

# Oliver Stone's Hard Look at US History

Many American historians, like their counterparts in journalism, fail the democratic process that they are supposed to serve. Both groups tend to put a positive spin on even the nastiest actions of the U.S. government, a process that Oliver Stone challenges in his "Untold History of the United States," which he discusses with Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Official American history has shaped a national myth that depicts a good and righteous country which invariably takes actions at home and abroad that are based on fairness and humanitarian principles, albeit with some mistakes made here and there but with no ill intent.

To fit with that myth, the darkest chapters of U.S. history get the lightest touch: the genocide and ethnic cleansing of indigenous peoples, the institution of slavery as a key early economic factor in building the nation, widespread abuses in factories including child labor, and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to name just a few.

But this whitewashing of U.S. history has always gotten under the skin of Oscar-winning filmmaker Oliver Stone, leading him to spend much of the last five years working on a unique documentary series, "The Untold History of the United States," along with a companion book, both co-written with American University historian Peter Kuznick.

The multi-part documentary, which aired on Showtime and is now being released as a four-disc, 12-hour set on Blu-Ray, seeks to counteract some of the biggest lies perpetuated by modern historians about the past century. Stone, whose classic films include "Platoon," "Wall Street" and "JFK," discussed his historical series in an interview with Dennis J Bernstein.

DB: What planted the seeds for this project? Has this marinated for a while? What are the origins?

OS: In my film work I have gone to historical subject matter quite often. I was interested in the big events. Although I was born conservative, raised that way, and went to school that way, I became more progressive as I experimented and talked to people. In 2008, I reached the place, after making more than a dozen films, where I was exhausted by the idea of George Bush having eight years in office. I felt that rather than make another dramatic film, if there was one thing I could do for my kids, it would be to look back at my life, going back to

the 1940s, to look at what went wrong.

Peter is an old friend who has been studying these issues for more than 30 years. He is a nuclear expert on arms, and we combined our forces – dramatist and historian. We went at it, from 1900 to now, and it was a big deal – much bigger than we had in mind. It was a five-year deal as opposed to a two and a half-year deal. We were over budget and over time. The book came out of this series. Once we were into the series, we realized we were in deep, and we wanted to substantiate some of what we said in the book, so Peter and his graduate students turned it on.

DB: A lot of footnotes in there.

OS: It is dramatic. The series was fact-checked three times and the book twice.

DB: I know a lot of this material, but this was revelatory. The way it was presented on screen was extraordinary. Let's talk about some of the content, then the process of the way you work. I think it differs from some of the documentarians working today. What surprised me the most was the story about Henry Wallace and the changing of the ticket under FDR. Was that revelatory for you?

OS: Yes. Peter knew a lot about it, as it was a special subject for him. It grew out of Peter's interest in the atomic bomb. His main study has been why we did not have to drop the bomb on Japan. He has a very sound argument, and you must see the series to understand it. Part of that chain of birth is the idea that Wallace, who was Vice President from 1941 to 1945, was a true, true American progressive, not a liberal. He had a new deal vision of America in cooperation with the Soviet Union as well as all countries.

He detested the British Empire – that is true. He didn't have any friends with Churchill. Over the course of the war years it was apparent he was progressive and the Democratic bosses, who were very conservative, could not abide him and wanted to get rid of him and they did. In the 1944 convention – it was very fixed in those days – they backed a non-entity called Harry Truman who managed to squeak in. Wallace's representative was five feet from the podium when the convention was closed the first night – when Wallace would have swept in. It was a very sad moment.

Roosevelt, if he had lived, wouldn't possibly have dropped the bomb on Japan, because there was no need to. We had been fed the myth over the years, driven into our education system, repeated over and over again, so that there are misinformed people. There is such a big story about the atomic bomb and the use of our force over this last 70 years, since WW II, and what we became. That is

the essence of the series.

