

# TIMELINE: IS VOLKSWAGEN'S 'BUG' AN EU FEATURE? [UPDATED]



[photo: macwagen via Flickr]

Reports this last week that Volkswagen deployed “defeat devices” – software designed to cheat diesel passenger vehicle emissions controls tests – revealed more than an automobile manufacturing group run amok. One might suspect European Union’s emissions governance after looking at a timeline of events.

NOTE: This timeline is in progress and is subject to updating as new items are identified. [Update 7:00 pm EDT – note added about translation, and note added to citation [4]]

– 1970 –

February 1970 – The Council of the European Communities issued the *Council Directive 70/156/EEC*, which established a mutual baseline for technical specifications of vehicles sold across the member states. This included 3.2.20. *Measures taken against air pollution.*

– 1992 –

July 1992 – The first standard for passenger vehicle emissions, Euro 1 through 6, is implemented. Level Euro 1 for new diesel-fueled vehicles limited emissions of carbon monoxide

(CO) to 2.72 grams per kilometer, with no initial limit on nitrous oxides (NOx) alone, but a combined limit of hydrocarbon+nitrous oxides (HC+NOx) at 0.97 g/km.

– 2004 – 2009 –

Dates Vary – Vehicle manufacturers phased in the remaining Euro 4 through 6 emissions standards.

19 October 2004 – European Environment Agency published a press release, Poor European test standards understate air pollution from cars, which summarized the problem:

Inadequate test standards are underestimating emissions of harmful air pollutants from new cars and evidence indicates that many diesel car owners are making things worse by modifying their engines to increase power, the European Environment Agency warned today.

No specific orders or directions were offered to resolve the problem with emissions test standards.

– 2007 –

(*Month TBD*) – Volkswagen subsidiary Audi launched its “Truth in Engineering” ad campaign. This tagline remains in use to present.

– 2008 –

(*Month TBD*) – VW announced its “Clean Diesel” (TDI model) technology, and began selling it in 4-cylinder diesel Jetta, Beetle, Audi A3, and Golf cars to the US market.

(*Month TBD*) – *Green Car Journal* named VW’s 2009 Jetta TDI “Green Car of the Year.”

– 2009 –

September 2009 – European emission standard Euro 5a for diesel passenger vehicles enacted, limiting CO to 0.50 grams per kilometer, NOx to 0.180 g/km , and HC+NOx to 0.230 g/km.

These levels are a reduction from Euro 4 standard implemented in January 2005 (CO=0.05,

NO<sub>x</sub>=0.25, HC+NO<sub>x</sub>=0.30).

– 2011 –

September 2011 – EU emission standard Euro 5b phased in, using same levels as 5a, but applying a specific particulate measure of 6×10(11th).

December 2011 – Report in *Atmospheric Environment* [1] says,

...The lack of a decrease in the concentration of NO<sub>x</sub> and in particular NO<sub>2</sub> is of concern given European air quality standards are set in law. The lack of decrease in the concentration of NO<sub>x</sub> and NO<sub>2</sub> is also in clear disagreement with emission inventory estimates and projections. ... We find that there are significant discrepancies between current UK/European estimates of NO<sub>x</sub> emissions and those derived from the remote sensing data for several important classes of vehicle. In the case of light duty diesel vehicles it is found that NO<sub>x</sub> emissions have changed little over 20 years or so over a period when the proportion of directly emitted NO<sub>2</sub> has increased substantially. For diesel cars it is found that absolute emissions of NO<sub>x</sub> are higher across all legislative classes than suggested by UK and other European emission inventories. Moreover, the analysis shows that more recent technology diesel cars (Euro 3–5) have clear increasing NO<sub>x</sub> emissions as a function of Vehicle Specific Power, which is absent for older technology vehicles. ... [*emphasis mine*]

– 2012 –

April 2012 – The International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT), an independent nonprofit, published a report, *Discrepancies between type-approval and real-world fuel consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> values in 2001-2011 European passenger cars*. Its summary is rather benign, though it does suggest there are discrepancies in emissions reporting:

This paper compares fuel consumption / CO2 values of passenger cars from different sources and aims at quantifying the discrepancy between laboratory type-approval values and real-world values, including a retrospective analysis for the years 2001-2011 to determine if the gap between the two datasets has increased over time. Potential explanations for the discrepancies found are discussed and possible practical solutions for the future outlined.

The report expressed concerns about consumers' perceptions that fuel efficiency does not match figures reported at time of sale, and that consumers might resist emissions controls because efficiency does not yield an offset in fuel savings.

– 2013 –

November 2013 – An op-ed by Christian Wüst in Der Spiegel, Artists of the Dynamometer (Artisten des Prüfstands), criticized automakers for failing to install particulate filters costing an estimated 100 euros per each gasoline-powered vehicle. Though Wüst had training as a mechanic as well as education in journalism, he may have been fooled by reports on diesel-powered vehicle emissions tests, with regard to soot-particulate filters.

... Die schon beim Diesel bewährten Filter hingegen könnten all diese Trickserei überflüssig machen. Sie fangen mehr als 99 Prozent der Partikel ein. Selbst auf Messfahrt bei Vollgas bliebe ein Benzinauto mit diesem Gerät weit unter dem zulässigen Grenzwert. ...

*[Translation: The already proven diesel filter on the other hand could make all this tricks\* superfluous. They capture more than 99 percent of the particles. Even on test runs at full throttle, a gasoline car with this device is far below the allowable limit. ...]*

(Month TBD) – West Virginia University’s Center for Alternative Fuels, Engines & Emissions (CAFEE) researchers are commissioned by the ICCT to test Volkswagen diesel passenger car emissions.

– 2014 –

May 2014 – WVU’s CAFEE researchers issue a Final Report [2] to ICCT.

(Month TBD) – VW began selling “Clean Diesel” Passats in the US market.

September 2014 – Emissions standard Euro 6 implemented, with CO limit unchanged at 0.50 g/km; NOX 0.080, HC+NOX 0.170, and particulate unchanged at 6×10<sup>11</sup>th).

28 September 2014 – ICCT published a report [3] updating previous work and extending “an analysis of the gap between official and real-world fuel consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for passenger cars in Europe, which reached 38% in 2013 and continues to grow at an accelerated pace.” The report calls for implementation of “new Worldwide Harmonized Light Vehicles Test Procedure (WLTP), a more appropriate test that will produce more realistic type-approval values.”

