

Skating to the Financial Abyss

Even as another potential Great Depression looms, the U.S. political/media system seems incapable of addressing the crisis and devising coherent answers. Instead, the old partisan and lobbying games dominate the political world and obsession with trivia commands the news media's focus, Danny Schechter writes.

By Danny Schechter

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Some years back Thomas Frank nailed it in his book, *The Wrecking Crew*. It was subtitled "How Conservatives Rule" and showed how narrow self-interest and well-practiced cynicism in the service of partisan warfare has crippled our political system resulting in a deep paralysis despite the threat of a collapse.

I call it sabotage, a tactic that goes way back and involves deliberate effort to insure that reforms are effectively undermined.

When the book came out, Publishers Weekly praised it and criticized it in the same breath, writing, "Frank paints a complex and conspiracy-ridden picture that illuminates the sinister and controversial practices of the Republican Party in the 20th and 21st centuries.

"While Frank's assessments and interpretations of key events, players and party doctrines is accurate and justifiable, his overwhelming blame of the Republican Party as the source of everything that's wrong with this country and as the emblem of self-destructing government denies the Democrats and the citizenry their roles in a decaying democracy"

How true! They didn't quibble with his findings, calling them "accurate and justifiable," but also note that political labels are often poor guides to understanding how this game operates.

That's because politics is no longer, if it ever was, a game played just by politicians. Politics is now an industry that plays itself out in an arena of the seen and unseen.

Today, the hatchets are out to do in needed financial reforms contained in a bill that has already been neutered and nit-picked, trimmed, sliced and diced by what's called legislative compromise.

A congressional-style Seal Team Six has been assembled and is ready to pounce on the new enemy, financial reform. There is no corporate privilege or malevolent bank practice that the lobbyists will not defend in the name of fostering economic growth.

One juicy sex scandal involving one or more pols gets more ink than all the investigations of how special interests, well-paid lobbyists, billionaire funders, think-tank gunslingers and slippery lawyers for hire operate to serve the status quo and stop even mild reforms that might cost the industries they work for money or influence.

They are no reforms they won't endlessly amend into oblivion.

First, they commission bogus and selective studies to "prove" why reforms need to be

“reformed” their way. Then, with PR and complicit media, they orchestrate coverage to sell their policies. They start with something small like protections for debit cards and then escalate to full-scale war.

Thanks to the Democratic majority in the Senate, an attempt to delay rules governing what banks and credit-card companies can charge for retailers to process cards was voted down, with the New York Times noting that this war will continue:

“Even with the defeat, the vote represented a remarkable come-from-behind lobbying campaign by banks to recover from the drubbing they took during the anti-Wall Street atmosphere that pervaded last year.”

A day later, the knives were out for the new Consumer Protection Bureau with a major campaign targeting Harvard Law Professor Elizabeth Warren, who first proposed the agency and was considered the most qualified to lead it.

She was then demonized by the industry and the Right and now the Obama administration seems ready to abandon her, rather than fight for her.

Four years ago, the markets melted down sparking a global crisis. The bailouts followed and a bank-led “recovery” helped many banks recover. However, unemployment and foreclosures stayed high. Growth seized up. The crisis continues.

What to do?

There were several schools of thought.

The administration locked itself into an alliance with Wall Street. They killed proposals for structural reform and restraints on private economic power. They are gambling on a turnaround, their version of faith-based politics, even as jobs are not coming back.

In short, they have no answers and are not prepared to fight any messy battles with the real power structure. In the name of pragmatism, they have betrayed their own campaign compromises and tacked right to out-Republican the Republicans.

They call it “triangulation.” Their critics call it a sell-out although what’s left of the Left was quickly left out.

The Republicans retreated into simplistic ideologies, blaming everything on Democrats and government spending. They began fueling a scare about the deficit the way their predecessors raved against the Red Menace.

They have no answers either.

In Congress, the wise men came up with a financial reform called Dodd-Frank. After stripping it of any radicalism, they offered up some pragmatic measures to increase regulation and try to force the finance industry to act responsibly with more transparency and accountability. The bill explicitly rejected proposes for any and all international standards.

Dodd-Frank passed, but then the real bargaining began on what the new rules should be. The finance industry mounted a lobbying force of 25 high-powered lawyers and consultants for every member of Congress. The deliberations moved out of public view and into the corridors

and closed clubs in Washington.

