MOVE OVER, MURPHY, YOU ARE NOT ALONE

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Avedis Kevorkian, Philadelphia, PA USA, 10 April 2009

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Whereas Murphy's Laws deal with the foibles and the perversities of life, Kevorkian's Laws deal with the serious challenges we face.

Kevorkian's First Law is: "All governments lie, and they tell their biggest lies to their own people." Now that I have stated it, you are all nodding your heads in agreement.

Like most of you, I was aware of government lies for some time. I didn't formulate the law until about twenty years ago, while still living in London. There was a pair of splendid series of talks by the late great historian A. J. P. Taylor in which he discussed, in the first, the events that led up to World War One and, in the other, the events leading to World War Two. They were on the BBC and were the kind of programming impossible on American television.

It was during one of the "chapters" in the second series, when he made a statement that brought me bolt-upright in my easy chair. He said: "Every nation must have a perceived enemy." He gave examples and then said that "During the 1920s, Britain's perceived enemy was France, and all of its war plans revolved about fighting France." That is my paraphrase, but I recall that he noted that the perceived enemy was not Stalin's USSR or Mussolini's Italy. There was no Nazi Germany, of course.

When the program was over, I switched off the television set, and began to think about what I had heard and, suddenly, everything fell into place.

In the post-World War Two world, America's perceived enemy was "Communism," we all know, but what struck me was the basic lie that America was told by successive governments--"The Reds were going to attack us tomorrow morning at 3 and we would all be dead in our beds by 8." One day, it would be the Soviet "Reds"; another day, it would be the Chinese "Reds."

Anyone with half a brain--people like me, that is--knew that neither the USSR nor the Chinese was going to attack the US. To make war on a country assumes a victory and assumes that it will control the destiny of the losing nation for the long-term or, certainly, for the short-term. Did anyone imagine that either the Soviets or the Chinese would attack thinking they would conquer, and

thinking they would or could control the destiny of, the US when neither country--at the time--was able to run its own affairs? But, official lies are like religion--they are to be believed, not understood or challenged.

And, thus was born Kevorkian's First Law.

How do you justify increasingly growing defense budgets? Lie. How do you curb freedoms? Lie. How do you justify tax increases? Lie.

After a while, the lies will have to get bigger and, of course, they do.

Actually, it wasn't only the USSR and China who were the enemy. Those of you of a certain age recall the two main threats to America--the "Monolithic Communist Conspiracy" and the "Domino Theory"--which actually gave birth to the perceived USSR and/or China as "enemies." Both were the brain-children of John Foster Dulles, the most evil man of the 20th century.

We were led to believe that the "communism" of the USSR was the same as the "communism" of The People's Republic of China which was the same as the "communism" of Yugoslavia which was the same as the "communism" of Albania (let us not forget little Albania)--despite the fact that these four "communist" states opposed each other and accused each other of back-sliding and not being true to Karl Marx. Yet, Dulles tried to convince us--succeeded, in many cases--that there was this threat of communists against the US.

Thus was born the other major lie--the falling dominoes, that when one country became communist, the neighbor would become communist.

And, thus began the Vietnam War. You will recall that after France lost to Ho Chi Mihn's forces, at Dien Bien Phu, in 1954, there was to be a UN-supervised vote in 1956. To separate the fighting forces, an arbitrary line--the 17th Parallel--was drawn and those who fought with the French were to move south of the line and disarm and those who fought against the French were to move north of the line and disarm. It was not a political division of the country.

Dulles, realizing that Ho would win any election by 80 percent of the vote (according to President Eisenhower's memoirs), decided that if Ho won, the entire country would become a communist state (which was a bold lie, since Ho was not a communist. We were made to forget that Ho--then considered a "nationalist"--was in Versailles, in 1919, arguing for the independence of then Indo-China and, also, that he fought with the Allies against the Japanese in World War Two). And if Indo-China, as it then was, became communist, the domino theory would go into effect. Dulles made the line permanent, called the country Vietnam, and set up a series of puppet governments (each more corrupt than the predecessor) in the south--each charged with fighting Ho--and began sending in “advisors.” The USSR and China vied with each other to help Ho. To get their aid, he said he was a communist. The rest is history: 58,000+ American dead, uncounted millions of Vietnamese dead, and, ultimately, a “communist” Vietnam under Ho's successors. And, guess what? No dominoes fell!

Why do I go into this ancient history?

