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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

## ASK THE HARD QUESTIONS – DEMAND HONEST ANSWERS

EDITORIAL

**R**emember when we were young and watched American westerns? It was so simple then to decide with whom to side. The good cowboys wore white and the bad ones wore black.

Now, as responsible, socially aware adults we apply intelligence and reasoning to make a far more informed decision about the morality and rights and wrongs of international disputes and wars, because whether we like it or not, we are involved and have responsibilities.

This church, through its journal *Beacon*, has always taken a consistent position on wars. We do not believe that any nation, however powerful, has the right to interfere in the internal affairs of any other. We do, however, recognise the difference between just and unjust wars. Wars of national liberation where people take up arms to defend themselves and to determine their right to a more democratic form of government are just wars. Unjust wars are those based on the acquisition of new 'spheres of influence', installing bases on foreign soil and/or stealing the natural resources of another country.

It has been suggested that 'it is wrong to focus on the scheming of outside powers while neglecting the poor suffering people ...' of whichever country is under attack. On what then should we focus? If we focus only on the suffering and ignore the multiple reasons for that suffering then we become complicit.

There are many countries now and in the recent past led by despotic and undemocratic leaders. Is it our responsibility (the Western nations) to remove these leaders? Are there perhaps degrees of lack of democracy and despotism? Do we tolerate some despots and not others and what shall be the criteria? Saudi Arabia is our ally, yet its leaders are cruel and despotic. We were happy to allow Batista of Cuba to murder the Cuban people yet demonise President Castro for freeing them. We preferred fascist Pinochet of Chile to the democratically elected Allende. We happily tolerated Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, work with Hamad Al Kalifa of Bahrain, preferred the fascist dictator Suharto to the democratically elected President Sukarno of Indonesia, and turn a blind eye to many others who flourish as our allies while they murder any opposition to their fascist-style leadership.

Yet Saddam Hussein of Iraq, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, the Taliban in Afghanistan and now Bashar al Assad of Syria must be removed because their policies and practices

offend our notions of democracy. On what basis do we decide? It isn't 'left' or 'radical' to analyse what is happening in the world: it is responsible and reasonable. If the people of Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria find their lives no longer tolerable and they take up arms to fight for a better life, we support them morally but NOT with weapons, training mercenaries, money, biased media reporting and manipulation of the United Nations. The removal of a dictator or unpopular leader must be an internal, not an external issue.

We went into Iraq for several reasons that were demonstrated later as complete lies. Today, Iraq lies in ruins, millions dead. We went into Afghanistan based on similar lies. Today that country is in ruins and millions have died and are dying, including our own young people. We went into Libya to remove their leader. Today, their infrastructure is decimated, millions of innocent people dead and the country still war-torn and divided. Now we are in Syria, it is claimed, for the same reasons: to save the poor Syrian people from their government, to bring them democracy. We are asked to believe that the US and its allies, including us, are so caring and concerned about the democratic rights of Middle Eastern people that they must take the actions they have.

Shouldn't we ask why the same principles don't apply to Israel, that other country in the Middle East, the one that has nuclear weapons, that is destroying the lives of the Palestinian people and their democratic rights, and has been occupying parts of Palestine in breach of UN resolutions for half a century. (In fact, Israel has broken more UN resolutions than any other in UN history). Of course we feel deeply for the suffering of the Syrian people and all peoples subjected to the miseries of war. However, we believe that by implicating ourselves in their conflicts, we do not help the people involved but only exacerbate and extend their suffering. And worse, our arms manufacturers, our oil explorers, the manipulators of our economies emerge immeasurably richer from these wars.

To ignore these obvious truths would be to turn our backs not just on the Syrian people but all peoples around the world suffering under the yoke of imperialist support for selected despotic leaders. Black hat, white hat: look beyond the simplistic analysis that we are coaxed into accepting. ■

## PART TWO

# Ethnic cleansing of invented people

By *Miko Peled*

4 January 2012 'Information Clearing House'

**N**ewt Gingrich, being the history buff that he is, might be interested in a story I mention in my book *The General's Son*, about my mother. She was born and raised in Jerusalem and she remembers the homes of Palestinian families in neighbourhoods in West Jerusalem. She told me that when she was a child, on Saturday afternoons she would go for walks through these neighbourhoods, admiring the beauty of the homes, watching families sit together in their beautiful gardens. In 1948 when the Palestinian families were forced out of West Jerusalem, my mother was offered one of those beautiful, spacious homes but she refused. At age 22, the wife of a young army officer with little means and with two small children, she refused a beautiful spacious home, offered to her completely free because she could not bear the thought of living in the home of a family that was forced out and now lives in a refugee camp. 'The coffee was still warm on the tables as the soldiers came in and began the looting', she told me. 'Can you imagine how much those families, those mothers must miss their homes'. She would ask and she continued, 'I remember seeing the truckloads of loot, taken by the Israeli soldiers from these homes. How were they not ashamed of themselves?' There are thousands upon thousands of homes in cities all over the country that were taken.

