

# A Poison Pill for Iran Nuke Talks

Israel and its hardline U.S. backers have tried to manipulate the UN's IAEA to ensure failure of negotiations aimed at constraining but not eliminating Iran's nuclear program. The new ploy is to sink the talks with a demand for an Iranian "confession," as Gareth Porter wrote for Inter Press Service.

By Gareth Porter

President Barack Obama's administration appears to have rejected a deal-breaking demand by Israel for an Iranian confession to having had a covert nuclear weapons program as a condition for completing the comprehensive nuclear agreement.

Pro-Israeli commentators have openly criticized the Obama administration for failing to explicitly demand that Iran confess to charges by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of a covert nuclear weapons program.

Demanding such a confession would be an obvious deal-breaker, because Iran has consistently denied those past charges and denounced the documents and intelligence reports on which they were based as fraudulent. In fact, the failure of the talks appears to be precisely the Israeli intention in pressing Washington to make that demand.

All the intelligence in question can be traced back to Israel, and investigation of the material has shown that the documents and reports that have been most widely publicized betray multiple indications of having been fabricated, as reported by IPS.

A "senior administration official" told reporters after the Nov. 24 Joint Plan of Action was announced that the United States had "made clear" in the negotiations that "the Security Council resolutions must still be addressed and that Iran must come into compliance with its obligations under the NPT and its obligations to the IAEA."

The U.N. Security Council Resolution 1929 of Jun. 9, 2010 says Iran "shall cooperate with the IAEA on all outstanding issues, particularly those which give rise to concerns about the possible military dimensions of the Iranian nuclear program."

The term "possible military dimensions" had been used by the IAEA in referring to the claims publicized by the agency over the past six years of covert Iranian nuclear weapons development projects, including an alleged facility at Parchin for testing nuclear weapons designs.

The Obama administration thus seemed to suggest that some kind of Iranian admission to past nuclear weapons work is a condition for a final agreement. But the administration's rhetoric on resolving IAEA claims of a nuclear weapons program appears to be less about forcing Iran to confess than responding to pressures from Israel and its supporters in the United States.

The first explicit indication of Israeli pressure on Obama to demand an Iranian confession as part of any diplomatic settlement came in a September 2012 article by Patrick Clawson and David Makovsky, then both senior staff members of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), whose analysis and recommendations reflect Israeli government policy.

"Given Iran's past undeclared activities," Clawson and Makovsky wrote, "a particular concern is that Iran will develop clandestine nuclear facilities. Tehran's coming clean about the past will therefore be an important determinant of whether it has any hidden capabilities."

The demand that Iran "come clean" on its alleged nuclear weapons program entered into the Obama administration's public posture for the first time after consultations with Israel in advance of the October 2013 round of negotiations with Iran.

Secretary of State John Kerry declared in Tokyo on Oct. 3 that Iran would "have to prove it's willing to come clean about the nuclear program." That same day, Ambassador James Jeffrey, a senior fellow at WINEP, in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Iran "must come clean on its nuclear-related military research".

By the time the negotiations on the joint Plan of Action were completed in November, however, the State Department adopted language on the issue that harkened back to Kerry's testimony at his Senate confirmation hearings in January 2013. Kerry had said then that "questions surrounding Iran's nuclear weapons program" had to be "resolved".

It quickly became apparent that Israel had wanted the United States to demand not only a pro forma confession by Iran but the details of its alleged work on nuclear weapons. On the very day the agreement was announced, however, Robert Satloff, the executive director of WINEP, expressed his unhappiness that the deal did not include "getting Iran to come clean on all its past clandestine programs."

Also on Nov. 24, in the Wall Street Journal, Mark Dubowitz and Orde Kittrie of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, which is well known for expressing Israeli policy on Iran, criticized the Joint Plan of Action for

failing to “make clear reference to Iran revealing its past nuclear weapons research.”

The following day, again in the Wall Street Journal, WINEP managing director Michael Singh objected to the same U.S. failure to demand all the details of Iranian work on nuclear weapons. “Without insight into the full extent of Iran’s clandestine nuclear activities,” Singh wrote, “no amount of monitoring and inspection can provide confidence that Iran lacks a parallel program beyond the inspectors’ view.”

