THE SCARY USED CAR BROKER PLOT

Consider these two data points. First, Jo Becker reports that the money laundering scheme run by the Canadian Lebanese Bank involved brokering used cars purchased in America.

> In that inquiry, American Treasury officials said senior bank managers had assisted a handful of account holders in running a scheme to wash drug money by mixing it with the proceeds of used cars bought in the United States and sold in Africa. A cut of the profits, officials said, went to Hezbollah, a link the organization disputes.
>
> [snip]
>
> Eventually an American team dispatched to look into Mr. Joumaa's activities uncovered the used-car operation. Cars bought in United States were sold in Africa, with cash proceeds flown into Beirut and deposited into three money-exchange houses, one owned by Mr. Joumaa's family and another down the street from his hotel. The exchanges then deposited the money, the ostensible proceeds of a booming auto trade, into the Lebanese Canadian Bank, so named because it was once a subsidiary of the Royal Bank of Canada Middle East.
>
> But the numbers did not add up. The car lots in the United States, many owned by Lebanese émigrés and one linked to a separate Hezbollah weapons-smuggling scheme, were not moving nearly enough merchandise to account for all that cash, American officials said. What was really going on, they concluded, was that European drug proceeds were being intermingled with the car-sale cash to make it appear legitimate.

> Hezbollah received its cut either from the exchange houses, or via the bank itself, according to the D.E.A. And the Treasury Department concluded that Iran also used the bank to avoid sanctions, with Hezbollah's envoy to Tehran serving as go-between.

And we only indicted the guy running this plot, Ayman Joumaa, in November, 10 months after Treasury designated Ayman Joumaa as a Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers.

Of course, November 23 is roughly two months after Manssor Arbabsiar, an Iranian used car broker whose finances had a remarkable uptick in the last two years, during which period he largely left South Texas, was arrested.

And while all of the ties Treasury noted in January were to Colombian drug networks, November's indictment rolled out this week includes a Los Zetas angle.

> It was part of the conspiracy that the defendant and his co-conspirators coordinated the shipment of at least tens of thousands of kilograms of cocaine from Colombia, through Central America and Mexico, to the United States, including but not limited to 85,000 kilograms ofcocaine shipped from Colombia for sale to Los Zetas drug cartel from in and around 2005 through in and around 2007.

I'll come back to this later—I'm watching Robert Mueller repeat that it's more important for FBI to entrap Muslim kids than to crack down on financial fraud at SJC.

But I'd suggest that the discovery of Scary Iran Plot as a side angle to Scary Used Auto Broker Plot would explain a lot of the problems with the case.

Update: One other thing: I'm curious why DOJ

sealed the Joumaa indictment from November 23 to December 12. I don't know the answer to that, but it's worth noting that Hezbollah and Iran rolled up US and Israeli spy rings during that period.

WHAT IF WE SCRUBBED WACHOVIA LIKE WE DID THE LEBANESE CANADIAN BANK?

I'll have several things to say about Jo Becker's story on the big Hezbollah money laundering ring. For the moment, I'm most interested in how Treasury Department authorities uncovered the ring: by first declaring Lebanese Canadian Bank a money launderer, providing reason to break it up. When an affiliate of Société Générale agreed to buy the bank, they also agreed to scrub its money laundering accounts. To do so, it specifically had someone beyond the Big Four accounting firm that had "overlooked" the accounts in the past scrub the books, including bringing in John Ashcroft.

