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Manning, Snowden and the U.S. Coup in Iran

A Monitored Populace is a Compliant Populace ... Until It Isn't

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With the CIA finally admitting the open secret this week that it and its counterparts in the British oil mafia ('intelligence' service) were behind the overthrow of Iran's democratically elected leader Mohammad Mossadegh in a coup it orchestrated in 1953 the economic interests behind American geopolitics in the Middle East were partly revealed. Apparently left to be revealed another half century hence is the current open secret, that the U.S. war on and occupation of Iraq was also oil geopolitics sold to the always gullible American public as self preservation — 'attack them over there before they attack us over here.' That from what is known the al Qaeda attacks of September 11, 2001 were 'blowback' for previous meddling to secure oil in Saudi Arabia should raise fundamental questions about truer motives for the 'war on terror' and whose interests the American and British oil mafias are really working in?

This question unites the thirty-five year prison sentence of Bradley Manning for revealing inconvenient truths about U.S. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan with the illegal detention of David Miranda, husband of journalist Glenn Greenwald who reported on illegal NSA surveillance in the name of this so-called war on terror, by British ‘authorities’ at Heathrow Airport. Framed differently, the CIA and British intelligence overthrew democratically elected governments whose leaders were acting in the interests of their citizens to install despotic regimes that immiserated ‘their’ populations to facilitate the control over, and extraction of, cheap oil for the U.S. When purportedly non-state actors brought the fight back to the U.S. on ‘9/11’ the U.S. responded by doubling down to declare war on Iraq in which over one-million people died and the nation was substantially destroyed. While terrorism no doubt played a role in the U.S. war on Iraq, it was hardly the Iraqis doing the terrorizing.

In alleged response to the attacks on the U.S. brought about by oil geopolitics a surveillance state was created to monitor and control the domestic population much as the despotic leaders installed by the U.S. overseas had done to their populations. When NSA contractor Edward Snowden revealed evidence of this surveillance state the U.S. threatened foreign governments believed to harbor him, orchestrated the brief kidnapping of the President of Bolivia, Evo Morales, and illegally detained (a/k/a kidnapped) Mr. Greenwald’s husband as he passed through the U.K. on his way back to his home in Brazil. Some fair proportion of brave and noble Americans— who stand a greater chance of dying from furniture falling on them than from blowback for the overseas depredations of the oil mafia (CIA), now cower by their televisions wandering out only to wish for the violent deaths of those courageous souls who bring them news of what their government, in the interests of its plutocrat masters, is doing.

The ‘shadow’ back-story, presented as indelible, anti-historical fact, is that current circumstance is the result of ‘natural’ development, that the way we live in the West, with its dependencies that require global depredations, somehow self-generated to arrive at ‘the world’ we inhabit. Put another way, through free choice we ‘consumers’ chose the world we were born into before we were born into it. Left out is the history of American industry tearing out mass transit systems to engineer a ‘car culture’ to sell cars, car parts and oil. Left out is the arrangement of cities that require driving to and from work to pay for the cars that transport us to and from work. Left out is that the largest ‘user’ of energy is the U.S. military so that it can fight wars to secure the energy it needs to fight wars to secure energy. Left out is the century of corporate propaganda (advertising) needed to sell the idea that what we ‘want’ is the stuff capitalism produces. And left out is the relation of the stuff we now want to the facts of the world required to produce it.

The question for we in 'the West' is who more fears the disclosures of Bradley Manning, Edward Snowden and the other reporters on the doings of empire—the U.S. government so clearly acting in the interests of imperial capitalism or the co-opted masses staring through the mall window believing, as we have been so well taught, that our lives would be complete if we could just get one more iGadget? What Bradley Manning revealed, and Edward Snowden well articulated, is the distance between 'the world' as it has been sold to us and the world as it is. Both persons were inserted into circumstances of disjunction, partly stumbling, partly intentional, where cost was suddenly and forcibly associated with price. And both determined the cost was too high. This possibility was well understood by the architects and engineers of conquest, hence the 'privatization' of the military where cost could be better associated with price for those willing to draw their circle of humanity tightly enough to 'grow' profits.