Moving forward now to 1967 and the myth that Israel was fighting for its existence as it was attacked by Arab armies from all directions. Much was written about this but nothing is more revealing than the minutes of the meetings of the IDF general staff from June 1967,

just prior to the war. According to the generals, one of whom was my father, Matti Peled, not only was there no existential threat but the generals clearly state that the Egyptian army needed at least a year and a half before it would be ready for war and therefore this was an opportune time to attack and destroy it. The army pressured the cabinet to authorise an attack and indeed the cabinet approved an attack against Egypt. The IDF destroyed the Egyptian army and then went on to attack Jordan and Syria. It took the IDF six days and 700 casualties to kill an estimated 15,000 Arab forces, take the West Bank, the Golan Heights and The Sinai Peninsula. One may like to think this was a miracle but it was a well-planned, well-executed attack against countries that had no viable military force. The Israeli army had thus fulfilled its goal of conquering the entire Land of Israel, and the De-Arabisng of Palestine could now proceed into the West Bank and Gaza.

Since the early days of the State of Israel the IDF made it its mission to be the most brutal bully in the region. Today the IDF has one purpose: to conduct an all out war against Palestinians by terrorising Palestinian civilians, kidnapping children from their homes and using brutal force against protesters. We are reminded of the intensity of IDF cruelty every so often, the latest major display being the three-week bloodbath in Gaza that began on 27 December 2008. Hundreds of tons of bombs were dropped by Israeli pilots on Gaza, followed by a massive invasion of land forces. All this for the purpose of terrorising a defenceless civilian population that includes 800,000 children.

Now that Israel has been in control of the West Bank for over four decades it has built and invested there heavily. But all of the investment and construction in the West Bank was made to bring Jews into the West Bank. Palestinian lands are being taken at an alarming pace, their homes are destroyed and thousands are incarcerated, while industry, roads, malls, schools and gated communities with swimming pools are being built for Jews only. Water, which is the scarcest resource of all, is controlled and distributed by the Israeli water authority, as follows: Per capita, Israelis receive 300 cubic metres of water per year. In comparison, per capita, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza receive 35–85 cubic metres per year, while the World Health Organization recommends a minimum of 100 cubic metres of water per person per year. But what is even worse is that per capita, Israeli settlers in the West Bank are allocated 1500 cubic metres of water per year. Jews in the West Bank live with green lawns and swimming pools while Palestinians quite often get no water at all. Perhaps invented people have no need for water.

De-Arabisng the history of Palestine is another crucial element of the ethnic cleansing. Fifteen hundred years of Arab and Muslim rule and culture in Palestine are trivialised, evidence of its existence is being destroyed and all this is done to make the absurd connection between the ancient Hebrew civilisation and today's Israel. The most glaring example of this today is in Silwan (Wadi Hilwe), a town adjacent to the Old City of Jerusalem with some 50,000 residents. Israel is expelling families from Silwan and destroying their homes because it claims that King David built a city there some 3000 years ago. Thousands of families will be made homeless so that Israel can build a park to commemorate a king that may or may not have lived 3000 years ago. Not a shred of historical evidence exists

that can prove King David ever lived yet Palestinian men, women, children and the elderly along with their schools and mosques, churches and ancient cemeteries and any evidence of their existence must be destroyed and then denied so that Zionist claims to exclusive rights to the land may be substantiated.

Once we connect the dots it is not hard to see that the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is only a small part of the Israeli Palestinian issue. The greater issue is the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestine by the Zionist state. The way forward for Israelis and Palestinians alike is to oppose the ethnic cleansing by opposing all its manifestations. This means supporting the movement to boycott, divest and place sanctions on Israel, or BDS for short, it means actively participating in the popular non-violent struggle in Palestine and it means challenging the racist laws that govern Israel by defying them. There has to be a clear and unequivocal call to recognise that the IDF is a terrorist organisation and its officers are war criminals. Furthermore, the reprehensible discrimination

against Palestinians, whether they live in Israel/Palestine or not, practised by the security officials at Ben Gurion airport and other points of entry to Israel/Palestine must be challenged. The struggle for a democracy in our shared homeland is no different than the struggle at Tahrir Square and can in fact be seen as part of the Arab Spring. ■

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Miko Peled is a peace activist who dares to say in public *what others still choose to deny*. He has credibility, so when he debunks myths that Jews around the world hold with blind loyalty, people listen. Miko was born in Jerusalem in 1961 into a well-known Zionist family. His grandfather, Dr Avraham Katsnelson was a Zionist leader and signer on the Israeli Declaration of Independence. His father, Matti Peled was a young officer in the war of 1948 and a general in the war of 1967 when Israel conquered the West Bank, Gaza, Golan Heights and the Sinai. <http://mikopeled.wordpress.com/>

# THE COLLAPSING US ECONOMY AND THE 'END OF THE WORLD'

By *Dr Paul Craig Roberts*

In a recent column, 'Can The World Survive Washington's Hubris', I promised to examine whether the US economy will collapse, before Washington in its pursuit of world hegemony brings us into military confrontation with Russia and China. This is likely to be an ongoing subject on this site, so this column will not be the final word.

Washington has been at war since October 2001 when President George W Bush concocted an excuse to order the US invasion of Afghanistan. This war took a back seat when Bush concocted another excuse to order the invasion of Iraq in 2003, a war that went on without significant success for 8 years and has left Iraq in chaos with dozens more killed and wounded every day, a new strong man in place of the illegally executed former strongman, and the likelihood of the ongoing violence becoming civil war. Upon his election, President Obama foolishly sent more troops to Afghanistan and renewed



the intensity of that war, now in its eleventh year, to no successful effect.