11 October 2014 – ICCT published another report [4] – in summary:

Documents the discrepancy between type-approval and real-world NOx emissions from new diesel passenger cars. On average, on-road NOx emissions from the vehicles tested for this analysis were about seven times higher than the limits set by the Euro 6 standard. [*emphasis mine*]

– 2015 –

(Month TBD) – VW’s 2015 Passat TDI named by Cars.com the “Eco-friendly Car of the Year.”

18 September 2015 – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued to Volkswagen AG, Audi

AG, and Volkswagen Group of America, Inc., a Notice of Violation (NOV) of the Clean Air Act, alleging:

...four-cylinder Volkswagen and Audi diesel cars from model years 2009-2015 include software that circumvents EPA emissions standards for certain air pollutants. California is separately issuing an In-Use Compliance letter to Volkswagen, and EPA and the California Air Resources Board (CARB) have both initiated investigations based on Volkswagen's alleged actions. ...

20 September 2015 – VW halted sales of some 4-cylinder diesel-powered vehicles in the U.S.

22 September 2015 – VW admitted that 11 million vehicles had been fitted with the “defeat device” software to thwart accurate testing of emissions.

23 September 2015 – VW's CEO Martin Winterkorn resigned; law firm Kirkland & Ellis, which represented BP after the Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010, was retained by VW.

(If you have a point you believe is critical to this timeline, feel free to share it in comments for consideration.)

Initial Conclusion:

On first pass, it appears that the EU did not have adequate mechanisms in place to investigate the disparities between actual emissions and test emission levels reported over the course of the last handful of years. Until the U.S. regulatory body took action, the EU did not appear to respond at all beyond press release(s).

It's not clear what happened between the time ICCT received their commissioned report from WVU-CAFEE and the U.S. EPA gave VW its NOV. This gap in time may have been the normal bureaucratic lag from reporting a problem through the federal government's validation of

the problem – but this gap meant 16 months of additional air pollution and more new vehicles sold with the cheating software on board.

The lack of prompt, effective action despite years of evidence mirrors the EU's response to the refugee crisis. Both issues are at complete odds with the EU's response to Greece's economic crisis. This begs the question whether the EU has outsourced pollution monitoring to the U.S., and whether the EU itself has real function beyond policing economic policy and banking legislation.

We might ask if the disparity in EU reaction to different crises a bug or a feature, or is the EU merely asleep at the wheel? Whatever the case, thousands of U.S. and EU citizens have sickened or died prematurely because of exposure to air pollution, and climate change has only grown worse, setting up conditions for more crises ahead.

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Note:

\* Translation here in question. By *all diese Trickerei überflüssig machen*, did Wüst mean:

- all these tricks are made superfluous, or
- all this trickery is superfluous

In either case, you get the gist, I'm sure.

Citations:

[1] Carslaw, D., Beevers, S., Tate, J., Westmoreland, E., & Williams, M. (2011). Recent evidence concerning higher NO<sub>x</sub> emissions from passenger cars and light duty vehicles. *Atmospheric Environment*, 45(39), 7053-7063.

[2] Thompson, Dr. Gregory J., Daniel K. Carder, Marc C. Besch, Arvind Thiruvengadam, and Hemanth K. Kappanna. In-Use Emissions Testing of Light-Duty Diesel Vehicles in the United States. Report (PDF), May 15, 2014.

[3] Mock, Peter, and Uwe Tietge, Vicente Franco, John German, Anup Bandivadekar (ICCT), Norbert Ligterink (TNO), Udo Lambrecht (IFEU), Jörg

Kühlwein (KISU), and Iddo Riemersma (Sidekick Project Support). From Laboratory to Road: A 2014 Update. *The International Council on Clean Transportation*. 28 Sept. 2014.

[4] Franco, Vicente, and Francisco Posada Sánchez, John German, Peter Mock. Real-world exhaust emissions from modern diesel cars. *The International Council on Clean Transportation*. 11 Oct. 2014. [EDITED: Note this is PART 1: AGGREGATED RESULTS of the entire study; PART 2: DETAILED RESULTS has been requested as it is not available online. ]

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## **POPE FRANCIS NAILS THE RHETORIC OF ADDRESSING CONGRESS**

Pope Francis just finished his address to Congress. It was a masterful speech from a political standpoint, designed to hold a mirror up to America and provide a moral lesson.

He started with an appeal the most conservative in America would applaud, to the foundation of Judeo-Christian law (CSPAN panned to the Moses relief in the chamber as he spoke).

Yours is a work which makes me reflect in two ways on the figure of Moses. On the one hand, the patriarch and lawgiver of the people of Israel symbolizes the need of peoples to keep alive their sense of unity by means of just legislation. On the other, the figure of Moses leads us directly to God and thus to the transcendent dignity of the human being. Moses provides us with a good synthesis of your work: you are asked to protect, by means of the law, the image and likeness fashioned by God on every human face.



He then couched his lessons in a tribute to four Americans – two uncontroversial, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr – and two more radical, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton (but probably obscure to those who would be most offended).

Several times he nodded towards controversial issues, as when he addressed making peace in terms that might relate to Cuba (controversial but still accepted by most who aren't Cuban-American) or might relate to Iran.

I would like to recognize the efforts made in recent months to help overcome historic differences linked to painful episodes of the past. It is my duty to build bridges and to help all men and women, in any way possible, to do the same. When countries which have been at odds resume the path of dialogue – a dialogue which may have been interrupted for the most legitimate of reasons – new opportunities open up for all. This has required, and requires, courage and daring, which is not the same as irresponsibility. A good political leader is one who, with the interests of all in mind, seizes the moment in a spirit of openness and pragmatism. A good political leader always opts to initiate processes rather than possessing spaces (cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 222-223).

Similarly, he spoke of the threats to the family in such a way that might include gay marriage, but he then focused on the inability of young people to form new families.

I will end my visit to your country in Philadelphia, where I will take part in the World Meeting of Families. It is my wish that throughout my visit the family should be a recurrent theme. How essential the family has been to the building of this country! And how worthy

it remains of our support and encouragement! Yet I cannot hide my concern for the family, which is threatened, perhaps as never before, from within and without. Fundamental relationships are being called into question, as is the very basis of marriage and the family. I can only reiterate the importance and, above all, the richness and the beauty of family life.

In particular, I would like to call attention to those family members who are the most vulnerable, the young. For many of them, a future filled with countless possibilities beckons, yet so many others seem disoriented and aimless, trapped in a hopeless maze of violence, abuse and despair. Their problems are our problems. We cannot avoid them. We need to face them together, to talk about them and to seek effective solutions rather than getting bogged down in discussions. At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that we live in a culture which pressures young people not to start a family, because they lack possibilities for the future. Yet this same culture presents others with so many options that they too are dissuaded from starting a family.

