the Congo, and the reasons for why the Congolese people have suffered a virtually unending war since 1996, requires an understanding of the organized crime perpetrated through multinational businesses. The tragedy of the Congo conflict has been instituted by invested corporations, their proxy armies, and the supra-governmental bodies that support them.

The process is tied to major multinational corporations at all levels. These include U.S.-based Cabot Corp. and OM Group; HC Starck of Germany; and Nigncxia of China—corporations that have been linked by a United Nations Panel of Experts to the atrocities in DRC. Extortion, rape, massacres, and bribery are all part of the criminal networks set up and maintained by huge multinational companies. Yet as mining in the Congo by western companies proceeds at an unprecedented rate—some \$6 million in raw cobalt alone exiting DRC daily—multinational mining companies rarely get mentioned in human rights reports.

Sprocket notes that Sam Bodman, CEO of Cabot during the coltan boom, was appointed in December 2004 to serve as President Bush's Secretary of Energy. Under Bodman's leadership from 1987 to 2000, Cabot was one of the U.S.'s largest polluters, accounting for 60,000 tons of airborne toxic emissions annually. Snow adds that Sony's current Executive Vice President and General Counsel Nicole Seligman was a former legal adviser for Bill Clinton. Many who held positions of power in the Clinton administration moved into high positions with Sony.

The article "Behind the Numbers," coauthored by Snow and David Barouski, details a web of U.S. corruption and conflicts of interest between mining corporations such as Barrick Gold (see Story #21) and the U.S. government under George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, as well as U.S. arms dealers such as Simax; U.S. defense companies such as Lockheed Martin, Halliburton, Northrop Grumman, GE, Boeing, Raytheon, and Bechtel; "humanitarian" organizations such as CARE, funded by Lockheed Martin, and International Rescue Committee, whose Board of Overseers includes Henry Kissinger; "Conservation" interests that provide the vanguard for western penetration into Central Africa; and of course, PR firms and news outlets such as the New York Times.

Sprocket closes his article by noting that it's not surprising this information isn't included in the literature and manuals that come with your cell phones, pagers, computers, or diamond jewelry. Perhaps, he suggests, mobile phones should be outfitted with stickers that read: "Warning! This device was created with raw materials from central Africa. These materials are rare, nonrenewable, were sold to fund a bloody war of occupation, and have caused the virtual elimination of endangered species. Have a nice day." People need to realize, he says, that there is a direct link between the gadgets that make our lives more convenient and sophisticated—and the reality of the violence, turmoil, and destruction that plague our world.

UPDATE BY SPROCKET

There are large fortunes to be made in the manufacturing of high-tech electronics and in selling convenience and entertainment to American consumers, but at what cost?

Conflicts in Africa are often shrouded with misinformation, while U.S. and other western interests are routinely downplayed or omitted by the corporate media. The June 5, 2006, cover story of Time, entitled "Congo: The Hidden Toll of the World's Deadliest War," was no exception. Although the article briefly mentioned coltan and its use in cell phones and other electronic devices, no mention was made of the pivotal role this and other raw materials found in the region play in the conflict. The story painted the ongoing war as a pitiable and horrible tragedy, avoiding the corporations and foreign governments that have created the framework for the violence and those which have strong financial and political interests in the conflict's outcome.

In an article written by Johann Hari and published by The Hamilton Spectator on May 13, 2006, the corporate media took a step toward addressing the true reason for the tremendous body count that continues to pile up in the Democratic Republic of Congo: "The only change over the decades has been the resources snatched for Western consumption—rubber under the Belgians, diamonds under Mobutu, coltan and caesium today."

Most disturbing is that in the corporate media, the effect of this conflict on nonhuman life is totally overlooked. Even with a high-profile endangered species like the Eastern lowland gorilla hanging in the balance, almost driven to extinction through poaching and habitat loss by displaced villagers and warring factions, the environmental angle of the story is rarely considered.

The next step in understanding the exploitation and violence wrought upon the inhabitants of central Africa, fueled by the hunger for high-tech toys in the U.S., is to expose corporations like Sony and Motorola. These corporations don't want protest movements tarnishing their reputations. Nor do they want to call attention to all of the gorillas coltan kills, and the guerrillas it feeds.

It is time for our culture to start seeing more value in living beings, whether gorillas or humans, than in our disposable high-tech gadgets such as cell phones. It is time to steal back a more compassionate existence from the corporate plutocracy that creates destructive markets and from the media system that has manufactured our consent.

It is not just a question of giving up cell phones (though that would be a great start). We must question the appropriation of our planet in the form of a resource to be consumed, rather than as a home and community to be lived in.

"High-Tech Genocide" and other articles about cell phone technology are available by contacting the author: sprocket@riseup.net.

UPDATE BY KEITH HARMON SNOW

War for the control of the Democratic Republic of Congo—what should be the richest country in the world—began in Uganda in the 1980s, when now Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni shot his way to power with the backing of Buckingham Palace, the White House, and Tel Aviv behind him.

Paul Kagame, now president of Rwanda, served as Museveni's Director of Military Intelligence. Kagame later trained at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, before the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)—backed by Roger Winter, the U.S. Committee on Refugees, and the others above—invaded Rwanda. The RPF destabilized and then secured Rwanda. This coup d'état is today misunderstood as the "Rwanda Genocide." What played out in Rwanda in 1994 is now playing out in Darfur, Sudan; regime change is the goal, "genocide" is the tool of propaganda used to manipulate and disinform.

In 1996, Paul Kagame and Yoweri Museveni, with the Pentagon behind them, launched their covert war against Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko and his western backers. A decade later, there are 6 or 7 million dead, at the very least, and the war in Congo (Zaire) continues.

If you are reading the mainstream newspapers or listening to National Public Radio, you are contributing to your own mental illness, no matter how astute you believe yourself to be at "balancing" or "deciphering" the code.

News reports in Time Magazine ("The Deadliest War In The World," June 6, 2006) and on CNN ("Rape, Brutality Ignored to Aid Congo Peace," May 26, 2006) that appeared at the time of this writing are being interpreted by conscious people to be truth-telling at last. However, these are perfect examples filled with hidden deceptions and manipulations.

For accuracy and truth on Central Africa, look to people like Robin Philpot (Imperialism Dies Hard), Wayne Madsen (Genocide and Covert Operations in Africa, 1993–1999), Amos Wilson (The Falsification of Consciousness), Charles Onana (The Secrets of the Rwanda Genocide—Investigation on the Mysteries of a President), Antoine Lokongo (www.congopanorama.info), Phil Taylor (www.taylor-report.com), Christopher Black ("Racism, Murder and Lies in Rwanda"). World War 4 Report has published my reports, but they are inconsistent in their attention to accuracy, and would as quickly adopt the propaganda, and have done so at times.

It is possible to collect little fragments of truth here and there—never counting on the mainstream system for this—but one must beware the deceptions and bias. In this vein, the elite business journal Africa Confidential is often very revealing. Some facts can be gleaned from www.DigitalCongo.net and Africa Research Bulletin.

Professor David Gibb's book *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Case of the Congo Crises* is an excellent background that identifies players still active today (especially Maurice Tempelman and his diamonds interests connected to the Democratic Party). Ditto *King Leopold's Ghost* by Adam Hochschild, but—exemplifying the expedience of "interests"—remember that Hochschild never tells you, the reader, that his father ran a mining company in Congo. Almost ALL reportage is expedient; one needs take care their propensity to be deceived.

Professor Ruth Mayer's book *Artificial Africas: Colonial Images in the Times of Globalization* is a particularly poignant articulation of the means by which the "media" system distorts and manipulates all things African. And, never forget www.AllThingsPass.com.

Also hoping to correct the record and reveal the truth, the International Forum for Truth and Justice in the Great Lakes of Africa (www.veritasrwandaforum.org), based in Spain, and co-founded by Nobel Prize nominee Juan Carrero Seralegui, is involved in a groundbreaking lawsuit charging massive crimes against humanity and acts of genocide were committed by the now government of Rwanda.

#6 Federal Whistleblower Protection in Jeopardy

Source:

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility website

Titles: "Whistleblowers Get Help from Bush Administration," December 5, 2005

"Long-Delayed Investigation of Special Counsel Finally Begins," October 18, 2005

"Back Door Rollback of Federal Whistleblower Protections," September 22, 2005

Author: Jeff Ruch

Faculty Evaluator: Barbara Bloom

Student Researchers: Caitlyn Peele and Sara-Joy Christenson

Special Counsel Scott Bloch, appointed by President Bush in 2004, is overseeing the virtual elimination of federal whistleblower rights in the U.S. government.

The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC), the agency that is supposed to protect federal employees who blow the whistle on waste, fraud, and abuse is dismissing hundreds of cases while advancing almost none. According to the Annual Report for 2004 (which was not released until the end of first quarter fiscal year 2006) less than 1.5 percent of whistleblower claims were referred for investigation while more than 1000 reports were closed before they were even opened. Only eight claims were found to be substantiated, and one of those included the theft of a desk, while another included attendance violations. Favorable outcomes have declined 24 percent overall, and this is all in the first year that the new special counsel, Scott Bloch, has been in office.

Bloch, who has received numerous complaints since he took office, defends his first thirteen months in office by pointing to a decline in backlogged cases. Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) Executive Director Jeff Ruch says, ". . . backlogs and delays are bad, but they are not as bad as simply dumping the cases altogether." According to figures released by Bloch in February of 2005 more than

470 claims of retaliation were dismissed, and not once had he affirmatively represented a whistleblower. In fact, in order to speed dismissals, Bloch instituted a rule forbidding his staff from contacting a whistleblower if their disclosure was deemed incomplete or ambiguous. Instead, the OSC would dismiss the matter. As a result, hundreds of whistleblowers never had a chance to justify their cases. Ruch notes that these numbers are limited to only the backlogged cases and do not include new ones.

On March 3, 2005, OSC staff members joined by a coalition of whistleblower protection and civil rights organizations filed a complaint against Bloch. His own employees accused him of violating the very rules he is supposed to be enforcing. The complaint specifies instances of illegal gag orders, cronyism, invidious discrimination, and retaliation by forcing the resignation of one-fifth of the OSC headquarters legal and investigative staff. The complaint was filed with the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency, which took no action on the case for seven months. PEER was one of the groups who co-filed the complaint against Bloch and Ruch wants to know, "Who watches the watchdogs?"

This is the third probe into Bloch's operation in less than two years in office. Both the Government Accountability Office and a U.S. Senate subcommittee have ongoing investigations into mass dismissals of whistleblower cases, crony hires, and Bloch's targeting of gay employees for removal while refusing to investigate cases involving discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

The Department of Labor has also gotten on board in a behind-the-scenes maneuver to cancel whistleblower protections. If it succeeds, the Labor Department will dismiss claims by federal workers who report violations under the Clean Air Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. General Counsel for PEER, Richard Condit says, "Federal workers in agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency function as the public's eyes and ears . . . the Labor Department is moving to shut down one of the few legal avenues left to whistleblowers." The Labor Department is trying to invoke the ancient doctrine of sovereign immunity, which says that the government cannot be sued without its consent. The Secretary of Labor's Administrative Review Board recently invited the EPA to raise a sovereign immunity defense in a case where a woman was trying to enforce earlier victories. Government Accountability Project General Counsel Joanne Royce sums up major concerns: "We do not want public servants wondering whether they will lose their jobs for acting against pollution violations of politically well-connected interests."

UPDATE BY JEFF RUCH

With the decline in oversight by the U.S. Congress and the uneven quality of investigative journalism, outlets such as the U.S. Office of Special Counsel become even more important channels for governmental transparency. Unfortunately, under the Bush-appointed Special Counsel, this supposed haven for whistleblowers has become a beacon of false hope for thousands.

Each year, hundreds of civil servants who witness problems ranging from threats to public safety to waste of tax funds find that their reports of wrongdoing are stonewalled by the Office of Special Counsel (OSC). Consequently, these firsthand accounts of malfeasance are not investigated and almost uniformly never reach the public's attention.

The importance of this state of affairs is that the actual workings of federal agencies are becoming more shrouded in secrecy and disinformation. Americans are less informed about their government and less able to be in connection with the people who actually work for them—the public servants.

In a recent development, employees within the OSC have filed a whistleblower complaint about the Special Counsel, the person who is supposed to be the chief whistleblower defender. After several months delay, the Bush White House assigned this complaint to the Inspector General for the Office of Personnel Management for review. This supposedly independent investigation has just begun in earnest, nearly one year after the complaint was filed.

Also, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report in May 2006 blasting the Bush-appointed Special Counsel for ignoring competitive bidding rules in handing out consultant contracts. GAO also recommended creating an independent channel whereby Office of Special Counsel employees can blow the whistle on further abuses by the Special Counsel.

In another recent development, PEER's lawsuit against the Special Counsel to force release of documents concerning crony hires has produced more, heavily redacted documents showing that these sole source consultants apparently did no identifiable work. Ironically, the PEER suit was filed under the Freedom of Information Act, a law that the Special Counsel is also charged with policing.

And in a new annual report to Congress, OSC (stung by criticism about declining performance) has, for the first time, stopped disclosing the number of whistleblower cases where it obtained a favorable outcome. Consequently, it is impossible to tell if anyone is actually being helped by the agency.

PEER's web page on the Office of Special Counsel has posted all developments since this story and also allows a reader to trace the story's genesis.

7 US Operatives Torture Detainees to Death in Afghanistan and Iraq

Sources:

American Civil Liberties Website, October 24, 2005

Title: "US Operatives Killed Detainees During Interrogations in Afghanistan and Iraq"

Tom Dispatch.com, March 5, 2006

Title: "Tracing the Trail of Torture: Embedding Torture as Policy from Guantanamo to Iraq"

Author: Dahr Jamal

Faculty Evaluator: Rabi Michael Robinson

Student Researchers: Michael B Januleski Jr. and Jessica Rodas

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) released documents of forty-four autopsies held in Afghanistan and Iraq October 25, 2005.