The predictable result has now surfaced in the New York Times:

“Nearly one year after Congress passed financial changes to rein in the banking sector, more than two dozen of the legislation’s rules are behind schedule, and no end to the wrangling over details is in sight.

“The delays come as regulators extend public comment periods on the rules, and as some on Wall Street and in Congress resist the changes. One result may be that many new safeguards do not take hold in earnest before the next election, an outcome that could open the door for newly elected officials to back away from the overhaul.”

The respected blog Naked Capitalism has followed this in excruciating detail.

Concluded Richard Smith, a London based capital markets IT Specialist:

“So where does that leave us with our shadow banking reforms? Well, we have a modest tweak to bank capital requirements, of unknown efficacy. The mountain has labored, and brought forth a mouse.

“Or you might prefer to pursue the anaconda/rabbit imagery to a physiologically realistic conclusion.”

(Translation: The snake swallowed the rabbit.)

Yves Smith, the editor of the blog is not surprised, suggesting this was the outcome that was always intended: To kill the bill by appearing to “strengthen” it.

So where are we? Nowhere, or perhaps it’s even worse than that. Many in the public backed the reforms including protections of consumers. They think it is being enacted.

When the next market crash occurs, as many insiders fear it will, they will realize how they were played, but then it will be too late.

Are we condemned for more of this rollercoaster ride to the apocalypse?

Smith seems disgusted, pointing out that even these tepid reforms emerged from a “weak analysis of the causes of the crash, some disjointed looking proposals, some mild BS. Kind of picking at the problem, with lobbyists at the ready.

“But what is the result of nine months’ thought and some horse-trading with concerned Congressmen, juggling lobbyists and angry voters? “

What, indeed! We can see where all this is headed. We will find out soon enough if the predictions of a possible “great, great depression” come to pass.

The problem is that while many see the logic of an illogical system, so intricately sabotaged from within, it is set up to make it almost impossible to stop the train wreck. On this, the press is largely missing.

The astute economics editor of the Guardian, Larry Eliot sees only one possible way to stop this disaster in the making:

“Policy, as ever, is geared towards growth because the great existential fear of the Federal Reserve, the Treasury and whoever occupies the White House is a return to the 1930s.

“Back then; the economic malaise could be largely attributed to deflationary economic policies that deepened the recession caused by the popping of the 1920s share market bubble. The feeble response to today’s growth medicine suggests the US is structurally **far weaker** than it was in the 1930s.” (Emphasis mine)

To tackle these weaknesses it must break finance’s stranglehold over the economy and boost ordinary families’ spending power to cut their reliance on debt.

Can we break finance’s stranglehold over the economy if these issues can’t displace the sex scandal of the week, as the real threat to our future. Can we identify and stop the saboteurs?

We keep reading about the Arab Spring, but not the American winter.

News Dissector Danny Schechter directed the film “Plunder The Crime of Our Time,” a film about the financial crisis as a crime story. (Plunderthecrimeofourtime.com) Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org

Three Deadly War Myths

Exclusive: The U.S. wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya have involved myths pleasing to Official Washington – about its own wisdom and the evil of the enemy – but these false narratives have caused President Barack Obama and other U.S. policymakers to base decisions on illusion rather than reality. Robert Parry examines three of these deadly myths.

By Robert Parry

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When a nation as powerful as the United States bases policy on bogus history, it can become a grave danger to others and to itself. Yet, that is what now goes on daily in Official Washington, with senior officials routinely citing false narratives and elite journalists accepting myths as truth.

Take for example one of the favorite “lessons” from the recent past: that in 1989, as soon as the Soviet Union left Afghanistan, the United States foolishly turned its back on that

central Asian nation setting the stage for the rise of the Taliban in the mid-1990s and for al-Qaeda's 9/11 attacks in 2001.

This "history" was cited again on Wednesday by President Barack Obama's nominee to be U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Ryan C. Crocker. In testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Crocker said the supposed U.S. abandonment of Afghanistan in 1989 had "disastrous consequences" and "we cannot afford to do so again."

In other words, Crocker implied, the United States must stick with its current counter-insurgency war and the "nation-building" that goes with it, even if that requires the continued commitment of a large military force and the expenditure of billions of dollars each month.