By far the shrewdest rhetorical move the Pope made – standing just feet from the Catholic swing vote on the Supreme Court, Anthony Kennedy, as well as John Roberts (Catholic Justices Sam Alito, Clarence Thomas, and Antonin Scalia, all blew off the speech given by the leader of their faith), with the Catholic Vice President and Speaker sitting just behind – calling to “defend life at every stage of its development.” – This brought one of the biggest standing ovations of the speech (though Justices never applaud at these things and did not here), at which point the Pope pivoted

immediately to ending the death penalty.

The Golden Rule also reminds us of our responsibility to protect and defend human life at every stage of its development.

This conviction has led me, from the beginning of my ministry, to advocate at different levels for the global abolition of the death penalty. I am convinced that this way is the best, since every life is sacred, every human person is endowed with an inalienable dignity, and society can only benefit from the rehabilitation of those convicted of crimes. Recently my brother bishops here in the United States renewed their call for the abolition of the death penalty. Not only do I support them, but I also offer encouragement to all those who are convinced that a just and necessary punishment must never exclude the dimension of hope and the goal of rehabilitation.

I hope the Pope's general pro life call, emphasizing the death penalty rather than abortion, will get people who claim to be pro-life to consider all that that entails.

That led – past his expected appeal to stop shitting on Eden and start taking care of the poor – to what was probably the worst received line in the speech, a call to stop trafficking in arms.

Being at the service of dialogue and peace also means being truly determined to minimize and, in the long term, to end the many armed conflicts throughout our world. Here we have to ask ourselves: Why are deadly weapons being sold to those who plan to inflict untold suffering on individuals and society? Sadly, the answer, as we all know, is simply for money: money that is drenched

in blood, often innocent blood. In the face of this shameful and culpable silence, it is our duty to confront the problem and to stop the arms trade.

The Pope went into a Chamber where large numbers are funded by arms merchants and told them they were relying on “money that is drenched in blood.” Very few applauded that line.

Still, the message was about the duty of legislators to serve the common good and on several issues, the Pope avoided directed confrontation, preferring an oblique message that might be interpreted differently by people of all political stripes. Amid the rancor of Congressional debates – about Planned Parenthood, about defunding government (and with it, harming the poor the most), about Iran – it was a remarkably astute message.

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Mr. Vice-President,

Mr. Speaker,

Honorable Members of Congress, Dear Friends,

I am most grateful for your invitation to address this Joint Session of Congress in “the land of the free and the home of the brave”. I would like to think that the reason for this is that I too am a son of this great continent, from which we have all received so much and toward which we share a common responsibility.

Each son or daughter of a given country has a mission, a personal and social responsibility. Your own responsibility as members of Congress is to enable this country, by your legislative activity, to grow as a nation. You are the face of its people, their representatives. You are called to defend and preserve the dignity of your fellow citizens in the tireless and demanding pursuit of the common good, for this is the chief aim of all politics. A political

society endures when it seeks, as a vocation, to satisfy common needs by stimulating the growth of all its members, especially those in situations of greater vulnerability or risk. Legislative activity is always based on care for the people. To this you have been invited, called and convened by those who elected you.

Yours is a work which makes me reflect in two ways on the figure of Moses. On the one hand, the patriarch and lawgiver of the people of Israel symbolizes the need of peoples to keep alive their sense of unity by means of just legislation. On the other, the figure of Moses leads us directly to God and thus to the transcendent dignity of the human being. Moses provides us with a good synthesis of your work: you are asked to protect, by means of the law, the image and likeness fashioned by God on every human face.

Today I would like not only to address you, but through you the entire people of the United States. Here, together with their representatives, I would like to take this opportunity to dialogue with the many thousands of men and women who strive each day to do an honest day's work, to bring home their daily bread, to save money and –one step at a time – to build a better life for their families. These are men and women who are not concerned simply with paying their taxes, but in their own quiet way sustain the life of society. They generate solidarity by their actions, and they create organizations which offer a helping hand to those most in need.

I would also like to enter into dialogue with the many elderly persons who are a storehouse of wisdom forged by experience, and who seek in many ways, especially through volunteer work, to share their stories and their insights. I know that many of them are retired, but still active; they keep working to build up this land. I also want to dialogue with all those young people who are working to realize their great and noble aspirations, who are not led astray by facile

proposals, and who face difficult situations, often as a result of immaturity on the part of many adults. I wish to dialogue with all of you, and I would like to do so through the historical memory of your people.

My visit takes place at a time when men and women of good will are marking the anniversaries of several great Americans. The complexities of history and the reality of human weakness notwithstanding, these men and women, for all their many differences and limitations, were able by hard work and self-sacrifice – some at the cost of their lives – to build a better future. They shaped fundamental values which will endure forever in the spirit of the American people. A people with this spirit can live through many crises, tensions and conflicts, while always finding the resources to move forward, and to do so with dignity. These men and women offer us a way of seeing and interpreting reality. In honoring their memory, we are inspired, even amid conflicts, and in the here and now of each day, to draw upon our deepest cultural reserves.

I would like to mention four of these Americans: Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton.

This year marks the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, the guardian of liberty, who labored tirelessly that “this nation, under God, [might] have a new birth of freedom”. Building a future of freedom requires love of the common good and cooperation in a spirit of subsidiarity and solidarity.

All of us are quite aware of, and deeply worried by, the disturbing social and political situation of the world today. Our world is increasingly a place of violent conflict, hatred and brutal atrocities, committed even in the name of God and of religion. We know that no religion is immune from forms of individual delusion or ideological extremism. This means that we must be especially attentive to every

type of fundamentalism, whether religious or of any other kind. A delicate balance is required to combat violence perpetrated in the name of a religion, an ideology or an economic system, while also safeguarding religious freedom, intellectual freedom and individual freedoms. But there is another temptation which we must especially guard against: the simplistic reductionism which sees only good or evil; or, if you will, the righteous and sinners. The contemporary world, with its open wounds which affect so many of our brothers and sisters, demands that we confront every form of polarization which would divide it into these two camps. We know that in the attempt to be freed of the enemy without, we can be tempted to feed the enemy within. To imitate the hatred and violence of tyrants and murderers is the best way to take their place. That is something which you, as a people, reject.

Our response must instead be one of hope and healing, of peace and justice. We are asked to summon the courage and the intelligence to resolve today's many geopolitical and economic crises. Even in the developed world, the effects of unjust structures and actions are all too apparent. Our efforts must aim at restoring hope, righting wrongs, maintaining commitments, and thus promoting the well-being of individuals and of peoples. We must move forward together, as one, in a renewed spirit of fraternity and solidarity, cooperating generously for the common good.

