

commentary

from other pens...

In 80s U.S. recruited many Islamic radicals

It's well known that Islamic guerrillas, with CIA assistance, helped evict the Soviet Army from Afghanistan in the 1980s, contributing in no small way to the eventual demise of the Soviet empire.

But many details about how the CIA got the job done never have been reported; Michael Springmann is willing to fill in some of the blanks. In the late 1980s, Springmann was a consular officer in Saudi Arabia — the same country, coincidentally, where 15 of the 19 terrorists who took part in the Sept. 11 suicide bombings obtained their U.S. visas.

He arrived in Saudi Arabia in September 1987, his first assignment as a career diplomat.

His main task was to decide whether visa applicants had a legitimate reason to visit the United States or instead were "intending immigrants" — meaning they had no intention of leaving once they got into the country.

From the outset, Springmann said in a recent interview, strange things happened. In 1988, two Pakistanis applied for visas to attend a trade show in the United States. But when they were unable to name the show or the city in which it was taking place, Springmann refused the visa requests.

A short while later, he said, the chief of the consular section overruled him. The Pakistanis soon were bound for the United States.

On another occasion, an unemployed refugee from Sudan showed up at the consulate — a person, Springmann said, who had no good reason to go to the U.S. and only the most ephemeral ties to Saudi Arabia.

In other words, Springmann said, the Sudanese was the type of person who would have no compelling reason to leave the United States once he arrived.

Springmann turned down the application but immediately encountered resistance. "I kept saying no," Springmann recalled. "But, again, the head of consular section gave him a visa. I asked why. He said national security reasons."

And so it went for the 18 months that Springmann was in Jiddah. About 100 applicants — Pakistanis, Syrians, Lebanese, Palestinians — whom he felt were unqualified were approved for visas over his objections, he said.

"I had people come to me and say, well, you can issue me the visa now or you can issue me the visa when the consul general overrules you," Springmann said.

The mystery about the bizarre situation disappeared around 1994, well after his departure from the foreign service. A one-time colleague told him Saudi Arabia was being used to funnel Islamic militants to the United States for training before heading for the battlefield in Afghanistan.

"I got the whole story and it all hung together," he said. "They were running people (to the consulate) from the CIA's recruiting office," he said, obviously exasperated that he wasn't told at the time.

He said the entire consular operation was run by the CIA.

The State Department had no comment on Springmann's allegations except to say final authority over visa decisions rests with the consular officer in charge, not with Springmann, a junior officer.

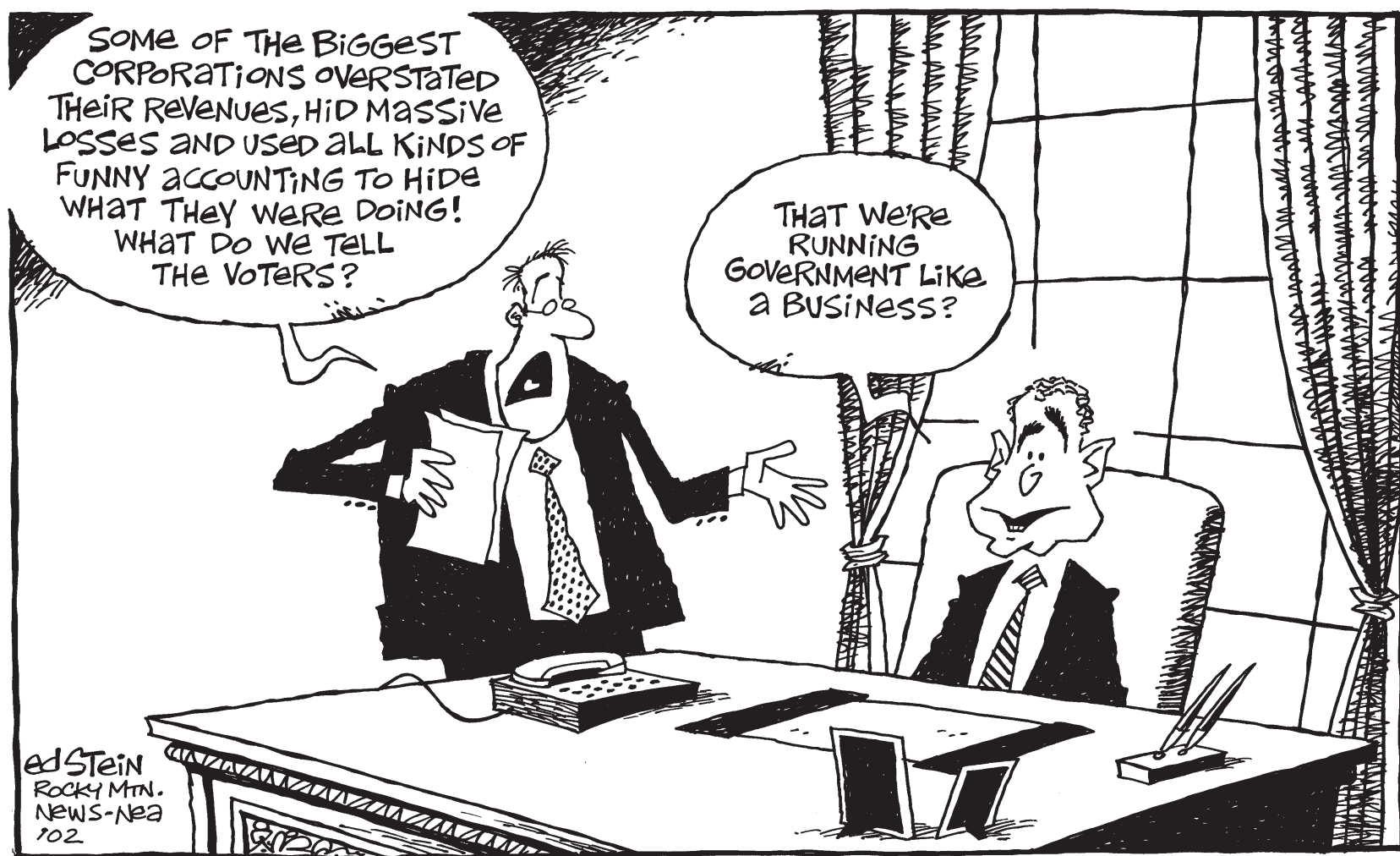
Looking back on his experience in Jiddah, Springmann said he found the idea of using the Jiddah consulate as a U.S. gateway for Islamic militants to be "sleazy and disreputable."