Along with Kerry’s initial adoption of the “come clean” rhetoric, these sharp criticisms of the U.S. refusal to call explicitly for a confession indicate that the Obama administration had initially gone along with Israel in calling for Iran to “come clean” but concluded that such a demand risked a premature breakdown in the talks.

Since the interim agreement, moreover, the State Department has avoided language that would commit it to requiring anything resembling an Iranian confession. In Israel on Feb. 22, Undersecretary of State Wendy Sherman, who is the primary negotiator with Iran, said, “What we have said to Iran is that [the ‘possible military dimensions’ issue] will have to be addressed in some way.”

Sherman suggested for the first time the possibility of a less than complete and clear-cut outcome of the process. The IAEA was “very much focused on working through PMD with Iran,” said Sherman. “And the more Iran can do with the IAEA, which is where this belongs, the more likely we will have successful comprehensive agreement.”

A former U.S. official who had worked on Iran suggested in a recent off-the-record meeting that the “possible military dimensions” issue could not be resolved completely, but that one or more parts could be clarified satisfactorily. The rest could be left for resolution by the IAEA after the comprehensive agreement is signed, the ex-official said.

That possibility arises because Iran and the IAEA agreed in February to work on the “Exploding Bridgewire” (EBW) issue the claim published by the IAEA that Iran had carried out experiments on high explosives developed for the purpose of detonating a nuclear weapon. That claim was based on a document that was part of the large collection originally said by anonymous intelligence sources to have come from the laptop computer of a participant in a purported Iranian nuclear weapons research project.

The documents were actually turned over to German intelligence by the Iranian terrorist organization Mujahedin-E-Khalq, which had close links to Israel’s

intelligence agency, Mossad.

Iran provided the IAEA with an account of its actual EBW development program in 2008. The Iranian account, cited by the agency in its May 2008 report, indicated the rate of explosions in its experiments, which was just one-eighth the rate mentioned by then IAEA deputy director Olli Heinonen in a briefing for member states in 2008.

But instead of acknowledging that fact in its report, the IAEA suggested repeatedly that Iran had acknowledged carrying out the EBW experiments described in the purported document from the secret weapons program while claiming it was for non-nuclear applications.

The new Iran-IAEA agreement on the EBW issue raises the question of whether IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano is now ready to reach a deal with Iran, despite having staked his own reputation on the November 2011 report on intelligence claims of covert Iranian nuclear weapons research coming from Israel.

Such an agreement might be based on the IAEA's stating accurately the Iranian explanation for the EBW and thus implicitly admitting that the agency had distorted the issue in the past. Other issues might be left to be resolved quietly after the negotiations on a comprehensive agreement are completed.

**Gareth Porter, an investigative historian and journalist specialising 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. His new book is *Manufactured Crisis: the Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare.***

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## Did Manning Help Avert War in Iran?

**From the Archive:** Many of the world's crises, like those in Syria and Ukraine, can be better understood by factoring in Israel's maneuvers to involve the U.S. in bombing Iran. Documents leaked by Pvt. Manning exposed how one such scheme might have played out, as Robert Parry wrote in 2013.

By Robert Parry (Originally published on Aug. 19, 2013)

From U.S. embassy cables leaked by Pvt. Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning, you can easily imagine how the propaganda game might have played out, how Americans could have been panicked into supporting another unnecessary war in the Middle East, this time against Iran. Except that Manning's release of the documents

spoiled the trick.

The gambit might have gone this way: One morning, a story would have led the front page of, say, the Washington Post citing how the widely respected International Atomic Energy Agency and its honest-broker Director-General Yukiya Amano had found startling "evidence" that Iran was nearing a nuclear bomb despite a longstanding U.S. intelligence estimate to the contrary and despite Iranian denials.

Next, the neocon-dominated opinion pages would ridicule anyone who still doubted these "facts." After all, these articles would say, "even" the IAEA, which had challenged President George W. Bush's claims about Iraq in 2002, and "even" Amano, who had initially believed Iran's denials, were now convinced.

