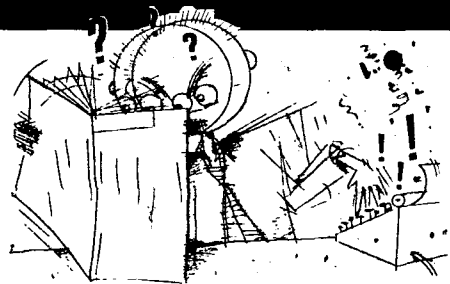


# LETTERS



## Surprise

I WAS SURPRISED THAT YOUR "OVERKILL" EDITORIAL (ITT, Aug. 29) did not point out the connection between the current crisis in the Gulf and the Reagan-Carter activities described in *October Surprise* by Barbara Honegger. Your early article by Honegger, "Did Reagan steal the 1980 election?" (ITT, June 24, 1987) and the Richard Brenneke sequel (ITT, Oct. 12, 1988) were impressive scoops. The events described in *October Surprise* give convincing evidence that Reagan and Bush bear a major responsibility for Iraq's crushing \$80 billion debt burden, the major force for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

Iraq's war with Iran was over control of the Shatt al Arab waterway, Iraq's only outlet to the Gulf, and Hussein had good reason to count on a short war. When Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980, according to Iran's commander in chief, the country had only five to 10 days' worth of military supplies to fight a war, and most experts thought Iraq would win quickly.

President Carter placed an embargo on arms shipments to the belligerents, but Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin had other ideas. In an effort to exhaust two hostile states by prolonging the war, Begin immediately sent a planeload of spare parts for Iran's air force and informed Carter only after the fact (a violation of our aid agreement).

As election day approached, the Reagan-Bush team knew that if Carter got the 52 hostages back he would win; to prevent this, the Reagan-Bush team made a deal with Iran. Iran promised to hold the hostages until the inauguration, and Reagan promised to send arms to Iran when elected. The hostages were released minutes after the inauguration, and President Reagan sent many billions of dollars of arms to Iran, starting in 1981, some through Israel, some direct and some from draw-downs of NATO supplies.

With this massive supply of arms from the U.S., Iran took the upper hand in the war. Alarmed at the prospect of Khomeini becoming dominant in the Gulf, the U.S. threw its support to Iraq until the war ended in 1988 in a virtual stalemate, with both nations heavily in debt and some 2 million dead. This is how Iraq came to have an \$80 billion debt, a crushing burden on 17 million people that made Hussein take his desperate gamble.

The account of the subversion of the 1980 election by the Reagan-Bush campaign team is described in great detail by Barbara Honegger in *October Surprise*. George Bush, former CIA director, was a key figure through a network of CIA agents, active and retired. Honegger's account is corroborated by Abolhassan Bani Sadr, now living in Paris, who was president of Iran in 1980. It is also corroborated by Mansur Rafizadeh in his book *Witness*. Rafizadeh, for 16 years SAVAK chief in the U.S., with channels both to Iran and the CIA, confirms Honegger's assertion that much of the CIA was loyal to Reagan, not President Carter, in 1980.

Alan Rhodes  
Willoughby, Ohio

## Kristolschlock

THE RATIONALES BEING OFFERED IN THE OBE- dient media to justify American military intervention in the Middle East are crass and cynical, even bizarre. For example, the neoconservative Irving Kristol (the *Washington Post*, Aug. 22) affirms that, since we now are the only superpower, it behooves us "to perform a policing role when, in our judgment, it is in our national interest to do so." This means that because we are uniquely powerful, we have the right to use military force abroad whenever we please—or, in short, might makes right.

George Will (*Newsweek*, Sept. 10) maintains that when international law is an obstacle to doing what America considers necessary in the world, it should be ignored. Furthermore, he continues, international law does not exist, or at least has no binding force, because it lacks an enforcement mechanism. As he quips with an airy anagram, "Law without a sword is mere words." The sword is in the hands of America—that is all that matters.

In their contempt for the ordinary opinion of mankind, such rationales recall the spirit of '30s fascism. Even a George Orwell peeking at the current scene from his grave would find them incredible.

Louvan Nolting  
Lewes, Del.

## Advocacy is in the eye of the beholder

CALL ME NAIVE, BUT I CAN'T HELP BUT BE SHOCKED when I see the liberal-to-left press reinforcing the marginalization of perfectly legitimate reporting and opinion.

