



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #74 — FEB. 15, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org> FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com

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Important Stuff: How We Got to Where We Are, Part 1

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 15, 2012)

Those of you who worry that President Obama is “destroying” (the favorite word on Fox) America’s image and reputation abroad would do well to consider the new, lavish American Embassy in Iraq. Remember the scandal over Saddam Hussein’s palaces? Our embassy is essentially at the same level, in a country we left dirt poor and war-torn.

What do you think George Bush’s and Dick Cheney’s and Halliburton’s embassy does to America’s reputation in at least one crucial part of the modern world? This embassy is a testament to blind ambition. It is a blatant symbol of America as a crazy, power hungry bunch of a*s-holes.

Just what we need. And the big Republican lie is that President Obama did it. He’s responsible. Please tell me how it is that he is responsible for: 1) the idiotic Iraq war; 2) the more idiotic American embassy in Baghdad; 3) the more than \$1 trillion wasted in Iraq (I don’t want to think of the lives!); 4) resulting in (with other Bush Administration screw-ups) the Crash of 2008; 5) hence joblessness, malaise, and deficits. According to Republicans (see yesterday’s Newsletter), Mr. Obama is an evil imposter responsible for everything that has ever gone wrong anywhere in American history.

Yet, despite all these huge problems President Obama “caused”, the stock markets are doing well and the economy is growing. The markets tell us that, despite their predictions of gloom and doom intended to gain political power, the big money believes recovery is here and/or coming very soon.

What a President!

I wonder if the day will ever come that the Right realizes that these lies stand between us, these lies prevent communications, these lies prevent democracy. Or is that what the Right really wants?

“Losing’ the World: American Decline in Perspective, Part 1” by Noam Chomsky, TomDispatch.com/Nation of Change

Feb. 14, 2012,

(http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175502/tomgram%3A_noam_chomsky%2C_hegemony_and_its_dilemmas/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+tomdispatch%2FesUU+%28TomDispatch%3A+The+latest+Tomgram%29&utm_content=Google+Reader) (<http://www.nationofchange.org/losing-world-1329237182>)

"Tomgram Introduction: Noam Chomsky, Hegemony and Its Dilemmas" by Thomas Engelhardt

Back in May 2007, I stumbled across online sketches at the website of a Kansas architectural firm hired to build a monster U.S. embassy-cum-citadel-cum-Greater-Middle-Eastern command center on 104 acres in the middle of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. They offered an artist's impressions of what the place would look like -- a giant self-sufficient compound both prosaic (think malls or housing projects) and opulent (a giant pool, tennis courts, a recreation center).

Struck by the fact that the U.S. government was intent on building the largest embassy ever in the planet's oil heartlands, I wrote a piece, "The Mother Ship Lands in Iraq" about those plans and offered a little tour of the project via those crude drawings. From TomDispatch, they then began to run around the Internet and soon a panicky State Department had declared a "security breach" and forced the firm to pull the sketches off its website.

Now, more than five years later, we have the first public photos of the embassy -- a pool, basketball court, tennis courts, and food court to die for -- just as the news has arrived that the vast boondoggle of a place, built for three-quarters of a billion of your tax dollars, with a \$6 billion State Department budget this year and its own mercenary air force, is about to get its staff of 16,000 slashed. In a *Washington Post* piece on the subject, Senator Patrick Leahy is quoted as saying: "I've been in embassies all over the world, and you come to this place and you're like: 'Whoa. Wow.' All of a sudden you've got something so completely out of scale to anything, you have to wonder, what were they thinking when they first built it?"

The answer is: in 2004, when planning for this white elephant of embassies first began, the Bush administration was still dreaming of a Washington-enforced *Pax Americana* in the Greater Middle East and saw it as its western command post. Now, of course, the vast American mega-bases in Iraq with their multiple bus routes, giant PXes, Pizza Huts, Cinnabons, and Burger Kings, where American troops were to be garrisoned on the "Korean model" for decades to come, are so many ghost towns, fading American ziggurats in Mesopotamia. Similarly, those embassy photos seem like snapshots from Pompeii just as the ash was beginning to fall. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, the news is similarly dismal with drawdowns and withdrawals suddenly the order of the day. Something's changing. It feels tectonic. Certainly, we're receiving another set of signs that American imperial plans on the Eurasian mainland have crashed and burned and that the U.S. is now regrouping and heading "offshore."

What a moment then for Noam Chomsky to weigh in on the subject of American decline. (His earlier TomDispatch post "Who Owns the World?" might be considered a companion piece to this one.) For him, a TomDispatch first: a two-day, back-to-back two-parter on imperial hegemony and its discontents. (To catch Timothy MacBain's latest Tomcast audio interview in which Chomsky offers an anatomy of American defeats in the Greater Middle East, click here: <http://tomdispatch.blogspot.com/2012/02/america-in-decline.html>.)