Neo-con think tanks would rush to join the chorus of alarm, dispatching WMD "experts" to TV talk shows bracing the American people on the need for military action. From Fox News to CNN to MSNBC, there would be a drumbeat about Iran's perfidy. Then, as hawkish Republicans and Democrats ratcheted up their rhetoric and as Israeli leaders chortled "we told you so" the war-with-Iran bandwagon might have begun rolling with such velocity that it would be unstoppable.

Perhaps, only years later after grave human costs and severe economic repercussions would the American people learn the truth: that the IAEA under Amano wasn't the objective source that they had been led to believe, that Amano was something of a U.S.-Israeli puppet who had feigned a pro-Iranian position early on to burnish his credentials for pushing an anti-Iranian line subsequently; that after he was installed, he had even solicited U.S. officials for money and had held secret meetings with Israelis (to coordinate opposition to Iran's nuclear program while maintaining a polite silence about Israel's rogue nuclear arsenal).

However, because of the actions of Pvt. Manning, the rug was pulled out from under this possible ruse. The U.S. embassy cables revealing the truth about Amano were published by the U.K. Guardian in 2011 (although ignored by the New York Times, the Washington Post and other mainstream U.S. news outlets). The cables also drew attention from Web sites, such as Consortiumnews.com.

So, the gambit could not work. If it had been tried, enough people would have known the truth. They wouldn't be fooled again and they would have alerted their fellow citizens. Pvt. Manning had armed them with the facts.

And this scenario, while hypothetical, is not at all far-fetched. When the cables were leaked about a year after Amano's appointment, his IAEA was busy feeding the hysteria over Iran's nuclear program with reports trumpeted by think

tanks, such as the Institute for Science and International Security, and by the Washington Post and other U.S. news media.

## **Revealing Cables**

According to those leaked U.S. embassy cables from Vienna, Austria, the site of IAEA's headquarters, American diplomats in 2009 were cheering the prospect that Amano would advance U.S. interests in ways that outgoing IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei wouldn't; Amano credited his election to U.S. government support; Amano signaled he would side with the United States in its confrontation with Iran; and he stuck his hand out for more U.S. money.

In a July 9, 2009, cable, American chargé Geoffrey Pyatt said Amano was thankful for U.S. support of his election. "Amano attributed his election to support from the U.S., Australia and France, and cited U.S. intervention with Argentina as particularly decisive," the cable said.

The appreciative Amano informed Pyatt that as IAEA director general, he would take a different "approach on Iran from that of ElBaradei" and he "saw his primary role as implementing safeguards and UNSC [United Nations Security Council]/Board resolutions," i.e. U.S.-driven sanctions and demands against Iran.

Amano also discussed how to restructure the senior ranks of the IAEA, including elimination of one top official and the retention of another. "We wholly agree with Amano's assessment of these two advisors and see these decisions as positive first signs," Pyatt commented.

In return, Pyatt made clear that Amano could expect strong U.S. financial support, stating that "the United States would do everything possible to support his successful tenure as Director General and, to that end, anticipated that continued U.S. voluntary contributions to the IAEA would be forthcoming. Amano offered that a 'reasonable increase' in the regular budget would be helpful."

Pyatt learned, too, that Amano had consulted with Israeli Ambassador Israel Michaeli "immediately after his appointment" and that Michaeli "was fully confident of the priority Amano accords verification issues." Michaeli added that he discounted some of Amano's public remarks about there being "no evidence of Iran pursuing a nuclear weapons capability" as just words that Amano felt he had to say "to persuade those who did not support him about his 'impartiality.'"

In private, Amano agreed to "consultations" with the head of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission, Pyatt reported. (It is ironic indeed that Amano would have secret contacts with Israeli officials about Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program, which has yet to yield a single bomb, when Israel possesses a large and

undeclared nuclear arsenal.)

