

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON says



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By Si Frumkin

THE MORE IT CHANGES, ETC., ETC.

Q.: What do a broken clock and Lenin have in common?

A.: A broken clock is right at least twice a day and if you wait long enough Lenin too will be right about something.

Lenin famously predicted that the communists would hang the last capitalist using rope that another capitalist sold them. Lenin was right in identifying greed as trumping all else - right and wrong, honor, even self-respect and dignity. The most recent example of this was a recent press conference where one of Lenin's heirs delivered a metaphorical kick to the behinds of three major global capitalists who reacted by heaping praise upon him, thanking him, complimenting him on his exceptional footwork and begging him to kick them again in the future.



meetings and conferences in a search for an equitable solution. The Kremlin ignored it all and, inevitably, it won.

Russia's economic self-confidence has increased immeasurably since the collapse of the Soviet Union 15 years ago. It has been bolstered by the increase of the price of oil and heavy European reliance on Russian natural gas. Russia has become indifferent to criticism that once may have affected its behavior and the world has grown to accept this new reality.

Russia began 2006 by shutting off the flow of natural gas by Ukrainian pipelines to Europe while demanding a large price increase from both Ukraine and the Europeans. The Europeans protested and vice president Cheney accused the Russians of using oil and gas as "tools of intimidation and blackmail." Russia wasn't impressed, the price paid to Gazprom was increased to meet Russian demands and, parenthetically, Ukraine was reminded that there were severe consequences to becoming too cozy with the West.

President Vladimir Putin, a former KGB lieutenant colonel and former head of the FSB - KGB's successor - called the press conference. It was the culmination of a 6-month assault by the Russian government against Sakhalin II, the world's largest natural gas and oil development project. It was a joint venture of Royal Dutch Shell, Mitsubishi and Mitsui for exploration and development on the Russian North Pacific island of Sakhalin, aimed at expanding and penetrating the Asian market.

Kremlin's campaign began as a surreal investigation by a heretofore-unknown environmental agency's inspector who basically closed the project and threatened hefty fines for every tree that had been cut or would be cut in the future.

After the initial shock it became obvious that the campaign was a transparent attempt by the Kremlin to take over the project and transfer it to the state Gazprom oil and gas entity. It was also clear that the West had no leverage except quiet diplomacy and persuasion. The U.S. and European governments filed protests, warned, cautioned and initiated

In a symbolic balancing act, Russia ended 2006 by shutting off the pipelines running through Belarus - which until recently was believed to be a close Russian ally. Friendship apparently didn't trump greed: Belarus had its gas price doubled.

Meanwhile, the three foreign companies that had been dispossessed had no criticism of Russia or Putin when it was announced that 50% plus 1 shares of the project would be sold to Gazprom at the discounted price of \$7.45 billion.

The chief executive of Royal Shell, Jeroen van der Veer, thanked Putin profusely for "his support" and proclaimed the surrender of control to Gazprom, "a historic occasion."

In his turn - Surprise! Surprise! - Putin magnanimously declared that the project's environmental problems could now "be considered to be resolved."

An energy analyst at a Moscow investment firm said that many foreign investors were disappointed by their experience in Russia but that this didn't deter them from trying again and that Shell is still hoping to win access to other Russian oil and gas fields in the future.

In surrendering to pressure, the Sakhalin II investors were certainly aware of what befell companies that resisted Kremlin pressure. Yukos, a major Russian oil company, was taken over by Gazprom and gutted into insignificance and bankruptcy while its CEO, Khodorkovsky, once Russia's wealthiest man, is serving a long prison term in Siberia.

The Russian arrogance is not confined to economics - murder of opponents is no longer confined to Russia - Litvinenko's poisoning in London shows that no place is really safe. Moreover, the British government has been very reluctant to say anything critical to Russia even though Litvinenko was a British citizen murdered on British soil and British police were hampered in their investigation in Moscow.



The Kremlin is quite satisfied with its policies and there is no reason to believe that its policies might change. Kremlin spokesmen have pointed out that while the Russian stock market had dropped to an index of 500 when Khodorkovsky was arrested, it had risen above 1800 since then. The chairman of Gazprom's board and deputy Prime Minister, Medvedev, points out that the Gazprom value was estimated at \$9 billion in 2000 and is between \$250 and \$300 billion at present.

