

BRAINSTORMING FUTURE AMERICAN NEO- FEUDALISM TODAY

See if this sounds familiar to you:



...governments and global elites pursue short-term economic gain above all else. Their aggressive focus on growth, efficient markets, and robust trade eventually causes financial volatility as a result of poorly organized uncoordinated responses to crises in global health, environmental change, and other international issues. The global economic system appears robust and successfully promotes prosperity, but this type of globalization has a dark side: trafficking of illicit goods, human rights violations, and a widening gap between rich and poor. Health and environmental disasters—some sudden and others slow-burning—frequently overwhelm domestic agencies, which are increasingly understaffed. Climate change becomes an acute concern, exacerbating resource scarcities and damaging coastal urban centers.

While it's not an exact match, it sounds pretty close to what I was talking about in my post on health care as a significant step towards neo-feudalism, or Glenn Greenwald's must-read piece on corporatism.

The piece is from an Office of Director of National Intelligence Scenario developed for the Quadrennial Intelligence Community Review. It is, ODNI seems to think, just one possible future—a future it places in 2025, 15 years away—though not the most likely one.

I raise it because Congress' failure to pass health care reform that actually promises health

care, and its upcoming failure to pass climate change legislation that actually fixes climate change (which was one of the things preventing Copenhagen from being more successful) show that key elements of this scenario are already in place. The reason Mary Landrieu and Joe Lieberman and Ben Nelson (though Landrieu is the only one who will consistently admit this) refuse to pass legislation that will introduce competition in the health insurance industry is because they want to ensure that the health care industry remains at its 16% of the economy, if not grows. The profits of our corporations are effectively taking precedence over the urgent need to both give everyone health care and cut the amount of money we use doing it. And while the health care bill will put off the time when our failure to do what every other industrialized nation has managed to do causes a major crisis, it will not prevent it.

Now the interesting thing about this scenario are the things that it gets—in my opinion—wrong. For example, it suggests that citizens in this world would have the ability to demand privacy protections from the government; yet we have already ceded so much privacy to corporations, and the corporations have taken over governmental functions, I see little chance of demanding real privacy from our government, or even rolling back the surveillance the government has already put into place. (Though note the scenario's fear that "profit motivated state actors dominate the information environment, limiting the Government's access to critical data"—it seems the intelligence community's big fear is that they won't be able to continue collecting our data.) I also find it ludicrous that our IC (!) suggests that the time when terrorists and other criminals will exploit cross-border flows to further their causes lies 15 years in the future; do they really not know the degree to which this happens right now? And while the government is currently dumping stimulus dollars into our infrastructure—something this scenario envisions happening to stave off natural disasters—it's

not clear that we're making substantive advances in our infrastructure, rather than just doing the maintenance that has been neglected for the last decade. And frankly, I think this scenario is far too placid about the types of organizations that average people will be forced to form in response to their increasing vulnerability.

It's a weird thing, this scenario. While it recognizes the real threat of the rising neo-feudalist world, it seems more worried about whether the IC will be able to exert the power it does today than about what it means for people more generally.