In another leaked cable dated Oct. 16, 2009, the U.S. mission in Vienna said Amano “took pains to emphasize his support for U.S. strategic objectives for the Agency. Amano reminded ambassador [Glyn Davies] on several occasions that he was solidly in the U.S. court on every key strategic decision, from high-level personnel appointments to the handling of Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program.

“More candidly, Amano noted the importance of maintaining a certain ‘constructive ambiguity’ about his plans, at least until he took over for DG ElBaradei in December” 2009.

In other words, Amano was a bureaucrat eager to bend in directions favored by the United States and Israel regarding Iran’s nuclear program. Amano’s behavior surely contrasted with how the more independent-minded ElBaradei resisted some of Bush’s key claims about Iraq’s supposed nuclear weapons program, correctly denouncing some documents as forgeries.

[Pyatt, who was the chief contact with Amano, is now U.S. ambassador to Ukraine and was a key figure, working with neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, in orchestrating the violent coup that overthrew the democratically elected President Viktor Yanukovych in February and touched off a confrontation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Barack Obama, a clash that disrupted their cooperation in trying arrange a peaceful resolution to the Iran-nuclear issue. For details, see Consortiumnews.com’s “What Neocons Want from Ukraine Crisis.”]

### **Salvaging Some Hype**

Though Manning’s release of the embassy cables apparently scotched any large-scale deployment of the Amano ploy, some elements of the gambit did go forward nonetheless, albeit with less oomph than they might have had.

In February 2013, the front page of the Washington Post offered a taste of what the propaganda campaign might have looked like when investigative reporter Joby Warrick hyped an account about Iran’s nuclear program pushed by David Albright, director of the Institute for Science and International Security who had lent support to Bush’s invasion of Iraq a decade ago.

The Albright/Warrick alarm cited Iran’s alleged effort to place an Internet order for 100,000 ring-shaped magnets that would work in some of the country’s older centrifuges.

“Iran recently sought to acquire tens of thousands of highly specialized magnets

used in centrifuge machines, according to experts and diplomats, a sign that the country may be planning a major expansion of its nuclear program that could shorten the path to an atomic weapons capability," Warrick wrote in his lede paragraph.

You had to read to the end of the long story to hear a less strident voice, saying that Iran had previously informed IAEA inspectors that it planned to build more of its old and clunkier centrifuges, which use this sort of magnet, and that the enrichment was for civilian energy, not a nuclear bomb.

"Olli Heinonen, who led IAEA nuclear inspections inside Iran before his retirement in 2010, said the type of magnet sought by Iran was highly specific to the IR-1 centrifuge and could not, for example, be used in the advanced IR-2M centrifuges that Iran has recently tested," according to the final paragraphs of Warrick's article.

"The numbers in the order make sense, because Iran originally told us it wanted to build more than 50,000 of the IR-1s,' Heinonen said. 'The failure rate on these machines is 10 percent a year, so you need a surplus.'"

At the bottom of Warrick's story, you'd also learn that "Iran has avoided what many experts consider Israel's new 'red line': a stockpile of medium-enriched uranium greater than 530 pounds, roughly the amount needed to build a weapon if further purified."

So there was nothing urgent or particularly provocative about this alleged purchase, though the structure and placement of the Post story suggested otherwise. Many readers likely were expected to simply jump to the conclusion that Iran was on the verge of building an atomic bomb and that it was time for President Barack Obama to join Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in another Middle East war.

The pressure from the Post and other neocon-leaning news outlets on the Obama administration to fall in line with Netanyahu's belligerence toward Iran has been building for years, often with Warrick channeling anti-Iranian propaganda from Albright and his ISIS, which, in turn, seems to be a pipeline for hardliners at the IAEA.

A decade ago, Albright and the ISIS were key figures in stoking the hysteria for invading Iraq around the false allegations of its WMD program. In recent years, Albright and his institute have adopted a similar role regarding Iran and its purported pursuit of a nuclear weapon, even though U.S. intelligence agencies say Iran terminated that weapons project in 2003.

