

Karl Rove's Prophecy: "We're an Empire Now, and When We Act, We Create our Own Reality"

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In a famous exchange between a high official at the court of George W. Bush and journalist Ron Susskind, the official – later acknowledged to have been Karl Rove – takes the journalist to task for working in “the reality-based community.” He defined that as believing “that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.” Rove then asserted that this was no longer the way in which the world worked.

“We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.” (Ron Susskind, NYTimes Magazine, Oct. 17, 2004).



This declaration became popular as an illustration of the hubris of the Bush-Cheney government. But we could also see it as fulfilled prophecy. Fulfilled in a manner that no journalist at that time would have deemed possible. Yes, the neoconservatives brought disrepute upon themselves because of the disaster in Iraq. Sure, opposition to the reality Rove had helped create in that devastated country became a first rung on the ladder that could lead to the presidency, as it did for Barack Obama. But the neocons stayed put in the State Department and other positions closely linked to the Obama White House, where they became allies with the liberal hawks in continuing to ‘spread democracy’ by overthrowing regimes.

America’s mainstream news and opinion purveyors, without demurring, accommodated the architects of reality production overseen by Dick Cheney. This did not end when Obama became president, but in fact with seemingly ever greater eagerness they gradually made the CIA/neocon-neoliberal created reality appear unshakably substantial in the minds of most newspaper readers and among TV audiences in the Atlantic basin. This was most obvious when attention moved to an imagined existential threat posed by Russia

supposedly aimed at the political and 'Enlightenment' achievements of the West. Neoconservatives and liberal hawks bent America's foreign-policy entirely to their ultimate purpose of eliminating a Vladimir Putin who had decided not to dance to Washington's tune so that he might save the Russian state, which had been disintegrating under his predecessor and Wall Street's robber barons. With President Obama as a mere spectator, the neocon/liberals could – without being ridiculed – pass off the coup d'état they had fomented in the Ukraine as a popular revolution. And because of an unquestioned Atlanticist faith, which holds that without the policies of the United States the world cannot be safe for people of the Atlantic basin, the European elites that determine policy or comment on it joined their American counterparts in endorsing that reality.



As blind vassals the Europeans have adopted Washington's enemies as their own. Hence the ease with which the European Union member states could be roped into a system of baseless economic sanctions against Russia, much to the detriment of their own economic interests. Layers upon layers of anti-Russian propaganda have piled up to bamboozle a largely unsuspecting public on both sides of the Ocean. In the Netherlands, from where I have been watching all this, Putin was held personally responsible in much of the media for the shooting down of a Malaysian airliner flying over the Ukraine, which killed 298 people. No serious investigation was undertaken. The presentation of 'almost definitive' findings by the joint investigation team under Dutch leadership has neither included clues supplied by jet fighter cannon holes in the wrecked fuselage nor eyewitness stories, which would make the government in Kiev the prime suspect. Moscow's challenging the integrity of the investigation, whose agreed-upon rules allowed publication of findings only if Kiev agreed with them, were met with great indignation by the Dutch Foreign and Prime Ministers.

As the fighting in Syria reached a phase when contradictions in the official Washington/NATO story demanded a stepping back for a fresh look, editors were forced into contortions to make sure that the baddies stayed bad, and that no matter how cruel and murderously they went about their occupation in Aleppo and elsewhere, the jihadi groups fighting to overthrow the secular Assad government in Damascus remained strictly labeled as moderate dissidents worthy of Western support, and the Russians as violators of Western values.

Architects of an official reality that diverges widely from the facts you thought you knew must rely on *faits accomplis* they achieve through military or police violence and intimidation, in combination with a fitting interpretation or a news blackout delivered by mainstream media. These conditions have been widely obtained in the Atlantic basin through a gradual loss of political accountability at top levels, and through government agencies protected by venerated secrecy that are allowed to live lives of their own. As a result American and European populations have been dropped into a fantasy world, one under constant threat

from terrorists and an evil dictator in Moscow. For Americans the never ending war waged by their own government, which leaves them with no choice but to condone mass murder, is supposedly necessary to keep them safe.