> As part of its own agreement with Treasury officials, Lebanon's Central Bank set up a process to scrub the books. But compliance officers at S.G.B.L.'s French partner, Société Générale, were skeptical of the Central Bank's choice of investigators. One of them, the local affiliate of the international auditing firm Deloitte, had presumably missed the drug-related accounts the first time around, when it

> served as the Lebanese Canadian Bank's outside auditor.
>
> And, according to people knowledgeable about Lebanese banking, the central bank's on-the-ground representative had been recommended to that post by Hezbollah.
>
> As an extra step, to reassure wary international banks, the chairman of S.G.B.L., Antoun Sehnaoui, commissioned a parallel audit, with the help of Société Générale's chief money-laundering compliance officer. And to make sure that his bank did not run afoul of Treasury officials by inadvertently taking on dirty assets, he also hired a consultant intimately familiar with the Patriot Act provision used to take the bank down: John Ashcroft, the former attorney general whose Justice Department wrote the law.

And then it investigated (presumably using pattern analysis) each and every account at the bank.

> Initially, the auditors looked only at records for the past year. As they began combing through thousands of accounts, they looked for customers with known links to Hezbollah. They also looked for telltale patterns: repeated deposits of vast amounts of cash, huge wire transfers broken into smaller transactions and transfers between companies in such wildly incongruous lines of business that they made sense only as fronts to camouflage the true origin of the funds.
>
> Each type of red flag was assigned a point value. An account with 1 or 2 points on a scale to 10 was likely to survive. One with 8 or 9 cried out for further scrutiny. Ultimately, the

> auditors were left with nearly 200 accounts that appeared to add up to a giant money-laundering operation, with Hezbollah smack in the middle, according to American officials. Complex webs of transactions featured the same companies over and over again, most of them owned by Shiite businessmen, many known Hezbollah supporters. Some have since been identified as Hezbollah fronts.

So effectively, they took a bank known to ignore money laundering controls and took it apart, piece by piece, to see all the money laundering it had sheltered.

Compare how the US dealt with Wachovia, which was involved in laundering a far greater chunk of money for drug cartels: $363 billion.

US authorities partly became aware Wachovia was helping cartels launder money when they captured a plane in 2006. In addition, the DEA first noted their role in launder Casas de Cambio money in 2005, and a British whistleblower had identified signs that same year.

But it's clear that by 2007 officials from top regulators were aware of the problems.

> Late in 2007, Woods attended a function at Scotland Yard where colleagues from the US were being entertained. There, he sought out a representative of the Drug Enforcement Administration and told him about the *casas de cambio*, the SARs and his employer's reaction. The Federal Reserve and officials of the office of comptroller of currency in Washington DC then "spent a lot of time examining the SARs" that had been sent by Woods to Charlotte from London.
>
> "They got back in touch with me a while afterwards and we began to put the pieces of the jigsaw together," says Woods. What they found was – as Costa says – the tip of the iceberg of what

> was happening to drug money in the banking industry, but at least it was visible and it had a name: Wachovia.

But the prosecution of Wachovia wasn't initiated until after Wells Fargo took it over in 2008. Which means Treasury could have insisted on the same process—an examination of a bank with known problems with money laundering to find all of its criminal clients.

It's possible Treasury did—or is still doing that. Though reports suggest they primarily looked at the methods already identified—CDCs and travelers checks—as laundering vehicles Wachovia facilitated, which is the reverse of what seems to have happened with LBC. Note, too, the cartel plane belonged to Sinaloa, which has had a very odd cooperation agreement with US authorities. What would Treasury find if it examined all of Wachovia's accounts for money laundering activity? Or any of the banks salvaged with the help of bailouts from taxpayers?

The former head of the UN's drug and crime office has explained that the liquidity crises banks have faced in the last decade has made them a lot more interested in handling the cash of organized crime.

> During Costa's time as director for economics and finance at the EC in Brussels, from 1987, inroads were made against penetration of banks by criminal laundering, and "criminal money started moving back to cash, out of the financial institutions and banks. Then two things happened: the financial crisis in Russia, after the emergence of the Russian mafia, and the crises of 2003 and 2007-08.
>
> "With these crises," says Costa, "the banking sector was short of liquidity, the banks exposed themselves to the criminal syndicates, who had cash in

> hand."
>
> Costa questions the readiness of governments and their regulatory structures to challenge this large-scale corruption of the global economy: "Government regulators showed what they were capable of when the issue suddenly changed to laundering money for terrorism — on that, they suddenly became serious and changed their attitude."