"'Losing' the World: American Decline in Perspective, Part 1" by Noam Chomsky, TomDispatch.com/Nation of Change

Significant anniversaries are solemnly commemorated -- Japan's attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, for example. Others are ignored, and we can often learn valuable lessons from them about what is likely to lie ahead. Right now, in fact.

At the moment, we are failing to commemorate the 50th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's decision to launch the most destructive and murderous act of aggression of the post-World War II period: the invasion of South Vietnam, later all of Indochina, leaving millions dead and four countries devastated, with casualties still mounting from the long-term effects of drenching South Vietnam with some of the most lethal carcinogens known, undertaken to destroy ground cover and food crops.

The prime target was South Vietnam. The aggression later spread to the North, then to the remote peasant society of northern Laos, and finally to rural Cambodia, which was bombed at the stunning level of all allied air operations in the Pacific region during World War II, including the two atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In this, Henry Kissinger's orders were being carried out -- "anything that flies on anything that moves" -- a call for

genocide that is rare in the historical record. Little of this is remembered. Most was scarcely known beyond narrow circles of activists.

When the invasion was launched 50 years ago, concern was so slight that there were few efforts at justification, hardly more than the president's impassioned plea that "we are opposed around the world by a monolithic and ruthless conspiracy that relies primarily on covert means for expanding its sphere of influence" and if the conspiracy achieves its ends in Laos and Vietnam, "the gates will be opened wide."

Elsewhere, he warned further that "the complacent, the self-indulgent, the soft societies are about to be swept away with the debris of history [and] only the strong... can possibly survive," in this case reflecting on the failure of U.S. aggression and terror to crush Cuban independence.

By the time protest began to mount half a dozen years later, the respected Vietnam specialist and military historian Bernard Fall, no dove, forecast that "Vietnam as a cultural and historic entity... is threatened with extinction...[as]...the countryside literally dies under the blows of the largest military machine ever unleashed on an area of this size." He was again referring to South Vietnam.

When the war ended eight horrendous years later, mainstream opinion was divided between those who described the war as a "noble cause" that could have been won with more dedication, and at the opposite extreme, the critics, to whom it was "a mistake" that proved too costly. By 1977, President Carter aroused little notice when he explained that we owe Vietnam "no debt" because "the destruction was mutual."

There are important lessons in all this for today, even apart from another reminder that only the weak and defeated are called to account for their crimes. One lesson is that to understand what is happening we should attend not only to critical events of the real world, often dismissed from history, but also to what leaders and elite opinion believe, however tinged with fantasy. Another lesson is that alongside the flights of fancy concocted to terrify and mobilize the public (and perhaps believed by some who are trapped in their own rhetoric), there is also geostrategic planning based on principles that are rational and stable over long periods because they are rooted in stable institutions and their concerns. That is true in the case of Vietnam as well. I will return to that, only stressing here that the persistent factors in state action are generally well concealed.

The Iraq war is an instructive case. It was marketed to a terrified public on the usual grounds of self-defense against an awesome threat to survival: the "single question," George W. Bush and Tony Blair declared, was whether Saddam Hussein would end his programs of developing weapons of mass destruction. When the single question received the wrong answer, government rhetoric shifted effortlessly to our "yearning for democracy," and educated opinion duly followed course; all routine.

Later, as the scale of the U.S. defeat in Iraq was becoming difficult to suppress, the government quietly conceded what had been clear all along. In 2007-2008, the administration officially announced that a final settlement must grant the U.S. military bases and the right of combat operations, and must privilege U.S. investors in the rich energy system -- demands later reluctantly abandoned in the face of Iraqi resistance. And all well kept from the general population.

Gauging American Decline

With such lessons in mind, it is useful to look at what is highlighted in the major journals of policy and opinion today. Let us keep to the most prestigious of the establishment journals, *Foreign Affairs*. The headline blaring on the cover of the December 2011 issue reads in bold face: "Is America Over?"

The title article calls for "retrenchment" in the "humanitarian missions" abroad that are consuming the country's wealth, so as to arrest the American decline that is a major theme of international affairs discourse, usually accompanied by the corollary that power is shifting to the East, to China and (maybe) India.

The lead articles are on Israel-Palestine. The first, by two high Israeli officials, is entitled "The Problem is Palestinian Rejection": the conflict cannot be resolved because Palestinians refuse to recognize Israel as a Jewish state -- thereby conforming to standard diplomatic practice: states are recognized, but not privileged sectors within

them. The demand is hardly more than a new device to deter the threat of political settlement that would undermine Israel's expansionist goals.

The opposing position, defended by an American professor, is entitled "The Problem Is the Occupation." The subtitle reads "How the Occupation is Destroying the Nation." Which nation? Israel, of course. The paired articles appear under the heading "Israel under Siege."

