

# Mitt Romney's 'Blood Money'

The U.S. press corps has been solicitous toward Mitt Romney's work at Bain Capital with "fact-checkers" even insisting that Romney isn't accountable for its actions while he was still the CEO. But almost completely out of the frame is how Romney raised the original money from right-wing Salvadorans, writes William Boardman.

By William Boardman

The essence of the widely unreported story is simple enough: when Mitt Romney was having difficulty raising money to start Bain Capital in 1984, he ended up raising a major share of his company's initial \$37 million investment from Salvadoran millionaires with indirect links to death squads in El Salvador.

Even though it appeared in muted form in the Los Angeles Times on July 19 this year, reported by Joseph Tofani, Melanie Mason and Matea Gold, the rest of what is loosely characterized as the mainstream media appears to have ignored the story altogether.

In their report, focused on how Bain Capital got started with the help of offshore investors, the three Times reporters devoted only three sentences to the El Salvador connection:

"About \$9 million came from rich Latin Americans, including powerful Salvadoran families living in Miami during their country's brutal civil war. At the time, U.S. officials were publicly accusing some exiles in Miami of funding right-wing death squads in El Salvador. Some family members of the first Bain Capital investors were later linked to groups responsible for killings, though no evidence indicates those relatives invested in Bain or benefited from it."

At The Nation, Jon Weiner summarized the Times story on his blog the day it came out, but there is little evidence of any other follow-up in July. Weiner links to an earlier report by Justin Elliott in Salon.com, headlined: "The Roots of Bain Capital in El Salvador's Civil War," published Jan. 20, 2012.

## **Pebbles In a Pond**

The Salon.com story made even less of a splash than the L.A. Times version is making now. This piece focuses on the difficulty reporters have penetrating Bain Capital's secrecy, starting with the continuing anonymity, 28 years later, of some of the original investors in 1984 in the midst Salvadoran civil war (1979-1992) which prompted about a million Salvadorans to come to the United States. Among these was a small community of avowedly right-wing oligarchs who

settled in Miami.

Often discussed in Cold War terms, El Salvador was never in much danger of anything like a communist take over. In October 1979, El Salvador's traditional military dictatorship was overthrown by a mixed junta of colonels and civilians who initiated some land reform and nationalized some aspects of Salvadoran business, including the coffee trade (not the industry itself). These changes were fought bitterly by the Salvadoran right who went to war against their government.

By 1984, the horrors of El Salvador, including the 1980 the right-wing assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero while celebrating mass, were well known to the people at Bain and they were leery of getting too close to what could be considered blood money.

As Romney told the Boston Globe in 1994, he was careful about investors, checking names with the Reagan administration and "we investigated the individuals' integrity and looked for any obvious signs of illegal activity and problems in their background, and found none. We did not investigate in-laws and relatives." Bain Capital has yet to reveal all the names of its original investors.

### **Some Stories Drown Out Others**

In January 2012, the El Salvador connection to Bain Capital got no traction in the midst of the furor provoked by a 28-minute attack ad running in South Carolina, a quasi-documentary called "When Mitt Romney Came to Town."

The ad described how Bain Capital took over four different companies and wreaked havoc on the lives of their workers. The catchphrase of the ad: "for tens of thousands of Americans, the suffering began when Mitt Romney came to town."

Produced by Winning Our Future, a Super PAC supporting Newt Gingrich, the ad met with widespread criticism for inaccuracy and misrepresentation. Under pressure, Newt Gingrich called for the PAC to correct the ad or withdraw it. It was withdrawn.

Romney's links to Salvadoran death squads surfaced again on Aug. 8, in a Huffington Post piece by Ryan Grim titled, "Mitt Romney Started Bain Capital With Money From Families Tied To Death Squads." The story's essence is unchanged, the basic assertion remains both true and tenuous money from Salvadoran coffee barons funded both death squads and Bain Capital, but the details remain secret almost 30 years later.

### **Who's Credible?**

Appearing on "Democracy Now" two days later, reporter Ryan Grim said that when he asked the Romney campaign for comment, their only response was to send him a paragraph from the Salt Lake Tribune in 1999: "As was Bain's policy with any big investor, they had the families checked out as diligently as possible. They uncovered no unsavory links to drugs or other criminal activity."

"Now, that's simply impossible to believe. These families were certainly connected to death squads," Grim said, "There's no possible way that anybody in 1984 could check out these families, which is the term they use, these families, and come away convinced that this money was clean."

