

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



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By Si Frumkin

WHO IS MISCHKA KUKIN AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Even the greatest among have a hidden past. More often than not these secrets are not intentionally hidden – they just are overshadowed by what the rest of us consider to be more important. When exposed, they do not detract from the other, greater accomplishments. They just surprise us by showing the humanity we are reluctant to grant to our heroes.

The name Mishka Kukin is unfamiliar to most of us. I have a book he wrote in German, in 1962. Its name, *“Humor hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang”* translates to “Humor behind the Iron Curtain”. It is a compendium of jokes that circulated in the Soviet Empire and all its colonies, jokes that were told in whispers and could result in long prison terms for those who told them. It is a very special kind of humor – it is bitter, sad, more than a little painful, yet somehow hinting at a better world sometime in the future and easing the unbearable present.

The jokes are no longer relevant. The societies where they were born are gone. They probably are still told in Cuba, North Korea and, unfortunately, may soon be revived in Russia. But the little book by Kukin – illustrated by his own tiny line drawings – is a surprise for another reason. It reveals a side of a heroic man that is virtually unknown to the millions who know him under a different name.

Mischka Kukin is the pseudonym of Simon Wiesenthal.

Like most of us, I knew Wiesenthal by what he did and what he stood for. He dedicated his life to exposing the Nazi monsters who had committed unspeakable crimes and whom he wanted punished. His stubbornness, his dedication made him known throughout the world.

I met him a few times, I was honored to shake his hand and every year, on Rosh Ha'Shana, I received a card from him. I framed the last one I received – it was mailed from Vienna on September 20, 2005, the day of his death.

I never knew if he had a sense of humor. I never thought about it. I found out about the Mischka Kukin book quite by accident – I was searching Google for something else and there it was. It took a little more effort to find and order it from Germany. I picked out just a few jokes out of the more than 100 in the book. If you read German you may want to order it yourself, otherwise, here are just a few – maybe even written by him? – that I selected and translated.

«An elderly immigrant from the Soviet



Union is going through immigration and customs in New York. The agent is looking for anything that may be suspicious or incriminating.

He opens up the suitcase and pulls out a small bottle of pills.

“What is this?”

“Headache pills.”

“And this bottle?”

“It a prescription for stomach aches.”

“And this?”



am an old woman. get backaches. This salve stops the pain.”

The inspector pulls out a small carefully wrapped package, opens it up and discovers a small picture of Stalin.

“Why do you carry this picture?” he says.

“Why do you think? It is my cure for homesickness...”

A British correspondent manages to get into East Berlin and interviews a border guard at the gate in the Berlin wall.

“What would you do if the Wall suddenly collapsed?”

The guard thinks for a minute and says, “I would climb the nearest tree.”

“Why?”

“Do you think I want to be trampled by the mob trying to get out?”

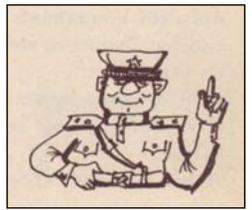
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«A Russian host is trying to convince a visiting foreign diplomat that coexistence is possible. He takes the guest to the Moscow zoo where a wolf and a lamb rest peacefully in the same cage.

“Nations with different political systems can coexist just as these two animals can. Capitalism and communism can live together in total harmony.”

“How did you achieve this?” asks the foreigner shaking his head. “A wolf and a lamb sharing a cage?”

“It’s simply a question of efficient organization. We bring a new lamb every morning.” (Continued on page 2)



«An old Czech farmer writes a letter to God: "Dear God – Please send me 1000 Kronas. You are almighty and it wouldn't mean anything for you but I need this help very badly."»

The censors read the letter and send it to the Party Committee for advice. The Party Secretary knows the farmer as a harmless simpleton and decides that it would be good propoganda to send him 500 Kronas.



The farmer then writes another letter: "Dear God – Thank you for the money. But if you should send any more money, please do not send it through the Party Committee. Those

thieves stole half of it."

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«In communist Prague a crowd gathers to admire a brand-new shiny Cadillac parked in the street. One of the onlookers says, "Isn't the new Russian 'Pobieda' a gorgeous car?"

"'Pobieda?' Comrade, don't you know that this is an American automobile?"

"Oh, I know the car. It is you whom I don't know".



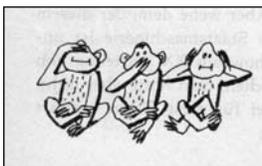
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«A foreigner asks a Moscow policeman.