Mikhail Kasyanov, Putin's prime minister from 2000 to 2004 and one Putin's severest critics says that foreigners who rushed to invest in Russia were very shortsighted and equally responsible for Russia's questionable policies. I agree.

I think that they are all rushing to Russia to sell the rope that will be used to hang them. ☛

BIGGEST STORY OF OUR TIME:

OUR SELF-EXTINCTION By Mark Steyn, December 14, 2006

Suppose for a moment that the birth in Bethlehem that Christians celebrate this week never happened --that it is, as the secularists would have it, mere mumbo jumbo, superstition, a myth. In other words, consider it not as an event but as a narrative. You want to launch a big new global movement from scratch. So what do you use?

The birth of a child.

If Christianity is just a myth, then it is, so to speak, an immaculately conceived one. On the one hand, what could be more powerless than a newborn babe? On the other, without a newborn babe, man is ultimately powerless. For, without new life, there can be no civilization, no society, no nothing.

"The world has collapsed," announces a BBC newsman in a new movie. "Only Britain soldiers on." Europe in 1940? No, 2027. Adapted from P.D. James' dystopian novel, *Children Of Men* is set on a planet in which humanity is barren. That's to say, it can no longer reproduce. And you'd be amazed at how much else collapses with the fertility rate.

You might have a hard time finding "Children Of Men" at your local multiplex. It's a more pertinent Christmas movie this holiday season than "Bad Santa 3" or "The Santa Clause 8," but Universal seems to have got cold feet and all but killed the picture. In an enthusiastic review in *Seattle Weekly*, J. Hoberman observed: "Universal may have deemed 'Children' too grim for Christmas, but it is premised on a reverence for life that some might term religious." Granted, he's in the godless precincts of Seattle, that last bit of the sentence -- "some might" -- seems a tad qualified. Obviously, Christianity has a "reverence for life." So too does Judaism: all that begetting the eyes glaze over at in the Old Testament, going right back to God's injunction to be fruitful and multiply.

Christmas is a good time not just for Christians to ponder the central proposition of their faith -- the baby in the manger -- but for post-Christian secularists to ponder the central proposition of theirs: that religion is a lot of goofy voodoo nonsense and that any truly rational person will give it the bum's rush. The problem with this view is that "rationalism" is looking less and less rational with each passing year. Here are three headlines from the last couple of weeks:

- "Mohammed Overtakes George In List Of Most Popular Names" (*Daily Telegraph, London*)
- "Japan's Population 'Set To Plummet'" (*BBC News*)
- "Islam Thrives As Russia's Population Falls" (*Toronto Star*)

By comparison with America, those three societies are very secular. Indeed, Russia spent three-quarters of a century under the most militantly secularist regime of all: Under Communism, the state was itself a religion, but, alas, only an ersatz one, a present-tense chimera. As a result, Russians more or less gave up begetting: Slavs are in steep population decline, and, on present trends, Russia will be majority Muslim by 2050. And the Russian army will be majority Muslim by 2015. In western Europe, societal suicide isn't quite so advanced, but the symbolism is still poignant: "George" isn't just the name of America's revered cowboy president, but of England's patron saint; the national flag is the Cross of St.



George, under which Englishmen sallied forth to smite the Mohammedans in those long-ago Crusades. Now the Mohammedans have managed to smite the Georgians big time, not by conquest but simply by outbreeding. Mohammed is also the most popular boy's name

in Brussels, Amsterdam and other Continental cities.

But forget Islam: In Europe, they're inheriting by default. There are no Muslims or any other significant group of immigrants in Japan and yet the Japanese are engaging in a remorseless auto-genocide. Already in net population decline and the most geriatric society on earth, their descent down the death spiral is only going to accelerate. As the BBC reported, "The imbalance is threatening future economic growth and raising fears over whether the government will be able to fund pensions. But Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki said: 'It's impossible for the pension system to collapse due to the declining birth rate because we will adjust the amount of money put into it.'"

Oh, OK then. But, just as a matter of interest, when you "adjust" the amount of money you put into the pension system, whose pockets are you going to "adjust" it out of? Japanese and European societies are trying to secure the future on upside-down family trees in which four grandparents have

one grandchild. No matter how frantically you "adjust," that's unsustainable.