Shouldn't every bank that becomes insolvent be examined for such laundering?

LANNY BREUER REWARDS DOJ LAWYERS FOR WINNING IMPUNITY FOR PROSECUTORIAL MISCONDUCT

I always like reading DOJ's various expressions of their investigative and prosecutorial priorities—because they usually show a disinterest in prosecuting banksters, a thorough waste of resources on entrapping young Muslims, and an ongoing fondness for Anna Chapman.

Lanny Breuer's choice of DOJ lawyers to recognize yesterday was, in some ways, an improvement over the trend. I'm happy to see prosecutors rewarded for taking down the "Lost Boy" website. Rather than fixating on Anna Chapman and entrapping young Muslims, Breuer recognized prosecutors who entrapped older Muslims who attempted to smuggle someone they believed to be a Taliban member into the US. And Breuer even celebrated the rare prosecution of a

bankster, Lee Bentley Farkas.

And while Breuer's multiple awards to people seemingly making it easier to shut down the InterToobz in the guise of IP violations concerns me, it's this bit that I found disgusting.

> The Assistant Attorney General's Award for Distinguished Service was presented to Kirby Heller and Deborah Watson of the Criminal Division's Appellate Section for their exceptional work in the successful appeal of sanctions imposed upon federal prosecutors in the case of Dr. Ali Shaygan.

Effectively, Lanny Breuer is rewarding two appellate section lawyers for winning an 11th Circuit Court decision overturning sanctions imposed on DOJ for gross prosecutorial misconduct. Breuer's priorities, it seems, include ensuring that DOJ pays no price when it abuses its prosecutorial power.

The case goes back to February 2008, when Ali Shaygan was indicted for distributing controlled substances outside the scope of his medical practice; one charge tied that distribution to the death of one of Shaygan's patients. Shaygan ended up hiring a defense team that included one attorney who had had a run-in with the prosecutors in his case. In addition, the lead prosecutor, Sean Paul Cronin, was admittedly buddies with the lead DEA Agent, Chris Wells. After Shaygan's lawyers attempted (ultimately, successfully) to suppress a DEA interview with Shaygan on Miranda grounds, Cronin threatened the team.

> AUSA Cronin warned David Markus, Shaygan's lead attorney, that pursuing the suppression motion would result in a "seismic shift" in the case because "his agent," Chris Wells, did not lie.

Nine months later, during the trial, one of the

prosecution's witnesses alluded in cross-examination that he had tapes of conversations—failed attempts to bribe Shaygan's lawyer—at home.

> During the cross-examination of Clendening on February 19, 2009, Shaygan's counsel, Markus, asked Clendening if he recalled a telephone conversation in which Clendening told Markus that he would have to pay him for his testimony, and Clendening responded, "No. I got it on a recording at my house."

This revelation led to exposure of the government's collateral, failed investigation of Markus for witness tampering, as well as a significant number of discovery violations. In short, it became clear the government tried, unsuccessfully, to catch Markus bribing witnesses for favorable testimony and then hid all evidence they had tried. The prosecutor in the case was not properly firewalled form that investigation and even personally claimed to give authorization to tape the conversations. And in the days before the trial, the prosecutor checked in on the witness tampering investigation, apparently hoping to force Markus to withdraw from the case just as it went to trial. In the end, Shaygan was acquitted of all 141 charges against him.

After the trial, Miami District Court Judge Alan Gold held a sanctions hearing against the government for its gross misconduct. He held the government in violation of the Hyde Amendment. He had them pay all reasonable costs after a superseding indictment he judged was filed as part of the "seismic shift in strategy." And he publicly reprimanded the prosecutors involved in the case.

Now, the government admitted that it committed significant errors.

