

# Major FAA Facility Disabled By Just One Person – US Air Traffic In Chaos

WASHINGTON – Just one (mentally imbalanced, it seems) disgruntled contractor, (his name is Brian Howard), upset because he had lost his job, managed to disable a major air traffic control facility located in Aurora, Illinois, that handles airline traffic for the Chicago area, (one of the busiest in America, and indeed the world). He had easy access to this critical facility.

## **The damage**

The damage has been horrendous. The facility is out of commission; and this means hundreds of flights canceled in Chicago and a complicated and quite costly rerouting of thousands of flights that cannot be guided by air traffic controllers on the ground, since they have no working instruments. The estimate is that it will take weeks to get back to normal.

Again, this havoc was caused by just one person.

## **Homeland Security was supposed to take care of things**

The United States government created the Department of Homeland Security as a response to the 9/11 attacks. The goal was to consolidate under one administrative roof dozen of government agencies that one way or the other share the responsibility to protect the homeland.

## **A daunting task**

At the time it seemed like a good idea. Homeland Security was supposed to create new, hardened protection for vulnerable US sites, while doing its best to prevent the bad guys from

getting in, or apprehend those who managed to get to America.

In reality, this was and still is an extremely complicated task.

In the first place, streamlining all the different agencies has proven to be an administrative nightmare. How do you coordinate everybody?

And then there is the task itself.

There are millions of people coming to America every year, most of them obviously legitimate travelers. How do you spot and pick up the few bad guys?

### **Too many vulnerable sites**

And then there is the critical task of securing tens of thousands of vulnerable, unprotected targets: shopping malls, railway stations, sport events venues, power plants, hospitals, schools, university campuses, underground trains, you name it.

Of course, it is impossible to protect "everything". However, the notion that just one person, venting his frustration, can totally disrupt US air traffic in a huge portion of the United States should give us pause.

### **Just a few terrorists**

It would take just a few units of well-trained terrorists to plan and execute coordinated attacks that would target (for instance) major electric power transmission centers, data centers, major hospitals, a few oil refineries and may be something else.

If just one person can cause major chaos in the entire US civil aviation system, several capable and motivated individuals can do a lot worse.

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# With Luck, In A Few Years Spain's Unemployment Rate Will Go Below 20%

**WASHINGTON** – Talk about beating low expectations. Luis de Guindos, Spanish Minister of the Economy and Competitiveness, recently reported that Spain's economic future is looking better than what the government had estimated a while ago.

## **Improved economic forecast?**

The government believed the economy in 2014 would grow 1.2%. Instead it looks more like 1.3%. The revised growth estimate for 2015 is 2%, and not 1.8%.

But the really great news is about unemployment. There are good chances that Spain's unemployment rate for 2014 will be "only" 24.7%, and not 24.9% as previously forecasted. And for 2015 it looks more like 22.9%, and not 23.3%.

So, cheer up Spain. With economic growth off the charts, most likely in two to three years unemployment will dip below 20%.

Imagine that. A stellar achievement.

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# Obama's "Ferguson Remarks" In His UN Speech Provide Ammunition To America-Haters

WASHINGTON – In an otherwise good UN speech (September 24, 2014) focused on the need to fight for international law while combating militant groups and terrorists, President Barack Obama could not resist the temptation to say something negative about America.

## **We are not perfect**

The objective –I suppose– was to show the world that, while we Americans pursue noble goals, we also humbly acknowledge our shortcomings. Alas, we are a still imperfect society. So, we are not preaching on the basis of arrogant self-righteousness. We would like to pursue good and lofty goals of world peace and justice, but we also recognize that in many instances we fail to live up to our ideals.

While in principle this attempt at even handedness may not be bad, the example picked by Obama to illustrate America's frailties was totally inappropriate.