What's the answer? Cloning? Artificial intelligence? Well, here's another story you may have missed in recent days. Sir David King, the British government's chief scientific adviser, has turned in a bunch of reports on issues likely to arise in the next 50 years. Among them is a study on "robot rights." In a nutshell, if robots advance to some form of consciousness, they'd be entitled to welfare. The state would be obliged to provide "robo-healthcare," as the report puts it, plus no doubt robo-pensions and all the rest.

These are four stories you may not even have seen, what with all the really important stuff happening in the world, like Miss USA not being fired by Donald Trump, and Matt Damon dissing Dick Cheney. I'm a big 24/7 demographics bore, as readers of my new doomsday book will know, but even I'm a little taken aback at the way its thesis is confirmed every day by some item from some part of the map. These stories are all one story, the biggest story of our time: the self-extinction of most of the developed world.

The Virgin Mary's pregnancy is not the only one in the Gospels.

There's another that prefigures it, in Luke 1:13:

"But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John."

Zacharias is surprised to discover his impending fatherhood -- "for I am an old man and my wife well stricken in

years." If you read Luke, the virgin birth seems a logical extension of the earlier miracle -- the pregnancy of Mary's elderly cousin. For Matthew, Jesus' birth is the miracle. Luke, a physician, leaves you with the impression that all birth -- all life -- is to a degree miraculous and God-given, if only because without it there can be no world. The obligation to have children may be a lot of repressive theocratic hokey, but it's less irrational than the secular self-absorption of a barren Russia, Japan and Europe. And, if Christianity is a fairy tale, it's a perfectly constructed one, beginning with the decision to establish Christ's divinity in the miracle of His birth: As the song says, "And man will live forever more because of Christmas Day." Ω



Just as the demise of Slobodan Milosevic in Yugoslavia closed the lid on national communist parties in Eastern Europe, the demise of Saddam Hussein in Iraq appears likely to do the same for secular Arab nationalism across the Middle East.

And just as communism exited the European stage exposed for what it always truly was? fascism without fascism's ability to make the trains run on time - secular Arab nationalism will exit the stage revealed for what it always was: a despotic perversion of the western nation-state that lasted as long as it did mainly because of secret-police techniques imported from the former Soviet Union.

Arab nationalism's roots go back to the revolt against European colonialism in the early decades of the 20th century. But as it developed, it faced a serious problem: Because it was organized around the artificial national borders that these same colonialists had drawn - which generally ignored ethnic and sectarian lines - the result, in too many cases, was multiethnic rivalry and the subjugation of one part of the population by another.

In Iraq, for instance, the national borders created a state in which the majority Shiites were subjugated by the minority Sunnis (as we all now know). In Syria, the majority Sunnis came to be subjugated by the minority Alawites, who constitute a branch of Shiism (and who had been favored in the armed forces by the French). In Lebanon, it was the Shiites who ended up subjugated by both Christians and Sunnis.

No sooner were these independent new states created than the ties of faith and tribe were undermining them. A fragile unity of sorts could only be achieved by recourse to secular nationalism, which, on paper at least, aimed to transcend those bitter rivalries.

Indeed, the more artificial the state, the more extreme the secular ideology had to be to hold it together. To secure unwieldy tribal assemblages, for instance, an austere state socialism was required in Algeria, and a form of "Dear Leader Absolutism" in Libya. Because Syria and Iraq were also artificial constructs, these two states resorted to Baathism—another bastardized form of state socialism.

Contrast all this with places such as Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, which were age-old civilization clusters whose identities, rather than artificial, harked back to antiquity. It should be no surprise that these places produced more benign forms of secular government.

The two extremes in the Arab world became Tunisia and Iraq. Tunisia, a small country of Sunni Arabs with no internal divisions, which traced its borders back to ancient Carthage, produced Habib Bourguiba, the Arab version of the enlightened Turkish modernizer

Kemal Ataturk. Iraq, a Frankenstein monster of a country assembled from warring ethnic and sectarian groups by the British, produced Saddam Hussein, the Arab Stalin.