"Could you tell me what time it is?"

"It is exactly quarter to nine," says the policeman at once.

"Thank you, but how did you know it? You didn't even look at your watch..."



"Simple. Look at all these apartment houses around us – all the windows are closed. The "Voice of America" starts at exactly 8:45 and everyone is listening to it."

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Two Jews meet in Moscow:

"So tell me, what do you think, have we reached communism already or will it get even worse?"



«... and in Odessa:

"So what's new?"

"There is good news and there is bad news!"

"Tell me!"

"The good news is that Khrushchev had a stroke."

"And the bad?"

"It isn't true!"



ANOTHER LETTER THE L.A. TIMES WILL NOT PRINT

(And this one was complimentary...)

The front page of the Sunday Opinion section of the Los Angeles Times ran a very unusual story. It reported that the situation among the homeless on skid row was actually improving because—get this!—of the efforts by the police. It said that the police actually helped save lives, that crime and homicides were reduced, and that the cops were to be commended for what they did.

This was amazing! There were many stories for the last 20 years about the skid row—the area roughly between 1st and 7th streets and between Los Angeles street and Alameda Blvd. for those of us who have never been there—and all those stories were critical of the nasty cops, full of complaints by the ACLU and its like, and calling for more compassion and understanding for the unfortunates, not for more police presence and law enforcement.

I was shocked and pleased and wrote the letter you see below. It wasn't published. Instead, on Thanksgiving day, there were two letters criticizing the article and calling for less action and more understanding.

Ah well, nothing really changes... Here is my letter:

To: LETTERS, L.A. Times, 11/19/2007

RE: "SKID ROW IN REHAB", OPINION, 1/18/07

You made my day!

As a businessman who worked for 15 years in the heart of skid row – corner of 6th and St. Julian – I was aware of the horror faced by those who lived there. I was also very much aware of the crime, drugs and murderous predators that preyed on the weak and defenseless. Most of all I was aware of, and grateful to, the police who tried to stop crime, save lives and do good work under impossible conditions while facing constant criticism and attacks from the well-meaning ignoramuses whose response to the situation was to attack the police and restrict its activity.

Policemen were prohibited from removing passed-out individuals from sidewalks who were then left to face the rain and the gangsters. Mentally challenged individuals were not to be arrested while running through traffic. Policemen were barred from "entrapping" predators by dressing in rags and lying on the filthy sidewalk for hours, immobile with money protruding from a pocket. Groups that distributed food in the streets were not allowed to urge the recipients to use garbage cans – "We don't have the right to tell them what to do!" I was told by a lady giving out hamburgers and hot dogs – and the rats had a field day in the filthy streets every time the trucks came. I carried a gun when I walked to the parking lot at night and twice I had to fire in the air to stop a gang from stomping a man to death, etc. etc.

But the worst was opening the Los Angeles Times and reading about the vicious, unsympathetic, brutal police who were always wrong in making life difficult for the poor homeless. Your coverage was inaccurate and biased. I am sure that it cost lives. You echoed the ACLU and supported senseless policies that encouraged crime. .

Now, finally, you ran an article that tells it like it really is. It is about time. Thank you, thank you on my behalf, but more importantly on the behalf of those who live there and do not read the Times. Maybe, just maybe, some of the ACLU bleeding hearts and their ilk who live in a world of their own, might be willing to stop, think and try doing real good for a change by supporting the police, not the criminals.

Sincerely, Si Frumkin

PS: Just for your information, I was the CEO of Universal Drapery Fabrics, Inc at 401 E. 6th street. I retired about 12 years ago. I toyed with idea of getting together a truckload of homeless and dumping them on the front lawn of Ramona Ripston, the head of California ACLU, just to see whom she would call for help. I didn't do it and have been regretting it ever since.

Hope is a Christian virtue, but not a political one. Those who depend on it for political ends will learn a painful lesson.

Niccolo Machiavelli, 1469-1527

Initially, the American strategy met with stunning success. Iran, North Korea, Syria and indeed the Arab world as a whole were terrified by the victorious American assault on Saddam. Unfortunately, rather than build on their momentum, the Americans did everything they could to assure these states that they had no reason to worry that a similar fate would befall them. Rather than maintain the offensive - by sealing Iraq's borders and then going after insurgents' bases in Iran and Syria - the US went on the defensive. And so it allowed Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia to support and direct the insurgency. As a result of America's show of weakness, the lesson that its enemies took from its campaign in Iraq was that to deter the Americans, they should intensify their support for terror and their weapons of mass destruction programs.