These two wars have been expensive. According to estimates by Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes, when all costs are counted the Iraq invasion cost US taxpayers \$3 trillion dollars. Ditto for the Afghan war. In other words, the two gratuitous wars doubled the US public debt. This is the reason there is no money for Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, the environment, and the social safety net. Americans got nothing out of the wars, but as the war debt will never be paid off, US citizens and their descendants will have to pay interest on \$6,000 billion of war debt in perpetuity.

Not content with these wars, the Bush/Obama regime is conducting military operations in violation of international law in Pakistan, Yemen, and Africa, organised the overthrow by armed conflict of the government in Libya, is currently working to overthrow the Syrian government,

and continues to marshal military forces against Iran. Finding the Muslim adversaries Washington created insufficient for its energies and budget, Washington has encircled Russia with military bases and has begun the encirclement of China. Washington has announced that the bulk of its naval forces will be shifted to the Pacific over the next few years, and Washington is working to re-establish its naval base in the Philippines, construct a new one on a South Korean island, acquire a naval base in Vietnam, and air and troop bases elsewhere in Asia.

In Thailand Washington is attempting to purchase with the usual bribes an air base used in the Vietnam War. There is opposition, as the country does not wish to be drawn into Washington's orchestrated conflict with China. Downplaying the real reason for the airbase, Washington, according to Thai newspapers, told the Thai government that the base was needed for 'humanitarian missions'. This didn't fly, so Washington had NASA ask for the air base in order to conduct 'weather experiments'. Whether this ruse is sufficient cover remains to be seen.

US Marines have been sent to Australia and elsewhere in Asia. To corral China and Russia (and Iran) is a massive undertaking for a country that is financially busted. With wars and bankster bailouts, Bush and Obama have doubled the US national debt while failing to address the disintegration of the US economy and rising hardships of US citizens.

The annual US budget deficit is adding to the accumulated debt at about \$1.5 trillion per year with no prospect of declining. The financial system is broken and requires ongoing bailouts. The economy is busted and has been unable to create high-paying jobs, indeed any jobs. Despite years of population growth, payroll employment as of mid-2012 is the same as in 2005 and substantially below 2008. Yet the government and financial press institute media tell us that we have a recovery.

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment in 2011 was only 1 million more than in 2002. As it takes about 150,000 new jobs each month to stay even with population growth, that leaves a decade-long job deficit of 15 million jobs. The US unemployment and inflation rates are far higher than reported. In previous columns I have explained, based on statistician John Williams' work (shadowstats.com), the reasons that the government's headline numbers are serious understatements. The headline (U3) unemployment rate of 8.2% counts no discouraged workers who have given up on finding a job. The government has a second unemployment rate (U6), seldom reported, which includes short-term discouraged workers. That rate is 15%. When the long-term discouraged workers are added in, the current US unemployment rate is 22%, a number closer to the unemployment rate of the Great Depression than to the unemployment rates of post-war recessions.

Changes in the way inflation is measured have destroyed the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as a measure of the cost of living. The new methodology is substitution based. If the price of an item in the index rises, a lower priced alternative takes its place. In addition, some price rises are labelled quality improvements whether they are or not and thus do not show up in the CPI. People still have to pay the higher price, but it is not counted as inflation. Currently, the substitution-based rate of inflation is about 2%. However, when inflation is measured as the actual cost of living, the rate of inflation is 5%.

The Misery Index is the sum of the inflation and unemployment rates. The level of the current Misery Index depends on whether the new rigged measures are used, which understate the misery, or the former methodology that accurately measures it. Prior to the November 1980 election, the Misery Index hit 22%, which was one reason for Reagan's victory over President Carter. Today if we use previous methodology, the Misery Index stands at 27%. But if we use the new rigged methodology, the Misery Index is 10%.

The understatement of inflation serves to boost Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP is calculated in current dollars. To be able to determine whether GDP rose because of price rises or because of increases in real output, GDP is deflated by the CPI. The higher the inflation rate, the less the growth in real output and vice versa. When the substitution-based methodology is used to measure inflation, the US economy experienced real growth in the 21st century except for the sharp dip during 2008–2010. However, if the cost-of-living based methodology is used, except for a short period during 2004, the US economy has experienced no real growth since 2000.

In the chart above, the lower measure (blue) of real GDP is deflated with the inflation methodology that measured cost-of-living. The higher GDP measure (red) deflates GDP with the new substitution-based methodology. The lack of employment and real GDP growth go together with the decline in real household median income. The growth in consumer debt substituted for the lack of income growth and kept the economy going until consumers exhausted their ability to take on more debt. With the consumer dead in the water, the outlook for economic recovery is poor.

Politicians and the Federal Reserve are making the outlook even worse. At a time of high unemployment and debt-stressed households, politicians at local, state, and federal levels are cutting back on government provision of healthcare, pensions, food stamps, housing subsidies and every other element of the social safety net. These cutbacks, of course, further reduce aggregate demand and the ability of income-stressed Americans to survive.

The Federal Reserve has interest rates so low that retirees and others living on their savings can earn nothing on their money. The interest rates paid on bank CDs and government and corporate bonds are lower than the rate of inflation. To live on interest income, a person has to purchase Greek, Spanish, or Italian bonds and run the risk of capital loss. The Federal Reserve's policy of negative interest rates forces retirees to spend down their capital in order to live. In other words, the Fed's policy is destroying personal savings as people are forced to spend their capital in order to cover living expenses. In June the Federal Reserve announced that it was going to continue its policy of driving nominal interest rates even lower, this time focusing on long-term Treasury bonds. The Fed said it would be purchasing \$400 billion of the Treasury's 30-year bonds.