Nevertheless, Albright has transformed his organization into a sparkplug for a



new confrontation with Iran. Though Albright insists that he is an objective professional, ISIS has published hundreds of articles about Iran, which has not produced a single nuclear bomb, while barely mentioning Israel's rogue nuclear arsenal.

An examination of the ISIS Web site reveals only a few technical articles relating to Israel's nukes while ISIS has expanded its coverage of Iran's nuclear program so much that it's been moved onto a separate Web site. The articles not only hype developments in Iran but also attack U.S. media critics who question the fear-mongering about Iran.

More than a year ago when a non-mainstream journalist confronted Albright about the disparity between ISIS's concentration on Iran and *de minimis* coverage of Israel, he angrily responded that he was working on a report about Israel's nuclear program. But there is still no substantive assessment of Israel's large nuclear arsenal on the ISIS Web site, which goes back to 1993.

Despite this evidence of bias, the Post and other mainstream U.S. news outlets typically present Albright as a neutral analyst. They also ignore his checkered past, for instance, his prominent role in promoting President Bush's pre-invasion case that Iraq possessed stockpiles of WMD.

### **Stoking a War**

At the end of summer 2002, as Bush was beginning his advertising roll-out for the Iraq invasion and dispatching his top aides to the Sunday talk shows to warn about "smoking guns" and "mushroom clouds," Albright co-authored a Sept. 10, 2002, article entitled "Is the Activity at Al Qaim Related to Nuclear Efforts?" which declared:

"High-resolution commercial satellite imagery shows an apparently operational facility at the site of Iraq's al Qaim phosphate plant and uranium extraction facility. This site was where Iraq extracted uranium for its nuclear weapons program in the 1980s. This image raises questions about whether Iraq has rebuilt a uranium extraction facility at the site, possibly even underground. The uranium could be used in a clandestine nuclear weapons effort."

Albright's alarming allegations fit neatly with Bush's propaganda barrage, although as the months wore on with Bush's warnings about aluminum tubes and yellowcake from Africa growing more outlandish Albright did display more skepticism about the existence of a revived Iraqi nuclear program.

Still, he remained a "go-to" expert on other Iraqi purported WMD, such as chemical and biological weapons. In a typical quote on Oct. 5, 2002, Albright told CNN: "In terms of the chemical and biological weapons, Iraq has those now."

After Bush launched the Iraq invasion in March 2003 and Iraq's secret WMD caches didn't materialize, Albright admitted that he had been conned, explaining to the Los Angeles Times: "If there are no weapons of mass destruction, I'll be mad as hell. I certainly accepted the administration claims on chemical and biological weapons. I figured they were telling the truth. If there is no [unconventional weapons program], I will feel taken, because they asserted these things with such assurance." [See FAIR's "[The Great WMD Hunt](#),"]

Given the horrendous costs in blood and treasure resulting from the Iraq fiasco, an objective journalist might feel compelled to mention Albright's track record of bias and error. But the Post's Warrick didn't, even though Albright and his ISIS were at the core of the February story, receiving credit for obtaining copies of the magnet purchase order.

So, while we'll never know if the Amano ploy would have been tried since Manning's disclosures made it unfeasible it surely would not have been unprecedented. The American people experienced similar deceptions during the run-up to war with Iraq when the Bush-43 administration assembled every scrap of suspicion about Iraq's alleged WMD and fashioned a bogus case for war.

Eventually, Manning was pulled into that war as a young intelligence analyst. He confronted so much evidence of brutality and dishonesty that he felt compelled to do something about it. What he did in leaking hundreds of thousands of documents to WikiLeaks and, thus, to other news outlets was to supply "ground truth" about war crimes committed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

His disclosure of diplomatic cables also gave the American people and the world a glimpse behind the curtain of secrecy that often conceals the dirty dealings of statecraft. Perhaps most significantly, those revelations helped sparked the Arab Spring, giving people of the Middle East a chance to finally take some political control over their own lives.

And, by letting Americans in on the truth about Amano's IAEA, Bradley Manning may have helped prevent a war with Iran.

[Pvt. Manning is now serving a 35-year prison sentence for unauthorized release of classified material.]

