

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



August 04, 2014

## **A WAR NO ONE CAN WIN**

One of the most educative and entertaining things about writing, posting and syndicating a weekly online op-ed piece is reading reader's comments. Over the years, they have run the gamut from the extremely complimentary and thoughtful to the agonizingly churlish. And for reasons perhaps best left to a therapist, the ones that stick with me the longest are the latter -- the churlish. Over the past decade I have been informed that I don't know Hell's first whisper about anything. I have told where I can go and what I should do to myself; have been called a "Communist," "Socialist" and "self-hating Jew" more times than I can count, and have, on occasion been informed that



the best thing I can do for the planet's future is to "go out and play in traffic." It helps to have a thick skin -- and a well-developed sense of the humor. "Be serious about what you do," I tell my students. "Just don't take yourself too seriously."

Occasionally, I've even been scorched for a piece I *did not* write. Such was the case last week when, instead of publishing a piece on the crisis in Israel and Gaza, I chose to write about [the plight of adjunct instructors](#) in higher education. From the point of view of many readers, this was a gross mistake -- one which, according to more than one correspondent, ". . . proves that you, like your buddies Obama and Kerry, hate Israel and side with Hamas."

Oh really? What's been poisoning *your* water supply?

The lethal confrontation between Israel and Hamas has been uppermost in my mind now for nearly a month -- so much so that the sheer horror of it has even crept into my dreams . . . turning them into nightmares. Without question, I fully accept and support Israel's right to defend itself against all those rockets launched from Gaza. Thank God for the brilliance of the Israel's Iron Dome defense system and Hamas' bad aim.

At the same time, I mourn the tremendous loss of life on both sides. I am fully cognizant of the fact -- yes, it's a FACT -- that Israel does its best to warn civilians in Gaza of pending attacks in order to save as many innocent lives as possible. I am also fully cognizant that much of the world disputes this FACT and charges Israel with willful acts of genocide. I know that the Palestinians react to the death of Israelis ("The Zionist Entity" as they call them) with glee. I also know that these people train their children from an early age to hate all Jews and continue perpetuating blood-curdling myths that should have died centuries ago. I have read the [Palestinian government website](#) which actually tells its people to ignore Israeli warnings and instead stay put: *"The ministry [is] calling all our people not to deal or pay attention to the psychological warfare carried out by the occupation through rumors that broadcast across his media and delivering publications and communications on the phones of citizens."* I do understand that this atrocious, immoral response on the part of Hamas is deliberate; through all these deaths, Hamas leaders hope to recapture a measure of the public support they have lost due to their inability to run a stable service-providing government. It is a cardinal, age-old move on history's political chessboard: when one loses the support of one's subjects or citizens, create a maximal number of innocent civilian martyrs, thus redirecting all the animus and gross dissatisfaction toward an eternal, external enemy.

Unlike many, I am terribly concerned that Israel's economic stranglehold on Gaza has made life there a horror. The chess strategy behind economic embargoes goes something like: the longer you keep a population in dire poverty, the greater the chance that the people will rise up against the very leaders who are ultimately responsible for the embargo. That strategy cannot and does not work in a society where the so-called leaders are more than willing to murder its own populace -- and then convince that populace that it is the source of those sanctions who are ultimately responsible for those murders.

I too am maddened by the fact that the media breathlessly and repeatedly reports the number of deaths and casualties Israeli forces have wrought in Gaza, while failing to mention that Syrian civil war deaths are more than *a thousand times greater*. Why, just this past weekend, more than 700 people died in Syria -- most at the hands of government forces. Additionally, continuing violence in Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, Yemen, and elsewhere garners not a fraction of the coverage "lavished" on the Israeli assault on the tunnels and terrorist hiding places in Gaza. Nor too does the media adequately explain that Hamas purposefully -- and strategically -- places its rocket launchers and weapons arsenals in or next to schools, hospitals and mosques. It is far too easy to

explain away this maddening incongruity by claiming that "The media is made up of a bunch of anti-Semitic, pro-Hamas SOBs." Maybe it is. But then again, maybe its because unlike Gaza, Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, Yemen and elsewhere, Israel places few if any restrictions on news coverage. It is next to impossible for Western media to take pictures of heavily-armed Hamas soldiers or rocket launchers housed in quiet neighborhoods for the simple reason that all sources of news and actualities are heavily controlled.