> The United States acknowledges that it

> initiated a collateral investigation into witness tampering and authorized two witnesses, Carlos Vento and Trinity Clendening, to tape their discussions with members of the defense team in violation of United States Attorney's Office policy; that, although there were efforts made to erect a "taint wall," the wall was imperfect and was breached by the trial prosecutors, AUSA Sean Paul Cronin and Andrea Hoffman, at least in part, because the case agent, DEA Special Agent Christopher Wells, was initially on both sides of the wall; and that, because the United States violated its discovery obligations by not disclosing to the defense "(a) that witnesses Vento and Clendening were cooperating with the government by recording their conversations with members of the defense team, and (b) Vento's and Clendening's recorded statements at the time of their trial testimony." Finally, the United States "acknowledges and regrets" that, "in complying with the Court's pre-trial order to produce all DEA-6 reports for in camera inspection on February 12, 2009 (Court Ex. 6), the government failed to provide the Court with the two DEA-6 reports regarding the collateral investigation, specifically Agent Wells' December 12, 2008 report (Court Ex. 2) and Agent Brown's January 16, 2009 report (Court Ex. 3)."

After the sanctions hearing, the government agreed to pay some legal fees associated with their misconduct. They just objected, and appealed, to the public reprimand and the requirement they pay for all fees after the superseding indictment.

But the appeals court not only **threw out the entire financial sanction**, it also vacated the public reprimands of the lawyers.

The Appeals Court opinion, written by William Pryor and joined by Rhesa Barksdale, read more like an attempt to override the jury's verdict than a recitation of the facts as determined by the District and Magistrate Judges. From their new interpretation of the facts, they effectively ruled the Hyde Amendment could not apply to prosecutorial misconduct undertaken after an initial objectively reasonable prosecution started.

> The starting point for a potential award of attorney's fees and costs under the Hyde Amendment is an objectively wrongful prosecution: that is, a prosecution that either is baseless or exceeds constitutional constraints. If the prosecution is objectively reasonable, as was the case here, then a district court has no discretion to award a prevailing defendant attorney's fees and costs under the Hyde Amendment.

In addition, in the name of "separation of powers," the Circuit effectively abdicated its role in policing prosecutorial misconduct.

> Respect for the separation of powers also informs our understanding that the Hyde Amendment provides an objective standard for bad faith. "In our criminal justice system, the Government retains 'broad discretion' as to whom to prosecute." Wayte v. United States, 470 U.S. 598, 607, 105 S. Ct. 1524, 1530 (1985) (quoting United States v. Goodwin, 457 U.S. 368, 380 n.11, 102 S. Ct.2485, 2492 n.11 (1982)). The Attorney General and United States Attorneys "have this latitude because they are designated by statute as the President's delegates to help him discharge his constitutional responsibility to 'take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed.'" Armstrong, 517 U.S. at 464, 116 S. Ct. at 1486 (quoting U.S. Const. art. II, § 3). "This broad discretion

> rests largely on the recognition that the decision to prosecute is particularly ill-suited to judicial review." Wayte, 470 U.S. at 607, 105 S. Ct. at 1530. "It also stems from a concern not to unnecessarily impair the performance of a core executive constitutional function." Armstrong, 517 U.S. at 465, 116 S. Ct. at 1486. In the light of this constitutional framework, we cannot read the Hyde Amendment to license judicial second-guessing of prosecutions that are objectively reasonable.

As James Edmondson noted in his dissent, the government didn't even ask the Circuit to weigh in on this as a separation of powers issue.

> I disagree with the idea that, if the Department of Justice and its lawyers are under the supervision, in some way, of federal judges – when the Department of Justice and its lawyers are actively engaged in litigating a case before a United States Court – a violation of the separation of powers is looming. I am inclined to think just the opposite. For me, it is the instances of the treating of the Department of Justice and its prosecutors differently from – and better than – other litigants that threaten the separation of powers between the Judicial Branch and the Executive Branch.
>
> [snip]
>
> By the way, the phrase "the separation of powers" never appears in the Department of Justice's brief, and the Department has never argued anything about that kind of issue.