Although the story still hasn't been widely covered in mainstream media, it has appeared in recent weeks on a variety of other online news and opinion sites including Daily Kos, AlterNet, Buzzflash at Truthout, Crooks and Liars, and others.

### **The Story Stands Unshaken, Ambiguity Intact**

Pushback on the story has been limited to non-existent. Rush Limbaugh did a next-day mockery takedown and Jim Hoft blogged similarly two days later, wondering when the story would make it into an Obama campaign ad. Limbaugh commented,

"The 'Huffing-and-puffing-ton Post' reported today that Bain Capital was seeded from money with Hispanic families, by the way, with ties to right-wing death squads in El Salvador and other Latin American countries. No, no, no, no, not talking about the Kennedys. They don't talk about that aspect of the Kennedys, no, no. Don't you find it interesting – yesterday, Romney essentially killed a guy's wife, and today Bain Capital was seeded with money from death squads? ... This is stuff we do parodies over. . It is depressing to know this stuff works."

Then he raised the ante: "Lemme ask you a question. What's the difference in that and the Democrats being underwritten by Planned Parenthood and NAARL? If they're not death squads, I don't know what is."

Human Events on Aug. 21 put out the closest thing to a rebuttal so far. Although David Harsanyi misrepresents some peripheral details to make his point, he does not disturb the essential story. His main point is to make a kind of equivalency between Romney's fundraising for Bain Capital in 1984 and Obama administration officials meeting with some of the same Salvadorans in 2012.

He writes, "If we concede the [Romney] story has legs, it is also fair to ask: Why would the Obama Administration meet with leaders of right-wing hit squads?"

### **Is There Any Serious Policy Issue Here?**

It's hard to imagine the Obama campaign trying to make an issue of a story as unfinished as Romney's link to Salvadoran death squads and that's not because Obama's people met with the same rich people who are connected to Bain Capital. That's just government as usual.

A stronger reason for the Obama campaign to steer clear of the death squad story is Obama's own vulnerability on the issue. That vulnerability is not Planned Parenthood, despite Rush Limbaugh's black humor. Obama's vulnerability is his administration's use of drones and his own personal control of the "kill list."

It's not that Romney or others would make an issue of assassination-by-drone, which is most likely a policy they support. But it would still be obvious to anyone who thought about it that an Obama attack on Salvadoran death squads would seem pretty hypocritical coming from a president using high tech, remote controlled death squad equivalents.

Then there's Honduras, where the Obama administration continues to support the military dictatorship that overthrew the elected government in 2009, and where death squad activities are on the increase.

But there seems to be another, unexamined story lurking in the reportage to date. Mitt Romney started Bain Capital with an initial investment of \$37 million from an unknown number of investors, an unknown number of whom remain anonymous. Today Bain Capital is worth about \$60 billion, a decent return on investment. And what do we know now about the original investors?

-\$1 million from Jack Hanley, former head of Monsanto Co.

-\$2 million came from Robert Maxwell, a British publisher who stole hundreds of millions of dollars from his company's pension funds.

-\$1.25 million, the first Bain investment in June 1984, was in the name of Jean Overseas Ltd., a Panama shell corporation. Jean Overseas later added another \$1.25 million. The backer of this corporation was apparently Sir Jack Lyons, who was later convicted in an unrelated stock fraud.

-\$4.8 million came from the Crocker Family Trust in California.

-About \$9 million came from Latin Americans from El Salvador, Ecuador, Colombia, and Guatemala.

-About half the money came from people at Bain, whoever they were.

At the Miami-Dade Lincoln Day Dinner on March 9, 2007, Romney spoke about his early experience with Bain Capital: "I owe a great deal to Americans of Latin American descent. When I was starting my business, I came to Miami to find

partners that would believe in me, and that would finance my enterprise. My partners were Ricardo Poma, Miguel Duenas, Pancho Soler, Frank Kardonski, and Diego Ribandinarea.

“These friends didn’t just help me, they taught me. Ricardo’s brother had been tortured and murdered by rebel terrorists in El Salvador. Miguel himself had been chained to a floor in Guatemala for weeks, and tortured. And their torturers were financed by Fidel Castro. I learned from these friends about the human cost when Castro has money.”

People on all sides in El Salvador suffered terribly from more than a decade of violence, but most of it was perpetrated by the right wing, according to the postwar Truth Commission.

While there’s no direct evidence that Bain Capital investors gave money to death squads, those rich Salvadorans who spent the civil war years in Miami surely preferred to invest it with people sympathetic to their interests.

