

Republicans, Unhinged

The current crisis of American democracy centers on the craziness that has engulfed the Republican Party, once considered home of the responsible “adults” but now more like an island controlled by nasty and destructive adolescents, as Beverly Bandler explains.

By Beverly Bandler

“No America without democracy, no democracy without politics, no politics without parties, no parties without compromise and moderation.” With these memorable words political scientist Clinton Rossiter began his classic text, *Parties and Politics in America* in 1960.

Journalist John B. Judis reminds us that Rossiter saw U.S. parties as “creatures of compromise, coalitions of interest in which principle is muted and often even silenced.” For Rossiter and several generations of political scientists, writes Judis: “this was the genius of America’s party system. It was what made it possible for the United States, in contrast to Europe or Latin America, where parties tended to be ideologically pure, to endure the wrenching change of war or depression without violence and revolution.”

Today’s Republican Party, which suffers from terminal Cold War nostalgia among other destructive maladies, is being run by the Tea Party movement, which has created, according to historian of ideas Mark Lilla, a new political type: *anti-political Jacobins*. The Tea Partiers and their right-wing sympathizers are reactionaries who have embraced a Soviet-style “never compromise” ideology that threatens to turn American democracy on its head.

Congressional scholars Thomas Mann and Norm Ornstein state it succinctly: “The GOP has become an insurgent outlier in American politics, it is ideologically extreme; scornful of compromise; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition.”

Modern Republicans in contrast to their forebears in the Nineteenth Century and some moderates who continued to uphold GOP progressivism in the Twentieth Century have long rejected the notion that government can do anything to solve the nation’s problems. They have embraced Ronald Reagan’s maxim: “Government is the problem.”

For several decades, these reactionary Republicans have fought the New Deal and its “capitalism with safety nets.” They have now advanced farther along the continuum toward anarchy or what might be called anti-government nihilism. They

have introduced, writes journalist Elizabeth Drew, a new concept of governing: *they are against it.*

The Good Republican Party

It was not always thus. The Republican Party began as an anti-slavery coalition that emerged in 1854 to combat the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which threatened to extend slavery further into the territories. The new party also promoted a more vigorous government role in modernizing the economy through such projects as the Trans-Continental Railroad. The party was led by Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican president (1861-1865), who guided the Union to victory in the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery.

Known for its pro-business nationalism and its generally progressive views on race, the Republican Party would dominate the American political scene until 1932, losing its majorities during the Great Depression (1929-1940) to Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal Coalition."

As FDR led the country out of the Depression and through World War II, the Democrats became the dominant political party from 1932 to 1964, not only building the United States into an economic and military superpower but addressing many of the nation's long-term ills, such as racial segregation, poverty, neglect for the elderly, and oppression of women. In these endeavors, progressive Democrats and progressive Republicans often worked together.

As NPR's homespun humorist Garrison Keillor reflected in 2004, "Once upon a time, reasonable people could vote for Republicans, like Eisenhower. Not now: The party of Lincoln and Liberty was transmogrified into the party of hairy-backed swamp developers and corporate shills, faith-based economists, fundamentalist bullies with Bibles, Christians of convenience, freelance racists, misanthropic frat boys, shrieking midgets of AM radio, tax cheats, nihilists in golf pants"

American political scientist Andrew Hacker traces the origins of the extremist Republican Party that we know today to 1946. In that year, he notes the GOP decided to sell itself "as the voice of ordinary Americans" to voters who were resentful of postwar rising prices and shortages. With the 1946 midterm elections, in the middle of Democrat Harry Truman's first term as president, "swept in were figures like Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy," each one notorious in his own way.

Nixon's shabby "smear campaign" treatment of Democrat Helen Gahagan Douglas firmly established him as a ruthless political "slime ball" of the first order. McCarthy gave us "McCarthyism" (using a Red Scare to destroy the careers of many

left-wing dissidents and progressives from 1950 to 1956), one of the most shameful periods in American history. McCarthy, Hacker notes, “created the epithet ‘un-American,’ an accusation almost impossible to refute. Since then, the party has exhibited a coarse strain, which its corporate wing tolerates as a price of prevailing.”

The Crazification

The real disintegration (what blogger John Rogers calls the “crazification factor”) of what used to be called the “Grand Old Party” began with the 1964 and 1965 civil rights legislation. From that period, the GOP once known for urging “caution and prudence” in blending reform with traditional values evolved steadily into a party with a free-floating relationship with reality. The process was accelerated by the rise of Ronald Reagan, an actor and corporate pitchman who himself had only a passing relationship with facts.

Now, the Republican Party is under the thumb of uninformed and irrational Tea Party extortionists, a coalition including extremist Ayn Rand capitalists, Christian fundamentalists who reject America’s tradition of religious tolerance, and neo-Confederates who want to return to the discredited constitutional theories promulgated by slave owners in the pre-Civil War South. These disparate groups have come together to reject the New Deal principles of a social compact in which the federal government plays an important role in promoting the “general Welfare,” as spelled out in the U.S. Constitution.

Indeed, the Republican Party is now controlled by right-wing extremists who attack the expressed wording of the U.S. Constitution (while pretending to love the Constitution), and beyond that they are contemptuous of any rational governance at any level.

The GOP has evolved into a political party unlike any the United States has experienced, at least not since the Southern Democrats in 1860 seceded from the Union to protect the institution of slavery. Like those Confederates, the Tea Partiers are attacking core principles of democracy and, in effect, the Republic itself.

Hostility to Democracy

Over the past several decades, these right-wing Republicans have been moving “to replace our representative democracy with a politically and economically authoritarian system,” according to American cultural critic Henry A. Giroux. The Republicans, he writes, “swath their unabashed greed and self importance with distorted ‘freedom’ and ‘free market’ rhetoric, unbridled and unaccountable.”

In this process, nearly all the traditional GOP moderates have been purged, reflecting a form of ideological purity and moral certainty that is more commonly associated with authoritarian systems, not major parties in a pluralistic democracy. Respected moderates and progressives in the past like Robert M. La Follette Sr. (Wisconsin), Jeannette Rankin (Montana), Margaret Chase Smith (Maine) and Charles McC. Mathias (Maryland) would not stand a chance in today's radicalized Republican Party.

Republicans are no longer a loyal opposition to the majority Democrats (who won not only the presidency and the Senate in 2012 but prevailed by about 1½ million votes for the House of Representatives, with the GOP's House "majority" sustained largely through anti-democratic gerrymandering).

Today's Republican Party has become more of an anti-democratic insurrectionary cult that disdains the will of the majority and considers governance itself a form of evil. Through this transformation, the Republicans have helped replace the American Dream with a paralyzing Nightmare that may be very difficult to end, but ended it must be.

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Tea Party and '12 Years a Slave'

Exclusive: Some on the Right like to compare the Affordable Care Act to slavery, apparently to get under the skin of Barack Obama, the first African-American president. But the glib talking point also reveals a callous disregard for slavery's evils, which popular culture is finally addressing, writes Robert

Parry.

By Robert Parry

"Twelve Years a Slave," a movie based on the 1853 autobiography of Solomon Northup, a free black man who was kidnapped into slavery in 1841, is a powerful antidote to the Tea Party's poisonous nostalgia for the era of "states' rights" and "nullificationism," which became code words for protecting the "liberty" of Southern whites to own African-Americans.

The movie, directed by Steve McQueen and starring Chiwetel Ejiofor as Northup, reveals how lofty phrases about "freedom" often meant their opposite as Southern politicians developed an Orwellian skill for weaving noble-sounding "principles" into a cloak for covering up the unjustifiable.

And, for too many generations, it worked. Americans have romanticized the antebellum South, seeing it through the rosy haze of "Gone with the Wind" or learning from school history books that most slave-owners were kindly and paternalistic masters. Even today many Americans tell themselves that slavery wasn't all that bad. To burnish their pride in the never-to-be-criticized USA, they whitewash one of the nation's greatest crimes, the enslavement of millions of people based on the color of their skin.

"Twelve Years a Slave" offers a counterpoint to this slavery apologia, carrying you back into a time and place that is still recognizable as America though arguably as crazy and surreal as any scene from "Alice in Wonderland."

Though not explicitly a political film, "Twelve Years a Slave" lays bare the cruel and dehumanizing system that twisted the morality and the psychology of an entire region. There is a matter-of-fact disquiet in the everyday madness as whites convince themselves that their financial well-being and their elevated place in society depend on the routine degradation of blacks.

