

Making 'Other America' Fail

Exclusive: Behind today's fight over government spending is a bigger struggle for U.S. democracy's future, pitting the traditional white-ruled country against a new multicultural nation, or the Right's Real America against Other America. To win, Real America must make Other America fail, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

You might have thought that Election 2012, in which Barack Obama thumped Mitt Romney and Democrats bested Republicans in total votes for Congress, provided a popular mandate for more government investments in national infrastructure, cutting-edge research and public education paid for with slightly higher taxes on the rich and less interest in austerity that will cost jobs. But, if you thought so, you were wrong.

From the point of view of the Right or what some like to call the Real Americans there is no reason to respect last November's electoral judgment because it was delivered by the Other Americans, who are seen as essentially an enemy country that just happens to be located inside the territorial United States. And that enemy country must not only be defeated, but must be made into an example of what happens to those who challenge Real America.

What President Obama and many Democrats have yet to realize is that they are not just in a political fight or even an ideological battle. They are in a zero-sum war over whether Real America will govern this land or whether political control will be ceded to Other America.

Similar struggles were waged when European whites wrested the land from Native Americans in colonial and post-colonial times and when Southern whites reclaimed control of the former Confederacy from freed African-American slaves after Reconstruction. Now, with Republicans losing the demographic competition having alienated blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans and young urban whites the Right must resort to anti-democratic and other under-handed tactics to win.

In doing so, the Right also is drawing on the history of the Cold War when it was common U.S. government practice to wreck the economies of Third World governments that were viewed as flirting with "socialism." There were two goals: to oust their wayward leaders (replacing them with more compliant figures) and to make the devastated countries examples for others.

Thus, you had CIA covert operations staging coups in Iran in 1953 (because Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh was nationalizing foreign-owned oil wells); in

Guatemala in 1954 (because President Jacobo Arbenz was pushing land reform); and in Chile in 1973 (because President Salvador Allende was trying to reduce income inequality).

In Nicaragua in the 1980s, a leftist Sandinista government opened health clinics and launched literacy programs, making it the ideological enemy of President Ronald Reagan who waged a ruthless campaign to reduce Nicaragua's economy to rubble, to terrorize the population, and to set the stage for the election of a pro-U.S. politician.

While getting rid of troublemakers in these and other cases was part of Washington's agenda, perhaps more important was the demonstration to nearby countries about what would befall them if they deviated from the model of unregulated or lightly regulated capitalism, i.e., if they challenged the economic status quo in which privileged elites collaborated with multinational corporations.

Thus, you had National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger's famous quip about the strategic insignificance of Chile as "a dagger pointed at the heart of Antarctica." In other words, the U.S. government knew that Chile itself was unimportant to the Cold War chessboard but still was determined to stop Chile from becoming a successful model for other Latin American countries. President Richard Nixon's stated goal regarding Chile was "to make the economy scream."

Coming Home to Roost

This history is relevant today because the United States is seeing something comparable occurring not in some faraway land but at home. Well-funded elements of the American Right are determined to do to the country that elected Obama twice what the CIA did to places like Iran, Guatemala, Chile and Nicaragua, i.e., whatever is necessary to wreck the economy and to create angry political divisions.

These right-wingers also don't see what they're doing as treasonous, which could be defined as willfully acting to damage or destroy your own country. The reason is that they no longer consider the America that elected Obama to be their country. They see it as a foreign entity increasingly controlled politically by brown-skinned minorities, feminists, gays, and young whites who are comfortable in a multicultural world.

In the Right's opinion, America should be ruled by whites, albeit with the help of a few token blacks and Hispanics; that's the proper order of things. It's what Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin and other right-wingers have called the "Real America"; it's what they mean when they talk about "taking our country back."

The "Other America" is not just seen as a political rival with some different ideas but as an alien being that has come to inhabit the body of the United States. It is a rampaging virus, a metastasizing cancer. It must be eradicated or at least brought under control and managed.