The January 2012 issue features yet another call to bomb Iran now, before it is too late. Warning of "the dangers of deterrence," the author suggests that "skeptics of military action fail to appreciate the true danger that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose to U.S. interests in the Middle East and beyond. And their grim forecasts assume that the cure would be worse than the disease -- that is, that the consequences of a U.S. assault on Iran would be as bad as or worse than those of Iran achieving its nuclear ambitions. But that is a faulty assumption. The truth is that a military strike intended to destroy Iran's nuclear program, if managed carefully, could spare the region and the world a very real threat and dramatically improve the long-term national security of the United States."

Others argue that the costs would be too high, and at the extremes some even point out that an attack would violate international law -- as does the stand of the moderates, who regularly deliver threats of violence, in violation of the U.N. Charter.

Let us review these dominant concerns in turn.

American decline is real, though the apocalyptic vision reflects the familiar ruling class perception that anything short of total control amounts to total disaster. Despite the piteous laments, the U.S. remains the world dominant power by a large margin, and no competitor is in sight, not only in the military dimension, in which of course the U.S. reigns supreme.

China and India have recorded rapid (though highly inegalitarian) growth, but remain very poor countries, with enormous internal problems not faced by the West. China is the world's major manufacturing center, but largely as an assembly plant for the advanced industrial powers on its periphery and for western multinationals. That is likely to change over time. Manufacturing regularly provides the basis for innovation, often breakthroughs, as is now sometimes happening in China. One example that has impressed western specialists is China's takeover of the growing global solar panel market, not on the basis of cheap labor but by coordinated planning and, increasingly, innovation.

But the problems China faces are serious. Some are demographic, reviewed in *Science*, the leading U.S. science weekly. The study shows that mortality sharply decreased in China during the Maoist years, "mainly a result of economic development and improvements in education and health services, especially the public hygiene movement that resulted in a sharp drop in mortality from infectious diseases." This progress ended with the initiation of the capitalist reforms 30 years ago, and the death rate has since increased.

Furthermore, China's recent economic growth has relied substantially on a "demographic bonus," a very large working-age population. "But the window for harvesting this bonus may close soon," with a "profound impact on development": "Excess cheap labor supply, which is one of the major factors driving China's economic miracle, will no longer be available."

Demography is only one of many serious problems ahead. For India, the problems are far more severe.

Not all prominent voices foresee American decline. Among international media, there is none more serious and responsible than the *London Financial Times*. It recently devoted a full page to the optimistic expectation that new technology for extracting North American fossil fuels might allow the U.S. to become energy independent, hence to retain its global hegemony for a century. There is no mention of the kind of world the U.S. would rule in this happy event, but not for lack of evidence.

At about the same time, the International Energy Agency reported that, with rapidly increasing carbon emissions from fossil fuel use, the limit of safety will be reached by 2017 if the world continues on its present course. "The door is closing," the IEA chief economist said, and very soon it "will be closed forever."

Shortly before the U.S. Department of Energy reported the most recent carbon dioxide emissions figures, which "jumped by the biggest amount on record" to a level higher than the worst-case scenario anticipated by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). That came as no surprise to many scientists, including the MIT program on climate change, which for years has warned that the IPCC predictions are too conservative.

Such critics of the IPCC predictions receive virtually no public attention, unlike the fringe of denialists who are supported by the corporate sector, along with huge propaganda campaigns that have driven Americans off the international spectrum in dismissal of the threats. Business support also translates directly to political power. Denialism is part of the catechism that must be intoned by Republican candidates in the farcical election campaign now in progress, and in Congress they are powerful enough to abort even efforts to inquire into the effects of global warming, let alone do anything serious about it.

In brief, American decline can perhaps be stemmed if we abandon hope for decent survival, prospects that are all too real given the balance of forces in the world.

"Losing" China and Vietnam

Putting such unpleasant thoughts aside, a close look at American decline shows that China indeed plays a large role, as it has for 60 years. The decline that now elicits such concern is not a recent phenomenon. It traces back to the end of World War II, when the U.S. had half the world's wealth and incomparable security and global reach. Planners were naturally well aware of the enormous disparity of power, and intended to keep it that way.

The basic viewpoint was outlined with admirable frankness in a major state paper of 1948 (PPS 23). The author was one of the architects of the New World Order of the day, the chair of the State Department Policy Planning Staff, the respected statesman and scholar George Kennan, a moderate dove within the planning spectrum. He observed that the central policy goal was to maintain the "position of disparity" that separated our enormous wealth from the poverty of others. To achieve that goal, he advised, "We should cease to talk about vague and... unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization," and must "deal in straight power concepts," not "hampered by idealistic slogans" about "altruism and world-benefaction."

Kennan was referring specifically to Asia, but the observations generalize, with exceptions, for participants in the U.S.-run global system. It was well understood that the "idealistic slogans" were to be displayed prominently when addressing others, including the intellectual classes, who were expected to promulgate them.

The plans that Kennan helped formulate and implement took for granted that the U.S. would control the Western Hemisphere, the Far East, the former British empire (including the incomparable energy resources of the Middle East), and as much of Eurasia as possible, crucially its commercial and industrial centers. These were not unrealistic objectives, given the distribution of power. But decline set in at once.