Whites exercise total control over the fate of their "property," whipping slaves who fall short in their work, lynching those who aren't submissive enough, making them dance for the amusement of their owners, requiring black girls and women to submit to the lust of white men – giving proof to the old adage that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

What "Twelve Years a Slave" lacks is a sense of catharsis where the bad guys get their comeuppance. In this case, the only satisfaction is that Northup is one of the rare cases in which a kidnapped black is returned to freedom and to his family. For a more vindictive sense of justice, you have to watch last year's fantastical "Django Unchained" in which the white slaveholders are annihilated

and their Candyland plantation goes up in flames in a stylized made-for-Hollywood shoot-out and bloodletting.

Instead, "Twelve Years a Slave" ends with an unrequited desire for justice, but that was the historical reality. Indeed, many whites still resist the historical judgment on the evils of slavery.

Nursing a Grievance

Yes, the South lost the Civil War but many white Southerners still see themselves as the real victims of what they call the "War of Northern Aggression." It was the innocent Southern whites who were somehow put upon by the North simply because of their principled commitment to "states' rights," "strict construction" and "nullificationism," fancy-sounding concepts that conveniently had been invented by slave-owning Southern politicians.

The failure of Reconstruction in the 1870s and the extension of white supremacy via Jim Crow laws over the next century contributed to this whitewashing of the history of slavery, as the focus shifted to the supposed violation of white rights during Reconstruction when blacks were allowed to vote and hold office and Northern "carpetbaggers" interfered with Southern ways.

Though I grew up in Massachusetts, I was not immune from getting a heavy dose of the romanticized version of the antebellum South and a long list of Southern grievances from the Civil War and Reconstruction, both from Hollywood movies and my grade-school history books of the 1960s.

I recall how revelatory the multipart series, "Roots," was for me and many other Americans when it aired in 1977. For the first time, many white Americans got a taste of slavery's reality from kidnapping people in West Africa, through the brutal ocean crossing, to the dehumanizing process of selling human beings into slavery, to the rapes and whippings, to the systematic crushing of the human will to be free.

However, many American whites, especially in the South but also in parts of the North, continue to internalize the old myths about white supremacy and the justice of the Confederate cause. They resent the demographic shifts in the United States, away from a white-dominated society to one that is more racially and ethnically diverse. To protect their privileges, they are comfortable with Republican machinations to suppress the votes of black and brown Americans, in order to exaggerate the value of white votes.

In the South, many whites still nurse those grievances from the federal government's ending of slavery through the Civil War in the 1860s and the federal outlawing of segregation in the 1960s. Rather than feel shame over the

cruel history of slavery and segregation, many Southern whites feel resentment at what they see as their own persecution.

Especially through the rise of the Tea Party a largely Southern-based movement although with significant support in pockets of the North and West the old excuses for racist repression are back in vogue: "states' rights," "nullificationism," "strict construction," even threats of secession as right-wing governors refer to their states as the "sovereign state of "

Distorting the History

To justify these theories pulled out of the dark history of slavery, the Tea Party and their strategists have relied on a historically revisionist version of the Constitution, distorting what the Framers were doing with the founding document.

The Constitution was drafted and pushed to ratification by Federalists the likes of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison (in this earlier phase of his career) and Gouverneur Morris (who authored the famous Preamble). The chief goal of these Framers, as they met in secret in Philadelphia in 1787, was to consolidate power in the central government. They were reacting to the disastrous experience of the Articles of Confederation, which had made the states "sovereign" and "independent" and left the federal government as not even a government but a "league of friendship."

By contrast, the Constitution gave the federal government broad powers to "provide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States" and afforded Congress the authority to enact legislation to carry out that sweeping mandate. Acts of Congress were deemed the supreme law of the land and federal courts were given the power to strike down state laws.

Though the Federalists made compromises with Southern slave-owning states to win ratification (implicitly accepting the South's institution of slavery), it was soon clear to opponents of the Constitution the Anti-Federalists that this new national governing structure could be the death knell for slavery, as the North gained population and accumulated political power.

That's why slavery-defending Virginians, such as George Mason and Patrick Henry, fought so hard against ratification. For instance, Henry warned his fellow Virginian slave owners that if the Constitution were ratified, eventually federal authorities would move against slavery. "They'll free your niggers!" Henry predicted.

The Anti-Federalists lost their fight against the Constitution in 1788, but they didn't go away. Instead, they organized behind the charismatic figure of Thomas

Jefferson, who had been in France during the drafting of the Constitution but returned in 1789 and began developing his extra-constitutional theories of “nullificationism,” the idea that individual states could reject federal laws, and even “secession,” the right of states to opt out of the Union.

The Southern Success

Jefferson, whose personal wealth derived from his Monticello plantation with some 100 slaves, also mounted a vicious and effective propaganda campaign to undermine the Federalists, especially President Washington’s Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton and President John Adams. Many of the Federalists, including Hamilton and Adams, were abolitionists who staunchly opposed slavery.

Amid the complexities of creating America’s new and unprecedented governing structure and navigating the treacherous straits of geopolitics in those early years the Federalists made their share of mistakes, which were exploited by Jefferson and his Republican-Democrats. In 1800, Jefferson prevailed over President Adams, winning the presidency because Southern slave states were allowed to count their slaves as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of representation.

Though Jefferson had devised the theory of “strict constructionism” that the federal government should only have powers explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, ignoring the phrase about providing for the “common Defense and general Welfare” he abandoned his revisionist theory as unworkable when he became president.

Indeed, President Jefferson exercised more federal power than even Alexander Hamilton had advocated when Jefferson acquired the Louisiana Territories and imposed a trade embargo against European countries. But Jefferson and his successors, fellow Virginians James Madison (in this later phase of his career) and James Monroe, still promoted Jefferson’s revisionist interpretation of the Constitution, with the slave South touting the Jeffersonian theories of “states’ rights.”

By the time the Virginia Dynasty ended in 1825, Jefferson’s protection of Southern slave interests had opened western states to slavery and had created a new industry for his native Virginia, the breeding and selling of slaves to the more fertile regions of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. The rising price of slaves boosted the net worth of Jefferson and his fellow slaveholders, but the expansion of slavery also put the United States on a collision course with the Civil War. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Rethinking Thomas Jefferson.”]

All this history is relevant again as the Tea Party and the Right dust off the

old Jeffersonian canards about “states’ rights,” “strict construction,” “nullificationism,” and even “secession.” Along with that has come a new trivializing of the historic crime of slavery by likening it to the individual mandate to obtain health insurance in the Affordable Care Act.

A number of right-wingers have claimed that Obamacare is the worst law in America since slavery, an absurd but glib comparison that rightists may think cleverly throws the issue of slavery into the face of Barack Obama, the first African-American president. But the comparison also suggests that the speakers don’t really regard slavery as all that bad, much like how mundane comparisons using Hitler are offensive to Jews and others who consider the Holocaust another one of history’s worst crimes.

Perhaps, anyone who thinks it’s appropriate to put Obamacare and slavery in the same sentence should be required to go watch what slavery was like, as portrayed convincingly in “Twelve Years a Slave.”

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). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, click here.

The Neocons’ Iraq War Mess

The neocons are rewriting more Iraq War history, arguing that if only President Obama had stayed the course on an open-ended U.S. military occupation, the regional situation would be a lot better. But the truth is that it was their invasion of Iraq that set loose the chaos, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki of Iraq is in Washington this week, getting away for a moment from the violent mess in his home country. An acceleration of bombings over the past few months has put the killing in Iraq on a pace that if continued for the rest of this year will match or surpass the high level seen in 2008, when an earlier round of civil war was raging there.

The upsurge of violence in Iraq has generated surprisingly little new policy debate in Washington. That's probably a good thing, because there is little that the United States can do, or should try to do, about it anyway.

If it is generally accepted that the United States ended its Iraq misadventure nearly two years ago and that there is no political basis for trying to reverse that ending, that is a good thing. At least, it is good as long as we do not lose sight of the principal long-term lessons of what we are witnessing, including the futility of trying to inject democracy through the barrel of a gun and how the overthrow of even nefarious dictators is not sufficient to open the door to justice and tranquility.

Several related reasons probably account for why those who might be expected to stir again this particular pot are not doing so. There are distractions nearby in the Middle East, of course, especially in Syria, about which there has been much effort at pot-stirring back here in Washington. The Syria issue has been soaking up most of the pro-interventionist sentiment lately. That is part of a larger pattern in which those who exhibit such sentiment most strongly are comfortable whacking one target at a time and then moving on to something else (which is part of why the expedition in Afghanistan was given insufficient attention for years while Iraq was the favored target).

They do not recognize the Pottery Barn rule, and they are more interested in slaying dragons than in repairing crockery. Besides, the Iraq War is such an unpleasant memory, and has been demonstrating for years why the invasion was such a colossal mistake, that most of those who favored the invasion would rather not dwell on it.