He goes on to note that Judge Gold was just following a statute passed by Congress.

But in William Pryor's opinion, asking the government to avoid gross misconduct when it's prosecuting people against whom it has legitimate evidence is too much to ask of the Executive Branch.

No wonder Lanny Breuer celebrated this result. A hack Republican judge just gave Breuer's prosecutors wide latitude to engage in prosecutorial misconduct in the 11th Circuit! To hell with due process!

Now, as Gold noted in his ruling, this gross misconduct was exposed in the wake of DOJ's gross misconduct in the Ted Stevens case. This kind of misconduct is in no way isolated. Breuer's prosecutors—including, potentially, the high profile William Welch, whom Breuer backs unquestioningly, are still on the hook for such misconduct in the DC Circuit.

But preventing such behavior seems not to be Breuer's plan. Rather, he's going to reward DOJ members who successfully protect their own.

Sort of like the mafia.

US KEEPS LOSING CONTROL OF ITS DRONES

Funny how these drones keep experiencing failures in areas where they're engaging in a covert war and not—say—where they're being used to arrest American citizens in North Dakota.

> One of the Air Force's premier drones crashed Tuesday morning in the Seychelles, the Indian Ocean archipelago that serves as a base for anti-piracy operations, as well as U.S. surveillance missions over Somalia.

> [snip]
>
> The Seychelles, where U.S. officials have worked closely with local officials to establish the drone base, is hardly enemy territory, and the drone that crashed Tuesday was operated by the Air Force, not the CIA, which operated the stealth RQ-170 that crashed in Iran.
>
> Still, Tuesday's crash once again illustrates the fallibility of unmanned aerial vehicles.

I guess as drone use ramps up here in the US maybe we'll need to consult with whomever has sabotaged drones of late in multiple countries?

IRAN SEEKS INTERPOL PROSECUTION OF NEOCONSERVATIVES JACK KEANE, REUEL MARC GERECHT

Multiple news outlets in Iran are reporting that Iran has asked Interpol to prosecute former General Jack Keane (co-author of the Iraq surge) and former CIA operative Reuel Marc Gerecht on the basis of their open calls for the assassination of Iranian figures during a meeting of two House Homeland Security Subcommitttees on October 26.

From Mehr News:

> In a letter to Interpol, Iranian National Prosecutor General Gholam Hossein Mohseni-Ejei has called for the prosecution of the U.S. officials, IRNA reported on Monday.

> /snip/
>
> According to the online magazine Firstpost, at a session of the committee, Jack Keane, a retired four-star general who helped plan the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq, called for the assassination of the leaders of Iran's Qods Force in retaliation for their alleged role in a plot to kill the Saudi ambassador to Washington, a claim vehemently denied by Iranian officials.
>
> "Why don't we kill them? We kill other people who are running terrorist organizations against the United States," he said.
>
> The other witness, Reuel Marc Gerecht, a former CIA officer who is now a senior fellow at the neoconservative think tank the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, told the committee, "I don't think that you are going to really intimidate these people, get their attention, unless you shoot somebody."

The article then goes on to report that Congressmen Peter King, Michael McCaul and Patrick Meehan signed a November 22 letter stating "that the U.S. should undermine Iranian officials and damage the country's infrastructure through increasing covert operations".

Fars News Agency claims that Interpol stands ready to help in the effort:

> Iran's Deputy Police Chief Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan announced that the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) has promised to help Tehran prosecute the two former US officials who had called on the Obama administration to assassinate Iran's top military commanders.
>
> "The Interpol will take the steps for

> the prosecution of two Americans who sponsor terrorism," Radan told FNA on Tuesday.