For Europeans, at least those in the northern half, the numerous NATO tanks rolling up to the border of the Russian Federation and the massing of troops in that area are an extra guarantee, on top of the missiles that were already there, that Vladimir Putin will restrain his urges to grab a European country or two. On a smaller scale, when every May 4th the 1940-45 war dead are remembered in the Netherlands, we must now include the fallen in Afghanistan as if they were a sacrifice to defend us against the Taliban threat from behind the Hindu Kush.

Ever since the start of this millennium there has been a chain of realities as prophesied by Karl Rove, enhanced by terrorist attacks, which may or may not have been the work of actual terrorists, but whose reality is not questioned without risking one's reputation. The geopolitical picture that they have helped build in most minds appears fairly consistent if one can keep one's curiosity on a leash and one's sense of contradiction sufficiently blunt. After all, the details of the official reality are filled in and smoothed out all the time by crafty campaigns produced in the PR world, with assistance from think tanks and academia. But the question does reappear in one's thoughts: do the politically prominent and the well-positioned editors, especially those known for having once possessed skeptical minds, actually believe it all? Do those members of the cabinet or parliament, who can get hot under their collar as they decry the latest revelation about one or other outrage committed by Putin, take seriously what they're saying?

Not all of them are believers. I know this from off the record conversations. But there appears to be a marked difference between the elite in government, in the media, in prominent social positions, and ordinary people who in these recent times of anguish about populism are sometimes referred to as uneducated. Quite a few among the latter appear to think that something fishy is going on. This could be because in my experience the alert ones have educated themselves, something that is not generally understood by commentators who have made their way through the bureaucracy of standard higher education. A disadvantage of being part of the elite is that you must stick to the accepted story. If you deviate from it, and have your thoughts run rather far away from it, which is quite inevitable once you begin with your deviation, you can no longer be trusted by those around you.

If you are a journalist and depend for your income on a mainstream newspaper or are hired by a TV company, you run the risk of losing your job if you do not engage in self-censorship. Consequently, publications that used to be rightly known as quality newspapers have turned into unreadable rags. The newspaper that was my employer for a couple of decades used to be edited on the premise that its correspondents rather than authorities were always correct in what they were saying. Today greater loyalty to the reality created in Washington and Langley cannot be imagined. For much of northern Europe the official story that originates in the United States is amplified by the BBC and other once reliable purveyors of news and opinion like the Guardian, the Financial Times and the (always less reliable) Economist.

Repetition lends an ever greater aura of truth to the nonsense that is relentlessly repeated on the pages of once serious publications. Detailed analyses of developments understood through strings of false clues give the fictions ever more weight in learned heads and

debates in parliament. At the time of writing, the grave concern spread across the opinion pages on my side of the Atlantic is about how Putin's meddling in upcoming European elections can be prevented.

The realities Rove predicted have infantilized parliamentary debates, current affairs discussion and lecture events, and anything of a supposedly serious nature on TV. These now conform to comic book simplicities of evil, heroes and baddies. They have produced a multitude of editorials with facts upside-down. They force even those who advise against provoking Moscow to include a remark or two about Putin being a murderer or tyrant, lest they could be mistaken for traitors to Enlightenment values or even as Russian puppets, as I have been. Layers of unreality have incapacitated learned and serious people to think clearly about the world and how it came to be that way.

How could Rove's predictions so totally materialize? There's a simple answer: 'they' got away with momentous lies at an early stage. The more authorities lie successfully the more they are likely to lie again in a big way to serve the purposes of earlier lies. The 'they' stands for those individuals and groups in the power system who operate beyond legal limits as a hydra-headed entity, whose coordination depends on the project, campaign, mission, or operation at hand. Those with much power got away with excessive extralegal use of it since the beginning of this century because systems of holding the powerful to account have crumbled on both sides of the Atlantic. Hence, potential opposition to what the reality architects were doing dwindled to almost nothing. At the same time, people whose job or personal inclination leads them to ferret out truth were made to feel guilty for pursuing it.

The best way, I think, to make sense of how this works is to study it as a type of intimidation. Sticking to the official story because you have to may not be quite as bad as forced religious conversion with a gun pointed at your head, but it belongs to the same category. It begins with the triggering of odd feelings of guilt. At least that is how I remember it. Living in Tokyo, I had just read Mark Lane's *Rush To Judgment*, the first major demolishing in book form of the Warren Report on the murder of John F. Kennedy, when I became aware that I had begun to belong to an undesirable category of people who were taking the existence of conspiracies seriously. We all owe thanks to writers of Internet-based samizdat literature who've recently reminded us that the pejorative use of the conspiracy label stems from one of the greatest misinformation successes of the CIA begun in 1967.