Another factor, which sets Syria apart from Iraq in many minds, concerns the regional sectarian line-up. Much of the sentiment in favor of doing more for the Syrian opposition is fueled by the idea that the Assad regime is an ally of Iran and that anything associated with Iran should be actively opposed. That is a crude and unproductive way to frame thinking about the Middle East, but it does unfortunately frame much such thinking.

Maliki, as a Shiite leader who has cuddled up to Iran, is not by that thinking seen worth going to bat for with much vigor, even when terrorists are conducting serial car-bombing in his cities' streets. Maliki is, however, accepted as a legitimate leader and interlocutor who may be around for some time. (He faces re-election in April.)

Here an interesting comparison and contrast is with Egypt. Maliki has acted in at least as much an authoritarian manner, and has ridden roughshod at least as much over his opponents, as Mohamed Morsi ever did during his one-year tenure as

president of Egypt. Yet no one seems to be anticipating a military coup against Maliki.

The main reason, of course, is that Iraq, where the U.S. occupation authority disbanded the mostly Sunni-led military years ago, has no military establishment with anything like the political and economic clout that the one in Egypt has. But there also does not seem to be any of the kind of American sentiment that, if an Iraqi coup were somehow in the cards, would condone such a coup in the way the coup in Egypt has been condoned.

We are seeing the effects of another crude but prevalent way of framing thinking about Middle Eastern conflicts: that Islamists are bad guys and secularists are the good guys. In Egypt, the president was the Islamist; in Iraq the prime minister is more secular than the fanatics who are detonating the car bombs.

Meanwhile Maliki is doing some of his own framing, particularly in blaming trouble in his country on mayhem being exported from Syria and in asking for more U.S. military aid to deal with that kind of security problem on its border. This is a warped view of what underlies the violence in Iraq. Some of the trouble is going across that border west to east, but more of it has moved east to west.

The most extreme of the major participants in the Syrian civil war is the group calling itself the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, which arose during the Iraqi civil war and only later moved into the action in Syria. Maliki should be told he needs to spend less time trying to be a player in other peoples' wars and devote more attention to reconciliation and inclusiveness in his own country.

Although American pro-interventionists have been taking mostly a "been there, done that" attitude toward Iraq, expect to hear more recriminations about how if only the United States had stayed the course the place would not be such a mess today. Maybe Maliki's visit will rekindle some such talk.

Don't believe the talk; the depth of the divisions and weakness of the political culture, and the resulting problems in Iraq that would have defied solution by any expeditionary force, are too apparent to deny.

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Neocons Push Israeli-Saudi Alliance

Exclusive: Early U.S. presidents warned against the dangers of “entangling alliances,” prescient advice that the neocons want President Obama to ignore amid demands from Israel and Saudi Arabia that America tie itself up in the endless and bloody sectarian conflicts of the Middle East, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

American neocons are rallying to the new Israeli-Saudi alliance by demanding that President Barack Obama engage more aggressively against the two countries’ foes in the Middle East, thus “bolstering Israeli and Saudi confidence,” as the Washington Post’s deputy editorial-page editor Jackson Diehl declared.

For years, the Washington Post has served as Official Washington’s neocon flagship, bristling in support of every hawkish demand for U.S. intervention in the Mideast, most notably assembling a flotilla of misguided consensus in support of President George W. Bush’s 2003 invasion of Iraq and then pounding any American skeptics who dared emerge over the horizon.

Diehl’s [column](#) on Monday represented an extension of the neocons’ knee-jerk support of Israeli interests to those of the Saudi monarchy, Israel’s new secret friend. Diehl hoisted the banner of this odd-couple alliance in excoriating President Obama for letting down these two “allies” as they maneuver to crush what’s known as the Shiite crescent extending from Iran through Iraq and Syria to the Hezbollah strongholds in Lebanon.

In sync with the regional interests of Saudi Arabia and Israel, Diehl argued that the United States should toughen up its military posture in the Middle East with the goal of “reshaping conditions on the ground,” specifically going after Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria and damaging the new Iranian government of President Hassan Rouhani, or in Diehl’s words, “weakening Assad [and] degrading Iranian strength.”

Diehl added, “That work could be done without deploying U.S. troops, but it would be hard, expensive and require a lot of presidential attention.”

Presumably, Diehl wants the U.S. military to launch those cruise missiles that were poised to “degrade” Assad’s regime in late August, and he hopes the U.S. diplomatic corps will rebuff Iran’s overtures for a diplomatic settlement over its nuclear program.

Like other neocons, Diehl takes Obama to task for giving peace a chance by accepting Assad’s surrender of Syria’s chemical weapons, by seeking a negotiated

settlement to the Syrian civil war (with Assad agreeing to send representatives to Geneva although the fractious Saudi-backed Syrian rebels and their jihadist allies still balk), by working with Iran on a deal that would swap tighter international controls over Iran's nuclear program for sanctions relief, and by pressing for meaningful talks between Israel and Palestine toward a two-state solution.

Diehl deems this diplomatic offensive a series of "foreign policy fantasies," the title of his Washington Post op-ed. By pushing diplomacy over confrontation, Obama has, in Diehl's view, "driven a wedge between the United States and some of its closest allies [leaving] U.S. allies in the region Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Turkey marooned in a scary new world where *their* vital interests are no longer under U.S. protection.

"Israel and Saudi Arabia worry that Obama will strike a deal with Iran that frees it from sanctions without entirely extirpating its capacity to enrich uranium, leaving it with the potential to produce nuclear weapons. But more fundamentally, they and their neighbors are dismayed that the United States appears to have opted out of the regional power struggle between Iran and its proxies and Israel and the Arab states aligned with the United States.

"It is the prospect of waging this regional version of the Cold War without significant U.S. support that has prompted Saudi leaders to hint at a rupture with Washington, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to talk more publicly than ever about Israel's willingness to act alone."

Fighting for Others

Diehl – like virtually all his compatriots in the mainstream U.S. news media – leaves out the detail that Israeli already possesses one of the most sophisticated though undeclared nuclear arsenals in the world, while U.S. intelligence agencies still conclude that Iran is not working on even a single nuclear bomb.

Diehl also doesn't bother to explain exactly why the American people should continue to expend vast amounts of money, prestige and blood to take sides in these interminable and often incomprehensible conflicts in the Middle East. The neocons simply behave as if every American should understand why a Shiite-dominated regime is so much more objectionable than a Sunni one; why an absolute monarchy like Saudi Arabia is preferable to a limited democracy like Iran; and why Israel has some fundamental right to possess East Jerusalem and other Palestinian lands.

For many Americans, it's perhaps even harder to understand why the likes of

Jackson Diehl and his boss, editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt, continue to reign over the Washington Post's editorial section more than a decade after they helped guide the American people into the disastrous war in Iraq.

Not only has there been no accountability for their journalistic errors, including reporting Saddam Hussein's alleged possession of WMDs as "flat fact" when it was no fact at all, but also none for the ugly character assassination against war critics, such as former U.S. Ambassador Joseph Wilson whose wife, CIA officer Valerie Plame, saw her career destroyed when the Bush administration exposed her identity on the Post's op-ed pages and Hiatt then kept up a years-long campaign to destroy Wilson's reputation. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Why WPost's Hiatt Should Be Fired.](#)"]

Beyond no accountability at the Post, there appear to have been no lessons learned. Hiatt, Diehl and the other neocons simply continue to place the policy desires of Israel, in particular, and now its new buddy, Saudi Arabia, above the foreign policy of the U.S. government and above the interests of the American people.

In the early years of the Republic, Presidents George Washington and John Adams warned against the dangers of "entangling alliances" that could draw the United States into faraway and expensive conflicts that would drain the Treasury and create unnecessary enemies. In his Farewell Address, Washington saw the risk of foreign influence coming not only from adversaries but from allies who would seek to twist American domestic opinion in their favor.

Washington warned: "The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign nations, is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities."

Those early warnings seem particularly prescient today regarding the Middle East, given the extensive and expensive efforts by Israel and Saudi Arabia to win favor in Official Washington through lobbying, propaganda and financial favors doled out to many influential Americans.

While Israel's skills at lobbying and propaganda are renowned, Saudi Arabia also can throw its weight around through its ownership of American debt, its ability to manipulate oil prices and its stakes in major U.S. corporations, including in the powerful Wall Street financial sector.

Now that these two longtime rivals, Israel and Saudi Arabia, have formed a behind-the-scenes alliance joining together on key regional issues such as countering Iranian influence, subverting the Assad regime in Syria, and backing the military coup in Egypt the Obama administration finds itself confronting an imposing phalanx of political and economic clout.