Although both sides in the current conflict have immediate aims and goals they seek to achieve, neither side is so blind or starry-eyed as to believe it will settle or solve anything in the long run. Both sides know that this is a war no one can win. Even if Israel were to destroy every last tunnel leading from Egypt to Gaza and from Gaza into Israel -- and utterly extirpate Hamas to boot -- the tunnels would eventually be rebuilt and a new terrorist group would likely take center stage -- unless Israel would be willing to occupy Gaza until the coming of the Messiah. This they are neither willing nor interested in doing, despite what her most right-wing ideologues might wish. **(n.b. Even as I write, Israel has begun pulling some IDF troops out of Gaza and informing Palestinians in Beit Lahiya and al-Atatra, in northern Gaza, that it was now safe to return to their homes.)**

Despite all the rockets Hamas aims at the Jewish State on a daily basis, Israel is as about as secure as it is ever likely to be unless Hamas totally disappears, never to be replaced, and the West Bank becomes even more accommodating to Israel. To be certain, neither of these prospects is likely. Israel's economy towers over its neighbors. The Palestinians are, for the most part, weak and divided. None of Israel's neighbors pose any immediate threat of invasion, a situation in place since the 1977 neutralization of Egypt. Jordan is locked into a close relation with Israel; Egypt has its peace treaty and Hezbollah is bogged down in Syria. Apart from Gaza, which is, when all is said and done, a relatively minor threat, Israel's position is difficult to improve.

Unlike many who write me on a weekly basis, I do not know what the solution to this age-old problem is. I pray for Israel's peace and security. Likewise, I pray for the all those Palestinians who have been made into pawns by their own supposed leaders. I hope that someday they wake up to the fact that Hamas cares not a fig for them. They have their own agenda, which includes neither peace nor security.

And for all those who blame Israel solely for the current war and see its roots solely in what Israel has done, I suggest they offer a workable solution . . . and see how far it gets them.

*Shalom rav ahl Yisrael amkha, ta-seem l'olahm . . .*

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August 11, 2014

## **INCOME INEQUALITY . . . OR, THE HORSE-AND-SPARROW THEORY**

Question: Which fuel best drives a nation's economy: wealth or consumption?

Answer: It depends, my friend . . . it depends.

"Depends on what?" I hear you ask.



It depends upon who you listen to, what your financial picture looks like, and from whence you get your news and views.

To paraphrase a statement that is all the rage, "I am not an economist." However, I have, over the course of a half-century love affair with knowledge, read and tried to understand the writings of many economic writers and theorists, ranging from classical dudes like Ricardo, Malthus and Adam Smith to such thought-provokers as Marx, Maynard Keynes, Hayek, and Stigletz, and even the ole' monetarist himself, Milton Friedman.

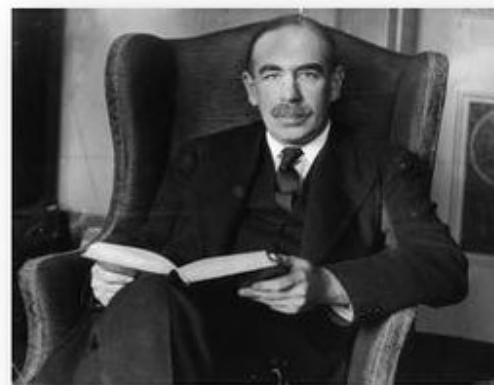
So what have I learned?

That there has long been a basic and telling divergence between those -- returning to our original question about what best fuels an economy -- between those who side with wealth and those with consumption.

In other words, there isn't much agreement.

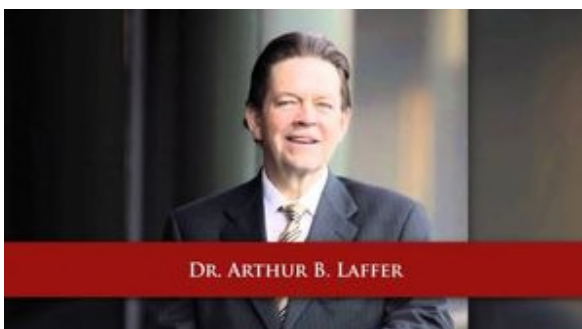
We see that lack of agreement in the different remedies prescribed by Democrats and Republicans.