Twenty-one of those deaths were listed as homicides. The documents show that detainees died during and after interrogations by Navy SEALs, Military Intelligence, and Other Government Agency (OGA).

"These documents present irrefutable evidence that U.S. operatives tortured detainees to death during interrogation," said Amrit Singh, an attorney with the ACLU. "The public has a right to know who authorized the use of torture techniques and why these deaths have been covered up."

The Department of Defense released the autopsy reports in response to a Freedom of Information Act request filed by the ACLU, the Center for Constitutional Rights, Physicians for Human Rights, Veterans for Common Sense, and Veterans for Peace.

One of forty-four U.S. military autopsy reports reads as follows: "Final Autopsy Report: DOD 003164, (Detainee) Died as a result of asphyxia (lack of oxygen to the brain) due to strangulation as evidenced by the recently fractured hyoid bone in the neck and soft tissue hemorrhage extending downward to the level of the right thyroid cartilage. Autopsy revealed bone fracture, rib fractures, contusions in mid abdomen, back and buttocks extending to the left flank, abrasions, lateral buttocks. Contusions, back of legs and knees; abrasions on knees, left fingers and encircling to left wrist. Lacerations and superficial cuts, right 4th and 5th fingers. Also, blunt force injuries, predominately recent contusions (bruises) on the torso and lower extremities. Abrasions on left wrist are consistent with use of restraints. No evidence of defense injuries or natural disease. Manner of death is homicide. Whitehorse Detainment Facility, Nasiriyah, Iraq."

Another report from the ACLU indicates: "a 27-year-old Iraqi male died while being interrogated by Navy Seals on April 5, 2004, in Mosul, Iraq. During his confinement he was hooded, flex-cuffed, sleep deprived and subjected to hot and cold environmental conditions, including the use of cold water on his body and head. The exact cause of death was 'undetermined' although the autopsy stated that hypothermia may have contributed to his death."

An overwhelming majority of the so-called "natural deaths" covered in the autopsies were attributed to "arteriosclerotic cardiovascular disease" (heart attack). Persons under extreme stress and pain may have heart attacks as a result of the circumstances of their detentions.

The Associated Press carried the story of the ACLU charges on their wire service. However, a thorough check of LexisNexis and ProQuest electronic data bases, using the keywords ACLU and autopsy, showed that at least 95 percent of the daily papers in the U.S. did not bother to

pick up the story. The Los Angeles Times covered the story on page A4 with a 635-word report headlined "Autopsies Support Abuse Allegations." Fewer than a dozen other daily newspapers including: Bangor Daily News, Maine, page 8; Telegraph-Herald, Dubuque, Iowa, page 6; Charleston Gazette, page 5; Advocate, Baton Rouge, page 11; and a half dozen others actually covered the story. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the Seattle Times buried the story inside general Iraq news articles. USA Today posted the story on their website. MSNBC posted the story to their website, but apparently did not consider it newsworthy enough to air on television.

Janis Karpinski, U.S. Brigadier General Commander of the 800th Military Police Brigade, was in charge of seventeen prison facilities in Iraq during the Abu Ghraib scandal in 2003. Karpinski testified January 21, 2006 in New York City at the International Commission of Inquiry on Crimes against Humanity Committed by the Bush administration. Karpinski stated: "General [Ricardo] Sanchez [commander of coalition ground forces in Iraq] signed the eight-page memorandum authorizing a laundry list of harsh techniques in interrogations to include specific use of dogs and muzzled dogs with his specific permission." Karpinski went on to claim that Major General Geoffrey Miller, who had been "specifically selected by the Secretary of Defense to go to Guantanamo Bay and run the interrogations operations," was dispatched to Iraq by the Bush administration to "work with the military intelligence personnel to teach them new and improved interrogation techniques." When asked how far up the chain of command responsibility for the torture orders for Abu Ghraib went, Karpinski said, "The Secretary of Defense would not have authorized without the approval of the Vice President."

UPDATE BY DAHR JAMAIL

This story, published in March 2006, was merely a snapshot of the ongoing and worsening policy of the Bush administration regarding torture. And not just time, but places show snapshots of the criminal policy of the current administration—Iraq, like Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan, and other "secret" U.S. military detention centers in Eastern European countries are physical examples of an ongoing policy which breaches both international law and our very constitution.

But breaking international and domestic law has not been a concern of an administration led by a "president" who has claimed "authority" to disobey over 750 laws passed by Congress. In fact, when this same individual does things like signing a secret order in 2002 which authorized the National Security Agency to violate the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act by wiretapping the phones of U.S. citizens, and then goes on to allow the secret collection of the telephone records of tens of millions of Americans, torture is but one portion of this corrupted picture. This is a critical ongoing story, not just because it violates international and domestic law, but this state-sanctioned brutality, bankrupt of any morality and decency, is already coming back home to haunt Americans. When U.S. soldiers are captured in Iraq or another foreign country, what basis does the U.S. have now to ask for their fair and humane treatment? And with police brutality and draconian "security" measures becoming more real within the U.S. with each passing day, why wouldn't these policies be visited upon U.S. citizens?

While torture is occasionally glimpsed by mainstream media outlets such as the Washington Post and Time Magazine, we must continue to rely on groups like the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York City, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International who cover the subject thoroughly, persistently, and unlike (of course) any corporate media outlets.

Since I wrote this story, there continues to be a deluge of information and proof of the Bush administration continuing and even widening their policy of torture, as well as their rendering prisoners to countries which have torturing human beings down to a science.

All of this, despite the fact that U.S. laws prohibit torture absolutely, clearly stating that torture is never, ever permitted, even in a time of war.

To stay current on this critical topic, please visit the following websites regularly:

<http://www.amnesty.org/>

<http://www.hrw.org/>

<http://www.ccr-ny.org/v2/home.asp>

#8 Pentagon Exempt from Freedom of Information Act

Sources:

New Standard, May 6, 2005

Title: "Pentagon Seeks Greater Immunity from Freedom of Information"

Author: Michelle Chen

Newspaper Association of America website, posted December 2005

Title: "FOIA Exemption Granted to Federal Agency"

Community Evaluator: Tim Ogburn

Student Researcher: Rachele Cooper and Brian Murphy

The Department of Defense has been granted exemption from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). In December 2005, Congress passed the 2006 Defense Authorization Act which renders Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) "operational files" fully immune to FOIA requests, the main mechanism by which watchdog groups, journalists and individuals can access federal documents. Of particular concern to critics of the Defense Authorization Act is the DIA's new right to thwart access to files that may reveal human rights violations tied to ongoing "counterterrorism" efforts.

The rule could, for instance, frustrate the work of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and other organizations that have relied on FOIA to uncover more than 30,000 documents on the U.S. military's involvement in the torture and mistreatment of foreign detainees in Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, and Iraq—including the Abu Ghraib scandal.

Several key documents that have surfaced in the advocacy organization's expansive research originate from DIA files, including a 2004 memorandum containing evidence that U.S. military interrogators brutalized detainees in Baghdad, as well as a report describing the abuse of Iraqi detainees as violations of international human rights law.

According to Jameel Jaffer, an ACLU attorney involved in the ongoing torture investigations, "If the Defense Intelligence Agency can rely on exception or exemption from the FOIA, then documents such as those that we obtained this last time around will not become public at all." The end result of such an exemption, he told The New Standard, is that "abuse is much more likely to take place, because there's not public oversight of Defense Intelligence Agency activity."

Jaffer added that because the DIA conducts investigations relating to other national security-related agencies, documents covered by the exemption could contain critical evidence of how other parts of the military operate as well.

The ACLU recently battled the FOIA exemption rule of the CIA in a lawsuit over the agency's attempt to withhold information concerning alleged abuse of Iraqi detainees. The CIA's defense centered on the invocation of FOIA exemption, and although a federal judge ultimately overrode the rule, Jaffer cited the case as evidence of "exemption creep"—the gradual stretching of the law to further shield federal agencies from public scrutiny.

According to language in the Defense Authorization Act, an operational file can be any information related to "the conduct of foreign intelligence or counterintelligence operations or intelligence or security liaison arrangements or information exchanges with foreign governments or their intelligence or security services."

Critics warn that such vague bureaucratic language is a green light for the DIA to thwart a wide array of legitimate information requests without proper justification. Steven Aftergood, director of the research organization Project on Government Secrecy, warns, "If it falls in the category of 'operational files,' it's over before it begins."

Thomas Blanton, director of the National Security Archive, adds, "These exemptions create a black hole into which the bureaucracy can drive just about any kind of information it wants to. And you can bet that Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib-style information is what DIA and others would want to hide."

The Newspaper Association of America reports that, due to lobbying efforts of the Sunshine in Government Initiative and other open government

advocates, congressional negotiators imposed an unprecedented two-year "sunset" date on the Pentagon's FOIA exemption, ending in December 2007.

Update by Michelle Chen:

The Defense Intelligence Agency, the intelligence arm of the Department of Defense, has been a source for critical information on the Pentagon's foreign operations as well as the DIA's observations of the conduct of other branches of the military. Its request for immunity from the Freedom of Information Act last year was not the first attempt to shield its data from members of the public, but it did come at a time that the government's anti-terror fervor was beginning to crest.

Open-government groups warn that such an exemption from FOIA requests, which the Central Intelligence Agency already enjoys, would close off a major channel for information in a government bureaucracy already riddled with both formal and informal barriers of secrecy. The Pentagon's request alarmed groups like the ACLU, which has relied heavily on such data to build cases regarding torture and abuse of detainees in Iraq. (<http://www.aclu.org/torturefoia/released/042005/>).

Since the article was published, the language proposed for the Defense Department budget for FY 2006 was adopted. (The public print of the bill can be read at the GPO website here, buried on page 472: http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109_cong_bills&docid=f:s1042pp.txt.pdf.)

The bill specifically refers to the immunity of "operational files," though this is somewhat ambiguously defined.

Another development in this issue area over the past year is that secrecy and intelligence gathering have become intense domestic political issues. As a result, heightened public attention to the gradual rollback on open-government laws is beginning to stir some congressional action in the form of hearings and investigative reports, not just related to classified information per se but also the new quasi-classified categories that have cropped up since 9/11 (<http://www.fas.org/sgp/congress/2006/index.html>).

Earlier this year, the Pentagon initiated a department-wide review of FOIA practices, though it is unclear whether this internal evaluation will lead to actual changes in how information is disclosed or withheld from public purview. (http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/foi/DoD_FOIA_Review.pdf).

For more on this issue, see:

The Project on Government Secrecy, a watchdog group run by the American Federation of Scientists: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/congress/2006/index.html>

The National Security Archives at George Washington University, which has an extensive collection of FOIA documents and has issued numerous reports and studies on government secrecy and FOIA policies: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/foia.html>

#9 The World Bank Funds Israel-Palestine Wall

Sources:

Left Turn Issue #18

Title: "Cementing Israeli Apartheid: The Role of World Bank"

Author: Jamal Juma'

Al-Jazeera, March 9, 2005

Title: "US Free Trade Agreements Split Arab Opinion"

Author: Linda Heard

Community Evaluator: April Hurley, MD

Student Researchers: Bailey Malone and Lisa Dobias

Despite the 2004 International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision that called for tearing down the Wall and compensating affected communities, construction of the Wall has accelerated. The route of the barrier runs deep into Palestinian territory, aiding the annexation of Israeli settlements and the breaking of Palestinian territorial continuity. The World Bank's vision of "economic development," however, evades any discussion of the Wall's illegality.

The World Bank has meanwhile outlined the framework for a Palestinian Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) policy in their most recent report on Palestine published in December of 2004, "Stagnation or Revival: Israeli Disengagement and Palestinian Economic Prospects." Central to World Bank proposals are the construction of massive industrial zones to be financed by the World Bank and other donors and controlled by the Israeli Occupation. Built on Palestinian land around the Wall, these industrial zones are envisaged as forming the basis of export-orientated economic development. Palestinians imprisoned by the Wall and dispossessed of land can be put to work for low wages. The post-Wall MEFTA vision includes complete control over Palestinian movement. The report proposes high-tech military gates and checkpoints along the Wall, through which Palestinians and exports can be conveniently transported and controlled. A supplemental "transfer system" of walled roads and tunnels will allow Palestinian workers to be funneled to their jobs, while being simultaneously denied access to their land. Sweatshops will be one of very few possibilities of earning a living for Palestinians confined to disparate ghettos throughout the West Bank. The World Bank states:

"In an improved operating environment, Palestinian entrepreneurs and foreign investors will look for well-serviced industrial land and supporting infrastructure. They will also seek a regulatory regime with a minimum of 'red tape' and with clear procedures for conducting business. Industrial Estates (IEs), particularly those on the border between Palestinian and Israeli territory, can fulfill this need and thereby play an important role in supporting export based growth."

Jamal Juma' notes that the "red tape" which the World Bank refers to can be presumed to mean trade unions, a minimum wage, good working conditions, environmental protection, and other workers' rights that will be more flexible than the ones in the "developed" world. The World Bank explicitly states that current wages of Palestinians are too high for the region and "compromise the international competitiveness" even though wages are only a quarter of the average in Israel. Juma' warns that on top of a military occupation and forced expulsion, Palestinians are to be subjects of an economic colonialism.

These industrial zones will clearly benefit Israel abroad where goods "Made in Palestine" have more favorable trade conditions in international markets. IPS reporter Emad Mekay, in February 2005, revealed the World Bank's plan to partially fund Palestinian MEFTA infrastructure with loans to Palestine. Israel is not eligible for World Bank lending because of its high per capita income, but Palestine is. Mekay quotes Terry Walz of the Washington-based Council for the National Interest, a group that monitors U.S. and international policy towards Israel and the Palestinians: "I must admit that making the Palestinians pay for the modernization of these checkpoints is an embarrassment, since they had nothing to do with the erection of the separation wall to begin with and in fact have protested it. I think the whole issue is extremely murky."¹ Mekay goes on to note that this is the first time the World Bank appears ready to get actively involved in the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. Former World Bank president James Wolfensohn rejected this possibility last year. Neo-conservative Paul Wolfowitz was, however, confirmed as president of the World Bank on June 1, 2005.