The ease with which neocons like Jackson Diehl lift up the banner of this new combination of Israeli-Saudi interests is a telling sign of the two countries' impressive geopolitical muscle. [For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Israeli-Saudi Alliance Slips into View.](#)"]

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](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

The Two Amigos' 'Credibility' Crisis

Neocons across Official Washington equate "credibility" with taking military action against some country that won't bend to America's will. But true credibility for the U.S. government can come from taking measured and responsible approaches to international disagreements, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Lindsey Graham and John McCain, the two-thirds of the Three Amigos who are still in the U.S. Senate since the departure of Joe Lieberman, contributed to the opinion pages of the *Washington Post* this weekend [a short reprise](#) of their familiar positions on front-burner Middle Eastern issues: act forcefully to defeat the Assad regime in Syria, be obdurate toward Iran, etc.

Nothing new here, but it might be worth reflecting for a moment on one of their accusations: that the administration's "failure in Syria" is part of broader "collapse of U.S. credibility in the Middle East." Graham and McCain's particular usage of the term *credibility* exemplifies something broader, too: a habit of associating the concept only with forceful actions, especially military actions, rather than with any other policy course.

This restrictive concept of upholding a nation's credibility does not flow from any dictionary definition of credibility ("the quality or power of inspiring belief"). Whether any given action or piece of inaction tends to inspire belief depends of course on context and on what else the state in question has said or done on the same subject. There is no reason to postulate an asymmetry in favor of forceful action or any other kind of action.

There are valid grounds for criticizing the Obama administration's policies on Syria, especially the overemphasis on the issue of chemical weapons with insufficient advance thinking about what to do if a significant chemical incident were to occur.

But the administration's subsequent seizing on the Russian initiative after the chemical incident in August was in a real sense a making good on its own word about viewing chemical weapons as the most important dimension of the Syrian conflict. That is an unjustifiably narrow way of viewing the conflict, but at least the administration was being consistent, and consistency is an important ingredient of credibility.

The Two Amigos write that the President "specifically committed" to them in the Oval Office "to degrade the Assad regime's military capabilities, upgrade the capabilities of the moderate opposition and shift the momentum on the battlefield." Those of us who have not been flies on the Oval Office wall cannot referee that one. But publicly the President has not made the sort of commitment that would warrant the Amigos' accusation that he "abandoned" the Syrian opposition.

Another erroneous application of the concept of credibility is the senators' equating loss of credibility with how "Israel and our Gulf Arab partners are losing all confidence" in the administration's diplomacy, with references to recent indications of the Saudi regime's displeasure. Displeasing other states, when there has been no failure to live up to a treaty commitment and when the other states, as is true of both Israel and Saudi Arabia, have major differences of interest with the United States as well as some shared interests, has nothing to do with a failure of credibility. Consistent pursuit of the United States' own interests is much more of a foundation for maintaining credibility.

Graham and McCain do inadvertently give us an example in their piece of how U.S. credibility can be hurt. In referring to the Iranian nuclear issue they say, "We should be prepared to suspend the implementation of new sanctions, but only if Iran suspends its enrichment activities." This formulation comes out of a letter that eight other senators also signed and that tries to portray this package as a balanced "suspension for suspension" deal. This is a ludicrous play on words.

There is nothing reasonable or proportionate about linking a demand for one side to stop completely an ongoing program in return for the other side not piling on still more new sanctions, which doesn't really entail a suspension of anything. The wordplay is unbelievable. If we want the Iranians or anyone else to believe that the United States is serious about reaching an agreement, this sort of silliness damages U.S. credibility.

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.)

Climate Deniers' Strategy of Confusion

The fossil-fuel industry has invested billions of dollars in propaganda funding phony "scientists" and bankrolling politicians to confuse the public about the threat from global warming. The deception is aided and abetted by the mainstream media's misguided "balance," as Dan Becker and James Gerstenzang explain.

By Dan Becker and James Gerstenzang

Half a century ago, the tobacco industry tried to preserve its market by misleading Americans about the scientific validity of research demonstrating that smoking causes cancer. To weaken efforts to fight global warming, the "climate change denial machine," in the words of the Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society, has been using that same strategy. For more than 20 years it has sought to cast doubt on the science that demonstrates that the climate is changing and pollution is to blame.

The Los Angeles Times has announced that it will no longer print letters to the editor that state "there's no sign humans have caused climate change," because they are factually inaccurate. Now, it is time for reporters and editors across the country to follow suit. To avoid misleading readers with a false "balance," they should also stop paying attention to the deniers.

The denial lobby is using pseudo-science and cherry-picked data to present the fringe view that global warming is nothing more than what Sen. James M. Inhofe, Republican of Oklahoma, famously called "the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people."

Just last month it reprised its tired, and false, arguments to debunk the

premier scientific assessment of global warming, produced by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. On Sept. 27, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning organization declared with near certainty that human activity is causing the climate to change. The panel's previous assessment, issued in 2007, was only slightly less certain, 90 percent versus the 95 percent in the new report. An overwhelming majority of climate scientists endorsed it.

In short, the global warming deniers are as wrong as the smoke-blowers who said in the 1960s that a pack a day was fine. No one seriously argues today that tobacco isn't bad for you, and if they did, no one would listen.

But the Marlboro Men of global warming still draw attention as they deny the consensus conclusion that burning fossil fuels in power plants, cars and factories is trapping heat in the atmosphere. They deny that this will raise sea levels, bring more violent storms, and worsen droughts and heat waves. What are they smoking?

Do we have a dog in this fight? Absolutely. We just think the debate should be about fact, not fiction. We are not trying to muzzle those who disagree with us. There will be plenty to disagree about in deciding what actions to take. But it is time for journalists to ignore false and misleading statements that mask the source's bias and scam the public.

With the new attention that the I.P.C.C. report brings to the science of global warming, in coming weeks and months more than a few serious news reporters will be tempted in the name of "balance" to quote the deniers, journalists call them "skeptics" who have presented increasingly discredited messages: Global warming is not happening. Or if it is, it is not caused by carbon dioxide emissions or other human activity. Or, well, it won't have an impact, we'll be fine.

Who is saying what?

—Bob Carter, Heartland Institute: "Currently the planet is cooling." Wrong. The last decade (2000-2009) was the hottest on record; 2010 was the hottest year recorded.

—Fred Singer, Science and Environmental Policy Project: "Carbon dioxide is not a pollutant." Oh, yeah? Acting under U.S. Supreme Court direction, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found that CO₂ is a pollutant because of the harm it causes.

—Joseph Bast, Heartland Institute: "Most scientists do not believe human activities threaten to disrupt the Earth's climate." Misleading, to say the least: 97 percent of climate scientists agree that humans are causing global warming.

For those who write about global warming, spreading the pronouncements of fringe “skeptics” doesn’t show balance. For those who read about global warming, it equates serious climate science and evaluation of peer-reviewed reports with the declarations of individuals, most lacking background in climate research, who are often funded by those standing to profit if the United States fails to curb carbon dioxide emissions.

Exxon, for example, gave \$2.8 million to the Heartland Institute, the Competitive Enterprise Institute and the Cato Institute alone from 1998 to 2012, according to corporate tax records cited in a Greenpeace report.

The attention paid to the deniers has real consequences. For one, it puts pressure on the I.P.C.C. to censor its conclusions. Climate “skeptics” have vilified the U.N. panel, made up of several hundred of the world’s leading climate scientists, subjecting them to “abusive language on blogs, comparisons to the Unabomber, e-mail hacking, and even occasional death threats,” Justin Gillis wrote in The New York Times.

“Who could blame the panel if it wound up erring on the side of scientific conservatism,” he wrote. The clear implication: The criticism could lead the panel to pull its punches when, he wrote, most would want “an unvarnished analysis” of global warming’s risks.

More broadly, relying on the deniers to provide so-called “balance” also helps create political pressure that makes it all the more difficult to act against global warming. It fuels efforts in the House of Representatives to thwart sensible measures to fight climate change. A solid majority of House Republicans denies that global warming is even occurring, pointing to the alleged disagreements among scientists to justify siding with the fossil-fuel industry.

At a minimum, good journalism, and the readers’ right to be fully informed requires identifying a source’s stake. Is the source an environmentalist or coal or oil spokesperson? Their interests are clear.

But what about those claiming expertise or academic credentials in climate science who are supported by think tanks and front groups funded by oil, coal and others with a financial stake in the debate? The reader deserves to know their potential for bias.

Better yet, it’s time to toss the denial machine into the bin of discredited ideas. It can keep Joe Camel company.

