

The Neo-Confederate Supreme Court

Exclusive: The Right's desperation over U.S. demographic changes has spread to the U.S. Supreme Court where its five Republican partisans appear ready to tear up the most important part of the Voting Rights Act and thus clear the way for suppressing the votes of minorities, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

If white rule in the United States is to be restored and sustained, then an important first step will be the decision of the five Neo-Confederate justices on the U.S. Supreme Court to gut the Voting Rights Act, a move that many court analysts now consider likely.

The Court's striking down Section Five of the Voting Rights Act will mean that jurisdictions with a history of racial discrimination in voting mostly in the Old Confederacy will be free to impose new obstacles to voting by African-Americans, Hispanics and other minorities without first having to submit the changes to a federal court.

This green light to renew Jim Crow laws also would come at a time when Republican legislatures and governors across the country are devising new strategies for diluting the value of votes from minorities and urban dwellers in order to protect GOP power, especially within the federal government.

Already, the Republicans' aggressive gerrymandering of congressional districts has ensured a continued GOP majority in the U.S. House of Representatives although Democrats outpolled Republicans nationwide in Election 2012.

Some GOP-controlled states, which also have tended to vote Democratic in presidential elections, are now considering apportioning presidential electors according to these gerrymandered districts to give Republican presidential candidates most of the electoral votes even if they lose the state. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Return of Three-Fifths of a Person.](#)"]

On Wednesday, the five partisan Republicans on the U.S. Supreme Court showed that they wanted to do their part in devaluing the votes of blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans and young urban whites. So the key GOP justices indicated during oral arguments that they are looking for excuses to strike down the heart of the Voting Rights Act.

Right-wing Justice Antonin Scalia shocked the courtroom when he dismissed the Voting Rights Act as a "perpetuation of racial entitlement," suggesting that the right of blacks to vote was some kind of government handout.

But almost as troubling was the remark from Justice Anthony Kennedy who insisted that the Voting Rights Act, which was first enacted by Congress in 1965 and was renewed overwhelmingly in 2006, was an intrusion on Alabama as an “independent sovereign,” states’ rights language reminiscent of the Old Confederacy.

Indeed, the five Republican justices also including John Roberts, Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito seem to have absorbed a Neo-Confederate interpretation of the Constitution that is at odds with what the Framers intended.

The Stolen Narrative

The language about “independent” and “sovereign” states was part of the Articles of Confederation, which governed the United States from 1777 to 1787 and which proved so disastrous that George Washington and James Madison insisted that the Articles be tossed out entirely during the writing of the Constitution in 1787.

General Washington, in particular, hated the concept of “independent” and “sovereign” states because he saw the effect on his inability to secure adequate supplies and munitions for his troops during the Revolutionary War. The states often reneged on their promises to provide support, and the central government had little power. In the Articles, it was deemed a “league of friendship.”

With the Articles failing as a governing structure, the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia was instructed to propose amendments, but Washington and Madison engineered the complete elimination of the Articles in favor of the new Constitution.

The Constitution made federal law supreme and transferred national sovereignty from the 13 states to “We the People.” All language about state “sovereignty” and “independence” was expunged, though the Framers left the states substantial control over local matters.

However, the tensions between the federal government and the states continued, especially over the South’s insistence that the slavery of African-Americans be made a permanent part of American life. Among the compromises in Philadelphia had been a particularly offensive clause that counted black slaves as “three-fifths of a person” for the purpose of representation.

Slave states also wanted their “peculiar institution” to be extended to other incoming states to prevent the possibility of non-slave states outvoting the slave states in Congress. Ultimately, this dispute led to Southern states seceding from the Union after Abraham Lincoln’s election in 1860.

The Rise of Jim Crow

The North's victory in the Civil War appeared to establish the supremacy of federal law as expressed in the Constitution. The Thirteenth Amendment was enacted in the waning days of the conflict, abolishing slavery once and for all. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments then established the principles of equal protection under the law, including the right to vote.

But still the former slave states didn't give up. With whites reasserting their racial supremacy and their political dominance through electoral trickery and terrorist violence the states of the Old Confederacy created a Jim Crow system of racial segregation that included devious means to rob African-Americans of the voting franchise.

It was not until the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s that the federal government again stepped in against these racist laws and actions. This intervention produced an angry white backlash in the South and a resurgence in the Right's pseudo-scholarship about the U.S. Constitution.

Over the past half century, wealthy right-wingers have invested millions and millions of dollars in "think tanks" and other research institutions the likes of Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute and Federalist Society that have worked diligently to cherry-pick the nation's early history to transform America's Founding narrative into its opposite, with Washington and Madison made into states' rights lovers and federal government haters.

In this right-wing narrative, the Articles of Confederation largely disappear because their presence destroys the storyline of the Framers enacting the Constitution to enshrine the principles of states' rights and a weak central authority. After all, if the Framers wanted that kind of system, why did they throw out the Articles with those "sovereign" and "independent" states and with the federal government just a "league of friendship"?

But the Right's scholars were well-paid to make a Neo-Confederate case. So they took the rather inconsequential Tenth Amendment and elevated it into some defining principle. In reality, it was a sop to the Anti-Federalists during the difficult ratification of the Constitution and simply says that powers not granted to the federal government remain with the people and the states.

The amendment meant very little since the Constitution granted very broad powers to the central government, and Madison always asserted that the Constitution defined the limits of federal power (which is why he initially thought there was no need for a Bill of Rights). [For more on this history, see Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative*.]

Neo-Confederate Revisionism

Why this history is significant today is that the five right-wing justices, making up the majority of the U.S. Supreme Court, are the products of this Neo-Confederate revisionism. They absorbed this ersatz history as they rose through the ranks of right-wing ideology and institutions.

Now they are in position to impose their false constitutional thinking on the United States, particularly as those theories relate to the present Republican crisis with the country's changing demographics. As the white population shrinks to below 50 percent, the only way to sustain white control is by devaluing minority votes by, in effect, counting them as only worth three-fifths of a person.

If the GOP can't rig future elections to give greater weight to white votes and less value to the votes of blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans and urban white youth (who accept the nation's new multiculturalism), then the right-wing cause will almost surely be lost.

Thus, the Supreme Court's arguments tend to sound more like a pundit debate on Fox News or a discussion group at the Conservative Political Action Conference than a serious legal deliberation.

For instance, Chief Justice Roberts questioned the need for Section Five of the Voting Rights Act by making the clever but disingenuous argument that blacks in Mississippi vote in higher proportions relative to whites than those in Massachusetts.

However, his point is illogical because, first, that would indicate that the Voting Rights Act is working as intended in Mississippi not that it should be struck down and, second, people aren't saying that Massachusetts has taken actions to discourage black voting. In the United States, people have the right to vote or not to vote. The legal problem arises when state and local jurisdictions try to stop people from voting.

