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ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

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Badger-Two Medicine and the Blackfeet Battle in the Backbone of the World

By Andrea Peacock

Browning, Montana

Nowhere in the West does the rolling sea of the high plains meet the mountains with such dramatic effect as in northwestern Montana. State Highway 2 stretches through the northern Hi-Line for miles of coulees and intermittent creeks, antelope, buffalo and Plains Indian country, crossing the seemingly endless, expansive prairie that gives the Big Sky Country its name, before crashing abruptly into the Rocky Mountain Front. A patchwork of national park and national forests, reservation and rangeland, the sparsely populated Front provides one of the last best refuges in the lower 48 states for grizzly bears, and shelters the nation's largest bighorn sheep herd. A great span of wilderness totaling five million acres that extends from the state's capital in Helena to the Canadian border, the Front hosts every single species of animal that lived here when Meriwether Lewis and William Clark arrived 200 years ago, with the exception of free-ranging bison.

Oil and gas companies have coveted the Rocky Mountain Front – known to geologists as the Montana Thrust Belt – for decades. The kind of violent tectonics responsible for this dramatic scenery tends to open channels for mineralization and leave pockets for oil and gas reservoirs. The U.S. Geological Survey estimated in 2002 that the Belt might harbor some 8.6 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, 109 million barrels of oil, and 240 million barrels of natural gas liquids (heavier

“Follow the Money” Why the U.S. Defense Budget Soars, Even as Military Shrinks

By Andrew Cockburn

“Follow the money,” the FBI source known as Deep Throat advised the journalists Woodward and Bernstein, as they investigated the Watergate scandal that brought down Richard Nixon. Endlessly and approvingly cited, these words have become a hallowed journalistic maxim, and quite right too. The problem is that most of the time this sage advice is ignored, not least by those whose job it is to report and comment on the activities of our national security system. Similarly, the venerated Dwight Eisenhower may have put the phrase “military-industrial complex” in the language, but it is today deemed too loaded a term for mainstream media employment anywhere outside the opinion columns. In fact, even to suggest that U.S. military organizations exist for the benefit of those who profit from them is considered unseemly, possibly indicating a dangerous predilection for “conspiracy theories.”

Instead, the public brain is more routinely softened with thoughtful ruminations such as the *New York Times* writer Elisabeth Bumiller's July 24, 2010, article on the enormous cost of the Iraq and Afghan wars. Pondering the issue, Bumiller found a partial culprit in “twenty-first century technology,” as if that were a sufficient explanation and also unavoidable. It would have been helpful if the writer had looked at specific examples of the technology that is costing us so much, such as “Compass Call,” a \$100 million Lockheed EC-130H equipped with ground-penetrating radar that searches for \$25 homemade bombs buried in an Afghan road – one small component of our \$50 billion counter-

IED (Improvised Explosive Device) effort. Readers should also be aware that those responsible for “Compass Call” have no excuse for believing that there is anything justifiable about it at all. An in-depth study of its effectiveness in Iraq, carried by a strategic analysis “cell” of military intelligence in Baghdad in April 2007, examined the results of hundreds of flights from the previous October through to May 2007. Examining the results, the analysts summarized them as follows: “Conclusion: No Detectable Effect.” (“Operational Iraq Data.” Study prepared for “MultiNational Force Iraq,” April 2008, and made available to author. Estimated cost per flying hour of “Compass Call” is roughly \$70,000.)

On the other hand, it is, of course, clearly a *financially* justifiable activity for the Lockheed Martin Corporation and the galaxy of subcontractors, whose interests are tied to the program – a fact that should be first and foremost in the mind of anyone looking into this or any other military initiative. With “who profits?” as a *schwerpunkt* – a main objective around which all efforts are organized – analyzing the salient features of the national security state becomes a much easier and more illuminating task.

Such an approach certainly helps in understanding post-World War II U.S. history. Library shelves groan under the volumes analyzing the origins of the Cold War. Recall that following victory in World War II, the U.S.A. rapidly disarmed, disbanding its huge conscript army and slashing weapons production. The economies of our allies and enemies in the recent conflict lay in total ruin. Although the Soviet Union controlled

eastern European states overrun by the Red Army during the war, this was by prior agreement with the U.S.A. and Britain. Suddenly, in the spring of 1948, senior officials of the Truman administration began issuing ominous warnings that the Soviet Union was bent on war and might attack at any time. A warning to that effect – “war could come at any time” – was solicited by the chief of army intelligence from the U.S. commander in Germany, General Lucius Clay, and duly leaked to the press.