The more telling stories of America's heroic efforts to spread freedom and democracy in Iraq came in pairs—the young girl whose head was cut off and a dog's head sewn onto her body and the boy- child whose hands were drilled through and bolted before he was murdered. Western reports of 'those people' thrive on ignorance of similar stories from everywhere American empire has gone. The banned chemical weapon white phosphorous that burns through flesh to the bone was reportedly used extensively in the siege of Fallujah where the city was emptied of all but 'military-age' men 12-75 years old so that only 'terrorists' would be incinerated by the thousands. And prior still was a century of brutality and slaughter always sold as making 'them' like 'us,' only raped, dismembered and / or dead. But Bradley Manning had made an oath and Edward Snowden had signed a contract promising the crimes they uncovered wouldn't be revealed. And we all understand the sanctity, nay—the moral imperative, of a contract.

The temptation in the face of horror is to isolate it, to categorize it in a way that allows it to be packed away. This is also one definition of psychological alienation—the separation of what we know from its being known to us. When Mr. Mossadegh was deposed he was publicly humiliated and this became standard practice as U.S. foreign policy 'liberated' one country after another from freedom and any possibility of self-determination. The imperative that United Fruit Company not have to pay a minimum wage in Guatemala or respect land reforms in Honduras was well worth the tens of thousands of persons raped, tortured and slaughtered under U.S. / CIA guidance with U.S. supplied arms as long as profits accrued to the connected capitalists on whose behalf U.S. foreign policy is always undertaken. And through the magic of capitalism there is never any indication in the price at the store of how the bananas were gotten—of their true cost. A few, Messrs. Manning and Snowden, got a glimpse of the cost, determined it to be too high, and made the moral decision to make the costs known.

While the events—the practices and their results, brought to light by Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden are often framed as ‘embarrassing’ or ‘humiliating’ to the public officials so exposed, in the first place, the premise they are capable of embarrassment or humiliation needs to be proven and in the second place, irrespective of the answer to the first, the more relevant term is ‘costly.’ This doesn’t mean costly in the contrived frames of those who were exposed such as ‘putting American lives at risk.’ It means costly in the sense of interfering with business. Anyone contending those freed from their mortal coils by the U.S. in Iraq, Vietnam, Honduras, East Timor and on and on were the intended beneficiaries of U.S. foreign policy slept through history class. By articulating the distance between cost in terms of human misery and the price at the gas station, between the idiot-child cartoons of television and print news and the facts as they apply to human existence, Messrs. Manning and Snowden shifted the costs ever so microscopically back toward empire. And what is inferred in the response of political leaders to their revelations is that ultimately some proportion of the acts of empire, its ability to profit through malevolent actions, depends on the consent of we ‘little people.’

The purpose of the surveillance state is to keep the price of this consent low. The secret interpretations of secret laws by the powerful make a mockery of the ‘self-rule’ intended by laws. And Mr. Snowden’s ‘crime’ was to demonstrate that law has no bearing on state actions—the surveillance conducted by the NSA was ruled illegal even by the kangaroo (FISA) court put together to give it the faux semblance of judicial oversight. Threatening to put NSA chief Keith Alexander in charge of the ‘independent’ review of the NSA’s activities was President Barack Obama’s ever so charming way of telling those opposed to NSA intrusion into their lives exactly where to stick their opposition. So while the actors behind the state spy apparatus probably regret the release of some of the specifics of the programs—most likely because it raises the cost of carrying the spying out, there is little regret that we now know that they know what we had for breakfast and what the recent fight with our partner was over. A monitored populace is a compliant populace—until it isn’t.

With Mr. Manning destined to spend the next decade or three in Federal custody and Edward Snowden tucked away in Russia, the imperial state, in the service of its plutocrat masters, is planning its next moves. The current ‘revelations’ are public relations propaganda 101—admit in the vaguest terms possible what is already known and ‘leak’ enough additional information to create the likelihood in the public’s mind that the nature and the scope of the NSA’s predations against us have been revealed. Get some well-placed windbags in Congress to hold faux ‘investigations’ where NSA talking points are voiced as if they resulted from questions being both asked and answered. Appoint some Democrats to the FISA court in case the illusion this

makes a difference still resonates with the duller ‘constituencies.’ Finally, issue a report and force insistence across ‘officialdom,’ government employees, contractors and the lap dog bourgeois press, that the matter is closed. And oh yes, create a new ‘threat’ to get the television crowd ready for a good slaughter—we all have bills to pay.