The Supreme Court's apparent intention to gut the Voting Rights Act also could be viewed in the continuum of its five-to-four ruling in the *Citizens United* case of 2010 in which the right-wing justices freed up rich Americans to spend unlimited amounts to influence political campaigns. In other words, the Court's majority seems intent on tilting the political playing field in favor of white plutocrats.

But the Court's Neo-Confederate rationale was underscored mostly openly by Justice Scalia and his sneering remark about minority voting rights being a "racial entitlement" and by Justice Kennedy's insistence that Alabama has the "independent sovereign" right to set its own voting rules without federal

oversight.

[For a limited time, you can purchase Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush family 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](#)).

A Looming Crisis in Israel/Palestine

Israeli repression of the Palestinians and Palestinian resistance toward the Israelis have laid the groundwork for another possible outbreak of disorder, a new intifada, which would present challenges to both sides and to the Obama administration, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Conditions seem to be as ripe as they have been for some time for the outbreak of a new Palestinian uprising, or intifada, in territory occupied by Israel. A hunger strike by several Palestinian prisoners held by the Israelis has been building suspense over what will happen when striking prisoners die.

Then over the weekend was the death of a different 30-year-old Palestinian in Israeli custody. Officially the cause was a heart attack, but Palestinians charge that an autopsy shows he was tortured. Israelis do not dispute at least some of the observations made during the autopsy but say that "fractures in the ribs" of the dead man "could be testimony to resuscitation efforts."

In a clash between Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli troops outside an Israeli military prison in the West Bank, several demonstrators were injured, by rubber bullets, not live ammunition, say the Israelis.

The best answer to the question of whether we are on the eve of a new intifada is: nobody knows. This is not just a cop-out, because any such outbreak is much more likely to be a basically unpredictable spontaneous happening rather than the product of anyone's conscious decision.

Previous intifadas involved more spontaneity than was often perceived, because perceptions got shaped by spinning of the story to direct blame. Palestinian and Israeli leaders are already doing preemptive spinning in anticipation of a new

uprising.

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas said on Monday, "The Israelis want chaos and we know it but we won't let them." Meanwhile, the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu has tried to assign responsibility for keeping streets calm to Abbas's Palestinian Authority.

The government released some of the Palestinian tax money it had been withholding (as punishment for the Palestinians getting their status at the United Nations upgraded last fall) so that, as an envoy of the government explained, the Palestinian Authority "won't have an excuse not to enforce calm on the ground."

Any analysis of how a new intifada would affect the interests of the leadership on each side is apt to yield mixed results. Probably there is ambivalence and internal disagreement on both sides as to likely costs and benefits.

For the Palestinians, unrest in the occupied territories has always drawn international attention to their plight in ways that diplomacy and lobbying alone cannot. One can fairly question whether the Oslo peace process of the 1990s would ever have happened without the first intifada, which began a few years earlier. Letting off steam against Israel in the streets might also help to divert, for a while, dissatisfaction with Abbas and his quasi-government.

The costs and risks for Palestinian leaders of an uprising are, however, substantial. They can themselves quickly become, along with the Israelis, targets for any mass letting off of steam. The Palestinian Authority would either take blame for stirring up the uprising or be shown to be impotent in its inability to control the Palestinian street.

Unrest would be inconsistent with the diplomatic and political direction Abbas set with his campaign for upgraded status at the United Nations. And any uprising would surely bring an Israeli response that would entail multiple negatives, including making the daily lives of ordinary Palestinians even more difficult than they are now.

For the Netanyahu government, a new uprising would have the attraction of offering a fresh argument for why it should not be pushed into a serious peace process. How do you expect us to try to negotiate an agreement, it would say, when all that we see on the other side is disorder and violence?

Any intifada, even one that began with mostly peaceful demonstrations, would inevitably spawn excesses that the Israelis could point to as evidence of malevolent Palestinian intent.

On the negative side of the ledger for the Israeli government, international reaction to an intifada would begin from a base that involves much more sympathy for Palestinians than it does for Israel. A new intifada would distract attention from Netanyahu's drum-beating campaign of alarmism about Iran. And there would be the risk that some in the international community, and most importantly the U.S. administration, would see the unrest as all the more reason for reviving a peace process.

For the United States, the first thing to do is to be ready with a well-thought-out posture before a new intifada begins. The Obama administration cannot allow itself to look like it is scrambling to put together a position.

Then when (and "when," rather than "if," there is more unrest is the right formulation, even if the timing is unpredictable) an intifada begins, one major theme of such a position should be opposition to violence in all forms, whether the perpetrator wears a kaffiyeh or a military uniform.

Another theme should be that the unrest is indeed all the more reason to pursue vigorously a peace process, because the ultimate cause of the mess is continued occupation and denial of Palestinian political rights.

And then, don't just stop at uttering themes. Use a new intifada as the occasion for abandoning past ineffective inertia and actually doing what is necessary, including exerting the necessary U.S. leverage, to resolve the underlying problem.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as [a blog post at The National Interest's Web site](#). Reprinted with author's permission.)

Courting Catastrophe in Syria

In the 1980s, the U.S. and its Saudi allies teamed up to funnel money and weapons to Afghan Islamists whose bloody "victory" set the stage for the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Now, the same team is heading back to work supporting Sunni rebels in Syria, as the Independent Institute's Ivan Eland explains.

By Ivan Eland

The United States and Saudi Arabia appear to be ramping up aid to the Syrian

rebels. Here we go again on the road to debacle. Why? The media never holds anybody to either their predictions or their results officeholders, politicians, and of course their own pundits. And it's a good thing for people like Bill Kristol, John McCain, and Lindsey Graham.

No matter what the overseas "crisis" or where it is they are gung-ho about sending either U.S. forces or U.S. arms into the fray. Recently, these war hawks have been pounding the drums for U.S. greater intervention in Syria.

Their argument isn't that the Syrian rebellion will fall apart if the United States doesn't provide arms, it's that when the insurgents finally take over Syria, the U.S. will won't have much "influence." They argue that militant Islamists among the rebels, who are the most well armed and ruthless fighters, will become dominant if the United States does not arm the more secular and democratic forces.

Yet the war hawks don't ever ask themselves how the Islamists became the most well-armed groups in Syria, answer: by being the most ruthless. So far, the United States has reportedly helped Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Sunni Arab arms providers to vet the groups to which they are arranging weapons shipments. Yet despite those efforts, media reports indicate that the Islamists seem to be getting the lion share of the weapons anyway. In chaotic war situations, such unintended consequences are usually the rule rather than the exception.