In 1949, China declared independence, an event known in Western discourse as "the loss of China" -- in the U.S., with bitter recriminations and conflict over who was responsible for that loss. The terminology is revealing. It is only possible to lose something that one owns. The tacit assumption was that the U.S. owned China, by right, along with most of the rest of the world, much as postwar planners assumed.

The "loss of China" was the first major step in "America's decline." It had major policy consequences. One was the immediate decision to support France's effort to reconquer its former colony of Indochina, so that it, too, would not be "lost."

Indochina itself was not a major concern, despite claims about its rich resources by President Eisenhower and others. Rather, the concern was the "domino theory," which is often ridiculed when dominoes don't fall, but remains a leading principle of policy because it is quite rational. To adopt Henry Kissinger's version, a region that falls out of control can become a "virus" that will "spread contagion," inducing others to follow the same path.

In the case of Vietnam, the concern was that the virus of independent development might infect Indonesia, which really does have rich resources. And that might lead Japan -- the "superdomino" as it was called by the prominent

Asia historian John Dower -- to "accommodate" to an independent Asia as its technological and industrial center in a system that would escape the reach of U.S. power. That would mean, in effect, that the U.S. had lost the Pacific phase of World War II, fought to prevent Japan's attempt to establish such a New Order in Asia.

The way to deal with such a problem is clear: destroy the virus and "inoculate" those who might be infected. In the Vietnam case, the rational choice was to destroy any hope of successful independent development and to impose brutal dictatorships in the surrounding regions. Those tasks were successfully carried out -- though history has its own cunning, and something similar to what was feared has since been developing in East Asia, much to Washington's dismay.

The most important victory of the Indochina wars was in 1965, when a U.S.-backed military coup in Indonesia led by General Suharto carried out massive crimes that were compared by the CIA to those of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. The "staggering mass slaughter," as the *New York Times* described it, was reported accurately across the mainstream, and with unrestrained euphoria.

It was "a gleam of light in Asia," as the noted liberal commentator James Reston wrote in the *Times*. The coup ended the threat of democracy by demolishing the mass-based political party of the poor, established a dictatorship that went on to compile one of the worst human rights records in the world, and threw the riches of the country open to western investors. Small wonder that, after many other horrors, including the near-genocidal invasion of East Timor, Suharto was welcomed by the Clinton administration in 1995 as "our kind of guy."

Years after the great events of 1965, Kennedy-Johnson National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy reflected that it would have been wise to end the Vietnam war at that time, with the "virus" virtually destroyed and the primary domino solidly in place, buttressed by other U.S.-backed dictatorships throughout the region.

Similar procedures have been routinely followed elsewhere. Kissinger was referring specifically to the threat of socialist democracy in Chile. That threat was ended on another forgotten date, what Latin Americans call "the first 9/11," which in violence and bitter effects far exceeded the 9/11 commemorated in the West. A vicious dictatorship was imposed in Chile, one part of a plague of brutal repression that spread through Latin America, reaching Central America under Reagan. Viruses have aroused deep concern elsewhere as well, including the Middle East, where the threat of secular nationalism has often concerned British and U.S. planners, inducing them to support radical Islamic fundamentalism to counter it.

The Concentration of Wealth and American Decline

Despite such victories, American decline continued. By 1970, U.S. share of world wealth had dropped to about 25%, roughly where it remains, still colossal but far below the end of World War II. By then, the industrial world was "tripolar": US-based North America, German-based Europe, and East Asia, already the most dynamic industrial region, at the time Japan-based, but by now including the former Japanese colonies Taiwan and South Korea, and more recently China.

At about that time, American decline entered a new phase: conscious self-inflicted decline. From the 1970s, there has been a significant change in the U.S. economy, as planners, private and state, shifted it toward financialization and the offshoring of production, driven in part by the declining rate of profit in domestic manufacturing. These decisions initiated a vicious cycle in which wealth became highly concentrated (dramatically so in the top 0.1% of the population), yielding concentration of political power, hence legislation to carry the cycle further: taxation and other fiscal policies, deregulation, changes in the rules of corporate governance allowing huge gains for executives, and so on.

Meanwhile, for the majority, real wages largely stagnated, and people were able to get by only by sharply increased workloads (far beyond Europe), unsustainable debt, and repeated bubbles since the Reagan years, creating paper wealth that inevitably disappeared when they burst (and the perpetrators were bailed out by the taxpayer). In parallel, the political system has been increasingly shredded as both parties are driven deeper into corporate pockets with the escalating cost of elections, the Republicans to the level of farce, the Democrats (now largely the former "moderate Republicans") not far behind.

A recent study by the Economic Policy Institute, which has been the major source of reputable data on these developments for years, is entitled *Failure by Design*. The phrase "by design" is accurate. Other choices were certainly possible. And as the study points out, the "failure" is class-based. There is no failure for the designers. Far from it. Rather, the policies are a failure for the large majority, the 99% in the imagery of the Occupy movements -- and for the country, which has declined and will continue to do so under these policies.

