



Governments: “Abbotabad” as Ever!

Recent uprisings in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East have given heart to those partisans of George W. Bush who share the former president’s dream of a “global democratic revolution.” Now it appears even Pakistan may be taking on some of the features of an American-style democracy. Pakistanis don’t trust their government either.



“On every street in this mountainous military town, in every chat shop, even in the barbershops — people are furious,” [ABC’s Nick Schifrin](#) reported from Abbotabad on Monday. In part they are angry at the United States for sending three-dozen Navy SEALs and four helicopters hundreds of miles into their officially sovereign land to kill Osama bin Laden. “But most of their fury is saved for their own leaders, in the government and the military, who they feel have let them down,” Schifrin said. A government that lets its people down? Gosh. Whooda thunk it?

“They’re all liars. They knew everything. If they didn’t, they’re answerable to 180 million people,” Sardar Saeed told the interviewer as he was having his beard trimmed at a local barbershop. A government that’s answerable to the people? Well, yes, you could call that a revolutionary idea. Perhaps Bush and his neocon pals deserve some credit if Pakistanis are reading Thomas Jefferson in Abbotabad.

Or maybe they’ve been reading and hearing about Will Rogers, the old cowboy-philosopher who insisted he didn’t write jokes. “I just watch the government and report the news,” he said. “There’s no trick to bein’ a humorist when you’ve got the whole government workin’ for ya.” It seems the Pakistanis, too, have learned there’s no point crying over a government that defends itself against charges of dishonesty by insisting it is merely inept. Text messages cited by Schifrin reflect the biting humor.

“Don’t honk: the army is asleep,” said one. “Public service message from the army: stay alert. Don’t rely on us,” said another. “Pakistani radar system for sale: buy one, get one free,” wrote one texter with a knack for marketing as well as mockery.

“If they can’t defend the borders of the country, what are they there for?” Saeed asked. Yup. Americans can, as we often say, relate to that. Welcome to the “new world order.”

In England, where, historically, concepts of democracy and national sovereignty have been marvelously flexible, some are questioning America’s roving jurisdiction to carry out executions of wanted terrorists. Writing in the British [Guardian](#) newspaper, Tom Wright invited readers to consider the following



scenario:

A group of Irish republican terrorists carries out a bombing raid in London. People are killed and wounded. The group escapes, first to Ireland, then to the US, where they disappear into the sympathetic hinterland of a country where IRA leaders have in the past been welcomed at the White House. Britain cannot extradite them, because of the gross imbalance of the relevant treaty. So far, this seems plausible enough.

But now imagine that the British government, seeing the murderers escape justice, sends an aircraft carrier (always supposing we've still got any) to the Nova Scotia coast. From there, unannounced, two helicopters fly in under the radar to the Boston suburb where the terrorists are holed up. They carry out a daring raid, killing the (unarmed) leaders and making their escape. Westminster celebrates; Washington is furious.

What's the difference between this and the recent events in Pakistan? Answer: American exceptionalism. America is subject to different rules to the rest of the world. By what right? Who says?

Picky, picky. Where does Wright get off, questioning this notion of "exceptionalism" and where it comes from? We inherited it from the Brits, didn't we? And to suggest our government might be furious if what we have been doing in and to other nations were done to us -- all that golden rule stuff. It's so "pre 9-11."

Besides, Washington has to deal now with matters more pressing than nagging questions about its governance of a mere planet. The Senate Indian Affairs Committee has already begun looking into concerns that the CIA code name, "Geronimo," for the mission that nailed bin Laden was "inappropriate" and "devastating" to children.

"The hearing was scheduled well before the Osama bin Laden operation became news, but the concerns over the linking of the name of [Geronimo](#), one of the greatest Native American heroes, with the most hated enemies of the United States is an example of the kinds of issues we intended to address," Loretta Tuell, the committee's chief counsel, said in a written statement prior to last week's hearing. "These inappropriate uses of Native American icons and cultures are prevalent throughout our society, and the impacts to Native and non-Native children are devastating," Tuell said. Other issues the committee is probing include how Wild West shows, Hollywood films, and "Indigenous-themed sports mascots" have affected popular perceptions of Native Americans.

It's not clear what, if anything, the Senators think they can do about all that, but they might try blaming it on Buffalo Bill. He started those Wild West shows as mere entertainment for the unthinking masses. What America does not need now is more mindless entertainment.

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