And the situation in Syria may be about to get worse. Media reports indicate that the Saudis have ramped up their arms financing, purchasing and sending to Syria a large shipment of Croatian infantry weapons, a transaction that seems to have been facilitated by the United States.

In addition, the Syrian rebels have extorted pledges of more humanitarian aid from the United States and United Kingdom in exchange for attending a Friends of Syria meeting in Rome. Previously, the U.S. has shipped "non-lethal" communications and medical supplies to the rebels.

So the public pronouncement that the United States is not arming the rebels is only technically true; the reality is that the U.S. is vetting and facilitating the delivery by other countries of weapons to the insurgents. Even the communications equipment the U.S. sends directly could be used to increase the coordination, and thus effectiveness, of rebel missions.

Is there any crisis the United States can stay out of? With huge federal budget deficits and a monstrous national debt of \$16.5 trillion, one would think "conservative" Kristol, McCain, and Graham would want to at least save some

government money. And if they actually looked at the track record of recent U.S. interventions, which wasted taxpayer money on failing enterprise after failing enterprise, they might see that the case for cost avoidance in Syria is even greater.

Since the post-Vietnam return of U.S. interventionism (subdued only in the immediate aftermath of the war during the Ford and Carter administrations) during the Reagan administration and after, very few episodes of overseas meddling have been successful. During the Reagan administration, contrary to popular belief, attacking and bombing Libya only led Muammar Qaddafi to more terrorism, this time aimed U.S. targets.

In Lebanon, U.S. forces turned from neutral peacekeepers to active participants on one side of a civil war and ultimately left with their tails between their legs after the bombing by Hezbollah of the Marine Corps barracks. In a situation similar to today's Syria, U.S. weapons supplies to Afghan rebels fighting the Soviets went to the most radical groups, leading to the rise of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the 9/11 attacks, and ultimately the Afghan bog in which the United States now finds itself.

Finally, Reagan secretly, illegally, and unconstitutionally funded against the wishes of Congress the thuggish Contra rebels in Nicaragua with the proceeds gained from selling arms to terrorist-sponsoring Iran, thus creating a scandal worse for the Republic than Watergate.

George H. W. Bush, Reagan's successor, ineptly and unwittingly gave the green light for Saddam Hussein, whom Reagan had supported, to invade Kuwait and then sent U.S. troops to put the Iraqi leader back in his box, creating a cascade of events that later led his son, George W. Bush, to invade Iraq and ensnare the U.S. in a near-decade long quagmire.

Bill Clinton, the modern-day intervention king in pure numbers of incidents, was railroaded out of Somalia by an attack from a Somali warlord trained by Osama bin Laden and also conducted one of the many U.S. military incursions to Haiti, which have only made things worse in that impoverished and corrupt country.

Barack Obama, in addition to continuing and escalating George W. Bush's tar baby in Afghanistan, has expanded Bush's air wars in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, which are all more about creating new enemies than killing any remaining perpetrators of 9/11. Finally, in a predictor of what might loom in Syria, Obama took out Muammar Qaddafi, leading to instability in that country that killed a U.S. ambassador and funneled many Islamists and Qaddafi's vast liberated weapons stocks to take over northern Mali.

If the rebels do finally displace Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria, the subsequent internecine violence could dwarf that of the tribal conflict and instability in post-Qaddafi Libya, because Syria has sectarian tensions, similar to those in Iraq, which Libya does not possess.

Thus, after analyzing and admitting such a record of failed interventions, how can anyone in the United States, with a straight face, advocate wading deeper into the Syrian swamp?

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Obama's Rebuilt National Security Team

In President Obama's first term, he built a national security "team of rivals" and got mouse-trapped into a dubious Afghan War escalation. For his second term, he's opted for people who share his views on more restrained military power and faces criticism for "group think," says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

David Ignatius has an interesting take on national security decision-making in the Obama administration in the wake of the reshuffle of senior positions taking place during these early weeks of the President's second term. Ignatius perceives certain patterns that he believes reinforce each other in what could be a worrying way.

One is that the new team does not have as much "independent power" as such first-term figures as Clinton, Gates, Panetta and Petraeus. Another is that the administration has "centralized national security policy to an unusual extent" in the White House. With a corps of Obama loyalists, the substantive thinking may, Ignatius fears, run too uniformly in the same direction. He concludes his column by stating that "by assembling a team where all the top players are going in the same direction, he [Obama] is perilously close to groupthink."

We are dealing here with tendencies to which the Executive Branch of the U.S.

government is more vulnerable than many other advanced democracies, where leading political figures with a standing independent of the head of government are more likely to wind up in a cabinet. This is especially true of, but not limited to, coalition governments.

Single-party governments in Britain have varied in the degree to which the prime minister exercises control, but generally room is made in the cabinet for those the British call "big beasts": leading figures in different wings or tendencies in the governing party who are not beholden to the prime minister for the power and standing they have attained.

Ignatius overstates his case in a couple of respects. Although he acknowledges that Obama is "better than most" in handling open debate, he could have gone farther and noted that there have been egregious examples in the past of administrations enforcing a national security orthodoxy, and that the Obama administration does not even come close to these examples.

There was Lyndon Johnson in the time of the Vietnam War, when policy was made around the President's Tuesday lunch table and even someone with the stature of the indefatigable Robert McNamara was ejected when he strayed from orthodoxy. Then there was, as the most extreme case, the George W. Bush administration, in which there was no policy process and no internal debate at all in deciding to launch a war in Iraq and in which those who strayed from orthodoxy, ranging from Lawrence Lindsey to Eric Shinseki, were treated mercilessly.

Obama's prolonged, to the point of inviting charges of dithering, internal debates on the Afghanistan War were the polar opposite of this.

Ignatius also probably underestimates the contributions that will be made to internal debate by the two most important cabinet members in national security: the secretaries of state and defense. He says John Kerry "has the heft of a former presidential candidate, but he has been a loyal and discreet emissary for Obama and is likely to remain so." The heft matters, and Kerry certainly qualifies as a big beast.

Moreover, the discreet way in which a member of Congress would carry any of the administration's water, as Kerry sometimes did when still a senator, is not necessarily a good indication of the role he will assume in internal debates as Secretary of State.

As for Chuck Hagel, Ignatius states "he has been damaged by the confirmation process and will need White House cover." But now that Hagel's nomination finally has been confirmed, what other "cover" will he need? It's not as if he ever will face another confirmation vote in the Senate. It was Hagel's very

inclination to flout orthodoxy, to arrive at independent opinions and to voice those opinions freely that led to the fevered opposition to his nomination.

