

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



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CORPORATIONS WE LOVE TO HATE

I am convinced that oil companies are the most disliked business entities in the U.S. Just a few days ago I saw a car with a bumper sticker saying, "This Car is Fueled by Blood". The implication is, of course, that blood is being shed in Iraq because of oil. Many – maybe most – Americans believe this to be true in spite of the fact that Saddam was eager to sell his oil to us at a discount and we not only refused to buy it but imposed sanctions against others buying it. Today Iraqi oil wells and refineries are barely producing and there is no profit there for anyone.

Many believe that our foreign policy is controlled and directed by Big Oil in spite of America – unlike Europe – being among the very few nations that support and help completely oil-less countries like South Korea, Taiwan

and Israel. I suppose this just makes the mystery of Big Oil's evil schemes that much more sinister.

But let us leave Big

Oil for a moment and go on to another question. If Big Oil is the most disliked, what then is number two? I can see heads nodding in agreement with my choice: Big Pharma! We know that pharmaceutical companies make obscene profits, they overcharge us while selling identical products for less to foreigners and they are taking in undeserved billions of dirty dollars while the average American cannot afford the medications he needs.

Big Pharma is bad. It is disgusting, immoral, evil, wicked and despicable. Its earnings are enormous, it is rich, rich, rich and it deserves our contempt and enmity. Right?

Well, here is my story. In a way it is almost as mysterious as U.S. support of countries with no oil.

There was a time when I too was convinced that Big Pharma was a money machine. What got my attention was Viagra. It was patented in 1996, approved in 1998 and became an immediate success: its 1999-2001 sales exceeded \$1 billion! Comedians made jokes about the little blue pill, shortages of Viagra were reported in the less fortunate countries and many relationships were made happier.

"Aha", I thought to myself. "This is a great investment opportunity – I better get in on it while the price is right and enjoy some of that

Big Pharma wealth!"

And so I did. I sold some of my mutual funds, cashed in some of my retirement fund and invested in the shares of the creator of Viagra: *Pfizer Pharmaceuticals*.

And then a strange thing happened – and it still is happening: nothing! Like the Baskerville hound that didn't bark that fateful night, the *Pfizer* stock didn't go up! I wasn't worried at first – just stupidity, I thought, pretty soon everyone will realize what a great buy *Pfizer* is and I will become a rich member of the Big Pharma crowd.

After a few years, as the stock didn't rise, I did what I should have done to begin with – I checked the financial histories of other, supposedly also ultra successful and much disliked major pharmaceuticals. And here are the shocking results for the last 6 years.

I bought *Pfizer* in October 1998 for \$32 a share (actually I paid \$95 but it soon split into 3 shares for each share so that my cost was about \$32.00)

By January 2001 each *Pfizer* share sold for

\$40 – but in February 2007, 6 years later, after supposedly incredible profits, the same share sells for \$26.80

Another Pharma giant, *Merck*, sold for \$63.53 in January 2001 and is selling now for \$44.73.

The 3rd major and allegedly obscenely rich pharmaceutical corporation, *GlaxoSmithKline*, did a little better: its stock actually gained! It sold for \$43.33 in January 2001 and by February 2007 has gone up to \$55.81! Hoo-ha! Almost 25% increase in 6 years –over 4% a year!

Ah, you might say, but what about the dividends? Didn't they pay tremendous dividends out of these gargantuan earnings? Well, actually no. **Pfizer paid out 44 cents (1.11%) a share in 2001 and 96 cents (3.58%) in 2006. Merck didn't do much better: \$1.36 (2.14%) a share in 2001 and a princely \$1.52 (3.39%) in 2006. And the GSK whose stock did go up paid \$1.14 (2.63%) in 2001 and in 2006, just \$1.80 or 3.22 %.** Actually, you could do better in any bank savings account.

So don't believe everything you read in the papers. Hating the large corporations is very popular in the U.S. – it requires no effort, no knowledge, no research – we just know that if they are big and sell and advertise a lot, well, they must be evil, greedy, irresponsible and if I only had some money to invest I too could join them and fly to the Riviera on my private jet.

So would you like to make me an offer on my *Pfizer* shares? I will be happy to sell them at the price I paid in 1998. As for me, I would rather buy a lottery ticket.