The challenges facing us today call for a renewal of that spirit of cooperation, which has accomplished so much good throughout the history of the United States. The complexity, the gravity and the urgency of these challenges demand that we pool our resources and talents, and resolve to support one another, with respect for our differences and our convictions of conscience.

In this land, the various religious denominations have greatly contributed to

building and strengthening society. It is important that today, as in the past, the voice of faith continue to be heard, for it is a voice of fraternity and love, which tries to bring out the best in each person and in each society. Such cooperation is a powerful resource in the battle to eliminate new global forms of slavery, born of grave injustices which can be overcome only through new policies and new forms of social consensus.

Here I think of the political history of the United States, where democracy is deeply rooted in the mind of the American people. All political activity must serve and promote the good of the human person and be based on respect for his or her dignity. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (Declaration of Independence, 4 July 1776). If politics must truly be at the service of the human person, it follows that it cannot be a slave to the economy and finance. Politics is, instead, an expression of our compelling need to live as one, in order to build as one the greatest common good: that of a community which sacrifices particular interests in order to share, in justice and peace, its goods, its interests, its social life. I do not underestimate the difficulty that this involves, but I encourage you in this effort.

Here too I think of the march which Martin Luther King led from Selma to Montgomery fifty years ago as part of the campaign to fulfill his "dream" of full civil and political rights for African Americans. That dream continues to inspire us all. I am happy that America continues to be, for many, a land of "dreams". Dreams which lead to action, to participation, to commitment. Dreams which awaken what is deepest and truest in the life of a people.

In recent centuries, millions of people came to this land to pursue their dream of building a



future in freedom. We, the people of this continent, are not fearful of foreigners, because most of us were once foreigners. I say this to you as the son of immigrants, knowing that so many of you are also descended from immigrants. Tragically, the rights of those who were here long before us were not always respected. For those peoples and their nations, from the heart of American democracy, I wish to reaffirm my highest esteem and appreciation. Those first contacts were often turbulent and violent, but it is difficult to judge the past by the criteria of the present. Nonetheless, when the stranger in our midst appeals to us, we must not repeat the sins and the errors of the past. We must resolve now to live as nobly and as justly as possible, as we educate new generations not to turn their back on our "neighbors" and everything around us. Building a nation calls us to recognize that we must constantly relate to others, rejecting a mindset of hostility in order to adopt one of reciprocal subsidiarity, in a constant effort to do our best. I am confident that we can do this.

Our world is facing a refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War. This presents us with great challenges and many hard decisions. On this continent, too, thousands of persons are led to travel north in search of a better life for themselves and for their loved ones, in search of greater opportunities. Is this not what we want for our own children? We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal. We need to avoid a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome. Let us remember the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Mt 7:12).

This Rule points us in a clear direction. Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let

us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities. The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us. The Golden Rule also reminds us of our responsibility to protect and defend human life at every stage of its development.

This conviction has led me, from the beginning of my ministry, to advocate at different levels for the global abolition of the death penalty. I am convinced that this way is the best, since every life is sacred, every human person is endowed with an inalienable dignity, and society can only benefit from the rehabilitation of those convicted of crimes. Recently my brother bishops here in the United States renewed their call for the abolition of the death penalty. Not only do I support them, but I also offer encouragement to all those who are convinced that a just and necessary punishment must never exclude the dimension of hope and the goal of rehabilitation.

In these times when social concerns are so important, I cannot fail to mention the Servant of God Dorothy Day, who founded the Catholic Worker Movement. Her social activism, her passion for justice and for the cause of the oppressed, were inspired by the Gospel, her faith, and the example of the saints.

How much progress has been made in this area in so many parts of the world! How much has been done in these first years of the third millennium to raise people out of extreme poverty! I know that you share my conviction that much more still needs to be done, and that in times of crisis and economic hardship a spirit of global solidarity must not be lost. At the same time I would encourage you to keep in mind all those people around us who are trapped in a cycle of poverty. They too need to be given

hope. The fight against poverty and hunger must be fought constantly and on many fronts, especially in its causes. I know that many Americans today, as in the past, are working to deal with this problem.

It goes without saying that part of this great effort is the creation and distribution of wealth. The right use of natural resources, the proper application of technology and the harnessing of the spirit of enterprise are essential elements of an economy which seeks to be modern, inclusive and sustainable. "Business is a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving the world. It can be a fruitful source of prosperity for the area in which it operates, especially if it sees the creation of jobs as an essential part of its service to the common good" (Laudato Si', 129). This common good also includes the earth, a central theme of the encyclical which I recently wrote in order to "enter into dialogue with all people about our common home" (ibid., 3). "We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all" (ibid., 14).

In *Laudato Si'*, I call for a courageous and responsible effort to "redirect our steps" (ibid., 61), and to avert the most serious effects of the environmental deterioration caused by human activity. I am convinced that we can make a difference and I have no doubt that the United States – and this Congress – have an important role to play. Now is the time for courageous actions and strategies, aimed at implementing a "culture of care" (ibid., 231) and "an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature" (ibid., 139). "We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology" (ibid., 112); "to devise intelligent ways of... developing and limiting our power" (ibid., 78); and to put technology "at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social,

more integral" (ibid., 112). In this regard, I am confident that America's outstanding academic and research institutions can make a vital contribution in the years ahead.

A century ago, at the beginning of the Great War, which Pope Benedict XV termed a "pointless slaughter", another notable American was born: the Cistercian monk Thomas Merton. He remains a source of spiritual inspiration and a guide for many people. In his autobiography he wrote: "I came into the world. Free by nature, in the image of God, I was nevertheless the prisoner of my own violence and my own selfishness, in the image of the world into which I was born. That world was the picture of Hell, full of men like myself, loving God, and yet hating him; born to love him, living instead in fear of hopeless self-contradictory hungers". Merton was above all a man of prayer, a thinker who challenged the certitudes of his time and opened new horizons for souls and for the Church. He was also a man of dialogue, a promoter of peace between peoples and religions.

From this perspective of dialogue, I would like to recognize the efforts made in recent months to help overcome historic differences linked to painful episodes of the past. It is my duty to build bridges and to help all men and women, in any way possible, to do the same. When countries which have been at odds resume the path of dialogue – a dialogue which may have been interrupted for the most legitimate of reasons – new opportunities open up for all. This has required, and requires, courage and daring, which is not the same as irresponsibility. A good political leader is one who, with the interests of all in mind, seizes the moment in a spirit of openness and pragmatism. A good political leader always opts to initiate processes rather than possessing spaces (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 222-223).