Driving interest rates down means driving bond prices up. With 5-year Treasury bonds paying only seven-tenths of one per cent and 10-year Treasuries paying only 1.6%, below even the official rate of inflation, Americans desperate for yield move into 30-year bonds currently paying 2.7%. However, the high bond prices mean that the risk of capital loss is very high.



The Fed's debt monetisation, or a drop in the exchange value of the dollar as other countries move away from its use to settle their balance of payments, could set off inflation that would take interest rates out of the Fed's control. As interest rates rise, bond prices fall.

In other words, bonds are now the bubble that real estate, stocks, and derivatives were. When this bubble pops, Americans will take another big hit to their remaining wealth.

It makes no sense to invest in long-term bonds at negative interest rates when the federal government is piling up debt that the Federal Reserve is monetising and when other countries are moving away from the flood of dollars. The potential for a rising rate of inflation is high from debt monetisation and from a drop in the dollar's exchange value. Yet bond fund portfolio managers have to follow the herd into longer-term maturities or see their performance relative to their peers drop to the bottom of the rankings. Some individual investors and foreign central banks, anticipating the dollar's loss of value, are accumulating gold and silver bullion. Realising the danger to the dollar and its policy from the rapid rise in the price of bullion during 2011, the Federal Reserve has arranged offsetting action. When the demand for physical bullion drives up the price, short sales of bullion in the paper market are used to drive the price back down.

Similarly, when investors begin to flee Treasuries, thus causing interest rates to rise, JP Morgan and other dependencies of the Federal Reserve sell interest-rate swaps, thus offsetting the effect on interest rates of the bond sales. (Keep in mind that interest rates rise when bond prices fall and vice versa.)

The point of all this information is to establish that except for the 1 per cent, the incomes and wealth of Americans are being cut back across the board. From 2002 through 2011 the economy lost 3.5 million manufacturing jobs. These jobs were replaced with lower-paying waitress and bartender jobs (1,189,000), ambulatory healthcare service jobs (1,512,000) and social assistance jobs (578,000). These replacement jobs in domestic services mean that on a net basis US consumer income was moved out of the country. Potential aggregate demand in the US dropped by the differences in pay in the job categories. Clearly and unambiguously, jobs offshoring lowered US disposable income and US GDP and, thereby, employment.

Despite the lack of an economic base, Washington's hegemonic aspirations continue unabated. Other countries are amused at Washington's unawareness. Russia, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa are forming an agreement to abandon the US dollar as the currency for international settlement between themselves. On July 4 the *China Daily* reported: 'Japanese politicians and prominent academics from China and Japan urged Tokyo on Tuesday to abandon its outdated foreign policy of leaning on the West and accept China as a key partner as important as the United States. The Tokyo Consensus, a joint statement issued at the end of the Beijing-Tokyo Forum, also called on both countries to expand trade and promote a free-trade agreement for China, Japan and South Korea.

This means that Japan is in play. The Chinese government, more intelligent than Washington, is responding to Washington's military threats by enticing away Washington's two key Asian allies. As the Chinese

## 'What's the good of nuclear weapons if you can't use them?'

Bill Kristol

economy is now as large as the US and on far firmer footing, and as Japan now has more trade with China than with the US, the enticement is appealing. Moreover, China is next door, and Washington is distant and drowning in its hubris. Washington, which flicked its middle finger to international law and to its own law and Constitution with its arrogance and gratuitous and illegal wars and with its assertion of the right to murder its own citizens and those of its allies, such as Pakistan, has made the United States a pariah state.

Washington still controls its bought-and-paid-for NATO puppets, but these puppet states are overwhelmed with derivative debt problems brought to them by Wall Street and by sovereign debt problems, some of which were covered up by Wall Street's Goldman Sachs.

Europe is on the ropes and has no money with which to subsidise Washington's wars of hegemony.

Washington is becoming an isolated and despised element of the world community. Washington has purchased Europe, Canada, Australia, the former Soviet state of Georgia (and almost Ukraine), and Colombia, and continues its effort to purchase the entire world, but sentiment is turning against the rising Gestapo state that has shown itself to be lawless, ruthless, and indifferent, even hostile to human life and human rights. A government, whose military was unable with the help of the UK to occupy Iraq after eight years and was forced to end the conflict by putting the 'insurgents' on the US military payroll and to pay them to stop killing American troops, and a government whose military has been unable to subdue a few thousand lightly armed Taliban after 11 years, is over the top when it organises war against Iran, Russia, and China.

The only prospect Washington has of prevailing in such an undertaking is first use of nuclear weapons, of catching its demonised opponents off guard by nuking them out of the blue. In other words, by the elimination of life on earth. Is this Washington's program revealed by the neoconservative warmonger, Bill Kristol, who had no shame to ask publicly: 'What's the good of nuclear weapons if you can't use them?' ■

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A talk given at  
the church by  
**Alan J Bishop,**  
church member on  
20 May 2012



# WESTERN MATHEMATICS: THE SECRET WEAPON OF CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

**O**f all the school subjects that were imposed on indigenous pupils in the schools of the colonies, arguably the one that could have been considered the least culturally loaded was mathematics. Even today that belief remains. Whereas arguments have taken place over which language(s) should be taught, what history or what religion, mathematics has somehow always been felt to be universal and, therefore, culture-free. It had in colonial times, and for most people it continues to have today, the status of a culturally neutral phenomenon in the otherwise turbulent waters of education and imperialism. My research challenges that myth and places what many now call Western mathematics in its rightful position in the arguments – namely as one of the most powerful weapons in the imposition of Western culture.