- In the main, most Democrats -- and liberal economists -- believe that consumption -- putting more money into the pockets of working people -- is the fuel that drives the economy. According to their understanding of the way things go, when working folk earn a buck, they spend it on such things as food, fuel and clothing, electronic devices and perhaps the occasional night out. In turn, increased consumer spending leads to increased manufacturing and increased employment, which in turn leads to more people who can spend; if you're selling more shoes, you're likely going to need to add another salesperson or two, thus adding another person or two who can earn a living and purchase consumer goods. This is called the multiplier effect. Additionally, most liberal economists believe that in times of recession, the government can play a positive role by increasing public spending, even if it means increasing deficits. Putting more spendable dollars into the hands of working class folks will, so the theory goes, stimulate our consumer-driven economy. This is pretty much what goes by the term "Keynesian Economics," named after the British economist Lord John Maynard Keynes.



John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946)

- On the other hand, Republicans, conservative economists and a whole lot of millionaires hold that *wealth* is the fuel that drives the economy. Higher taxes on the rich and their corporations, they argue, hurts economic growth, for it is the wealthy who are the job creators. Cut their taxes and they will use that extra capital to expand business, thus creating more employment, which will offset the decreased revenues caused by the tax cuts. This is classic "trickle-



down" or "supply-side" economics. Its rallying cry is "A rising tide lifts all boats. The theory has many fathers; one of the latest is Reagan-era economist Arthur Laffer. As Nobel Prize winning economist [Paul Krugman recently wrote](#), trickle down theorists "[insist] that the best policy is to cut taxes on the rich, slash aid to the poor and count on a rising tide to raise all boats."

For whatever reason, the perceived wisdom has long held that the nation's economy does far better under Republicans than Democrats -- that when it comes to "fuel," wealth outweighs consumption. Turns out, the perceived wisdom is wrong: according to a [recent study](#) published by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), during the past 16 presidential terms, Republican presidents have presided over 41 quarters classified as recessions. And the Democrats? Only eight. According to the NBER report, under Democratic presidents, per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been higher; job creation has been stronger; decreases in unemployment have been greater; the S&P 500 stock index has been higher; corporate profits have been bigger; and real wages and labor productivity have increased. And yet, in [poll after poll after poll](#), a majority of Americans believe that Republicans do a better job of handling the economy than Democrats. Go figure.

Income inequality has been growing at an unbelievably rapid pace over the past thirty years. In the latest such [reporting from the AFL-CIO](#), American CEOs earned an average of \$11.7 million -- an eye-popping 331 times the average workers \$35,293; the CEO-to-minimum-wage-worker pay ratio was a staggering 774:1. Compare that to 30 years ago, when an average CEO earned about 30 times more than a typical worker. Now without question, market economies *do* need a certain amount of inequality to function. However, if the proponents of supply-side, trickle-down economic theories were correct, all this increased wealth redounding to CEOs and the upper one or one-tenth-of-one percent should have helped foster an increasingly robust economy and narrowed the income inequality gap. But of course, it has not. And yet, despite demonstrable proof that trickle-down economic models do not -- and never have -- worked, American politicians continue to support them as if it were the Holy Grail.

It is possible -- just possible -- that this may be about to change. Just the other day, economists at Standard & Poor's Ratings Services issued a report with the straightforward title ["How Increasing Inequality is Dampening U.S. Economic Growth, and Possible Ways to Change the Tide."](#) The fact that S.&P., an apolitical organization whose purpose is to produce reliable research for bond investors and others, is raising alarms about the risks that emerge from income inequality is a small but important sign of how a debate that has been largely confined to the academic world and left-of-center political circles is becoming more mainstream.



The S&P report notes that *"Higher levels of income inequality increase political pressures, discouraging trade, investment, and hiring. [John Maynard] Keynes first showed that income inequality can lead affluent households (Americans included) to increase savings and decrease consumption, while those with less means increase consumer borrowing to sustain consumption...until those options run out. When these imbalances can no longer be sustained, we see a boom/bust cycle such as the one that culminated in the Great Recession."*

It makes sense. If multi-millionaires make a few more millions, what are they going to do with it? Buy another house or yacht or Rolex? How many is enough? But put a few extra dollars in the pay envelope of a worker and he or she will spend it as quick as you can say Jack Robinson.