Once deterrence collapsed, the Americans chose a mix of appeasement and threats that had no expiration date. Last year's North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile and nuclear tests, the war in Lebanon, the Hamas takeover of Gaza and Iran's intensification of its nuclear program are all the result of the failure of this model of US foreign policy making.

These policies are of a piece with the US's general posture toward its adversaries. And that posture is unfortunately based on a hugely inflated view of America's deterrent capabilities and Washington's failure to craft policies that are suited to its interests and goals.

TODAY, THE most glaring example of this state of affairs is Pakistan.

America has two primary goals there. First, it seeks to prevent Pakistan's nuclear weapons and technologies from proliferating or falling under the control of jihadists.

Second, it seeks to defeat al-Qaida and the Taliban.

After September 11, the Americans gave Pakistani's military dictator a choice: he could help them defeat the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan or he could lose power. That was a good start, but then the Americans began losing track of their priorities. After Gen. Pervez Musharraf agreed to Washington's ultimatum, the Americans put all their eggs in his basket. And they thereby lost their ability to deter him and so influence his behavior.

Certain of unconditional American backing, Musharraf played a double game. He helped the US in Afghanistan and then allowed the Taliban and al-Qaida to escape

and re-base in Pakistan.

Musharraf also failed to be forthcoming on nuclear issues. He barred American investigators from interrogating Pakistan's chief nuclear proliferator, A.Q. Khan, and so denied them key intelligence on other countries' Pakistani-supported nuclear programs. Yet having based their Pakistan policy on their assumption that Musharraf was irreplaceable, the Americans pretended nothing was wrong.

And now they are confronted with a disastrous situation. On the one hand, thanks to Musharraf's hospitality, al-Qaida and the Taliban control large swathes of Pakistan and have declared jihad against their host, thus placing Pakistan's nuclear arsenals in greater danger. At the same time, they use their Pakistani bases to intensify their insurgency in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, as has been his consistent policy since seizing power in 1998, Musharraf continues to ignore the seriousness of the Taliban-al Qaida threat. The purpose of his recent declaration of martial law and suspension of the Pakistani constitution was not to enable him to better fight the jihadists. It was to break his liberal political opposition whose members demand democracy and an end to his military rule.

And in the midst of this, the Americans find themselves with no leverage over the still irreplaceable Musharraf.

A similar situation exists in Saudi Arabia. There, too, the US squandered the leverage it gained after the September 11 attacks by giving unconditional support to the Saudi royal family. The Saudis immediately understood that the best way to ensure continued American support was to

extend their support for terrorism and funding of radical, pro-jihad mosques while raising the price

of oil. As in Pakistan, the worse the situation became, the more the Americans supported them.

AND THEN of course there are the Palestinians. Here American policy has been a double failure. First of all, it has destroyed American deterrence toward the Arab world.

To divert American attention away from their support for jihadist terrorism, the leaders of the Arab world sought to convince the Americans that the only way to end their support for terror and jihad was by resolving the Palestinian conflict with Israel.

Rather than stop to question the validity of the Arabs' strange assertion, the Americans believed them. Over time, this belief led them to neglect their actual goals - ending the Arab world's support for terror; preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and maintaining oil prices at around \$30 a barrel - in favor of a secondary and unrelated issue.

Aside from that, it bears noting that it is largely because of the strengthening of jihadist forces in the Arab world that there is no possibility of achieving peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Rather than understand this, the Americans have allowed the Arabs to send them on a wild goose chase that will never end.

The very fact that this week US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice thought that it was more important to come to Israel for the ninth time this year than to deal with the crisis in Pakistan shows clearly just how deeply the Americans have internal-

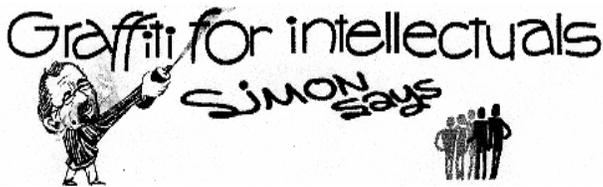
Americans find themselves with no leverage over the still irreplaceable Musharraf.

ized this Arab fiction.