One more thing. In doing research on this



piece I discovered that **only about 3%-4% of the total healthcare cost is for drugs and medications-** the remaining 90+% is to pay for the hospitals, physicians, procedures and equipment. Maybe, just maybe, the expensive drugs are really a bargain? And maybe we shouldn't believe everything the media – and the bumper stickers – tell us? Ω

CHESS? Nickolai Butkevich, J'lem Post, 4/17/07

The April 14 detention of chess champion and opposition politician Garry Kasparov in Moscow may be the Russian government's biggest miscalculation yet in its burgeoning campaign to stifle political dissent.

On Saturday, thousands of anti-riot troops broke up a demonstration in Moscow led by Kasparov and his coalition partners in the "Other Russia" umbrella group. An estimated 170 other demonstrators were detained and fined amid reports of police brutality. The same dispiriting scene repeated itself the following day in St. Petersburg, with more arrests and beatings of peaceful demonstrators.

Government-controlled media outlets have engaged in a campaign to demonize Kasparov and other opposition politicians as tools of a Western conspiracy; the country's main television station even referred to the demonstrators as "ultra-radicals."

Given all the fuss, one would think that Kasparov was either a genuine security threat, or at the very least a wildly

popular politician with a big enough chunk of the electorate behind him to pose a serious challenge to President Vladimir Putin or his yet to be anointed successor in next year's presidential elections. The truth is that he is neither.

Independent pollsters have measured Putin's approval ratings as consistently hovering in the 60-70% range. In contrast, the vast majority of Russians know nothing about Kasparov's political activities, thanks largely to a de-facto ban against the media covering him. The ratings of Kasparov's partner in the "Other Russia" coalition, former prime minister Mikhail Kasyanov, barely register on the popularity scale.

So why does the Kremlin seem so afraid of him? I believe there are two reasons. The first is Kasparov himself. I first heard him speak in May 2004 at a congressional hearing in which we were co-panelists. His intelligence, articulate grasp of the issues and personal dynamism leave the impression of a man with obvious leadership potential intent on using his celebrity to engage an increasingly repressive government on issues he feels passionately about.

He blasted the Russian media for being "totally submissive" to the Kremlin, especially on taboo issues like Chechnya and the government's mishandling of terrorist attacks.

The second reason is a systemic problem that most authoritarian regimes suffer from. Putin spent the first years of

his presidency restricting the independent media, subduing big business and narrowing the powers of regional leaders. Constructing a nascent dictatorship, however, turns out to be a lot easier than actually governing it. With the checks and balances of a free press and parliamentary and judicial oversight removed, government corruption has increased, and reliable information about what is really happening in the country is scarcer.

Within this information vacuum Kremlin officials and their political allies are beginning to believe their own propaganda about conspiracies against Russia abetted by human rights NGOs and liberal politicians.

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, during which a pro-Russian leader lost power, significantly worsened the deep-seated paranoia endemic to the former KGB agents in Putin's retinue.

Unfortunately for the Kremlin, Kasparov's detention is likely to backfire, as it will likely only increase his popular support among the large numbers of Russians who, despite their generally warm feelings toward their president, are increasingly dissatisfied with how his government is addressing Russia's daunting economic and social challenges.

With so few legitimate channels for expressing discontent, Russians are increasingly falling prey to nationalist demagogues, who did surprisingly well in the last parliamentary elections. Furthermore, the absurdity of the government's overreaction to "Other Russia" is so obvious that Putin risks creating a backlash in the West, where distaste for the Russian government's heavy-handed tactics is rising. However, expressions of distaste by Western governments are not enough now that the Russians have reverted to the Soviet-era tactic of openly targeting political opponents. Protection of dissidents and human rights activists from persecution should be seen by our government as a sine qua non for partnership with Russia, or any other country, for that matter.

Otherwise, the repression will only get worse, and the consequences for Russia's future ever more dire.