The answer is clear for anyone who remembers to follow the money. The aircraft corporations that had garnered enormous profits during the war on the back of government contracts had discovered by 1947 that peace was ruinous. Despite initial high hopes, the commercial marketplace was proving a far harsher and less accommodating environment than that of wartime, especially as there were far more companies than required by the peacetime economy. Orders from the civilian airline industry never lived up to expectations, while efforts to diversify into other products, including dishwashers and stainless steel coffins, proved disappointing and costly.

Something had to be done. In the spring of 1948, senior officials in the Truman administration, including

Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, suddenly began warning that the Soviets were on the brink of unleashing a surprise military attack against Western Europe. There was no evidence that the Soviets had any such intentions, a point, as declassified documents now make clear, that was well known to the senior officials (see Frank Kofsky, *Harry S. Truman and the War Scare of 1948*, St. Martin's Press, 1995, p.117 ff.) In fact, Stalin, the Soviet leader, was enjoining the powerful Western European Communist parties from any revolutionary action and refusing to aid the Greek Communists in their civil war against the U.S.-backed government.

This cause (need for stimulus in the aerospace industry) and effect (war scare leading to sharp increase in defense appropriations) were pithily summed up at the time by Lawrence D. Bell, president of the Bell Aircraft Corporation: “As soon as there is a war scare, there is a lot of money available.” And so it proved. The aircraft-procurement budget soared 57 per cent as the overall Pentagon procurement budget exploded by almost 600 per cent, from less than \$6 billion in 1947 to more than \$35 billion in 1948 (in 2011 dollars). Thus the industry, not to mention powerful institutions linked to its fortunes, such as major banks, was saved from collapse.

Apart from a brief relapse pending the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, “war scares,” otherwise known as “threat inflation,” would thereafter be a regular feature of the U.S. political and economic landscape. It mattered little what the Soviet enemy was actually doing, or in a position to do. All that was required was an announcement that “intelligence” had revealed an ominous “gap” between U.S. and Soviet capabilities, and the money flowed. The “missile gap” on which John F. Kennedy rode to victory in 1960 yielded an immediate 15 per cent hike in defense spending. Years after the money had been appropriated and spent, it was openly admitted by the relevant defense secretary, Robert McNamara, that, in fact, the gap had been entirely in favor of the U.S.A. Similar, if less infamous, episodes recurred featuring bombers, tanks, ships, anti-ballistic missiles and, most comprehensively, defense budgets themselves.

Embarrassing realities, such as serious shortcomings in our putative enemies’

capabilities, have generally been kept out of sight of the taxpayers. Equally, explosive cost overruns and technical disasters have generated at most, short-term scandals. Pleas to cut the defense budget have rarely yielded much of a political dividend. Indeed, in former days, the very size of the budget, irrespective of its components, was touted as a necessary part of our deterrent. One of the more successful “gaps” of the Cold War years was the greater size of the Soviet defense budget. The Soviets didn’t announce how much they were spending on defense (even if they knew the real cost themselves, which is dubious); so, the figure publicized by the military-industrial complex was based on an ersatz calculation of the presumed cost to the Soviets of duplicating U.S. programs and systems. In other words, the cost of a Soviet swing-wing bomber would be assessed on the basis of the cost of a similar U.S. effort. Therefore, as Ernie Fitzgerald, the consummate Pentagon “whistleblower” of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, once observed, “every time the B-1 bomber has a cost overrun, the Soviet defense budget goes up!” In other words, the more dollars we wasted, the more dangerous the other side became, which justified our wasting even more dollars, and so on.

Misguided commentators customarily referred to the Cold War defense environment as the “arms race.” It is important to understand that there was little or no element of military competition with the Soviets, rather one of mostly one-sided budget enhancement. This point is most easily made by comparing the level of defense spending while the U.S.A. was purportedly faced with a formidable and potentially aggressive enemy with the level of spending once that threat had disappeared. From 1948 to 1990, i.e., during the Cold War, the U.S.A. spent an annual average of \$440 billion (in 2011 dollars). For the period when the Pentagon budget had adjusted to the end of the Cold War (that is, with General Colin Powell’s and Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney’s “Base Force” reductions) up to the first year before the global war on terrorism (1993-2000), Pentagon spending averaged \$392 billion (also in 2011 dollars). Interestingly, during these years of the Clinton presidency, Pentagon spending was higher than the long-range budget plan envisioned by Secretary of Defense Cheney. Thus,

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when the Soviet Union had disintegrated and Soviet missile sub crews were offering tours of their vessels to western TV teams for \$500, the U.S. defense budget was just 11 per cent lower. By subtracting the later amount from the Cold War-era figure, we can discern the actual annual cost of confronting the USSR: \$48 billion – tantamount to a bargain. The fact that the end of superpower confrontation made such a little difference to defense spending underlines the irrelevance of the Soviet military, save as a useful justification, to the U.S. defense system.

