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## Big Money, Left-Wing Politics Fuel Hollywood's Anti—Fracking Drive

By CHUCK DEVORE

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Culture influences politics more than politics influences politics. Popular culture and religion shape political outcomes years in advance of, and in ways far deeper, than can mere political parties.

Paradoxically, the fact that culture trumps politics is more readily embraced by those who favor big and powerful government, while being generally ignored by proponents of small government, liberty and free markets.

Ben Urwand's new book, "Hollywood's Pact with Hitler," explores the Nazis' deep understanding of the power of cinema and how it drove them to successfully manipulate Hollywood.

Urwand chronicles an American film industry so desperate to distribute movies in Germany that it capitulated to Nazi demands, not only censoring films for the German market, but internationally as well.

Film projects critical of Nazism were even spiked out of a fear that all American movies might be banned in 1930s Germany.

As in the 1930s, today's Hollywood is captive to the market, even when it results in films with a laughable or false premise.

Take this year's remake of the Cold War era "Red Dawn," starring Patrick Swayze. The original, released in 1984 at the height of Reagan-era tensions with the former Soviet Union, featured an all-out assault on America by the Soviet bloc. The new "Red Dawn" was to feature a Chinese surprise invasion of the U.S.

But, a complaint from a newspaper owned by the Chinese Communist Party sent panicked Hollywood executives to change the script and alter already filmed scenes to make the invaders be North Korean, never mind that that broken down nation has an economy the size of South Dakota's.

Not unsurprisingly, the new "Red Dawn" floundered, grossing \$20 million less than costs.

With ample historical and recent evidence of Hollywood's susceptibility to foreign pressure in pursuit of overseas profits, might our domestic film industry also be subject to influence by more seemingly mundane issues, such as fracking for oil and natural gas?

We know that, from 2007 to 2010, U.S. natural gas giant Chesapeake Energy donated \$26 million to the Sierra Club to fund a big-budget lobbying and propaganda effort to shut down coal plants called Beyond Coal. Most shuttered coal plants are replaced by natural gas plants.

That \$26 million would make a good down payment for a Hollywood feature production.

"Promised Land," released late last year, was a project of actor and writer Matt Damon. It is the story of how the lure of vast underground natural gas riches ends up polluting farmland.

Never mind that the story's premise is false and that fracking hasn't caused the environmental havoc its detractors claim. Rather, "Promised Land" depicts fracking as driven by greedy corporations — and as scary and evil to boot.

Interestingly, "Promised Land's" initial script followed the story of how government subsidies drive the wind turbine market, which doesn't really produce much usable electricity.

What happened next is illuminating: "Promised Land" took in \$15 million in funding from Image Nation Abu Dhabi. This film production company is wholly-owned by the United Arab Emirates, an OPEC member with large natural gas exports. Regarding this, the Heritage Foundation noted that the UAE has "... a direct financial interest ... in slowing the development of America's natural gas industry."

"Promised Land" was a flop, grossing \$7.6 million after opening on 1,676 screens.

Nevertheless, almost a million people saw the film — such is the attraction of star power backed by a decent marketing budget.

In contrast, the low-budget anti-fracking documentary "GasLand" grossed \$30,846 in a four-week theatrical run, reaching a commercial audience 1/220th that of "Promised Land."

However, "GasLand" came out six weeks before the pivotal 2010 elections, was critically acclaimed at the Sundance Film Festival and was even nominated for an Oscar. It was cheap to make, but its appeal was largely limited to the elite left rather than the mass of U.S. voters.

"GasLand II" is in the works, perhaps because people with money see an advantage in producing anti-fracking documentaries for the American market.

Fracking has dramatically upended the energy arena. U.S. oil and gas production is surging, confounding peak oil theorists in the process.

Further, inexpensive and plentiful domestic oil and gas threatens the decades' old, Middle Eastern-centric power of OPEC and the hold it has on vital energy supplies.

This recently came to light when billionaire Saudi prince Alwaleed bin Talal al-Saud sounded the alarm to the close-knit leadership of Saudi Arabia: rising U.S. energy output, driven by fracking, threatens the kingdom's economy.

Prince Alwaleed, worth some \$20 billion, is an international investor, savvy in the ways of the West. His grave concern over America's technology-driven revitalization of its oil and gas industry is not without cause.

All of which makes one wonder: What might vested interests — whether nations, royal families, corporations, billionaires, or environmental groups — do with so much money and power at stake?

We likely haven't seen the last of anti-fracking theatrical and documentary productions.

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