The New York Times reported Crocker's comments about the alleged 1989 abandonment without challenge, indeed, the Times hailed his testimony an "unvarnished assessment." As for the senators, the Washington Post described Crocker's confirmation hearing as "a virtual love-fest."

No one wanted to suggest that Crocker might be lying. After all, he, along with Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Gen. David Petraeus, walk on water as far as Official Washington is concerned. The trio is credited with another favorite Washington myth, the "successful surge" in Iraq, where Crocker served as ambassador while Petraeus was the military commander and Gates ran the Pentagon.

Official Washington also has bought into a third deadly myth, the certainty that Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi has American blood on his hands for his purported role in blowing Pan Am 103 out of the sky over Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1988, a terrorist attack that killed 270 people.

All three of these dubious certainties are cited in the major U.S. news media as flat fact and thus a factor in determining war policy even though they are either untrue or in serious doubt.

Tom Hanks's History

Regarding Crocker's testimony about the Afghan abandonment, it is simply accepted in Washington's power circles that the United States did cut off assistance to the Afghan mujahedeen immediately after the Soviet army departed on Feb. 15, 1989. That "history" has even been popularized by Tom Hanks in the movie, "Charlie Wilson's War" and who would question Tom Hanks?

Defense Secretary Gates hammered home the same point in late 2009 as he sold the case for the "surge" of 30,000 more U.S. troops to Afghanistan. On a flight to the war zone, he told a group of credulous reporters "that we are not going to repeat the situation in 1989."³

But one has to assume that Gates and Crocker know the real history, that the United States did not terminate its covert support for the Afghan mujahedeen immediately after the Soviets left. In fact, we know for a fact that Gates is aware of the real history because he recounted it in his 1996 memoir, *From the Shadows*.

Here's what the history actually shows: In 1988, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev

promised to remove Soviet troops from Afghanistan and sought a negotiated settlement. He hoped for a unity government that would include elements of Najibullah's Soviet-backed regime in Kabul and the CIA-backed Islamic fundamentalist rebels.

Gates, who was then deputy CIA director, opposed Gorbachev's plan, disbelieving that the Soviets would really depart and insisting that if they did the CIA's mujahedeen could quickly defeat Najibullah's army.

Inside the Reagan administration, Gates's judgment was opposed by State Department analysts who foresaw a drawn-out struggle. Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead and the department's intelligence chief Morton Abramowitz warned that Najibullah's army might hold on longer than the CIA expected.

But Gates pushed the CIA analysis of a rapid Najibullah collapse and prevailed in the policy debates. In his memoir, Gates recalled briefing Secretary of State George Shultz and his senior aides about the CIA's prediction prior to Shultz flying to Moscow in February 1988.

"I told them that most [CIA] analysts did not believe Najibullah's government could last without active Soviet military support," wrote Gates.

After the Soviets did withdraw in early 1989 proving Gates wrong on that point some U.S. officials felt Washington's geostrategic aims had been achieved and a move toward peace was in order. There also was concern about the Afghan mujahedeen, especially their tendencies toward brutality, heroin trafficking and fundamentalist religious policies.

However, the new administration of George H.W. Bush with Gates having moved from the CIA to the White House as deputy national security adviser rebuffed Gorbachev and chose to continue U.S. covert support for the mujahedeen, funneled primarily through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency, the ISI.

Yet, instead of the CIA-predicted fast collapse, Najibullah's regime used its Soviet weapons and advisers to beat back a mujahedeen offensive in 1990. Najibullah hung on. The war, the violence and the disorder continued.

Gates finally recognized that his CIA analysis was wrong. In his memoir, he wrote: "As it turned out, Whitehead and Abramowitz were right" in their warning that Najibullah's regime might not collapse so quickly.

Acknowledging a Fact

But Gates's memoir also belies the fiction that he told the reporters in December 2009 about the immediate U.S. pullback in Afghanistan once the Soviets left in February 1989. In his memoir, Gates acknowledged that the U.S. government did not depart Afghanistan immediately.

"Najibullah would remain in power for another three years [after the Soviet pull-out], as the United States and the USSR continued to aid their respective sides," Gates wrote. "On Dec. 11, 1991, both Moscow and Washington cut off all assistance, and Najibullah's government fell four months later. He had outlasted both Gorbachev and the Soviet Union itself."

In other words, covert U.S. support to the Afghan rebels continued for almost three years. The United States did not simply pull the plug in Afghanistan; instead it pressed ahead

seeking a clear-cut military triumph.