Clearly, military budgets are driven by something other than military requirements, at least in peacetime. But surely an actual shooting war, with American lives and vital interests at stake must be different, right? Military spending zoomed to gargantuan levels in 1950-53, for example, but those were the years of the Korean War, with almost six million men and women in uniform, of whom 140,000 were killed or wounded. That explains the huge increase in defense spending of those years? Not so. Sadly, it seems that even a shooting enemy made little difference to the way the defense system does business. Follow the money.

True, the U.S.A. deployed large armies to fight in the frozen rockbound wastes of the Korean Peninsula – but that's not where huge amounts of the money went. The fastest growing component of the budget in those years was for "strategic" B-47 nuclear bombers (which, however, lacked intercontinental range), as well as other items useful only in a strategic nuclear war, such as the sluggish "D" version of the F-86 fighter suitable only as an anti-bomber interceptor, and developing the follow-on F-102 and F-106 interceptors. These were suitable only for shooting down those high-altitude bombers, of which the Russians had very few, and the Koreans and Chinese none. The budget for these items soared from \$2.5 billion in 1950 to \$7.7 billion in 1951 to \$11.3 billion in 1952.

Meanwhile, in the freezing front-line trenches, U.S. soldiers and marines lacked decent cold-weather boots. Half the casualties in the first winter of the war were from frostbite. Like some threadbare guerilla army, GIs would raid enemy trenches to steal the warm, padded boots provided by the Communist high command. "I could never figure out why I, a soldier of the richest country on

earth, was having to steal boots from soldiers of the poorest country on earth," recalled one veteran of these harrowing but necessary expeditions. (Personal account from a Korean War veteran.)

Lest anyone think that such outrages belong only to a dark and distant age, it is worth recalling that two years into the war in Iraq, military families in the U.S.A. were going into debt to buy armored vests, camelbacks, socks, boots, and even night-vision goggles for sons, brothers and husbands, whose senior commanders and congressional reps felt no need to supply them with these items – until they were shamed into it by the press.

In the modern era, the U.S. government added \$1 trillion to the defense

It mattered little what the Soviet enemy was actually doing. All that was required was for an announcement that "intelligence" had revealed an ominous "gap" between U.S. and Soviet capabilities, and the money flowed.

budget after September 11, 2001, to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (up to 2010). In that same period, it added a second trillion dollars to the non-war base Pentagon budget; that additional money made our Air Force and Navy smaller and our inventories of ships and combat aircraft older. In the Army, for example, a 53 per cent increase in money allowed a 5 per cent increase in brigade combat teams.

Given this demonstration of Pentagon priorities then and now, it should come as no surprise that the torrent of money unleashed thanks to the Korean War continued to flow at only a slightly diminished rate once the guns stopped firing, with much of the money consigned to contracts for strategic systems with the "aerospace industry," as the aircraft corporations had sleekly renamed themselves. Key to the process, and to the enormous ensuing costs, was the system of "cost plus" contracts instituted in World War II that endures in one form or another to this day. So long as the con-

tractors are guaranteed a percentage of their costs as profit, they have an obvious incentive to make those costs as great as possible. A contract to produce 100 missiles at a cost of \$1 billion can yield a \$50 million profit. Ergo, if it suddenly transpires that for reasons beyond man's control the cost of that program zooms to \$2 billion, then the profit, accordingly, leapt to \$100 million. It makes no difference if, as is all too likely, the cost of the individual missiles has increased so much that the \$2 billion now buys only 50 missiles, or 10, or ultimately just one. The bottom line is unaffected.

In other words, as observed long ago by Ernie Fitzgerald who battled this corrupt culture as an Air Force official, the contractors are "selling costs," not weapons systems. To the extent that they can improve their "products" by making them more complex and, thus, more expensive, they prosper. The inevitable corollary has been that the number of items produced for any one program goes down as the costs zoom up. Hence the F-35 fighter, currently under development for the Air Force, Navy and Marines as well as a number of foreign

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air forces, was originally slated for a production run of 2,866 planes at a unit cost per plane of \$81 million. Already, well before the plane has completed testing, the unit cost has soared – thus far – to \$155 million each, and the total buy has, accordingly, shrunk to 2,457. Further production cuts, as foreign buyers drop out, are inevitable, which will, in turn, boost the unit cost of the remaining planes on order, leading to further cuts, and so on.

