

The World as a Theater of the Absurd

Interests or Idiocy?

By [Danny Schechter](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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It's been a long time since I sat in a college literature class and learned about the theater of the absurd, the work of great writers like Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Camus, among others. Their writing was their way of reacting to a world that seemed out of control and maybe out of its mind.

Wikipedia tells us "It expressed the belief that, in a Godless universe, human existence has no meaning or purpose and therefore all communication breaks down. Logical construction and argument gives way to irrational and illogical speech and to its ultimate conclusion, silence."

Significantly, the word theater is used for places putting on plays and countries conducting wars. The battlefield is considered as much a "theater" as Broadway.

Without waxing philosophically and commenting on the many unknowns that so obsessed Donald Rumsfeld, our modern day philosopher king of the Pentagonian School, one has to abandon logic and rationality to try to make sense out of what is happening in front of our eyes.

The great leader who led the disastrous invasion of Iraq, and who expected that war to be a "cakewalk," now calls the latest US attack "worrisome," Rummy may be right this time.

Worrisome perhaps, that the media that has been having a ball making fun of Gaddafi's fears about Al Qaeda and hasn't looked at intelligence reports that suggest he may be right: that Benghazi has been one of Bin Laden's favorite recruiting zones.

Then there was this inconvenient fact in the Washington Post: "Six days into the allied bombardment of Libyan military targets, it is clear that Moammar Gaddafi can count on the fierce loyalties of at least a significant portion of the population." (Don't the Pentagon planners know that when you bomb a country, the people unite against the aggressor. For more on this, see the history books.)

As Alexander Cockburn puts it, "The war on Libya now being waged by the US, Britain and France must surely rank as one of the stupidest martial enterprises, smaller in scale to be sure, since Napoleon took it into his head to invade Russia in 1812."

It's one thing to oppose a policy that seems to have a rational logic behind it, however disguised, deceptive, and misguided. It's another to find policies built around a politician's desire to deflect criticism, look good or act for the sake of acting. That's the **essence** of absurd.

We would like to think that our “leaders” know what they are doing and behave within some calculus of civilized norms. More often they act in a rushed manner on bad intelligence, or no intelligence at all, defending what they do with folksy aphorisms and unverified or unverifiable claims.

George W. Bush was a master of non-sensical faith-based explanations that he no doubt believed even when they made no sense. He viewed facts with disdain.

Western nations, wracked it seems by guilt and hidden motives about oil booty, start bombing Libya, ostensibly to protect civilians who perish in the bombings. Their action was uncoordinated, their mission, imprecise, and its impact uncertain. They are aligned with a phantom group called “The Rebels” (Sounds like a football team, one of whose members told NBC News that he is fighting Gaddafi because he is Jewish.)

The cost of this exercise is now over a billion dollars and rising — and rising; so much for the money we are saving to retire the deficit. So much for the hopes of economic recovery.

As Tom Dispatch noted, “it could be the first intervention that actually escalated before it even began. It went from no-fly-zone to no-fly-no-drive-zone before a U.S. cruise missile was launched or a French jet took off. Within two days, it seemed to be escalating even further into a half-baked, regime-change(ish)-style operation. (162 Tomahawk cruise missiles had already been sent Libya-wards, most of them from American vessels, at more than \$1 million a pop.)”

It might have been cheaper to just organize a giant fireworks extravaganza if the idea is to light up the sky. Since when was Libya considered a military power? We have lived with Gaddafi for decades in the knowledge that he was an abusive and corrupt autocrat. We made deals with him and benefited in the relationship. He hustled us and we bribed him — business as usual!

Supposedly this intervention was motivated by a desire to protect civilians. Who are the civilians — are they and the “rebels” one and the same? As Mark Benjamin writes in TIME, the issue has become muddled, “as the protests against Gaddafi have morphed into a civil war; it’s hard to determine exactly who the ‘civilians’ are in Libya, since many of them have taken up arms.”

The human rights groups that condemned Libya’s abuses also blasted similar practices in regimes in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria. Notes Time, “The White House says that military action in Libya, under broad international support, has already averted 100,000 deaths. But if one only considers the lives already claimed in autocratic crackdowns across the region, it’s hard to see a significant gap between Gaddafi’s actions and those of governments like Yemen and Bahrain that have historically been friendlier to U.S. interests.”

We fired no Tomahawk missiles to help protesters in other countries.. (One wonders if firing all the missiles we did was just a way of cleaning out the old inventory to make way for the new models, i.e., the iPad 2s of these killing machines.) That is what happened when Israel dumped old US supplied cluster bombs on Lebanon years back.

Is this a practice opportunity for NATO and Gulf country Air Forces? Wars often provide opportunities to test out new weapons and weapon systems.

At first, we were told the US was just joining their allies, that we were just there to “enable,” until it became clear the Pentagon was actually running the operation, flying 78% of the combat missions.

Now NATO, over which Washington has disproportionate influence but **appears** separate, is officially taking over. Still unclear is what it will do. The headline in the New York Times today reflects the confusion: “Allies Are Split on Goal and Exit Strategy of Libya Mission”

Additionally, the UN which exists to *prevent* war supports this one. Clearly, you can’t trust what you are told.

On the other side of the world, nuclear power plants are literally exploding with workers in hospitals for radiation, and water is unsafe to drink. A nation seems to be unraveling while trying not to alarm its people, and in the process alarming them, more than decades of Godzilla-like monster movies that perhaps anticipated this apocalypse. (The grim stats: Death toll from Japan’s earthquake and tsunami reaches 10,035 people, with 17,443 still missing, national police say (CNN)).

Of all nations, Japan had two good historical reasons to fear nuclear disasters, but they justified their power plants as a high tech ticket to the modern world.

And, as in our plants, safety rules were scoffed at, and warnings were ignored. Science gave way to commerce. Instead of confronting the dangers, they looked away.

The commissars in China have been following Japan’s travails in detail, but that hasn’t stopped them from ordering a batch of pricey new nuclear plants, convinced that their new technologies will protect them, despite so much advice to the contrary.

That’s just the tip of that country’s absurd policies.

Adrian Brown reports: “vast new cities of apartments and shops are being built across China at a rate of ten a year, but they remain almost completely uninhabited ghost towns.

It’s all part of the government’s efforts to keep the economy booming, and there are many people who would love to move in, but it’s simply too expensive for most. 64 million apartments are said to be empty across the country and one of the few shop owners says he once didn’t sell anything for four or five days.”

We are not much better off in this country. We stood by while Wall Street looted our country. Today, 20% of all homes in Florida stand empty. The debt grows, and all of us suffer. They can’t seem to stop it. Republicans promise jobs, but then pass laws that hike unemployment.

Ideology has become a substitute for clear thinking, while posturing and polarization define the issues of our times, leading to a stalemate and paralysis.

The theater of the absurd has gone from being a literary subculture to a mainstream political strategy. Its one thing to take an action to confuse your enemies, but today, government is routinely confusing all of us.

News Dissector Danny Schechter produced Plunder The Crime of Our Time, a film on the

financial crisis as a crime story. (See www.plundethecrimeofourtime.com) Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org

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