Karen Rosenberg (ITT, Aug. 1) seems to think it's such a generous bone to throw for mainstream media critics to "recognize" the PBS series *P.O.V.* as "advocacy journalism" and, therefore, to refrain from attacking the facts or analysis of those filmmakers.

Aw, c'mon folks. What about the *MacNeil Lehrer NewsHour*? Or the *McLaughlin Group*? Or *Washington Week in Review*? Or *This Week with Granddad*? Am I just a crazed ideologue, or do these shows trot out a seemingly endless guest list of white, male, conservative current or former government officials? No advocacy of any certain interests there, eh?

No, we're expected to swallow the myth of these media institutions' impartiality right along with the AT&T and General Electric jingles.

Well, no more! It's time for your publication to name names and tell it like it is: it's fine for the left to eke out a "dissenting"

opinion or two every now and then—as long as those opinions are trivialized by the "advocacy" label. Defining news coverage, analysis and debate in so-called "centrist terms" is bought and paid for by corporate and government interests—and legitimacy is conferred by omission of the same "advocacy" label.

Henry M. Hughes  
Oakland, Calif.

## Analogies

ALEXANDER COCKBURN (ITT, AUG. 29) EXPRESSES understanding for those Arabs who sympathize with Iraq, since the U.S. "did nothing to stop the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon" and "has done nothing about the bloody occupation of the West Bank."

The analogy is inaccurate and unfair. Israel sent its troops into Lebanon in response to continuous terrorist raids by Palestine Liberation Organization forces in Lebanon. Israel's presence in the West Bank—regardless of what one thinks of its present policies—is the result of Jordan's participation in the pan-Arab invasion of Israel in 1967.

If Iraq had occupied Kuwait because terrorists were using bases in Kuwait to launch attacks on Iraq, or because Kuwait had participated in a pan-Arab invasion of Iraq, its action might be understandable.

But one thing should be clear: Iraq's takeover of Kuwait is an act of unprovoked aggression, while Israel's presence in Lebanon and the West Bank has been motivated by self-defense.

Bertram Korn Jr.  
Executive Director, Committee for Accuracy  
in Middle East Reporting in America, Philadelphia

## Costly war

THE COST OF THE MARION BARRY CASE WILL range from \$8 million to over \$23 million, just for the eight-year investigation. Including the trial costs, the total bill could be more than \$30 million.

Isn't it time that the average taxpayer asks if we really want to spend millions of dollars to prevent a person from using something that harms no one but himself? There must be taxpayer backlash against the use of 30-plus agents conspiring to bust one man in a hotel room, especially a mayor who is not armed and dangerous. Couldn't a team of two or three guys have handled the operation?

Consider my case. I was sentenced to two years and given a \$10,000 fine for importing smoking pipes, along with leather goods and handicrafts from India and other countries for 17 years. My nine-months pregnant wife and I picked up our shipment of pipes and handicrafts from U.S. Customs in Col-

umbus, Ohio, as we had done for 17 years. But this time we were followed by two carloads of federal agents all day in Columbus and 70 miles back to our home. An hour after coming home we had 25 to 30 agents from Columbus, Cleveland and Athens standing on our front porch reading us the riot act. When they claimed to have a search warrant, the agent in charge could not produce it, saying, "I must have left it in the trunk." That was the code phrase to charge into our house, guns drawn, and surround my wife in the children's bedroom, where she was putting two other children to bed.

Our van was confiscated for carrying the shipment of handicrafts the U.S. Customs legally cleared and gave to us. Most of my pipe inventory was taken from my warehouse, although they did leave 4,500 pipes behind that were no different from the ones they took. I was thrown in jail and, when my time came before the judge, I was accused by the judge of "destroying the lives of hundreds and thousands of children across America" with my pipes.

My business has been destroyed, our property is being taken from us (that which has not already been confiscated), we are forced into bankruptcy proceedings, and a business that operated legitimately for 17 years, paid taxes and caused no harm to anyone has been turned from a net financial benefit to the government into a total loss. The government has spent \$150,000 to \$200,000 on my case. In addition, they are spending \$50,000 per year to incarcerate me. We are declaring bankruptcy on \$30,000 credit that cannot be repaid, \$30,000 on defaulted loans and another \$30,000 in additional liabilities mostly associated with legal expenses and the fine. My wife and children have to go on welfare.