DB: I want to talk to you more about that. I know that you were in Japan with Peter Kuznick for the 60th commemoration of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and I'm wondering if this discussion came up. Is there the knowledge of the way the atomic bomb became the opening salvo of the Cold War, as opposed to the end of WW II?

OS: No. It's not there, but it was a very moving experience. There were many survivors, *Hibakusha*, they are called in Japan. We went to Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Okinawa, because bases are still there, and they are building new ones. I went up to Jeju Island in South Korea where the South Korean government and the Pentagon, of course, are building a gigantic naval base. A lot is going on in the Asian Pacific. That is what our journey was about.

When we talked to the Japanese, they were like us. They never got the basic education about how the U.S. military controlled Japan after the war. Everything about the atomic bomb was censored; even the word itself couldn't be used until 1953 or 1954 when Japan started to open up after the rocky dragon incident. The incident in the South Pacific was a hydrogen bomb test gone wrong. It affected the tuna fish, people died – it was a disaster.

The Japanese turned against the bomb because they were the victims of it. Ironically, at this very time Eisenhower was selling the atoms for peace proposal throughout the world, atoms for the peaceful. His first target was Hiroshima and he wanted to build a nuclear power plant there. He didn't, but they did get Fukushima up, and of course that was a disaster for an earthquake-ravaged country. There was a great movie called Japan's Longest Day, which is about the last few days before surrender.

The American people didn't know how prostrated the Japanese economy was – the ports, facilities, and transportation gone from the terror bombing. More than 100 cities destroyed. Tokyo burned to the ground. People were starving. Also unknown to the American people is that the Japanese were trying to surrender. We had broken their codes, so Truman, and those in his circle, knew that Japan wanted to surrender. What is also kept from the American people is the Soviet invasion of Manchuria going toward Japan and its impact of terror on the Japanese. They knew they were sunk, and their only hope was to make a deal with the U.S.

Once that was known we were still three months away from an invasion. We didn't have the troops ready to go, so much would have happened during those three months. But Truman wanted to drop the bomb. We spent a fortune building it. He hyped it – we built it, so we must find out if it really works. They picked

Hiroshima because it had never been bombed, so it was a pristine target – they could see how much damage this bomb could do.

Truman didn't want to acknowledge the concessions Roosevelt made with Stalin at Yalta, so we went ahead and basically violated the agreement with the Russians. From that point, the Cold War was on. The Russians knew our game. Two weeks after Roosevelt died, it turned icy, with Truman, in an ugly scene, insulting the Soviet Foreign Minister in Washington. Truman was a small man, like George Bush, with a narrow mind. It's a shame that he's been mythologized in American history as a big hero, [the subject of a biography that was] a Pulitzer Prize winner. People should read this book [*The Untold History of the United States*], because it opens an alternative way of looking at our history.

DB: It is an experience to see it all. It reminded me of the great work of Howard Zinn. Is he a precursor, setting the tone? Were you influenced by his work as well?

OS: Wonderful. I met him a few times. I'm sorry he didn't live to see the series. We didn't always agree with each other, but Peter and I loved his anti-establishment thinking. There are other Cold War historians who shouldn't be ignored. Peter studied with these historians. We did not just find out about this for the first time, it's been out there, at a high level in the college education system. But it's not available in the mass media so we continue the lies at that level.

DB: Let's fast forward and deal with 9/11, because there's a lot said about that. I always thought it wasn't about the self-demolition, but that many of the people involved in this action were trained in the U.S. and did actions for the U.S.

OS: It is very disturbing. Once Brzezinski opened the door in Afghanistan in 1978, he was clear it was a trap, saying in a memo to Carter, that it would be the Soviet Viet Nam. We knew about the Caucasian Muslim resistance that existed throughout Southern Russia. Even Bill Casey of the CIA under Reagan was actively encouraging rebellion of the Islamic fundamentalists in Southern Russia – he wanted that. So we backed them from the beginning in Afghanistan, and gave them a lot of money.