**William Boardman lives in Vermont, where he has produced political satire for public radio and served as a lay judge.**

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## Training Societies to be Bigoted

Racial, ethnic and religious bigotry is often planted deep within a society, requiring a determined effort to root it out. However, there is inevitably resistance from forces that benefit from the presumed supremacy of one group over another, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

The Ku Klux Klan (the name derives from the Greek word Kuklos meaning circle with a modification of the word clan added), an American terrorist organization, was founded in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1865. It was organized by Southerners who refused to reconcile themselves to the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War, and its declared mission was to “maintain the supremacy of the white race in the United States.”

To this end it adopted tactics in the Southern states that would so terrify emancipated African-Americans and their white allies that they would not dare to vote, run for public office, or intermingle with whites except in “racially appropriate” ways.

Intimidation took many forms. Non-whites and their allies who sought to assert civil rights were threatened, assaulted and frequently murdered. If they were women, they were subjected to assault and rape. The property of these people was destroyed, their homes and meeting places attacked with bombs or burned. Finally, a favorite tactic was lynching.

Lynching was/is murder carried out by a mob that collectively thinks it is protecting the community and/or its traditions. Between 1882 and 1930, the Klan and allied organizations lynched some 3,000 people, mostly black men. Often the accusation was that the black male victim had sought sexual relations with white women.

It was very rare that those involved in these murders, which were carried out quite openly with little effort to hide identities, were arrested for their actions much less convicted and adequately punished. This, in turn, was possible because of a number of factors:

First and foremost, the belief that African-Americans, and subsequently all non-whites, were dangerous to "white civilization." This belief was built into the cultural perceptions of the majority. With rare exceptions, a white person could not grow up in this environment without acquiring a knee-jerk prejudice against non-whites.

As a result, local white populations, as well as local law enforcement, often sympathized with the Klan, sometimes feared it, or just did not care about what happened to the non-white population.

In the years following the Civil War, the activities of the Klan only subsided when the U.S. government allowed the Southern states to impose laws that prevented African-Americans from voting and acquiesced in a harsh regime of segregation. When the civil rights movement finally took place in the 1960s, the Klan reappeared and participated in the violent opposition to desegregation and racial equality. This abated only when the federal government started seriously enforcing its own civil rights laws.

### **Old Tactics and New Victims**

While today the Ku Klux Klan as an organization is nearly (but not quite) gone, it would be a mistake to think that the Klan mentality is dead in the U.S. Quite the contrary. The nation's deep-seated history of racism has helped preserve an apparent permanent subset of Americans who grow up with prejudicial feelings against anyone they perceive as a threat to their version of the "American way of life."

This background can help us understand the ongoing attacks against American

Muslims. Since 2010 there has been an increase in the number of attacks on American Muslims, their mosques and other property, as well as American minorities (such as Sikhs) who are regularly mistaken for Muslims.

These attacks are not the work of a refurbished Ku Klux Klan but, nonetheless, have about them the same nature: fear of American Muslims as cultural subversives (for instance, the delusion that they seek to impose Sharia law in the United States); anonymous threats of violence (via telephone, Internet, and also in the form of abusive graffiti); bomb, arson, and gun-fire attacks on property; and finally assaults and murders.

The Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Justice Department has investigated over 800 such incidents in the last 11 years. Eight such attacks occurred in the first half of the present month of August 2012, including the murder of six Sikhs in Milwaukee on Aug. 5.

An important factor in all of this is the role of a number of campaigning politicians who go around proclaiming the threat that American Muslims supposedly represent to the country. For instance, just prior to a spate of arson attacks in the Chicago area, U.S. Rep. Joe Walsh held townhall meetings in the area where he proclaimed, "One thing I am sure of is that there are people in this country there is a radical strain of Islam in this country it's not just over there trying to kill Americans every week."

His talk was filmed and posted on YouTube. Similar rhetoric has been heard from a dozen other politicians including Peter King, the Chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, and Michele Bachmann, who was among those running for GOP candidate for president.

### **What It Takes to Break a Bad Habit**

This is what you get when you practice a culture that has evolved around racist views. And, you get it more or less in perpetuity. In the case of the United States, the nation spent from 1789 (counting from the establishment of the Constitution which legitimized slavery) to 1954 (the year the Supreme Court declared, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, mandatory segregation of public schools unconstitutional), or 165 years, building up an "American way of life," which legitimized discrimination against non-whites.