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"I FOUND SADDAM'S WMD BUNKERS"— FROM PAGE 3

that they can't dismiss Mr Gaubatz as a rogue agent - because they have repeatedly decorated him for his work in the field. In 2003, he received awards for his 'courage and resolve in saving lives and being critical for information flow'. In 2001, he was decorated for being the lead agent in a classified investigation, arguably the most sensitive counter-intelligence investigation currently in the entire Department of Defense and because his 'reports were such high quality, many were published in the Air Force's daily threat product for senior USAF leaders or re-transmitted at the national level to all security agencies in US government'.

The organizer of the Intelligence Summit, John Loftus - himself a formidably well-informed former attorney to the intelligence world - has now sent a memorandum to Congress asking it to investigate Mr Gaubatz's claims. He has also hit a brick wall. The reason is not hard to grasp.

The Republicans won't touch this because it would reveal the incompetence of the Bush administration in failing to neutralize the danger of Iraqi WMD. The Democrats won't touch it because it would show President Bush was right to invade Iraq in the first place. It is an axis of embarrassment.

Mr. Loftus goes further. Saddam's nuclear



research, scientists and equipment, he says, have all been relocated to Syria, where US satellite intelligence confirms that uranium centrifuges are now operating - in a country which is not supposed to have any nuclear program. There is now a nuclear axis, he says, between Iran, Syria and North Korea - with Russia and China helping to build an Islamic bomb against the West. And of course, with assistance from American negligence.

Apparently Saddam had the last laugh and donated his secret stockpile to benefit Iran's nuclear weapons program. With a little technical advice from Beijing, Syria is now enriching the uranium, Iran is making the missiles, North Korea is testing the warheads, and the White House is hiding its head in the sand.'

Of course, we don't know whether any of this is true. But given Dave Gaubatz's testimony, shouldn't someone be trying to find out? Or will we still be intoning there were no WMDs in Iraq' when the Islamic bomb goes off?



"I FOUND SADDAM'S WMD BUNKERS"

Melanie Phillips, The Spectator (England), April 21, 2007

It's a fair bet that you have never heard of a guy called Dave Gaubatz. It's also a fair bet that you think the hunt for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq has found absolutely nothing, nada, zilch; and that therefore there never were any WMD programs in Saddam's Iraq to justify the war ostensibly waged to protect the world from Saddam's use of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons.



Dave Gaubatz, however, says that you could not be more wrong. Saddam's WMD did exist. He should know, because he found the sites where he is certain they were stored. And the reason you don't know about this is that the American administration failed to act on his information, 'lost' his classified reports and is now doing everything it can to prevent disclosure of the terrible fact that, through its own incompetence, it allowed Saddam's WMD to end up in the hands of the very terrorist states against whom it is so controversially at war.

You may be tempted to dismiss this as yet another dodgy claim from a warmongering lackey of the world Zionist neocon conspiracy giving credence to yet another crank pushing US propaganda. If so, perhaps you might pause before throwing this article at the cat. Mr Gaubatz is not some marginal figure. He's pretty well as near to the horse's mouth as you can get.

Having served for 12 years as an agent in the US Air Force's Office of Special Investigations, Mr Gaubatz, a trained Arabic speaker, was hand-picked for postings in 2003, first in Saudi Arabia and then in Nasariyah in Iraq. His mission was to locate suspect WMD sites, discover threats against US forces in the area and find Saddam loyalists, and then send such intelligence to the Iraq Survey Group and other agencies.

Between March and July 2003, he says, he was taken to four sites in southern Iraq - two within Nasariyah, one 20 miles south and one near Basra - which, he was told by numerous Iraqi sources, contained biological and chemical weapons, material for a nuclear program and UN-proscribed missiles. He was, he says, in no doubt whatever that this was true.

This was, in the first place, because of the massive size of these sites and the extreme lengths to which the Iraqis had gone to conceal them. Three of them were bunkers buried 20 to 30 feet beneath the Euphrates. They had been constructed through building dams which were removed after the huge subterranean vaults had been excavated so that these were concealed beneath the river bed. The bunker walls were made of reinforced concrete five feet thick.

'There was no doubt, with so much effort

having gone into hiding these constructions, that something very important was buried there', says Mr Gaubatz. By speaking to a wide range of Iraqis, some of whom risked their lives by talking to him and whose accounts were provided in ignorance of each other, he built up a picture of the nuclear, chemical and biological materials they said were buried underground.