In breach of the ICJ ruling, the U.S. has already contributed \$50 million to construct gates along the Wall to "help serve the needs of Palestinians."

Linda Heard reports for Al-Jazeera that the U.S. is currently pushing for bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with various Arab states, including members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as part of a vision for a larger Middle East Free Trade Agreement. President Bush hopes the MEFTA will encompass some twenty regional countries, including Israel, and be fully consolidated by 2013.

Many in the region are suspicious of the divisive trend of bilateral agreements with the U.S. and worry that the GCC will end up with small, fragmented satellite economies without any leverage against world giants. Prince Saud Al-Faisal, the Saudi foreign minister, stated, "It is alarming to see some members of the GCC enter into separate agreements with international powers . . . They diminish the collective bargaining power and weaken not only the solidarity of the GCC as a whole, but also each of its members."

Note

1. Emad Mekay, "World Bank and U.S.: Palestinians Should Pay for Israeli Checkpoints," IPS, February 25, 2005.

UPDATE BY JAMAL JUMA'

"Cementing Israeli Apartheid: The Role of the World Bank" was written last summer as part of Stop the Wall's campaign efforts to widen attention of those horrified by the construction of the 700 km long wall around Palestinian cities and villages. It aimed to expose the vicious mechanism of control, exploitation, and dispossession devised by the Occupation, but moreover the activities of the international community in safeguarding the Wall and making Palestinian ghettos sustainable.

It opens a chapter in a story that no one wants to hear: the globalization of apartheid in the Occupation of Palestine. Zionism has its own racist interest in ghettoizing 4 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and securing the judaization of Jerusalem. It ensures a Jewish demographic majority and ethnic supremacy over as much of Palestine as possible, working against all UN resolutions and the recent ICJ ruling on the Wall.

Within this project it finds allies in the international community keen to exploit cheap Palestinian labor locked behind Walls and gates. The degree to which Zionism and the international community—headed by the World Bank—work together with the aim of controlling every aspect of Palestinian life has become increasingly evident since the Left Turn article.

The Palestinian Authority's (PA) role is reduced to the administrators of the Bantustans. The Palestinian people resoundingly said no to Bantustans at the ballot boxes last January.

While the Bank's initial responsibility was to devise economic policies for the sustainability of a Palestinian Bantu-State, the institution is now facilitating efforts to ensure that Palestinians cannot interfere in the plans of the Occupation and the international community. The World Bank is gearing up to take over the payrolls of various Palestinian institutions, should the PA not comply with Zionist and global interests.

While global IFIs meticulously plan the financial and material survival and political control of the ghettos, Ehud Olmert offers the slogan of "Final Borders" to describe the project. In legitimizing the Wall, annexing Jerusalem, increasing the number of settlers, and denying the mere existence of the refugees, Olmert finds a willing accomplice in the Bank and its policy makers in Washington, who look to cash in on the Bantu-State.

The Palestinian people will never accept the plan, so it is hoped that they will be starved into it. But we will not kneel down. After dozens of massacres, killings, arrests, and almost sixty years of life in the Diaspora, surrender is too high a price to pay. We are not asking for outside institutions to provide us with bread, but to comply with their duties under international law and support our struggle for justice and liberation. None of the horrific realities of life in Palestine are apparent in the headlines and doublespeak of mass media and international diplomacy, where our ghettoization is called "state-building." International complicity with Israeli apartheid is dressed up as "humanitarian aid." Palestinians are supposed to be grateful for gates in the Wall so they can be funneled between ghettos.

Just like Olmert's schemes with the White House, the media shuns and neglects the rights and voices of Palestinians. Neither the daily killing of our people, nor the destruction of our homes, the dispossession of our farmers, or the sufferings of 6 million refugees make headlines. The consumers of mainstream media outlets are left to discuss the diatribe of "peace" and "borders," disputed between the protagonists of our oppression, while the racism, ethnic cleansing, and ghettoization continue.

More information on the issue is to be found at our website: <http://www.stopthewall.org>

#10 Expanded Air War in Iraq Kills More Civilians

Sources:

The New Yorker, December 2005

Title: "Up in the Air"

Author: Seymour M. Hersh

Tomdispatch, December 2005

Title: "An Increasingly Aerial Occupation"

Author: Dahr Jamail

Community Evaluator: Robert Manning

Student Researcher: Brian Fuchs

There is widespread speculation that President Bush, confronted by diminishing approval ratings and dissent within his own party as well as within the military itself, will begin pulling American troops out of Iraq in 2006. A key element of the drawdown plans not mentioned in the President's public statements, or in mainstream media for that matter, is that the departing American troops will be replaced by American airpower.

"We're not planning to diminish the war," Seymour Hersh quotes Patrick Clawson, the deputy director of the Washington Institute, whose views often mirror those of Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld. "We just want to change the mix of the forces doing the fighting—Iraqi infantry with American support and greater use of airpower."

While battle fatigue increases among U.S. troops, the prospect of using airpower as a substitute for American troops on the ground has caused great unease within the military. Air Force commanders, in particular, have deep-seated objections to the possibility that Iraqis will eventually be responsible for target selection. Hersh quotes a senior military planner now on assignment in the Pentagon, "Will the Iraqis call in air strikes in order to snuff rivals, or other warlords, or to snuff members of their own sect and blame someone else? Will some Iraqis be targeting on behalf of al-Qaeda, or the insurgency, or the Iranians?"

Dahr Jamail reports that the statistics gleaned from U.S. Central Command Air Forces (CENTAF) indicate a massive rise in the number of U.S. air missions—996 sorties—in Iraq in the month of November 2005.

The size of this figure naturally begs the question, where are such missions being flown and what is their size and nature? It's important to note as well that "air war" does not simply mean U.S. Air Force. Carrier-based Navy and Marine aircraft flew over 21,000 hours of missions and dropped over twenty-six tons of ordnance in Fallujah alone during the November 2004 siege of that city.

Visions of a frightful future in Iraq should not overshadow the devastation already caused by present levels of American air power loosed, in particular, on heavily populated urban areas of that country. The tactic of using massively powerful 500 and 1,000 pound bombs in urban areas to target small pockets of resistance fighters has, in fact, long been employed in Iraq. No intensification of the air war is necessary to make it commonplace. Jamail's article provides a broad overview of the air power arsenals being used against the people of Iraq.

A serious study of violence to civilians in Iraq by a British medical journal, The Lancet, released in October 2004, estimated that 85 percent of all violent deaths in Iraq are generated by coalition forces (see Censored 2006, Story #2). 95 percent of reported killings (all attributed to U.S. forces by interviewees) were caused by helicopter gunships, rockets, or other forms of aerial weaponry.¹ While no significant scientific inquiry has been carried out in Iraq recently, Iraqi medical personnel, working in areas where U.S. military operations continue, report that they feel the "vast majority" of civilian deaths are the result of actions by the occupation forces.

Given the U.S. air power already being applied largely in Iraq's cities and towns, the prospect of increasing it is chilling indeed. As to how this might benefit the embattled Bush administration, Jamail quotes U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Karen Kwiatkowski:

"Shifting the mechanism of the destruction of Iraq from soldiers and Marines to distant and safer air power would be successful in several ways. It would reduce the negative publicity value of maimed American soldiers and Marines, would bring a portion of our troops home and give the Army a necessary operational break. It would increase Air Force and Naval budgets, and line defense contractor pockets. By the time we figure out that it isn't working to make oil more secure or to allow Iraqis to rebuild a stable country, the Army will have recovered and can be redeployed in force."

Note

1. Les Roberts, et al., "Mortality Before and After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq," The Lancet, October 29, 2004.

UPDATE BY DAHR JAMAIL

Eleven days after this story about the lack of reportage in the corporate media about the U.S. military's increasing use of air power in Iraq, the Washington Post ran a story about how U.S. air strikes were taking an increasing toll on civilians. Aside from that story, the Washington Post, along with the New York Times, remain largely mute on the issue, despite the fact that the U.S. use of air strikes in Iraq has now become the norm rather than being used in contingencies, as they were in the first year of the occupation. Needless to say, corporate media television coverage has remained the same as it did prior to the publishing of this story—they prefer to portray a U.S. occupation of Iraq sans warplanes dropping bombs in civilian neighborhoods.

This story remains a critical issue when one evaluates the occupation of Iraq, for the number of civilians dying, now possibly as high as 300,000 according to Les Roberts, one of the authors of the famous Lancet Report, only continues to escalate. This is, of course, due in large part to U.S. war planes and helicopters dropping bombs and missiles into urban areas in various Iraqi cities.

It is also important when one looks at the fact that more than 82 percent of Iraqis now vehemently oppose the occupation, because one of the biggest recruiting tools for the Iraqi resistance is U.S. bombs and missiles killing the innocent. Years from now when a corporate media outlet decides to break down and acknowledge that the level of anti-American sentiment in Iraq is as high (or higher) than it is anywhere in the world, and asks the mindless question, "Why do they hate us?" one will only need to look towards the indiscriminate use of air power on the Iraqi population.

This story was not difficult to write for two reasons: the first was that any reporter in Iraq with eyes and ears knows there is a vast amount of air power being projected by the U.S. military. Secondly, thanks to the Internet, statistics on sorties are readily available to anyone willing to look. Googling "CENTAF" brings up several "Air Power Summary" reports, where one is able to find how many missions, and what type, are being flown each month in Iraq, as well as other countries.

To monitor the number of Iraqi civilians being killed by these missions, along with other deaths caused by the U.S. occupation of Iraq, the Iraqi Mortality Survey published in the prestigious British Lancet medical journal, albeit eighteen months out of date and a highly conservative estimate by the authors admission, remains by far and away the most accurate to date.

One thing is for certain, and that is the longer the failed U.S. occupation of Iraq persists, the more U.S. air power will be used—a scenario that closely resembles that of the shameful Vietnam War.

#11 Dangers of Genetically Modified Food Confirmed

Sources:

Independent/UK, May 22, 2005

Title: Revealed: "Health Fears Over Secret Study in GM Food"

Author: Geoffrey Lean

Organic Consumers Association website, June 2, 2005

Title: "Monsanto's GE Corn Experiments on Rats Continue to Generate Global Controversy"

Authors: GM Free Cymru

Independent/UK, January 8, 2006

Title: GM: New Study Shows Unborn Babies Could Be Harmed"

Author: Geoffrey Lean

Le Monde and Truthout, February 9, 2006

Title: "New Suspicions About GMOs"

Author: Herve Kempf

Faculty Evaluator: Michael Ezra

Student Researchers: Destiny Stone and Lani Ready

Several recent studies confirm fears that genetically modified (GM) foods damage human health. These studies were released as the World Trade Organization (WTO) moved toward upholding the ruling that the European Union has violated international trade rules by stopping importation of GM foods.

- Research by the Russian Academy of Sciences released in December 2005 found that more than half of the offspring of rats fed GM soy died within the first three weeks of life, six times as many as those born to mothers fed on non-modified soy. Six times as many offspring fed GM soy were also severely underweight.
- In November 2005, a private research institute in Australia, CSIRO Plant Industry, put a halt to further development of a GM pea cultivator when it was found to cause an immune response in laboratory mice.¹
- In the summer of 2005, an Italian research team led by a cellular biologist at the University of Urbino published confirmation that absorption of GM soy by mice causes development of misshapen liver cells, as well as other cellular anomalies.
- In May of 2005 the review of a highly confidential and controversial Monsanto report on test results of corn modified with Monsanto MON863 was published in The Independent/UK.

Dr. Arpad Pusztai (see Censored 2001, Story #7), one of the few genuinely independent scientists specializing in plant genetics and animal feeding studies, was asked by the German authorities in the autumn of 2004 to examine Monsanto's 1,139-page report on the feeding of MON863 to laboratory rats over a ninety-day period.

The study found "statistically significant" differences in kidney weights and certain blood parameters in the rats fed the GM corn as compared with the control groups. A number of scientists across Europe who saw the study (and heavily-censored summaries of it) expressed concerns about the health and safety implications if MON863 should ever enter the food chain. There was particular concern in France, where Professor Gilles-Eric Serralini of the University of Caen has been trying (without success) for almost eighteen months to obtain full disclosure of all documents relating to the MON863 study.

Dr. Pusztai was forced by the German authorities to sign a "declaration of secrecy" before he was allowed to see the Monsanto rat feeding study, on the grounds that the document is classified as "CBI" or "confidential business interest." While Pusztai is still bound by the declaration of secrecy, Monsanto recently declared that it does not object to the widespread dissemination of the "Pusztai Report."²

Monsanto GM soy and corn are widely consumed by Americans at a time when the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization has concluded, "In several cases, GMOs have been put on the market when safety issues are not clear."

As GMO research is not encouraged by U.S. or European governments, the vast majority of toxicological studies are conducted by those companies producing and promoting consumption of GMOs. With motive and authenticity of results suspect in corporate testing, independent scientific research into the effects of GM foods is attracting increasing attention.

Comment: In May 2006 the WTO upheld a ruling that European countries broke international trade rules by stopping importation of GM foods. The WTO verdict found that the EU has had an effective ban on biotech foods since 1998 and sided with the U.S., Canada, and Argentina in a decision that the moratorium was illegal under WTO rules.³

Notes

1. "GM peas cause immune response—A gap in the approval process?" <http://www.GMO-Compass.org>, January 3, 2006.
2. Arpad Pusztai, "Mon863-Pusztai Report," <http://www.GMWatch.org>, September 12, 2004.
3. Bradley S. Clapper, "WTO Faults EU for Blocking Modified Food," Associated Press, May 11, 2006.