Fars also has more of Keane's remarks:

> Keane pointed to US allegations that the elite Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) took part in a plot to kill Saudi Ambassador Adel al-Jubeir in Washington and pushed for assassinating "Quds Force top commanders".
>
> The retired general said Washington should carry out "cyber-attacks" against "selected military and economic interests inside of Iran," seize its assets, look into "denying their ships entry to ports around the world," work to isolate Tehran's central bank, and support Iranian dissident movements.

The article ends with a strong denial of Iran's involvement in the Scary Iran Plot and warns that these calls for retaliation amount to a call for war.

You can read more on Keane's background here on SourceWatch. It's probably enough to know about him that the Iraq "surge" was first discussed in an article he jointly authored with Fred Kagan. Gerecht also is an unabashed neocon, appearing prominently on the old Project for a New American Century website and now with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and The Weekly Standard.

Just in case you might think that Iran invented these quotes from Keane and Gerecht, you can listen to audio of portions of their October 26 testimony in this report (warning, audio is autoplay; click on "transcript" button for the text) for Austrailian radio.

It will be very interesting to see if Interpol actually opens an investigation and publicly

admits to having done so. Outright calls for the assassination of public figures are quickly labeled as terrorism when directed against the US, but are just as quickly labeled patriotism when directed outward from the US. I will keep an eye out for any further developments on this front.

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION CONFERENCE MAKES FEW CHANGES TO DETAINEE PROVISIONS

According to a press release from Senator Levin's office, the conference on the Defense Authorization has made few changes to the detainee provisions institutionalizing military detention of alleged terrorists.

With regards to Section 1031, which authorized the indefinite detention of alleged terrorists, the conference bill,

> Reaffirm[s] the military's existing authority to detain individuals captured in the course of hostilities conducted pursuant to the Authorization for the Use of Military Force. No change has been made to the Senate version of this provision, which confirms that nothing in the provision may be "construed to affect existing law or authorities relating to the detention of United States citizens, lawful resident aliens of the United States, or any other persons who are captured or arrested in the United States."

Section 1032, which mandates presumptive military detention, adds language purporting not to change FBI's national security authorities (though I don't understand how that could practically be the case).

> Require military detention – subject to a Presidential waiver – for foreign al Qaeda terrorists who attack the United States. This provision specifically exempts United States citizens and lawful resident aliens, authorizes transfer of detainees to civilian custody for trial in civilian court, and leaves it up to the President to establish procedures for determining how and when persons determined to be subject to military custody would be transferred, and to ensure that such determinations do not interfere with ongoing intelligence, surveillance, or interrogation operations. **Language added in conference confirms that nothing in the provision may be "construed to affect the existing criminal enforcement and national security authorities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation or any other domestic law enforcement agency with regard to a covered person, regardless whether such covered person is held in military custody."** [my emphasis]

And the conference does change the breathtaking limits on Attorney General authority in the Senate bill I laid out here, apparently adopting the House formulation of requiring the AG to ask permission of the Defense Secretary before the AG does his or her job.

> Require the Attorney General to consult with the Secretary of Defense before prosecuting a foreign al Qaeda terrorist who is determined to be covered under the previous section, or any other person who is held in military custody outside the United States, on whether

> the more appropriate forum for trial is a federal court or a military commission and whether the individual should be held in civilian or military custody pending trial.

It seems to me the language does enough to avoid a veto from the cowardly Obama, but still does terrible damage to both the clarity of national security roles and overall investigative expertise.

OBAMA TO IRAN: PLEASE GIVE OUR ASSASSINATION SURVEILLANCE DRONE BACK

Sorry, this is absurd.

> "We have asked for [our Sentinel drone] back. We'll see how the Iranians respond," Obama said during a joint news conference with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki after the two met at the White House.

We violate Iran's airspace, almost certainly conducting surveillance to support illegal assassinations, and we have the audacity to ask for our legally-suspect drone back?!?!