The silly movie, "Charlie Wilson's War," gave the idea that we were heroes for financing these people who are dead serious fundamentalist Taliban types, not interested in the reforms the Soviets brought to the educational system, rights of women, basic scientific education. We lost track of them and then they came back and they are after us because we put 500,000 troops in Saudi Arabia under George Bush's father, which was disgusting, disgusting, a violation of

everything we learned in Vietnam. Bringing those troops in there sealed our involvement in the Middle East as well as our Israeli policies, and that's what got Al Qaeda against us. We brought it on.

DB: Robert Fisk, of the *Independent*, did an interview with Osama Bin Laden in which Bin Laden said he said it in several interviews – you need to know that when we are done here, we are turning these guns toward the West.

OS: Fisk is good. He was always out in the front lines. I always liked Fisk.

DB: This is what Bin Laden said. It is so troubling what people do not learn in school when they study the history of that part of the world.

OS: I never got into all the details, but there were so many Saudi Arabians, which makes us now more and more awake to that idea that the Saudi Arabians have a very fundamentalist regime and we are very entrenched in backing those regimes throughout the Middle East, including [in] Syria now. Saudi Arabia's interests are not necessarily our interests.

DB: You made this film quite a bit different from some of the traditional filmmakers. There is a lone narrator, not a lot of talking heads. Why did you do it the way you did?

OS: We wanted to make it fast – 120 years in 12 hours. We had to travel and wanted to stick to the big points, not get stuck with the smaller points, which are important, and were brought into the book. It is hard to simplify. Each chapter is dedicated, in 58 minutes and 30 seconds, to telling a narrative story. We ended up using my voice, which was used as a temp-track, but people were responding positively to it, so we stayed with it, otherwise I would have used Lawrence Olivier – just kidding. The archival footage was terrific, with a lot of original material from around the world. Rob Wilson pulled that in. Music was by Craig Armstrong and Adam Peters, both great composers of the original music, which gives the whole series a movie feel – a lift, which is lovely.

We used film clips, which is important to break the tedium sometimes of looking only at archival footage -although it may be fascinating, it can be a lot for the mind. We decided to cut away the movies, and add movies of the time, which adds spice, color and flavor to help understand the mood of the country, especially if the film is a propaganda film, etc. We had no talking heads, which is important, because it would have broken the rhythm. At times I realized I was making the series for the level of my children, who are smart and went to good schools. There is a lot of information, so these hours can be watched again. We made it a kind of evergreen, so it can last into the future. It is well worth watching a second time, because you can learn something that you may have

missed, since it does go fast.

DB: The context and continuum are crucial as well. When you see it in a flow, it begins to come together as a whole in terms of the nature of U.S. policy.

OS: That's right. Don't get stuck in the details, because the details can drive you down. The everyday news in this country, the 24-hours news cycle, is ridiculous. You rarely get a big picture.

DB: That's how they teach journalism. They don't want you to link. I did a lot of journalism, and every time I wrote a story that tried to give some historical context, first it was the good images – "we don't want any good imagery", then it was the context "this is just about what happened there, then and now." It's a killer.

OS: That's the beauty of history – why I have always loved history. It allows you to think and put together events and make sense of them. Often we only react to the tyranny of now. The maps are extraordinary in the film, done by a very good graphic company, and they made a special effort to make the maps live. We sometimes used old maps, but we also put new maps in, which allow you to understand some of the geopolitical moves of, for example, the British Empire, and its reach in 1940. Churchill was fighting to protect much more than England itself.

DB: Maps have been a key part of deception and lying about history, haven't they?

OS: Yes. Churchill plays a huge role in the Cold War too. Greece was the first [Cold War] battle, and that was Churchill's war, which set us up for Truman's Turkish-Greek aid advisors who use the word terrorist as early as 1947 and declare the National Security Agency.