#12 Pentagon Plans to Build New Landmines

Source:

Inter Press Service, August 3, 2005

Title: "After 10-Year Hiatus, Pentagon Eyes New Landmine"

Author: Isaac Baker

Human Rights Watch website, August 2005

Title: "Development and Production of Landmines"

Faculty Evaluator: Scott Suneson

Student Researchers: Rachel Barry and Matt Frick

The Bush administration plans to resume production of antipersonnel landmine systems in a move that is at odds with both the international community and previous U.S. policy, according to the leading human rights organization, Human Rights Watch (HRW).

Nearly every nation has endorsed the goal of a global ban on antipersonnel mines. In 1994 the U.S. called for the "eventual elimination" of all such mines, and in 1996 President Bill Clinton said the U.S. would "seek a worldwide agreement as soon as possible to end the use of all antipersonnel mines." The U.S. produced its last antipersonnel landmine in 1997. It had been the stated objective of the U.S. government to eventually join the 145 countries signatory to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, which bans the use, production, exporting, and stockpiling of antipersonnel landmines.

The Bush administration, however, made an about-face in U.S. antipersonnel landmine policy in February 2004, when it abandoned any plan to join the Mine Ban Treaty, also known as the Ottawa Convention. "The United States will not join the Ottawa Convention because its terms would have required us to give up a needed military capability," the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military announced, summing up the administration's new policy, "The United States will continue to develop non-persistent anti-personnel and anti-tank landmines."

HRW reports that, "New U.S. landmines will have a variety of ways of being initiated, both command-detonation (that is, when a soldier decides when to explode the mine, sometimes called 'man-in-the-loop') and traditional victim-activation. A mine that is designed to be exploded by the presence, proximity, or contact of a person (i.e., victim-activation) is prohibited under the International Mine Ban Treaty."

To sidestep international opposition, the Pentagon proposes development of the "Spider" system, which consists of a control unit capable of monitoring up to eighty-four hand-placed, unattended munitions that deploy a web of tripwires across an area. Once a wire is touched, a man-in-the-loop control system allows the operator to activate the devices.

The Spider, however, contains a "battlefield override" feature that allows for circumvention of the man-in-the-loop, and activation by the target (victim).

A Pentagon report to Congress stated, "Target Activation is a software feature that allows the man-in-the-loop to change the capability of a munition from requiring action by an operator prior to being detonated, to a munition that will be detonated by a target. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Service Chiefs, using best military judgment, feel that the man-in-the-loop system without this feature would be insufficient to meet tactical operational conditions and electronic countermeasures."

The U.S. Army spent \$135 million between fiscal years 1999 and 2004 to develop Spider and another \$11 million has been requested to complete research and development. A total of \$390 million is budgeted to produce 1,620 Spider systems and 186,300 munitions. According to budget documents released in February 2005, the Pentagon requested \$688 million for research on and \$1.08 billion for the production of new landmine systems between fiscal years 2006 and 2011.

Steven Goose, Director of HRW Arms Division, told Project Censored that Congress has required a report from the Pentagon on the humanitarian consequences of the "battlefield override" or victim-activated feature of these munitions for review before approving funds. Though production was set for December of 2005, Congress has not, as of June 2006, received this preliminary Pentagon report.

If the Spider or similar mine munitions systems move forward, a frightening precedence will be set. At best the 145 signatories to the Ottawa Convention will be beholden to the treaty, which forbids assistance in joint military operations where landmines are being used. At worst, U.S. production will legitimize international resumption of landmine proliferation.

Steven Goose warns, "If one doesn't insist on a comprehensive ban on all types and uses of antipersonnel mines, each nation will be able to claim unique requirements and justifications."

UPDATE BY ISAAC BAKER

Landmines are horrific weapons. And, naturally, news stories about the terror they inflict upon human beings—mainly civilians—are gritty and disturbing if they are truthful. Especially when it's your own government that's responsible.

And given the mainstream media's typical service to power, this story didn't make many headlines.

But the potential ramifications of the U.S. government resuming production of landmines are overwhelming. And since the average American can't depend on many media to inform them of the horrific things their government is doing, concerned people must take it upon themselves to put their government in its place.

We all must ask ourselves: Do we want our government—the body that theoretically represents we, the people—spending millions upon millions of dollars on these destructive weapons? Are we comfortable with sitting back and letting our government produce weapons that kill and maim civilians?

Or will we coalesce and let the powerful know that we will not stand for this gross disregard for human life and international opinion?

It's our responsibility to stop the abuses of power in our country. And if we do not confront our government on this issue, I believe, the blood of the innocents will be on all of our hands.

For more information on how to get involved please visit: <http://www.hrw.org> and <http://www.banminesusa.org> or <http://www.icbl.org>

#13 New Evidence Establishes Dangers of Roundup

Sources:

Third World Resurgence, No. 176, April 2005

Title: "New Evidence of Dangers of Roundup Weedkiller"

Author: Chee Yoke Heong

Faculty Evaluator: Jennifer While

Student Researchers: Peter McArthur and Lani Ready

New studies from both sides of the Atlantic reveal that Roundup, the most widely used weedkiller in the world, poses serious human health threats. More than 75 percent of genetically modified (GM) crops are engineered to tolerate the absorption of Roundup—it eliminates all plants that are not GM. Monsanto Inc., the major engineer of GM crops, is also the producer of Roundup. Thus, while Roundup was formulated as a weapon against weeds, it has become a prevalent ingredient in most of our food crops.

Three recent studies show that Roundup, which is used by farmers and home gardeners, is not the safe product we have been led to trust.

A group of scientists led by biochemist Professor Gilles-Eric Seralini from the University of Caen in France found that human placental cells are very sensitive to Roundup at concentrations lower than those currently used in agricultural application.

An epidemiological study of Ontario farming populations showed that exposure to glyphosate, the key ingredient in Roundup, nearly doubled the risk of late miscarriages. Seralini and his team decided to research the effects of the herbicide on human placenta cells. Their study confirmed the toxicity of glyphosate, as after eighteen hours of exposure at low concentrations, large proportions of human placenta began to die. Seralini suggests that this may explain the high levels of premature births and miscarriages observed among female farmers using glyphosate.

Seralini's team further compared the toxic effects of the Roundup formula (the most common commercial formulation of glyphosate and chemical additives) to the isolated active ingredient, glyphosate. They found that the toxic effect increases in the presence of Roundup 'adjuvants' or additives. These additives thus have a facilitating role, rendering Roundup twice as toxic as its isolated active ingredient, glyphosate.

Another study, released in April 2005 by the University of Pittsburgh, suggests that Roundup is a danger to other life-forms and non-target organisms. Biologist Rick Relyea found that Roundup is extremely lethal to amphibians. In what is considered one of the most extensive studies on the effects of pesticides on nontarget organisms in a natural setting, Relyea found that Roundup caused a 70 percent decline in amphibian biodiversity and an 86 percent decline in the total mass of tadpoles. Leopard frog tadpoles and gray tree frog tadpoles were nearly eliminated.

In 2002, a scientific team led by Robert Belle of the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) biological station in Roscoff, France showed that Roundup activates one of the key stages of cellular division that can potentially lead to cancer. Belle and his team have been studying the impact of glyphosate formulations on sea urchin cells for several years. The team has recently demonstrated in *Toxicological Science* (December 2004) that a "control point" for DNA damage was affected by Roundup, while glyphosate alone had no effect. "We have shown that it's a definite risk factor, but we have not evaluated the number of cancers potentially induced, nor the time frame within which they would declare themselves," Belle acknowledges.

There is, indeed, direct evidence that glyphosate inhibits an important process called RNA transcription in animals, at a concentration well below the level that is recommended for commercial spray application.

There is also new research that shows that brief exposure to commercial glyphosate causes liver damage in rats, as indicated by the leakage of intracellular liver enzymes. The research indicates that glyphosate and its surfactant in Roundup were found to act in synergy to increase damage to the liver.

UPDATE BY CHEE YOKE HEONG

Roundup Ready weedkiller is one of the most widely used weedkillers in the world for crops and backyard gardens. Roundup, with its active ingredient glyphosate, has long been promoted as safe for humans and the environment while effective in killing weeds. It is therefore significant when recent studies show that Roundup is not as safe as its promoters claim.

This has major consequences as the bulk of commercially planted genetically modified crops are designed to tolerate glyphosate (and especially Roundup), and independent field data already shows a trend of increasing use of the herbicide. This goes against industry claims that herbicide use will drop and that these plants will thus be more "environment-friendly." Now it has been found that there are serious health effects, too. My story therefore aimed to highlight these new findings and their implications to health and the environment.

Not surprisingly, Monsanto came out refuting some of the findings of the studies mentioned in the article. What ensued was an open exchange between Dr. Rick Relyea and Monsanto, whereby the former stood his grounds. Otherwise, to my knowledge, no studies have since emerged on Roundup.

For more information look to the following sources:
Professor Gilles-Eric, criigen@ibfa.unicaen.fr
Biosafety Information Center, <http://www.biosafety-info.net>
Institute of Science in Society, <http://www.i-sis.org.uk>

#14 Homeland Security Contracts KBR to Build Detention Centers in the US

Sources:

New America Media, January 31, 2006

Title: "Homeland Security Contracts for Vast New Detention Camps"

Author: Peter Dale Scott

New America Media, February 21, 2006

Title: "10-Year US Strategic Plan for Detention Camps Revives Proposals from Oliver North"

Author: Peter Dale Scott

Consortium, February 21, 2006

Title: "Bush's Mysterious 'New Programs'"

Author: Nat Parry

Buzzflash

Title: "Detention Camp Jitters"

Author: Maureen Farrell

Community Evaluator: Dr. Gary Evans

Student Researchers: Sean Hurley and Caitlyn Peele

Halliburton's subsidiary KBR (formerly Kellogg, Brown and Root) announced on January 24, 2006 that it had been awarded a \$385 million contingency contract by the Department of Homeland Security to build detention camps in the United States.

According to a press release posted on the Halliburton website, "The contract, which is effective immediately, provides for establishing temporary detention and processing capabilities to augment existing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Detention and Removal Operations (DRO) Program facilities in the event of an emergency influx of immigrants into the U.S., or to support the rapid development of new programs. The contingency support contract provides for planning and, if required, initiation of specific engineering, construction and logistics support tasks to establish, operate and maintain one or more expansion facilities."

What little coverage the announcement received focused on concerns about Halliburton's reputation for overcharging U.S. taxpayers for substandard services.

Less attention was focused on the phrase "rapid development of new programs" or what type of programs might require a major expansion of detention centers, capable of holding 5,000 people each. Jamie Zuieback, spokeswoman for ICE, declined to elaborate on what these "new programs" might be.

Only a few independent journalists, such as Peter Dale Scott, Maureen Farrell, and Nat Parry have explored what the Bush administration might actually have in mind.

Scott speculates that the "detention centers could be used to detain American citizens if the Bush administration were to declare martial law." He recalled that during the Reagan administration, National Security Council aide Oliver North organized the Rex-84 "readiness exercise," which contemplated the Federal Emergency Management Agency rounding up and detaining 400,000 "refugees" in the event of "uncontrolled population movements" over the Mexican border into the U.S.

North's exercise, which reportedly contemplated possible suspension of the Constitution, led to a line of questioning during the Iran-Contra Hearings concerning the idea that plans for expanded internment and detention facilities would not be confined to "refugees" alone.

It is relevant, says Scott, that in 2002 Attorney General John Ashcroft announced his desire to see camps for U.S. citizens deemed to be "enemy combatants." On February 17, 2006, in a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld spoke of the harm being done to the country's security, not just by the enemy, but also by what he called "news informers" who needed to be combated in "a contest of wills."

Since September 11 the Bush administration has implemented a number of interrelated programs that were planned in the 1980s under President Reagan. Continuity of Government (COG) proposals—a classified plan for keeping a secret "government-within-the-government" running during and after a nuclear disaster—included vastly expanded detention capabilities, warrantless eavesdropping, and preparations for greater use of martial law.

Scott points out that, while Oliver North represented a minority element in the Reagan administration, which soon distanced itself from both the man and his proposals, the minority associated with COG planning, which included Cheney and Rumsfeld, appear to be in control of the U.S. government today.

Farrell speculates that, because another terror attack is all but certain, it seems far more likely that the detention centers would be used for post-September 11-type detentions of rounded-up immigrants rather than for a sudden deluge of immigrants flooding across the border.

Vietnam-era whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg ventures, "Almost certainly this is preparation for a roundup after the next September 11 for Mid-Easterners, Muslims and possibly dissenters. They've already done this on a smaller scale, with the 'special registration' detentions of immigrant men from Muslim countries, and with Guantánamo."

Parry notes that The Washington Post reported on February 15, 2006 that the National Counterterrorism Center's (NCTC) central repository holds the names of 325,000 terrorist suspects, a fourfold increase since fall of 2003. Asked whether the names in the repository were collected through the NSA's domestic surveillance program, an NCTC official told the Post, "Our database includes names of known and suspected international terrorists provided by all intelligence community organizations, including NSA."

As the administration scoops up more and more names, members of Congress have questioned the elasticity of Bush's definitions for words like terrorist "affiliates," used to justify wiretapping Americans allegedly in contact with such people or entities.

A Defense Department document, entitled the "Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support," has set out a military strategy against terrorism that envisions an "active, layered defense" both inside and outside U.S. territory. In the document, the Pentagon pledges to "transform U.S. military forces to execute homeland defense missions in the . . . U.S. homeland." The strategy calls for increased military reconnaissance and surveillance to "defeat potential challengers before they threaten the United States." The plan "maximizes threat awareness and seizes the initiative from those who would harm us."

But there are concerns, warns Parry, over how the Pentagon judges "threats" and who falls under the category of "those who would harm us." A Pentagon official said the Counterintelligence Field Activity's TALON program has amassed files on antiwar protesters.