Nevertheless, Ignatius is on to something that is at least a potential hazard for the second Obama term. The key factor is not so much the substantive views that senior appointees bring with them into office. As the cliché goes, a president is entitled to have working for him people who agree with his policies. The issue is instead one of how loyalty, not only to the president, but collective loyalty as part of the president's inner circle, may affect how senior officials express or push views once they are in office.

In this regard it is useful to reflect on the meaning of "groupthink." The term has come to be used loosely as a synonym for many kinds of conventional wisdom or failure to consider alternatives rigorously. But the father of research on groupthink, the psychologist Irving Janis, meant something narrower and more precise.

Groupthink is pathology in decision-making that stems from a desire to preserve harmony and conformity in a small group where bonds of collegiality and mutual loyalty have been forged. It is the negative flip side of whatever are the positive attributes of such bonds. LBJ's Tuesday lunch group was one of the original subjects of Janis's writing.

With this in mind, the second term appointment that becomes even more interesting regarding Ignatius's thesis is that of John Brennan. Ignatius has Brennan well-pegged, including a comment that he "made a reputation throughout his career as a loyal deputy."

One might expand on that by observing that among Brennan's talents, and they are considerable, is a knack for what is often called managing up. Earlier in his career he was a protégé of George Tenet, and during the past four years he appears to have forged a similar relationship with Barack Obama.

One ought to ask what all of this might mean for Brennan's ability and willingness to speak truth not only to power, but to his patron, and to do so especially at politically charged times when his patron may be under pressure or may have other reasons for wanting to move in a particular direction in foreign policy.

This is more of a question with Brennan than it would have been with David Petraeus if he were still the CIA director. Petraeus was very conscious of the truth-to-power issue, and more generally of the importance of objectivity, when he was appointed. As he himself observed, on matters relating to Afghanistan he might find himself "grading my own work."

Because the issue was recognized and involved obvious matters such as the Afghanistan War, and because there was nothing even remotely resembling a patron-protégé relationship between Petraeus and Obama, the issue was not destined to be a significant problem. The intimate, cloistered nature of the patronage involved in the Obama-Brennan relationship is something quite different.

Against this backdrop, and given how the Obama administration appears to have signed on to the conventional wisdom about unacceptability of an Iranian nuclear weapon, one ought to look more closely at a troubling line in Brennan's statement submitted to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence for his confirmation hearing.

In listing some of the national security challenges that require "accurate intelligence and prescient analysis from CIA," the statement said: "And regimes in Tehran and Pyongyang remain bent on pursuing nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missile delivery systems rather than fulfilling their international obligations or even meeting the basic needs of their people."

Two countries, Iran and North Korea, get equated in this statement even though one already has nuclear weapons (and recently conducted its third nuclear test) while the other forswears any intention of building any. There are other related differences as well, including ones having to do with international obligations: North Korea renounced the Nonproliferation Treaty in 2003 and has been a nuclear outlaw for ten years, while Iran is a party to the treaty and conducts its nuclear work under IAEA inspections.

The judgment of the U.S. intelligence community is that Iran has not to date decided to build a nuclear weapon and, as far as the community knows, may never make such a decision. One would think that senators would be making better use of time if, instead of asking for the umpteenth time for still more information about the Benghazi incident, they would ask instead why the nominee to be CIA director, by saying that Tehran is "bent on pursuing nuclear weapons," disagrees with a publicly pronounced judgment of the intelligence community.

If a crunch comes that is related to this issue, perhaps the rest of the intelligence community will play a beneficial role. I have been quite critical of the intelligence reorganization of 2004 as being a poorly thought-out response to the post-9/11 public appetite to do something visible that could be called "reform."

The rapid turnover in the job of director of national intelligence is a symptom of the problems the reorganization has entailed. The current director, James Clapper, deserves the public's thanks for taking a thankless job and performing

it with distinction.

But maybe in the face of certain types of personal relationships and certain decision-making patterns, the new arrangement can have some payoffs. If Clapper, who does not figure into Ignatius's discussion of Obama's inner circle, becomes, on Iran or any other issue, a counterweight to any White House-centered groupthink that might emerge in that circle, he will have earned even more thanks.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a [blog post](#) at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

Are Some Big Donors Out There?

From Editor Robert Parry: In the near 18-year history of Consortiumnews, we have relied mostly on small donations from readers and an occasional grant from a few family foundations. But it's important that we finally secure funding support from a big donor or two if we are to reach a larger audience.

With that in mind, I've prepared the following narrative explaining why we exist and what we have accomplished. If you know anyone who fits the bill as a potential major funder, please forward this message along with your recommendation that we deserve serious consideration:

A Narrative Explaining Who and What We Are

As a longtime investigative reporter for the Associated Press, Newsweek and PBS Frontline, I reached the unpleasant conclusion in the 1990s that journalism was failing the American people and our democratic Republic. For a host of reasons from personal careerism to ideological pressures mainstream journalists simply weren't taking on the challenging stories that were defining U.S. policies and politics, especially in the areas of national security.

My conclusion was shaped by the hostility that often greeted my own investigative work and that of a few others into the crimes of the Reagan administration, from secret arms shipments to various unsavory characters, to tolerance of drug trafficking by supposed allies in Central America, to the cover-up of the wrongdoing. But Ronald Reagan was well-liked and many news executives shared his views about the need for a robust U.S. foreign policy. So

negative stories were usually received with annoyance, if not anger.

While some of this may seem like ancient history, the failure of the mainstream news media to deal honestly and professionally with the grim reality of the Reagan years distorted America's political structure over the next decades in ways that have handed dangerous people control of important levers of national power, taking the country into unnecessary wars, draining the national Treasury and refining tactics that are used for propagandizing the public.

My experiences from that time convinced me that nothing is more important to a democracy than a truthful narrative of key events. Out of my frustrations with what had become a timid or complicit mainstream media grew the idea for Consortiumnews.com, founded in 1995 in the early days of the modern Internet.

The original idea was to use this new medium to create a framework that would support the work of investigative journalists, providing them resources, editing support and a place to publish. I thought naively as it turned out that the funding would be the easy part, that foundations and wealthy individuals would understand the need.

The funding instead became the principal drawback, but we pressed ahead creating a home for invaluable investigative journalism that reset the narrative of recent decades based on documentary evidence and other solid reporting.

But perhaps my biggest surprise was that Consortiumnews.com began to attract submissions from former CIA analysts who, it turned out, had been facing the same kinds of pressures inside the government to slant their analyses that we in the mainstream press were encountering in our newsrooms. These intelligence professionals saw their job as getting the information right just as responsible journalists did.

So, our Web site evolved into a unique mix of investigative-style journalism and intelligence analyses, from ex-CIA personnel such as Ray McGovern, Melvin A. Goodman, Elizabeth Murray, Paul R. Pillar and Peter Dickson.