Make no mistake about it: the authors of the S&P report are not liberal academics writing peer-reviewed articles that will only be read by their equally liberal academic colleagues. This is Standard & Poor's -- an organization everyone on Wall Street keeps on speed dial. Supply-siders cannot dismiss this report as the ivory-tower ranting of aging Marxist hippies. The folks at S&P have revealed a truth to Wall Street that many on Main Street have known -- at least viscerally -- for a long time: that massive income inequality is bad for the very poor, the very rich and everyone in between. Moreover, the S&P report speaks to the role played by education and notes that, *"... if we added another year of education to the American workforce from 2014 to 2019, in line with education levels increasing at the rate of educational achievement seen from 1960 to 1965, U.S. potential GDP would likely be \$525 billion, or 2.4% higher in five years."*

To be certain, we are not the first generation to experience such radical income inequality; check out America in the last decade of the 19th century. But our level of inequality is far, far worse, because unlike our Victorian ancestors, we don't have an economy largely based on manufacturing. Ours is driven by consumption. And in order to consume, you have to be able to earn a living wage. And when workers earn a living wage, it's good for the companies that pay that living wage. Even Henry Ford knew that; 100 years ago he doubled his assembly-line workers pay to \$5 for an eight-hour day. The result? Worker productivity surged and the Ford Motor Company doubled its profits in less than two years.

And by the way, there's nothing new about trickle-down economics. Back in Gilded Age, they had something called *The Horse-and-Sparrow Theory*: namely, if you feed the horse enough oats, some will pass through to the road for the sparrows. Any way you slice it, what the sparrow -- and the rest of us who aren't hyper wealthy -- wind up eating is . . . horse . . . ah . . . oh, figure it out for yourself.

Which is the best fuel: wealth or consumption?

Let the debate continue!



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*(Many thanks to my old chum Alan Wald for an able assist in putting this essay together).*

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August 17, 2014

## ISLAMOPHOBIA FOR FUN AND PROFIT

Without question, Americans' feelings about Arabs and Muslims have taken a nose-dive over the past several years. Many of us are bombarded on a daily basis with emails that warn, frighten and induce extreme hypertension without offering a cure . . . let alone a palliative. They warn us that the Obama administration is filled with Muslims serving in sensitive positions; they frighten us with stories about atrocities and sleeper cells; they induce extreme hypertension in a thousand-and-one ways. Is it any wonder that Islamophobia is on the rise?



According to a recent poll by the Arab American Institute, *"Favorable attitudes have continued to decline - from 43% in 2010 to 32% in 2014 for Arabs; and from 35% in 2010 to 27% in 2014 for Muslims."* Upon reading these poll figures, I was amazed to find that even a quarter of the population still had a favorable attitude towards Muslims. I mean, if the number of those scathing, screaming emails decrying the imminent threat and danger that radical bloodthirsty Muslims pose to American -- and European -- society is any indication, Islamophobia has indeed reached

epic proportions.

Of late, we have all been receiving dozens of forwarded emails carrying subject titles like *"Wake Up America!"* and *"Islamic Terrorist Network in America!"* I have traced the emails back to several sites, the most obnoxious of which belongs to former 1-term

Representative [Alan West](#) (R-FL). In responding to one fellow who had forwarded me this email ([reproduced here](#)) I asked him how he -- an otherwise sober-sided moderate -- felt about following Alan West -- a member of the Conspiracist's Hall of Fame -- out into the nether frontier of Islamophobia. The chap took me to task, arguing in a return email that "*Islamophobia is an oxymoron . . . . A phobia is an irrational fear . . . there is nothing irrational about fearing islam* [sic]."

Many of these "warning shot emails" come from such infamous, professional Islamophobes as [Pam Geller](#) ("*Islam . . . the most radical and extreme ideology on the face of the earth . . .*"), [Debbie Schlussel](#) ("*[T]he majority of Muslims support terrorism. The vast majority. Not just a few hijackers and a few suicide bombers. But the MAJORITY.*"), [Brigitte Gabriel](#) ("*Tens of thousands of Islamic militants now reside in America, operating in sleeper cells, attending our colleges and universities, even infiltrating our government. They are here -- today. Many have been here for years. Waiting. Preparing.*"), and Dutch legislator Geert Wilders, ("*I don't hate Muslims, I hate Islam*") whose May 2009 speech "America, the Last Man Standing" still winds up in my inbox on an almost daily basis.

