

DEEPBACKGROUND

In the fighting in AfPak, it's important to know who your friends are. It's also important to know whether and why they might be angry with you. Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence is one of the world's most ruthless intelligence agencies and comes second to none in sheer duplicity. The ISI contains pro- and anti-Taliban elements, as well as factions favorable and hostile to the government they ostensibly serve. Concealed within the ranks are numerous Islamists, some of whom merrily plot terrorist attacks against neighboring India and Afghanistan. They work with the United States when they feel inspired to do so.

The U.S. has often been reluctant to provide tactical intelligence to Pakistan because the shared information frequently winds up in the hands of the Taliban or even al-Qaeda. Many believe rogue ISI elements actually protect al-Qaeda forces in Waziristan. ISI is also a business, cooperating with the Americans just enough to keep the money flowing, while nurturing narco-trafficking arrangements to move drugs out of Afghanistan and into Russia.

The May 2002 suicide-bomber attack on a bus in Karachi in southern Pakistan, which killed 11 French naval engineers, was originally attributed to al-Qaeda-linked jihadist radicals, but investigating magistrates in France slowly working their way through the evidence have come up with a different story. French intelligence now believes that the attacks might have been organized by members of Pakistan's intelligence services as payback for Paris cutting off millions of dollars in kickback payments that had been part of a 1994 submarine purchase. French counterterrorism specialists have decided that there is no actual evidence linking any known jihadis to the bombings and note that no group has ever claimed credit, highly unusual in a successful terrorist attack.

On June 19, lawyers who represent families of the bombing victims received a briefing from the investigating magistrates suggesting that Pakistani officials were behind the attack. The judges and investigators noted that in 1994 Paris had closed a \$1 billion 10-year deal to sell and assemble Agosta submarines in Pakistan that included \$33 million in kickbacks paid in installments to Pakistani officials who had played a key role in approving the contract. There was subsequently a change of government in France. The advisers of newly elected president Jacques Chirac then decided the kickback was illegal and refused to continue with that part of the arrangement. This enraged some of Pakistan's senior military officers and leading figures in its intelligence service. Having looked at all the evidence, French authorities now believe that key members of Pakistan's military-intelligence-political elite decided to get even for what they regarded as a breach of contract by attacking and killing the French submarine engineers working on the project in Karachi. Investigators believe that the attack was carried out by militants from one of the Sunni terrorist groups active in Kashmir and controlled by the ISI.

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on liberty. He has written eloquently about the Constitution's sanctity in times of war, and the United States' own history of overriding basic rights in times of great stress. Yet he still seems to think a state of permanent war can coexist with freedom. "War does curtail freedom—unless people are aware of what is going on. If there is a clear realization about the basic idea of America amongst people, war does not have to lead to people relinquishing their rights," he protests.

Hentoff's belief in Americans' ability to resist the temptations of empire derives from a faith in the power of education. But he is dismayed at the ignorance about the Constitution among the American populace. "What makes America different than the rest of the world is the U.S. Constitution. It seems to me that most Americans don't really know why they're American, or what that means," he says. His 1983 work of fiction, *The Day They Came to Arrest the Book*, tells the story of a high-school newspaper editor who rebels against school authorities banning *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. It is not difficult to imagine who acted as the real-life inspiration for the brave young editor. "The republic is in danger of being lost if it is not understood. People need to know about their freedoms," he says.

Fifty-odd years is a long time to be infatuated with one idea. Hentoff is rare among American writers for his consistency, but there is one less defining issue on which he has noticeably switched sides. "The only thing I really regret is that I didn't become pro-life sooner," he says. "It took me a while to realize that sanctioning abortion meant killing actual human beings." Hentoff has long championed the rights of the disabled and sees his crusade against abortion as a logical extension of those concerns.

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Squaring Dupont Circle

HEAVEN IS NOT a farm.

If you spend too much time on the American Right—in either its demotic or romantic-intellectual forms—you might forget this essential truth. You'll be subjected to paeans to rural community; cities are so soulless! They're cold, artificial, out of touch with beauty (which explains why cities produce so little great art). City folk exemplify capitalist modernity at its most unnatural.

Well, I'm human, not natural. I like strangers, mostly because I am one. I'm also a resident of one of America's least-loved cities: her nation's capital. And my current address is an even harder sell for the conservative mind: the former gay ghetto, Dupont Circle. Here is a neighborhood where nobody's your neighbor. Yet everybody is.

Dupont in the summer favors one sense only—sight. On Saturday around the fountain, women in bright dresses saunter past men in sherbet-colored suits, giving one another the eye.

The other four senses aren't so lucky. You can usually placate taste with a Jack Daniel's chocolate ice cream sundae from Larry's. Touch is worse, since all you feel is your clothes sticking to your body. Smell, which in a District summer always seems to be shifting from honey-suckle to unhailed garbage, settles down to a one-note hum of sweat. And there are buskers, hiking out their guitars for the treacle of the counterculture: Dylan, Neil Young.

In the summer, God remembers the District and clamps down his palm on it. The city gets slow and flirtatious. We swelter under a low-slung skyline, teasing strangers.

The man next to me calls out to a group of women, "What country y'all from?" The

darkest and most statuesque slowly turns her head toward him and, with a hometown voice laden with irony and resignation, replies, "*This* one." They laugh and shake their heads at one another and he settles back, foxed for the moment.

I'm told that country life teaches you patience and charity, since you can't get away from your neighbors or your past. Every day you pass the familiar scenes of your little victories and large heartbreaks.

The city teaches you patience and charity in a different way: You learn to negotiate among strangers. Every region has a different way of managing it—pop culture tells me that Midwesterners smile relentlessly, Southerners drink and fight, and Californians drive. D.C. flirts. If you don't interpret strangers' actions with charity and good humor, you'll go crazy here.

The scene is full of small public camaraderies. A man with a stuffed crocodile on his shoulder encourages his little boy to play with a couple's trained parrots. Two men share a bottle of rum. Their casual illegality is also very D.C.; it's part of the fatalism bred by our civic helplessness. The bar I sometimes frequented before I turned 21 had a sign above the door, *ABOVE THE LAW SINCE 1996*. Until then it had been an after-hours speakeasy, which it still was, but the slogan was too good to resist. This is Marion Barry's city. When the *Washington Post* ran a contest seeking pickup lines that could only be used in the District, the winner was, "Your beauty renders me as powerless as Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton."

Dupont today, like the gay community generally, has gone aggressively bobo

(David Brooks's abbreviation for "bourgeois bohemian," those who want the perks of living outside the rules as well as the perks of following them). Happiness beat ecstasy, order beat alienation, respectability beat solidarity. I chafe at the new bobo order, but I have to pay respect even to respectability when it is this hard-won. As you ascend the long escalator up from the Dupont Circle subway station you can read lines from Walt Whitman's "The Wound-Dresser" carved in stone:

*I sit by the restless all the dark
night — some are so young;
Some suffer so much — I recall
the experience sweet and sad ...*

Even bobos can offer an exhausted beauty in the wake of the plague years.

In the gay community you meet a lot of the deracinated cosmopolites who populate conservative caricatures of the city (a role once played primarily by Jews). You meet the people who left home, family, and tradition behind. And you learn why: who left whom, the gay son or the mother who won't speak to him?

But the stronger defense of the deracinated cosmopolite is that he is Everyman. The city is the human condition with the volume on high. The past is always lost, even if you stay right where you left it. The longing for home is never fully satisfied. The most familiar neighbor—and even your own beloved—always remains a stranger with whom you must negotiate.

"What country y'all from?" Eventually you learn that you don't know the answer. ■

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