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throughout our world. Here we have to ask ourselves: Why are deadly weapons being sold to those who plan to inflict untold suffering on individuals and society? Sadly, the answer, as we all know, is simply for money: money that is drenched in blood, often innocent blood. In the face of this shameful and culpable silence, it is our duty to confront the problem and to stop the arms trade.

Three sons and a daughter of this land, four individuals and four dreams: Lincoln, liberty; Martin Luther King, liberty in plurality and non-exclusion; Dorothy Day, social justice and the rights of persons; and Thomas Merton, the capacity for dialogue and openness to God.

Four representatives of the American people.

I will end my visit to your country in Philadelphia, where I will take part in the World Meeting of Families. It is my wish that throughout my visit the family should be a recurrent theme. How essential the family has been to the building of this country! And how worthy it remains of our support and encouragement! Yet I cannot hide my concern for the family, which is threatened, perhaps as never before, from within and without. Fundamental relationships are being called into question, as is the very basis of marriage and the family. I can only reiterate the importance and, above all, the richness and the beauty of family life.

In particular, I would like to call attention to those family members who are the most vulnerable, the young. For many of them, a future filled with countless possibilities beckons, yet so many others seem disoriented and aimless, trapped in a hopeless maze of violence, abuse and despair. Their problems are our problems. We cannot avoid them. We need to face them together, to talk about them and to seek effective solutions rather than getting bogged down in discussions. At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that we live in a culture which pressures young people not to

start a family, because they lack possibilities for the future. Yet this same culture presents others with so many options that they too are dissuaded from starting a family.

A nation can be considered great when it defends liberty as Lincoln did, when it fosters a culture which enables people to “dream” of full rights for all their brothers and sisters, as Martin Luther King sought to do; when it strives for justice and the cause of the oppressed, as Dorothy Day did by her tireless work, the fruit of a faith which becomes dialogue and sows peace in the contemplative style of Thomas Merton.

In these remarks I have sought to present some of the richness of your cultural heritage, of the spirit of the American people. It is my desire that this spirit continue to develop and grow, so that as many young people as possible can inherit and dwell in a land which has inspired so many people to dream.

God bless America!

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## **PARTNERING WITH THE KIWIS, NSA “PROTECTS” US FROM CLIMATE RESISTORS?**

The Intercept has what will be the first in a series of partnering articles with New Zealand’s great surveillance reporter Nicky Hager on the role of New Zealand’s SIGINT agency, Government Security Communications Bureau, in the Five Eyes dragnet. As part of it, they target south Pacific islands that its hard to understand as a threat to anyone.

Since 2009, the Government  
Communications Security Bureau

intelligence base at Waihopai has moved to “full-take collection”, indiscriminately intercepting Asia-Pacific communications and providing them en masse to the NSA through the controversial [NSA intelligence system XKeyscore](#), which is used to monitor emails and internet browsing habits.

[snip]

The documents identify nearly two dozen countries that are intensively spied on by the GCSB. On the target list are most of New Zealand’s Pacific neighbours, including small and vulnerable nations such as Tuvalu, Nauru, Kiribati and Samoa.

Other South Pacific GCSB targets are Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Fiji, Tonga and French Polynesia. The spy agency intercepts the flows of communications between these countries and then breaks them down into individual emails, phone calls, social media messages and other types of communications. All this intelligence is immediately made available to the NSA, which is based in Maryland, near Washington, DC.

Effectively, the NSA forces GCSB to spy on these teeny tiny countries in the middle of the Pacific in order to benefit from our dragnet.

And for what?!?!

Even the CIA acknowledges that Nauru has no military, and it somewhat optimistically claims Nauru has no international disputes.

<b>Military :: NAURU</b>	
<b>Military branches:</b>	no regular military forces (2012)
<b>Manpower available for military service:</b>	<b>males age 16-49:</b> 2,542 (2010 est.)
<b>Manpower fit for military service:</b>	<b>males age 16-49:</b> 1,823 <b>females age 16-49:</b> 2,034 (2010 est.)
<b>Manpower reaching militarily significant age annually:</b>	<b>male:</b> 74 <b>female:</b> 78 (2010 est.)
<b>Military - note:</b>	Nauru maintains no defense forces; under an informal agreement, defense is the responsibility of Australia
<b>Transnational Issues :: NAURU</b>	
<b>Disputes - international:</b>	none

The same is true of Tuvalu.

<b>Military :: TUVALU</b>	
<b>Military branches:</b>	no regular military forces; Tuvalu Police Force (2012)
<b>Manpower fit for military service:</b>	<b>males age 16-49:</b> 2,021 <b>females age 16-49:</b> 2,026 (2010 est.)
<b>Manpower reaching militarily significant age annually:</b>	<b>male:</b> 119 <b>female:</b> 111 (2010 est.)
<b>Transnational Issues :: TUVALU</b>	
<b>Disputes - international:</b>	none

Both have a dispute, of course. The rich lifestyles of the rest of the world (which Tuvalu shared in for a period of Phosphate exploitation) threaten to wipe these nations off the face of the earth with rising ocean levels. To the extent they might be threats to the US, it is because the citizens of Tuvalu and Nauru speak with the moral authority of some of the first peoples who will be wiped off the face of the earth because of climate change.

Aside from that, Tuvalu has its own Internet domain; Nauru has become a tax haven.

Still, it's hard to believe that the most powerful country in the world, which has an active military population that is 136 times the population of these countries, is really threatened by either of these countries.

But nevertheless, we're forcing New Zealand to get "full take" from them, as the price of admission to our spying club.

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# AMERICAN HEGEMONY: DELIVERING “UNPREDICTABLE INSTABILITY” THE WORLD OVER

I love Global Threat Hearings and curse you Richard Burr for holding the Senate Intelligence Committee's hearing in secret.

At least John McCain had the courage to invite James Clapper for what might have been (but weren't) hard questions in public in front of Senate Armed Services Committee Thursday.

Clapper started with a comment that was not prominent in (though it definitely underscored) his written testimony (Update: Here's the transcript of his as-delivered statement.)

Unpredictable instability is the new normal. The year 2014 saw the highest rate of political instability since 1992. The most deaths as a result of state-sponsored mass killings since the early 1990s. And the highest number of refugees and internally displaced persons (or IDPs) since World War II. Roughly half of the world's currently stable countries are at some risk of instability over the next two years.