## **Ferguson remarks**

Speaking from the UN podium to senior representatives of the entire world gathered there for the annual General Assembly, Obama had this to say:

***"I realize that America's critics will be quick to point out that at times we too have failed to live up to our ideals; that America has plenty of problems within its own borders. This is true. In a summer marked by instability in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, I know the world also took notice of the small American city of Ferguson, Missouri –where a young***

*man was killed, and a community was divided. So yes, we have our racial and ethnic tensions. And like every country, we continually wrestle with how to reconcile the vast changes wrought by globalization and greater diversity with the traditions we hold dear”.*

### **Inappropriate comparison**

Let me start with the obvious. To place in the same sentence the killing of one Black American young man (Michael Brown) by a White police officer, (no doubt a tragedy), and the daily slaughters perpetrated by ISIL, Assad and other in Syria and Iraq, along with the war of aggression sponsored in Ukraine by Russian President Vladimir Putin, is a really bad idea.

This will encourage people around the world to say: *“Hey, there are problems in the Middle East. But there are also problems in America. They may not be the same. But they are very close in size and scope, as the President of the United States himself had to admit while speaking to the world from the podium of the UN General Assembly.”*

### **America just as bad**

Let me say this again. To place in the same context the killing of one individual in Ferguson and the murdering of tens of thousands by lawless fanatics in the Middle East gives precious ammunition to all those who hate America. It legitimizes stupid and meaningless comparisons and moral relativism: *“Assad bad. ISIL bad. Putin bad. But America also bad. US President Barack Obama himself said so”.*

### **Offering an opinion on a pending case**

And there is more. Even though he did not get into any details, Obama clearly indicated that the Ferguson killing is evidence of something deeply wrong in America.

By giving this characterization, Obama did something

totally uncalled for. He essentially sided with all those (in America and abroad) who believe, based on what they have seen or heard, that the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson is yet another instance of White police criminal brutality.

We know that within the Black Community and beyond the prevailing, even if yet unproven, narrative about Ferguson is that an unarmed Black young man was killed in cold blood by a White police officer, even though (allegedly) he had raised his arms, clearly indicating that he had surrendered. (The police officer claims that he was attacked by Brown, and that he shot him in self-defense).

That said, Obama knows that the case is still pending. Therefore, for the President of the United States to publicly discuss it, while letting the whole world understand what he thinks about it, is really uncalled for.

### **No trial, no conviction**

President Obama, with his Harvard Law Degree, should know better. He knows that the case is still before a Grand Jury. In the end, the White police officer who shot Michael Brown may or may not be indicted. Still, even assuming that he will be indicted, (usually Grand Juries tend to err in favor of indictments), there has been no trial and no conviction.

In other words, our own American justice system has not yet decided what happened and whether or not the police officer committed a crime.

But, by saying that the killing –of course– caused a totally understandable rage within the Black Community, President Obama told the world what he thinks about the sad incident. Once again, the President of the United States should have never mentioned this incident in the course of a UN speech, as the case is still pending.

**Obama's own words will be used by America-haters**

Now, to place these “Ferguson remarks” uttered by Obama in context, we should recognize that they were only one paragraph in a much longer speech about terrorism, Russian aggression in Ukraine, and a lot more.

Fair enough. And yet, as these words uttered by the President of the United States are part of the official record, they will be cited, (of course out of context), by all those who argue that America, despite its lofty rhetoric, is in fact a truly bad place where racism is rampant. So much so that White policemen (routinely?) shoot unarmed Black kids at will. The US President himself said so.

Is this the image of America that President Obama wants to convey to the world?

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## **Flex Fuel Engines Allow Trucks To Use Natural Gas – No Downside**

**WASHINGTON** – While American energy firms have made major progress in exploiting new “unconventional” (mostly shale) oil, this way vastly increasing domestic production, we still import almost half of the 18 million barrels of oil that we consume every day. This means “exporting” billions of US dollars, every day, in order to pay for this precious fuel. It is a well-known fact that most of our oil is refined into transportation fuel necessary to power a gigantic US fleet of automobiles and trucks.

## **US produced natural gas**

Beyond increased domestic production, can America find other ways to import less oil? Yes it can, by taking advantage of abundant, cheap (and much cleaner) US produced natural gas. Using hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling, US energy companies managed to vastly increase the production of American natural gas.