Our expanding list of writers enabled us to mix topical reporting with historical context. Many of our articles address what is happening today like the confrontation with Iran or the power of the right-wing media but place those events within a larger narrative. Other articles start with some new historical discovery, often unearthed from the National Archives, and then explain why this material is relevant today. I've also incorporated much of this material into books to reach a print audience as well. The Web site now publishes daily with dozens of stories each month.

Our current challenge remains, however, securing the necessary resources to take

this project to the next level. As a 501-c-3 non-profit (since 1999), we have received modest support from some small foundations and a few well-to-do individuals, but we have remained dependent mostly on small donations from readers.

If our vision of building a truthful national narrative could ever be expanded to reach a much larger audience, I believe the prospects for American democracy would grow with it. An electorate armed with reliable information and the necessary context for understanding the facts could reshape not only the direction of national security policy but all other policies and priorities that have been stunted by the diversion of resources into unnecessary wars and other wasteful spending.

Thanks for your consideration.

Robert Parry, investigative journalist and editor of Consortiumnews.com. (Consortiumnews.com is published by the non-profit Consortium for Independent Journalism)

For more information, you can write to me at 2200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 102-231; Arlington VA 22201; or send an e-mail to consortnew@aol.com.

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in January focused on the need for a truthful history, the failure of the news media to do the right thing, the neocons' ugly battle to block Chuck Hagel's nomination to be Defense Secretary, and the need to pose some tough questions to CIA nominee John Brennan.

["How America Became an Empire"](#) by Jim DiEugenio, writing the first of a two-part review of Oliver Stone's Showtime series and book. Jan. 1, 2013

["Should Afghanistan Be Partitioned?"](#) by Bruce P. Cameron, suggesting the need for a divided Afghanistan. Jan. 3, 2013

["Al Gore's Current TV Debacle"](#) by Robert Parry, explaining why an alternate TV strategy failed. Jan. 4, 2013

["Is the Constitution Still Relevant?"](#) by Robert Parry, answering mostly in the affirmative. Jan. 5, 2013

["Excusing Torture, Again"](#) by Ray McGovern, dissecting the latest pro-torture

apologia from the Washington Post. Jan. 7, 2013

"The Grilling that Brennan Deserves" by Ray McGovern, laying out the hard questions that the CIA nominee should answer. Jan. 9, 2013

"Anti-Hagel Bullies Meet Resistance" by Paul R. Pillar, noting that for once the neocons are not getting a free shot. Jan. 10, 2013

"America's Bloody Price for Power" by Jim DiEugenio, providing the second part of his review of Stone's "The Untold History of the United States." Jan. 11, 2013

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"The Second Amendment's History" by Beverly Bandler, recollecting the actual context of American gun rights. Jan. 21, 2013

"What to Make of Barack Obama?" by Robert Parry, puzzling over the contradictions between his Second Inaugural and his record. Jan. 22, 2013

"Finally, the Republicans Are Afraid" by Robert Parry, observing a growing alarm in GOP ranks. Jan. 24, 2013

"Overcoming the Great Dismal" by Phil Rockstroh, pondering desperate challenges like climate change and the political dysfunction. Jan. 25, 2013

"Return of Three-Fifths of a Person" by Robert Parry, reporting on brazen Republican schemes to devalue the votes of blacks and other minorities. Jan. 26, 2013

"Reality Bites Back" by Robert Parry, reflecting on the great American battle

between fantasy and empiricism. Jan. 29, 2013

"When Truth Tried to Stop War" by Ray McGovern, recalling the brave act by British intelligence officer Katharine Gunn to stop the Iraq War. Jan. 31, 2013

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Neocon 'Veto' Fails to Block Hagel

Exclusive: The neocons and their Republican allies bloodied former Sen. Chuck Hagel with ugly smears, but he won Senate approval to become Defense Secretary. The neocons' failure to exercise this "veto" now stands as a sign of their diminished standing with the Obama administration, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Washington's conventional wisdom is that Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel was badly damaged by the ugly smear campaign of his confirmation process and by the 41 no votes in the Senate, but this Republican temper tantrum obscured a more important reality, that the neocons have lost their last toehold in the Executive Branch.

For the first time in decades, the neoconservatives find themselves on the outside of Washington's executive power looking in. With the ignominious departure of General David Petraeus as head of the CIA in November and the retirement of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in January, they now have no powerful allies in any key national security position.

Granted, one need not shed tears for the neocons. They still have many of their own in the U.S. Congress, in the national news media, and in influential Washington think tanks. Wealthy right-wing donors will keep them well-housed, well-clothed and well-fed.

There is also the likelihood that the Obama administration will bend more than it should to the noisy neocon presence in the corridors of power. The neocons, after all, are famous for their readiness to deride and disparage anyone who gets in their way. And such nastiness tends to induce fear among people even

with important titles.

But there is this overriding fact: the neocons failed in asserting what they had hoped would be their last power over the Executive Branch: vetoing disfavored government nominees. Despite the neocons' preemptive assault on Hagel before his nomination was made, President Barack Obama pressed ahead with his choice for the Pentagon.

Then, the Senate Republicans took up the neocon cudgel against their former Republican Senate colleague, turning his confirmation process into a venomous assault on someone they deemed a turncoat for having dared criticize President George W. Bush's Iraq War and then endorsing Obama for President in 2008.

Hagel has indicated, too, a preference for real negotiations with Iran regarding its nuclear program rather than simply a steady escalation of sanctions and hostilities leading inexorably to war, as Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and many neocons seem to prefer. And Hagel ventured into the real world again by detecting in Washington the presence of an Israel lobby.

So, both in the Senate Armed Services Committee and on the Senate floor, Republicans bashed Hagel for having the audacity to criticize some Israeli policies, for his openness toward Iran, and for his curious belief that there indeed was a lobby in Washington advocating for Israeli interests.

Besides hammering Hagel as allegedly "anti-Israel," some Republicans like Texas Sen. Ted Cruz suggested that Hagel might have accepted payments from America's enemies like maybe North Korea although Cruz acknowledged that he had no evidence to support his innuendo.

McCarthyism to Go

Others played a favorite neocon game of truncating a person's quotes to make them seem outrageous. "Senator Hagel has accused Israel of quote, 'playing games' and committing, quote, 'sickening slaughter,'" said Mississippi Sen. Roger Wicker before Hagel's confirmation vote on Tuesday. Oklahoma's Sen. Jim Inhofe cited the same "sickening slaughter" quote regarding Israel.

However, as Washington Post columnist Dana Milbank noted in an article entitled "[McCarthyism 2013](#)," the full quote from Hagel was made during the 2006 Lebanon war when Sen. Hagel pleaded for a ceasefire and said, "This sickening slaughter on both sides must end."