It's a damning catalog. All the more so given that the US has been the world's unquestioned hegemon since that period in the early 1990s when everything has been getting worse, since that period when the first President Bush promised a thousand points of light.

And while the US can't be held responsible for all the instability in the world right now, it owns a lot of it: serial invasions in the Middle East and the coddling of Israel account for many

of the refugees (though there's no telling what would have happened with the hundred thousand killed and millions of refugees in Syria had the second President Bush not invaded Iraq, had he taken Bashar al-Assad up on an offer to partner against al Qaeda, had we managed the aftermath of the Arab Spring differently).

US-backed neoliberalism and austerity – and the underlying bank crisis that provided the excuse for it – has contributed to instability elsewhere, and probably underlies those countries that Clapper thinks might grow unstable in the next year.

We're already seeing instability arising from climate change; the US owns some of the blame for that, and more for squandering its leadership role on foreign adventures rather than pushing a solution to that more urgent problem (Clapper, by the way, thinks climate change is a problem but unlike Obama doesn't consider it the most serious one).

There are, obviously, a lot of other things going on. Clapper talked admiringly of China's modernization of its military, driven by domestically developed programs, an obvious development when a country becomes the manufacturing powerhouse of the world. But China's growing influence comes largely in the wake of, and in part because of, stupid choices the US has made.

There was, predictably, a lot of discussion about cyberthreats, even featuring Senate Intelligence Committee member Angus King arguing we need an offensive threat (we've got one – and have been launching pre-emptive strikes for 9 years now – as he would know if he paid attention to briefings or read the Intercept or the New York Times) to deter others from attacking us with cyberweapons.

Almost everyone at the hearing wanted to talk about Iran, without realizing that a peace deal with it would finally take a step towards more stability (until our allies the Saudis start

getting belligerent as a result).

Still, even in spite of the fact that Clapper started with this inventory of instability, there seemed zero awareness of what a damning indictment that is for the world's hegemon. Before we address all these other problems, shouldn't we focus some analysis on why American hegemony went so badly wrong?

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## THE FOSSIL FUELED MILITARY BATTLES CLIMATE CHANGE

"The responsibility of the Department of Defense is the security of our country." Thus begins DOD's 2014 Climate Change Adaption Road Map, released yesterday to much acclaim.

But then two paragraphs later, it refers to climate change as a "threat multiplier," not a threat.

In our defense strategy, we refer to climate change as a "threat multiplier" because it has the potential to exacerbate many of the challenges we are dealing with today – from infectious disease to terrorism. We are already beginning to see some of these impacts.

A few more paragraphs later, it admits this report primarily looks at climate change's impact on DOD, not its impact on the US.

Our first step in planning for these challenges is to identify the effects of climate change on the Department with tangible and specific metrics, using the best

available science.

I don't mean to be churlish – and I do recognize that DOD is quite forward-thinking, among government agencies for its awareness of and initial preparations for climate change.

But that's sort of the point. This is as good as it gets. And only secondarily does even one of the most progressive agencies in government, with respect to climate change, get to this kind of admission.

Maintaining stability within and among other nations is an important means of avoiding full-scale military conflicts. The impacts of climate change may cause instability in other countries by impairing access to food and water, damaging infrastructure, spreading disease, uprooting and displacing large numbers of people, compelling mass migration, interrupting commercial activity, or restricting electricity availability. These developments could undermine already-fragile governments that are unable to respond effectively or challenge currently-stable governments, as well as increasing competition and tension between countries vying for limited resources. These gaps in governance can create an avenue for extremist ideologies and conditions that foster terrorism. Here in the U.S., state and local governments responding to the effects of extreme weather may seek increased [Defense Support of Civil Authorities].

Climate change is going to be hell. It's going to cause wars. And it will even require addition DOD resources domestically, in the form of Reserve troops to help local authorities cope with emergencies. And – though DOD doesn't say it, certainly not in its publicly released

document – the US is one of the places that will struggle with governance of the internal effects of climate change, even if they'll do better than, say, Bangladesh or some harder hit countries. Certainly the US is no model of proactive government preparing for these disasters!

Meanwhile, here's what else DOD does in the name of fulfilling its responsibility for the security of the country. (h/t OTB)

To date, there have been approximately 240 coalition air strikes against ISIS targets in Iraq and Syria since air operations began nearly a month ago.

[snip]

What goes underreported and, hence, underappreciated, is the magnitude of the overall air operation being conducted in support of or in addition to the actual air strikes against targets on the ground. Simply put, behind every successful air strike is a massive supporting infrastructure of aircraft, ground operations and planning activities. Air strikes are not conducted in isolation. Every strike package consists not only of bomb-carrying aircraft but others providing the protection, electronic warfare support, aerial refueling, battle space management and intelligence. The 240 strikes in Iraq and Syria were supported by some 3,800 aircraft sorties, 1,700 tanker flights and over 700 ISR sorties. There have also been thousands of flights by transport aircraft, C-17s and C-130s making up the largest fraction, providing humanitarian relief but also moving personnel and essential supplies into the region.

Behind all these aircraft stands the supporting personnel and infrastructure necessary to any air operation. These

range from ground crews and air traffic controllers to maintainers, armorers and intel personnel. Then there are the people in the air operations center who put together the air tasking order that details all the air activities for a 24-hour period. There are more people and more complexity when it is a joint and coalition operation.

Doing the math, this means there have been around 20 supporting sorties for each strike conducted. This is in a fairly benign environment.

That is, even while DOD notes – laudably, given how dysfunctional our government is – that climate change is going to destabilize countries and will even require deployment of the Reserve to limit instability in our own country, it is burning up fossil fuels at an alarming rate, even in its relatively circumscribed operation against ISIL.

This report edges us closer to the point where we call climate change a threat to the US, rather than just a threat multiplier to all the other things looming out there.

But until we're there – until we recognize that climate change has killed far more people in the US since 9/11 than terrorism – we will continue to burn fossil fuel as a first or second response to threats on the other side of the world.

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## **DAY AFTER ESCALATING CLIMATE DAMAGING**

# WAR, OBAMA CITES “BEYOND VIETNAM” ON CLIMATE URGENCY

In a column at Salon, I compare two executive actions President Obama took this week: escalating the war against ISIL (and expanding it to “the Khorasan group”), and including climate resilience as one consideration in foreign aid projects.

The war escalation makes it quite clear that Obama believes he has expansive Executive Authority. Which makes it all the more pathetic that he’s still piddling around with using that authority to respond to a far more urgent threat, climate change.