In the view of some civil libertarians, a form of martial law already exists in the U.S. and has been in place since shortly after the September 11 attacks when Bush issued Military Order Number One, which empowered him to detain any noncitizen as an international terrorist or enemy combatant. Today that order extends to U.S. citizens as well.

Farrell ends her article with the conclusion that while much speculation has been generated by KBR's contract to build huge detention centers within the U.S., "The truth is, we won't know the real purpose of these centers unless 'contingency plans are needed.' And by then, it will be too late."

UPDATE BY PETER DALE SCOTT

The contract of the Halliburton subsidiary KBR to build immigrant detention facilities is part of a longer-term Homeland Security plan titled ENDGAME, which sets as its goal the removal of "all removable aliens" and "potential terrorists." In the 1980s Richard Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld discussed similar emergency detention powers as part of a super-secret program of planning for what was euphemistically called "Continuity of Government" (COG) in the event of a nuclear disaster. At the time, Cheney was a Wyoming congressman, while Rumsfeld, who had been defense secretary under President Ford, was a businessman and CEO of the drug company G.D. Searle.

These men planned for suspension of the Constitution, not just after nuclear attack, but for any "national security emergency," which they defined in Executive Order 12656 of 1988 as: "Any occurrence, including natural disaster, military attack, technological or other emergency, that seriously degrades or seriously threatens the national security of the United States." Clearly September 11 would meet this definition, and did, for COG was instituted on that day. As the Washington Post later explained, the order "dispatched a shadow government of about 100 senior civilian managers to live and work secretly outside Washington, activating for the first time long-standing plans."

What these managers in this shadow government worked on has never been reported. But it is significant that the group that prepared ENDGAME was, as the Homeland Security document puts it, "chartered in September 2001." For ENDGAME's goal of a capacious detention capability is remarkably similar to Oliver North's controversial Rex-84 "readiness exercise" for COG in 1984. This called for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to round up and detain 400,000 imaginary "refugees," in the context of "uncontrolled population movements" over the Mexican border into the United States.

UPDATE BY MAUREEN FARRELL

When the story about Kellogg, Brown and Root's contract for emergency detention centers broke, immigration was not the hot button issue it is today. Given this, the language in Halliburton's press release, stating that the centers would be built in the event of an "emergency influx of immigrants into the U.S.," raised eyebrows, especially among those familiar with Rex-84 and other Reagan-era initiatives. FEMA's former plans 'for the detention of at least 21 million American Negroes in assembly centers or relocation camps' added to the distrust, and the second stated reason for the KBR contract, "to support the rapid development of new programs," sent imaginations reeling.

While few in the mainstream media made the connection between KBR's contract and previous programs, Fox News eventually addressed this issue, pooh-poohing concerns as the province of "conspiracy theories" and "unfounded" fears. My article attempted to sift through the speculation, focusing on verifiable information found in declassified and leaked documents which proved that, in addition to drawing up contingency plans for martial law, the government has conducted military readiness exercises designed to round up and detain both illegal aliens and U.S. citizens.

How concerned should Americans be? Recent reports are conflicting and confusing:

- In May, 2006, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) began "Operation Return to Sender," which involved catching illegal immigrants and deporting them. In June, however, President Bush vowed that there would soon be "new infrastructures" including detention centers designed to put an end to such "catch and release" practices.
- Though Bush said he was "working with Congress to increase the number of detention facilities along our borders," Rep. Bennie Thompson, ranking member of the House Homeland Security Committee, said he first learned about the KBR contract through newspaper reports.
- Fox News recently quoted Pepperdine University professor Doug Kmiec, who deemed detention camp concerns "more paranoia than reality" and added that KBR's contract is most likely "something related to (Hurricane) Katrina" or "a bird flu outbreak that could spur a mass quarantine of Americans." The president's stated desire for the U.S. military to take a more active role during natural disasters and to enforce quarantines in the event of a bird flu outbreak, however, have been roundly denounced.

Concern over an all-powerful federal government is not paranoia, but active citizenship. As Thomas Jefferson explained, "even under the best forms of government, those entrusted with power have, in time, and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny." From John Adams's Alien and Sedition Acts to FDR's internment of Japanese Americans, the land of the free has held many contradictions and ironies. Interestingly

enough, Halliburton was at the center of another historical controversy, when Lyndon Johnson's ties to a little-known company named Kellogg, Brown and Root caused a congressional commotion—particularly after the Halliburton subsidiary won enough wartime contracts to become one of the first protested symbols of the military-industrial complex. Back then they were known as the "Vietnam builders." The question, of course, is what they'll be known as next.

Additional links:

"Reagan Aides and the Secret Government," Miami Herald, July 5, 1987, <http://fpiparticle.blogspot.com/2005/12/front-page-miami-herald-july-5-1987.html>

"Foundations are in place for martial law in the US," July 27, 2002, Sydney Morning Herald, smh.com.au/articles/2002/07/27/1027497418339.html

"Halliburton Deals Recall Vietnam-Era Controversy: Cheney's Ties to Company Reminiscent of LBJ's Relationships," NPR, Dec. 24, 2003, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1569483>

"Critics Fear Emergency Centers Could Be Used for Immigration Round-Ups," Fox News, June 7, 2006, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,198456,00.html>

"U.S. officials nab 2,100 illegal immigrants in 3 weeks," USA Today, June 14, 2006, http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-06-14-immigration-arrests_x.htm

#15 Chemical Industry is EPA's Primary Research Partner

Sources:

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, October 5, 2005

Title: "Chemical Industry Is Now EPA's Main Research Partner"

Author: Jeff Ruch

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, October 6, 2005

Title: "EPA Becoming Arm of Corporate R&D"

Author: Jeff Ruch

Community Evaluator: Tim Ogburn

Student Researcher: Lani Ready and Peter McArthur

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) research program is increasingly relying on corporate joint ventures, according to agency documents obtained by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). The American Chemical Council (ACC) is now EPA's leading research partner and the EPA is diverting funds from basic health and environmental research towards research that addresses regulatory concerns of corporate funders.

Since the beginning of Bush's first term in office, there has been a significant increase in cooperative research and development agreements (CRADAs) with individual corporations or industry associations. During Bush's first four years EPA entered into fifty-seven corporate CRADAs, compared to thirty-four such agreements during Clinton's second term.

EPA scientists claim that corporations are influencing the agency's research agenda through financial inducements. One EPA scientist wrote, "Many of us in the labs feel like we work for contracts." In April 2005, EPA's Science Advisory Board warned that the agency was no longer funding credible public health research. It noted, for example, that the EPA was falling behind on issues such as intercontinental pollution transport and nanotechnology.

Furthermore, in April 2005, a study by the Government Accountability Office concluded that EPA lacks safeguards to "evaluate or manage potential conflicts of interest" in corporate research agreements, as they are taking money from companies and corporations that they are supposed to be regulating.

According to Rebecca Rose, the Program Director of PEER, "Under its current leadership, EPA is becoming an arm of corporate R&D." She also notes that the number of corporate CRADAs under the Bush administration outnumbered those entered into with universities or local governments, adding, "Public health research needs should not have to depend upon corporate underwriting."

In October 2005 President Bush nominated George Gray to serve as the Assistant Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency Office of Research and Development (ORD). At that time George Gray ran a Center for Risk Analysis at Harvard University where the majority of the funding came from corporate sources. Gray indicated upon nomination that he intends to continue and expand his solicitation of corporate research funds in his position with ORD.

PEER's Executive Director Jeff Ruch warns, "Injecting outside money into a public agency research program, especially when it is tied to particular projects, has a subtle but undeniable influence on not only what work gets done but also how that work is reported." He adds, "As what was one of the top public health research programs slides toward dysfunction, nothing about the background, attitude or philosophy of Mr. Gray suggests that he is even remotely the right person for this job."

In 2004 & 2005, EPA was plagued by reports of political suppression of scientific results on important health issues such as asbestos and mercury regulation (see Censored 2005, Story #3). In response ORD launched a public relations campaign, entitled "Science for You," using agency research funds to clean up its image.

Comments: George M. Gray was sworn in as the Assistant Administrator of Research and Development at EPA on November 1, 2005, with unanimous consent of the U.S. Senate.

UPDATE BY JEFF RUCH

This story illustrates how key environmental research is being diverted away from public health priorities in order to meet a corporate regulatory agenda. By enticing EPA into partnerships, entities such as the American Chemical Council (ACC), which is now EPA's leading research partner, can influence not only what EPA researches but how that research is conducted, as well.

For example, long-term health monitoring studies drop off EPA's list of priority topics because industry has no interest in funding such vital work—if anything, industry has an incentive to prevent such research from being conducted. By the same token, the industry push to allow human subject experiments to test tolerance to pesticides and other commercial poisons is precisely the type of research the industry desires to entice EPA into conducting, and thus legitimizing, despite an array of unresolved ethical problems.

A few updates since October 2005 worthy of note: a) A leading proponent of industry research partnerships, George Gray, has been confirmed as EPA Assistant Administrator for Research & Development. b) President Bush has proposed further cuts to EPA's already shrinking research budget. (see http://www.peer.org/news/news_id.php?row_id=661). This growing penury makes EPA even more interested in using corporate dollars to supplement its tattered research program. c) EPA is in the first weeks of its human testing program. A specially convened Human Subjects Review Board is now struggling to approve industry and agency studies in which people were not given informed consent or were given harmful doses of chemicals.

The EPA page of our website has several updates on this and related issues.

#16 Ecuador and Mexico Defy US on International Criminal Court

Sources:

Agence France Press News (School of the Americas Watch), June 22, 2005

Title: "Ecuador Refuses to Sign ICC Immunity Deal for US Citizens"

Inter Press Service, November 2, 2005

Title: "Mexico Defies Washington on the International Criminal Court"

Author: Katherine Stapp

Faculty Evaluator: Elizabeth Martinez

Student Researchers: Jessica Rodas, David Abbott, and Charlene Jones

Ecuador and Mexico have refused to sign bilateral immunity agreements (BIA) with the U.S., in ratification of the International Criminal Court (ICC) treaty. Despite the Bush administration's threat to withhold economic aid, both countries confirmed allegiance to the ICC, the international body established to try individuals accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

On June 22, 2005 Ecuador's president, Alfredo Palacios, vocalized emphatic refusal to sign a BIA (also known as an Article 98 agreement to the Rome Statute of the ICC) in spite of Washington's threat to withhold \$70 million a year in military aid.

Mexico, having signed the Rome Statute, which established the ICC in 2000, formally ratified the treaty on October 28, 2005, making it the 100th nation to join the ICC. As a consequence of ratifying the ICC without a U.S. immunity agreement, Mexico stands to lose millions of dollars in U.S. aid—including \$11.5 million to fight drug trafficking.

On September 29, 2005 the U.S. State Department reported that it had secured 100 "immunity agreements," although less than a third have been ratified.

"Our ultimate goal is to conclude Article 98 agreements with every country in the world, regardless of whether they have signed or ratified the ICC, regardless of whether they intend to in the future," said John Bolton, former U.S. Undersecretary for Arms Control and current U.S. ambassador to the United Nations—and one of the ICC's staunchest opponents.

The U.S. effort to undermine the ICC was given teeth in 2002, when the U.S. Congress adopted the American Servicemembers' Protection Act (ASPA), which contains provisions restricting U.S. cooperation with the ICC by making U.S. support of UN peacekeeping missions largely contingent on achieving impunity for all U.S. personnel.

The ASPA prohibits U.S. military assistance to ICC member states that have not signed a BIA.

Legislation far more wide-reaching, however, was signed into law by President Bush on December 2004. The Nethercutt Amendment authorizes the loss of Economic Support Funds (ESF) to countries, including many key U.S. allies, that have not signed a BIA. Threatened under the Nethercutt Amendment are: funds for international security and counterterrorism efforts, peace process programs, antidrug-trafficking initiatives, truth and reconciliation commissions, wheelchair distribution, human rights programs, economic and democratic development, and HIV/Aids education, among others. The Nethercutt Amendment was readopted by the U.S. Congress in November 2005.¹

In spite of severe U.S. pressure, fifty-three members of the ICC have refused to sign BIAs.

Katherine Stapp asserts that if Washington follows through on threats to slash aid to ICC member states, it risks further alienating key U.S. allies and drawing attention to its own increasingly shaky human rights record. "There will be a price to be paid by the U.S. government in terms of its credibility," Richard Dicker, director of Human Rights Watch's International Justice Program, told IPS. "But criticism of the administration's hard line has also come from unlikely quarters.

Testifying before Congress in March, Gen. Bantz J. Craddock, the commander of U.S. military forces in Latin America, complained that the sanctions had excluded Latin American officers from U.S. training programs and could allow China, which has been seeking military ties with Latin America, to fill the void.

"We now risk losing contact and interoperability with a generation of military classmates in many nations of the region, including several leading countries," Craddock told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Experts say it is particularly notable that Mexico, which sells 88 percent of its exports in the U.S. market, is defying pressure from Washington.

"It's exactly because of the geographic and trade proximity between Mexico and the United States that Mexico's ratification takes on greater significance in terms of how isolated the U.S. government is in its attitude toward the ICC," Dicker told IPS.

Notes

1. "Overview of the United States' Opposition to the International Criminal Court," <http://www.iccnw.org>.

UPDATE BY KATHERINE STAPP

As noted by Amnesty International, the United States is the only nation in the world that is actively opposed to the International Criminal Court (ICC). However, more and more countries appear to be resisting pressure to exempt U.S. nationals from the court's jurisdiction. Since the time of my writing, the number of "bilateral immunity agreements," or BIAs, garnered by Washington has remained the same: 100, of which only twenty-one have been ratified by parliaments, while another eighteen are considered "executive agreements" that purportedly do not require ratification. Only thirteen states parties to the ICC (out of 100) have ratified BIAs with the United States, while eight others have reportedly entered into executive agreements. In the past two years, only four countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have signed BIAs, also known as Article 98 agreements.