Up to 20 years or so ago the conventional wisdom was that mathematics was culture-free knowledge. After all, the popular argument went, two twos are four, a negative number times a negative number gives a positive number, and all triangles have angles which add up to 180 degrees. These statements are true the world over – they have universal validity. Surely, therefore, it follows that mathematics must be free from the influence of any culture?

There is no doubt that truths like these are valid everywhere because of their abstract and generalised nature. So it doesn't matter where you are in the world, if you draw a flat triangle, measure all the angles with a protractor, and add the degrees together, the result will always be approximately 180 degrees. The approximate nature is only because of the imperfections of your drawing and your measurement. If you were able to draw the perfect triangle then the total would always be exactly 180 degrees. Because mathematical truths like these are abstractions from the real world, they are necessarily context-free.

But where did degrees come from? Why is the total 180? Why not 200 or even 100 – much more sensible! Indeed, why are we interested in triangles and their properties? The answer to all these questions is essentially because some people ('mathematicians') determined that it should be that way. Mathematical ideas, like any other ideas, are humanly constructed. They have a cultural history.

Nowadays the anthropological literature demonstrates for all who wish to see it that the mathematics that most people learn in contemporary schools is not the only mathematics that exists. For example, we know that many different counting systems exist in the



world. Glen Lean (1986) in Papua New Guinea documented nearly 600, containing various cycles of numbers, not all of them base ten. As well as finger counting there is documented use of body-counting systems. Numbers are also recorded in knotted strings called quipu, carved on wooden tablets or on rocks, and beads are also used, as well as many different written systems of numerals (see also Menninger, 1969).

Not only is it in number that we find interesting differences. The conception of space that underlies Euclidean geometry is only one conception. It relies on the atomistic and object-oriented ideas of points, lines, planes and solids. Other conceptions exist such as that of the Navajos (see Pinxten et al., 1983) where space is neither subdivided nor objectified, and where everything is in motion. In Mozambique, Gerdes (1986) found similar 'frozen' geometric notions

that were de-frozen by the researchers and the educators there. Perhaps even more fundamentally we are now also aware of forms of classification that are different from Western hierarchical systems. The languages and logic of the Indo-European group have developed layers of abstract terms within the hierarchical classification matrix, but this has not happened in all language groups, resulting in different logics and different ways of relating phenomena.

Facts like these demonstrate the existence of what some call 'ethnomathematics' (d'Ambrosio, 1985) – a more localised and specific set of mathematical ideas, which may not aim to be as generalised or as hierarchically structured as Western mathematics. We must therefore take much more care with our labels. We cannot now talk about 'mathematics' without being more specific, unless we are referring to the generic form, such as 'language' or 'religion'. The particular kind of mathematics which is now the internationalised subject most of us recognise is a product of a cultural history, and in the last three centuries it was developing as part of Western European culture. That is why the title of this paper refers to Western mathematics. In a sense, that term is also inappropriate because many cultures have contributed to this knowledge. Nevertheless, in my view, it is appropriate to identify 'Western mathematics' since it was Western culture and more specifically Western European culture which played such a powerful role in achieving the goals of Western imperialism.

There were three major mediating agents in the process of cultural invasion by Western mathematics in colonised countries: trade, administration, and education. Regarding trade and the commercial field generally, this clearly is the area where measures, numbers, currencies and some geometrical ideas were employed. For example, it would have been Western ideas of length, area, volume, weight, time and money that would have been imposed on the indigenous societies. If there was any knowledge at all of the indigenous measure systems there is little reference to them in the literature. Nowadays that literature does indeed recognise indigenous measure

systems. Many were quite specific to a local context, and often there were simply no units available to measure the kinds of quantities, or magnitudes that the colonisers wanted to use. As one local informant said, 'It could be said (that two gardens are equal in area) but it would always be debated' and 'there is no way of comparing the volume of rock with the volume of water – there being no reason for it'.

The second way in which Western mathematics would have influenced other cultures is through the mechanisms and structures of administration and government. In particular, the numbers and computations necessary for keeping track of large numbers of people and commodities would have necessitated Western numerical procedures being used in most cases. Although the research evidence suggests that most indigenous systems would have had difficulty with large numbers, there were some cultures such as the Igbo and the Incas who did have suitable systems. There was little evidence, however, that the colonial administrators would have known about or used these systems. The only exception would have been the case of the abacus used by the Chinese and others, which clearly was felt to be a sufficiently sophisticated system for administrative use.

The other aspect to be imposed through administration would have been the language of hierarchy, through structuring people and their functions. This aspect of language may seem to have been a relatively insignificant example to take, but it is very difficult for anyone used to the Western obsession with naming and classification to imagine that there are other ways of conceptualising and using language. Any enforced use of another language, especially ones as complex as those in the Indo-Chinese group, would have caused huge problems for the indigenous people. Any Western European colonial governmental and administrative activity which concerned system, structure and the role of personnel would inevitably, and probably unwittingly, have imposed a Western European mode of linguistic and logical classification.