Dan Becker directed Sierra Club’s Global Warming and Energy Program for 18 years before founding the Safe Climate Campaign, which advocates strong measures to fight global warming. James Gerstenzang is the campaign’s editorial director.

During four decades as a journalist, he covered the environment and the White House for the Los Angeles Times. [A version of this article previously appeared in USA Today.]

A Threat to Nuke Tehran

Exclusive: Republican mega-donor Sheldon Adelson urged the United States to coerce Iran by dropping a demonstration nuke in the desert followed by a blackmail threat that the next one would obliterate Tehran. But this idea of genocide-extortion has drawn no official U.S. condemnation, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

When the largest donor to Republican political organizations urges the U.S. military to detonate a nuclear bomb in an Iranian desert with the explicit warning that “the next one is in the middle of Tehran,” you might expect that major American political figures and large U.S. media outlets would strongly denounce such genocidal blackmail.

After all, Tehran has a population of more than eight million people with millions more living in the suburbs. So, this threat to exterminate Tehran’s inhabitants from casino mogul Sheldon Adelson would be comparable to someone nuking an empty space in the United States as a warning that if Americans didn’t capitulate to some demand, a nuclear bomb would be dropped on New York City, the site of Adelson’s ugly threat.

The fact that the scattered outrage over Adelson’s remarks on Oct. 22 was mostly limited to the Internet and included no denunciations from prominent U.S. politicians, including leading Republicans who have benefited from Adelson’s largesse, suggests that many Muslims and especially Iranians are right to suspect that they are the object of obscene prejudice in some American power circles.

Indeed, HuffingtonPost published a vociferous defense of Adelson’s comments by Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, who organized the event at Yeshiva University where Adelson spoke. Boteach, who has been hailed as the “most famous Rabbi in America,” treated Adelson’s nuke threat as innocent hyperbole only underscoring how aggressively the world should treat Iran.

Instead of apologizing for letting Adelson go unchallenged as he mused about murdering millions of Iranians, Boteach expressed outrage over the few

expressions of outrage about Adelson's plan.

"I found the reaction to his statement illuminating as to the double standards that are often employed on matters relating to Israel," wrote Boteach, who then reprised the infamous false translation of former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad supposedly saying "that Israel must be wiped off the map."

Boteach then added to the false quote the assumption that if Israel ceased to exist as a Jewish state, that would require "the murder of the six million Jews who live there [as] the precondition of such erasure." However, there is the other possibility that Israel/Palestine could become like the United States, a country that has no official religion but that respects all religions.

To lay out only the two extremes that Israel must be officially a Jewish state (with non-Jews made second-class citizens or stateless people) as one option and the other that all the Jews must be murdered invites either apartheid or genocide.

Boteach also misrepresented recent comments by Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei about destroying Tel Aviv and Haifa. The rabbi left out the context of Khamenei's remark: the threat was predicated on Israel having first militarily attacked Iran. In other words, Khamenei was saying that if Israel destroyed Iranian cities, Iran had the right to retaliate against Israeli cities.

Israel's Rogue Nuke Arsenal

But one thing that Iran has never threatened to do is to drop a nuclear bomb on Israel. First, Iran doesn't have a nuclear bomb; has foresworn any interest in building one; has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty allowing in inspectors; and has offered to accept even more intrusive inspections in exchange for removal of economic sanctions.

By contrast, Israel possesses one of the world's most sophisticated nuclear arsenals, albeit one that is undeclared and existing outside international inspections since Israel has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. I've also been told that Israel's military contingency plan for possibly attacking Iran's hardened nuclear sites includes use of low-yield nuclear weapons.

So, loose talk from a prominent American Zionist about the value of the United States launching a ballistic nuclear strike from Nebraska targeting an Iranian desert with the explicit follow-up threat that the next nuke would obliterate Iran's capital could be read by the Iranians as a real possibility, especially considering Adelson's close ties to prominent Republicans.

The fact that such a discussion was held in New York City with no meaningful repercussions for Adelson could be read further as a message to Iran that it might well need a nuclear deterrence to protect itself from such terroristic blackmail.

Boteach's HuffingtonPost commentary also focused only on the part of Adelson's remark about dropping a nuclear bomb in an unpopulated area of Iran, where only "a couple of rattlesnakes, and scorpions, or whatever" would be killed.

Treating the idea like some kind of humanitarian gesture, not a genocidal extortion threat, Boteach wrote, "Sheldon's glib comments about nuking rattle snakes seemed to rattle many of the bloggers who were at our event even more than Ahmadinejad's threats."

But what made Adelson's remark even more stunning than his idea of a demonstration nuclear attack in the desert was the follow-up warning: "Then you say, 'See! The next one is in the middle of Tehran. So, we mean business. You want to be wiped out? Go ahead and take a tough position and continue with your nuclear development.'"

At that point, the audience at Yeshiva University interrupted Adelson with applause.

The obvious problem with this kind of blackmail threat, of course, is that it requires the extortionist to follow through if the other side doesn't capitulate. To be credible, you have to back up the warning "you want to be wiped out?" by actually wiping the other side out.

Republican Influence

If Adelson were simply an eccentric old billionaire spouting threats of genocide at some university forum in New York City, that would be bad enough. But Adelson is an important behind-the-scenes figure in the Republican Party.

Nearly singlehandedly, Adelson kept afloat the 2012 presidential campaign of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and then threw his vast financial resources behind the Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney, who accompanied Adelson on a high-profile trip to Israel that was designed to highlight tensions between President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Romney's warm reception in Israel was seen as effectively an endorsement of his candidacy by Netanyahu, who has rattled many of his own military sabers at Iran. While in Israel, Romney delivered a belligerent speech suggesting that he, as U.S. president, would happily support an Israeli war against Iran.

Romney told an audience of Israelis and some wealthy pro-Israel Americans that he is prepared to employ “any and all measures” to stop Iran from gaining a nuclear weapons “capability,” a vague concept that arguably already exists.

Romney’s speech in Jerusalem was accompanied by a comment from his top foreign policy adviser Dan Senor seeming to endorse an Israeli unilateral strike against Iran. “If Israel has to take action on its own,” Senor said, “the governor would respect that decision.”

Romney said, “today, the regime in Iran is five years closer to developing nuclear weapons capability. Preventing that outcome must be our highest national security priority. We must not delude ourselves into thinking that containment is an option. We must lead the effort to prevent Iran from building and possessing nuclear weapons capability.

“We should employ any and all measures to dissuade the Iranian regime from its nuclear course, and it is our fervent hope that diplomatic and economic measures will do so. In the final analysis, of course, no option should be excluded.”

By elevating Iran’s achievement of a nuclear weapons “capability” to America’s “highest national security priority” and vowing to “employ any and all measures” to prevent that eventuality, Romney was essentially threatening war against Iran under the current circumstances. In that, he went beyond the vague language used by President Obama, who himself has sounded belligerent with his phrasing about “all options on the table” to stop Iran if it moves to build a nuclear weapon.

However, the nuance was significant, since U.S. intelligence agencies and even their Israeli counterparts have concluded that Iran has not decided to build a nuclear weapon even as it makes progress in a nuclear program that Iranian leaders say is for peaceful purposes only. Still, those lessons from a peaceful nuclear program arguably can give a country a nuclear weapons “capability.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“US/Israel: Iran NOT Building Nukes.”](#)]

Though Romney lost the 2012 election, his point of view is common among pro-Israel hawks in Congress and throughout Official Washington’s think-tank and media communities. Adelson also wields real influence because he, along with his wife Miriam, has poured a fortune into the U.S. political process, calculated at \$92.8 million to outside political groups during the 2012 election cycle, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

And, it is his kind of crazy talk, not uncommon among extreme Zionists, that makes any political settlement of the Middle East disputes next to impossible.

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](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

Geopolitics of the Drone

The U.S. drone program has decimated the leadership of al-Qaeda and other Islamic militant groups, but it also has alienated people and governments in countries on the front lines by killing civilians and disrupting political alliances, a complexity often missed by the U.S. media, as Gareth Porter reported for Inter Press Service.

By Gareth Porter

The Washington Post on Thursday reported what it presented as new evidence of a secret agreement under which Pakistani officials have long been privately supporting the U.S. drone war in the country even as they publicly criticized it.

Most news outlets picked up the Post story, and the theme of public Pakistani opposition and private complicity on the drone issue framed media coverage of Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's declaration that he had called on President Barack Obama to end the drone war.

But the Post story ignored a central fact that contradicts that theme: the Pakistani military leadership had turned decisively against the drone war for years and has been strongly pressing in meetings with U.S. officials that Pakistan be given a veto over targeting.

In fact, the leak of classified CIA documents to the Post appears to represent an effort by CIA officials to head off a decision by the Obama administration to reduce the drone war in Pakistan to a minimum, if not phase it out completely.