Some key figures in the Bush administration have recently expressed doubts about the wisdom of withholding aid from friendly countries that refuse to sign. At a March 10 briefing, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice likened the BIAs to "sort of the same as shooting ourselves in the foot . . . by having to put off aid to countries with which we have important counter-terrorism or counter-drug or in some cases, in some of our allies, it's even been cooperation in places like Afghanistan and Iraq."

Bantz Craddock, head of the U.S. Southern Command, remains a vocal critic of the American Servicemembers' Protection Act (ASPA) sanctions, noting in testimony before the House Armed Services Committee on March 16 that eleven Latin American nations have now been barred under ASPA from receiving International Military Education and Training funds. These include Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Mexico.

"Decreasing engagement opens the door for competing nations and outside political actors who may not share our democratic principles to increase interaction and influence within the region," he noted.

And in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report published on February 6, the Defense Department said it will consider whether ASPA restrictions on "foreign assistance programs pertaining to security and the war on terror necessitate adjustment as we continue to advance the aims of the ASPA."

Meanwhile, a May 11 poll by the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes found that a bipartisan majority of the U.S. public (69 percent) believes that the U.S. should not be given special exceptions when it becomes a party to human rights treaties. 60 percent explicitly support U.S. participation in the ICC.

Mexico has stood firm in its refusal to sign a BIA, with the Mexican Parliament's Lower Chamber stating that immunity is not allowed under the Rome Statute that establishes the ICC. As a result, \$3.6 million in military aid has been frozen, and further International Military Exchange Training aid cut to zero in the administration's proposed 2007 budget request. The country also stands to lose more than \$11 million from the Economic Support Fund (ESF).

Other countries currently threatened with aid cuts include Bolivia, which could lose 96 percent of its U.S. military aid, and Kenya, which could lose \$8 million in ESF aid.

More information can be found at:

Citizens for Global Solutions (http://www.globalsolutions.org/programs/law_justice/icc/icc_home.html); Coalition for the International Criminal

#17 Iraq Invasion Promotes OPEC Agenda

Sources:

Harper's in coordination with BBC Television Newsnight, October 24, 2005

Title: "OPEC and the economic conquest of Iraq"

Author: Greg Palast

The Guardian March 20, 2006

" Bush Didn't Bungle Iraq, You Fools: The Mission Was Indeed Accomplished"

Author: Greg Palast

Faculty Evaluator: David McCuan

Student Researcher: Isaac Dolido

According to a report from journalist, Greg Palast, the U.S. invasion of Iraq was indeed about the oil. However, it wasn't to destroy OPEC, as claimed by neoconservatives in the administration, but to take part in it.

The U.S. strategic occupation of Iraq has been an effective means of acquiring access to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). As long as the interim government adheres to the production caps set by the organization, the U.S. will ensure profits to the international oil companies (IOCs), the OPEC cartel, and Russia.

With the prolonged insurgency following the invasion, along with internal corruption and pipeline destruction, hard line neoconservative plans for a completely privatized Iraq were dashed. According to some administration insiders, the idea of a laissez-faire, free-market reconstruction of Iraq was never a serious consideration. One oil industry consultant to Iraq told Palast he was amused by "the obsession of neoconservative writers on ways to undermine OPEC."

In December 2003, says Palast, the State Department drafted a 323-page plan entitled "Options for Developing a Long Term Sustainable Iraqi Oil Industry." This plan directs the Iraqis to maintain an oil quota system that will enhance its relationship with OPEC. It describes several possible state-owned options that range from the Saudi Aramco model (in which the government owns the whole operation) to the Azerbaijan model (in which the system is almost entirely operated by the International Oil Companies).

Implementation of the plan was guided by a handful of oil industry consultants, promoting an OPEC-friendly policy but preferring the Azerbaijan model to the "self-financing" system of the Saudi Aramco, as it grants operation and control to the foreign oil companies (the 2003 report warns Iraqis against cutting into IOC profits). Once the contracts are granted, these companies then manage, fund, and equip crude extraction in exchange for a percentage of the sales. Given the way in which the interests of OPEC and those of the IOCs are so closely aligned, it is certainly understandable why smashing OPEC's oil cartel might not appeal to certain elements of the Bush administration.

According to the drafters and promoters of the plan, dismantling OPEC would be a catastrophe. The last thing they want is the privatization of Iraq's oil fields and the specter of competition maximizing production. Pumping more oil per day than the OPEC regulated quota of almost 4 million, would quickly bring down Iraq's economy and compromise the U.S. position in the global market.

Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, profits have shot up for oil companies. In 2004, the major U.S. oil companies posted record or near record profits. In 2005 profits for the five largest oil companies increased to \$113 billion. In February 2006, ConocoPhillips reported a doubling of its quarterly profits from the previous year, which itself had been a company record. Shell posted a record breaking \$4.48 billion in fourth-quarter earnings—and in 2005, ExxonMobil reported the largest one-year operating profit of any corporation in U.S. history.

#18 Physicist Challenges Official 9-11 Story

Sources:

Deseret Morning News, November 10, 2005

Title: "Y. Professor Thinks Bombs, Not Planes, Toppled WTC"

Author: Elaine Jarvik

Brigham Young University website, Winter 2005

Title: "Why Indeed Did the WTC Buildings Collapse?"

Author: Steven E. Jones

Deseret Morning News, January 26, 2006

Title: "BYU professor's group accuses U.S. officials of lying about 9/11"

Author: Elaine Jarvik

Faculty Evaluator: John Kramer

Student Researchers: David Abbott and Courtney Wilcox

Research into the events of September 11 by Brigham Young University physics professor, Steven E. Jones, concludes that the official explanation for the collapse of the World Trade Center (WTC) buildings is implausible according to laws of physics. Jones is calling for an independent, international scientific investigation "guided not by politicized notions and constraints but rather by observations and calculations."

In debunking the official explanation of the collapse of the three WTC buildings, Jones cites the complete, rapid, and symmetrical collapse of the buildings; the horizontal explosions (squibs) evidenced in films of the collapses; the fact that the antenna dropped first in the North Tower, suggesting the use of explosives in the core columns; and the large pools of molten metal observed in the basement areas of both towers.

Jones also investigated the collapse of WTC 7, a forty-seven-story building that was not hit by planes, yet dropped in its own "footprint," in the same manner as a controlled demolition. WTC 7 housed the U.S. Secret Service, the Department of Defense, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management, the Internal Revenue Service Regional Council, and the Central Intelligence Agency. Many of the records from the Enron accounting scandal were destroyed when the building came down.

Jones claims that the National Institutes of Standards and Technology (NIST) ignored the physics and chemistry of what happened on September 11 and even manipulated its testing in order to get a computer-generated hypothesis that fit the end result of collapse, and did not even attempt to investigate the possibility of controlled demolition. He also questions the investigations conducted by FEMA and the 9/11 Commission.

Among the report's other findings:

- No steel-frame building, before or after the WTC buildings, has ever collapsed due to fire. But explosives can effectively sever steel columns.
- WTC 7, which was not hit by hijacked planes, collapsed in 6.6 seconds, just .6 of a second longer than it would take an object dropped from the roof to hit the ground. "Where is the delay that must be expected due to conservation of momentum, one of the foundational laws of physics?" Jones asks. "That is, as upper-falling floors strike lower floors—and intact steel support columns—the fall must be significantly impeded by the impacted mass.
- How do the upper floors fall so quickly, then, and still conserve momentum in the collapsing buildings?" The paradox, he says, "is easily resolved by the explosive demolition hypothesis, whereby explosives quickly removed lower-floor material, including steel support

columns, and allow near free-fall-speed collapses." These observations were not analyzed by FEMA, NIST, or the 9/11 Commission.

- With non-explosive-caused collapse there would typically be a piling up of shattered concrete. But most of the material in the towers was converted to flour-like powder while the buildings were falling. "How can we understand this strange behavior, without explosives? Remarkable, amazing—and demanding scrutiny since the U.S. government-funded reports failed to analyze this phenomenon."
- Steel supports were "partly evaporated," but it would require temperatures near 5,000 degrees Fahrenheit to evaporate steel—and neither office materials nor diesel fuel can generate temperatures that hot. Fires caused by jet fuel from the hijacked planes lasted at most a few minutes, and office material fires would burn out within about twenty minutes in any given location.
- Molten metal found in the debris of the WTC may have been the result of a high-temperature reaction of a commonly used explosive such as thermite. Buildings not felled by explosives "have insufficient directed energy to result in melting of large quantities of metal," Jones says.
- Multiple loud explosions in rapid sequence were reported by numerous observers in and near the towers, and these explosions occurred far below the region where the planes struck.

In January 2006 Jones, along with a group calling themselves "Scholars for 9/11 Truth," called for an international investigation into the attacks and are going so far as to accuse the U.S. government of a massive cover-up.

"We believe that senior government officials have covered up crucial facts about what really happened on September 11," the group said in a statement. "We believe these events may have been orchestrated by the administration in order to manipulate the American people into supporting policies at home and abroad."

The group is headed by Jones and Jim Fetzer, University of Minnesota Duluth distinguished McKnight professor of philosophy, and is made up of fifty academicians and experts including Robert M. Bowman, former director of the U.S. "Star Wars" space defense program, and Morgan Reynolds, former chief economist for the Department of Labor in President George W. Bush's first term.

<http://www.scholarsfor911truth.org/WhyIndeedDidtheWorldTradeCenterBuildingsCompletelyCollapse.pdf>

#19 Destruction of Rainforests Worst Ever

Source:

The Independent/UK, October 21, 2005

Title: "Revealed: the True Devastation of the Rainforest

Author: Steve Connor

Faculty Evaluator: Myrna Goodman

Student Researcher: Courtney Wilcox and Deanna Haddock

New developments in satellite imaging technology reveal that the Amazon rainforest is being destroyed twice as quickly as previously estimated due to the surreptitious practice of selective logging.

A survey published in the October 21 issue of the journal *Science* is based on images made possible by a new, ultra-high-resolution satellite-imaging technique developed by scientists affiliated with the Carnegie Institution and Stanford University.

"With this new technology, we are able to detect openings in the forest canopy down to just one or two individual trees," says Carnegie scientist Gregory Asner, lead author of the *Science* study and assistant professor of Geological and Environmental Sciences at Stanford University. "People have been monitoring large-scale deforestation in the Amazon with satellites for more than two decades, but selective logging has been mostly invisible until now." While clear-cuts and burn-offs are readily detectable by conventional satellite analysis, selective logging is masked by the Amazon's extremely dense forest canopy.

Stanford University's website reports that by late 2004, the Carnegie research team had refined its imaging technique into a sophisticated remote-sensing technology called the Carnegie Landsat Analysis System (CLAS), which processes data from three NASA satellites—Landsat 7, Terra and Earth Observing 1—through a powerful supercomputer equipped with new pattern-recognition approaches designed by Asner and his staff.¹

"Each pixel of information obtained by the satellites contains detailed spectral data about the forest," Asner explains. "For example, the signals tell us how much green vegetation is in the canopy, how much dead material is on the forest floor and how much bare soil there is."

For the *Science* study, the researchers conducted their first basin-wide analysis of the Amazon from 1999 to 2002. The results of the four-year survey revealed a problem that is widespread and vastly underestimated, "We found much more selective logging than we or anyone else had expected—between 4,600 and 8,000 square miles every year of forest spread across five Brazilian states," Asner said.

Selective logging—the practice of removing one or two trees and leaving the rest intact—is often considered a sustainable alternative to clear-cutting. Left unregulated, however, the practice has proven to be extremely destructive.

A large mahogany tree can fetch hundreds of dollars at the sawmill, making it a tempting target in a country where one in five lives in poverty. "People go in and remove just the merchantable species from the forest," Asner says. "Mahogany is the one everybody knows about, but in the Amazon, there are at least thirty-five marketable hardwood species, and the damage that occurs from taking out just a few trees at a time is enormous. On average, for every tree removed, up to thirty more can be severely damaged by the timber harvesting operation itself. That's because when trees are cut down, the vines that connect them pull down the neighboring trees.

"Logged forests are areas of extraordinary damage. A tree crown can be twenty-five meters. When you knock down a tree it causes a lot of damage in the understory." Light penetrates to the understory and dries out the forest floor, making it much more susceptible to burning. "That's probably the biggest environmental concern," Asner explains. "But selective logging also involves the use of tractors and skidders that rip up the soil and the forest floor. Loggers also build makeshift dirt roads to get in, and study after study has shown that those frontier roads become larger and larger as more people move in, and that feeds the deforestation process. Think of logging as the first land-use change."

Another serious environmental concern is that while an estimated 400 million tons of carbon enter the atmosphere every year as a result of traditional deforestation in the Amazon, Asner and his colleagues estimate that an additional 100 million tons is produced by selective logging. "That means up to 25 percent more greenhouse gas is entering the atmosphere than was previously assumed," Asner explains, a finding that could alter climate change forecasts on a global scale.

Notes

1. Mark Shwartz, "Selective logging causes widespread destruction, study finds," Stanford University website, October 21, 2005.

#20 Bottled Water: A Global Environmental Problem

Source:

OneWorld.net, February 5, 2006

Title: "Bottled Water: Nectar of the Frauds?"

Author: Abid Aslam

Faculty Evaluator: Liz Close

Student Researchers: Heidi Miller and Sean Hurley

Consumers spend a collective \$100 billion every year on bottled water in the belief—often mistaken—that it is better for us than what flows from our taps. Worldwide, bottled water consumption surged to 41 billion gallons in 2004, up 57 percent since 1999.