Subsequently, it has spent from 1957 (counting from the year that *Brown v. Board of Education* actually began to be enforced) to the present, or 55 years trying to undo that legacy. If it takes about as long to undo a nationwide bad habit as it did to establish it, we have a long road ahead of us.

What the years since 1957 have done is to legally enforce non-racist public

behavior. This is certainly a necessary step, which, if consistently applied, would eventually lead to an internalized change in the outlook and morality of most of the population. In this regard Barack Obama's election as the first African-American president in 2008 was a sure sign of progress.

However, the virulent reaction to Obama by more than a few is another sign that, while 55 years is long enough to alter the public behavior of some people, it is not long enough to change the private attitudes of many. Thus, there are still those groups of citizens who are deeply racist.

Today, under normal circumstances, these racist groups keep their feeling to themselves and their like-minded circle. However, when conditions allow, that racism emerges in a public way, often in hate speech but sometimes more brutally. These extremists are the modern day versions of yesterday's Klansmen and, given a chance, they will happily commit mayhem in the name of their cherished traditions. American Muslims are now their chief target.

### **Another Example, Our Ally Israel**

If you want to see another example of a society that has historically cultivated discriminatory outlooks and practices, one that American Zionists consider quite similar to the U.S., take a look at Israel. By the way, if there is any truth to the belief that Israel is "just like us," it can only refer to the United States prior to 1957 prior to the introduction of civil rights laws.

Much like the American South of that pre-legal equality era, Israel is shaped by a culture of ethno/religious exclusiveness practiced amidst a larger out-group (in this case the Palestinian Arabs). This has led the Israeli Jews to teach successive generations that it is proper and necessary to discriminate against Palestinians.

And, sure enough, over the years Israel has produced its own terrorist organizations that intimidate and attack Palestinian Arabs: the Irgun and Lehi during the years leading to the establishment of the state in 1948, Gush Emunim and Terror Against Terror in the 1970s and 1980s, and today's "Price-Taggers" and West Bank settler vigilantes.

Just like Klansmen in the American South, these terrorists are rarely prosecuted and almost never adequately punished for their crimes because much of the Jewish population as well as the organs of the state sympathize with them. And, just like the American South, they operate in an environment conducive to an Israeli version of lynching.

That brings us to the Israeli-style lynching that occurred on the night of Aug. 17 in Jerusalem. Raised in an environment that purposely cultivates prejudice



and hatred against Arabs, a mob of some 50 Israeli Jewish young people attacked four Palestinian male youths, almost killing one of them.

The attack was seemingly unprovoked and apparently random, though the attackers “claimed they wanted to prevent them [the Arab boys] from speaking to Jewish girls.” “Hundreds” witnessed this event but did not interfere. The entire thing was predictable, and indeed inevitable. It is what you get when you practice a culture that has evolved around racist views.

There might be a human genetic inclination toward group solidarity, but its worst manifestations are not inevitable. You can feel solidarity with your family, your religious community, your ethnic group, your nation, etc. without hating others. The hating part is a learned attitude. And, as is often the case, fear will underlie the hatred.

Both American and Israeli bigots or terrorists have focused on Arabs and Muslims as a threatening out-group. Both the Americans and the Israelis who do so draw strength from a culture that has deep racist roots. In today’s U.S.A., many know that this is wrong and so there is a moral position from which to combat this behavior. Unfortunately, it is not possible to say the same thing about Israel.

In the United States the core need is consistent educational and legal pressure against racist behavior both in terms of individual and institutional behavior. When I say consistent I mean over multiple generations, for at least as many years as it took to create the nationwide bigotry in the first place.

If we do not succeed in this endeavor then American Zionists will be proven correct. We in the U.S. will be just like the Israelis.

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## When GOP Likes Big Government

The Republican Party touts itself as the advocate for small government and individual liberty, but the reality is different when it comes to demanding that personal behavior fit with the moral precepts of fundamentalist Christianity and within the strictures of a national security state, says Lawrence S. Wittner.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

One of the most widely advertised but falsest claims in American politics is that the modern Republican Party stands for “small government.”

In the distant past, leading Republicans were indeed sharp critics of statism. And even today a few marginal party activists, like U.S. Rep. Ron Paul, have championed limited government – even libertarian – policies. But this is not at all the norm for the contemporary GOP.



For example, the Republican Party has stood up with remarkable consistency for the post-9/11 U.S. government policies of widespread surveillance, indefinite detention without trial, torture and extraordinary rendition.