The Post article, co-authored by Bob Woodward, said, "Despite repeated denunciation of the CIA's drone campaign, top officials in Pakistan's government have for years secretly endorsed the program and routinely received classified briefings on strikes and casualty counts."

The Post cited top secret CIA documents that it said "expose the explicit nature

of a secret arrangement struck between the two countries at a time when neither was willing to publicly acknowledge the existence of the drone program." The documents, described as "talking points" for CIA briefings, provided details on drone strikes in Pakistan from late 2007 to late 2011, presenting them as an overwhelming success and invariably claiming no civilian casualties.

It has long been known that an understanding was reached between the George W. Bush administration and the regime of President Pervez Musharraf under which the CIA was allowed to carry out drone strikes in Pakistan. A WikiLeaks cable had quoted Prime Minister Yousaf Gilani as saying in August 2008, "I don't care if they do it as long as they get the right people. We'll protest in the National Assembly and then ignore it."

That statement was made, however, at a time when CIA strikes were still few and focused only on Al-Qaeda leadership cadres. That changed dramatically beginning in 2008.

The Post articles failed to point out that Pakistan's military leadership shifted from approval of the U.S. drone campaign to strong opposition after 2008. The reason for the shift was that the CIA dramatically expanded the target list in 2008 from high-value Al-Qaeda officials to "signature strikes" that would hit even suspected rank-and-file associated with supporters of the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban.

The Post referred to the expansion of the drone strike target list, but instead of noting the impact on the Pakistani military's attitude, the article brought in another popular news media theme the unhappiness of Obama administration officials with the support of the Pakistan's intelligence agency for the Afghan Taliban based in Pakistan.

The Obama administration was well aware of the Pakistani military's support for the Afghan Taliban movement, however, before it decided to escalate the war in Afghanistan a fact omitted from the Post story.

The vast expansion of drone strikes in Pakistan engineered by then CIA Director Michael Hayden in 2008 and continued by his successor, Leon Panetta, was justified by targeting anyone in Pakistan believed to be involved in support for the rapidly growing Pashtun resistance to the U.S.-NATO military presence in Afghanistan.

That shift in targeting meant that the CIA's drone war was no longer concentrated from mid-2008 onward on foreign terrorists and their Pakistani allies who had been waging an insurgency against the Pakistani government. Instead the CIA was targeting Islamists who had made peace with the Pakistani

government and were opposing the Pakistani Taliban war against the government.

Two-thirds of the drone strikes in 2008 targeted leaders and even rank-and-file followers associated with Jalaluddin Haqqani and Mullah Nazeer, both of whom were involved in supporting Taliban forces in Afghanistan, but who opposed attacks on the Pakistani government.

At least initially, the CIA was not interested in targeting the Pakistani Taliban leaders associated with Baitullah Mehsud, who was leading the violent war against the Pakistani military. It was only under pressure from the new head of the Pakistani Army, Chief of Staff Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, that the CIA began targeting Mehsud and his organization in 2009, when Mehsud was killed in a drone strike.

That temporarily mollified the Pakistani military. But in 2010, more than half the strikes in Pakistan were against Hafiz Gul Bahadur, an ally of the Haqqani forces who had reached agreement with the Pakistan government that he would not shelter or support any Taliban militants fighting against the government. Nearly all the rest of the strikes were against Afghan Taliban targets.

The original agreement reached under Musharraf was clearly no longer applicable. Kayani had clearly expressed his unhappiness with the drone war to the CIA leadership in 2008-09 and again in 2010, but only privately.

Then the January 2011 Raymond Davis incident, in which a contract CIA employee shot and killed two Pakistanis who he believed had been following him on motorcycles, triggered a more serious conflict between the CIA and ISI, the chief Pakistani intelligence agency.

The CIA put intense pressure on ISI to release Davis from jail rather than allowing him to be tried by a Pakistani court, and ISI Chief Shuja Pasha personally intervened in the case to arrange for Davis to be freed on March 16, 2011, despite the popular fury against Davis and the United States.

But the CIA response was to carry out a drone attack the day after his release on what it thought was a gathering of Haqqani network officials but was actually a meeting of dozens of tribal and sub-tribal elders from all over North Waziristan.

An angry Kayani then issued the first ever denunciation of the U.S. drone campaign by a Pakistan military leader. And when Pasha met with CIA Director Leon Panetta and Deputy Director Michael Morell in mid-April 2011, he demanded that Pakistan be given veto power over the strikes, according to two active-duty Pakistani generals interviewed in Islamabad in August 2011.

Reuters reported April 16, 2011, that U.S. officials had said the CIA was willing to consult with Pakistan over the strikes, but that suggestions from the Pakistani military that the drone campaign should return to the original list of high-value Al-Qaeda targets was “unacceptable”.

But the Pakistani military’s insistence on cutting down on strikes apparently had an impact on the Obama administration, which was already debating whether the drone war in Pakistan had become counterproductive. The State Department was arguing that it was generating such anti-U.S. sentiment in Pakistan that it should be curbed sharply or stopped.

Obama himself indicated in his May 23, 2013 speech at the National Defense University that he was thinking about at least reducing the drone war dramatically. Obama said the coming end of U.S. combat in Afghanistan and the elimination of “core Al-Qaeda militants” in Pakistan “will reduce the need for unmanned strikes.”

And in an Aug. 1 interview with a Pakistani television interviewer, Secretary of State John Kerry said, “I think the [drone] program will end. I think the President has a very real timeline, and we hope it’s going to be very, very soon.”

CIA concern that Obama was seriously considering ending the drone war in Pakistan was certainly the motive behind a clever move by CIA officials to create a story denigrating Pakistani official opposition to the drone war and presenting it in the best possible light.

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. [This story was originally published by Inter Press Service.]

The Lies Killing America

While many reformers have focused on money in politics, a parallel danger comes from the billions of dollars that right-wing ideologues have poured into media. The likes of Rupert Murdoch have made an art form out of peddling “populism” that serves the financial elites, as Bill Moyers and Michael Winship note.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

Here in Manhattan the other day, you couldn’t miss it the big bold headline

across the front page of the tabloid New York Post, screaming one of those sick, slick lies that are a trademark of Rupert Murdoch's right-wing media empire. There was Uncle Sam, brandishing a revolver and wearing a burglar's mask. "UNCLE SCAM," the headline shouted. "U.S. robs bank of \$13 billion."

Say what? Pure whitewash, and Murdoch's minions know it. That \$13 billion is the settlement JPMorgan Chase, the country's biggest bank, is negotiating with the government to settle its own rip-off of American homeowners and investors – those shady practices that five years ago helped trigger the financial meltdown, including manipulating mortgages and sending millions of Americans into bankruptcy or foreclosure.

If anybody's been robbed it's not JPMorgan Chase, which can absorb the loss and probably take a tax write-off for at least part of it. No, it's the American public. In addition to financial heartache we still have been denied the satisfaction of seeing jail time for any of the banksters who put our feet in cement and pushed us off the cliff.

This isn't the only scandal JPMorgan Chase is juggling. A \$5.1 billion settlement with institutional investors has just been announced and criminal charges may still be filed in California. The bank is under investigation on so many fronts it's hard to keep them sorted out everything from deceptive sales in its credit card unit to Bernie Madoff's Ponzi scheme to the criminal manipulation of energy markets and bribing Chinese officials by offering jobs to their kids.

Nor is JPMorgan Chase the only culprit under scrutiny. Bank of America was found guilty just this week of civil fraud, and a gaggle of other banks is being investigated by the government for mortgage fraud. No wonder the camp followers at Fox News, the Wall Street Journal, CNBC and other cheerleaders have ganged up to whitewash the banks.

If justice is somehow served, this could be the biggest egg yet across the smug face of unfettered, unchecked, unaccountable capitalism. One face in particular: Jamie Dimon, the chairman and CEO of JPMorgan Chase. One of Murdoch's Fox Business News hosts, Charlie Gasparino, claims the Feds are on a witch-hunt against Dimon for criticizing President Barack Obama, whose administration, we are told, "is brutally determined and efficient when it comes to squashing those who oppose their policies."

But hold on: Dimon is a Democrat, said to be Obama's favorite banker, with so much entree he's been doing his own negotiating with the Attorney General of the United States. But that's crony capitalism for you, bipartisan to a fault.

Rupert Murdoch has been defending Dimon in his media for a long time. Last spring, when it looked like there might be a stockholders revolt against Dimon, Murdoch was one of many bigwigs who rushed to his defense. He tweeted that JPMorgan would be “up a creek” without Dimon. “One of the smartest, toughest guys around,” Murdoch insisted. Whether Murdoch’s exaltation had an effect or not, Dimon was handily reelected.