"Even in areas where tap water is safe to drink, demand for bottled water is increasing—producing unnecessary garbage and consuming vast

quantities of energy," reports Earth Policy Institute researcher Emily Arnold. Although the U.S., more regulations govern the quality of tap water than bottled water, bottled water can cost up to 10,000 times more. At up to \$10 per gallon, bottled water costs more than gasoline in the United States.

"There is no question that clean, affordable drinking water is essential to the health of our global community," Arnold asserts, "But bottled water is not the answer in the developed world, nor does it solve problems for the 1.1 billion people who lack a secure water supply. Improving and expanding existing water treatment and sanitation systems is more likely to provide safe and sustainable sources of water over the long term." Members of the United Nations have agreed to halve the proportion of people who lack reliable and lasting access to safe drinking water by the year 2015. To meet this goal, they would have to double the \$15 billion spent every year on water supply and sanitation. While this amount may seem large, it pales in comparison to the estimated \$100 billion spent each year on bottled water.

Tap water comes to us through an energy-efficient infrastructure whereas bottled water is transported long distances—often across national borders—by boat, train, airplane, and truck. This involves burning massive quantities of fossil fuels.

For example, in 2004 alone a Helsinki company shipped 1.4 million bottles of Finnish tap water 2,700 miles to Saudi Arabia. And although 94 percent of the bottled water sold in the U.S. is produced domestically, many Americans import water shipped some 9,000 kilometers from Fiji and other faraway places to satisfy demand for what Arnold terms "chic and exotic bottled water."

More fossil fuels are used in packaging the water. Most water bottles are made with polyethylene terephthalate, a plastic derived from crude oil. "Making bottles to meet Americans' demand alone requires more than 1.5 million barrels of oil annually, enough to fuel some 100,000 U.S. cars for a year," Arnold notes.

Once it has been emptied, the bottle must be dumped. According to the Container Recycling Institute, 86 percent of plastic water bottles used in the United States become garbage or litter. Incinerating used bottles produces toxic byproducts such as chlorine gas and ash containing heavy metals tied to a host of human and animal health problems. Buried water bottles can take up to 1,000 years to biodegrade.

Worldwide, some 2.7 million tons of plastic are used to bottle water each year. Of the bottles deposited for recycling in 2004, the U.S. exported roughly 40 percent to destinations as far away as China, requiring yet more fossil fuel.

Meanwhile, communities where the water originates risk their sources running dry. More than fifty Indian villages have complained of water shortages after bottlers began extracting water for sale under the Coca-Cola Corporation's Dasani label. Similar problems have been reported in Texas and in the Great Lakes region of North America, where farmers, fishers, and others who depend on water for their livelihoods are suffering from concentrated water extraction as water tables drop quickly.

While Americans consume the most bottled water per capita, some of the fastest collective growth in consumption is in the giant populations of Mexico, India, and China. As a whole, India's consumption of bottled water increased threefold from 1999 to 2004, while China's more than doubled.

While private companies' profits rise from selling bottled water of questionable quality at more than \$100 billion per year—more efficiently regulated, waste-free municipal systems could be implemented for distribution of safe drinking water for all the peoples of the world—at a small fraction of the price.

UPDATE BY ABID ASLAM

Consumer stories are a staple of the media diet. This article spawned coverage by numerous public broadcasters and appeared to do the rounds in cyberspace. Perhaps what seized imaginations was our affinity for the subject: apparently we and our planet's surface are made up mostly of water and without it, we would perish. In any case, most of the discussion of the issues raised by the source—a research paper from a Washington, D.C.-based environmental think tank—focused mainly on consumer elements (the price, taste, and consequences for human health of bottled and tap water), as I had anticipated when I decided to storify the Environmental Policy Institute (EPI) paper (in honesty, that is pretty much all I did, adding minimal context and background). However, a good deal of reader attention also focused on the environmental and regulatory aspects.

Further information on these can be obtained from the EPI, a host of environmental and consumer groups, and from the relevant government agencies: the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for tap water and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for bottled water.

Differences in the ways these regulators (indeed, regulators in general) operate and are structured and funded deserve a great deal more attention, as does the unequal protection of citizens that results.

Numerous other questions raised in the article deserve further examination. Would improved waste disposal and recycling address the researcher's concerns about resources being consumed to get rid of empty water bottles? If public water systems can deliver a more reliable product to more people at a lower cost, as the EPI paper says, then what are the obstacles to the necessary investment in the U.S. and in poor countries, and how can citizens here and there overcome those obstacles?

Some of these questions may strike general readers or certain media gatekeepers as esoteric. Then again, we all drink the stuff.

#21 Gold Mining Threatens Ancient Andean Glaciers

Source:

CorpWatch.com, June 20, 2005

Title: "Barrick Gold Strikes Opposition in South"

Author: Glenn Walker

InterPress Service, February 15, 2006

Title: "Chile: Yes, to Gold Mine But Don't Touch the Glaciers"

Author: Daniela Estrda

Faculty Evaluator: Andy Roth

Student Researcher: Michelle Salvail

Barrick Gold, a powerful multinational gold mining company, planned to melt three Andean glaciers in order to access gold deposits through open pit mining. The water from the glaciers would have been held for refreezing in the following winters. Opposition to the mine because of destruction to water sources for Andean farmers was widespread in Chile and the rest of the world. Barrick Gold's Pascua Lama project represents one of the largest foreign investments in Chile in recent years, totaling \$1.5 billion. However, some 70,000 downstream farmers backed by international environmental organizations and activists around the world waged a campaign against the proposed mine.

In the fall of 2005, environmental activists dumped crushed ice outside the local headquarter of Barrick Gold in Santiago. Thousands had marched earlier in the year shouting slogans such as, "We are not a North American colony," and handing out nuggets of fool's gold emblazoned with the words oro sucio—"dirty gold."

In February 2006, Chile's Regional Environment Commission (COREMA) gave permission for Barrick Gold to begin the project, but did not approve the relocation of the three glaciers.

"The mine will cause severe damage to the local ecosystem because it will pollute the Huasco River as well as underground water sources," said Antonia Fortt, an environmental engineer with the Oceana Ecological Organization.

The Pascua Lama deposits are considered one of the world's largest untapped sources of gold ore, with a potential yield of 17.5 billion ounces of gold. Barrick's removal of the gold will employ cyanide leaching for on-site processing of the ore. Cyanide is a chemical compound that is extremely toxic to humans and other life forms. Environmentalists are worried that the cyanide will leach into the water systems and contaminate entire ecosystems downstream. Construction of the mine will begin in 2006 and begin full operations in 2009.

Barrick Gold also succeeded in convincing both the Chilean and Argentine governments to sign a binational mining treaty, which allows the

unrestricted flow of machinery, ore, and personnel against the border. Lawsuits against the treaty are pending in Chilean courts.

Barrick Gold has been accused of burying fifty miners alive in Tanzania and blatantly disregarding environmental concerns in operations all over the world. George H. W. Bush, from 1995 to 1999, was the "Honorary Chairman" of Barrick's international Advisory Board.

Barrick Gold is the third largest gold mining company in the world, with a portfolio of twenty-seven mining operations in five continents. Gold sales in 2005 were \$2.3 billion.

The company is based in Canada, but U.S. directors include: Donald Carty, CEO of AMR Corp and American Airlines, Dallas, Texas; J. Brett Harvey, CEO CONSOL Energy Inc., Venitia, Pennsylvania; Angus MacNaughton, President of Genstar Investment Inc., Danville, California; and Steven Shapiro, VP Burlington Resources, Inc., Houston, Texas.

#22 \$Billions in Homeland Security Spending Undisclosed

Source:
Congressional Quarterly, June 22, 2005.
Title: "Billions in States' Homeland Purchases Kept in the Dark"
Author: Eileen Sullivan

Faculty Evaluator: Noel Byrne
Student Researchers: Monica Moura and Gary Phillips

More than \$8 billion in Homeland Security funds has been doled out to states since the September 11, 2001 attacks, but the public has little chance of knowing how this money is being spent.

Of the thirty-four states that responded to Congressional Quarterly's inquiries on Homeland Security spending, twelve have laws or policies that preclude public disclosure of details on Homeland Security purchases. Many states have adopted relevant nondisclosure clauses to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The reason, state officials say, is that the information could be useful to terrorists.

Further hindering public demand for accountability, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) spokesperson Marc Short confirms, DHS will not release its records on state spending of funds.

"These non-disclosure policies are troubling," Steven Aftergood, director of the research organization Project on Government Secrecy, warns in an interview with CQ. "Accountability is the price we pay. We're giving away the ability to hold public officials accountable. More than we value public oversight, we fear a nebulous terrorist threat, and this is changing the character of American political life."

New York is one of many states that will disclose broad categories of purchases, such as personal protective gear, but will not specify type of equipment, which company makes it, how much it costs, or where it is going. Roger Shatzkin, CQ's interviewee on the subject of New Jersey's policy on Homeland Security spending disclosure, offered this example: "If there was a potential flaw in equipment, that could be exploited [by terrorists], so the state would not want that information to become public."

Aftergood counters that taxpayers have the right to know if law enforcement is using defective equipment: "One of the things that happens when you restrict information is that you reduce the motivation to fix problems and correct weaknesses."

Colorado's secrecy provision was enacted in 2003, but State Senator Bob Hagedorn says the law has been misinterpreted, authorizing automatic denial of access to any and all information regarding Homeland Security. Hagedorn told CQ that this broad application had never been his intention when sponsoring the bill. He warned against the shroud of secrecy as, in early 2005, state lawmakers discovered that Colorado did not have a Homeland Security plan, yet had spent \$130 million in Homeland Security funds. "How the hell do you spend \$130 million for homeland security when you don't have a damn plan?" Hagedorn asked. "At this point, the public still does not have an official answer to that question," he added.

CQ investigators confirm that federal lawmakers want to know more about how states are spending Homeland Security funds.

"There's a delicate balance that needs to be struck between ensuring our security and not advertising our vulnerabilities, but also ensuring how our security money is being spent," said a staff member for the House Homeland Security Committee who requested anonymity. "We're spending billions of dollars every year on grants to state and local governments . . . there should be some expectation [of] accountability."

#23 US Oil Targets Kyoto in Europe

Sources:
The Guardian UK, December 8, 2005
Title: "Oil Industry Targets EU Climate Policy"
Author: David Adam

The Independent UK, December 8, 2005
Title: "How America Plotted to Stop Kyoto Deal"
Author: Andrew Buncombe

Faculty Evaluator: Ervand Peterson
Student Researcher: Christy Baird

Lobbyists funded by the U.S. oil industry have launched a campaign in Europe aimed at derailing efforts to tackle greenhouse gas pollution and climate change.

Documents obtained by Greenpeace reveal a systematic plan to persuade European business, politicians and the media that the European Union should abandon its commitments under the Kyoto protocol, the international agreement that aims to reduce emissions that lead to global warming.

The documents, an email and a PowerPoint presentation, describe efforts to establish a European coalition to "challenge the course of the EU's post-2012 agenda." They were written by Chris Horner, a Washington D.C. lawyer and senior fellow at the rightwing think tank the Competitive Enterprise Institute, which has received more than \$1.3 million funding from the U.S. oil giant ExxonMobil. Horner also acts for the Cooler Heads Coalition, a group set up "to dispel the myth of global warming."

The PowerPoint document sets out plans to establish a group called the European Sound Climate Policy Coalition. It says: "In the U.S. an informal coalition has helped successfully to avert adoption of a Kyoto-style program. This model should be emulated, as appropriate, to guide similar efforts in Europe."

During the 1990s U.S. oil companies and other corporations funded a group called the Global Climate Coalition, which emphasized uncertainties in climate science and disputed the need to take action. It was disbanded when President Bush pulled the U.S. out of the Kyoto process. The group's website now says: "The industry voice on climate change has served its purpose by contributing to a new national approach to global warming."

Countries signed up to the Kyoto process have legal commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Oil and energy companies would be affected by these cuts because burning their products produces the most emissions.

The PowerPoint document written by Horner appears to be aimed at getting RWE, the German utility company, to join a European coalition of companies to act against Kyoto. Horner is convinced that, with Europe's weakening economy, companies are likely to be increasingly ill at ease

with the costs of meeting Kyoto standards and thus could be successfully influenced to pressure their government to reject Kyoto standards, as the U.S. government has. Horner's audiences have included several significant companies including Ford Europe, Lufthansa, and Exxon.

The document says: "The current political realities in Brussels open a window of opportunity to challenge the course of the EU's post-2012 agenda." It adds: "Brussels must openly acknowledge and address them willingly or through third party pressure."

It says industry associations are the "wrong way to do this" but suggests that a cross-industry coalition, of up to six companies, could "counter the commission's Kyoto agenda." Such a coalition are advised to steer debate by targeting journalists and bloggers, as well as attending environmental group meetings and events to "share information on opposing viewpoints and tactics."

#24 Cheney's Halliburton Stock Rose Over 3000 Percent Last Year

Sources:

Raw Story, October 2005

Title: "Cheney's Halliburton Stock Options Rose 3,281 Percent Last Year, Senator Finds"

Author: John Byrne

Senator Frank Lautenberg's website

Title: "Cheney's Halliburton Stock Options Soar to \$9.2 Million"

Faculty Evaluator: Phil Beard

Student Researchers: Matthew Beavers and Willie Martin

Vice President Dick Cheney's stock options in Halliburton rose from \$241,498 in 2004 to over \$8 million in 2005, an increase of more than 3,000 percent, as Halliburton continues to rake in billions of dollars from no-bid/no-audit government contracts.

An analysis released by Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) reveals that as Halliburton's fortunes rise, so do the Vice President's. Halliburton has already taken more than \$10 billion from the Bush-Cheney administration for work in Iraq. They were also awarded many of the unaccountable post-Katrina government contracts, as off-shore subsidiaries of Halliburton quietly worked around U.S. sanctions to conduct very questionable business with Iran (See Story #2). "It is unseemly," notes Lautenberg, "for the Vice President to continue to benefit from this company at the same time his administration funnels billions of dollars to it."