By the time their anti-Islamic philippics arrive in our inboxes, they are mostly anonymous. And what is more, they've generally been shorn of their most alarming trappings -- the bloody photos, the over-the-top "proofs," the [links](#) to [dozens](#) of [other](#) like-minded [websites](#). It is instructive -- and indeed horrifying -- to discover what other "truths" these professional Islamophobes hold to be self-evident. I find myself wondering just how far people would follow the originators of these cyber screeds if only they knew the totality of their worldview. For these are people who warn us that Islamic terrorists are everywhere; they are in the White House, the campus quad and the court room. They are seeking to take over America and make it part of a resurrected Caliphate. They are on the verge of replacing our Constitution with Sharia law. To date, six states have actually passed anti-Sharia bills; nine more states (including Florida) have them on their legislative dockets. The bills are intended to combat this perceived threat that Muslims are undermining the United States Constitution and imposing Sharia law.

OK. I get it. There *are* a lot of insane, sociopathic, homicidal Islamic terrorists in the world. And they do go into battle against "infidels" armed with early 9th-century jeremiads ringing in their ears and late 20th-century weapons stockpiled in their arsenals. They *are* dangerous; their murders, kidnaps, beheadings and suicide missions are appalling. I sometimes wonder, however, if this gross fear of Islamic world domination hasn't made of us something we revile in others: abject haters of "the other."

Believe it or not, there are just as many -- if not more -- websites devoted to the *Jewish* takeover of America and the world as there are those devoted to the threat of Islamic hegemony. Such sites as [Real Jew News](#), [Veterans Today](#), and [Reality Blog](#) to cite merely three of more than *three thousand*, warn that Jews are nearing the completion of

their age-old, Satanically-ordained mission: the New World Order. Jews, these sites argue -- and offer "photographic proof" -- already control the banks, the media, medicine and the governments of most Western countries. They make no distinction whatsoever between the most fervently secular and most unbendingly orthodox; all Jews, so these hate-filled sites argue, know and communicate with one another. All Jews, these anti-Semites contend, are equal partners in the plot to dominate the world.

Yes, I know, these people are crazy. But they don't know it; and this is what they and their followers really, truly believe. And like it or not, many more are in tacit agreement.

Now don't get me wrong: I am in no way comparing those who hold fast to a [\*Protocols of the Elders of Zion\*](#)-inspired delusion of Jewish world domination with those who have become -- or are in the process of becoming -- increasingly Islamophobic. The former is a fatuous phobia which has existed since the dawn of time; the latter, a very real fear and revulsion based upon what we see happening on a daily basis. The one thing I would urge though, is that we keep the former in mind even as we try and figure out how to most successfully deal with the latter.

What do I mean by this?

Simply stated, that we not go off on some psychopathic, paranoid tangent, seeing Muslim terrorists hiding under every bed or behind every door. No sane person believes that all Jewish people are part of an international conspiracy to take over the world. So too, no sane person should believe that all Muslims are bloodthirsty terrorists. But people do, partly because of what we see and read, and partly because of what prize-winning author [Nathan Lean](#) refers to as "The Islamophobia Industry." Lean sees this industry as "*. . . a multi-million dollar network with deep pockets and extensive political connections. It consists of right-wing bloggers, politicians, academics and terrorism 'experts,' all of whom are committed to telling us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about Islam.*"

By all means, let us be weary, vigilant and fearless where it comes to combating Islamic terrorists. But please, may we avoid the stultifying trap of seeing Islamic conspirators and sleeper cells under every bed and behind every door. For if we do, we will have, to paraphrase Pogo, "*. . . met the enemy, only to find that he is us.*"

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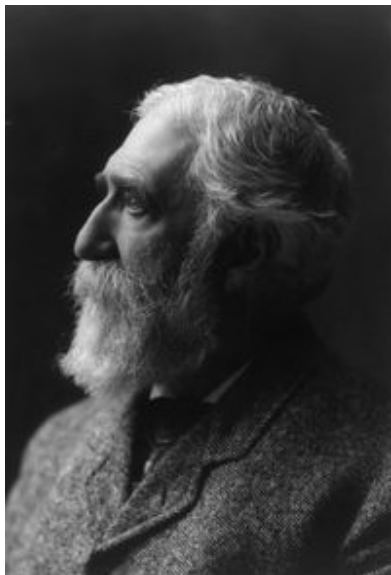
(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