But the neocons find such evenhandedness objectionable. They condemn any practice of "false equivalence," i.e., comparing the violence from Israel or the United States to the behavior of adversaries. To the neocons, violence inflicted

by Israel or the United States is always justified while violence from enemies is always “terrorism.”

As Milbank noted, the war on Hagel extended beyond traditional neocon circles to Tea Party favorite, Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, who “gave credence to a hoax, published credulously in the conservative press, that Hagel had received funds from a fictitious group called Friends of Hamas. Asked about this by radio host Hugh Hewitt, Paul replied, ‘You know, I saw that information today, also, and that is more and more concerning.’”

With Hagel’s confirmation on a 58-41 vote, the best the neocons can now hope is that a chastened Hagel will be more submissive toward their demands, particularly about a possible war with Iran over its nuclear program. But another possibility is that Hagel and Obama will retaliate by closing the door further on neocon influence over policy.

By standing by Hagel, Obama showed that he has learned something from his first term when he often bent over backwards to appease the neocons. He kept in place George W. Bush’s military command from Defense Secretary Robert Gates to the neocons’ favorite general, David Petraeus. Obama also put in hawkish Democrat Hillary Clinton at State and she brought along a number of neocon-lite advisers.

This neocon-leaning contingent then boxed in Obama on a major escalation in Afghanistan in 2009, after denying his request for an Afghan exit plan. He reportedly considered that decision one of the worst of his first term.

What Israel Lobby?

In 2009, the neocons also rolled the novice President after Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair picked former U.S. Ambassador Chas W. Freeman to be chairman of the National Intelligence Council. The neocon propaganda machine promptly revved up, denouncing Freeman as a “realist” who was too friendly with Arab countries. But Freeman’s real crime was a lack of sufficient ardor toward Israel and his recognition like Hagel’s that an Israel lobby actually exists in Washington.

“Realists tend not to abide the American alliance with Israel, which rests on shared values with a fellow imperfect democracy rather than on a cold analysis of America’s interests,” wrote Jon Chait in an article entitled “Obama’s Intelligence Blunder” for the Washington Post’s neocon-dominated op-ed page.

Chait, a senior editor at the neocon New Republic, added: “As far as realists are concerned, there’s no way to think about the way governments act except as the pursuit of self-interest. Taken to extremes, realism’s blindness to morality can lead it wildly astray. Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, both staunch

realists, wrote 'The Israel Lobby,' a hyperbolic attack on Zionist political influence.

"Freeman praised 'The Israel Lobby' while indulging in its characteristic paranoia. 'No one else in the United States has dared to publish this article,' he told a Saudi news service in 2006, 'given the political penalties that the lobby imposes on those who criticize it.'"

The right-wing Washington Times published its own smear job against Freeman, written by former Reagan administration Pentagon official Frank Gaffney, another neocon.

"The announcement that the Obama administration would turn over the job of preparing National Intelligence Estimates to a man whom Saudi Arabia, China, Iran and Hamas surely consider an agent of influence calls to mind an old axiom about Charles 'Chas' Freeman's new line of work, 'Garbage in, garbage out,'" Gaffney wrote.

Faced with this furious reaction to the appointment of Freeman, Obama quickly retreated. Freeman was forced to step down, and the neocons celebrated their reassertion of political clout even in Obama's Washington.

In a later book, *America's Misadventures in the Middle East*, Freeman noted that the day after he withdrew his acceptance of the job, the Washington Post published "an unsigned editorial calling me a 'crackpot' for imagining that there was an Israel Lobby and that it had opposed me."

By contrast to the cave-in on Freeman, second-term Obama refused to buckle regarding Hagel, although the neocons applied similar smear tactics.

Another one of Hagel's alleged sins is that he believes the vast Pentagon budget "needs to be pared down." The Washington Post editorial page, which has long been the neocons' media flagship in the nation's capital, denounced that position as reckless and out of the mainstream.

"Mr. Hagel's stated positions on critical issues, ranging from defense spending to Iran, fall well to the left of those pursued by Mr. Obama during his first term and place him near the fringe of the Senate that would be asked to confirm him," the Post sniffed in a Dec. 19 editorial.

But it is clear that Hagel's primary disqualification was that he has, at times, refused to sign on to hawkish neocon positions circulated by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, AIPAC, such as piling on more anti-Iran sanctions and demanding that Europe designate Hezbollah, Israel's chief foe in Lebanon, as a terrorist organization.

Betting on Romney

Overall, the neocons have found their power prospects waning by comparison to what they had hoped just a few months ago. They had expected President Mitt Romney to restore them to the previous glory that they had enjoyed under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush.

However, just days after Romney lost to Obama, the neocons got an unexpected surprise when their cozy ally, David Petraeus, was forced to resign as CIA director due to a sex scandal. Given his star status, Petraeus had expected to have his sexual escapades swept under the rug but he was informed that he would have to leave and that the reason would be made public.

According to intelligence sources, Obama was upset with a behind-his-back effort by CIA Director Petraeus and Secretary of State Clinton to push a scheme for shipping arms to the Syrian rebels. The Petraeus-Clinton thinking apparently was that Obama, in a tough reelection fight, would not have the political guts to block their Syrian plan and face possible accusations of timidity, but he did.

Then, heading into his second term, Obama finished clearing the decks of his first-term national security team. Defense Secretary Gates already had resigned in 2011. With John Kerry at State and Chuck Hagel at Defense, Obama also has two Vietnam War veterans with Purple Hearts who have expressed a reluctance to go casually off to war, as many neocons who typically have never served in uniform do.

Yet, despite their loss of standing within the Executive Branch, the neocons can still be counted on to push violent solutions to diplomatic problems. Indeed, their voices may become even more strident if they see Obama's second term seeking more multilateral solutions and more "realist" approaches to the rest of the world.

The neocons may still raise their voices and type out angry op-eds, but their hands are off the levers of military power more so than we have seen since the 1970s.

[For a limited time, you can purchase Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush family 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](#)).

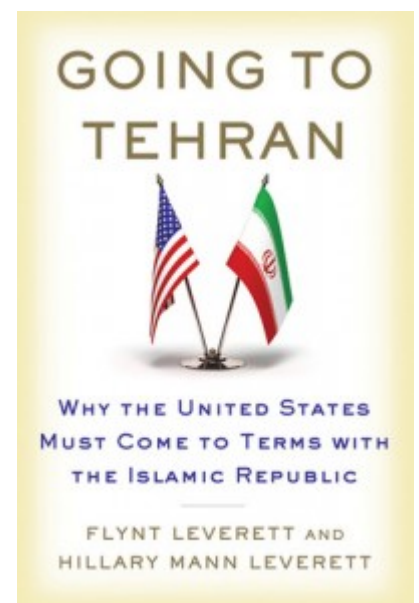
Challenging the Neocons on Iran

Despite the Iraq debacle, neocons remain in the driver's seat setting official U.S. attitudes toward Iran, mixing worst-case assumptions with unrelenting hostility. But national security experts Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett have stood up to this neocon-driven conventional wisdom, says Gareth Porter at Inter Press Service.