According to the Vice President's Federal Financial Disclosure forms, he holds the following Halliburton stock options:

100,000 shares at \$54.5000 (vested), expire December 3, 2007

33,333 shares at \$28.1250 (vested), expire December 2, 2008

300,000 shares at \$39.5000 (vested), expire December 2, 2009

The Vice President has attempted to fend off criticism by signing an agreement to donate the after-tax profits from these stock options to charities of his choice, and his lawyer has said he will not take any tax deduction for the donations. However, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) concluded in September 2003 that holding stock options while in elective office does constitute a "financial interest" regardless of whether the holder of the options will donate proceeds to charities. Valued at over \$9 million, the Vice President could exercise his stock options for a substantial windfall, not only benefiting his designated charities, but also providing Halliburton with a tax deduction.

CRS also found that receiving deferred compensation is a financial interest. The Vice President continues to receive deferred salary from Halliburton. While in office, he has received the following salary payments from Halliburton:

Deferred salary paid by Halliburton to Vice President Cheney in 2001: \$205,298

Deferred salary paid by Halliburton to Vice President Cheney in 2002: \$162,392

Deferred salary paid by Halliburton to Vice President Cheney in 2003: \$178,437

Deferred salary paid by Halliburton to Vice President Cheney in 2004: \$194,852

(The CRS report can be downloaded at: <http://lautenberg.senate.gov/Report.pdf>)

These CRS findings contradict Vice President Cheney's puzzling view that he does not have a financial interest in Halliburton. On the September 14, 2003 edition of Meet the Press in response to questions regarding his relationship with Halliburton, where from 1995 to 2000 he was employed as CEO, Vice President Cheney said, "Since I left Halliburton to become George Bush's vice president, I've severed all my ties with the company, gotten rid of all my financial interest. I have no financial interest in Halliburton of any kind and haven't had, now, for over three years."

Comment: A similar undercover story of conflicting interest and disaster profiteering by those in the top echelon of the U.S. Government is of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's connections to Gilead Sciences, the biotech company that owns the rights to Tamiflu—the influenza remedy that is now the most-sought after drug in the world. This story was brought forward by Fortune senior writer, Nelson D. Schwartz, on October 31, 2005 in an article titled "Rumsfeld's growing stake in Tamiflu," and by F. William Engdahl for GlobalResearch, on October 30, 2005, in an article titled "Is avian flu another Pentagon hoax?"

Rumsfeld served as Gilead's chairman from 1997 until he joined the Bush administration in 2001, and he still holds a Gilead stake valued at between \$5 million and \$25 million, according to Federal Financial Disclosures filed by Rumsfeld.

The forms don't reveal the exact number of shares Rumsfeld owns, but whipped up fears of an avian flu pandemic and the ensuing scramble for Tamiflu sent Gilead's stock from \$35 to \$47 in 2005, making the Pentagon chief, already one of the wealthiest members of the Bush cabinet, at least \$1 million richer.

What's more, the federal government is emerging as one of the world's biggest customers for Tamiflu. In July 2005, the Pentagon ordered \$58 million worth of the treatment for U.S. troops around the world, and Congress is considering a multibillion dollar purchase. Roche expects 2005 sales for Tamiflu to total at about \$1 billion, compared with \$258 million in 2004.

UPDATE BY JOHN BYRNE

The media has routinely downplayed Cheney's involvement and financial investment in Halliburton, one of the largest U.S. defense contractors that received supersized no-bid contracts in Iraq. Ultimately, the importance of the story is that the Vice President of the U.S. is able to use his position of power to reap rewards for his former company in which he has a financial investment. Halliburton may also benefit from a chilling effect in which the Pentagon is more likely to favor Cheney's firm to seek favor with the White House.

Cheney continues to hold 433,333 Halliburton stock options, and receives a deferred salary of about \$200,000 a year. According to Cheney's most recent tax returns, he held \$2.5 million in retirement accounts, much of which likely came from his former defense firm.

Cheney recently filed disclosure reports that show he is valued at \$94 million.

Senator Lautenberg's disclosure, brought forward by Raw Story, received no mainstream coverage. While the press has often noted that Cheney was formerly Halliburton's CEO, they routinely fail to mention how much money he accrued from the firm during his service there. They also fail to mention that he continues to receive a pension.

RawStory.com regularly reports on Halliburton and contracts awarded to the company. SourceWatch.org also has a good library of resources on Halliburton and other defense contractors as well as the Vice President. Another way to get involved is to contact your local senator or representatives about your concerns, and to ask them to push the Vice President to sell his stock options in Halliburton.

#25 US Military in Paraguay Threatens Region

Sources:**Upside Down World, October 5, 2005****Title: "Fears mount as US opens new military installation in Paraguay"****Author: Benjamin Dangl****Foreign Policy in Focus, November 21, 2005****Title: "Dark Armies, Secret Bases, and Rummy, Oh My!"****By Conn Hallinan****International Relations Center, December 14, 2005****Title: US Military Moves in Paraguay Rattle Regional Relations"****Sam Logan and Matthew Flynn****Faculty Evaluator: Patricia Kim-Ragal****Student Researchers: Nick Ramirez and Deyango Harris**

Five hundred U.S. troops arrived in Paraguay with planes, weapons, and ammunition in July 2005, shortly after the Paraguayan Senate granted U.S. troops immunity from national and International Criminal Court (ICC) jurisdiction. Neighboring countries and human rights organizations are concerned that the massive air base at Mariscal Estigarribia, Paraguay is potential real estate for the U.S. military.

While U.S. and Paraguayan officials vehemently deny ambitions to establish a U.S. military base at Mariscal Estigarribia, the ICC immunity agreement and U.S. counterterrorism training exercises have increased suspicions that the U.S. is building a stronghold in a region that is strategic to resource and military interests.

The Mariscal Estigarribia air base is within 124 miles of Bolivia and Argentina, and 200 miles from Brazil, near the Triple Frontier where Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina meet. Bolivia's natural gas reserves are the second largest in South America, while the Triple Frontier region is home to the Guarani Aquifer, one of the world's largest fresh water sources. (See Story #20.)

Not surprisingly, U.S. rhetoric is building about terrorist threats in the triborder region. Dangl reports claims by Defense officials that Hezbollah and Hamas, radical Islamic groups from the Middle East, receive significant funding from the Triple Frontier, and that growing unrest in this region could leave a political "black hole" that would erode other democratic efforts. Dangl notes that in spite of frequent attempts to link terror networks to the triborder area, there is little evidence of a connection.

The base's proximity to Bolivia may cause even more concern. Bolivia has a long history of popular protest against U.S. exploitation of its vast natural gas reserves. But the resulting election of leftist President Evo Morales, who on May 1, 2006 signed a decree nationalizing all of Bolivia's gas reserves, has certainly intensified hostilities with the U.S.¹

When Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld visited Paraguay in August of 2005, he told reporters that, "there certainly is evidence that both Cuba and Venezuela have been involved in the situation in Bolivia in unhelpful ways."

Military analysts from Uruguay and Bolivia maintain that the threat of terrorism is often used by the U.S. as an excuse for military intervention and the monopolization of natural resources.

A journalist writing for the Argentinian newspaper, Clarin, visited the base at Mariscal Estigarribia and reported it to be in perfect condition. Capable of handling large military planes, it is oversized for the Paraguayan air force, which only has a handful of small aircraft. The base is capable of housing 16,000 troops, has an enormous radar system, huge hangars, and an air traffic control tower. The airstrip itself is larger than the one at the international airport in Asuncion, Paraguay's capital. Near the base is a military camp that has recently grown in size.

Hallinan notes that Paraguay's neighbors are very skeptical of the situation, as there is a disturbing resemblance between U.S. denials about Mariscal Estigarribia and the disclaimers made by the Pentagon about Eloy Alfaro airbase in Manta, Ecuador. The U.S. claimed the Manta base was a "dirt strip" used for weather surveillance. When local journalists revealed its size, however, the U.S. admitted the base harbored thousands of mercenaries and hundreds of U.S. troops, and Washington had signed a ten-year basing agreement with Ecuador. (See Chapter 2, Story #17, for similarities between the Manta air base in Ecuador, and the current situation unfolding in Paraguay.)

As Paraguay breaks ranks with her neighbors by allowing the U.S. to carry out military operations in the heart of South America, Logan and Flynn report that nongovernmental organizations in Paraguay are protesting the new U.S. military presence in their country, warning that recent moves could be laying the foundation for increasing U.S. presence and influence over the entire region. Perhaps the strongest words come from the director of the Paraguayan human rights organization Peace and Justice Service, Orlando Castillo, who claims that the U.S. aspires to turn Paraguay into a "second Panama for its troops, and it is not far from achieving its objective to control the Southern Cone and extend the Colombian War."

Note

1. "Bolivian Gas War," <http://www.Wikipedia.org>, May 2006.

UPDATE BY BENJAMIN DANGL

The election of Evo Morales in Bolivia in December of 2005 brought more attention to the U.S. military presence in neighboring Paraguay. Since his election, Morales has nationalized the country's gas reserves and strengthened ties with Cuba and Venezuela to build a more sustainable economy. Such policies have not been warmly received in Washington. Responding to this progressive trend, on May 22, 2006 George Bush said he was "concerned about the erosion of democracy" in Venezuela and Bolivia.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, himself a victim of a U.S.-backed coup, said Bush's comments mean, "He's already given the green light to start conspiring against the democratic government of Bolivia." U.S. troops stationed in Paraguay may be poised for such an intervention. However, human rights reports suggest the U.S. military presence has already resulted in bloodshed.

Paraguay is the fourth largest producer of soy in the world. As this industry expands, poor farmers are being forced off their lands. These farmers have organized protests, road blockades and land occupations against this displacement and have faced subsequent repression from military, police, and paramilitary forces.

Investigations by Servicio Paz y Justicia (Serpaj), a human rights group in Paraguay, report that the worst cases of repression against farmers took place in areas with the highest concentration of U.S. troops. This violence resulted in the deaths of forty-one farmers in three separate areas.

"The U.S. military is advising the Paraguayan police and military about how to deal with these farmer groups," Orlando Castillo of Serpaj told me over the phone. He explained that U.S. troops monitor farmers to find information about union organizations and leaders, then tell Paraguayan officials how to proceed. "The numbers from our study show what this U.S. presence is doing," Castillo said.

The U.S. government maintains the military exercises in Paraguay are humanitarian efforts. However, the deputy speaker of the Paraguayan parliament, Alejandro Velazquez Ugarte, said that of the thirteen exercises going on in the country, only two are of a civilian nature.

This presence is an example of the U.S. government's "counter-insurgency" effort in Latin America. Such meddling has a long, bloody history in the region. Currently, the justification is the threat of terrorism instead of communism. As Latin America shifts further away from Washington's interests, such militarization is only likely to increase.

Throughout these recent military operations, the U.S. corporate media, as well as Paraguayan media, have ignored the story. Soccer, not dead farmers or plans for a coup, has been the focus of most headlines.

For ongoing reports on the U.S. militarization of Paraguay and elsewhere visit www.UpsideDownWorld.org, a website on activism and politics in Latin America, and www.TowardFreedom.com. Benjamin Dangl's book, *The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia*

(forthcoming from AK Press, January 2007), includes further investigations into the U.S. military operations in Paraguay. Ideas for action include organizing protests and writing letters to the U.S. embassy in Paraguay (www.asuncion.usembassy.gov). For more information on international solidarity, email Orlando Castillo at Serpaj in Paraguay: desmilitarizacion@serpajpy.org.py

UPDATE BY CONN HALLINAN

My article was written in late November 2005 during the run-up to the Bolivian elections. That campaign featured indigenous leader Evo Morales, a fierce critic of Washington's neoliberal, free trade policies that have impoverished tens of millions throughout Latin America. The Bush administration not only openly opposed Morales, it charged there was a growing "terrorism" problem in the region and began building up military forces in nearby Paraguay.

There have been a number of important developments since last fall. Morales won the election and nationalized Bolivia's petrochemical industry. In the past, such an action might have triggered a U.S.-sponsored coup, or at least a crippling economic embargo. Foreign oil and gas companies immediately tried to drive a wedge between Bolivia and other nations in the region by threatening to halt investments or pull out entirely. This included companies partially owned by Brazil and Argentina.

But Latin America is a very different place these days. Three days after the May 1, 2005 nationalization, Argentine President Nestor Kirchner, Brazilian President Lula De Silva, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, and Morales met in Puerto Iguazu and worked out an agreement to help Bolivia develop its resources while preserving regional harmony. As a result, it is now likely that foreign petrochemical companies will remain in Bolivia, although they will pay up to four times as much as they did under the old agreements. And if they leave, the Chinese and Russians are waiting in the wings.

The situation is still delicate. U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld recently compared Chavez to Adolph Hitler and linked him to Cuba's Fidel Castro and Morales. Aid is flowing to militaries in Colombia and Paraguay, and the White House continues to use private proxies to intervene in the Colombian civil war. While there is a growing solidarity among nations in the southern cone, some of their economies are delicate.

Ecuador is presently wracked by demonstrations demanding the expulsion of foreign oil companies and an end to free trade talks with the U.S. This is an ongoing story. While the alternative media continues to cover these developments, the mainstream media has largely ignored them.

A note on reading the mainstream: the Financial Times recently highlighted a Latinobarometro poll indicating that most countries in South America were rejecting "democracy" as a form of government. But since free markets and neoliberalism were sold as "democracy"—economic policies that most South Americans have overwhelmingly rejected—did the poll measure an embrace of authoritarianism or a rejection of failed economic policies? Tread carefully.

To stay informed of developments in this area visit websites of School of the Americas Watch: <http://www.soaw.org/new/> and Global Exchange: <http://www.globalexchange.org/> or contact Conn Hallinan at connm@ucsc.edu

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