August 24, 2014

## "AND THERE'S A ROSE IN A FISTED GLOVE . . ."

Outside of those who majored American Lit or are otherwise major fans of Mark Twain, the name Charles Dudley Warner is likely to draw a blank. That is most unfortunate, for Warner (1829-1900) was a major Victorian-era travel writer and co-authored with



Twain the marvelous 1873 novel [\*The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today\*](#). He was also a world-class epigrammatist. In fact, most every semi-literate person is familiar with at least two of his bons mots: "*Everybody talks about the weather but nobody does anything about it*," and undoubtedly the most famous, "*Politics makes strange bedfellows*."

The notion of "strange bedfellows" is an old one. In *The Tempest*, Tranculo, a lecherous hunchback, has become shipwrecked. He finds himself alone; the sky is dark and threatening. He is frightened by a deafening thunder. In his deep anxiety, he spies a deformed monster -- Caliban -- and decides that perhaps for safety's sake, he should seek shelter next to him. And thus he says "*Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows*. . ."

Strange bedfellows: For Shakespeare, it was caused by misery; for Warner, politics. For the late Helen Thomas, its source was war. Thomas (1920-2013), the dean of White

House correspondents was a realist. She knew, better than most that wars frequently cause enemies to become allies; to sheathe their swords for the nonce. And although it may be necessary, pragmatic or utile to band with one's adversary in the pursuit of a common foe, that relationship must of needs be far more a tethering or tacit understanding than a passionate embrace. Such "tethering" is not all that unusual. Remember Ms. Thomas' dictum: "*Wars make strange bedfellows.*" Nonetheless, these sorts of arrangements are rarely discussed in polite company; in both love and war, there are certain things a gentleman -- or gentlewoman -- neither reveals nor speaks of in public.

Like the tacit alliance -- the "strange bedfellowship" -- between the United States and Iran.

For the past couple of months, a huge amount of international focus has been directed toward Iraq, where the transnational jihadist movement Islamic State (I.S. -- also called ISIS) has taken over huge areas of the country's Sunni-majority areas, have robbed and raped, kidnapped and beheaded -- all in the name of reestablishing the caliphate. With so much of the world's attention focused on the barbarity of the Islamic State and the ensuing American military response, one thing that has managed to fly beneath the radar has been the U.S.-Iranian cooperation against the terrorist group. As George Friedman, founder and chair of [Stratfor Global Intelligence](#) explained in a recent column, *A convergence of interests, particularly concerning the Iraqi central and Kurdish regional governments, has made it necessary for Washington and Tehran to at least coordinate their actions.* As essential as this "strange bedfellow" scenario may well be, it does not -- and likely will not -- obviate the mistrust and domestic opposition which have existed for years in both Washington and Tehran.

Remember the wisdom of Trinculo: "*Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows.*"

This is not the first time the U.S. and Tehran have put aside their mutual enmity in order to cooperate against a common jihadist enemy. Shortly after 9/11, the two countries made common cause in toppling the Taliban in Afghanistan. And despite President George W. Bush's referring to Iran as part of the "axis of evil" -- and the economic sanctions and the showdown over the country's nuclear ambitions -- the two came together again in 2003 in order to effect regime change in Iraq.

Of course in toppling Saddam Hussein, the U.S. did Iran a huge favor; Iraq had been its gravest national security threat. History will record that in order to oust Hussein, the U.S. partnered up with Iraqi Shiites and Kurds, both of whom had long been Irani proxies. As such, Iran had a hand in shaping the new Iraqi balance of power; a Shiite dominated state in which the Kurds had considerable autonomy. (*Do remember that Iraq is one of only five Shiite-majority countries in the Muslim world and that despite this, Hussein and his henchmen were Sunnis.*)



Throughout the years since Hussein's ouster and the creation of the new order, Iran and the U.S. have played a complex game that is part cooperation, part competition. At one point Tehran and Washington engaged in direct public talks about the future of Iraq's post-Baathist republic. More recently, Iran and the U.S. worked together behind the scenes to replace outgoing Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, whom Washington and Tehran hold responsible for the political crisis in Iraq. Tehran and Washington have also been working together to ease tensions between the Shia and Sunnis, as well as between Baghdad and Erbil, the capital of Iraq's Kurdish region.

