

Letter from Woolwich by William Shepherd ¹

On Wednesday 22nd May 2013 a White British soldier was hacked to death close to his barracks in Woolwich, ten miles south-east of the centre of London. The 'alleged' assailants (though there was no shortage of witnesses and many videos of the assassination) were two radicalised Black English Islam converts...one pictured below. The British government convened *COBRA*...but let the Prime Minister go ahead with his holiday in Ibiza.



For a week after the incident the British media went into overdrive with pages and pages of comment and opinion, most of it hypocrisy and Princess Diana hysteria when not militaristic jingoism, demanding tightening up of anything involving the police, the military and the intelligence services.

France had its own incident around this time when a French soldier on patrol in Paris was jumped on from behind by a White Islam convert who jabbed him in the neck narrowly missing the artery. Hardly any mention of this reached the British public.

There are two ways to react to the Woolwich assassination. One is sheer anger and disgust plus a demand for the government to ratchet up the war on terror by eavesdropping on every citizen's phone calls and email messages. The other is to use our brains and our imagination to understand why young Muslims can be turned into murderers. The shrill attempt to bully the British into losing all sense of proportion by reacting the first way will never work. People are not stupid. They know what is going on.

They may appear to submit to these soft bully-boy tactics in posh voices from Whitehall, Westminster and Fleet Street. But this is not acquiescence. Most ordinary people think the second way. They know full well that Britain's young men and women should never have been sent to Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya...Syria, Iran.

Ordinary people know that we have no business spreading mayhem over Africa, the Mediterranean and in Mesopotamia and beyond. And they are increasingly sceptical about the jingoism behind the demands of the political establishment ² that they send their sons and daughters away to be slaughtered and maimed in the name of an *Old Patriotism*.

The *New Patriots* have broken free from the *Treaty of Westphalia* ³ and see *Diasporas* and not *States*. When told to choose between their country and their friends, they will choose their friends. My nation is the circle of my friends. And they are starting to ask who benefits from wars. ⁴



Everyone now knows this *War on Terror* is a disaster and the sooner we declare victory and bring our boys and girls home the better. A state's only legitimate use of military violence...otherwise known as legalised murder...is to

¹ Acknowledgement is due to the columnist Andrew Alexander in the *Daily Mail* on Wednesday 29th May 2013 for an article entitled *Foreign Wars and a Chilling Legacy of Hate* for the inspiration (and some of the rhetoric) in this dispatch. Alexander is the author of *America and the Imperialism of Ignorance* (2011).

² See the *Daily Telegraph* report from the *Hay Festival* on Saturday 13th June 2013: *Our country is run by secretive public school elites warns Le Carré*.

³ Although discredited, the *NeoCons* are still a force to be reckoned with and increasingly they refer back to the *Peace of Westphalia* of 1648 to justify their intervention in 'failed states'. The line is that *Westphalia* got it wrong and the mistake needs correcting by intervention. This is disingenuous because disapproval of empires and empire building was the point of *Westphalia*...a diplomatic response to the never-ending wars caused by expansion of the *Hapsburg Empire*.

⁴ Assassinations of British soldiers on home soil may have been going on for some time...see the *Deepcut Barracks* files.

defend its borders from invasion, not to wage pre-emptive wars in far off places, about which we know nothing...and care even less.

We have no business meddling in the affairs of Africa and the Arab world. Our military presence has absolutely nothing to do with any defensive need that ordinary people in this country could conceivably imagine. We wanted *NATO* dismantled when the Berlin Wall came down. We never gave our consent to rewriting its mission statement.

Just Wars? Wars to End War? Pre-emptive Wars. What nonsense will the think tanks dream up next? There is only war...and with it rape, slaughter, pillage and bounty. Non-combatants with war rights, in a word, civilians, have rules of engagement as well as military commanders. When was the last time you read the *Geneva Convention*?

The spectacle at Woolwich may have been horrific. But was it any more appalling than the spectacle of an Afghan child with its limbs blown off because a *CIA* agent in Virginia had hit the 'Go' button for his drone to fire without being certain the targeted gathering was a Taliban gang or a wedding party?

And all that before he headed off home, not forgetting to stop off at *McDonald's* for his kids, buy a bottle of wine for his wife and have a nice relaxing evening. In a recent drone attack, 10 of the 11 killed were children.

At last President Obama has admitted that 'drone discipline is not strong enough' and shifted responsibility from the *CIA* to the *Pentagon*. Yet still the drones carry out their deadly work in Afghanistan and Pakistan, while ever more sophisticated drones roll off production lines for the US military. The next drone generation will be unmanned. No Penelope in Virginia; no Chuck in Nevada with fingers on the trigger. How do you charge a computer chip with war crimes?



The *Afghan War* will end in the pretence of victory, when the US and British withdraw their remaining troops at the end of next year. But do not cheer too loudly. The Americans are negotiating with Kabul for nine permanent bases.

The legacy of Western military actions in the Middle East...US-led and British supported beneath the *NATO banner*...is truly horrific. We have had over 20 years of 'intervention', starting with the *First Gulf War* in 1990 and followed by *Gulf War II* in 2003. Iraq has been left in ruins, hovering on the verge of civil war.