What are we going to offer them in exchange? Manssor Arbabsiar and a number of other, more competent spies to be named later? Because doesn't the request for the drone implicitly suggest assassinations are acceptable and really shouldn't interfere with polite diplomacy?

Besides, doesn't this violate trade sanctions on Iran?

NORMALIZING THE DISENFRANCHISEMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

I've been one of the first people to note that the Emergency Financial Manager laws have disproportionately affected MI's African Americans. Note what I wasn't arguing: that Governors Snyder and Granholm imposed EFMs **because** the cities in question were predominantly black. But it is, in fact, the case that the EFM law is affecting African Americans disproportionately, and with Detroit as Rick Snyder's bullseye, affecting far too many of MI's African Americans.

Nevertheless, the Free Press decided to turn that observation into a straw man.

> Brian Dickerson: What's really driving state takeovers: It ain't race
>
> [snip]
>
> Benton Harbor, Ecorse, Flint and Pontiac have something much more important in common: They're all *shrinking*—hemorrhaging taxpayers, homeowners, employers at an alarming rate.
>
> And in each case, African Americans are rushing for the exits just as fast, and in some cases faster, than their white, Latino and Asian neighbors.
>
> The numbers in the accompanying chart tell the story succinctly: In the decade between the U.S. census counts in 2000 and 2010, Benton Harbor and Pontiac both lost more 10% of their residents. Ecorse

> and Flint lost more than 15%, and Detroit, the city currently atop the state treasurer's critical list, lost 25%.

Now, the argument is a bit odd, not least because it looks at the last 10 years of population trends to explain an EFM law that goes back over twenty years (though the cities that have been in and out of EFM status, including Flint and Ecorse, have been losing population throughout that period).

More telling, though, is that Dickerson didn't consider why Wayne County, which also has a deficit and also shrank over 10% in the last decade, hasn't been seized (though people have started gunning for Wayne County, too). While the answer is obvious—not least, that the law pertains to municipalities—it reveals a lot of the underlying logic that got MI to embrace EFM laws.

It's not just that both Democrats and Republicans chose to make cities sink or swim on their own decades ago; given the segregation and history of white flight, that decision did have racial implications. It's also that the state relies relatively more on property taxes than other states, and relatively less on income taxes (particularly for a state that doesn't have another big source of funding, like oil revenues). Those decisions have made the exodus of MI's residents—both black and white—particularly devastating for cities. And all that's before you factor in things like predatory lending which further exacerbated the problems of communities with large African American populations.

The underlying issue here **is** MI's shrinking population, which itself is largely a response to globalization, to the gutting of the manufacturing that once thrived in these cities. But we as a state can choose to deal with it as a state, or we can choose to let the cities rot while putting stimulus money into newer areas.

And while the decision to do the latter may not be motivated primarily out of racism, it is having the undeniable affect of taking away a disproportionate amount of African Americans' self-governance.

GILANI TO BBC: ZARDARI TO REMAIN IN DUBAI HOSPITAL TWO MORE WEEKS

[youtube]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxfZ2706b0U[/youtube]

Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gilani granted an extended interview to BBC on Sunday.

Although many important topics were covered in the interview, the subject of the health of Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zaradari was perhaps the most crucial. The health part of the interview starts at around 1:50 of the video. I find it interesting that Gilani states that Zardari has now been moved from the ICU to "his room" at the hospital. If I recall correctly, early reports had stated that Zardari was in the ICU in order to cut down on the number of visitors. Gilani's reference to this move to a regular room appears to be more in the context of Zardari's recovery, so now there is reason to believe that Zardari's health when he arrived in Dubai was poor enough to warrant an extended stay in the ICU.

Gilani rejected outright the rumors that Zardari has suffered a stroke. Those rumors have persisted on Twitter for the entire time that Zardari has been hospitalized.