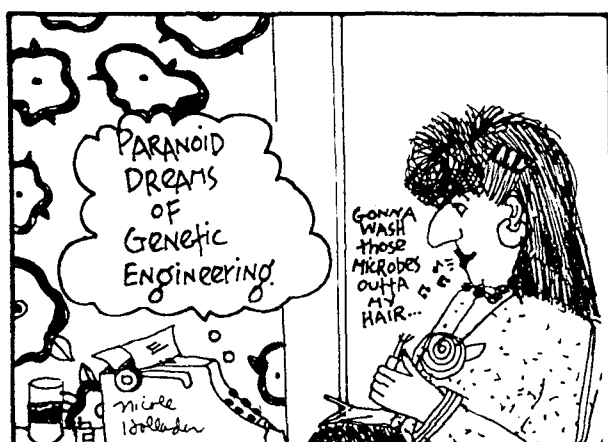
Does that make sense? The total turnaround on this from the financial point of view has to be close to \$400,000 to \$500,000.

The majority of prison inmates were convicted for drug-related crimes. Almost all of them were busted by hordes of cops. Almost all of them have cost the taxpayers more than \$100,000 to bust and prosecute. Throw in the cost of incarceration at \$50,000 per year for federal and somewhat less for state and local prisons, and the taxpayer should re-evaluate his stand on drugs.

1990 looks to be a record year for murders in this country. Yet the drug war is finally being "won." The feds have confiscated more cocaine than ever. Street prices and quality reflect this decrease in supply. But what does society gain by this if murders and mayhem actually increase?

Ronald Linker  
Prisoner of the War on Drugs  
Morgantown, W.Va.

## SYLVIA



by Nicole Hollander



By James Petras

**T**HE IRAQI INVASION OF KUWAIT DID NOT in itself threaten the economies of the U.S., Europe or Japan. Furthermore, no evidence has surfaced that Saddam Hussein was preparing to invade Saudi Arabia. His seizure of Kuwait was made in order to increase oil revenues, which meant selling oil to the West and Japan. Paradoxically, it is the U.S. invasion of the Mideast, the threat of a major war with Iraq and the Iraqi oil embargo that have had a major destabilizing effect on world markets. As a result, global stock markets have plunged downward and the tendency toward stagflation has been exacerbated.

The forces shaping President Bush's Mideast military adventure do not spring from an undifferentiated American capitalism, much less our national interest. His decision reflects the interest of specific sectors that influence Washington policy-makers. In recent decades these have been the military-industrial complex, banks and financial institutions and oil interests. Over the years these interests have shaped

## Saddam, you're no Noriega

budgets, foreign policy and domestic priorities. From the late '70s to the present, social policy has been sacrificed to immense military spending. Banks were deregulated and a half-trillion dollars must now be allocated by the state to subsidize the "losers," while profits for the winners soar as U.S. foreign policy puts a premium on Third World debt payments over and against any other issue. And oil companies, which were faced with declining profits and tied to crisis-ridden financial institutions, are now about to enjoy a windfall revival.

These forces at the center of U.S. executive decision-making are the principal beneficiaries of Bush's military intervention. With the end of the Cold War and mounting public pressure for large-scale, long-term cuts in military spending on the agenda, the escalation of the regional war into a global confrontation mobilizes mass media propaganda for reversing congressional and public opinion. The sending of U.S.

troops on a large scale creates a "human face" for securing public acquiescence in revising earlier attitudes: who can oppose high military spending in the face of U.S. hostages, or when it is needed to support GIs sweating in the desert—even though those GIs are defending corrupt, authoritarian oil billionaires, profit-gouging oil companies and defense contractors?

From the point of view of American banks, the U.S. intervention could not have been better timed. With almost \$70 billion in Kuwaiti assets frozen indefinitely and Saudi Arabia occupied by U.S. forces, the banks can expect increased leverage on Gulf oil funds. The depressed oil industry and the affiliated financial institutions and banks holding oil shares are in a position to recapture their strategic position in the U.S. economy and, with prices having risen more than 50 percent in less than a month, to increase their profits.

The size, scope and speed of the U.S. military intervention cannot be explained by mere bureaucratic imperatives or geopolitical considerations. In the short run, and for the above-mentioned specific sectors of the U.S. economy, Bush's policies will be successful; but in the middle and long term, the Bush policy merely reinforces structures that have caused the U.S. to decline in the world economy: *rentier* incomes undercut investment in production and technology, military contracts undercut competitiveness, and oil-price increases raise costs and lower consumption, depressing the economy and increasing inflation.