DB: Speaking of the NSA, and Edward Snowden. Any surprises? Do you conduct your life differently now? Do you have more face-to-face meetings?

OS: During these five years I wasn't able to develop anything long range – only this. It refreshed me in a deep way, like going back to school and getting a PhD. Now I feel like I have a solid foundation to understand all the recent history in the U.S. I hope I can bring it back to film. After you do something like this, it is hard to settle on one story.

DB: May be those releases, revelations, will change in some way how history is recorded.

OS: I hope so. It is so difficult to sell something like this to a public that

has been brainwashed for so many years. It feels like we are an exception to the rule.

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## Edward Snowden’s Brave Integrity

**Exclusive:** President Obama says he welcomes the debate on post-9/11 surveillance of Americans and the world, but that debate was only made meaningful by the disclosures of NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden, who was then indicted and sought asylum in Russia, where he just met with some ex-U.S. intelligence officials, including Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

I’ve had a couple of days to reflect after arriving back from Moscow where my whistleblower colleagues Coleen Rowley, Jesselyn Radack, Tom Drake and I formally presented former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden with the annual Sam Adams Associates award for integrity in intelligence.

The thought that companioned me the entire time was the constant admonition of my Irish grandmother: “Show me your company, and I’ll tell you who you are!” I cannot remember ever feeling so honored as I did by the company I kept over the past week.

That includes, of course, Snowden himself, WikiLeaks journalist Sarah Harrison (and “remotely” Julian Assange) who, together with Russian civil rights lawyer Anatoly Kucherena, helped arrange the visit, and last but not least the 3,000 Internet transparency/privacy activists at OHM2013 near Amsterdam, whom Tom, Jesselyn, Coleen and I addressed in early August and who decided to crowd-source our travel. (See: “In the Whistleblower Chalet” by Silkie Carlo; <http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/in-the-whistleblower-chalet>)

As representatives of Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence, we were in Moscow last Wednesday not only to honor Snowden with the award for integrity, but also to remind him (and ourselves) that we all stand on the shoulders of patriots who have gone before and pointed the way.

Because of speaking commitments he could not break, Pentagon Papers truth-teller

Dan Ellsberg, whom Henry Kissinger called “the most dangerous man in America” and who in 1971 was vilified as acidly as Ed Snowden is being vilified now, could be with us only in spirit. He did send along with us for Ed the video of the award-winning documentary that uses Kissinger’s epithet as its title, together with Dan’s book *Secrets*, in which he had inscribed a very thoughtful note.

Ellsberg’s note thanked Snowden for his adroit and already partially successful attempt to thwart what Snowden has called “turnkey tyranny,” that is the terrifying prospect of a surveillance-driven government tyranny ready to go with the simple turn of a key.

Two at our table Ed Snowden and Tom Drake enjoy with Dan the dubious distinction of having been charged with espionage under the draconian Espionage Act of 1917 that is so much favored by the administration of President Barack Obama and other zealous protectors of the national security state and its multitude of secrets.

Call me naive, but I had no sense that I was cavorting with treasonous criminals. Rather, it seemed crystal clear that Ed Snowden is simply the current embodiment of people so castigated when they feel compelled to speak out, as Ed did, against gross violations of the Fourth Amendment.

Compelled? Well, yes, compelled. Those of us like Snowden, who took a solemn oath “to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic” recognize that our oath has no “expiration date.”

During interviews, I found it easy to put the Snowden disclosures into perspective regarding the seriousness of the Bush and Obama administration crimes against the Fourth Amendment by simply reciting that key part of our now-fractured Bill of Rights; it’s just one sentence:

*“The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.”*

Director of National Intelligence James Clapper may be able to tell Congress with impunity (in his own words) “clearly erroneous” things, but neither he, nor his duplicitous sidekick NSA Director Keith Alexander, nor complicit Senators and Representatives, nor the President himself can easily bend the Fourth Amendment that far out of shape once people read the text.