By Gareth Porter

Going to Tehran arguably represents the most important work on the subject of U.S.-Iran relations to be published thus far. Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett tackle not only U.S. policy toward Iran but the broader context of Middle East policy with a systematic analytical perspective informed by personal experience, as well as very extensive documentation.

More importantly, however, their exposé required a degree of courage that may be unparalleled in the writing of former U.S. national security officials about issues on which they worked. They have chosen not just to criticize U.S. policy toward Iran but to analyze that policy as a problem of U.S. hegemony.



Their national security state credentials are impeccable. They both served at different times as senior coordinators dealing with Iran on the National Security Council staff, and Hillary Mann Leverett was one of the few U.S. officials who have been authorized to negotiate with Iranian officials.

Both wrote memoranda in 2003 urging the George W. Bush administration to take the Iranian “roadmap” proposal for bilateral negotiations seriously but found

policymakers either uninterested or powerless to influence the decision. Hillary Mann Leverett even has a connection with the powerful American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), having interned with that lobby group as a youth.

After leaving the U.S. government in disagreement with U.S. policy toward Iran, the Leveretts did not follow the normal pattern of settling into the jobs where they would support the broad outlines of the U.S. role in world politics in return for comfortable incomes and continued access to power.

Instead, they have chosen to take a firm stand in opposition to U.S. policy toward Iran, criticizing the policy of the Barack Obama administration as far more aggressive than is generally recognized. They went even further, however, contesting the consensus view in Washington among policy wonks, news media and Iran human rights activists that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election in June 2009 was fraudulent.

The Leveretts' uncompromising posture toward the policymaking system and those outside the government who support U.S. policy has made them extremely unpopular in Washington foreign policy elite circles. After talking to some of their antagonists, *The New Republic* even passed on the rumor that the Leveretts had become shills for oil companies and others who wanted to do business with Iran.

The problem for the Establishment, however, is that they turned out to be immune to the blandishments that normally keep former officials either safely supportive or quiet on national security issues that call for heated debate.

In *Going to Tehran*, the Leveretts elaborate on the contrarian analysis they have been making on their blog (formerly "The Race for Iran" and now "Going to Tehran") They take to task those supporting U.S. systematic pressures on Iran for substituting wishful thinking that most Iranians long for secular democracy, and offer a hard analysis of the history of the Iranian revolution.

In an analysis of the roots of the legitimacy of the Islamic regime, they point to evidence that the single most important factor that swept the Khomeini movement into power in 1979 was "the Shah's indifference to the religious sensibilities of Iranians." That point, which conflicts with just about everything that has appeared in the mass media on Iran for decades, certainly has far-reaching analytical significance.

The Leveretts' 56-page review of the evidence regarding the legitimacy of the 2009 election emphasizes polls done by U.S.-based Terror Free Tomorrow and World Public Opinion and Canadian-based Globe Scan and 10 surveys by the University of Tehran. All of the polls were consistent with one another and with official election data on both a wide margin of victory by Ahmadinejad and turnout rates.

The Leveretts also point out that the leading opposition candidate, Hossein Mir Mousavi, did not produce “a single one of his 40,676 observers to claim that the count at his or her station had been incorrect, and none came forward independently.”

Going to Tehran has chapters analyzing Iran’s “Grand Strategy” and on the role of negotiating with the United States that debunk much of which passes for expert opinion in Washington’s think tank world. They view Iran’s nuclear program as aimed at achieving the same status as Japan, Canada and other “threshold nuclear states” which have the capability to become nuclear powers but forego that option.

The Leveretts also point out that it is a status that is not forbidden by the nuclear non-proliferation treaty much to the chagrin of the United States and its anti-Iran allies.

In a later chapter, they allude briefly to what is surely the best-kept secret about the Iranian nuclear program and Iranian foreign policy: the Iranian leadership’s calculation that the enrichment program is the only incentive the United States has to reach a strategic accommodation with Tehran. That one fact helps to explain most of the twists and turns in Iran’s nuclear program and its nuclear diplomacy over the past decade.

One of the propaganda themes most popular inside the Washington Beltway is that the Islamic regime in Iran cannot negotiate seriously with the United States because the survival of the regime depends on hostility toward the United States.

The Leveretts debunk that notion by detailing a series of episodes beginning with President Hashemi Rafsanjani’s effort to improve relations in 1991 and again in 1995 and Iran’s offer to cooperate against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and, more generally after 9/11, about which Hillary Mann Leverett had personal experience.

Finally, they provide the most detailed analysis available on the 2003 Iranian proposal for a “roadmap” for negotiations with the United States, which the Bush administration gave the back of its hand.

The central message of *Going to Tehran* is that the United States has been unwilling to let go of the demand for Iran’s subordination to dominant U.S. power in the region. The Leveretts identify the decisive turning point in the U.S. “quest for dominance in the Middle East” as the collapse of the Soviet Union, which they say “liberated the United States from balance of power constraints.”

They cite the recollection of senior advisers to Secretary of State James Baker that the George H. W. Bush administration considered engagement with Iran as part of a post-Gulf War strategy but decided in the aftermath of the Soviet adversary's disappearance that "it didn't need to."

Subsequent U.S. policy in the region, including what former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft called "the nutty idea" of "dual containment" of Iraq and Iran, they argue, has flowed from the new incentive for Washington to maintain and enhance its dominance in the Middle East.

The authors offer a succinct analysis of the Clinton administration's regional and Iran policies as precursors to Bush's Iraq War and Iran regime change policy. Their account suggests that the role of Republican neoconservatives in those policies should not be exaggerated, and that more fundamental political-institutional interests were already pushing the U.S. national security state in that direction before 2001.

They analyze the Bush administration's flirtation with regime change and the Obama administration's less-than-half-hearted diplomatic engagement with Iran as both motivated by a refusal to budge from a stance of maintaining the status quo of U.S.-Israeli hegemony.

Consistent with but going beyond the Leveretts' analysis is the Bush conviction that the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq had shaken the Iranians, and that there was no need to make the slightest concession to the regime. The Obama administration has apparently fallen into the same conceptual trap, believing that the United States and its allies have Iran by the throat because of its "crippling sanctions".

Thanks to the Leveretts, opponents of U.S. policies of domination and intervention in the Middle East have a new and rich source of analysis to argue against those policies more effectively.