One factor is the offshoring of manufacturing. As the solar panel example mentioned earlier illustrates, manufacturing capacity provides the basis and stimulus for innovation leading to higher stages of sophistication in production, design, and invention. That, too, is being outsourced, not a problem for the "money mandarins" who increasingly design policy, but a serious problem for working people and the middle classes, and a real disaster for the most oppressed, African Americans, who have never escaped the legacy of slavery and its ugly aftermath, and whose meager wealth virtually disappeared after the collapse of the housing bubble in 2008, setting off the most recent financial crisis, the worst so far.

(Noam Chomsky is Institute Professor emeritus in the MIT Department of Linguistics and Philosophy. He is the author of numerous best-selling political works. His latest books are *Making the Future: Occupations, Intervention, Empire, and Resistance*, *The Essential Chomsky* (edited by Anthony Arnone), a collection of his writings on politics and on language from the 1950s to the present, *Gaza in Crisis*, with Ilan Pappé, and *Hopes and Prospects*, also available as an audiobook.)

(Note: Part 2 of Noam Chomsky's discussion of American decline, "The Imperial Way," will be posted at TomDispatch and here in the FotM newsletter, tomorrow.)

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<u>20120214-01</u>	02:09	SteveG	Fw: NationofChange Action: Donate to Help Us Speak Truth to Power!
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from NationofChange:

Oil baron brothers Charles and David Koch are the third and fourth richest men in the United States controlling Koch Industries, the second largest privately owned company in the country.

They have used their power to defraud countless citizens, illegally manipulate our democratic process, engineer fraudulent popular movements, influence mass media, fund false "scientific studies," and now they are intent on fast-tracking the "fuse to North America's biggest carbon bomb," a pipeline that would bring toxic, dangerous Tar Sands crude from Alberta, Canada, 1,700 miles across the United States to the Gulf Coast.

The Kochs have set out to buy the White House, pledging 100 million dollars to defeat President Obama and supplant the office with a candidate bought and paid for with Koch money (a practice which after Citizens United is perfectly legal).

We must take action to curb the unchecked and destructive greed of these plutocrats and send a clear message to the White House that this pipeline is unacceptable to the American people and that corporate personhood must end now.

This Presidents' Day weekend we are fighting back in "Koch Town," Wichita, Kansas, home base of the Koch Brothers and Koch Industries.

We need your support today to help raise \$5,000 for essential supplies for the event.

If you believe that we need to stand up to corporate greed and protect our communities and our environment stand with us with your tax-deductible donation now!

Please click here to make a secure tax-deductible donation or call in your donation at 1-800-803-6045. You can also mail a check to: 6319 Dante Ln NW, Albuquerque, NM 87114

To Donate: <https://secure.nationofchange.org/occupy-koch-town/?ref=email>

Thank you for all that you do.

Respectfully Yours, Rebecca Buell, Executive Director, Donna Luca, Board President, and the NationofChange Team

20120214-02	10:17	Phil	Re: The "Church", Chapter 22 (reply to Pam, FotM Newsletter #73)
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from Pam:

If only humanity could think of religion the way we think about art or music, something meaningful to enjoy but nothing to go to war over. You don't like Mozart? Off with your head! You find abstract art revolutionary? Lock up all the abstract expressionists. Ridiculous and pointless--just like hating and killing because someone prefers Allah to Ganesh.

Pam, I'll certainly second that.

20120214-06	13:08	Art	Re: The "Church", Chapter 22 (reply to SteveB & Pam, FotM Newsletter #73)
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Although admittedly religion is not a strong point in my study of history, I recall the Catholic church solidified its opposition to birth control somewhat late in its formation. By the end of the 4th century the Catholic Church and the Roman Empire are pretty much bound together. The Empire desperately needs troops to stave off all those encroaching barbarians but the population of the empire is declining. Answer, birth control becomes a religious anathema. . There's a bit more to it but that's the source. Not sure it had anything to do with God.

It's like the ban against eating pork by both Jews and Moslems. Trichinosis. Common in pork, especially in warmer climates. How to stop it, make it a religious taboo.

Most American Catholics practice birth control in any event. With 7 Billion people in the world (about 5 Billion too many by my count), the planet is about to take action to shed its parasites in any event.

[20120214-07](#) 13:23 Pam Re: The "Church", Chapter 22 (reply to Art, above)

And the pope wasn't "infallible" until rather late--perhaps as late as the 19th c., I forget, but late. Everything changes. Why should religion be exempt? It's as flexible and protean as an oil spill, and it can be as dangerous. If my saying that makes you angry, you might ask yourself why, if what you believe is true, it should matter so much what I say or think?

[20120214-03](#) 10:24 NormF Re: The State of the Nation (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #73)

Thanks, brother! I just wanted you & yours to know that, when I can, I read the letters. If you're for the meek, then your mail is welcome here.