And now that the future stability of the new Haidir al-Abadi led Iraqi government is being threatened by ISIS, it should come as little surprise that the U.S. and Iran should resume their strange bedfellowship. Washington and Tehran -- Presidents Obama and Rouhani -- are well aware that the Islamic State poses a direct military threat to Iraq. They also understand that neither the Iraqi military nor the Kurdish peshmerga forces are in a position to fight back. Effective operations against the Islamic State will require Washington and Tehran to support their common allies in Iraq and engage in direct military action.

Although the Obama/al-Abadi/Rouhani bedfellowship is likely essential if the Islamic State is to be turned back, it is *unlikely* to be the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Between Washington and Tehran there is a ton of mistrust. As Stratfor's George Friedman succinctly notes, this mistrust " . . . limits the extent to which they can cooperate against the Islamic State -- especially in the areas of military and intelligence. Neither side wants to reveal its assets or processes to the other." Before too long, the bedfellowship will once again be sorely tested. This time the issue will be ISIS in Syria, where Washington's and Tehran's interests aren't going to align.



Then too, there is the issue of Bashir al-Assad, who has strong Irani backing. He is a murderous SOB. who, like his father, has gassed his own people; the question is, will he become *our* murderous SOB? As bad a dude as he is, we may well have to align ourselves with him for whatever amount of time it takes to decimate the Islamic State. When -- and if -- we do, hold your ears, because sure as God made little green apples, President Obama's none-too-loyal opposition will cry foul, accuse him of treason and claim that they've never heard of such a thing.

Right.

As rocker Stephen Stills put it years ago:



*Well there's a rose in a fisted glove  
And the eagle flies with the dove  
And if you can't be with the one you love, honey  
Love the one you're with.*

War certainly does make strange bedfellows. . .

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August 30, 2014

## WHAT'S IT GOING TO TAKE?

It seems like every time you think you've seen or heard it all, something else pops up to prove just how wrong you can be. Take the horror of gun violence. A crazed gunman shoots up a political rally in Tucson, killing six (including the chief judge of the U.S. District Court and a nine year old girl) and gravely wounds a sitting United States Congresswoman. At the time it seemed about as brazen and depraved an act as could be. Then the ante was upped at Sandy



Hook Elementary in Connecticut, where an even more crazed gunman murdered 20 schoolchildren, 6 staff members and his mother. Then there was the mass shooting inside an Aurora, Colorado movie theatre in which a dozen were killed, and an additional 70 wounded.

Then there are all the cases of kids who accidentally shoot -- and frequently kill -- their friends, siblings, parents and even themselves with unsecured guns they find at home.

It just can't get any more insane, right?

Wrong.

Just this week, a nine-year-old girl was at a shooting range with her parents. The range was located at the eerily-named "Arizona Last Stop." The little girl was receiving instruction in how to use an automatic Uzi because, according to her parents, it was on the little girl's "bucket list." According to investigators when the little girl pulled the trigger the recoil caused the gun to fly over her head. A bullet struck her 39-year-old instructor in the head. He was killed, and God knows what the nine-year old girl is going through . . . or might go through for the rest of her life.

One wonders what kind of parents would permit their child to target practice with a fully-automatic weapon. When questioned, they flatly stated that doing so was "high on her bucket list." I may not be the hippest dude on the block, but I do know that the items on one's "bucket list" are those things a person itches to do, see or experience before they die. Keeping this in mind, what in the hell is a nine-year old doing with a bucket list in the first place? And one that her parents actually take seriously and feel they must respond to? They've got to be the most indulgent parents on the planet. Or just plain stupid . . .

The outdoor shooting range, "Burgers and Bullets Adventure," offers its customers the opportunity to shoot a wide variety of automatic and "specialty" weapons. Its owner, Sam Scamardo says his business is a great place to hold birthday and bachelor (or bachelorette) parties. When questioned about the appropriateness of permitting a nine-year old to fire an Uzi, Scamardo told MSNBC's Chris Hayes that so long as children have parental permission, they are free to fire any weapon he's got. And besides, he added, this particular nine-year old was "quite mature for her age."