The third and major medium for cultural invasion was education, which played such a crucial role in promoting Western mathematical ideas and thereby Western culture. In most colonial societies the imposed education functioned at two levels, mirroring what existed in the European country concerned. The first level, that of elementary education, developed hardly at all in the early colonial period. In India, for example, the 'filtering down' principle, whereby it was assumed that it was only necessary to educate the elite few and the knowledge would somehow filter down to the masses, was paramount.

In the mission schools and in the latter years of colonialism, when elementary schooling began to be taken more seriously, it was Western European content that dominated. The perceived need was felt to be the education of the indigenous people only in order to enable them to function adequately in the European-dominated trade, commercial and administrative structures which had been established. Mathematically, the only content of any significance was arithmetic with its related applications. Of much more interest to the title of this paper is the secondary education given to the elite few in the colonised countries where some schools and colleges were established. Once again the content mirrored that in the comparable institutions in the 'home' country.



At best, the mathematics curriculum of these schools was laughably and pathetically inappropriate. Mmari (1978) quotes some typical problems from Tanzanian colonial textbooks recommended for use in schools by British colonial education officers:

If a cricketer altogether scores  $r$  runs in  $x$  innings,  $n$  times not out, his (sic) average is  $r/x-n$  runs. Find his average if he scores 204 runs in 15 innings, 3 times not out.

Reduce 207,042 farthings, 89,761 halfpence, and 5,708  $\frac{1}{2}$  shillings to pounds, shillings and pence.

The escalator at the Holborn tube station is 156 feet long and makes the ascent in 87 seconds. Find the speed in miles per hour.

At worst, the mathematics curriculum was abstract, irrelevant and elitist – as indeed it was in Europe – governed by the Cambridge Overseas Certificate – and culturally laden to a very high degree. It was part of a deliberate strategy of acculturation – intentional in its efforts to instruct in ‘the best of the West’ and convinced of its superiority to any indigenous ethnomathematical culture. Mathematics and science, two subjects that, in fact, could have been made relevant to the needs of the indigenous society, were just not thought of in those terms. They were seen merely as two of the pillars of Western culture, significant as part of a cultured person’s education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

So through the three media of trade, administration and education, the symbolisations and structures of Western mathematics would have been imposed on the indigenous cultures just as significantly as were those linguistic symbolisations and structures of English, French, Dutch or whatever was the European language of the particular dominant colonial power in the country. However, also like a language, the particular symbolisations used were in a way the least significant aspect of mathematics. Of far more importance, particularly in cultural terms, were the values that the symbolisations and procedures carried with them. (This area is very new for us researchers, and perhaps I may be invited back to tell what we are currently doing about researching values in mathematics.)

From those colonial times through to today, the power of Western mathematics has grown apace – so much so that it is the mathematics that is taught in schools and universities throughout the world. Once again it is taught with the assumptions of universality and cultural neutrality. However, as awareness of the cultural nature and influence of Western mathematics is spreading, so various levels of resistance can be seen. At the first level, there is increasing interest in ethnomathematics, through both anthropological research and investigations of real-life situations where people are using their own mathematics. At the second level, there is a response

in many developing countries, and in former colonies, which is aimed at creating a greater awareness of students’ own cultures, and building these into the school mathematics curriculum. The third level of response is, paradoxically, to re-examine the whole history of Western mathematics itself. It is no accident that this history has largely been written by white, male, Western European or American researchers and there is a concern that the contribution of, for example, Black Africa has been undervalued (see van Sertima’s 1986 book).

This brings us back to values once again, and how they have been ignored over the centuries. One example is Indian mathematics which had strong religious and spiritual values associated with it originally. Western mathematics on the other hand was identified with Western science, with dehumanised and so-called ‘objective knowledge’ and with empirical and rational interpretations of natural phenomena. Yet in most Indian schools today it is the Western mathematics that is taught and thus Western values that are being fostered.

I began by describing the myth of Western mathematics’ cultural neutrality, but increasingly modern evidence serves to destroy this naive notion. Resistance to the old beliefs is growing, critical debate is informing theoretical development, and research is increasing, particularly in educational situations where cultural conflict is at last being recognised. I can confidently assert that this secret weapon of cultural imperialism is secret no longer! ■

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# There will be *hell* to pay for NATO's *Holy War*

By *Pepe Escobar*

10 July 2012 'Information Clearing House'

**U**S Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is running out of rhetorical ammunition in the US's Holy War against Syria. Perhaps it's the strain of launching a NATO war bypassing the UN Security Council. Perhaps it's the strain of being eaten for breakfast routinely by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Hillary has just called on 'Western powers' and their Arab stooges – the NATOGCC compound[1] that passes for the 'international community' – to 'make it clear that Russia and China will pay a price because they are holding up progress' regarding weaponised regime change in Syria.

In non-newspeak, this means, 'If you block our new war, there will be payback'.

Howls of laughter in the corridors of the Kremlin and the Zhongnanhai notwithstanding, this shows how desperate the NATOGCC compound is to force regime change in Syria as a stopover in cutting off Iran's privileged connection with the Arab world. And this while Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan – leading NATO's eastern flank – itches to attack Syria but can't find a way to sell it to Turkish public opinion.

Into this incandescent context plunges WikiLeaks – releasing a batch of very embarrassing emails against the Assad system and the NATO rebels as well. A possible side effect will be to inspire waves of so-called progressives all across the West to start supporting the Holy War on Syria. A realistic effect will be to show how unsavory both sides – the police state Assad system and the armed opposition – really are.