Perhaps more appalling, however, is how he rolled these out. The day after escalating a war that will burn vast amounts of fossil fuel at a speech at the UN Climate Summit, Obama invoked Martin Luther King, Jr’s “Beyond Vietnam” speech to describe the urgency of the problem he is largely ignoring.

In his climate speech, the president rather ironically invoked Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech “**Beyond Vietnam.**” In it, the civil rights leader described how we did then what we still do now in the Middle East: “[W]e increased our troop commitments in support of governments which were singularly corrupt, inept, and without popular support.” The day after Obama escalated a war on the other side of the world, he cited King’s radically anti-war speech to invoke the urgency of fighting climate change, not terrorism. “We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now,” the original speech went. “[T]here is such a thing as being too late,” were

the words the president cited.

And yet, having invoked that urgency, the president took executive action that – compared with his executive actions that expanded a war – was timid and inadequate to the climate threat facing the nation and the globe.

The president clearly believes he has expansive authorities to protect the country. Given that's the case, why isn't he heeding Dr. King's call to meet the urgency of the moment with appropriate action?

Obama is clearly making a choice to use his Executive Authority to respond to less urgent threats.

And all the while he's invoking the words of King to put a gloss on his own inaction.

[Click through for more.](#)

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## **DICK CHENEY'S INTERESTS: NOT OURS**

In Salon today, I've joined the chorus of people objecting to PapaDick Cheney and his spawn Liz BabyDick's op-ed claiming of Obama that, "Rarely has a U.S. president been so wrong about so much at the expense of so many."

In addition to reviewing some of the so wrong things Cheney said 12 years ago to get us into Iraq, I look closely at two things few others have, both suggesting certain things about whose interests Cheney claims to represent.

First, while claiming to speak for America's interests in Iraq, he actually cites the leaders of Middle Eastern countries.



Clearly, his temper tantrum serves, in part, to distract from his own culpability.

But note who else's views Cheney cites? He claims he heard "a constant refrain in capitals from the Persian Gulf to Israel," complaining about Obama's actions. He describes a senior official in an Arab capital laying out ISIS' aspirations on a map. He portrays those same figures in the Middle East demanding, "Why is he abandoning your friends?" "Why is he doing deals with your enemies?"

And he does so even while he mocks the notion of actually doing something about climate change, a threat that (in the form of extreme weather events) more immediately threatens Americans today.

Even while Cheney parrots the interests of Middle Eastern leaders and conflates their interests with America's, he scoffs at Obama's (belated) efforts to address a far more immediate risk for America, climate change. "Iraq is at risk of falling to a radical Islamic terror group and Mr. Obama is talking climate change," Cheney complains.

ISIS may be overrunning Iraqi cities, but extreme weather events are endangering cities in the United States and across the world. Much of the American West is struggling with extreme drought. Cheney, however, would have the president ignore this threat and instead prioritize the concerns he heard from his friends in the Middle East.

ISIS' actions in Iraq are troubling – though it's not clear that the US can do anything to fix it, certainly not now.

But the US has real problems here at home that

threaten American lives and well-being. We really need to spend time working on our own governance before we decide to re-govern another country on the other side of the world.

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## REPUBLICANS REFUSE TO EXPAND CLIMATE CHANGE ANALYSIS IN INTELLIGENCE AUTHORIZATION

I will have a few posts on the Intelligence Authorization that passed the House Intelligence Committee last week. (h/t Steven Aftergood)

But before I talked about what made it into the bill, I'd like to highlight what isn't in it: language requiring the Intelligence Community to consider climate change. The minority views reveal,

One of the bill's weaknesses is that it does not do enough to enhance analysis of the national security implications of climate change, which the Intelligence Community refers to as environmental indications and warning. Whether by driving competition for scarce [sic] resources, by opening the Arctic, or by increasing sea level and storm surge near our naval installations, climate change will have profound, destabilizing effects which need to be understood, anticipated, and accounted for. There may be disagreement about the causes of climate change, but the national security consequences are so significant that they cannot be ignored.

The intelligence community has been delving into this area in recent years (and appear to have renamed climate change “environmental indications and warning”). But thus far, the IC has stopped short of treating climate change as the threat to the US it clearly represents.

It appears Democrats on HPSCI tried to change that. And Republicans refused.

Someday the climate deniers will be held responsible for leaving our country vulnerable. And the Democrats will have left a record of those who should be held responsible.

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## **MASSIVE WILDFIRES IN SOCAL MONTHS AHEAD OF SEASON, BUT AL GORE IS STILL FAT**

I remember moving to Pasadena in September of 1979. I was told that our cheap student apartment had a good view of Mount Wilson out the living room window, but smoke and smog obscured it until nightfall, when flames on the ridge brought it into view. That was actually a very small fire, but the memory of those flames and the falling ash persist as my introduction to living in California. Throughout my years in California (we moved to the northern part of the state in 1983 and stayed there for ten years), I recall the rhythm of reliable late winter storms and spring showers giving way to dry summers that eventually turned into wildfire season late in the summer as the spring flush of growth in the hills dried out.

But that reliable rhythm in California faces serious disruption. The state is in its third year of extreme drought and fires are raging

several months ahead of schedule. Consider this from the Governor's Office, published on May 5, before the current outbreak of severe fires:

It is dry in the foothills and southern California as during a typical July or August, the peak of the fire season. Even in a region used to wildfires, *this* year appears poised to be especially destructive. California is facing its third dry year; thirsty grasses, parched brush and trees are more susceptible to burn, so fuel is ready.

/snip/

"The historic drought that is upon us makes Wildfire Preparedness more critical than ever," said Cal OES Director Mark Ghilarducci. "There's a very high likelihood of well-above-normal fires and perhaps a chance of longer-lasting fires, which require more resources in order to fight them."

But it's not just the current drought that is causing fires in California to be worse than ever:

So far this year, California has already experienced more wildfire activity than normal. As of April 26th, the state has recorded more than 1,100 fires; that's more than double the average of the previous five years. Even before this year's drought, forest officials were reporting a longer fire season and more catastrophic mega-fires in California and other western states. More than half of California's worst fires in recorded history have occurred since 2002.

Think about that. The state's list of worst fires can be found [here](#) (pdf). The records go back to 1932, but in the more than 80 years of

those records, 11 of the worst 20 have occurred in the 11 years from 2002 to 2013.

The current outbreak is worst around San Diego. From CNN:

San Diego County is hoping for a break Thursday, a day after wildfires ravaged the landscape, threatening homes, universities, a military base and a nuclear power plant.

“Let’s hope for a calm day,” said County Supervisor Dianne Jacob, who marveled at the outbreak that saw San Diego go from one wildfire to nine, charring more than 9,000 acres.