So, if you must suppress the votes of "those people" by imposing new "ballot security" measures or by rigging control of Congress through extreme gerrymandering of districts (and thus devaluing the votes of blacks, Hispanics and young city dwellers), then that's okay.

Some Republican-controlled states that tend to vote Democratic in national elections are now trying to apportion presidential electors from those deformed congressional districts, rather than from the state as a whole, in order to make the votes of rural whites more powerful than the votes of minorities and urban residents. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Return of Three-Fifths of a Person.](#)"]

Or, if you must whip up some crazy dreams of armed insurrection against the U.S. government by distorting the original intent of the Second Amendment and allowing weapons of war into the hands of unstable people that serves the purpose of putting everyone on edge and creating useful insecurity. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Right's Second Amendment Lies.](#)"]

Similarly, some right-wing public officials, including Texas Gov. Rick Perry, offer loose talk about "secession" in which the states of Real America would secede from the Union of the Other America, much as the Confederate states seceded in the early 1860s to protect the institution of slavery.

And, if you must disrupt the economy of the Obama-controlled Other America by threatening to make the United States default on its debts, that has benefits, too. Certainly, before Election 2012, such disruptions helped keep unemployment high and boosted Mitt Romney's electoral chances.

But even after the election, there remains a necessity to beat down the U.S. economy, to make it "scream," whether by implementing major spending cuts as in the current "sequester" or by forcing periodic crises in the functioning of government like standoffs over government shut-downs and debt defaults.

Bad Is Good

Certainly, there is no interest in supporting public spending on infrastructure, research or education, which might only put people back to work or make the government look useful. Today's Right doesn't care that the predictable results of austerity as Europe has shown is a likely double-dip recession and more pain, indeed that appears to be the plan.

After more years of high unemployment and decaying services, the Right can then pound away at the talking point that Obama's modest policy reforms, including slight increases in tax rates on the rich, failed. The political space might be created for restoring full right-wing control of Congress in 2014 and over the entire federal government in 2016.

Then, more permanent alterations in democracy can be installed to give substantially more weight to the votes of Real Americans while ensuring that Other Americans never get their hands on real power.

Perhaps President Obama's biggest miscalculation has been his lack of appreciation for how radical the Right and its chief political vehicle, the Republican Party, have become. In 2009, he assumed that the depth of the financial crisis would force greater cooperation with his proposals for saving the auto industry, stimulating the economy and achieving some reform of health care. Instead he faced near unanimous GOP opposition.

With his "base" demoralized in 2010, Obama saw the Republican Party and its Tea Party faction make major gains in Congress, seizing control of the House and growing even more emboldened about using the filibuster to tie up the Senate. GOP governors and statehouses also moved to reshape congressional districts to enhance Republican power.

In 2011, to stop the GOP from forcing a default on the U.S. debt and throwing the world's economy into crisis Obama agreed to an unpalatable across-the-board cut in future spending, called "the sequester." By doing so, Obama at least kept the U.S. economy on a slight growth path through Election 2012.

Though Obama won reelection decisively and Democrats outpolled Republicans in congressional races, the Republicans retained control of the House largely due to the aggressive gerrymandering of districts. Combined with the Senate filibuster, the House majority has given the GOP effective veto power over Obama's agenda.

Heading into his second term, Obama is surely less starry-eyed than he was in 2009, but he continues to underestimate what is confronting him from the more extreme elements of the Republican Party the neo-Confederates, the Tea Partiers, the Ayn Rand acolytes and the Christian fundamentalists. These groups are not at all interested in making things work in the Other America; they want pretty much everything to fail.

These extremists financed by the likes of the Koch Brothers and other anti-government ideologues view Other America as an enemy state that must be hobbled, put back in its place and forced to let Real America reassert control. If that

can be achieved in 2014 and 2016, Real America would then move with more determination to reshape the electoral system to give even greater weight to its votes and less value to the votes of Other America.