Most importantly, though, is Gilani's statement that Zardari now will "take rest" and that the

rest will be for “about two weeks”. Recall that when it was first revealed that Zardari was hospitalized in Dubai, the story was that he had suffered a mild heart attack and that he had undergone angioplasty. In my post about that news, I had this to say:

> It should be kept in mind that if Zardari did suffer a mild heart attack and then was treated with angioplasty, patients in this situation often are discharged from the hospital the next day and are usually free to resume normal activities fairly quickly. Should the hospitalization continue into next week, then either the status of Zardari’s health or the status of the political situation should be assumed to be different from what has been reported.

If we were to work only from the assumption that this was a mild heart attack followed by angioplasty, then Zardari remaining in Dubai for two more weeks would seem to point pretty strongly to the likelihood that Zardari has deemed it either not safe or not prudent for his return to Pakistan. However, that interpretation is complicated by Gilani linking Zardari’s shift out of the ICU as part of his recovery. A stay of four or five days in the ICU is not consistent with the initial health status that was reported. As a result, it appears that we are stuck in a holding pattern where we cannot fully ascribe Zardari’s extended hospital stay as wholly health-dependent or wholly politics-dependent.

The entire video is worthy of a close watch, as the questions from the BBC interviewer are delivered rapid-fire and Gilani seems to have been prepared for each of them.

Here is part of the Express-Tribune’s discussion of the interview:

> Gilani denied that the president had

> written a letter of resignation, as claimed by a source in Dubai. “Why should he write it?” asked Gilani. “He has the backing and support of the entire parliament.”
>
> /snip/
>
> As the last of US officers left the Shamsi airbase on Sunday, Gilani said that the base is now back in the hands of Pakistani forces.
>
> The base was constructed by the UAE government and had been used by Americans for many years, he added.
>
> The Americans had been given a 15-day deadline to vacate the base after the Nato attacks in Mohmand Agency on November 26 that killed 24 people.

Stay tuned for further developments.

THE WILD, WILD WEST: DRONES HUNTING DOWN CATTLE RUSTLERS

This story, billed as an account of the first Predator-drone assisted arrest in the US, has all the elements we’ve been expecting from this development.

The drone in question belongs to the Border Patrol; presumably, it operates under the legal black hole built up around borders.

> The drones belong to U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which operates eight Predators on the country’s northern and

> southwestern borders to search for illegal immigrants and smugglers.
>
> [snip]
>
> Congress first authorized Customs and Border Protection to buy unarmed Predators in 2005. Officials in charge of the fleet cite broad authority to work with police from budget requests to Congress that cite “interior law enforcement support” as part of their mission.

The local sheriff used the drone to conduct sophisticated surveillance of his target, the Brossart family.

> For four hours, the Predator circled 10,000 feet above the farm. Parked on a nearby road, Janke and the other officers watched live drone video and thermal images of Alex, Thomas and Jacob Brossart — and their mother, Susan — on a hand-held device with a 4-inch screen. The glowing green images showed people carrying what appeared to be long rifles moving behind farm equipment and other barriers.

What surprised me, though, was the justification for using the drone: $6,000 worth of cows that had wandered into the family’s property.

> A search of the property turned up four rifles, two shotguns, assorted bows and arrows and a samurai sword, according to court records. Police also found the six missing cows, valued at $6,000.

Now, to be fair, the cow thieves in question weren’t just your garden variety cow thieves. In a move that ought to remind Conservatives why they used to embrace libertarianism, these cow thieves allegedly belong to the Sovereign Citizen Movement.

> The six adult Brossarts allegedly belonged to the Sovereign Citizen Movement, an antigovernment group that the FBI considers extremist and violent. The family had repeated run-ins with local police, including the arrest of two family members earlier that day arising from their clash with a deputy over the cattle.

It’d be nice if the story considered this angle in more detail. Was the sheriff quicker to use this drone because he was targeting the closest thing his district has to terrorists? Is this part of the (also entirely predictable) focus on domestic terrorism for local law enforcement that doesn’t have any Muslim extremists to hunt?