**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**

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## Ukraine's Inconvenient Neo-Nazis

**Exclusive:** When Ukrainian neo-Nazis infuriated over the killing of an ultranationalist leader surrounded the Parliament in Kiev, the incident presented a problem for the U.S. news media which has been trying to airbrush the neo-Nazis out of the Ukraine narrative, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

The U.S. media's take on the Ukraine crisis is that a "democratic revolution" ousted President Viktor Yanukovich, followed by a "legitimate" change of government. So, to mention the key role played neo-Nazi militias in the putsch or to note that Yanukovich was democratically elected and then illegally deposed gets you dismissed as a "Russian propagandist."

But Ukraine's neo-Nazis are not some urban legend. Their presence is real, as they swagger in their paramilitary garb through the streets of Kiev, displaying Nazi insignias, honoring SS collaborators from World War II, and hoisting racist banners, including the white-power symbol of the Confederate battle flag.

Over the past few days, the neo-Nazis have surged to the front of Ukraine's unrest again by furiously protesting the killing of one of their leaders, Oleksandr Muzychko, known as Sashko Bily. The Interior Ministry reported that Muzychko died in a Monday night shoot-out with police in Rivne in western Ukraine.

But the right-wing paramilitaries claim that Muzychko was murdered in a cold-blooded contract hit, and these modern-day storm troopers have threatened to storm the parliament building if the interim Interior Minister is not fired.

This renewed disorder has complicated the storytelling of the major U.S. news media by challenging the sweetness-and-light narrative preferred by U.S. policymakers. The New York Times, the Washington Post and other leading news outlets have worked hard to airbrush [the well-established fact](#) that neo-Nazi militants spearheaded the coup on Feb. 22.

To dismiss that inconvenient fact, the major U.S. media has stressed that the extreme rightists made up a minority of the demonstrators, which while true is largely irrelevant since it was the paramilitary Right Sektor that provided the armed force that removed Yanukovich and then dominated the "transition" period

by patrolling key government buildings. As a reward, far-right parties were given control of four ministries.

Some U.S. outlets also have picked up on the unsubstantiated U.S. government theme that Russia is dispatching unidentified “provocateurs” to destabilize the coup regime in Kiev, though it doesn’t seem like Moscow would have to do much besides stand aside and watch the interim government’s unruly supporters turn on each other.

But reality has stopped playing much of a role in the U.S. news media’s Ukraine reporting as the U.S. press continues to adjust the reality to fit with the desired narrative. For instance, the New York Times, in its boilerplate account of the uprising, has removed the fact that more than a dozen police were among the 80 or so people killed. The Times now simply reports that police fired on and killed about 80 demonstrators.

Fitting with its bowdlerized account, the Times also ignores evidence that snipers who apparently fired on both police and protesters before the coup may have been working for the opposition, not Yanukovich’s government. An intercepted phone call by two European leaders discussed those suspicions as well as the curious decision of the post-coup government not to investigate who the snipers really were.

### **Surrounding the Parliament**

But most significantly, the U.S. mainstream media has struggled to downplay the neo-Nazi angle as was apparent in the Times’ report on President Vladimir Putin’s call on Friday to President Barack Obama to discuss possible steps to defuse the crisis. Putin noted that neo-Nazis had surrounded the parliament.

“In citing extremist action, Mr. Putin sought to capitalize on a tense internal showdown in Kiev,” the Times wrote. “The presence of masked, armed demonstrators threatening to storm the Parliament building offered the Russian government an opportunity to bolster its contention that the ouster of President Viktor F. Yanukovich, a Moscow ally, after pro-European street protests last month was an illegal coup carried out by right-wing extremists with Western encouragement.”

But the Times couldn’t simply let those facts speak for themselves, though they were all true: right-wing extremists did provide the key manpower and organization to overrun government buildings on Feb. 22 and there is no doubt that these right-wing elements were getting Western encouragement, including a shoulder-to-shoulder appearance by Sen. John McCain.