To hold back the demographic shift toward a “multicultural America,” “traditional America” must impose a form of American apartheid, that is, legal arrangements to ensure future white control even though non-whites and urban youth might make up the majority. In effect, they would be given some lesser status as citizens. Their votes might count as, say, three-fifths of a person.

That is the project that the Republican Party began in earnest in 2011 with laws to restrict voting times, to impose new obstacles for casting ballots, and to reshape districts to maximize the electoral clout of rural whites (while minimizing the influence of urban non-whites and other city dwellers).

Now, the next phase of this war is playing out in the right-wing obstructionism toward virtually every economic policy proposed by President Obama. It is very important to the Right’s strategy that the U.S. economy be made to “scream.”

[For a limited time, you can purchase Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush family, which includes detailed accounts of these false narratives, for only \$34. For details, [click here](#).]

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

Cracks in Sanctions on Iran

As the U.S. and other world powers resume talks with Iran on its nuclear program, key questions relate to U.S.-sponsored sanctions, how effective they’ve been and when they might be eased. But there’s also doubt they can be sustained, write Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett.

By Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett

Western [policymakers](#) and [commentators](#) wrongly assume that sanctions will force Iranian concessions in nuclear talks that resume this week in Kazakhstan, or perhaps even undermine the Islamic Republic’s basic stability in advance of the next Iranian presidential election in June.

Besides exaggerating sanctions' impact on Iranian attitudes and decision-making, this argument ignores potentially fatal flaws in the U.S.-led sanctions regime itself, flaws highlighted by ongoing developments in Europe and Asia, and that are likely to prompt the erosion, if not outright collapse of America's sanctions policy.

Virtually since the 1979 Iranian revolution, U.S. administrations have imposed unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic. These measures, though, have not significantly damaged Iran's economy and have certainly not changed Iranian policies Washington doesn't like.

Between 2006 and 2010, America got the UN Security Council to adopt six resolutions authorizing multilateral sanctions against Iran, also with limited impact, because China and Russia refused to allow any resolution to pass that would have harmed their interests in Iran.

Beyond unilateral and multilateral measures against Iran's economy, the United States has, since 1996, threatened to impose "secondary" sanctions against third-country entities doing business with the Islamic Republic. In recent years, Congress has dramatically expanded the range of activities subject to such sanctions, going beyond investments in Iranian oil and gas production to include simple purchases of Iranian crude and almost all financial transactions.

This year, Congress blacklisted transfers of precious metals to Iran, to make it harder for Tehran to repatriate export earnings or pay for imports in gold. Congress has also increased the sanctions that can be imposed on offending entities, including their cut-off from the U.S. financial system.

Secondary sanctions are a legal and political house of cards. They almost certainly violate American commitments under the World Trade Organization, which allows members to cut trade with states they deem national security threats but not to sanction other members over lawful business conducted in third countries. If challenged on the issue in the WTO's Dispute Resolution Mechanism, Washington would surely lose.

Consequently, U.S. administrations have been reluctant to impose secondary sanctions on non-U.S. entities transacting with Iran. In 1998, the Clinton administration waived sanctions against a consortium of European, Russian, and Asian companies developing an Iranian gas field; over the next decade, Washington declined to make determinations whether other non-U.S. companies' Iranian activities were sanctionable. The Obama administration now issues blanket waivers for countries continuing to buy Iranian oil, even when it is questionable they are really reducing their purchases.

Still, legal and reputational risks posed by the threat of U.S. secondary sanctions have reduced the willingness of companies and banks in many countries to transact with Iran, with negative consequences for its oil export volumes, the value of its currency, and other dimensions of its economic life.

Last year, the European Union, which for years had condemned America's prospective "extraterritorial" application of national trade law and warned it would go to the WTO's Dispute Resolution Mechanism if Washington ever sanctioned European firms over Iran-related business, finally subordinated its Iran policy to American preferences, banning Iranian oil and imposing close to a comprehensive economic embargo against the Islamic Republic.