'They explained in detail why WMDs were in these areas and asked the US to remove them,' says Mr Gaubatz. 'Much of this material had been buried in the concrete bunkers and in the sewage pipe system. There were also missile imprints in the area and signs of chemical activity - gas masks, decontamination kits, atropine needles. The Iraqis and my team had no doubt at all that WMDs were hidden there.'

There was yet another significant piece of circumstantial corroboration. The medical records of Mr Gaubatz and his team showed that at these sites they had been exposed to high levels of radiation.

Mr Gaubatz verbally told the Iraq Study Group (ISG) of his findings, and asked them to come with heavy equipment to breach the concrete of the bunkers and uncover their sealed contents. But to his consternation, the ISG told him they didn't have the manpower or equipment to do it and that it would be 'unsafe' to try.

'The problem was that the ISG were concentrating their efforts in looking for WMD in northern Iraq and this was in the south,' says Mr Gaubatz. 'They were just swept up by reports of WMD in so many different locations. But we told them that if they didn't excavate these sites, others would.'

That, he says, is precisely what happened. He subsequently learnt from Iraqi, CIA and British intelligence that the WMD buried in the four sites were excavated by Iraqis and Syrians, with help from the Russians, and moved to Syria. The location in Syria of this material, he says, is also known to these intelligence agencies. The worst-case scenario has now come about. Saddam's nuclear, biological and chemical material is in the hands of a rogue terrorist state - and one with close links to Iran.

When Mr Gaubatz returned to the US, he tried to bring all this to light. Two congressmen, Peter Hoekstra, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, and Curt Weldon, were keen to follow up his account. To his horror, however, when they tried to access his classified intelligence reports, they were told that all 60 of them - which, in the routine way, he had sent in 2003 to the computer clearing-house at a US air-base in Saudi Arabia - had mysteriously gone missing. These written reports had never even been seen by the ISG.

One theory is that they were inadvertently destroyed when the computer's database was accidentally erased in the subsequent US evacuation of the airbase. Mr Gaubatz, however, suspects dirty work at the crossroads. It is unlikely, he says, that no copies were made of his intelligence. And he says that all attempts by Messrs Hoekstra and

Weldon to extract information from the Defense Department and CIA have been relentlessly stonewalled.

In 2005, the CIA held a belated inquiry into the disappearance of this intelligence. Only then did its agents visit the sites - to report that they had indeed been looted.

Mr Gaubatz's claims remain largely unpublicized. Last year, the New York Times dismissed him as one of a group of WMD diehard obsessives. The New York Sun produced a more balanced report, but after that the coverage died.

According to Mr Gaubatz, the reason is a concerted effort by the US intelligence and political world to stifle such an explosive revelation of their own lethal incompetence.

After he and an Iraqi colleague spoke at last month's Florida meeting of the Intelligence Summit, an annual conference of the intelligence world, they were interviewed for two hours by a US TV show - only for the interview to be junked after the FBI repeatedly rang Mr Gaubatz and his colleague to say they would stop the interview from being broadcast.

The problem the US authorities have is (Contd. on page 2)





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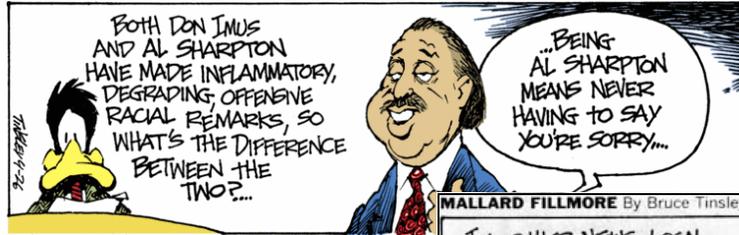
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lisheda comic strip—*Mallard
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servative. I enjoyed both but
Ramirez was fired in 2006
and left Fillmore as one of the
few things I liked about the
Times. Finally, the inevitable
happened: early in 2007 *Mal-
lard Fillmore* was cancelled.

For those who are missing
both or have no idea
what I am talking about,
here are a few nostalgic
memories of both and
they can still be found—
and enjoyed or hated —
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Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to think "profiling" is worse than the slaughter of innocent people....
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