And that, of course, explains why co-conspirators in Congress like House Speaker



John Boehner and Senate Intelligence Committee chair Dianne Feinstein call the kettle black by branding Snowden a “traitor.” And it is also why former NSA and CIA director Michael Hayden and House Intelligence Committee chair Mike Rogers indicate publicly, as they did two weeks ago, that they would like to see Snowden’s name added to the infamous “Kill List” for the President’s approval.

That list renders the Fifth Amendment “quaint and obsolete,” the words used by George W. Bush’s White House counsel Alberto Gonzales when troublesome legal restrictions might otherwise impinge on what the White House wished to do.

### **American Traditions**

At our dinner with Ed Snowden, Coleen Rowley reminded him that his willingness to expose injustice fit in with a patriotic tradition modeled by Founders like Benjamin Franklin even before the American Revolution.

Coleen recounted how Benjamin Franklin got himself in deep trouble in 1773, when he acquired and released confidential letters from the British governor of Massachusetts to the Crown showing that the colonial authorities did not think the American colonists should enjoy the same rights as British citizens in England. Franklin was fired from his post as Postmaster General and called a traitor and every other name in the book many of them the same epithets hurled at Snowden.

More poignant still was a reading from Albert Camus beautifully rendered aloud by Jesselyn Radack, who related some of Camus writings to Snowden’s testimony (earlier read on his behalf by Jesselyn) to the European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs on Sept. 30.

Snowden wrote: “The work of a generation is beginning here, with your hearings, and you have the full measure of my gratitude and support.”

### **What follows is how Jesselyn Radack presented the quotes from Camus:**

Edward Snowden, you are in good company. “The Wager of Our Generation” is how Albert Camus described what you have called “The Work of a Generation,” when he spoke of a similar challenge in 1957, the year he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. And the similarity between Snowden and Camus does not end there. The official Nobel Prize citation praised Camus for “his clear-sighted earnestness illuminating the problems of the human conscience of our times.”

In 1957, Camus expressed hope in “the quality of the new generation and its increased unwillingness to adopt slogans or ideologies and to return to more tangible values.” He wrote: “We have nothing to lose except everything. So let’s go ahead. This is the wager of our generation. If we are to fail, it is better,

in any case, to have stood on the side of those who refuse to be dogs and are resolved to pay the price that must be paid so that man can be something more than a dog.”

Camus rejected what he called the “the paltry privileges granted to those who adapt themselves to this world,” adding that, “those individuals who refuse to give in will stand apart, and they must accept this. Personally, I have never wanted to stand apart. For there is a sort of solitude, which is certainly the harshest thing our era forces upon us. I feel its weight, believe me. But, nevertheless, I should not want to change eras, for I know and respect the greatness of this one. Moreover, I have always thought that the maximum danger implied the maximum hope.”

In December 1957, the month he won the Nobel Prize, Camus strongly warned against inaction: “Remaining aloof has always been possible in history. When people did not approve, they could always keep silent or talk of something else. Today everything is changed and even silence has dangerous implications.”

And concrete dangers like “turnkey tyranny.”

A key figure in the French Resistance, Camus in July 1943 published a “Letter to German Friend,” which began as follows: “You said to me: ‘The greatness of my country [Germany] is beyond price. Anything is good that contributes to its greatness. Those who, like us young Germans, are lucky enough to find a meaning in the destiny of our nation must sacrifice everything else.’

“‘No,’ I told you, ‘I cannot believe that everything must be subordinate to a single end. There are means that cannot be excused. And I should like to be able to love my country and still love justice. I don’t want for my country a greatness born of blood and falsehood. I want to keep it alive by keeping justice alive.’ You retorted, ‘Well, then you don’t love your country.’”

Edward, that may have a familiar ring to you. But, of course, the truth is the very opposite. Let us take one more cue from Albert Camus, who emphasized that, “Truth needs witnesses.”