In recent weeks, however, Europe's General Court overturned European sanctions against two of Iran's biggest banks, ruling that the EU never substantiated its claims that the banks provided "financial services for entities procuring on behalf of Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs."

The European Council has two months to respond, but removing sanctions against the banks would severely weaken Europe's sanctions regime. Other major players in Iran's economy, including the Central Bank of Iran and the National Iranian Oil Company, are now challenging their own sanctioned status.

On the other side of the world, America is on a collision course with China over sanctions. In recent years, Beijing has tried to accommodate U.S. concerns about Iran. It has not developed trade and investment positions there as rapidly as it might have, and has shifted some Iran-related transactional flows into *renminbi* to help the Obama administration avoid sanctioning Chinese banks. (Similarly, India now pays for some Iranian oil imports in rupees.)

Whether Beijing has really lowered its aggregate imports of Iranian oil is unclear, but it clearly reduces them when the administration is deciding about six-month sanctions waivers for countries buying Iranian crude.

The administration is taking its own steps to forestall Sino-American conflict over sanctions. Besides issuing waivers for oil imports, the one Chinese bank Washington has barred from the U.S. financial system for Iran-related transactions is a subsidiary of a Chinese energy company, a subsidiary with no business in the United States.

However, as Congress enacts additional layers of secondary sanctions, President Obama's room to maneuver is being progressively reduced. Therein lies the looming policy train wreck.

If, at congressional insistence, the administration later this year demands that China sharply cut Iranian oil imports and that Chinese banks stop virtually any

Iran-related transactions, Beijing will say no. If Washington retreats, the deterrent effect of secondary sanctions will erode rapidly.

Iran's oil exports are rising again, largely from Chinese demand. Once it becomes evident Washington won't seriously impose secondary sanctions, growth in Iranian oil shipments to China and other non-Western economies (e.g., India, South Korea) will accelerate. Likewise, non-Western powers are central to Iran's quest for alternatives to U.S.-dominated mechanisms for conducting and settling international transactions, a project that will also gain momentum after Washington's bluff is called.

Conversely, if Washington sanctions major Chinese banks and energy companies, Beijing will respond, at least by taking America to the WTO's Dispute Resolution Mechanism (where China will win), perhaps by retaliating against U.S. companies in China.

Chinese policymakers are increasingly concerned Washington is renegeing on its part of the core bargain that grounded Sino-American rapprochement in the 1970s, to accept China's relative economic and political rise and not try to secure a hegemonic position in Asia.

Beijing is already less willing to work in the Security Council on a new (even watered-down) sanctions resolution, and more willing to resist U.S. initiatives that, in its view, challenge Chinese interests (witness China's vetoes of three U.S.-backed resolutions on Syria).

In this context, Chinese leaders will not accept American high-handedness on Iran sanctions. At this point, Beijing has more ways to impose costs on America for violations of international economic law that impinge on Chinese interests than Washington has levers to coerce China's compliance.

As America's sanctions policy unravels, President Obama will have to decide whether to stay on a path of open-ended hostility toward Iran that ultimately leads to another U.S.-initiated war in the Middle East, or develop a very different vision for America's Middle East strategy, a vision emphasizing genuine diplomacy with Tehran, rooted in American acceptance of the Islamic Republic as a legitimate political order representing legitimate national interests and aimed at fundamentally realigning U.S.-Iranian relations.

Flynt Leverett served as a Middle East expert on George W. Bush's National Security Council staff until the Iraq War and worked previously at the State Department and at the Central Intelligence Agency. Hillary Mann Leverett was the NSC expert on Iran and from 2001 to 2003 was one of only a few U.S. diplomats authorized to negotiate with the Iranians over Afghanistan, al-Qaeda and Iraq.