## Car bombing tourism, anyone?

It's useful to examine what price Washington itself, not to mention its NATO subjects, could be paying for this Holy War branch-out fought with – who else – the same bunch of 'terrorists' who until yesterday were about to destroy Western civilisation and turn it into a giant Caliphate.

Washington, London and Paris have tried – twice – to twist the UN Security Council into yet another war. They were blocked by Russia and China. So plan B was to bypass the UN and launch a NATO war. Problem is NATO has no stomach – and no funds – for a very risky war with a country that can actually defend itself.

Thus plan C is to bet on a prolonged civil war, using the Far-from-Free Syrian Army (FSA), crammed with mercenaries and jihadists, and the band of opportunistic exiles known as the Syrian National Council (SNC).

The SNC has actually called for a Libya-style no-fly zone over Syria – shorthand for a NATO war. Turkey

also formally asked NATO for a no-fly zone. NATO commanders may be inept – but they have a certain amount of experience with major embarrassment (see Afghanistan). They flatly refused it.

The SNC – and the FSA – could not be more un-representative. The 'Friends of Syria' – as in Hillary and the Arab stooges – barely acknowledge the existence of the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change (NCB), the main indigenous opposition movement in Syria, composed of 13 political parties, mostly from the Left, Arab nationalists and including one Kurdish party. The NCB firmly denounces any form of militarisation and totally dismisses the FSA.

Iraq's Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari – a Kurd – has warned that Salafi-jihadists of the al-Qaeda mould are moving into Syria in droves. Apparently this bunch still listens very closely to 'invisible' al-Qaeda ideologue Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri; five months ago he issued these marching orders to jihadis in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. It also helps that many of them are being weaponised – via different networks – by the House of Saud and Qatar.

For months everybody knows that the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) of al-Qaeda-linked Abdul Hakim Belhaj has been active in Syria – as well as remnants of al-Qaeda in Iraq now responsible for car bombings even in Damascus.

In the event of a post-Assad Syria dominated by hardcore Sunnis infiltrated by Wahhabis and Salafi-jihadists, guaranteed blowback will leave Afghanistan after the 1980s anti-Soviet jihad looking like a ride on Disneyland Hong Kong.

## We accept yuan and rubles

As for China, it's laughing about Hillary's desperation all the way to the bank. As the House of Saud becomes ever more paranoid with what it sees as the Obama administration flirting with democracy in the Arab world, Beijing jacked up trade ties by delivering a bunch of new missiles to Riyadh.

And while the 'West' flirts with Holy War, Beijing's state-sponsored corporations have been buying commodities like crazy all across the Middle East, North Africa and South America – as well as stockpiling rare earths for strategic reserves. China produces no less than 97% of the world's rare earths – used on everything from iPads to those shiny new missiles now frying in the Arabian desert.

Other side effects as in 'the price to pay' for the bypassing of the UN and the obsession on NATO as global Robocop will be inevitable. It shouldn't be

forgotten that the Holy War on Syria is a stopover on the way to Tehran. For instance, a new system of maritime insurance, as well as a new international exchange mechanism – bypassing Western diktats – may be about to be born.

Yet the most important element may be a concerted move by Russia, Iran and China to reorganise the global energy market by transacting outside of the petrodollar.

So Washington cuts Iran off from SWIFT – the international bank clearing system? Iran's central bank counterpunches: if you want to do business with us, you can pay in any currency apart from the US dollar, or you can pay with gold.

This is the Holy Grail of the Holy War – not Syria; one thing is for Tehran to accept euros as payment for its oil and gas; another thing is to accept gold. On top of it with full support from both Russia and China.

In a nutshell: the whole Holy War syndrome is accelerating the end of the US dollar as global reserve currency. And when it happens, will there be an American Spring? Or will US elites – like the Mob – have the guts, and the muscle, to force Russia and China to pay the price? ■

**Note:**

**I. NATOGCC is a compound of the North Atlantic treaty Organization and the Gulf Cooperation Council.**

**Pepe Escobar is the author of *Globalistan: How the Globalized World is Dissolving into Liquid War* (Nimble Books, 2007) and *Red Zone Blues: a snapshot of Baghdad during the surge*. His most recent book is *Obama does Globalistan* (Nimble Books, 2009).**

**He may be reached at [pepeasia@yahoo.com](mailto:pepeasia@yahoo.com)**

**This article was originally published at Asia Times**

## from our readers



### ***The Conflict in Syria***

The only constant thing in life is change and struggle. We are witnessing profound change sweeping through the Middle East at present, including Syria. It is something I think progressive and activist people everywhere would greatly welcome and encourage. The veneer presented by the Syrian regime of being progressive is a blatant deception. It only looks good to some people because several of the other Arab regimes are even more vile and reactionary. That many of the Syrian people are in rebellion against the brutal, corrupt, crony capitalist regime is to me a very good thing. While the terrible loss of so many people's lives is utterly appalling and immoral, the Syrian people have shown they have had enough of this repressive regime and will sacrifice their lives to overthrow it in pursuit of freedom.