"If they wanted to train these people, why not train them in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan? Why bring them to the States?"

Springmann's politics are hardly mainstream. Last winter, he outlined his experiences in Jiddah in a radical publication, *The CovertAction Quarterly*. The magazine is a successor to the *CovertAction Information Bulletin*, whose chief mission was to expose the identities of CIA agents around the world.

A senior administration official, asking not to be identified, said the Bulletin's reports caused untold damage to the CIA over the years. The official declined comment on Springmann's allegations about his experiences in Jiddah.

EDITOR'S NOTE — George Gedda has covered foreign affairs for *The Associated Press* since 1968.



A tale of betrayal



joan ryan

• commentary

In "The Godfather: Part II," Michael Corleone softly delivers the poignant and ominous lines that seal his brother's fate. "I knew it was you, Fredo," Michael tells him. "You broke my heart. You broke my heart."

Then he has Fredo killed.

Fredo had committed the unforgivable offense, the injury that can never be made whole. He had betrayed one of his own.

This, more than any laws that might have been broken, gets to the core of the anguish and uproar over John Walker Lindh.

My son asked me the other day why Lindh was being treated differently from the other Taliban. Didn't they all commit the same offense? Why might Lindh spend his life in jail but not the other fighters? And why is everyone so angry at someone who seemed such a minor (some might say irrelevant) figure in the war?

I could have explained that fighting against one's own country — if that is what Lindh did — is considered the highest crime in the land, that treason is the only criminal offense specifically mentioned in the U.S. Constitution.

But there was a simpler answer.

"Betrayal," I said.

Treason, conspiring to kill an American abroad, providing support to a terrorist organization that results in American deaths — they are the legal expressions of something much more personal, an offense that stirs some ancient ganglia deep inside us, triggering emotions that reach back to the beginning of time.

"Elemental to every social group is the sense of moral obligation to each other," said James Quesada, an anthropology professor at San Francisco State University. "Betrayal induces an almost primordial reaction. That basic bond of trust has been severed."

In virtually every culture's story about Earth's first man and woman, the couple inevitably falls from grace after betraying the gods. The Bible tells the tale of Adam and Eve, who were tossed from Eden for betraying God's trust. For many Christians, that betrayal is known as original sin because it has stained all human souls ever since. It was the one sin even God couldn't forgive.

We reserve special contempt for those who turn on one of their own. In the story of Jesus' death, it is Judas the betrayer more than Pontius Pilate the condemner who is the more despicable figure.

In Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar," the one line everyone remembers is in the raspy last words of the great leader: "Et tu, Brute?" Brutus's betrayal is the true tragedy in the story, more than the bloody assassination itself.

In modern times, Linda Tripp became the target of ceaseless, hateful criticism and derision not so much because she revealed Bill Clinton's sordid

romps in the Oval Office but because she betrayed a friend to do it. (As for Clinton's own betrayals, they will garner more space in his obituary than his accomplishments.)

The Enron story, too, has captured the nation in great part because it's a tale of betrayal: A beloved boss and civic leader named Ken Lay, trusted beyond reason by his employees, sells them out and destroys their lives.

"In all closed groups, there's a shared identity," said Nancy Shepper-Hughes, a UC Berkeley anthropologist. "There's the notion of insiders and outsiders. You can lie, cheat and steal among the outside group, but there's a morality that applies within the group that can't be broken."

Lindh was an insider who went over the wall. He became the other. He embraced a moral code that spit in the face of everything the group held dear.