Once this disconnect between the official (weapons systems of postulated quality and quantity) and actual products (costs) marketed by the defense industry is clearly grasped, other distressing aspects of the U.S. defense system become easier to understand. Escalation of costs required inefficient management practices, employing twenty people to do, supervise, manage, and administer the work of five, for example. “Inefficiency is national policy,” declared the Air Force general managing the vastly overbudget F-111 bomber program in 1967. (A. Ernest Fitzgerald, *The High Priests of Waste*, Norton, 1972, p.159. The general was “Zeke” Zoeckler.)

But inefficient reduction tended to produce inefficient performance. The great missile-gap fraud of the early 1960s led not only to the abandonment of all cost restraints on the crash programs, instituted by the Kennedy administration to “catch up” with the Russians, but also to some egregious technical failures. The guidance system for the Minuteman II ICBM, for example, was so unreliable that 40 per cent of the missiles in the silos were out of action at any one time. Replacements had to be bought from the original contractor, who, thereby, made an extra profit thanks to having supplied faulty sets in the first place.

Because the system, despite countless reorganizations and “reforms,” remains essentially unchanged in the intervening half-century, we have merely to substitute the names of today’s major contracts in order to understand why our budget soars as our military shrinks, as it has.

Grasping the notion that defense contractors have an incentive to maximize the costs rather than the operational capability of their products should not require much imagination. But the system requires the active complicity of soldiers, sailors and airmen, who, one would think, have a direct stake in effective, reliable weapons systems. The easi-

est way to demonstrate that the military services are, nevertheless, as dedicated to the maximization of costs as any corporate stockholder is to consider the fates of those who buck the system, or at least try to. Plucking just a few names from the honor roll, we can review the experience of Air Force Colonel Joe Warren, whose career was effectively ruined in the late 1960s for daring to call attention to monumental cost overruns and technical shortfalls on the C-5 program, or that of Colonel Jim Burton, forced out of the service in the 1980s for insisting that the Army redesign the Bradley Fighting Vehicle so that it would not incinerate the occupants when hit by enemy fire. (Read about Burton’s experience in his autobiographical *The Pentagon Wars: Reformers Challenge the Old Guard*, U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1993.)

Even as I write, the Marine Corps is at-

Like some threadbare guerilla army, GIs would raid enemy trenches to steal the warm, padded boots provided by the Communist high command.

tempting to destroy the career of Franz Gayl, a former Marine, now a civilian working on the headquarters staff. Gayl’s offense? In 2006, he relayed pleas from the fighting troops in Iraq to Marine Corps headquarters that they be supplied with vehicles sufficiently armored to withstand the impact of increasingly lethal roadside bombs. The ubiquitous Humvee, with its vulnerable flat underbelly, offered little protection and had, in fact, been described as a “death trap” for this very reason in an official report following the Somali operation of the early 1990s. It turned out that plans to supply such sufficiently armored ones, later dubbed MRAPs (Mine Resistant Ambush Protected), were already in place but were being held up because officers in the Marine Corps procurement office did not want to disrupt their arrangements with the contractor for continuing high volume Humvee production. The necessary funds had already been appropriated, and no one wanted to disrupt the flow by redirecting the money to the MRAPs.

Even though political pressure ultimately forced the Marines to order MRAPs, with a consequent decline in casualties, Gayl has not been forgiven, but instead subjected to further persecution by his superiors.

Clearly, impeding the progress of a procurement contract, or in any way threatening the prospects of a major program, is not the way to prosper in today’s military. Taking the opposite course, on the other hand, is generally seen as key to a successful career and golden (in every sense of the word) prospects following retirement. Reviewing the career of one Air Force two-star, the very model of a modern major general, enjoying a trouble-free ascent through the ranks, one caustic observer suggested the following biographic entry:

“Under General X’s leadership, ... the projected cost of the ---- program increased by several tens of billions of dollars. General X is commended for the exemplary denial with which he approached the increasing non-executability of the program, and for the zeal with which he attacked those inside and outside the Pentagon who correctly predicted that the official schedule was hopelessly optimistic.

“Meanwhile, General X further disrupted the program by focusing on the PR strategy of achieving first flight dates, regardless of whether the jets were ready for sustained testing. Under his command, the program achieved timely delivery of numerous tests assets, which required major work before they were actually any use.

“General X further showed his leadership qualities by bugging out, mere months before the shit hit the fan, and leaving his deputy and successor to be, inevitably, fired and publicly disgraced.

“Given this record, there is no reason to believe that Gen. X will not continue to advance in rank and, on retirement, proceed to a senior post at one or other of our leading defense contractors, as so many of his fellow general officers have done before him.”

The author of this bio has spent decades as an intimate observer of the Pentagon; the deletion of the major general’s name is not to protect the guilty protagonist, but the innocent source.