It has also supported government subsidies for religious institutions, government restrictions on immigration and free passage across international boundaries, government denial of collective bargaining rights for public sector workers, government attacks on public use of public space (for example, the violent police assaults on the Occupy movement), and government interference with women’s right to abortion and doctors’ right to perform it.

And this barely scratches the surface of the Republican Party’s “big government” policies. The GOP has rallied fervently around government interference with the right of same-sex couples to marry, government provision of extraordinarily lengthy imprisonment for drug possession (for example, in the “war on drugs”) and numerous other nonviolent offenses, government interference with voting rights (such as “voter suppression” laws), and government restrictions on freedom of information.

Where, one wonders, is the Republican outrage at the U.S. government’s crackdown on people like Bradley Manning who expose government misconduct, or on whistle-blowing operations like WikiLeaks and its leading light, Julian Assange?

If the Republican Party were a zealous defender of civil liberties, as it claims to be, it would laud civil liberties organizations. But, in fact, the GOP has kept its distance from them. During the 1988 presidential campaign, George H. W. Bush, the Republican presidential candidate, publicly and repeatedly ridiculed

his Democratic opponent as a “card-carrying member of the ACLU.”

Then, there is the largest national military machine in world history. A Republican Party that wanted to limit government would be eager to cut funding for this bloated giant. But the reality is that the modern GOP has consistently supported a vast U.S. military buildup. Today, its presidential candidate, Mitt Romney, assails his Democratic competitor for military weakness and champions a \$2 trillion increase in U.S. military spending over the next decade.

Moreover, the Republican Party is an avid proponent of the most violent, abusive, and intrusive kind of government action – war. In recent decades, as U.S. military intervention or outright war raged in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Grenada, Panama, Kuwait, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and other nations, the GOP was a leading source of flag-waving jingoism, as it is today in the U.S. government’s confrontation with Iran.

This is not a prescription for creating limited government. As the journalist Randolph Bourne remarked in the midst of U.S. government mobilization for World War I: “War is the health of the State.”

Yes, admittedly, there is plenty of GOP support for small government when it comes to cutting taxes on the wealthy, limiting regulation of big business, gutting environmental regulations, weakening legal protections for workers and racial minorities, and slashing government funding for public education, public health, and social welfare services.

But there is a common denominator to this kind of small government action. It is all designed to serve the interests of the wealthy and powerful at the expense of everyone else. Thus, the Republican Party opposes government alleviation of hunger through the distribution of food stamps, but supports government subsidies to corporations.

Just take a look at the platform that will emerge from the GOP national convention. There will be plenty of rhetoric about freedom and limited government. But the party’s actual policies will reflect a very different agenda.

For those people who can see beyond the deluge of slick campaign advertisements, it should be clear enough that the Republican Party’s claim to support “small government” is a fraud. That claim is only an attractive mask, designed to disguise a party of privilege.

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# Eager for War with Iran

Some U.S. neocons are eager for another war against a Muslim enemy of Israel, this time Iran. There is anger, too, at any signs of serious diplomacy that might avert a conflict, including UN Secretary General's Ban Ki-Moon's decision to attend an international conference in Tehran, notes Danny Schechter.

By Danny Schechter

For more than a year now, the drums of war emanating from Israel have become louder and louder with weekly news leaks and threats including the disclosure of alleged attack plans. The whole exercise seems designed to create a sense of alarm and inevitability. These warnings have been amplified by statements by American politicians that seem to be occurring with greater frequency. The escalation of the war on and in Syria, with some spread into Lebanon, only makes the scenarios for regional conflict seem more scary and realistic.

For the most part, in the U.S. media at least, Iran has appeared isolated and even crippled by U.S. sanctions while being targeted by noisy statements from Western countries orchestrated by Israel's backers.

Nations faced with aggression often seek alliances, support and solidarity, and Iran is no exception. The meeting of the non-aligned nations in Tehran, along with the decision by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to attend, is raising hackles among Western warriors and propagandists. Ban is defying the wishes of those nations who insist that his presence will give comfort to the Islamic Republic. In particular, Israel and the U.S. are furious with his decision to "legitimate" Iran, even though you can expect him to speak critically of the government there to appear "balanced."

Foreign Policy notes, "U.S. and Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, objected to Ban's attendance on the grounds that it frustrates their efforts to isolate Tehran. 'Your visit will grant legitimacy to a regime that is the greatest threat to world peace and security,'; Netanyahu was quoted as saying."