[Thank you, NormF. Thank you so much for reading, and, believe me, we are for the meek, because that is how we save the nation. --SteveB]

[20120214-05](#) 12:47 Art Re: "Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist!" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #73)

God bless you. We may need this debunking thing down the road, as this will come up again.

[20120214-04](#) 11:35 Pam Re: "Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist!" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #73)

SteveB, you have way more patience than I have. Mary's laundry list of grievances against Obama are patently ridiculous. Since you deal with them one by one, I won't bother. Here's the thing: this mindset is the problem. We all know that. It is steeped in hysteria, short on argument, and riddled with logical fallacies, not to mention guilt by association. It's an odd phenomenon--feeling threatened when there is no threat. Newt says that the day after an Obama re-election, the first thing Obama will do is "wage war on the Catholic Church." Absurd. "Obama is a socialist." Not true, and do those who charge him with being a leftist even know what socialism is? I very much doubt it. I'm sick of hearing George Soros maligned. He has done more to encourage democracy around the world than just about anyone, and his ideas for saving the Euro and the European Union are sensible and smart.

It is difficult to argue with someone who is not arguing policy and citing concrete evidence. Mary's list of accusations has more to do with manners and courtesy (Obama bowed to the king of wherever; Bush held hands with a middle-eastern oil baron)--the custom of the country--than with truckling to despots. Obama didn't tout America's superiority over the rest of the world during his travels? If you caught a six-year old telling a friend, "I'm better than you," you'd put him in time-out. If we're better, we won't need to tell the world about it. So long as immigrants are desperate to come here, the numbers speak for themselves.

I hate Newt because he says stupid things and tries to manipulate people with big lies--like making the moon the 51st state. I hate Santorum because he thinks all laws come from god--his. I hate Romney because he's like a weathervane in a wind storm. What good has any of them done the country? Romney got a good health care plan going in MA, but now he disowns it like a bastard child. I'm surprised Santorum didn't join the priesthood and retire to a monastery where he could await the second-coming. And Newt? Mr. "best defense is a good offense" personified. Don't answer difficult questions; make your interviewer look like a jackass. What this country needs is

a good course in basic logic, then maybe we could begin to argue the merits of cases rather than the misperceptions of personality.

[Incredibly well put, Pam. The one thing I would add is that we are all learning a lot about truth and lies in this group. I believe anyone who reads the unfinished, but not for long, *FotM Archive* (online at: <http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/archives/FotM-Archive-1.pdf>) and the daily FotM Newsletters is receiving a college education in American Current Affairs. Some of us are further along the path than others, but I have to believe we all seek the same goal—a truly great nation, not the sham of one. We have spelled out, here, in great detail, what we believe this nation would have to be like to be great. We're still waiting to hear from the Right. -- SteveB]

20120214-08	15:59	SteveG	"Study: 1 in 8 Voter Registrations Have Errors"
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Good reasons for election reform...

About 2.7 million people have active registrations in multiple states, including about 2,000 people registered in four or more states, according to the Pew report. Election officials said it is difficult to track when someone has moved to another state without canceling their previous registration.

This is the acknowledged legal form of voter fraud that can legally occur. Some fraudsters actively vote in multiple states if they have residences in multiple states.

"Study: 1 in 8 Voter Registrations Have Errors" by AP

Feb. 14, 2012, (<http://nbcpolitics.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/02/14/10405361-study-1-in-8-voter-registrations-have-errors>)

Some 24 million voter registrations in the United States contain significant errors, including about 1.8 million dead people still on the rolls and many more approved to vote in multiple states, according to a report released Tuesday.

Even though the inaccuracies impact one in eight registrations, researchers at the Pew Center on the States said they don't see it as an indicator of widespread fraud. Rather, they believe outdated systems are failing to keep pace with the most basic changes in people's lives, feeding perceptions that U.S. elections are not as airtight as they could be.

In conjunction with Pew's report, eight states said they are working this year on a centralized data system to help identify people whose registrations may be outdated.

"A lot of people probably assume we do this already," said Sam Reed, who oversees elections as Washington's secretary of state. "I think it's going to bring more trust and confidence in the election system."

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Some 1.8 million deceased people are still listed as active voters, according to the study, which is based on a computer analysis of a proprietary voter database used by Democrats. Researchers believe 12.7 million records do not reflect the current addresses of active voters while 12 million contain address inaccuracies, including those that make it unlikely that mail could reach them.

Some of the files contain multiple problems, with Pew estimating that a total of 24 million have problems.

The numbers are at least partially supported by anecdotal evidence. For example, Washington state and Alaska — one of the nation's least populous states — compared each other's voter registration systems last year and found an estimated 4,500 duplicates.

The eight states involved in the centralization project are Colorado, Delaware, Maryland, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Virginia and Washington.

Pew believes the centralized system and online voter registrations will help save money by eliminating the need to print millions of forms, enter data by hand or send mail to outdated or incorrect addresses.