Increased supply means lower prices. As most of our natural gas is used for electric power generation and for heating, this new supply is great news for both industry and individual consumers who see stable or lower electricity prices.

## **CNG/LNG as transportation fuels**

While this is wonderful, we can do much better. Natural gas, compressed or liquefied (CNG/LNG) can also be used as transportation fuel, this way replacing diesel or gasoline, much of it derived from expensive imported oil. The reason for switching is lower prices. LNG/CNG cost only about \$ 1.70 per "gasoline-gallon equivalent". And do keep in mind that this is not a new, experimental technology. This is old stuff.

The reason why America never adopted natural gas engines to power vehicles is that traditionally we used to have relatively cheap gasoline. Well, now all this has changed.

Gasoline and diesel are no longer cheap; while (thanks to hydraulic fracturing) now we have enormous amounts of domestic and really inexpensive natural gas. Hence the price difference between gasoline/diesel and natural gas.

## **How can we switch?**

The problem in shifting from gasoline/diesel to CNG/LNG is that the US automotive industry has been slow in offering new products that run on natural gas. At the same time, America still lacks a reliable network of refueling stations offering

LNG or CNG.

And here we have the classic “chicken or egg” dilemma. LNG/CNG refueling stations are quite expensive. Very few entrepreneurs are willing to build them without the assurance that there will be plenty of customers. By the same token, consumers will be reluctant to make the switch to LNG/CNG powered vehicles unless they believe that they can be easily refueled anywhere.

### **Flex-fuel engines**

Well, there is a solution to the “chicken or egg” dilemma and challenge. As Bob Lukefahr and Balu Balagopal explain in a [WSJ](#) op-ed piece, (*Forget Electric Cars. Natural Gas Is Powering Vehicles in Texas*, September 27, 2014), major US auto manufacturers such as Ford are introducing new trucks with flex-fuel engines, meaning engines that can work with both, natural gas and diesel. Other types of engines now being offered work with a blend of the two fuels.

This should take care of the refueling problem until more stations will be built. If you run out of LNG and the next refueling station is still too far, you switch your engine to diesel. No problem.

### **Cheaper fuel**

As the two authors explain, it is clear that companies that operate medium-sized or heavy trucks will get the most out of this fuel conversion. They work with heavy commercial vehicles that are on the road most of the time and therefore consume a lot of fuel. Considering the price advantage of CNG/LNG over diesel, the upfront costs of any conversion/retrofit of an existing fleet of trucks will easily be recovered because of the significant savings due to lower fuel costs.

### **Converting heavy trucks**

Of course, down the line the real targets are bigger and more expensive 18 wheelers. However, the cost of converting really heavy trucks to LNG/CNG is much higher. And there are other issues, such as training mechanics on how to maintain these different types of engines.

Given the lack of familiarity with natural gas-powered vehicles, in many instances the cost of maintaining them is higher than the cost of maintaining the old but well known diesel powered trucks.

Overtime, as more and more people master the still unfamiliar technology, this will change. But higher maintenance costs may induce fleet operators to wait a bit longer before embracing LNG/CNG.

### **Complicated transition**

In other words, the transition to LNG/CNG is still complicated. But, in the end, as industry adjusts its offerings to the new fuel reality, and as more companies will invest in LNG/CNG refueling stations, simple economics should favor a switch from diesel to natural gas to power heavy vehicles.

### **With flex-fuel vehicles there is no down side**

All this of course assumes that the substantial price differential between natural gas and diesel will stay. If we can imagine a future in which oil prices will go down (and stay down) significantly, this way driving down the cost of diesel, then there will be no longer any advantage in powering your trucks with LNG/CNG.

However, if you purchased a flex-fuel vehicle, you are still OK. If diesel will become cheaper than natural gas, (this is possible, although unlikely), then you switch back to diesel, at no extra cost, because your vehicle works with both fuels.