That hope for a calm day is unlikely to be met, as forecasters are saying today will be the hottest day this week. And yesterday was a flurry of activity for emergency services:

[Alert San Diego](#), a countywide notification system, sent out nearly 122,000 emergency telephone notifications on Wednesday as the wildfires sprang up.

Carlsbad alone issued 23,000 evacuation notices. Thousands of students won’t have classes on Thursday due to the continuing threat; [California State University-San Marcos](#) canceled all activities through Friday, including commencement. Students in the [San Diego Unified School District](#) will also get a break from the books.

Numerous roads have been shut down while others have become clogged with people trying to escape.

/snip/

Another fire ignited around Camp Pendleton, a mammoth Marine base and training facility for multiple military branches, prompting evacuations of the

O'Neill Heights Housing, the De Luz Child Development Center and Mary Fay Pendleton Elementary School, the Marines said.

Another blaze burned in the community of Fallbrook, adjacent to the military post, which is the West Coast boot camp for enlistees.

Cal Fire said the wildfire charred 6,000 acres around the military facilities.

A precautionary evacuation was ordered at the nearby San Onofre nuclear power plant, which has been offline for two years because of another wildfire.

Southern California Edison spokeswoman Maureen Brown said "there is no safety threat," though.

Isn't that something? San Onofre got knocked offline over two years ago by another wildfire and is under attack again before it can get back up and running.

But don't you dare blame these developments on climate change. Don't you know how fat Al Gore is?

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## 50 YEARS: THAT DAY, JFK AND TODAY



Where were you fifty years ago today? If you were old enough to remember at all,

then you undoubtedly remember where you were on Friday November 22, 1963 at 12:30 pm central standard time.

I was at a desk, two from the rear, in the left most row, in Mrs. Hollingshead's first grade class. Each kid had their own desk, and they were big, made out of solid wood and heavy. They had to be heavy, of course, because they were going to protect us when we ducked and covered from a Soviet nuclear strike. There were, as there were in most elementary school classrooms of the day, a large clock and a big speaker on the wall up above the teacher's desk.

I can't remember what subject we were working on, but the principal's voice suddenly came over the loudspeaker. This alone meant there was something important up, because that only usually occurred for morning announcements at the start of the school day and for special occasions. The voice of Mr. Flake, the principal, was somber, halting and different; perhaps detached is the word. There was a prelude to the effect that this was a serious moment and that the teachers should make sure that all students were at their desks and that all, both young and old, were to pay attention.

There had occurred a tragic and shocking event that we all needed to know about. Our attention was required.

Then the hammer fell and our little world literally caved in.

President John Fitzgerald Kennedy had been assassinated. Shot and killed in Dallas Texas. Then without a moment's pause, we were told that the nation was safe, Vice-President Johnson was in charge, the government was functioning and that we need not have any concerns about our own safety. We were not at war.

Twenty four some odd little hearts stopped, plus one from Mrs. Hollingshead. You could literally feel the life being sucked out of the room like air lost to a vacuum. Many of us began looking

out the window, because no matter what Mr. Flake said, if our President was dead, we were at war and the warheads were coming. They had to be in the sky. They were going to be there.

Unlike the hokey color coded terror alerts, ginned up fear mongering of Bush/Cheney, Ashcroft and Ridge, and today the terroristic fearmongering of Keith Alexander, James Clapper, Mike Rogers and Dianne Feinstein, things were dead nuts serious at the height of the cold war. If President Kennedy had been killed, we were at war; the missiles were on their way. Had to be. Looking back, the school officials and teachers had to have been as devastated and afraid as we were, yet they were remarkable. They kept themselves in one piece, held us together, talked and comforted us into calm.

We had not been back in class from lunch break for long; it was still early afternoon in the west. Before the announcement was made, the decision by the school officials had been made to send us home. The busses would be lined up and ready to go in twenty minutes. Until then there would be a brief quiet period and then the teachers would talk to us and further calm the situation. Then off we would go to try to forge a path with our families, who would need us as much as we needed them.

Except for me and a handful of other kids. My mother was an educator and was not at home, so I and a few other similarly situated kids were kept at school until we could be picked up. Somehow it wasn't right to be inside, so we all, along with another teacher, Mrs. Thomas, went outside and sat underneath a large palm tree in front of the school. We talked about how it could be that our President, our hero, our king, was dead. Maybe he wasn't really dead, maybe it was all a mistake. Maybe Soviet troops were on their way; possibly tanks. This kind of excited me and the other boys; we perked up at this thought, tanks were cool. The Russians probably had awesome tanks. Each minute that passed made us feel a little better because there were no



missiles in the sky. That was a good sign.

In about half an hour, maybe an hour, I don't know any more, my mother drove up and off we went. My mother was also reassuring. It was good to be with her; mom saying it would all be alright meant a lot. Once home, we ate and sat dumbstruck and transfixed in front of the Curtis Mathes console television the rest of the afternoon and night. We watched Walter Cronkite on CBS and Chet Huntley and David Brinkley on NBC. These men were giants of news and journalism; to say that they don't make them like that anymore is a understatement of untold proportion. Things slowly, but surely, stabilized; but it took awhile. A long while.

Well, that was my day fifty years ago. What was your day? Take a moment and reflect back and share with those of us that know the traumatic event, and help those who are younger to understand what the day was like. The palpable sorrow. The sinking, abiding fear. The comfort of teachers, friends and family. And what it means to you today, on this anniversary.

The last time I wrote this basic post, five years ago today, I ended with, inter alia, these words:

There may be another Kennedy like figure in our midst, Barack Obama. He stands to assume office in a similarly, albeit it from different factors, troubled time. The world roils and America's existence hangs in the lurch; not from Soviet missiles, but our own selfishness, avarice and stupidity.

Well, that was hopelessly idealistic, and not yet tempered by knowledge of the real Obama that would govern, as opposed to the false "Hope and Change" guy who captured the imagination and dreams of liberals and well meaning people throughout the land. We sit in a different posture today.

There is still hope; but the real change,

whether on authoritarian government, government surveillance, financial reform, liberal judicial philosophy, environmental protection, income inequality, and a host of other critical concerns still is yet to be seen.

On the fiftieth anniversary of one of our worst days, let there be hope for better ones ahead.

[Most all of this post was taken from a previous one I did five years ago. I cannot kick the vivid memories I have of November 22, 1963 as a child. It is still all I think of when I think of this day. It is that seared into who, and what I am. So, absent a few additions, it is set forth again herein]