Over the last few days, The Wall Street Journal, both Bible and supplicant of high finance as well one of Murdoch’s more reputable publications at least in its reporting echoed the “UNCLE SCAM” indignation of the more lowbrow Post. The government just wants “to appease their left wing populist allies,” its editorial writers raged, with a “political shakedown and wealth-redistribution scheme.” Perhaps, the paper suggested, the White House will distribute some of the JPMorgan Chase penalty to consumers and advocacy groups and “have the checks arrive in swing Congressional districts right before the 2014 election.”

We can hear the closet Bolsheviks panting for their handouts now and getting ready to use their phony ID’s to stuff the box on Election Day with multiple illegal ballots. Such fantasies are all part of the Murdoch News Corp. pattern, an unending flow of falsehood and phony populism that in reality serves only the wealthy elite.

Fox News is its ministry of misinformation, the fake jewel of the News Corp. crown, a 24/7 purveyor of flimflam and the occasional selective truth. Look at the pounding they’ve given Obama’s healthcare reform right from the very start, whether the non-existent death panels or claims that it would cause the highest tax increase in history.

While it’s true that the startup of Obamacare has been plagued by its website nightmare and other problems, Fox News consistently has failed to mention Republican roadblocks that prevented the program from getting proper funding or the fact that so many states ruled by Republican governors and legislatures more than 30 have deliberately failed to set up the insurance marketplaces critical to making the new system work.

Just the other day, Eric Stern at Salon.com fact-checked a segment on Sean Hannity’s show. “Average Americans are feeling the pain of Obamacare and the healthcare overhaul train wreck,” Hannity declared, “and six of them are here tonight to tell us their stories.” Eric Stern tracked down each of the Hannity Six and found that while their questions about health reform may have been valid, the answers they received from Hannity or had decided for themselves were not.

“I don’t doubt that these six individuals believe that Obamacare is a disaster,”

Stern reported. "But none of them had even visited the insurance exchange."

And there you have the problem: ideology and self-interest trump the facts or even caring about the facts, whether it's banking, Obamacare or global warming. Ninety-seven percent of climate scientists say that climate change is happening and that humans have made it so, but only four in ten Americans realize it's true.

According to a new study in the journal *Public Understanding of Science*, written by a team that includes Yale University's Anthony Leiserowitz, the more that people listen to conservative media like Fox News or Limbaugh, the less sure they are that global warming is real. And even worse, the less they trust science.

Such ignorance will kill democracy as surely as the big money that funds and encourages the media outlets, parties and individuals who spew the lies and hate. The ground is all too fertile for those who will only believe whatever best fits their resentment or particular brand of paranoia.

It is, as an old song lyric goes, "the self-deception that believes the lie." The truth will set us free; the lie will make prisoners of us all.

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The Tea Party's Confederate Roots

For "branding" purposes, the Tea Party pretends to reflect the views of the Constitution's Framers but it actually follows the Slave South's hostility to the strong federal government that the Framers created. That historical link to the Confederacy is crucial for understanding the Tea Party's goals, as Beverly Bandler explains.

By Beverly Bandler

The political movement known as the Tea Party (a historically distorted label derived from the famous 1773 anti-British protest in Boston) is not a structured, accountable political party with a constructive, coherent agenda based on any recognized economic or social principles. It is even devoid of any

real historical frame of reference, although some anal

ysts have likened the Tea Party obstructionist tactics to the behavior of the pro-slavery South before the Civil War.

Historian Garry Wills, for instance, notes how some Tea Party activists and politicians “do not recognize laws and Supreme Court decisions, or constitutional guarantees of free speech.” Some states under the sway of the Tea Party have blocked the work of “navigators” assigned to help people obtain health insurance under the Affordable Care Act, or have prohibited health centers from advising women about their abortion rights, or have restricted voting in defiance of constitutional and federal protections.

“The people behind these efforts are imitating what the Confederate States did even before they formally seceded in 1861,” Wills wrote recently. “Already they ran a parallel government, in which the laws of the national government were blatantly disregarded. They denied the right of abolitionists to voice their arguments, killing or riding out of town over three hundred of them in the years before the Civil War. They confiscated or destroyed abolitionist tracts sent to Southern states by United States mail. In the United States Congress, they instituted ‘gag rules’ that automatically tabled (excluded from discussion) anti-slavery petitions, in flagrant abuse of the First Amendment’s right of petition.

“The Southern states were able to live in such open disregard for national law because the national Democratic-Republican Party needed the Southern part of its coalition so badly that it colluded with the Southern states’ violations of the Constitution. In 1835, for instance, President Andrew Jackson did not enforce the sacredness of the US mail, allowing states to refuse delivery of anti-slave mailings unless a recipient revealed his identity, requested delivery, and had his name published for vilification.

“Just as the Old South compelled the national party to shelter its extremism, today’s Tea Party leaders make Republicans toe their line. Most Republicans do not think laws invalid because the president is a foreign-born Muslim with a socialist agenda. But they do not renounce, or even criticize, their partners who think that. The rare Republican who dares criticize a Rush Limbaugh is quickly made to repent and apologize. John Boehner holds the nation hostage because the Tea Party holds him hostage.”

A Mouse That Roared

Yet, the Tea Party is a relatively small movement, drawn from the estimated 10 percent of Americans who make up the Far Right defined as the overwrought,

hypervigilant, paranoid ultraright wing authoritarians, the “True Believers.” Another 20 percent of Americans are considered conservative by temperament but usually hew closer to the political center-right, keeping some distance from the wild-eyed ultra-right.

Though this less radical faction is a bit more tethered to reality, it will embrace hard-right conservatism under extreme social or economic stress, such as the confluence of the Great Recession of 2008 and the recognition that America’s demographic changes are creating a more diverse and less white country. The radicalization of some from the center-right also has been influenced by the sheer political momentum of the Tea Party, which is viewed as the right-wing faction that is “standing up” to Barack Obama, the first African-American president.

Thus, this “swing” group of more moderate conservatives has been actively decoupling itself from the center-right GOP mainstream and creating a worrisome super-right-wing faction that is capable of destabilizing the governing of the United States. As we’ve seen in recent weeks with the federal government shutdown and the threatened credit default, this Tea Party-driven movement can neutralize the interests of the 70 percent of Americans who comprise what is characterized as the rational, moderate majority, ranging from the center to left of center.

For John Dean, a former Republican and White House counsel to President Richard Nixon, the Tea Party “conservatives” are not conservative in any traditional sense but rather a group of rash and radical authoritarians the “same old authoritarian conservatives with a new label a notoriously nasty crew delighted with the chaos they have created [who] actively work to screw up federal government in the hope of literally destroying it.”

Indeed, the Tea Partiers repudiate what political conservatism has meant historically. “True conservatism is cautious and prudent,” writes Dean, who has described himself as a Goldwater conservative.

Extraordinary Anger

Traditional conservatives are not on some social mission to create a “Christian America,” nor are they so extreme that they would use a threatened default on the national debt to extract ideological concessions. The vitriol directed at Barack Obama also is unprecedented to many longtime political observers. Many Tea Partiers insist that Obama has no right to be president, calling him a Muslim, a foreigner, a gangster, a fascist, a communist, the anti-Christ.

For writer Gary Kamiya, Tea Party Republicans are comparable to wailing babies,

“disturbingly infantile,” a group that has “reverted to a pre-potty-trained state.” The infantilism is underscored by Tea Partiers dressing up in period costumes with tea bags hanging from their heads. And there is something not only infantile but destructive when the Tea Partiers confuse the cause of liberty from the Revolutionary War with the cause of pre-Civil War slavery as it was rationalized across the South behind extra-constitutional theories of states’ rights and nullificationism.

Kamiya reminds us that historian Richard Hofstadter traced the long tradition of irrational, conspiratorial and paranoid thinking in America history. Yet, Hofstadter’s work is a chilling reminder that the right-wing was considered mostly marginal a half century ago but has since entered the mainstream propelled by a confusing (and often contradictory) mix of fundamentalist Christianity, fear of the Other, unfettered capitalism and unchecked libertarianism.

Author Sarah Robinson argues that Southern conservatives have blended their nostalgia for Plantation America with the narcissistic selfishness of Ayn Rand who “updated the ancient slaveholder ethic for the modern age,” i.e. the Old South’s concept of personal “liberty” as a force that justified slave-ownership and was divorced from any societal good.

“The Tea Party became the voice of the unleashed id of the old Southern order, bringing it forward into the 21st century with its full measure of selfishness, racism, superstition, and brutality intact,” Robinson wrote. “From its origins in the fever swamps of the lowland south, the worldview of the old Southern aristocracy can now be found nationwide.”