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# The Roots Of Islamic Fundamentalism Are In The Crisis Of the Arab World

WASHINGTON – Denmark, a NATO country, just joined the fight against ISIL, (also ISIS or IS) in Iraq. We are told that it will contribute four combat jets and three more in reserve. The fact that this militarily insignificant development is news tells us a great deal about the level of European enthusiasm regarding this new, probably long, conflict in the Middle East.

## Where is NATO?

Without any offense to Denmark whose government is no doubt sincere about doing what it can regarding the fight against ISIL, four combat jets do not add much muscle to the US-led coalition. Where is the German air force? More broadly, did NATO, the (once mighty) Western Alliance linking North America and Europe, rise to the occasion? No, it did not, and it will not. Europe is poor, indebted, exhausted and depressed.

## Small coalition, big problem

The Obama administration is trying to make the best of a bad situation. It is trying to portray its limited and late response to the threat represented by the Islamic State and any other radical group now established in Syria, Iraq and beyond as a well-organized, cohesive collective action.

Yes, Saudi Arabia is on board, and so is Jordan, the UAE,

Qatar and Bahrain. And now we have Denmark, soon to be joined by Great Britain, while France has already engaged in a few bombing missions. Yes, this is something. But not that much, given the magnitude of the task.

All in all, are we making progress? Sure, some progress. But it is modest. In the course of the 1999 air campaign against Serbia regarding the future of Kosovo, NATO had 38,000 air sorties. Now we are at around 300 sorties in Iraq and Syria, while we celebrate as major accomplishments a few hits here and there.

### **The larger problem**

The obvious problem here is in the disconnect between means (scarce) and ends (very large). America and its few allies want us to believe that it is possible to “resolve” with a (so far) modest air campaign a political-military problem –Islamic radicalism– that is really large, and in fact almost intractable.

***Sure we can and should bomb the Islamic radicals in Syria and Iraq. But the end game is not just to kill a few bad guys. The end game is to break the morale of ISIL leaders and foot soldiers, and to kill the appeal of their cause within the wider Muslim World.***

It is most unlikely that the mission as defined –bombing from the air, no US boots on the ground– will accomplish that. In a best case scenario, most radicals will be chased out of Syria and Iraq. But they will regroup somewhere else; they will change tactics. They always do.

### **The crisis of the Arab World**

At the root of this festering mess there is a disoriented Arab World in crisis. Sadly some Muslim believers decided that the only way out of backwardness is to embrace an absolutely crazy religious and political model founded on absurd rules enforced

with barbaric cruelty, all the way stating that the plight of good Muslims is the result of a giant, US-led, Western conspiracy.

This is a horrible way to address the real problems stemming from systemic under development. But, strangely enough, this way to explain and “resolve” major problems rooted in cultural backwardness finds a lot of converts.

### **Success?**

Given all this, it is delusional to believe that now, with the US Air Force in the lead and a few additional airplanes provided by second or third-rate military powers, we are going to take care of a major Middle East crisis.

Look, there will be some military successes. I certainly hope so. But this problem of the appeal of Islamic fundamentalism will not go away. This horrible virus will fade away only when most people in the Arab world will be able to concentrate their energies on real goals of education, modernization, equal rights for women, investments, and more. This has yet to happen.

In hindsight, if President Obama had acted swiftly when the ISIL threat had become apparent, that is before it took firm roots in Syria and then moved into Iraq, probably today we would not need this large-scale military effort to contain it and hopefully destroy it.

### **Islamic radicalism will not go away**

However, realistically speaking, it would be foolish to believe that by defeating ISIL, (assuming that this is possible), we would have resolved once and for all the threat of Islamic radicalism.

Religious fanaticism operates in a fantasy world of its own making. It recruits dreamers, and not people who have rational

political goals. No rational, modern person would believe that establishing a New Caliphate represents a reasonable political objective.

### **Tactical victories**

Yes, president Obama managed to locate and then kill Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, while America also captured or killed other senior al Qaeda leaders. But radicalism did not go away as a result of these significant tactical victories. We face an extremely difficult threat for which there is no simple solution.