Yet, with the false presentation of this history by Gates in 2009 and by Crocker in 2011 the real historical lessons also have been lost.

Those lessons are, first, that as difficult and repugnant as it may be, give-and-take negotiations and power-sharing with adversaries may represent the best possible outcome for a war-torn country like Afghanistan. And, second, an insistence on "victory" can result in a far worse outcome.

Yet, instead of absorbing those historical lessons, Gates, Crocker and other war hawks have used the myth of the premature Afghan pullout to guide the nation onto the same disastrous path that was followed in Afghanistan nearly two decades ago seeking victory through warfare.

Similarly, the myth of the "successful surge" in Iraq has clouded the judgment of Official Washington on Afghanistan, creating political pressure on President Obama and other decision-makers to pursue the supposedly victorious course charted in Iraq.

But the "surge" myth in Iraq is almost as flimsy as the "pullout" myth regarding Afghanistan.

Many of the key factors that led to the gradual decline in violence in Iraq predated the 2007 "surge," including the policy of paying off Sunni tribal leaders not to shoot at Americans, the Sunni disillusionment with al-Qaeda extremism, the killing of al-Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and the de facto ethnic cleansing of the major cities.

In other words, the Washington consensus crediting the "surge" and its architects for the eventual drop in Iraqi killing missed the more complex reality and may actually have contributed to more death and destruction by causing the Iraq "surge" myth to be applied to the Afghan War.

The "surge" myth also obscured a real lesson from Iraq, that once the United States agreed to pull out its troops, the violence against U.S. soldiers dropped dramatically. It only has spiked recently amid suggestions from U.S. policymakers that they would be open to revising the status-of-forces-agreement to allow some U.S. military personnel to stay past the end of 2011.

The Libyan Myth

Today's third deadly myth is Washington's certainty that Libyan dictator Gaddafi was responsible for the Pan Am 103 attack and thus must be removed from power by force and possibly by assassination.

The alternative option of taking Gaddafi up on his offers of a cease-fire and negotiations toward a political settlement has been rejected out of hand by both the Obama administration and by nearly all the influential pundits in Washington, in part, because of the Pan Am case.

Repeatedly citing Gaddafi's killing of Americans over Lockerbie, the U.S. debate has centered on the need to ratchet up military pressure on Gaddafi and even chuckle over NATO's transparent efforts to murder the Libyan leader (and his family members) by bombing his homes and offices.

The Obama administration is sticking with this violent course of action even though Libyan

civilians continue to die and the cutoff of Libyan oil from the international markets has exacerbated shortages in supplies, thus contributing to the higher gas prices that are damaging the U.S. economic recovery.

But President Obama apparently sees no choice. After all, the conventional wisdom is that Gaddafi is guilty in the Pan Am 103 case. All the leading U.S. news organizations, such as the New York Times, and prominent politicians, such as Sen. John McCain, say so.

“The blood of Americans is on [Gaddafi’s] hands because he was responsible for the bombing of Pan Am 103,” declared Sen. McCain, R-Arizona, after an early trip to rebel-held Benghazi.

However, the reality of the Pan Am case is much murkier and some experts on the mystery believe that Libyans may have had nothing to do with it.

It is true that in 2001, a special Scottish court convicted Libyan agent Ali al-Megrahi for the bombing. But the judgment appears to have been more a political compromise than an act of justice. Another Libyan was found not guilty, and one of the Scottish judges told Dartmouth government professor Dirk Vandewalle about “enormous pressure put on the court to get a conviction.”

Megrahi’s conviction assuaged the understandable human desire to see someone punished for such a heinous crime, albeit a possibly innocent man.

In 2007, after the testimony of a key witness against Megrahi was discredited, the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission agreed to reconsider the conviction as a grave miscarriage of justice. However, that review was proceeding slowly in 2009 when Scottish authorities released Megrahi on humanitarian grounds, after he was diagnosed with terminal prostate cancer.

Megrahi dropped his appeal in order to gain the early release, but that doesn’t mean he was guilty. He has continued to assert his innocence and an objective press corps would reflect the doubts regarding his curious conviction.