The UN is an institution that was designed to use its good offices to stop war. Its failure to do so effectively at the time of the U.S. invasion of Iraq on the pretext of curbing non-existent WMDs tarnished its own credibility. Now, with

Iran, it must try to avert a conflict likely to be disastrous, while at the same time, using its diplomatic influence to press Iran to stop any threatening behavior on its part.

Instead of imagining how war with Iran can be contained or avoided, we have websites and TV networks inventing excited scenarios to sell war, not avert it. Armchair generals at think tanks and policy wonks can't seem to wait for the bombs to fly. Here's one example: Rense.com speculating on what a war would look like:

"The war began as planned. The Israeli pilots took off well before dawn and streaked across Lebanon and northern Iraq, high above Kirkuk. Flying US-made F-15 and F-16s, the Israelis separated over the mountains of western Iran, the pilots gesturing a last minute show of confidence in their mission, maintaining radio silence.

"Just before the sun rose over Tehran, moments before the Muslim call to prayer, the missiles struck their targets. While US Air Force AWACS planes circled overhead – listening, watching, recording – heavy US bombers followed minutes later. Bunker-busters and mini-nukes fell on dozens of targets while Iranian anti-aircraft missiles sped skyward. The ironically named Bushehr nuclear power plant crumbled to dust. Russian technicians and foreign nationals scurried for safety. Most did not make it."

This is the latest form of dramatized saber-rattling that sounds like some alarmist reality TV show, videogame or a Fox News wet dream. These scenarios always make it seem as if a war will be swift and surgical, with no retaliation, and no consequences. It brings you back to the neocon fantasies about the "cakewalk" they expected in Iraq, the war that never went as planned, and took a decade to lose before the U.S. was, in effect, tossed out. (Today there are reports that Iraq is actually defying the financial and oil sanctions imposed on its neighbor, Iran.)

This doesn't stop those who seem to be looking forward to the fight they believe is coming. Here's another site: Polcymic.com

"In recent weeks, all indications have pointed to an increasingly imminent Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. Whether it be the account of the reporter who was granted access to observe the Israeli Air Force prepare for a strike and subsequently recounted his belief that Israel is now 'closer than ever' to mounting an attack, or the former prime minister warning, 'If I were Iranian, I would be very fearful of the next 12 weeks,' Israel has made no attempt to hide the contents of its short-term agenda."

At least this site is **not** salivating, also noting: "The fatal flaw of an Israeli assault is that some of the facilities lie underground and out of reach. Worse, many, including Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, fear the 'unintended consequences' an Israeli strike could sow. The American Security Project, among others, points out that an attack , which would only amount to a flesh wound , would unite Iranians around hardliners and would not only guarantee further nuclear production, but also legitimize it even in the opinion of Iranians previously opposed to the nuclear program."

Former CIA Station Chief Robert Greniew has another take. He believes that Iran and the US are calling Israel's bluff. He says so on AlJazeera: "Israeli President Shimon Peres, reflecting the concerns of many, said a few days ago that 'It is clear to us now that we cannot do this alone. It is clear to us we need to work together with America.' That view, we are told, is widely shared within the Israeli defense and intelligence establishments.

"The military people charged with conducting a preemptive strike on Iran are the most likely to resist starting something that they know they cannot finish on their own. They are the ones who realize, despite the uninformed and wishful thinking of some civilians, that long-range air attacks on Iran are unlikely to have more than a marginal impact on its nuclear program unless they are sustained. Israel cannot sustain these attacks. Only the US can.

"But the Americans have made clear that they want to wait. It is at least part of Netanyahu's calculation that credible threats of an Israeli strike during the US presidential campaign season and the Obama administration's desperate desire to avoid it will motivate the US to trade Israeli assurances of near-term forbearance for a more credible and irrevocable US commitment to employ military force if and when evidences of the failure of economic sanctions and the imminence of a hardened Iranian nuclear weapons capability converge.

"That is more than understandable, because the only really effective military action to be taken would have to be taken by the US, and the main point of an Israeli attack would be to precipitate it. Though it may not have been their conscious intent, the Americans have in effect called Netanyahu's bluff. If he doesn't realize it, he soon will."

Let's not forget that American airpower, while deadly, is not always effective. Remember "shock and awe" over Baghdad or the bombings of Hanoi? They were devastating, but did not achieve their military goals. All of this is war-gaming has to be predicated on the assumption that rationality will prevail on all sides. But as the American political campaign heats up, inflated rhetoric can be expected.

Some currently unanticipated high-profile incident or covert provocation could change the equation creating some pretext for conflict. We live in a dangerous world.

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