Because of more recent events. We are enmeshed in Iraq because the Liar in the White House, who is now the Resident Liar in Crawford, Texas, used a series of lies to justify the war there. No need to remind you--but I will--"Iraq was behind 9/11"; "Iraq has Weapons of Mass Destruction"; "Iraq is capable of sending missiles to destroy us"; etc. As a result, the American Constitution was virtually discarded, the American people lost many of their rights, the country's economy suffered, future generations are saddled with trillions of dollars of debt, America lost the goodwill of much of the world. And, in Iraq, more than four-thousand Americans dead, possibly more than a million Iraqi dead, two-million Christians fleeing their country, Muslims killing Muslims. All the result of lies in the name of fighting a perceived enemy.

So "successful" were those lies that, you will recall, they were being used to work up a "war against Iran" mentality in the American people. Well, why not? If a lie works once so well, keep using it. Josef Goebbels would have been proud.

All those many centuries ago, Thucydides noted: "In a war, a politician is better able to disguise the crimes against the people."

Of course, Kevorkian's Law applies to other countries as well. The USSR and China told their people lies about the US. Wartime lies don't count; truth is the first and the biggest casualty in war. But, when a country begins a verbal campaign against another country, you can be sure that it is based on lies, and when that country tries to whip up passions, you can be sure that the lies will get bigger.

You ask: If there is a First Law, is there a second? Yes. Kevorkian's Second Law states: "People like to be lied to, and the bigger the lie the more they are accepted."

In the beginning, the American people actually believed the Dulles lies, they actually believed there was a Monolithic Communist Conspiracy to attack America (but few asked if the attacker would be the USSR, China, Yugoslavia, or Albania--it was enough that we were going to be attacked!). I had colleagues, in the 1950s and 1960s, who actually built air-raid shelters in their basements or back yards. And, I remember being called a "communist" when I said air-raid shelters were folly. There are some Americans who still believe Iraq's involvement in 9/11 and that Saddam really had WMD--though they can't quite explain why Iraq didn't use them. There are some Americans who are now convinced that Iran is an enemy.

And Cuba. Oh, Yes. Let us not forget Cuba. You may remember that when President Eisenhower, committing one of the most dastardly acts an outgoing president ever committed, broke relations with Cuba just three weeks before leaving office, in January 1961, saddling the incoming President Kennedy with a problem that was to dog him for the rest of his 1000 days in office--not to mention the country, since. You will recall that when Fidel Castro overthrew the government of Fulgencio Battista (one of the bloodiest of the bloody dictators to run Latin-American countries) in January 1959, he was considered another would-be corrupt dictator who would let America run things (as

the other dictators were doing). However, when Castro uttered those dirty words, "Cuba first," America labelled him a "Communist" and, Yes, said that Castro was going to spread communism to the United States. Forgotten was the fact that more than 95 percent--that's right, more than 95 percent--of Cuba's then economy was run by American interests. Cuba had no right to declare Cuba's interests first, so it was a threat to the United States.

But, enough of history. Except to say that William Saroyan once commented to me, "History is agreed-to lies." Come back, Bill, we still need you!

Lying is an art and it follows that those who achieve positions of authority have mastered the art. There was a comic many year ago who explained his success with his jokes: "It's how you tell 'em." Properly told, any lie can be believed, especially when the media supports them. But, let us not journey down that path.

If anyone doubts that people like to believe lies, look around (or, if you will excuse me, look in the mirror) and see which politician is voted in and what he has promised.

Who gets elected,
--the one who says "We are a second-rate country and might as well accept it and do our best" or the one who says "We are the greatest country in the history of the world, and I will keep it that way"?;
--the one who says "I am going to raise taxes because I have a few pet projects I want to pursue and, besides, I have a useless unemployed brother-in-law who needs a job" or the one who says, "Not only will I lower taxes but also I will increase free services and benefits for everyone"?;
--the one who. . .but, you get the point.

Suffice to be said that for lies to work, it requires that people believe their leaders are honest and honorable and speak only the truth. It helps, of course, if the people also believe that the leaders of other countries (or the opposition) are not honest and honorable and always lie. And, since one man's "we" is another man's "other," the circle is complete.

Of course, governments lie to other governments, also, but that need not concern us here because governments expect lies and know how to accept--and ignore--them. (It comes with the territory, so to speak.) What they do, as we all know, is to meet secretly and come to agreements--despite what may have been said publicly.

If there is a First and a Second Kevorkian's Law, you ask if there is a Third. Yes, there is, but it will have to wait for another time.