Dubious Witness

The Scottish court’s purported reason for finding Megrahi guilty while acquitting his co-defendant Lamin Khalifa Fhimah was the testimony of Toni Gauci, owner of a clothing store in Malta who allegedly sold Megrahi a shirt, the remnants of which were found with the shards of the suitcase that contained the bomb.

The rest of the case rested on a theory that Megrahi put the luggage on a flight from Malta to Frankfurt, where it was transferred to a connecting flight to London, where it was transferred onto Pan Am 103 bound for New York, a decidedly unlikely way to undertake an act of terrorism given all the random variables involved.

Megrahi would have had to assume that three separate airport security systems at Malta, Frankfurt and London would fail to give any serious scrutiny to an unaccompanied suitcase or to detect the bomb despite security officials being on the lookout for just such a threat.

As historian William Blum recounted in [a Consortiumnews.com article](#) after Megrahi’s 2001 conviction, “The case for the suitcase’s hypothetical travels must also deal with the fact

that, according to Air Malta, all the documented luggage on KM180 was collected by passengers in Frankfurt and did not continue in transit to London, and that two Pan Am on-duty officials in Frankfurt testified that no unaccompanied luggage was introduced onto Pan Am 103A, the feeder flight to London.”

There also were problems with Gauci’s belated identification of Megrahi as the shirt-buyer a decade after the fact. Gauci had made contradictory IDs and had earlier given a physical description that didn’t match Megrahi. Gauci reportedly received a \$2 million reward for his testimony and then moved to Australia, where he went into retirement.

In 2007, the Scottish review panel decided to reconsider Megrahi’s conviction after concluding that Gauci’s testimony was unbelievable. And without Gauci’s testimony, the case against Megrahi was virtually the same as the case against his co-defendant who was acquitted.

However, after Megrahi’s conviction in 2001, more international pressure was put on Libya, which was then regarded as the archetypal “rogue” state. Indeed, it was to get onerous economic sanctions lifted that Libya took “responsibility” for the Pan Am attack and paid reparations to the victims’ families even as Libyan officials continued to deny guilt.

In April, there was some excitement over the possibility that Gaddafi would be fingered personally as the Pan Am 103 mastermind when former Libyan foreign minister Moussa Koussa defected. He was believed to be in charge of Libyan intelligence in 1988 and thus almost certainly in the know.

Moussa Koussa was questioned by Scottish authorities but apparently shed little new light on the case. He was allowed to go free after the interview. Very quickly the press interest over Moussa Koussa faded away, except for the recurring assumption in some Western press articles that he must have implicated Gaddafi.

Despite the doubts about the Pan Am 103 case – and the tragic human and economic toll from the Libyan war – the U.S. news media and politicians continue to treat Libya’s guilt as a flat fact. It appears that no big-time journalist or important official has even bothered to read the Scottish court’s bizarre judgment regarding Megrahi’s 2001 conviction.

Instead, NATO’s bombing campaign against Libyan targets continues, including the recent leveling of tents where Gaddafi greets foreign dignitaries and the destruction of Libyan TV.

Rather than making war policies based on serious factual analysis, the United States and NATO continue to be guided by politically pleasing myths. It is a recipe for an even-greater disaster and unnecessary deaths.

[For more on these topics, see Robert Parry’s *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a two-book set for the discount price of only \$19. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege:*

The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq and Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth' are also available there.

Ellsberg on Pentagon Papers Release

On the 40th anniversary of Daniel Ellsberg leaking the Pentagon Papers, the Nixon presidential library is touting its release of the entire set, including a section on Vietnam peace talks that Ellsberg withheld to avoid disrupting the negotiations. The misimpression that much of Monday's release will be new prompted questions from CNN producer Jay Kernis, which Ellsberg answered and requested that we republish.

By Daniel Ellsberg

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Question: Until now, the public has been able to read only the small portions of the report that you leaked. What do you think the impact of releasing all 7,000 pages might be?"

Ellsberg: The "declassification" of the Pentagon Papers exactly 40 years late is basically a non-event. The notion that "only small portions" of the report were released 40 years ago is pure hype by the Nixon Library.

Nearly all of the study except for the negotiations volumes, which were mostly declassified over 20 years ago became available in 1971, between the redacted (censored) Government Printing Office edition and the Senator Gravel edition put out by Beacon Press.

It would be helpful if the publishers indicated, by brackets or different type, what was withheld earlier. But that would be very embarrassing to the Library and the government; I'll be surprised if they do it.

