

AN EXTRAORDINARY SILENCE

By Michael Ventura

August 12, 2011

Fact set No. 1:

Former CIA agent Valerie Plame Wilson: “A hundred pounds of highly enriched uranium could fit in a shoebox – and 100,000 shipping containers come into the U.S. every day. Existing radiation sensors at the docks stand little chance: there are simply not enough of them, and it’s easy to hide highly enriched uranium in common materials that also give off a slight radioactive signature, like kitty litter” (*Newsweek*, Aug. 9, 2010, p.30).

Set that beside this: “The Obama administration has quietly cancelled a much-criticized billion-dollar program to equip ports across the United States with detectors to pick out radioactive material and nuclear weapons being shipped into the country, after acknowledging that the devices did not work. ... [T]he physics of detecting materials inside metal containers turned out to be far more difficult than many experts expected” (*The New York Times*, July 30, 2011, p.A18).

Set that beside this: “When asked last year about the security of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal, Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Admiral Mike Mullen didn’t hesitate: ‘I’m very comfortable that the nuclear weapons in Pakistan are secure,’ he said flatly. Asked the same question earlier this month, his answer had changed. ‘I’m reasonably comfortable,’ he said, ‘that the nuclear weapons are secure.’ ... The concern... is less that-Qaeda or the Taliban would manage to seize Pakistan’s nuclear weapons, but instead that increasingly-radicalized younger Pakistanis are finding their way into military and research circles where they may begin to play a growing role in the nation’s nuclear-weapons program” (*Time* online, April 24, 2009).

Note that date: seven months before President Obama announced his escalation of the Afghan war which, as I’ve documented recently, is also a covert war with Pakistan that is infuriating the Pakistani military.

Set that beside this: “Less than a month after President Obama testily assured reporters in 2009 that Pakistan’s nuclear materials ‘will remain out of militant hands,’ his ambassador... sent a secret message to Washington suggesting that she remained deeply worried” (*The New York Times*, Dec. 1, 2010, p.A1).

Fact set No. 2:

“The U.S. intelligence system has expanded so rapidly since the 9/11 terror attacks that no one knows exactly how much it costs, how many people it employs, or whether its efforts to combat terrorism are succeeding... [M]ore than 1,200 government agencies and 1,900 private companies are involved... [and] an estimated 854,000 are said to hold top-secret security clearances” (*The Washington Post*, summarized in *The Week*, July 30, 2010, p.7).”

Set that beside this headline: “Terror List Wrongly Includes 24,000, While Some Actual Suspects Escaped It” (*The New York Times*, May 7, 2009, p.A22).

Set that beside this: “The Federal Bureau of Investigation has suspended work on parts of its huge computer overhaul, dealing the agency the latest costly setback in its decade-long effort to develop a modernized information system to combat crime and terrorists.

...Beyond the financial costs are concerns about the F.B.I.'s ability to handle its law enforcement and national security responsibilities with an information system still regarded as sub-par in some crucial areas" (*The New York Times*, March 19, 2010, p.A12).

Set that beside this: "When [Gen. David Petraeus] took over [Central Command] in 2008 he was so perturbed by the poverty of good intelligence on Afghanistan and Pakistan that he persuaded the director of national intelligence to upgrade the entire collection effort, and he set up a special CentCom unit to provide an independent analysis of the take" (*Newsweek*, July 25, 2011, p.35).

Notice that when he upgraded the collection effort, Petraeus did not trust analysts at the CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency; he found it necessary to handpick his own.

How much good did that do? U.S. citizens have no way to know. We must remember – we really must remember – that almost all data we get about al Qaeda, the Taliban, and terrorism in general, comes from sources that Petraeus himself believes to be dubious: U.S. intelligence agencies.

Set that next to this: "CIA drone attacks in Pakistan killed an estimated 581 militants last year. But only two of those killed were sufficiently noteworthy to have appeared on a U.S. government list of most-wanted terrorists" (*The Washington Post*, summarized in *The Week*, March 4, 2011, p.22).

Fact set No. 3:

Most reportage conveys the impression that Pakistan, as a country, is roughly equivalent to Afghanistan and/or Iraq. Not so.

Pakistan is the world's sixth most populous country. Its population of 170. is almost six times that of Iraq and more than five times that of Afghanistan, according to Wikipedia. The Afghan city of Kabul has about 3.9 million people; Iraq's Baghdad, over 7 million; Pakistan's commercial center, Karachi, has "between 17 million and 20 million" (*The New York Times*, Aug. 3, 2011 p.A9). Pakistan's army is the world's seventh largest (*The Economist*, May 21, 2011, p.47).

Pakistan is the most formidable country we've antagonized since Vietnam, with more than twice the population Vietnam had during that war.

Items like this appear often: "The C.I.A. has drastically increased its bombing campaign in recent weeks. ...In recent days, American military helicopters have launched three air-strikes into Pakistan. (*The New York Times*, Sept. 28, 2010, p.A1)." But, to me, such an item brings to mind Joseph Conrad's 1899 *Heart of Darkness*: "Once, I remember, we came upon a man-of-war anchored off the [African] coast. There wasn't even a shed there, and she was shelling the bush. ...In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent."

Speaking of incomprehensible, stir these antics into the mix: "Even at the best of times it would have seemed unusual for America's embassy in Islamabad to organize its recent gathering for 'gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender' people. Given the grim state of bilateral relations, the meeting looked downright provocative. ...One Islamic political party called it 'cultural terrorism'" (*The Economist*, July 16, 2011, p.44).

Those are chilling words when you remember that Pakistan is on pace to have the world's fifth-largest nuclear arsenal (*The New York Times*, Feb. 1, 2011, p.A1), while many in Pakistan's military already consider the U.S. their worst enemy (*The Economist*, June 18, 2011, .46).

Meanwhile, in the United States there is an extraordinary silence.

As of this writing, the U.S. is warring in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Yemen and Somalia, yet days pass with barely any war coverage, little of which is in-depth. President Obama is fighting more wars at once than any president in my lifetime, and his rash Pakistan policies threaten to transform a resentful ally into a most dangerous enemy, but there is nary a peep of anti-war protest. Where are the legions of so-called progressives to whom Obama owed his election?

Seriously, where the hell did you all go? These wars are OK with you?

Fact set No.4:

The U.S. military budget “accounts for roughly 50 cents of every dollar of federal discretionary spending” (*The New York Times*, July 2, 2011, p.A18). We spend \$190 million dollars a day in Afghanistan (*The New York Times*, Dec. 1, 2010, p.A33). A record number of Americans – 45.8 million – are on food stamps (*The New York Times*, Aug. 3, 2011, p.A13). That’s close to one in seven.

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