"That's a tremendous cost to the taxpayers," said David Becker, director of Election Initiatives at the Pew Center on the States. The centralized system has not settled on participation fees yet but is expected to be in the tens of thousands of dollars per state per year.

The Brennan Center for Justice, which has been working on voter registration issues, is also pushing for a modernization of the system but cautions that states need to take particular care to not rush to eliminate voters from their rolls. Lawrence Norden, an attorney at the center, said there have been a number of cases in recent years where people have been improperly removed from the system based on an incomplete match — for example, two people who have the same name and birthdate.

"This is something that has to be done very carefully," he said.

Some states have adopted laws in the past couple years to require photo IDs to vote — hoping it would prevent fraud even though examples of such cheating are rare. That tactic was one the Brennan Center is directly opposing.

Linda Lamone, the administrator of elections in Maryland, said the Pew work has already pushed the state toward online voter registration, which will also allow voters to update their information electronically. Maryland has also changed its system so that voters who choose to register while getting a driver's license must complete the process there. Previously, voters had to separately file paperwork and the state ended up having conflicting information about registrants.

Lamone said dead people who are registered in the state but end up dying in another state that does not actively share death information can leave deceased voters on the rolls. She said the centralized system will help ease those administrative challenges.

"We're going to get better information on voters," she said. "Overall, it's going to result in much more accurate voter registration lists."

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20120214-09	17:05	SteveB	Re: "Study: 1 in 8 Voter Registrations Have Errors" (reply to SteveG, above)
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You would think, after more than 200 years at least thinking we're the greatest Democracy in the history of the Universe, that we would know how to run a fair, accurate election.

We don't. We simply do not. Think: Florida.

It's the pathetic truth. The voting process has been especially casual and incompetent in the 2012 Republican primaries and caucuses. Iowa evidently still doesn't know who won, and they may have altered the course of history by declaring the wrong winner. Now we find that Maine didn't bother to count a bunch of ballots.

The problem needs to be fixed. To do it, we need bulletproof federal ID's for all citizens eligible to vote (at least), and we need uniform federal election standards mandated to the states. We need accountability.

One comment about the article. I think very little of the double registration and registration problems are to cause fraud or do cause fraud. It's the process that is the problem, not the voters. I have never heard of any "un-registration" process in my life. Whenever I have moved to another state, I have registered. It never occurred to me that any necessary un-registration would not automatically occur. I suppose I could have voted twice, but I would not have done that. I guess if I could move fast enough, I could vote in about sex states this year. Am a guilty of election fraud and eligible for prison for that? Most people see voting as a task, not as fun. Once is usually enough. That said, nefarious souls might seek to take advantage of all the registration problems and casual voting laws to rig elections. I worry a lot more about the politicians than any voters, but...

THE SYSTEM MUST BE FIXED IF DEMOCRACY IS TO ENDURE!

20120214-10	17:38	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Keep the Senate & Your Employer Out of Your Bedroom!
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from MoveOn:

Republicans in Congress want to put your boss right in your bedroom, deciding whether you have access to contraception and even what kind you can use—and the Senate's voting on it tomorrow. It's Senator Roy Blunt's radical response to President Obama's balanced approach to ensuring that women have access to birth control coverage.

Senator Blunt wants to let any employer deny coverage for any health care treatment to which they claim a religious or moral objection. That means your employer could claim an objection to almost any kind of medical treatment: contraception, HIV treatment, vaccination, substance-abuse counseling, blood transfusions, prenatal care for unmarried women, or mental health care, just to name a few.

We can stop the Blunt amendment and future attacks on health care access if we insist that our Senators leave medical decisions where they belong: in the hands of doctors and patients. But we have to act before tomorrow's crucial vote.

Click here to sign and tell the Senate that you don't want your boss to decide if you get the health care you need: <http://pol.moveon.org/healthcoverage/?id=35767-20195165-AX%3Dk%3DTx&t=1>.

The Blunt amendment was proposed to get around the new health care rule that ensures all women have access to contraception coverage, no matter who they work for. Under the guise of "religious freedom" the Republicans are attacking the very idea of comprehensive health insurance.

Having someone else's beliefs dictate your ability to get care isn't religious freedom—and it isn't good for workers, families, or public health and safety.

And this is just the latest in a long-running series of attacks on health care reform, women's health care, and reproductive choice.⁵ We have to stop these attacks once and for all by bringing attention to the real issue. It comes down to one simple thing: Your employer's religion shouldn't decide what medical treatment you're able to get.

Thanks for all you do. –Elena, Joan, Carrie, Marika, and the rest of the team

20120214-11	23:24	SteveG	"OWS Meets with Members of Dissident Movements from All Over the World"
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All bases being touched here.