Once upon a time, defense contractors would reward general officers who had demonstrated their loyalty in such

fashion with a well-endowed corporate vice-presidency, requiring only a commitment to do their bit in lobbying colleagues still in uniform, thus leaving plenty of time for relaxing deployment on the golf course. Nowadays, however, we find retirees playing more powerful corporate and influence-peddling roles – multitasking, as it were. For example, the Humvee that Gayl was punished for endeavoring to supplant as the vehicle of choice in Iraq is manufactured by the AM General Corporation, headed until recently by retired four-star General Paul Kern, who led the Army's Materiel Command until 2004. As well as serving as president and chief operating officer at AM General, which is now controlled by billionaire Ron Perelman's MacAndrew & Forbes holding company, Kern was also welcomed onto the board of the EDO Corporation, a lead contractor in the burgeoning counter-IED electronics industry. When EDO was bought by ITT, Kern transitioned to the merged corporate board, having also served on the board of IRobot, manufacturer of some ubiquitous counter-IED robots, as well as CoVant Technologies, a private equity group specializing in defense investments in the Washington area.

Kern's involvement with firms associated with the counter-IED mission serves as a reminder that whereas once upon a time the military-industrial complex depended on "scares" generated as needed by our impressively large Soviet adversary, today's conflicts with lightly armed insurgents offer rewards that are hardly less fulfilling. "Asymmetric warfare" has turned out to be even more expensive and at least as rewarding. Not only has annual Pentagon spending gone up tremendously above Cold War levels since September 11, 2001, but also the lowly homemade bomb, or IED, occupies a place in the threat pantheon once reserved for the likes of Soviet Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles. Thus far, the Pentagon's Joint IED Defeat Organization has spent at least \$50 billion in countering these garage-made threats, and, despite increasing U.S. deaths from IEDs and a rising chorus of criticism, there is no sign the spigot is being turned down significantly.

The rise of CACI, a northern Virginia corporation, serves as an instructive case study of the beneficiaries of today's threat environment, in which a corporation can

rise to great prosperity (with a headquarters building emblazoned with its titular acronym looming over I-66 on the western approach to Washington, D.C.) without actually making anything at all. Its functions, as a close scrutiny of the CACI website reveals, being in the unexplained area of "analysis" and "support" – a pure example of "selling costs." Originally intended by its founders to commercialize their SIMSCRIPT simulation programming language, the war on terror brought many fresh opportunities to CACI, including a contract to supply interrogators for the notorious Abu Ghraib jail. Though that service does not today

Commentators referred to the Cold War defense environment as the "arms race." It is important to understand that there was little or no element of military competition with the Soviets, rather one of mostly one-sided budget enhancement.

appear in the list of employment opportunities on offer on the company's website, there is no lack of listings for work subcontracted by the Joint IED Defeat Organization, beloved by the service bureaucracies and their corporate partners for its mandate to apportion funds without specific authorization.

The CACI website also helpfully lists the board of directors, complete with biographies, thereby furnishing a useful cameo of today's military-industrial complex. Topping the list of outside directors is Gordon England, best known for his service as Navy secretary and deputy secretary of defense in the George W. Bush administration, in which capacity he adroitly avoided the odium incurred by Donald Rumsfeld and displayed a helpful solicitude for the interests of major contractors, ever ready to run interference with Congress on their behalf. One example suffices: a well-informed critic of the lethal V-22 boondoggle was giving a scheduled briefing to an influential congressman on the drawbacks to

the program, notably its tendency to kill the Marines who were riding in it. Who should drop in, "just passing by," but Mr. England, who enquired on the topic of discussion and then weighed in with what was obviously a very carefully prepared rebuttal, defending the V-22. That was hardly surprising, given England's prior service with the General Dynamics, Lockheed, Litton and Honeywell Corporations.

Another name that catches the eye is the retired, well-connected four-star Admiral Gregory Johnson, who earned the trust of his peers not only as the commander of far-flung fleets, but also as senior military assistant to Secretary of Defense William Cohen.

Also on the CACI board sits James Gilmore, former governor of Virginia, whose biography is larded with references to his experience in the bountiful area of homeland security. Dr. Warren Phillips, a former academic with an expertise in oil pipelines and armored vehicles, along with a lawyer and a graduate of the railroad and natural gas industry round off the roster of this truly 21st century defense company, with 2010 sales in excess of \$3 billion.