The military adventure in the Gulf creates the illusion that the U.S. is reasserting world power. It provides a military display to lay a new foundation for sustaining the dominant power. Just as in Eastern Europe, military pressure is intended to break the back not only of the aggressor Saddam Hussein but of any projection of nationalism, and to "open up" the Mideast to neoliberal economics and free-market democrats. This is short-term grandeur: the grand alliance now allegedly stretches from NATO through Moscow and Beijing to Tokyo. The worldwide support of the oil embargo has the U.S. leading and its allies following. We are back to the Golden Age, the zenith of U.S. power, 1945. Or are we?

The gains on the politico-diplomatic front are not accompanied by commensurate gains on the economic side. Apart from the above-mentioned troika (oil, banks and military-industrial groups), the military buildup is creating greater strains on the U.S. economy, increasing deficits, devastating urban centers with further budget cuts and undermining non-military industries.

**Institutional background:** Bush's policy reflects not only the interests of the military, banks and oil companies but also his institutional background as a former director of the CIA. But there is tension and potential conflict between the economic interests and CIA strategic concerns. The optimal strategy from the point of view of the business forces is a policy of "no war, no peace," a permanent tension that generates big military budgets without losing public support through high military casualties. For the banks, continued confrontation keeps the

U.S. in Saudi Arabia and the pressure on the Saudis, thus facilitating continued U.S. access to and control over funds. For the oil companies, the confrontation keeps oil prices rising, while war could endanger supplies.

The other face of Bush—the CIA operative side—sees the problem in terms of a military action to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime. This narrow "operational vision" is evident in Bush's changing conception of the nature of the military escalation. In the initial period, Washington described the Bush policy as directed toward "stopping the invasion of Saudi Arabia"; this was later extended to include "driving Iraq out of Kuwait." Subsequently, the policy was further widened to "overthrowing the Hussein regime."

The increased U.S. military presence is accompanied by an escalation of demands and the extension of the U.S. politico-military agenda. Bush has shifted U.S. policy from dependence on a strategic client (Saudi Arabia) to rolling back Mideast politics to the early '50s, when American power in the Mideast was unchallenged and the region was dominated by a collection of Euro-American client states.

**More of the same:** Fatuous dreams are a poor substitute for a realistic policy, but there is a history of American presidents acting in a similar manner. Bush is following an interventionary policy based on false analogies: extrapolating from previous experience, presidents have projected U.S. power in new contexts with disastrous consequences. Bush's Iraqi policy is a product of what can be called the "Panama complex": successful intervention in overthrowing one adversary becomes the model for a subsequent attempt. Kennedy's CIA-orchestrated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba drew on the agency's earlier overthrow of the Arbenz government in Guatemala, with disastrous results. A few thousand exiles were no match for Castro's half-million-strong militias. President Johnson's massive escalation in Vietnam followed his successful invasion of the Dominican Republic; however, in contrast to Juan Bosch's poorly armed civilians, Ho Chi Minh had several hundred thousand seasoned guerrilla fighters, and the U.S. went down to defeat. President Bush's successful invasion and overthrow of Panama's Noriega has created a frame of reference for his current approach to Iraq, but Saddam Hussein is not Noriega; he has a million-man army and anti-aircraft missiles that can hit back.

In each case where U.S. presidents have attempted to repeat earlier experiences of imperial successes in different contexts, their policies have been major failures. Bush seems to be following the pattern; as in Panama, the administration is "demonizing" the adversary, and Noriega the narcotictator is now replaced by Hussein the "Nazi." Then there is a massive military buildup and the search for a pretext to mobilize public opinion behind military action—in Panama it was the shooting of a U.S. soldier in Panamanian territory; in the case of Iraq, it could involve the U.S. shooting at an Iraqi ship. But Hussein is committed to fighting, and, above all else, he is in his own backyard: there is an unknown reserve of nationalist sentiment in the region that was lacking among the residents of the Canal Zone.

James Petras teaches sociology at the State University of New York, Binghamton.

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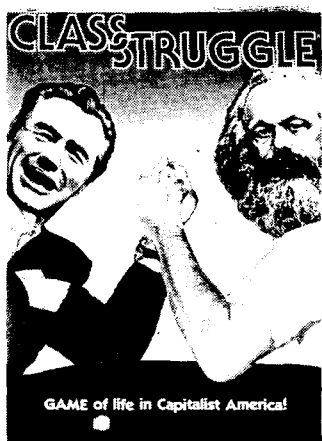
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