Yet these wonderful expressions of people's revolts seem to strike fear into some progressives and leftists. They highlight and worry about the opening this gives outside forces to intrude on the struggle and consequently support the maintenance of the present regime to block this. Well, of course it's only expected that the Western powers, Islamic extremists and others will interfere in these struggles. These forces may be exposed and defeated by the people in their struggle, but they may also seize power when the Assad regime falls, which it will. The outcome is not assured either way, but the people would have been empowered by this struggle and learnt valuable lessons in overthrowing oppressive regimes. Any new government that tries to stifle and subjugate the people will be on borrowed time, because the people are conscious of their power and will rise up again to defend their liberty and other hard won rights.

I believe it is wrong to focus on the scheming of outside powers and neglect the poor, suffering, but brave people of Syria who are being imprisoned, injured, tortured and killed in a bitter struggle against a cruel regime. Rebellion is the option the people have chosen in the face of a vicious response of the Syrian government. Any

chance of reforms to the system died amid hails of bullets and a barrage of tank bombardment and the deaths of thousands. With their lives they are struggling towards a better nation and they deserve the unconditional support of all those who value real justice and freedom. Those of us who seek to change the world cannot seek to prop up a reactionary regime because of the risk of another pro-western or other bad regime maybe (for a time) replacing it. Life is a risk and revolution is a risk. But to live under a cruel regime is also a constant danger and a trauma. A new world is possible if people have the courage to struggle for it. The timing is unknown, but this worthy struggle will lead to a radical change in Syria eventually. And this defiant uprising will also inspire other peoples elsewhere to struggle against their oppressive regimes.

But it seems to me that some of the left has lost its way politically when the main focus is on the interference of outside forces when the Syrian regime is engaged in the slaughter of its people. Surely, the real issue is the mass killing and human rights abuses carried out by the Syrian government, and we should direct our outrage there, not at the question of the interference of the West or others, as that's a minor diversion at the moment. At this time the reality is that it's not US or European Imperialism that is bombarding the cities, towns and villages of Syria and killing thousands of Syrians, but the Syrian government. I say this as someone who has been actively involved in the struggle against US and European Imperialism and Colonialism since the mid-1960s in Vietnam, Palestine, Cyprus, elsewhere in the Middle East and the rest of Asia, Europe, Africa, the Pacific and Latin America, in many anti-war, anti-imperialist and solidarity movements. I have not gone soft on Western imperialist and colonialist foreign policies, but I also oppose reactionary regimes that try to maintain power by indiscriminate war and brutality against their own people, something in my view we are witnessing in Syria now. And I raise my voice in condemnation and protest against this gross injustice.

**Steven Katsineris, Vic**

# from our readers



## **The Beacon**

I enclose my cheque for \$40 being subscription for the next year plus \$20 donation to cover postage, etc.

Further to my letter which was printed in the last edition of the *Beacon*, I thought I would include a few details about the Adelaide Church which your editors might like put into the next edition, for the benefit of anyone who may be planning to travel to Adelaide at some stage, but if they would prefer not to, then so be it.

Services are held at the Adelaide Church every Sunday at 10.30 am (not 11.00 am like yours) except that 3 times a year the main service is at the Unitarian Church at Shady Grove in the Adelaide Hills.

To access the Adelaide Church, the following choices are available:

- 1) It is a short taxi ride from most places around Adelaide.
- 2) Short car trip as above. The car park is small and fills quickly but adequate street parking is usually available in Osmond Terrace, within 200 metres or so of the church.
- 3) Take the 141 or 142 bus from the city centre in Currie St. Get off at Osmond Tce and walk 200 metres north. The 141 leaves Currie St at 9.45 and would get you there a bit early, the 142 at 10.15 and you would probably be a bit late. (Weekend bus services in Adelaide are like that.)

Yours faithfully

**Bob Brummitt, SA**

## **Dear Editor**

Enclosed is my cheque for the *Beacon* and associate membership.

I am so sorry for the delay. I have been very ill.

Thank you for your enjoyable publication.

Regards

**J Lucas, Vic**

## **Dear Editor**

Enclosed are the details of people who I wish to give a year's subscription to the *Beacon* – an outstanding publication.

**C Whatmough, NSW**

## **The Beacon**

Please find enclosed a cheque for my subscription (concession rate) and the remainder as a donation to 3CR via the Unitarian Half-Hour.

I especially liked the article by Miko Peled, 'Ethnic cleansing of invented people (part 1)'. He is the author of *The General's Son*. He is certainly one of the 'Good Ones'. There is a documentary relating to his views and background on YouTube that is well worth viewing.

Good on you and keep up the good work.

**B McLure, Vic**

## **Dear Editor**

Please find enclosed my renewal for the coming year, also a small donation.

I find each edition surpasses the last (how do you do that?)

Keep up the good work.

**J Collins, Qld**

Please find enclosed a cheque for \$100, to cover my subscription to the *Beacon*, any membership fees, etc. Please receive the remainder of the amount as a donation.

Keep up the great work.

**R Andrews, NSW**

## **Dear Peter**

I thought I'd send my subscription for the *Beacon* early – it's due in September and I wonder if you've an extra copy of November 2011 for me please.

Nigel Sinnott could write a Handbook for Dissenters, particularly as all too often we perceive some injustice and go it alone against the mob. That's a good way to get a mauling.

Perhaps you might remember that I enquired re David James son of Victor James. I'd nursed him when I was training in Albury and finally he brought his wife to my place. He's 80 now.

Love the *Beacon* and one day would like to attend a service.

Sincerely

**S Angus, Vic**

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Email: [admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au](mailto:admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au)

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