Officially the war there is over, though nine thousand security contractors (almost all ex-military) were left behind to guard US interests.

In Iraq the death toll of civilians is officially quoted at 150,000. But that is only reported deaths at hospitals. By sampling, polling organisations put the figure at five times the official returns. Meanwhile five million have been driven from their homes in Iraq and Afghanistan to add to the Middle East's vast and roaming crowds of refugees.

For any young man of Muslim extraction growing up in these times, the remarkable thing about both the Afghan and Iraq wars is that hardly anybody now pretends they were necessary, let alone driven by idealistic concerns to plant democracy and progress in unpromising soil.

The second and most controversial war with Iraq was launched on the bogus scare that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. It was a made-up tale. The *UN* weapons inspector Hans Blix warned that this might well prove a figment of an over-excited imagination. It was indeed just that, as we now know. That may be a matter of keen interest to us, but a cause of outrage to many young Muslims. An Arab country was trampled on and humiliated by US President George W. Bush and his fellow-traveller Tony Blair. Nobody asked for my consent. In fact 14-million of us made it clear, by marching and demonstrating in the streets, that we did not consent.

‘We know best,’ we were told. ‘There are secrets we can’t share with you. We must maintain our special relationship with the USA.’ But what exactly is this special relationship? To ordinary people it looks like two sets of undemocratic judicial persons making bogus claims to represent real people while conspiring to rob them. *New Labour* and the *Nasty Tory Party* are both hopelessly deluded. Only the dissidents are asking the right questions.

The *First Gulf War* was scarcely better justified. Saddam...an American ally in Iraq’s war with Iran...was massing his troops on the frontier of oil-rich Kuwait. When he inquired of the American ambassador in Baghdad what Washington’s attitude was, he got an unbelievably naïve answer. It effectively said: ‘We are not interested.’

He invaded, and the US promptly proclaimed war against its former ally. Iraq was defeated and humiliated. Sanctions were added to the pressure on Saddam...which the *CIA* said would soon topple him. But they didn’t, though they were responsible for many Iraqis dying for lack of proper medical treatment.

Chastened by the obvious failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, the British government now has half-in-half-out intervention policies. No-fly zones and selling killings into war regions is the new approach, ignoring the fact that unintended side effects are the main effects and that, once in a war-zone, weapons can end up anywhere.



The British government still presumes to claim for itself, at tax payers’ expense, a role as a world policeman. Why? Who consented to this? I didn’t give my consent. Did you give yours? Who actually said any of this was OK?

From the start of Britain’s involvement in the *Gulf Wars*, many of us have been warning that the main effect would be to recruit terrorists at home and abroad. Do you really believe you can bomb people into the Stone Age from 40,000 feet with impunity? Retaliations and reprisals should be expected. We are not surprised at what

happened in London and Paris. *COBRA* is right to be concerned. This might be the start of something much worse.

In his address to the cameras in Woolwich...the press called it a rant...the British assassin said that he and others would “fight you until you leave us alone”. It was a telling phrase. But who are ‘us’ and ‘you’? Is ‘us’ just British Muslims or all Muslims? Have you set off a *Class War* with the ‘us’ encompassing the unemployed working-class youth at home and abroad? And who was ‘you’ when the Scots were expelled from the glens in 1745? The Hanoverians wielding the bayonets or the shadowy figures paying their wages from behind their funds and ledgers?

Did this begin with the *East India Company* and *Royal Charters*? Or can we trace it back to the cultivation of the earth and the enclosure of landed property...dispossessing the 99% for the private enrichment of the 1%? What are we doing about the radicalization of our British elites on the playing fields of Eton and in the counting houses of London and Edinburgh? Are we monitoring private conversations in the *Inns of Court* and the *Clubs of St James*?

It is time to ask what our country’s great 1930s peacemonger-statesmen⁵ would do about our warmongering. For 75 years great men have been written out of our island story. The warmongers in power are a tiny corrupt and greedy elite. These self-appointed emperors arrogantly claiming, as their birthright, to be our lords and masters, are morally bankrupt and at the beck and call of merchants and usurers...hard, cruel men with militant tendencies.

Nobody ever willingly consented to secret cabals of limited liability companies, limited liability partnerships, unaccountable trusts, phoney charities and invisible hedge funds looting us of our personal and family possessions by legally-piggily deploying their secret bank accounts and tax avoidance havens. Those who conspire against real persons to destroy the common good are traitors, not patriots. Is society hounding the right people? Who are the guilty men? Once we answer that question we will be in a position to fight them until they leave us alone.

⁵ Specifically, the great *Labour Party* leader, George Lansbury (a *Christian Pacifist*) and the former *Conservative Party* Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain who created our modern social welfare system in the 1920s & 1930s...for which the *Attlee Government* took credit. Their shrewd long-range strategic thinking ensured the country could defend itself from a German air invasion in September 1940. See three essays by William Shepherd: (1) *The Political Economy of Sir Oswald Mosley (1896-1980)*; (2) *Tony Blair on Neville Chamberlain*; and (3) *Mr Churchill and Mr Baruch*.