An Anarchic Mob

The Tea Party acts like an anarchic, “libertarian mob” that appears to define “liberty” as a “divine right to do whatever we damn well please” and that finds all expertise and authority (the paradox of authoritarianism) inherently suspect and who believe the so-called “elites” historians, constitutional lawyers, economists, political scientists and teachers can’t possibly know anything worthwhile. The Tea Partiers reveal not only a profound ignorance but an extraordinary arrogance.

Commenting on American culture, author Isaac Asimov once said: “Anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that ‘my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge’.”

English writer George Monbiot asks: “How did politics in the United States come

to be dominated by people who make a virtue out of ignorance?... In the most powerful nation on Earth, 1 adult in 5 believes the sun revolves around the Earth; only 26 percent accept that evolution takes place by means of natural selection; two-thirds of young adults are unable to find Iraq on a map; two-thirds of U.S. voters cannot name the three branches of government.”

We Americans also appear to have made a virtue out of bad manners and coarse discourse. Yet, perhaps most threatening to a functioning democratic Republic, the worst elements of this ignorance and extremism, which were on the margins of society in the 1950s, have expanded into the mainstream. For the Tea Party and its unhappy, fearful sympathizers, belief trumps facts; government by extortion trumps the forming of a rational consensus; indeed verifiable facts and careful reasoning are suspect as some tell-tale sign of liberal elitism.

Centralizing Authority

Tea Party leaders also have sold their followers on a false understanding of the U.S. Constitution and what the key Framers the likes of George Washington, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and Gouverneur Morris were trying to create.

The Framers despised the idea of states’ rights and were determined to concentrate governing power in the federal government. In other words, what the Tea Party leaders are selling their followers is a neo-Confederate interpretation of the Constitution that turns the document inside out.

“They don’t realize that the Constitution represented the most important assertion of central authority in American history,” writes investigative reporter Robert Parry, who notes that the Constitution must be understood in the context of the Articles of Confederation which it replaced. The Articles guided the new country starting in 1777 and granted broad authority to the 13 original states with only a weak national government, described as a “league of friendship.”

George Washington was among the fiercest of the critics of the Articles, having experienced their ineffectiveness firsthand while watching his Continental Army suffer when states reneged on promises of support. Virginian James Madison, then a protégé of Washington and a chief architect of the Constitution, saw the Articles “holding back the nation’s economic growth” and wanted to take the states from being dominant to “subordinately useful,” Parry wrote.

So, with the Articles of Confederation failing and the young nation’s hard-won independence in danger the Constitutional Convention met in secret in Philadelphia in 1787 and replaced the Articles with a new system that granted sweeping authority to the federal government, including to “provide for the

common Defense and general Welfare of the United States.” Congress was empowered to pass all laws deemed “necessary and proper” to carry out those powers.

That the Constitution centralized power was well understood at the time, prompting fierce opposition from so-called Anti-Federalists, who protested that the earlier system in which the states were independent and sovereign was being swept away. Some Southern slaveholders feared that the Constitution eventually would be used by the North to eradicate slavery. However, after a contentious ratification process in 1788, the Constitution became the law of the land.

Still, the political fight wasn't over. In the decades that followed, Southern whites used their disproportionate clout since they got to count their black slaves as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of representation to argue for what, in effect, was a reinterpretation of the Constitution as something more like what it had replaced, the Articles of Confederation, with states' rights preeminent and the federal government tightly constrained.

The Tea Party has essentially convinced its followers that this slaveholders' interpretation of the Constitution is what the Framers intended, but that's simply distorted history, writes Parry.

Disinterest in History

The American Bar Association has pointed out that the image of education in civics, government and history as “dry, dull and irrelevant” was a product of the 1960s. Many of that decade's rebellions were welcome (challenges to sterile conformity, bigotry, segregation, inequality, and double standards among them), but the marked deterioration of American education in general that is said to have begun then has had dire consequences.

While more people have attended higher grades, the quality of education has been characterized as low, many Americans are considered functionally illiterate. The United States has fallen to “average” in international education rankings, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, receiving scores around 500 on a scale that goes up to 1,000: 487 in math, 500 in reading and 502 in science. Lack of education about their own government and the nation's history is clearly demonstrated in Tea Party rhetoric and activism.

The current crop of anti-government (and anti-institutional) libertarians appears to be a destructive combination of the Sixties' version of anarchism and the Eighties' “greed is good” selfishness with ample doses of narcissism reflective of both periods. In the process, much critical thinking has been lost.

Essayist and historian of ideas Mark Lilla describes the Tea Party as a

makeshift “movement whose activists rage against ‘government’ and ‘the media,’ while the hotheads of talk radio and cable news declare that the conservative counterrevolution has begun.”

For Lilla, it is “a manifestation of deeper social and even psychological changes that the country has undergone in the past half-century.” We have a new political type: *the antipolitical Jacobins*, who have, he writes: “two classic American traits blanket distrust of institutions and an astonishing, and unwarranted, confidence in the self. They are apocalyptic pessimists about public life and childlike optimists swaddled in self-esteem when it comes to their own powers.”

Lilla views it as a new strain of populism that is “metastasizing before our eyes estranged, aimless, and as juvenile as our new century.”

Confederate Heritage

But is the Tea Party really a new national “grassroots” movement as frequently portrayed by the mainstream media, or does it have national pretensions while being basically regional? There are those who describe it as essentially an extremist neo-Confederate movement.

Texas-born writer Michael Lind noted in 2011 that while there may be Tea Party sympathizers throughout the country, the House of Representatives Tea Party faction was overwhelmingly Southern in its origin, 63 percent that year. After the 2012 election, the Tea Party Caucus in Congress weakened, but it still has some 46 members in the 435-seat House of Representatives and six in the 100-seat Senate. Some 34 of those members come from the South or 65 percent of the total Tea Party Caucus.

“The fact that Tea Party conservatism speaks with a pronounced Southern drawl may have escaped the attention of the mainstream media, but it is obvious to members of Congress who have to try to work with these disproportionately-Southern fanatics,” Lind wrote two years ago.

There are also troubling parallels between the coercive tactics that the politicians from the Old South used in the decades before the Civil War and those employed by today’s Tea Partiers.

As Lind wrote, “From the earliest years of the American republic, white Southern conservatives when they have lost elections and found themselves in the political minority have sought to extort concession from national majorities by paralyzing or threatening to destroy the United States. In 1861, the South tried to destroy the United States, rather than accept a legitimately elected president, Abraham Lincoln, whom it did not control.”

In Lind's view, it's clear that the Tea Party in Congress is merely the old Confederate Southern right-wing in new packaging. Even the Confederate battle flag makes regular appearances at Tea Party rallies, though for "branding" purposes the movement favors the Revolutionary War era's yellow banner with a coiled snake and the "Don't Tread on Me" motto.

Going to Extremes

Americans should understand that the GOP attempt to sabotage the Affordable Care Act was "unprecedented well beneath any reasonable standards of elected officials with fiduciary responsibility of governing," according to congressional scholar Norman Ornstein.

In the recent government shutdown crisis instigated by the GOP (the cost of which has been estimated at \$24 billion), the Democratic Party and, eventually, some moderate Republicans stood their ground and stood up for the Constitution.

In effect, the Tea Party Republicans were trying to rewrite the Constitution (again) and its principles of majority rule to give a determined Southern-based minority (themselves) the power to coerce the majority of elected officials into either scrapping a duly-enacted law or watching the economy be sabotaged (via a government shutdown and debt default).

Of course, polls show that many Republicans, especially moderates, reject the Tea Party and its radicalism. It's also clearly true that many Southerners reject neo-Confederate hostility toward the federal government and see themselves as Americans first. The South also boasts many fine and respected scholars and educational institutions, and has a good number of progressive organizations.

But it's time that rational Americans from the South and everywhere else recognize the threat from the Radical Right and its overlapping ideologies of Ayn Rand capitalism, Christian fundamentalism and neo-Confederate white supremacy forces that are corrupting and crippling the nation's political and economic system, while putting at risk the "general Welfare" of 317 million Americans.

As historian Garry Wills has noted, "The problem with modern Republicans is not fanaticism in the few but cowardice in the many, who let their fellows live in virtual secession from laws they disagree with."

The madness must be ended. The nation has been paying a high price for the fanaticism of the few and cowardice of the many.

Beverly Bandler's public affairs career spans some 40 years. Her credentials

include serving as president of the state-level League of Women Voters of the Virgin Islands and extensive public education efforts in the Washington, D.C. area for 16 years. She writes from Mexico.

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