

More Nuggets From A Nut House

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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It is amusing to contrast the September 24, 2007 treatment of Iran President Mahmoud Ahmandinejad by Columbia University President Lee Bollinger with Bollinger's September 16, 2005 treatment of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and the treatment of the Shah of Iran in 1955 by Columbia University President Grayson Kirk (and by the media). As we all know, after having invited Ahmandinejad to speak at Columbia, Bollinger proceeded to give the guest a nasty, pedantic, and misinformed attack, calling him a "cruel dictator" with a "mind of evil." But in 2005, Bollinger welcomed Pakistan President Musharraf with a warm accolade, as "a leader of global importance...[whose] contribution to Pakistan's economic turnaround and the international fight against terror remain remarkable—it is rare that we have a leader of his stature at campus" ("Columbia University has standing ovation for President," press release, General Pervez Musharraf, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, September 16, 2005).

In February 1955, the Shah of Iran was a guest at Columbia receiving an honorary Doctor of Laws degree and he, like Musharraf, was greeted deferentially by Grayson Kirk and gave a well-received speech featuring an accolade to the U.S. "policy of peace backed by strength." The *New York Times* also noted that the Shah was "impressed by the desire of Americans for a secure and enduring peace" ("Shah Praises U.S. For Peace Policy," *NYT*, February 5, 1955). This was, of course, just a few months after the United States had overthrown the elected government of Guatemala via a proxy army and had installed a regime of permanent terror.

In the real world, both Musharraf and the Shah of Iran fit comfortably the category of "cruel dictator," whereas Ahmandinejad does not. Musharraf came to power in a coup and has ruled by decree ever since, in the interim carrying out quite a few massacres of his own people. The Shah was installed as ruler by the United States in a coup in 1953 (only 18 months before his Doctor of Laws degree award—or reward—at Columbia University) and from the very beginning displayed his cruelty and intention to rule by dictatorial authority. Ahmandinejad won a contested election and has limited personal power.

The Shah's torture chambers were famous, modernized with the help of his CIA and Israeli advisers and probably topped anything the Iranian regime has engaged in since the Shah's departure. The crucial difference between the winners of Columbia presidents' accolades and denunciations is obviously that the one denounced is a declared U.S. enemy and target, whereas the good guys served U.S. interests. As in so many cases of leaders who serve, any little defects like torture or dictatorial rule somehow fail to get noticed by the presidents of Columbia (or by the mainstream media), whereas the lesser defects of the leader of the target state arouses furious indignation as the Columbia president displays his deep concern for human rights and democracy.

It is a little awkward for Bollinger that since Musharraf's 2005 visit to Columbia he has fallen out of complete favor and there is talk of ousting this "leader of stature" who has not shaped up adequately. But if Musharraf came to Columbia again, we can be sure that Bollinger would find the proper nuance for a leader who was of somewhat diminished stature, but still a U.S. instrument.

The Shah was even encouraged to pursue nuclear energy, just as the target Iran of today is being threatened for trying to do what the Shah was allowed to do, by dictate of the ruler of the world. In short, the double standard is comprehensive and even funny in its crudity, but the United States and its propaganda system prevent large numbers from seeing this and laughing the responsible charlatans off the stage.

Israel Bombing Syria "Fuels Debate"

Almost daily the title and framing of news articles puts on clear display the internalized bias of propaganda system journalism. A nice illustration is the September 22, 2007 article in the *New York Times* by Mark Mazzetti and David E. Sanger, "Raid on Syria Fuels Debate on Weapons." The continuation page headline is "Israeli Raid Renews Debate on Nuclear Arms and Syria." Then in a box we see this thought: "Washington worries, Is Damascus trying to build or buy an arsenal?" Now if Syria had bombed Israel to knock out some of its threatening weaponry, it is obvious that the *Times* headline would be much larger and the focus would be on the bombing attack itself, not on any "debate" that might ensue about nuclear arms. This would be considered an act of war and very bad business and deserving of retaliatory action (which would surely ensue). There would be no box that says, "Damascus worries, Is Israel trying to build an arsenal?" And there would be an indignant editorial denouncing Syrian aggression violating the UN charter.

What this reflects is the *New York Times's* journalistic principles. That is, Israel has a right to an arsenal, whereas any Syrian arsenal and any Syrian effort that might enable it to defend itself is highly debatable. Furthermore, Israel shares aggression rights with the United States, so that if it attacks Syria that is not in itself bad or even problematic, whereas if Syria or Iran or any non-ally bombs another country, aids dissident or resistance movements like Hezbollah, or intervenes anywhere outside their own territory, this is very bad business. These principles are so well internalized that people like Mazzetti and Sanger probably don't even realize that they are pretty brazen propagandists.