So the campaign to make journalists feel guilty for their embarrassing questions dates from before Dick Cheney and Rove and Bush. But it has only reached a heavy duty phase after the moment that I see as having triggered the triumph of political untruth.

We have experienced massive systemic intimidation since 9/11. For the wider public we have the absurdities of airport security – initially evidenced by mountains of nail-clippers – reminding everyone of the arbitrary coercive potential that rests with the authorities. Every time people are made to take off their belts and shoes – to stick only to the least inane instances – they are reminded: yes, we can do this to you! Half of Boston or all of France can be placed under undeclared martial law to tell people: yes, we have you under full control! For journalists unexamined guilt feelings still play a major role. The serious ones feel guilty for wanting to ask disturbing questions, and so they reaffirm that they still belong to 'sane' humanity rather than the segment with extraterrestrials in flying saucers in its belief system. But there is a confused interaction with another guilty feeling of not having pursued unanswered questions. Its remedy appears to be a doubling down on the official story. Why throw in fairly common lines like "I have no time for truthers" unless you feel that this is

where the shoe pinches?

You will have noticed a fairly common response when the 9/11 massacre enters a discussion. Smart people will say that they “will not go there”, which brings to mind the “here be dragons” warning on uncharted bits of medieval maps. That response is not stupid. It hints at an understanding that there is no way back once you enter that realm. There is simply no denying that if you accept the essential conclusions of the official 9/11 report you must also concede that laws of nature stopped working on that particular day. And, true enough, if you do go there and bear witness publicly to what you see, you may well be devoured; your career in many government positions, the media and even academia is likely to come to an end.

So, for the time being we are stuck with a considerable chunk of terra incognita relating to recognized political knowledge; which is an indispensable knowledge if you want to get current world affairs and the American role in it into proper perspective.

Mapping the motives of those who decide “not to go there” may be a way to begin breaking through this disastrous deadlock. Holding onto your job is an honorable motivation when you have a family to maintain. The career motivation is not something to scorn. There is also an entirely reasonable expectation that once you go there you lose your voice publicly to address very important social abuse and political misdeeds. I think it is not difficult to detect authors active on internet samizdat sites who have that foremost in mind. Another possible reason for not going there is the more familiar one, akin to the denial that one has a dreadful disease. Also possible is an honorable position of wishing to preserve social order in the face of a prospect of very dramatic political upheaval caused by revelations about a crime so huge that hardly anything in America’s history can be compared to it. Where could such a thing end – civil war? Martial law?

What I find more difficult to stomach is the position of someone who is worshiped by what used to be the left, and who has been guiding that class of politically interested Americans as to where they can and cannot go. Noam Chomsky does not merely keep quiet about it, but mocks students who raise logical questions prompted by their curiosity, thereby discouraging a whole generation studying at universities and active in civil rights causes. One can only hope that this overrated analyst of the establishment, who helps keep the most embarrassing questions out of the public sphere, trips over the contradictions and preposterousness of his own judgments and crumples in full view of his audience.

The triumph of political untruth has brought into being a vast system of political intimidation. Remember then that the intimidator does not really care what you believe or not, but impresses you with the fact that you have no choice. That is the essence of the exercise of brute power. With false flag events the circumstantial evidence sometimes appears quite transparently false and, indeed could be interpreted as having been purposeful. Consider the finding of passports or identity papers accidentally left by terrorists, or their almost always having been known to and suspected by the police. And their deaths through police shooting before they can be interrogated. Could these be taunting signals of ultimate power to a doubting public: Now you! Dare contradict us! Are the persons killed by the police the same who committed the crime? Follow-up questions once considered perfectly normal and necessary by news media editors are conspicuous by their absence.

How can anyone quarrel with Rove’s prophecy. He told Susskind that we will forever be

studying newly created realities. This is what the mainstream media continue to do. His words made it very clear: you have no choice!

A question that will be in the minds of perhaps many as they consider the newly sworn in president of the United States, who like John F. Kennedy appears to have understood that "Intelligence" leads a dangerously uncontrolled life of its own: At what point will he give in to the powers of an invisible government, as he is made to reckon that he also has no choice?

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