No survey of the relationship between the corporate and military professions would be complete without comparing the differing fates of General John M. Keane and Admiral William J. Fallon. Both rose to dizzying heights in the military command structure; Keane retired as vice chief of the Army, while Fallon was head of Central Command. In his latter years in the service, Keane shared the doubts of his fellow generals regarding the Iraq adventure, but kept his thoughts to himself, maintaining good relationships not only with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Richard Cheney, but also with other politically significant factions in the corporate, political, and media worlds. Keane has long accepted a major share of the credit for conceiving the notion of a "surge" in Iraq – now deemed the key to victory – though the all-important concept of buying off the insurgents would seem to have originated elsewhere. Keane has since become a highly sought after talker, advisor and policy guru. Today, he also sits on the board of General Dynamics (to which he made a swift ascension after retiring) and many other boards, including Ron Perelman's

MacAndrews and Forbes, is a senior adviser to the private equity giant Kohlberg, Kravis, & Roberts, sits on the board of the Rand Corporation, comments on security matters for ABC News, and is generally a potent force in today's military-industrial complex.

Admiral Fallon, on the other hand, today sports only a few comparatively insignificant corporate appointments on his CV. The point of departure in the career trajectories of the two men would appear to have been Admiral Fallon's public and private outspokenness on a variety of subjects, including his rejection of the notion that Iran posed a significant threat to the U.S.A., coupled with spirited denunciation of a preemptive U.S. attack on Iran, when that thinking was *de rigueur* in the George W. Bush administration. Such defiance of the Washington consensus, especially in an area where precise correctness is required among neocons and other supporters of Israel, got Fallon promptly fired and dispatched to the wilderness by George W. Bush.

A review of a hundred leading defense corporate boards would uncover many similar instances of the close embrace between the senior officer class (along with their intelligence colleagues) and the industries that serve them. That is one more reason why, in considering policies and priorities of our military leadership, outside observers must never lose sight of the pond in which they swim.

Whether it be the enduring phenomenon of the neocons, a group originally fostered in the mid-1970s by the late Paul Nitze as a means to enlist Israel supporters in the cause of bigger defense budgets, or the specter of the (alleged) Iranian nuclear weapons program that has so far generated \$123 billion worth of U.S. weapons sales in the region, or any other aspect or issue related to U.S. national security, Deep Throat's wise advice should always be in the forefront of a truly enquiring mind. CP

Andrew Cockburn lives in Washington, D.C., and has written extensively on military matters. His essay here is included in an indispensable guide to the U.S. war machine, *The Pentagon Labyrinth*, edited by Winslow Wheeler, and currently being published by the Center for Defense Information in Washington, D.C. Andrew Cockburn can be reached at amcockburn@gmail.com.

hydrocarbons like propane, butane and ethane).

Environmentalists argue these amounts are miniscule compared to our national needs; industry folks counter that every bit helps. But no one really knows what lies underground, because in 2006 Congress banned leasing.

The ban capped off a 30-year campaign to "Save the Front," – the rallying cry of the coalition of ranchers, outfitters and environmentalists who oppose drilling there – but probably had less to do with their political power, and nearly everything to do with the Blackfeet Nation.

The Blackfeet reservation sits at the north end of the Front, straddling the foothills abutting Glacier National Park

Floyd "Tiny Man" Heavy Runner told reporters, "What you're doing is putting us on the road to extinction. We are here to notify you that we have no alternatives. We are not going to stand back."

to the west. The Blackfeet are large people – imposing in stature and big-hearted, a physical and spiritual match to the landscape. One of only six tribes in the United States whose reservation occupies their ancestral homeland, their 19th century reputation as fierce and fearsome warriors survives to this day. The Blackfoot Confederacy includes three groups in Canada, with the Blackfeet (or South Piegan, or Pikuni) the sole tribe settling south of the border. The Confederacy's territory once stretched from the Great Slave Lake of the Northwest Territories of Canada to the north end of present-day Yellowstone National Park.

Historians date the Blackfeet's tenure in the Northern Rockies at a mere 300 years (which, as it turns out, is when the first Europeans encountered the Blackfoot Confederacy in Canada). But as one archeologist told me, the combination of linguistics, oral tradition, mythology, and archeology makes possible an 8,500-year timespan or more. Tribal Historic Preservation Officer John Murray cites 10,000-year-old archeologi-

cal sites in the nearby mountains tied to his people. The Nation's website proclaims, "We come from right here."

At the heart of "here" is a smallish piece of land, 130,000 acres southwest of the reservation. Technically, the Badger-Two Medicine is national forest land and, to the naked eye, is not distinguishable from the rest of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. But the Badger is the key to what happened here and why. The Badger-Two Medicine is part of the Backbone of the World. It's full of mountains named for the supernatural beings who live there, "other-than-human persons," as one writer calls them: Morningstar, Poia, the colorful Thunder bird, Wind Maker, and Medicine Grizzly. "It is precisely this mythic understanding of kinship and reciprocity with the land – all rocks, plants and animals – which empowers the Badger-Two Medicine as a sacred landscape," writes Jay Vest in his 1988 article, "Traditional Blackfeet Religion and the Sacred Badger-Two Medicine Wildlands."