The defining fact of the Cold War years in the Middle East was competition among these insecure new states for the right to inherit the mantle of the deceased Ottoman Turkish empire, which had held sway over most of their territories for centuries. Because Israel served as a symbolic replacement for the other to prove its anti-Zionist bona fide European colonialism, each new state tried to outdo the other to prove its anti-Zionist bona fides.

Egypt, the Arab world's demographic hub, had the advantage, especially as its leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, psychologically mobilized the Arab masses by standing up to an invasion by Britain, France and Israel in October 1956, leading to a withdrawal of these "colonial" powers from the Suez Canal. Thus began the high-water mark of secular Arabism, which lasted until Nasser's humiliation by the Israelis in the 1967 war.

The Palestine Liberation Organization merged in the waning years of Nasserism. It was modeled after the other secular nationalist movements - so much so that its foundational text, the 1938 book "The Arab Awakening," was written not by a Muslim but by a Greek Orthodox Christian, George Antonius. Another Christian, George Habash, became one of the PLO's most radical guiding lights.

The defining organizational attribute of secular Arab nationalism was the military emergency regime - witness Egypt, Syria and Iraq. That justified its existence by the continued state of war with Israel. Also working against liberal change in the Middle East was the influence of the Soviet Union. With Soviet military and economic aid for the secular nationalists came the techniques of East Bloc security services.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in the two Baathist countries, Syria and Iraq. The result of made-in-Moscow surveillance techniques was the emergence in the early 1970s of a new class of dictator Hafez Assad in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq who, unlike their predecessors, were not overthrown by yet another general or colonel after a short time in office.

These new men stayed in power for decades because anyone who opposed them, no matter how furtively, was soon identified and destroyed.

Thus it was that the Nasserites, the Baathists from Syria and Iraq and the austere pseudo-Marxists from Algeria vied with each other for influence. The PLO, as the supreme

symbol of the anti-Zionist struggle, was the beneficiary of the competition. But when the Berlin Wall collapsed and aid from the East Bloc began to dry up, Palestine had still not been liberated, even as creaky, authoritarian bureaucracies across the Arab world were decaying.

Beneath the carapace of secularism, a disturbing brew of religious and sectarian tensions had always simmered. Islamism merged from an upwardly mobile peasantry that had drifted into Arab cities from the countryside. In the countryside, Islam was an integral part of a traditional existence and generally nonpolitical, but in these pseudo-Westernized cities, filled with the worst sorts of temptations, religion required a severity and ideological component in order to keep families together and teenage boys from slipping into crime.

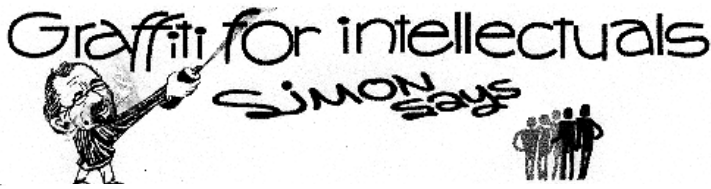
Alas, what really killed secular Arab nationalism - much more so than the dark influence of the Soviet police state or the mobilizing distraction of the Zionist threat - was the combination of a bad form of urbanization and what Middle East expert Michael Hudson in the 1970s labeled the "primordial identifications" of tribe and sect and religion.

As the secularized Arab state withered, these sub-state loyalties reemerged full bore, making even further mockery of the borders of the Arab world - because tribe- and faith-based communities have little use for national borders.

Those who proclaim today that the only real solution to the Arab dilemma is political freedom are correct. The problem is that they are describing a process that could encompass several bloody decades. After all, it took centuries for stable democracy as we know it to evolve in Europe. In this Darwinian shanking-out process, the new forms of political legitimacy may more closely resemble militarized social welfare organizations such as Hezbollah and the Al Mahdi army than the ramshackle contrivances of the European model that we saw in the post-colonial era.

Right before the trap door was opened, Hussein's executioners chanted "*Muqtada, Muqtada, Muqtada*," referring to Shiite militia leader Muqtada Sadr - because what was supposed to have been retribution for crimes against humanity had, despite all of our efforts, turned into another sectarian killing. Such is the abyss that follows secular Arab nationalism. Δ

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AN OUTRAGE, A COVER-UP —SO WHAT? By Joel Mowbray, Wash.Times, 1/8/07

With the release of an internal investigation last week, we now know that former National Security Advisor Sandy Berger not only knowingly flouted laws for handling classified documents, but he went to incredible lengths to cover his tracks and thwart investigators.