Gareth Porter, an investigative historian and journalist specializing in U.S. national security policy, received the UK-based Gellhorn Prize for journalism for 2011 for articles on the U.S. war in Afghanistan.

The Ever-Spinning Revolving Door

Federal conflict-of-interest laws restrict what former government officials can do if they leave to take jobs as lobbyists, but there remains much flexibility both in Washington and state capitals for the revolving door to keep spinning,

say Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

To those who would argue that the notion of a perpetual motion machine is impossible, we give you the revolving door that ever-spinning entrance and exit between public service in government and the hugely profitable private sector. It never stops.

Yes, we've talked about the revolving door until we're red or blue in the face (the door is bipartisan and spins across party lines) but this mantra bears its own perpetual repetition, a powerful reason for our distrust of the people who make and enforce our laws and regulations.

Jesse Eisinger, writing at *The New York Times*, reports that on Jan. 25, Senate Majority leader Harry Reid announced the appointment of Cathy Koch as his chief advisor on tax and economic policy. According to the *Times*, "The news release lists Ms. Koch's admirable and formidable experience in the public sector. 'Prior to joining Senator Reid's office,' the release says, 'Koch served as tax chief at the Senate Finance Committee.'"

But, Eisinger notes, the press statement fails to mention Ms. Koch's actual last job as a registered lobbyist for GE. "Yes, General Electric," he writes, "the company that paid almost no taxes in 2010. Just as the tax reform debate is heating up, Mr. Reid has put in place a person who is extraordinarily positioned to torpedo any tax reform that might draw a dollar out of GE – and, by extension, any big corporation."

One other example cited in the *Times* article: Julie Williams, chief counsel for the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency "and a major friend of the banks for years" has been forced out of the OCC by its new boss and is joining Promontory Financial Group, "a classic Washington creature that is a private sector mirror image of a regulatory body."

Promontory plays both sides of the field, helping financial companies hack their way through the bogs of regulation while simultaneously "helping" the OCC review said regulations like the just abandoned Independent Foreclosure Review that essentially let the banks hire outside "experts" to decide who had been victimized by the banks' abuse of mortgages. Result: not a dime to affected homeowners but \$1.5 billion in consulting fees to Promontory and other companies like it.

And get this: as Julie Williams exits OCC for Promontory, she will be succeeded as chief counsel by Amy Friend, former chief counsel of the Senate Banking

Committee but currently a managing director at wait for it Promontory!

It's a wonder all of Washington doesn't lie prostrate in the streets, overcome by vertigo from all the spinning back and forth. But while we're at it, remember that this whirling frenzy isn't limited to the federal government. There are revolving doors installed at the exits and entrances of every state capitol in the country. The temptation for officeholders to seek greener pastures in lobbying can be even greater in statehouses where salaries are small and legislative sessions infrequent.

A quick search of newspapers around the country reveals how pernicious the problem is. On Feb. 22, the *Los Angeles Times* reported "the abrupt resignation" of State Senator Michael J. Rubio to take a government affairs job with Chevron: "As chairman of the Senate Environmental Quality Committee, Rubio was leading the charge to make California's environmental laws more business-friendly and has introduced bills during his two years in office that affect the oil industry in his Central Valley district."

A recent editorial in the Raleigh (North Carolina) *News & Observer* points out that since the last session of the legislature there, Republican Harold Brubaker, former speaker of the North Carolina House; and Republican Richard Stevens, a ten-year veteran of the state senate, have become registered lobbyists: "Both men became experts in state spending by heading budget committees in their respective chambers. Top legislators-turned-hired-guns advising lawmakers sounds like an opening for well-funded interests to buy influence."

Florida, that inflamed big toe of American politics, is one of the worst offenders, even as the state debates a sweeping ethics reform bill that keeps in place a current law that prevents departing members from lobbying the legislature for a two-year "cooling off" period but postpones for two years a similar ban on doing business with the governor and state agencies. Over the last two decades, the state has increasingly contracted government work currently valued at \$50 billion to outside vendors.

Earlier this month, Mary Ellen Klas of *The Miami Herald* wrote, "The infusion of state cash into private and non-profit industries has spawned a cottage industry of lobbyists who help vendors manage the labyrinth of rules and build relationships with executive agency officers and staff so they can steer contracts to their clients.

"There are now more people registered to lobby the governor, the Cabinet and their agencies 4,925 than there are registered to lobby the 160-member Legislature 3,235." Dozens of them are former legislators and staff members "as

well as former utility regulators, agency secretaries, division heads and other employees.”

Former Florida House Speaker Dean Cannon retired last November and has set up a lobbying shop just a block from the state capitol in Tallahassee. And former Senate President Mike Haridopolos, now a lobbyist, “used his influence to get lawmakers to insert millions into the budget at the final stage of the budget process to pay for a state law enforcement radio system the agencies didn’t ask for, a juvenile justice contract that agency didn’t seek and the extension of a contract to expand broadband service in rural areas.”

You get the picture. In 15 states, according to the progressive Center for Public Integrity, “there aren’t any laws preventing legislators from resigning one day and registering as lobbyists the next. In the most egregious cases, legislators or regulators have written laws or set policy that helps a business or industry with whom they have been negotiating for a job once they leave office.” What’s more, in many of the 35 states that do have restrictions, “the rules are riddled with loopholes, narrowly written or loosely enforced.”

Which is why Glenn Harlan Reynolds, law professor, libertarian and head honcho of the political blog *Instapundit*, may be on to something. In a column for *USA Today* last month, he suggested, “Let’s involve the most effective behavior-control machinery in America: The Internal Revenue Code.

“In short, I propose putting 50% surtax or maybe it should be 75%, I’m open to discussion on the post-government earnings of government officials. So if you work at a cabinet level job and make \$196,700 a year, and you leave for a job that pays a million a year, you’ll pay 50% of the difference just over \$400,000 to the Treasury right off the top. So as not to be greedy, we’ll limit it to your first five years of post-government earnings; after that, you’ll just pay whatever standard income tax applies.”

The conservative *Boston Herald* endorsed the idea, comparing an ex-legislator or official’s connections and knowledge to intangible capitol and Reynolds’ scheme to a capital gains tax.

Imagine conservatives and libertarians making a favorable comparison to the capital gains tax! This and that Russian meteor may be signs of the apocalypse. Just gives you an idea of how deeply awful and anti-democratic the revolving door is, no matter which side you’re on. That’s why it has to be slowed down if not completely stopped and why we’ll keep talking about it.

Bill Moyers is managing editor and Michael Winship, senior writer at the think tank Demos, is senior writer of the weekly public affairs program, Moyers &

Company, airing on public television. Check local airtimes or comment at www.BillMoyers.com.

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.”

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