Most of the omissions in the GPO edition "for security" a ridiculous claim, since their substance was nearly all available to the world in the simultaneous Gravel/Beacon Press edition will appear arbitrary and unjustified.

I'd really like to see someone a journalist or an anti-secrecy NGO compare this version in detail with the redacted white space in the 1971 GPO edition, for a measure of what the government has regarded as necessarily classified for the last forty years.

And then ask: just why was most of what was released by the GPO, covering 1945 to 1968, kept secret as late as 1971? Hint: it wasn't for "national security."

What that comparison would newly reveal is the blatant violation of the spirit and letter of the FOIA declassification process by successive administrations (including the present one), in rejecting frequent requests by historians and journalists for complete declassification of the Papers over the years.

But if the hype around this belated release got a new generation to read the Pentagon Papers or at least the summaries to the various volumes (my highest hope, pretty unlikely), they'd

get from them as good an understanding as they could find anywhere today of our war in Afghanistan.

The Pentagon Papers didn't explicitly present that last alternative, but their release contributed to that result, eventually. Is it too much to hope that their re-release could do the same?

Yes, it is. But fortunately there are a few Congresspersons, like Dennis Kucinich and Barbara Lee, Walter Jones and Ron Paul who got that message the first time, even if the Republican and Democratic leadership hasn't, yet. ([Click here](#) to see a salon.com essay pointing to the only way out of Afghanistan, as it was the only way out of Vietnam).

Question: On June 23, 1971, in an interview with CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite, you said, "I think the lesson is that the people of this country can't afford to let the President run the country by himself, even foreign affairs, without the help of Congress, without the help of the public. I think we cannot let the officials of the Executive Branch determine for us what it is that the public needs to know about how well and how they are discharging their functions." How concerned are you that elected officials haven't learned those lessons?

Ellsberg: I still stand by my cited conclusions, both for 1971 and for every single year since, including this one. But I never expected elected officials in the Executive branch (of which there are exactly two in each administration) or their myriad subordinates to "learn those lessons" or to accept them as warnings.

Leaders in the Executive branch in every country know what they're doing, and why they're doing it, and they always want to stay in office and keep on running things with as little interference from Congress, the public and the courts as possible: which means, with as much secrecy as they can manage.

So I'm not exactly concerned that they're still at it (which is why I'm still at what I do), since that is so predictable, in every government, tyrannical or "democratic."

Our Founders sought to prevent this. Article I, section 8 of the Constitution, for the first time in constitutional history, put the decision to go to war (beyond repelling sudden attacks) exclusively in the hands of Congress, not the president.

But every president since Harry Truman in Korea as the Pentagon Papers demonstrated up through LBJ, but beyond them to George W. Bush and Barack Obama has violated the spirit and even the letter of that section of the Constitution (along with some others) they each swore to preserve, protect and defend.

However, as has been pointed out repeatedly by Glenn Greenwald ([click here](#)) and [Bruce Ackerman](#), David Swanson and others, no president has so blatantly violated the constitutional division of war powers as President Obama in his ongoing attack on Libya, without a nod even to the statutory War Powers Act, that post-Pentagon Papers effort by Congress to recapture something of the role assigned exclusively to it by the Constitution.

This open disregard of a ruling statute (regardless of his supposed feelings about its constitutionality, which Obama has not even bothered to express) is clearly an impeachable offense, though it will certainly not lead to impeachment given the current complicity of the

leaders of both parties any more than President George W. Bush's misleading Congress into his crime against the peace, aggression, in Iraq, or President Johnson's lies to obtain the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

Yet the most important point, as I see it, is not the secrecy and the lying, or even the blatant disregard of the Constitution, the Presidential oath and the rule of law.

As the Pentagon Papers documented for the much of the Vietnam era (we still lack, and we still need, the corresponding Papers for the Nixon policy-making, that added over twenty thousand names unnecessarily to the Vietnam Memorial and over a million deaths in Vietnam) and the last decade confirms: the point is that the Founders had it right the first time.

As Abraham Lincoln explained their intention (in defending to his former law partner William Herndon his opposition to President Polk's deliberately provoked Mexican War):

"The provision of the Constitution giving the war making power to Congress was dictated, as I understand it, by the following reasons: kings had always been involving and impoverishing their people in wars, pretending generally, if not always, that the good of the people was the object.