They are authors of the new book, *Going to Tehran*. [This story has also appeared elsewhere. Direct links:

<http://goingtotehran.com/the-coming-collapse-of-iran-sanctions>;

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/02/201322584515426148.html>; and

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/flynt-and-hillary-mann-leverett/iran-sanctions_b_2758738.html]

Framing the Torture-Drone Debate

The neocons have lost ground within the Executive Branch, but continue to wield great influence in Congress and Washington opinion circles. That sway is revealed in the framing of debates on President George W. Bush's power to torture and President Obama's use of lethal drones, notes ex-FBI agent Coleen Rowley.

By Coleen Rowley

Sen. [Rand Paul](#) is not the only one with serious questions about the nomination of John Brennan for CIA Director. Many people are rightly concerned that the CIA nominee failed to provide a clear answer to Paul's question: "Do you believe that the president has the authority to order lethal force, such as a drone strike, against a U.S. citizen on U.S. soil, and without a trial?"

On Wednesday, the House Judiciary Committee will hold a [hearing](#) on "Drones and the War On Terror: When Can the U.S. Target Alleged American Terrorists Overseas?" Unfortunately, besides being [framed in a completely leading way](#), the only witnesses who will testify, all four, were drawn from the same Lawfare blog. Lawfare co-founder Benjamin Wittes (who doesn't even possess a law degree himself) [gloats](#) about it.

Have you ever heard of a congressional hearing that calls all of its "experts" from one certain pro-war agenda-driven blog?!

(Note how the Lawfare blog byline, "Hard National Security Choices." masks how these blogging lawyers tend to always come up with the very easy answer that the law of force is the answer instead of the rule of law. Clearly the aim of this "Judiciary Hearing" should be questioned as it does not appear it is to fairly consider the range of views about the illegality of drone assassination without judicial process.)

Additionally, we in Minnesota have initiated meetings and letters signed now by

over 200 members of different peace groups asking our Senators Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken, given their important Judiciary Committee assignments, to use their influence to seek answers. We've asked several other serious questions about Brennan's background with CIA torture black sites as well as his role in drone assassinations (in this latest full [letter to Sen. Klobuchar.](#))

Finally, our Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) group [sent a memo to Sen. Dianne Feinstein](#) warning her about endorsing Brennan, who cooperated with former CIA Director George Tenet as he helped fix the Bush administration's case for war on Iraq.

It would be her next-to-worst mistake of her tenure on the Senate Intelligence Committee, we told her. The worst we hope she now concedes was voting to authorize the Iraq War. Read the letter in full [here.](#)

Let me also mention something else that seems to be going on in the "legal" debate that is now distracting people as it devolves into party partisanship. A number of law professors and legal commentators, from both the Right and the Left (even most recently Georgetown Law Professor David Cole who wrote: "[Laying Down the Law Why Obama's targeted killing is better than Bush's torture](#)") have turned what should be a much wider real debate based on facts and law into the narrow, more partisan-driven question of "What's worse? (Bush's) Torture or (Obama's) Drone Bombing?"

Some like Cole, at least have the decency to preface their comments with "well they are both wrong, but.." while John B. Bellinger III [and others of his Lawfare ilk](#) post their challenges on the other side of the partisan "divide," that in fact killing is worse than torture, using such common sense arguments that it's better to be alive with your fingernails torn out than to be dead.

Isn't this partisan "divide" as to whether to prefer torture or assassination as the lesser evil a bit like counting how many demons can dance on the head of a pin?! It's certainly confusing to those of us who think torture AND drone assassination are both wrong.

The unfortunate result, however and perhaps the goal of the two party kabuki theater is that the entire red herring "debate" distracts the partisans of both parties, making both Republicans and Democrats more complacent about both torture and drone assassination. This is how so many people come to ignore the right and wrong of it all and turn it into a mere political difference of opinion.

Coleen Rowley is a retired FBI agent and former chief division counsel in Minneapolis. She's now a dedicated peace and justice activist and board member

of the Women Against Military Madness. [A version of this article was originally posted at Huffington Post.]