Then there are the Palestinians themselves. As Bush announced in 2002, the US's main goal regarding the Palestinians is to force them to stop engaging in terror and jihad. All other American policies regarding the Palestinians were supposed to be conditioned on the accomplishment of this goal. Yet as in Pakistan, over time the Americans neglected this goal in favor of an easier one - supporting Mahmoud Abbas and Fatah. To strengthen Abbas and Fatah, the Americans have cast aside their goal of ending Palestinian terror. As a result, today they have no leverage over Abbas. As with Musharraf in Pakistan, strengthening Abbas is the only policy the Americans have toward the Palestinians, and increasingly, toward Israel. And as in Pakistan, the threatening reality on the ground is a consequence of the fact that their policy ignores their actual goals.

Two conclusions can be drawn from contrasting America's victory in Iraq with its failures in so many other theaters. First, the only way to successfully fight your enemies is to actually fight them. And second, basing policies on pretending to deter leaders who are not deterred is a recipe for failure. Until the Americans accept these lessons, Iraq aside, the international environment will grow ever more threatening. ☆

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AMERICA'S STRATEGIES FOR VICTORY & DEFEAT

Caroline Glick, Jerusalem Post, November 2007

The Battle of Iraq is nearly over. And the Americans have nearly won. Their enemies are on the run. Al-Qaida forces have lost or are losing their bases of operations. Its fighters are being killed and captured in ever increasing numbers. Iraq's Sunni citizens, who, until recently, refused to take any part in the post-Saddam regime, are joining the army and citizens' watch groups by the thousands.

Local sheikhs in Baghdad, following the example set earlier by Sunni sheikhs in Anbar province, are ordering their people to fight with the Americans against al-Qaida. For their part, the Shi'ite militias know that they are next in line for defeat. As a result, Muqtada al-Sadr ordered his Shi'ite militiamen to cease their attacks.

The numbers speak for themselves. Over the past month, some 46,000 Iraqi refugees returned home. Since May, the number of civilian casualties has decreased by 75 percent. US military casualties have also dropped precipitously after the death rate rose in recent months of hard fighting. Neighborhoods in Baghdad that had ceased to function under al-Qaida's reign of terror have come back to life.

Businesses are reopening. People are rebuilding their homes. Even churches are reopening their doors. This is what victory looks like.

Yet the promise of Baghdad is a lone ray of light in an otherwise darkened field of failed US policies. As President George W. Bush prepares to enter his last year in office, America's international standing is at a low point. The forces of jihad, while being defeated in Iraq, are rising everywhere else. The price of oil races toward the once inconceivable price of

\$100 a barrel. New jihadist mosques open daily throughout the world. Pakistan is a disaster. Iran is closing in on the bomb.

TO UNDERSTAND America's manifold failures, it makes sense to begin with a look at why Iraq is different. For the new, successful American strategy in Iraq is not only different from what preceded it there. It is also different from the US strategy that is failing everywhere else.

First, the only way to successfully fight your enemies is to actually fight them.

The new American strategy in Iraq is based on a fairly simple assumption: The US goal in Iraq is to defeat its enemies, and to defeat its enemies the US must target them with the aim of defeating them. This is a strategy based on common sense.

Unfortunately, common sense seems to be the rarest of commodities in US foreign policy circles today. Outside of Iraq, and until recently in Iraq as well, the US has based its policies on the notion that it can bend its adversaries to its will by on the one hand signaling them in a threatening way, and on the other hand by trying to appease them where possible. And this is the heart of the failure.

In the lead-up to Iraq, it was clear to US strategic planners that of the three states - Iraq, Iran and North Korea - that Bush labeled

as members of the "Axis of Evil," Iraq was the least dangerous. It sponsored terror less than Iran. Its weapons of mass destruction programs were less developed than those of Iran and North Korea.

As a result, there were some voices - particularly in Israel - which suggested that given that the US was uninterested in targeting more than one country in addition to Afghanistan, the US should direct its fire at Iran rather than Iraq. But for their own reasons - among them the collapse of the UN sanctions regime on Iraq, the fact that Iraq alone was under UN Security Council authority, and Iraq's relative weakness - the Americans chose to go after Saddam.

And second, basing policies on pretending to deter leaders who are not deterred is a recipe for failure.

They assumed that the invasion itself would strengthen America's deterrent capability and so work to America's advantage in its dealings with Iran and North Korea. Here, then, we see that the decision to invade Iraq was based in part on a continued American reliance on a strategy of signaling rather than confronting Iran and North Korea. If this hadn't been the case, Iraq probably would have been cast to the side **(Continued on page 3)**.