Sure we can do better in identifying and preventing hostile actions aimed at American assets and individual Americans. But it would be unrealistic to believe that we can identify and capture all the bad guys. There are too many of them, and they can easily operate in small groups or as individuals.

### **Will the Arab World choose modernity?**

As I said above, the root of the problem is in a major cultural crisis within the Arab World affecting also other Muslim societies. The only way out of this is for the Arabs to find and pursue a realistic path that will lead them to modernity.

Until large segments of these perennially backward societies are prisoners of fantastic, conspiratorial world views justified through crazy interpretations of the Muslim faith, we shall continue to have a nasty problem in our hands.

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# Have Zero Interest Rates Created Another Wall Street Bubble?

**WASHINGTON** – The real threat against America may not be terror attacks against the homeland engineered by ISIL, after all. Most probably, the real threat is home-made, in the form of foolish monetary policies that have created yet another, gigantic Wall Street speculative bubble.

## **All looks fine**

This is the ultra-contrarian view forcefully articulated by David Stockman, a Reagan era Budget Director who later on worked on Wall Street.

These days, most analysts look at the American economy and confidently say that all is well. Things are not great, they would agree, but they are mostly OK. The economy grows, albeit at a slower pace than the post-war historic norm. (2% instead of 3%). Unemployment is way down, even though still high by historic norms. (6% as opposed to 4.5%). And corporate America is chugging along at a nice pace, as the buoyant stock market indicates.

## **Abnormally low interest rates created the bubble**

Yes, this is true, argues Stockman. But this rosy picture conveniently hides that we live in the false paradise of zero interest rates resulting from an unprecedented easy monetary policy engineered and kept for years by the Federal Reserve. With interest rates at zero, investors are almost forced to buy stocks. There is no other way to make any money.

Therefore Wall Street's impressive growth is not the result of a healthy US economy. It is instead the outcome of the massive

amount of steroids introduced by the Fed.

### **Too much debt**

On top of that, there are other dark clouds. Enormous budget deficits accumulated in the past few years, (in part this is the result of extraordinary new public spending aimed at countering the horrible impact of the 2008 mega-recession), have caused a major increase of an already large national debt, now beyond \$ 17 trillion.

***\$ 17 trillion is a truly staggering figure.***

Add to that trillions of dollars of unfunded liabilities in the form of pensions and other obligations that it will be next to impossible to meet, and the rosy picture suddenly turns very, very dark.

### **How long can this go on for?**

Common sense would dictate that the gravity-defying Fed measures cannot go on forever. You cannot have zero interest rates for generations. By the same token, you cannot keep accumulating large, (even though now relatively smaller), federal budget deficits in perpetuity. As the national debt keeps getting bigger, (even assuming abnormally low-interest rates), there will be a point in which debt service alone will eat up all federal revenues.

Sooner or later, there will have to be a moment of truth. The only question is how soon.

### **No signs of an imminent crisis**

For the moment all is well. The US economy, especially if compared with Europe and Japan, is doing quite well. Likewise, our 6% unemployment rate is much better than the 10% of the Eurozone.

And the optimistic analysts argue that compared with historic

averages US stocks do not appear overvalued.

Yes, except that for many years we have been living in an unprecedented environment of forced zero interest rates. At some point this will have to end. At that point stocks will lose much of their current appeal. What will happen then? A slow, orderly transition away from Wall Street? Or a sudden panic, starting with the immediate collapse of the most speculative sectors?

Who knows really. Is Stockman just an inveterate pessimist? Is he just determined to see the glass of the US economy half empty? I do not know.

### **Artificial environment distorted our perceptions**

However, I do know that the Fed has created an artificial environment that has enhanced the appeal of stocks as a preferred form of investment. Therefore stocks must be overvalued. I just do not know how overvalued.

I also know that the US economy is not doing that great. Sure enough, we are doing much better than Europe or Japan.

But this is no great achievement. Europe is a Continent in slow but steady historic decline, with no sign whatsoever of any new trend working towards revival.

Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Japan tried to engineer a reversal of the same negative trends. But Japan is unlikely to succeed. Whatever else can be said about "Abenomics", Japan is headed towards rapid demographic decline. A country of old people does not hold much promise of exuberant growth.

### **Too many anomalies**

So, is America really headed towards disaster? We do not know. But we do know that there are just too many anomalies in our economy and in our perennially out of balance public spending, starting with artificially low-interest rates.

Of course, it is possible to rationalize everything. Prior to the 2008 disaster triggered by the US housing bubble, most experts were confident that there was no bubble. Starting with then Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan, everybody agreed that Wall Street had correctly priced any risks involved in the securitization of sub-prime mortgages. Well, now we know that it was not so, not by a long shot. In short, everybody was wrong.

### **Bad public policies are the root of our problems**

Right now we face a different type of danger. After the 2008 collapse, policy makers have done their very best to breath new life into a semi-comatose economy. But all these emergency measures are not free. Hence our stupendous, and growing, national debt. Likewise, lacking any serious attempt at reforming public spending with the goal of recreating some fiscal balance, while incentivizing economic activities via a pro-growth tax reform, the US Fed stepped in. It injected oxygen into the economy in the form of zero interest rates.

### **Not normal**

***So there you have it. Low growth, high unemployment, chronic deficits, enormous national debt, zero interest rates and a long bull market. Sorry, but none of this is "normal".***

Given all this, the almost universal belief that current stock market prices reflect real value may be the latest delusion. I am sure that there is a bubble. I just do not know how big, and how soon it will burst.

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# Public School Teachers Send Their Own Kids To Private Schools

WASHINGTON – US public schools are so bad that many public schools teachers –that is those who have first hand knowledge of the failures of the system- send their own children to private schools. (More on this below).

## Two tier America

I have stated in several earlier pieces how the crisis of US public education has essentially created a two tier America. In tier one we have the children of the rich and the well-educated who attend quality private schools. In general, these children receive good quality education. With these academic credentials they can get into the prestigious universities whose degrees, in most cases, become the tickets to high paying jobs and good careers.

## Tier two

In tier two we have all those who cannot afford private education and who are not lucky enough to live in the few areas where public schools are decent, or where other choices, such as quality charter schools, are available.

## The poor suffer the most

Within this large second tier the children of the poor suffer the most. Most likely their parents are uneducated. There are no books and no mentors in their homes. If these children do not get a good education in the public school they attend, they have almost no chance of getting any somewhere else. It is quite obvious that being poor and uneducated in today's America means no opportunity, menial part-time jobs, and

marginalization.

### **This is not an accident**

Having said all this, now we learn that this national tragedy is not the result of some misguided public policy regarding public education pursued by people acting in good faith. On the contrary, it would appear that those who work in the system know exactly what they are doing.

### **Public school teachers send their kids to private schools**

Ms. Ronda Ross in a letter to the WSJ, (*Choice, for Children of Progressives*, September 24, 2014), quotes data from a Fordham Institute study. Assuming that the information she provides is accurate, we learn that *“Nationwide, public schools teachers are more than twice as likely as an average citizen to enroll their children in private learning institutions”*.

### **Hypocrisy**

Got that? Public school teachers who have the means to do so send their kids to private schools. So, here is the ugly story that reveals bad faith and hypocrisy.

Public school teachers have an intimate knowledge of how bad the system they work in and defend really is. And so, as good parents, they send their own children to private schools where they will not be harmed by the effects of a bad public education.

In the case of law makers who publicly defend the system for political reasons, same story. They applaud public school teachers and their unions. But they send their own kids to private schools.

### **Do we care?**

Given all this, it is clear that those who run the system and

their political allies know exactly what they are doing. They know how bad US public education really is. So much so that they make sure that their own children are not damaged by it.

That said, does America care about all the others who have no choice? Do we really want millions of children to grow up as hopeless adults, with almost no doors open for them?

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# **The Long War Against The Islamic State**

**WASHINGTON** – President Obama, now acting in conjunction with a newly formed Arab coalition, (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar), just expanded the war effort against ISIL. There have been strikes against ISIL targets in Syria. Most likely many more will follow.