When oil companies Chevron and Fina were poised in 1993 to send in their drilling rigs, Floyd "Tiny Man" Heavy Runner told reporters, "What you're doing is putting us on the road to extinction. We are here to notify you that we have no alternatives. We are not going to stand back." Heavy Runner, leader of the warrior Brave Dog society, explained that the nature of the Blackfeet's relationship to the Badger-Two Medicine is not something that can be taken into account by the oil companies' talk of "improved technology," "small footprints" and "seasonal occupancy." If one drop of oil were spilled on the land, he said, the place would be ruined.

The gist of Heavy Runner's argument speaks to a profound connection between a given landscape and the humans who occupy it: a bond of such intimacy that a seemingly innocuous wound to the former is felt by the latter.

Blackfeet Community College instructor and journalist Woody Kipp explains: "[T]hose places are sacred places, and there's usually a story that goes with it. So our stories, legends, and mythology go with the landscape. And trying to convey that to mainstream people is just ... just almost impossible, because the concepts are not there. Our language says something different about the landscape than English. English is a great language

for commerce, for recreation, for sex, whatever. But it is not a sacred language, as our language is.”

Kipp was a founding member of the Pikuni Traditionalist Association (“Not your grandmother’s PTA,” he jokes), a group formed to fend off drilling. He elaborates: “What environmentalists call ecosystems we say is a part of the fabric of life. *Mitakuye oyasin*, it’s Lakota and it means we’re all related. And when I say we are all related, it doesn’t mean just you and I as humans: we’re related to the rocks and the trees and the air and the whole thing ... that the physicists call a unified system. So, when these environmentalists came to us and wanted to know if we were aware of the oil and gas wells that had been leased in the Badger-Two Medicine, we told them no, our tribal council didn’t even know about it ... But we joined with these white environmentalists in an effort to stop the drilling because we understood what they were saying.”

If there’s an Anglo name synonymous with the campaign to save the Badger-Two Medicine, it’s Lou Bruno. A biology teacher by training, Bruno moved to the reservation in 1974 to teach remedial reading. As a gay man in 1970s Montana, he felt like an outcast pretty much everywhere he went. But he needed the job – the Blackfeet needed a warm body. “I hated this place when I got here, I have to tell you,” he says. “I felt like I was being exiled to Siberia. The winters set in really early. You go over [to the Flathead Valley] shopping and you feel like a Martian: you’re wearing winter coats and they’re still in shorts.”

The job itself was great: he got to spend hours a day with small classes, and felt like he was doing some good. And he began to appreciate the landscape. “I love the diversity here and the fact that, you know, unlike Yellowstone, you have all of these forest types and you have all of these plant species that are not down there... At certain times of the year, there’s no place else I’d rather be.”

In 1982, the Forest Service sold nearly four dozen leases in the Badger, and soon after two companies – Chevron and Fina – applied for permits to drill. The agency held an informational meeting in the reservation resort town of East Glacier, and Bruno attended. “They were giving us a lot of bullshit. They were telling us a lot of lies. And, basically, it made me so

angry that it got me activated,” he recalls.

He and others started the Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance and began fighting the plan on two fronts. With the help of a pro bono lawyer and the Montana Wilderness Association, the group stalled with appeals and lawsuits. Meanwhile, they organized the locals.

Bruno led hikes into the mountains; he talked with his colleagues. “I just got possessed about it. I went around to all the people at school and the Native American people and the white people. There were lots of aides and janitors and things like that. And I knew that they did not support the drilling, you know. Did not want any development up there. And so I told them, ‘If you don’t feel comfortable writing a letter, I’ll ghostwrite one for you and I’ll run it by you then.’ And I

“English is a great language for commerce, for recreation, for sex, whatever. But it is not a sacred language, as our language is.”

would interview them and find out what they wanted to say.”

Lea Whitford, director of the Blackfeet studies program at the community college, invited Bruno – among others – to come and speak with her students. She recalls, “He was real passionate about keeping the area pristine, and he talked about the animals and the relationship that people have with not only landscape, but with the habitat in the area. It does something for you as a Blackfoot person to know the relationship to the land. It makes you more conscious. It makes you a better steward.”