While Mr. Berger's "punishment" was a pittance of a fine, former Pentagon analyst **Larry Franklin has been financially ruined and sentenced to 12 and a half years for passing along far less-classified information to unauthorized third parties.**

Unfortunately, disproportionate justice is inherent to the legal system. The written play-book might be the same for various cases, but different judges and different dynamics can lead to dramatically disparate results.

But what excuse is there for the wildly different media coverage of the two cases, both of which came to public attention in the summer of 2004?

Given the nature of each man's actions and the starkly different status each enjoyed in the public eye, the media actually was justified in providing dissimilar coverage. Only the press got it exactly wrong.

One man verbally disclosed classified information devoid of sources or methods. The other snuck five different versions of a top-secret document out of a secure facility.

One was a low-level career bureaucrat, while the other was just a few years removed from being the president's national security advisor. One man cooperated with authorities and didn't even retain a lawyer before being interrogated, while the other lied to investigators and then intentionally destroyed evidence.

While conservative news outlets reveled in the Berger story, the mainstream media was at best blasé. Of all the articles about Mr. Berger's case -- from the revelation that he was the subject of an inquiry through the recent release of the National Archives inspector general's report -- only one made it to the front page of either The Washington Post or the

New York Times. Coverage of Mr. Franklin's case, however, earned that distinction more than a half-dozen times.

The Franklin affair started out with a bang. **Over seven days, starting in late August 2004, The Washington Post published six distinct stories, three of which landed on the front page. It was a sizzling story. Someone who worked in the Pentagon seen by the media as too pro-Israel was suspected of passing national-security secrets to the Jewish state. The Post even implied that five others -- all Jews with "strong ties to Israel" -- might also be spies.**

In the end, the FBI's full-court press only netted one conviction of a government official. Mr. Franklin plea-bargained to three counts, including passing classified information to an Israeli government official and two men at pro-Israel lobby AIPAC. (The trial of Steven Rosen and Keith Weissman is slated to begin by the spring.)

According to someone with intimate knowledge of the leaked draft presidential directive, the document contained no sources and no methods. It had no sensitive material of any kind. It was nothing more than a policy paper -- just a few pages that resembled an opinion-editorial -- advocating tougher diplomacy, not war, in dealing with Iran.

Reporters at The Post and the New York Times worked overtime to find new angles in the Franklin case, and that effort yielded considerable ink. On the Berger case, though, the mega newspapers simply reported stories as information came out. There was no digging, no investigative passion. Even the disclosure of the inspector general's report only happened because of a freedom of information request filed by the Associated Press.

The mainstream media's palpable disinterest in the Berger case is hardly justified. Many questions remain unanswered. Of the few explanations Mr. Berger and his defenders have actually provided, none passes the laugh test.

Mr. Berger claimed in court last year that smuggling classified documents out of the National Archives was about "personal convenience," but the inspector general report states that he **walked out of the building and down the street, found a construction site, looked to see if the coast was clear, then slid behind a fence and hid the documents under a trailer.**

Which part of that elaborate procedure was "convenient"?

According to the New York Times story last April following Mr. Berger's guilty plea, "Associates attributed the episode to fatigue and poor judgment." While lying to authorities is bad judgment, it is also illegal. And how exactly did fatigue drive Mr. Berger to use his scissors to shred three versions of the top-secret document?

Despite the report's devastating blow to Mr. Berger's excuse machine, it was buried. The Post dumped it on page 7, and the New York Times exiled it to page 36.

Reflecting -- or perhaps because of -- the respective media attention is the justice meted out to each man. President Clinton's national security adviser will not see the inside of a jail cell. His \$50,000 fine sounds big, but it's roughly equivalent to a few weeks out of his princely salary. Meanwhile, Franklin has lost half his pension and was given a stiffer sentence than several Islamic terrorists convicted in the very same courthouse.

Just don't expect the Post or the Times to point that out. Ω