"This our convention understood to be the most oppressive of all kingly oppressions, and they resolved to so frame the Constitution that no one man should hold the power of bringing this oppression upon us." ([Click here](#) to read the whole letter, which I keep pinned to the wall of my office).

As Lincoln put it, the alternative approach (which we have actually followed in the last 60 years) "places our President where kings have always stood." And the upshot of that undue, unquestioning trust in the president and his Executive branch is: smart people get us into stupid (and wrongful) wars, and their equally smart successors won't get us out of them.

Either we the people will press elected officials in Congress on pain of losing their jobs to take up their Constitutional responsibilities once again and to end by defunding our illegal, unjustifiable (and now, financially insupportable) military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and air attacks on Pakistan, Libya and Yemen: or those bloody stalemates will continue indefinitely.

Question: In March at the age of 79 you were arrested in front of the White House and then again outside of Quantico military prison while protesting in support of Army private Bradley Manning, accused of being the WikiLeaks leaker. Manning, charged with 34 counts including "aiding the enemy," faces life in prison and possibly, execution. Have you been able to communicate with Bradley?

Ellsberg: It was then almost impossible to communicate with Bradley Manning, and I have so far done so only through his few visitors. In front of the White House and at Quantico, I was attempting to communicate with those holding him prisoner, to protest the abusive and illegal conditions of his detention, amounting not only to punishment of someone not tried, convicted or sentenced but to torture forbidden by domestic and international law and the Constitution even as punishment.

Question: Do you believe what Bradley did was necessary and heroic?

Ellsberg: Yes.

Question: Do you still have all 7,000 pages of the Pentagon Papers?

Ellsberg: I don't really know. Hundreds of boxes of files have gone from storage into my basement, and my old copies of the Papers may or may not be somewhere in there. I'm not going to go searching among them for the still-classified eleven words.

Question: These days, when you find yourself thinking about Richard Nixon, what comes to mind?

Ellsberg: Richard Nixon, if he were alive today, might take bittersweet satisfaction to know that he was not the last smart president to prolong unjustifiably a senseless, unwinnable war, at great cost in human life. (And his aide Henry Kissinger was not the last American official to win an undeserved Nobel Peace Prize.)

He would probably also feel vindicated (and envious) that ALL the crimes he committed against me which forced his resignation facing impeachment are now legal.

That includes burglarizing my former psychoanalyst's office (for material to blackmail me into silence), warrantless wiretapping, using the CIA against an American citizen in the U.S., and authorizing a White House hit squad to "incapacitate me totally" (on the steps of the Capitol on May 3, 1971).

All the above were to prevent me from exposing guilty secrets of his own administration that went beyond the Pentagon Papers. But under George W. Bush and Barack Obama, with the PATRIOT Act, the FISA Amendment Act, and (for the hit squad) President Obama's executive orders, they have all become legal.

There is no further need for present or future presidents to commit obstructions of justice (like Nixon's bribes to potential witnesses) to conceal such acts. Under the new laws, Nixon would have stayed in office, and the Vietnam War would have continued at least several more years.

Likewise, where Nixon was the first president in history to use the 54-year-old Espionage Act to indict an American (me) for unauthorized disclosures to the American people (it had previously been used, as intended, exclusively against spies), he would be impressed to see that President Obama has now brought five such indictments against leaks, almost twice as many as all previous presidents put together (three).

He could only admire Obama's boldness in using the same Espionage Act provisions used against me almost surely unconstitutional used against disclosures to the American press and public in my day, less surely under the current Supreme Court to indict Thomas Drake, a classic whistleblower who exposed illegality and waste in the NSA.

Drake's trial begins on June 13, the 40th anniversary of the publication of the Pentagon Papers. If Nixon were alive, he might well choose to attend.

Daniel Ellsberg was a senior Pentagon official during the early stages of the Vietnam War and an analyst at the Rand Corp. where he worked on the secret history of the Vietnam War known as the Pentagon Papers. After failing to spark interest in the classified history inside

Congress, Ellsberg leaked the documents to the New York Times and other news organizations which then defied the Nixon administration in publishing stories about the secret history in 1971. Ellsberg was indicted under the Espionage Act, but the case collapsed amid disclosures that President Richard Nixon and other senior government officials had engaged in illegal acts, including a break-in at Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office seeking information to discredit him.