As with virtually every gun atrocity, the NRA response was as crass and inappropriate as a strip tease in a cathedral. Within 24 hours of the tragic shooting, a Twitter account linked to National Rifle Association Women sent out a [link](#) promoting "Seven ways children can have fun at the shooting range." (*Admittedly, this article was posted about a week before the Arizona shooting. Nonetheless, the NRA Tweet -- since deleted -- was posted 24 hours after the tragedy.*)

Every time some deranged individual takes up a fully- or semi-automatic weapon and sprays a gathering with deadly fire, you can count on the NRA to stand foursquarely against anything -- ANYTHING -- that might seriously address the issue of gun violence. Limit the number of rounds of ammunition in a magazine? Forget about it. Institute background checks for weapons purchased at gun shows? No way Ray. Urge common sense in keeping Uzis and other automatic weapons out of the hands of children? You've got to be kidding. To virtually every query, concern or proposal the NRA responds with one of [two moronic bromides](#): either "Guns don't kill people; people kill people,"

or "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun." Then too, they are notorious for sounding the alarm of weapons' confiscation, breathlessly warning, "Today they limit the number of rounds in a magazine; tomorrow they take away all our weapons."

Welcome to the slippery slope.

The NRA is unquestionably out of step with a majority of the American public -- and with a substantial percentage of their own members. According to the [most recent Pew Research Center Survey](#) 74% of those who belong to the NRA favor the idea of making private gun sales and sales at gun shows subject to background checks. The NRA made damn sure a bill calling for such checks died in Congress. And where 51% of the American public support a ban on high capacity ammunition clips, more than a third (35%) of NRA members also supports such a ban. And yet, the NRA continues wearing blinders, standing up to any and every sensible proposal, raking in the cash and making life miserable for any elected official who dares go against their wishes even once.

No one really knows why America is more gun-nutty than any other country in the world. Some claim it is in our DNA; that from our earliest days we carried weapons for protection and providing food. Our Wild West heritage -- at least as portrayed in a million-and-one on-screen oaters, has every man walking around with brandishing six-guns and a belt-full of bullets. Today, many blame Hollywood and claim that movies are at the root of so many massacres and mass killings; people are emulating what they see on the big screen. And yet, for anyone who has been around the making of films, Hollywood is exceptionally aware of the danger presented by guns. According to Alan Wald, a lifelong friend, fellow "Hollywood Brat," and actor:

*When I play a police officer with a realistic looking plastic gun (these replicas should be only available to property masters on films TV and theater), they take them away from us at lunch and tie them up in a rope just to avoid any incidents where people off set may mistake them for real guns. Also we never unholster our weapons unless specially asked to by the prop master or firearms specialist. On CSI we had a old veteran gun expert. On Rizzoli and Isles our technical on-set expert was a retired Boston PD homicide detective with 30 years experience*

So what's it going to take to quell the epidemic of gun violence in America? At a time when Georgia has enacted a "carry anywhere" law, which permits licensed gun owners to pack heat in bars, schools, churches and many government buildings, what is the average non-gun owning citizen to do? What's going to level the playing field -- or in this case the shooting range?

Sadly, the answer is not "one more atrocity." Every time a heavily armed crazy blasts his or her way on to the front pages, our horror, anger and desire to do something is thwarted -- if not check-mated -- by the weapons' industry shills of the National Rifle Association. There are thousands of laws -- federal, state and local -- dealing with guns in the country. They range from California, where all firearms sales, transfers, including private transactions and sales at gun shows, must go through a California licensed firearms dealer, to Georgia, where, as noted above, licensed gun owners are permitted to carry weapons virtually anywhere. A recent exhaustive [study](#) by the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence shows there is *some* correlation between the strictness of gun laws and the incident of gun deaths; seven of the ten states with the lowest number of gun deaths in 2013 came in states with the strongest gun laws.

And yet, statistics can't change anything. Only people can; citizens who once and for all refuse to let their shock, outrage and nausea be blunted or shunted by the fear mongers, the NRA, and those who make a killing off of killing.

That's one thing that's at the top of *my* bucket list.

How about you?

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