We are honored, Edward, to be here at this time and place to be your witnesses. You have the full measure of our gratitude and support.

**End of Jesselyn Radack’s presentation.**

People have been telling me how eloquent Ed Snowden was in responding to the award. And although DemocracyNow! hosted us for 40 minutes on Monday, we four did not have time to point to small, but significant, things like the fact Ed’s remarks were totally ad lib; he did not know he would be asked to give remarks

until I whispered it to him right after Tom Drake presented him with the traditional Sam Adams corner-brightener candlestick holder.

One of the things that impressed me most was Ed's emphasis on the "younger generation" he represents typically those who have grown up with the Internet who have (scarcely-fathomable-to-my-generation) technical expertise and equally remarkable dedication to keeping it free AND have a conscience. My first personal exposure to the depth, breadth and importance of this critical mass of those often dismissed as "hackers" came at the OHM2013 conference outside of Amsterdam in early August.

The James Clappers and Keith Alexanders of this world simply CANNOT do what they see as their job of snooping on the lot of us on this planet without this incredibly talented and dedicated generation. They CANNOT; and so they are in deep kimchi. If only a small percentage of this young generation have the integrity and courage of an Ed Snowden, the prospect is dim that repressive measures in violation of citizens' rights previously taken for granted can succeed for very long without full disclosure.

That is the good news. And with each new Snowden-enabled disclosure of infringements on our liberties, it becomes more likely that an awakened public will create sustained pressure for restoration of our Constitutional rights, and for holding accountable those senior government officials who have crassly violated those rights, and continue to violate Ed Snowden's rights simply because he made it possible for us to know the truth.

**Ray McGovern works for Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. Ray entered the CIA as an analyst on the same day as the late CIA analyst Sam Adams (a direct descendant of John Adams, by the way), and was instrumental in founding Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence.**

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## Shimmers of Mideast Hope

In the face of sustained injustice, there is an understandable desire to detect hopeful signs of change, small victories that boost the spirits of those fighting to make things better. But those shimmers of hope can often prove to be mirages in the harsh geopolitical desert of the Middle East, warns Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

On May 22, I wrote a cautionary analysis entitled "Staying Sober" which recounted two news stories that had drawn hopeful comments from progressives. One story was about the New York-based federal judge who placed an injunction on the U.S. government's practice of indefinite detention. The other was the momentary success of Palestinian hunger strikers in Israeli prisons at attaining some relief from their intolerable conditions. The hunger strikers were protesting, among other things, Israel's version of indefinite detention.

In the analysis, I noted that these were battles won and precedents to take heart from. They showed what was possible through determined opposition against unjust state practices. However, I added that winning battles is not equivalent to winning wars, so it would be wise to celebrate soberly, knowing the struggles were not over. As it turned out, that was good advice. The New York judge's injunction was overturned on appeal and the behavior of the Israelis quickly reverted to the status quo ante.

Today we are in a similar situation. Again we have two news stories that have raised the hopes of progressives. The first is the decision of U.S. President Barack Obama and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to engage diplomatically, a step which represents a setback for the influence of the Zionist lobby.

The second report is about a poll indicating that a near majority of American Jews think the Israeli government is not serious about peace with the Palestinians. Again, while both developments show movement in the right direction – movement that progressives can help sustain – it would be wise to stay sober.

The most immediately uplifting event was President Obama's diplomatic approach to Iran. I was quite impressed with the President's move in this direction and said so in an Oct. 5 analysis. However, others have seen this move as a possible "radical reforging of American foreign policy." While a delightful thought, I think this is highly unlikely. Consider the following:

–One of the things that makes this move so surprising and welcome to progressives is that it defies very powerful opposition. But, of course, that opposition will not simply give up. The neocons and Zionist devotees are still out there and are working overtime to sabotage this rare act of sanity in foreign policy. *What really stands in their way* is the publicly recognized popular opposition to another war, particularly in the Middle East. That's great. However, progressives will have to continue to work hard to keep it that way because the public is fickle and vulnerable to media propaganda.