An old favorite of mine that beautifully illustrates the *New York Times's* structured bias and normalization of Israeli state terrorism is an article by Joel Greenberg on "Israel Rethinks Interrogation of Arabs" (*NYT*, August, 14, 1993). This was a period in which Israel's torture of Palestinians was running at 400-500 victims per month, a point mentioned rather matter-of-factly deep in Greenberg's article. But instead of the article featuring the torture itself—and it was alone in even mentioning the subject and giving the estimated number of victims—it is framed around Israeli thoughts on whether such "interrogation" procedures are helpful. The torture "fuels debate." It isn't worthy of an article on the torture regime itself. The *Times* has always steered clear of reporting on Israeli torture and, in a notorious case, when the *London Times* Insight team produced a lengthy study of Israeli torture in 1977, the *New York Times* refused to pick up the story (also fended off by the *Washington Post*) and mentioned it first in an article featuring the Israeli rebuttal to the torture charges (which were not spelled out).

Anti-Semitism as a Function of Israeli State Terrorism

The point was made years ago by Alexander Cockburn, but retains its value as a virtual social science law: that the more ruthlessly Israel behaves toward its untermenschen the more furious the outcries of growing anti-Semitism. This law is easily explained: when Israel escalates its violence, the “defenders of anything Israel chooses to do” realize that Israel’s actions might provoke criticism in the West among those elements of the population overly sensitive to enlightenment values. So the best defense is a good offense. That is, start proclaiming that anti-Semitism is once again on the march, picking out or even manufacturing illustrations, and continue the long-standing effort to conflate hostility to Israeli actions to anti-Semitism. Of course, the conflation is rendered plausible by the fact that the campaigners who are identifying critics of Israeli actions as anti-Semites are usually Jewish and are usually linked to the well-financed Jewish lobby. So these Jewish campaigners are de facto supporters of Israeli state terror, making it not unreasonable to see a definite connection between the two, even if these campaigners don’t represent Jews in general.

The purpose of these campaigns is not only to silence criticism of Israel, but beyond that to help mobilize the West for war against Israel’s targets, now notably Iran. This program has been frighteningly successful. The U.S. Senate and Congress are now virtual appendages of the Israel lobby and rush to denounce its enemies and clear the ground for war against Israel’s targets. The political leaders compete for subservience honors and are afraid even to denounce the leaked suggestions that nuclear weapons might be used against Iran, let alone put a brake on further U.S. aggression. The media not already in service have been beaten into submission and the lobby has had notable successes in its McCarthyite campaigns against academics who don’t meet their standards of political correctness on Middle East issues. A stream of quality academics have been attacked and some of them damaged by Lobby campaigns—Juan Cole, Rashid Khaladi, Nadia Abu el-Haq, Joel Beinen, Joseph Massad, Norman Finkelstein, among others. People like Jimmy Carter, Stephen Walt, and John Mersheimer have been under steady attack for expressing critical views on Israeli policy and Lobby influence. Speakers not satisfying the Lobby principles have been denounced and invitations withdrawn because of the systematic pressure. Publishers of books deemed overly critical, most recently Pluto Press, have been threatened. Although the efforts of Campus Watch, CAMERA, Israel on Campus Coalition, and the David Project are such a clear throwback to the McCarthy era efforts of Red Channels and other private thought-police operations, you would hardly be aware of the civil liberties threat if you read only the mainstream media.

Democracy in Its Last Throes?

The already weak (plutocratic) democracy is in deep trouble in the United States, and good arguments can be made that it is likely to be stripped of its façade in the very near future. Right now it is crystal clear that “the people” do not rule and that monied interests and powerful lobbies determine eligible candidates—it is power sovereignty, not popular sovereignty. We have had a telling illustration of this following the 2006 election, where a majority of the the public clearly rejected the Bush policies and Iraq war, verified by polls, but were unable to do anything about it through the political process.

The Bush-Cheney team has already done serious damage to the democratic structures of this country: the checks-and-balances system is badly impaired, executive power to ignore congressional legislation is now openly asserted and still in place, executive power to permit torture and ignore international law has been strengthened, the right to privacy and due

process has been weakened, habeas corpus is in jeopardy, and the executive's power to go to war and carry out assassinations and other covert and military operations abroad has also been strengthened. In a recent speech, Daniel Ellsberg argues convincingly that a coup has already taken place with these legal-structural changes making for an all-powerful executive ("A Coup Has Occurred," September 27, 2007, www.consortiumnews.com). But he then goes on to point out that a war with Iran, with its more catastrophic effects, including an impact on energy prices and supply, as well as wider warfare (possibly including the use of nuclear weapons), would almost surely produce a second coup and a police state. He argues that this may be just what Cheney, his chief-of-staff David Addington, and other elements of the Iran war support network want, but it would be the end of a great U.S. experiment and would usher in a new dark age.

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