The Blackfeet lost title to the Badger in 1896, at the end of a century marked by deadly cycles of measles, scarlet fever and smallpox, the near eradication of buffalo leading to the Starvation Winter of 1883-84, and the “scorched earth” policies of the United States Army, culminating most famously in the 1870 massacre of Heavy Runner’s peaceful camp by Major Eugene Baker. In less than 50 years, a series of ratified and unofficial treaties whittled the Blackfeet territory down to the corner of Montana they now occupy. The Blackfeet who agreed in 1896 to cede their claim to the Badger, and to

the strip of land that now makes up the eastern portion of Glacier National Park, were sick, starving and desperate. Tribal oral tradition has it that the 1896 agreement was meant as a 99-year lease; the United States government took it for a sale, and while that view has prevailed, the Blackfeet’s insistence of legal claim to the Badger has left all in the region in an uneasy stalemate.

The Blackfeet are not opposed to drilling in general – in fact, in the last few years the tribe has signed three major agreements to explore the central and eastern portions of the reservation. The most recent included a signing bonus of more than \$15 million, a very big deal in a community with 70 per cent unemployment. So, white conservationists fear that if a pro-development faction were to take control of the tribal government, economics would trump spirituality. Environmentalists like Bruno would rather see the Badger declared a Wilderness Area. “They feel like it’s their land, they should be able to do with it what they want to do,” he says. “And I feel, no, that’s not true. Nobody should be able to trash their lands, no matter what color they are or what nationality they are, or whatever. It’s wrong. It’s in nobody’s best interests.”

After 150 years of getting pushed around, it’s not hard to understand why the tribe might feel proprietary, even defensive – especially when it comes to energy policy. The Blackfeet reservation was Ground Zero for the *Cobell v. Babbitt* class action lawsuit, in which Browning banker Eloise Cobell sued the federal government for gross mismanagement of resource royalties due to some half a million American Indians. It wasn’t until the 1982 Indian Minerals Development Act that tribes were even allowed to negotiate the terms of their own leases.

Tribal Historic Preservation Officer John Murray says, however, that the Blackfeet are capable of making fine distinctions. “They say, ‘You, guys, are drilling on the reservation, what about that?’ We say, ‘Well, that’s our land, we can do any damn thing we want with it.’ But [the Badger] is land that we want to eventually manage and use for a variety of things, including traditional hunting, traditional gathering. But we don’t intend to desecrate it, build roads. If we get to manage it, we don’t intend to drill.”

The Badger’s uncertain title may work

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to everyone's advantage – except for the oil and gas companies. The Blackfeet can use their claim as leverage to get the kind of management they want from the Forest Service – in fact, in the spring of 2010 the Forest Service banned all motorized use of the area. The Forest Service can wash its hands of controversial decisions, essentially abdicating authority without any kind of showdown over ownership. And environmentalists grudgingly compromise on wilderness status for the Badger, knowing that they won't have any influence on management issues if they alienate the tribe. "I think that's what has saved that place," says Joe Jessepe, a Blackfeet historian and member of the Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance. "Because of the unclear status. And I think maybe for everybody involved there is too much at stake."

Over the years, the stalling tactics worked. Each time environmentalists won a bureaucratic battle, the government would redo some aspect of their plans and forge ahead. In 1993, Clinton's Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt temporarily called a halt to exploration in the region, pending completion of a cultural

survey; in 1997, Forest Supervisor Gloria Flora became a folk hero when she issued a moratorium banning new leasing on Lewis and Clark forest lands for ten years. It proved the beginning of the end of her government career, and a marked departure from the ways public lands agencies had been making land use decisions in the West. "What I did try to do was go around and talk to people and try to understand where they were coming from," she told me in a 2003 interview.

"I'm not doing what the [Bureau of Land Management] does, which is, 'You may give us your input, but we don't want any emotion. Just give us the facts.' I find that patently offensive, because one of the most important things about being human is our relationship to landscapes, our relationship to nature, our interdependency." During Flora's moratorium, the Blackfeet and Forest Service cooperated to produce a cultural inventory of the Badger, resulting in two-thirds of the region classified as a Traditional Cultural District, making it eligible for placement on the National Register of Historic Places.

Of the original 47 leases in the Badger,

most now have been retired in some fashion – through trades or private buy-outs. Of those remaining, only two companies are holding onto permits to drill: Chevron's leases now are held by Devon Energy, and Fina's lease was taken over by Louisiana businessman Sidney Longwell. These were thrown into limbo pending a proposal to include all of the Badger in the Traditional Cultural District, and remain there to this day.

"Somewhere there has to be a benchmark," Flora says. "Somewhere, some piece of landscape has to be so spectacular that a few days worth of gas for the nation really isn't worth the destruction that would be involved. What other place? I tell people now, I hope people look at that decision and say it was a no-brainer." CP

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