–It is one thing to get to the negotiating table and another to have the political wherewithal and courage to make the reasonable compromises necessary

for a successful settlement. The Iranians want their rights recognized and sanctions lifted. Getting Congress to go along with that will take visible public demand. Progressives will have to find a way to help realize that demand.

### **American Jewish Attitude Toward Israel**

A recent Pew Research Center poll of American Jews found that nearly half (48 percent) “do not think that the current Israeli government is making a sincere effort to bring about a peace settlement.” Forty-four percent agree that “the continued building of Jewish settlements in the West Bank hurts Israel’s security.”

Actually, given the obvious nature of these facts, it is a wonder that the percentages aren’t much higher. Nonetheless, questionable conclusions have been drawn from this poll by both Zionists and those critical of Zionist behavior. Consider the following:

–Abe Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League (an avid Zionist organization), tends to exaggerate the negative message (as he sees it) of the poll. He dismissed this near majority of critical Jews as those who “do not care” about Israel. He declared that they are not *his* constituency. Only those who “do care” – that is, the Israel-right-or-wrong crowd – are the ones he will pay attention to. Well, that is convenient for Foxman. He will only listen to those who agree with him and, so, he can go blissfully into the future guided by the logical fallacy of confirmation bias.

Of course, this is a gamble on Foxman’s part. The number of American Jews (which, by the way, includes an increasing number of Israeli expatriates) who are more or less alienated from Israeli policy is growing. Groups that seek to co-opt this process, like J Street and Taglit-Birthright, might slow it but they cannot stop it, much less reverse it, as long as Israel remains a racist and expansionist country.

On the other hand, as long as those “who care” have the money to fund the Zionist lobby sufficiently to buy the support of Congress, Foxman’s narrow worldview of Israel *uber alles* (Israel “more than anything else”) will not wholly collapse.

–Those who see great positive significance in the Pew poll might also be off the mark. For instance, Juan Cole, a Middle East historian and well-known blogger whose opinions are usually very accurate, tends to exaggerate the positive importance of the Pew results. In Cole’s opinion the Zionist-oriented American-Jewish establishment no longer represents most of the country’s Jews.

Here, I think, Cole is correct. However, his conclusion that the Zionist lobby

can therefore “most often be safely defied” by politicians and other policy makers is probably incorrect. Cole’s proposition would be true if counting *Jewish* voters was the sole antidote for fear and trembling induced by the Zionist lobby.

However, those Jewish voters critical of Israel are not organized into a lobby that can compete with the Zionists. There is no indication that they are ready to punish politicians who support racist Israel by denying them their votes. And they are not so rich as to be able to help others compete with the Zionists in buying congressional votes. In other words, the Jewish opinions reflected in the Pew poll offer insufficient cover for those politicians who want to defy Zionist lobby power.

It is only when these critical Jews are joined by millions of non-Jewish voters that the potential of overcoming the Zionist lobby becomes real. That is what happened in the cases of Syria and Iran, when public opposition to hostile action and war gave politicians the cover they needed to defy Zionist political clout.

At the end of my May 2013 analysis, I drew the following conclusion: “On the up side, the news stories analyzed here demonstrate that battles against even the most entrenched and powerful of foes can be won. To win wars, however, is another thing altogether. ... It should sober us all to realize that it will take staying power – the sort of staying power that has already kept many other struggles for rights and justice going for decades if not generations.”

The power of special interests and their abilities to turn politicians and government bureaucracies to their own purposes is probably as old as civilization itself. We have to face that and be prepared to fight not just the current battle, but recurrent battles into the indefinite future. We must train our children to fight those battles. The British parliamentarian Barbara Castle put it this way: “I will fight for what I believe in until I drop dead. And that’s what keeps me alive.”

**Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America’s National Interest*; *America’s Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.**

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