## **Attacking Syria**

It is certainly good news that the US is attacking ISIL in its Syrian stronghold. And we know what the end game is: degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL in both Iraq and Syria.

Given the magnitude of the strategic objective, it is certainly very positive that America now has the support of important Arab states.

## **It will take years**

That said, it should be clear that this war effort conducted mostly via an air campaign will take a very long time, given the very low intensity of the military effort thus far.

Indeed, prior to the just announced Syria escalation, the US had conducted about 200 air sorties against ISIL targets in Iraq. If this sounds substantial, please think again.

### **The Kosovo air campaign was far more intense**

In March 1999, NATO, with the US Air Force in the lead, began "Operation Allied Force" aimed at forcing Serbia to relinquish Kosovo, a small region inhabited mostly by ethnic Albanians. Over a period of 78 days, US and other air forces conducted 38,000 sorties against Serbia, of which 10,484 were strike sorties.

The Kosovo campaign was also a "*no US boots on the ground*" war. But the magnitude of the effort was truly significant. If we switch to the military effort against ISIL currently underway, after weeks of operations, we are talking about only 200 sorties. Compared to 38,000 in the Kosovo operation, 200 is nothing.

And do keep in mind that US air strikes often hit minor targets. For example: one machine gun position, one vehicle.

### **How long will it take to defeat ISIL?**

And here is my point. Even without any "US boots on the ground", the Kosovo air war was a relentless campaign that mercilessly pounded Serbia until then president Slobodan Milosevic gave up, and agreed to let Kosovo go.

Given the much more relaxed tempo of this air war against ISIL, now extended to Syria, how long will it take to defeat the Islamic State?

### **Years, not months**

I have no idea. But, unless the effort is significantly increased via a much more intensive air war and –yes, "*boots on the ground*"– we are talking years, not months.

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# Man Made Global Warming? Not So Sure Anymore

**WASHINGTON** – Until a few years ago there was a semi-universal consensus on “global warming”. It was settled that the earth’s temperature is rising. It was settled that human activity, that is burning large amounts of fossil fuels, was the main cause. It was also settled that all countries, especially big ones that use most of the fossil fuels, would agree to drastically cut their consumption of coal, oil and gas, in order to stabilize the earth’s temperature. This change would be made possible by shifting to abundant, inexpensive and environmentally benign renewable energy.

## **Nothing is settled**

Well, as the world leaders gather in New York to look again at this scenario, it appears that nothing is settled.

First of all, while emissions have been rising during the past 10 to 15 years, temperatures have not. This should be impossible. All models indicated that more emissions must result in higher temperatures.

Of course, climate scientists who support the “man-made global warming” theory have tried to come up with explanations. And, who knows, may be there is a plausible reason why there has been a lull in rising temperatures, despite higher emissions. May be we are experiencing just a short pause within a long-term trend indicating higher and higher temperatures caused by fossil fuels consumption.

**Man made global warming?**

Still, this so far unexplained glitch may raise some doubts. What if the supposedly established cause and effect relationship between higher emissions and higher temperatures is just not there? In that case, the basic rationale for mandating or even suggesting the whole –immensely complex– energy policy shift would disappear. In that case, we would go back to normal. Energy choices will be determined by cost effectiveness, and not by the desire to avoid unproven global warming effects of fossil fuels.

### **US should change its energy policies**

Still, even assuming the validity of the “man-made global warming” theory, what should the United States do? Well, according to those who believe in the official global warming orthodoxy, it is clear that America, as the country with the highest per capita energy consumption and emissions, should be leading the anti-carbon battle.

Really? Well, the facts do not support this. The fact is that, while America is a major contributor to global emissions, (number 2 in the world), taken in isolation its efforts would have almost no impact. Indeed, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency, the very federal institution that has just come with a major plan aimed at moving America away from fossil fuels, the net outcome of this costly shift from fossil fuels to renewables would be a 0.18% reduction in global emissions.