He is not unlike a lot of people at 20, an age of rebellion. But he rebelled against an America that has pulled itself more tightly together than at any time since World War II. Verbal dissent is barely tolerated at the moment, so it is no surprise that 28 percent of Californians support executing Lindh if he is found guilty of providing support to Osama bin Laden's army, even if he didn't personally harm another American.

No matter what happens in the courts, Lindh has already been sentenced. Fair or not, true or false, he will bear the stain of betrayal forever.

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Send comments to her e-mail at joanryan@sfgchronicle.com.

The defense rests



red green

• north of forty

Whenever you see a married couple telling a story to a third party, there is a drastic shift in the relationship and dynamic between them. The person who's telling the story, in most cases the wife, becomes the Prosecutor, while the person who the story's about, in all cases the husband, becomes the Defense Attorney. The third party, who is usually a friend or neighbor, becomes judge and jury. Unlike formal court procedures, these trials have very few rules. There is no prerequisite to present evidence or provide witnesses or most importantly, to tell the truth. The two quasi-lawyers start with the summations and then just interrupt each other at will, imploring the judge to see it their way. The judge on the other hand has no hard evidence to make a decision and ultimately sides with the person they like, which puts the friendship in jeopardy. So I suggest that if you and your wife have a story to tell, never tell it together. Let her tell it her way to her friends, and you tell it your way to yours. Neither one of you is telling the story the way it actually happened anyway, so the outcome is not relevant or important. And if you ever do get into a situation where you accidentally find yourselves telling a story simultaneously to the same person, ask for a recess, take your wife aside and settle out of court.

I'M KING OF THE WORLD

I know that in the early stages of child development, they go through a phase when they believe they are the center of the universe. As a parent, it is your job to alter that misconception by trying to convince them to be mindful of others, mainly to

be mindful you. It happened to us. Through the experiences of growing up and having teachers and friends and bosses, we all became convinced that we are not the center of our universe. I think this is a mistake. This may be a good policy short term, but in the long run, like when you get to be my age, it's really important to be the focus of your own life. Otherwise, you run the risk of making a 27-year-old Hooters waitress the center of your universe and that will only lead to disappointment as you fall short in oh so many areas. But when you're the one who sets the standard for your universe, you're like a chapter from the Goldilocks story — everyone different than you is either too young or too old or too big or too small, whereas you are just right. So be the center of your universe. Make all of your decisions based on how it affects you. Live everyday as if you are the Intergalactic Emperor. But don't tell anyone. Especially your wife.

TIME CAPSULE RE-THINK

A long time ago some of us made time capsules, filled them with memorabilia and buried them in our backyards. Now that we've gained the perspective of time, you may not want to be remembered for what you put in there. Here are a few items you should remove before it's too late:

- Your pet rock.
- Your Slim Whitman 8-track.
- Your mood ring.
- Your lucky rabbit's foot.
- Your Nixon button.

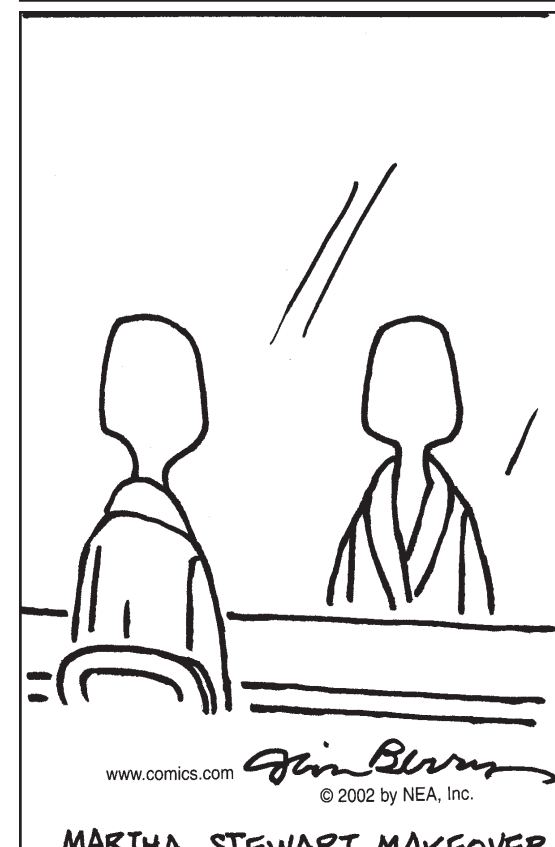
GRANDCHILDREN SHOULD BE SEEN

A lot of people my age have grandchildren. That has to be the best of all worlds. All the good parts of being a parent without any of the consequences. You play with the kid until he gets on your nerves, and then you take him home. You can give him a pony for his birthday and not have to worry about where he's going to keep it. Spoiling your grandchildren is the nicest way to get back at your kids.

Quote of the Day: "There is always one more imbecile than you counted on." — Red Green

Red Green is the star of "The Red Green Show," a television series seen in the U.S. on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of the new book "Duct Tape is not Enough: A humorous guide to midlife." (Hatherleigh Press, 2002). Watch for the feature film *Red Green's "Duct Tape Forever"* at a theater near you.

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