"OWS Meets with Members of Dissident Movements from All Over the World" by J.A. Myerson, TruthOut

Feb. 14, 2012, (<http://www.truth-out.org/ows-meets-members-dissident-movements-all-over-world/1329229242>)

In late January, two Wall Street Occupiers took a trip to Porto Alegre, Brazil, to meet with members of dissident movements from all over the world. The thematic Social Forum, serving as an anti-Davos economic forum, was set up to tackle the "capitalist crisis, social and environmental justice." Nelini Stamp and Amin Husain met with, among others, Chilean student demonstrators, Tunisian revolutionaries and "indignant citizens" from Greece and Spain.

"All roads lead to Rio," Stamp tells me, was the credo among participants. This refers to the "Rio +20" conference that will convene in late June "to mark the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), in Rio de Janeiro" and "secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development," in the "green economy."

At the thematic Social Forum, global youth and democratic movements mobilized not for the UN conference, but for the "People's summit of Rio +20" event, which is set to happen several days earlier. Stamp says that the prevalent attitude among the Porto Alegre attendees was the one articulated by Esther Vivas. "All indications," she wrote, "are that the Rio +20 Earth Summit will to serve to clear the way for multinationals to justify their practice of appropriation of natural resources." The People's summit will present an alternative program to "green capitalism."

"We found that ecology was an issue that could unite us all," Stamp says, but not in the way official state bodies were prepared to endorse. For her, the ecological battle is the same as the battle against neoliberal globalization. "We need to globally challenge the G8, the G20, the UN, NATO, the World Bank, the IMF [International Monetary Fund] - and we have to organize to figure out strategies." She adds, "It is easy to understand globalization at a basic level, but it is difficult to understand in its particulars," contending that the global capitalist economy's grip on governments everywhere renders politicians impotent to reduce carbon emissions, deforestation, and other harmful industrial practices.

Husain agrees that 2011's social movements and uprisings were all local protests against the same global forces, telling me, "I was in the West Bank in July and we watched the international arena and what was happening. We saw self-immolation in Tunisia and there was something in the air from that - an act of desperation, but also a wake-up call. In Egypt, we saw an affirmation of people power in a productive way, reclaiming of public space signaling to the world that the problem was with democracy. It's not about better politicians, there's something more fundamental going on. The movement is very strong in Greece, the bedrock of democracy. We're still watching."

In Porto Alegre, Stamp noticed a split between the institutional affiliations that come with the World Social Forum process and the social movement on the ground. "The NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] and labor and government-run projects [staples of the World Social Forum] were all in the Legislative Assembly building, but the social movement folks basically didn't attend. Instead, they were at the youth camp in an occupied building, Utopia E Luta." Far from the tent cities that "occupied" conjures in American heads, "They have a theater there, sewing machines and sewing classes and a hydroponics set-up on the roof."

In addition to challenging globalization, she counsels, "we also have to challenge the Social Forum process." Utopia E Luta and its international counterparts, she says, have to become the dominant politics of the anti-globalization left. "NGOs need to stop dropping people in a certain neighborhood and having them canvass for two months. That's why we're not building movements. We're too busy building campaigns. We have to have many more forums and interactive spaces." The problem is that NGOs are where a lot of the money is and as Stamp laments, "It costs a lot of money to fly people in."

Flight costs weren't the only obstacle. When the formal forum procedure was in order, conference-goers had a translators and earphones arrangement, a luxury not available at Utopia E Luta. "It's hard to do collective work, when we all don't speak the same language. Everyone translated for each other in mutual languages. I know Spanish, so I helped translate the Spanish indignados into English, which the Greek indignados understood."

Nevertheless, events like this, says Husain, are valuable. "We left," he says, "thinking that we need to see more of each other. There is something to be built upon this network of connections. It's beyond ultra globalization and

connectivity. We're all fighting the same battle in different spaces." Husain sees the "federalism" at play when different American Occupy camps adopt differentiating procedures and policies (which best fit their local circumstances) on a global scale, as each country's People's movement operates differently too. Next month, Husain will be going to Egypt for ten days to expand international social movement interconnectivity.

"The question now," according to Husain, becomes, "that cross-fertilization, that sharing - what does it mean? What does it look like? The World Social Forum could be a good vehicle."

Stamp is asking the same question. "What does movement connection look like? Is it training? Is it that there's a big Skype call that we can try to do internationally? In Nice in November, we had a global assembly." Ultimately, she shares Husain's answer, concluding, "The World Social Forum process can be much stronger with the social movements having a strong hand. The NGO stuff, the union stuff, is necessary, but it has to stop being old people talking down to the movement."

Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff skipped Davos to address the Porto Alegre Social Forum. She called neoliberalism "a failed recipe" for development in the Global South, pointing to neoliberal efforts in Brazil's resultant "stagnation, loss of democratic space and sovereignty, deepening poverty, unemployment and social exclusion." She called for "a development model that articulates growth and job creation, battles poverty and decreases inequalities," and promotes the "sustainable use and preservation of natural resources."

<http://handlensandbinoculars.blogspot.com/2011/01/to-honor-botanical-legend.html>

White Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*), Apr. 18, 2010, Bentley Woods, St. Joseph County, IN (Scott Namestnik)



—Friends of the Middle,
Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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