### **Policy changes would have no impact**

Got that? As a result of major and costly investments in new energy, while closing down coal-burning power plants, we would get 0.18% reduction in global emissions. That’s it.

And this is because all the other major offenders, including China, India, Russia are not on board. Ditto for other emerging countries. Whatever they may think or believe about man-made global warming, they want to pursue economic

development. And this requires affordable energy: coal, gas, and heating oil. Simply stated, from their perspective, renewable energy is still way too expensive, and therefore unaffordable.

### **Is this a good foundation for public policy?**

So, here we are. We are confronted with an issue –global warming– whose causes are not quite understood. That said, even if we wanted to believe that rising temperatures are the direct result of higher emissions due to fossil fuels consumption, it is clear that forcing 300 million Americans to shift to still expensive renewable energy would not make any difference on global emissions.

And yet the President, the EPA and eminent scientists strongly believe that we should change our energy policies so that we can stop and reverse global warming.

Let me say this again. According to our national leadership, we should adopt a brand new energy policy in order to counter the effects of a problem we are not totally sure exists, while we know that this far reaching and expensive US effort would make no difference.

This does not make any sense.

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# **Without Access To A Good**

# Education America's Poor Will Stay Poor

WASHINGTON – President Barack Obama won re-election in 2012 largely on the promise that, with him as president, all the existing federal welfare and entitlement programs protecting the poor would be safeguarded.

## **Protect the safety net**

He won the day by convincing millions of Americans that the mean-spirited Republicans were going to destroy America's sacrosanct "safety net". According to the Obama campaign, Mitt Romney and his running mate Paul Ryan were determined to cut Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and other measures aimed at supporting indigent single mothers, poor children, and what not.

Addressing the poor and the struggling middle class, Obama essentially said: *"Vote for me, and you will be fine. I'll take care of you. Vote for Romney-Ryan and you will be in real trouble"*. And he won. There is no doubt that the voters bought all his scary predictions about what would have happened if the Republicans got into the White House.

## **Welfare programs do not work**

Fine. Except that now it is becoming more and more obvious that the extremely expensive social safety net fiercely protected by the Democrats in the name of "social justice" and "fairness" at best provides some economic relief.

However, all these programs do not accomplish their stated objective: reduce poverty. Thanks to various forms of welfare, the poor are subsidized, and so that they can get by. But their basic conditions do not change.

The fact is that all these programs do not create real opportunities for the poor to get out of poverty. Their net effect is to “stabilize” poverty, so that the poor do not become destitute; but they do not help eliminate poverty.

Indeed, under this supposedly enlightened and benevolent system, most of the poor stay poor and will stay poor.

And, to make things worse, just as before, the poor are mostly minorities. While the overall poverty rate in America is 15%, For Blacks it is 27% and for Hispanics it is 24%.

### **A good education is the only real path out of poverty**

At the cost of oversimplification, here is my assessment. Welfare programs fail because they focus mostly on income support.

But, while helping people to get by is important, the truth is that in most cases poverty begins at birth. And it is clear that if you are a poor child in America the only real path to get out of poverty is not welfare but access to a good education. Welfare is about survival. Education is about having a future.

And here I emphasize access to a “good” education. A little, so-so education will not cut it.

***It is a well known fact that in today's ultra-competitive and super specialized economy the good jobs go only to the highly skilled. Everybody else gets what's left. If you only have a little education, you get the scraps. And if you have no education, you get essentially nothing. Most poor children in America's receive little or no education. And this enormous disadvantage practically guarantees that most of them will stay poor.***

So, here is my point. Unless poor children have real,

practical access to a good education, their chances to get out of poverty and climb up the socio-economic ladder are practically zero.

### **Income support does not change anything**

You can provide all the income support subsidies you can think of. However, the only real ticket out of poverty and into the main stream is to get into the productive economy as a real player. And you cannot get there without a good education that includes truly marketable skills. Without the skills that allow them to compete for good jobs, the poor will stay poor.

Sure, thanks to costly government handouts, the uneducated poor will not starve. But they will stay poor, in most cases for ever.