The Times felt compelled to interject an argumentative counterpoint, saying: “In fact, the nationalist groups, largely based in western Ukraine, had formed just

one segment of a broad coalition of demonstrators who occupied the streets of Kiev for months demanding Mr. Yanukovich's ouster."

And, that has been a consistent pattern for the supposedly objective U.S. news media. If the Russians say something, even if it is clearly true, the point must be contradicted. However, when a U.S. official states something about the Ukraine crisis, the claim goes unchallenged no matter how absurd.

For example, when Secretary of State John Kerry denounced Putin's intervention in Crimea by declaring, "you just don't in the 21st Century behave in 19th Century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped-up pretext," mainstream U.S. news outlets simply let the statement stand without noting that Kerry himself had voted in 2002 to authorize President George W. Bush to invade Iraq in pursuit of non-existent weapons of mass destruction.

You might think that Kerry's breathtaking hypocrisy would be newsworthy or at least a relevant fact that should be pointed out to readers, but no. The Times also has routinely distorted Crimea's secession from Ukraine. The Black Sea peninsula, a longtime Russian province that was only attached to Ukraine for administrative purposes during Soviet days, asserted its independence after the coup ousting Yanukovich, who had won Crimea overwhelmingly.

No one seriously doubts that the vast majority of Crimean citizens wanted to escape the disorder and hardship enveloping Ukraine and to return to Russia with its higher per capita income and functioning national government but the Obama administration and the dutiful U.S. news media have pretended otherwise.

In New York Times speak, Crimea's popular vote to secede from Ukraine and to join Russia was simply Putin's "seizure" of Crimea. The Times and other mainstream news outlets dismissed Crimea's March 16 referendum as somehow rigged citing the 96 percent tally for secession as presumptive evidence of fraud although there was no actual evidence of election rigging. Exit polls confirmed the overwhelming majority favoring secession from Ukraine and annexation by Russia.

### **IMF's 'Reforms'**

And, really, who could blame the people of Crimea? As Ukraine's acting Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk has said, Ukraine "is on the edge of economic and financial bankruptcy" and the International Monetary Fund agreed to throw a financial lifeline only if Ukraine imposes "reforms" that Yatsenyuk has admitted are "very unpopular, very difficult, very tough."

They will be toughest on average Ukrainians who will face severe public sector budget cuts, slashed pensions, soaring heating costs and rapid inflation due to

changes in the exchange rate. The cumulative impact of these IMF “reforms” is expected to result in a 3 percent contraction of Ukraine’s already depressed economy.

Yet, much of the mainstream U.S. media ignores the understandable desire of the Crimean people to bail out on the failed Ukrainian state. Instead, the MSM pretends that Russia simply invaded Crimea and now is threatening to do the same in eastern Ukraine, or as the Times put it, Putin has engaged in “provocative moves punctuated by a menacing buildup of troops on Ukraine’s border.”

The bottom line is that the U.S. government and media have constructed a substantially false narrative for the American people, all the better to manufacture consent behind a \$1 billion U.S. aid package for Ukraine and the launch of a new Cold War with the expectation of many more exciting confrontations to come in places like Syria and Iran all justifying fatter military budgets.

A more objective and less alarmist narrative on the Ukraine crisis would describe Putin’s actions as primarily defensive and reactive. He was distracted by the Winter Olympics in Sochi and was caught off-guard by the violent putsch that removed Yanukovich.

In light of Yanukovich’s democratic election victory in 2010 and his agreement on Feb. 21 to speed up new elections (a deal that was negated within hours by the U.S./EU-supported coup), Russia has a legitimate argument that the coup regime in Kiev is illegitimate.

The removal of Yanukovich not only was spearheaded by neo-Nazi militias but subsequent parliamentary actions to “impeach” him did not follow Ukraine’s constitutional rules. The putsch essentially disenfranchised the large ethnic-Russian populations in the east and south, where Yanukovich had his political base.

Then, the rump parliament in Kiev reflecting the intense Ukrainian nationalism in the western section passed punitive laws targeting these Russian speakers, including elimination of Russian as an official language. For Putin to be troubled by this crisis on his border – and to take action – was neither surprising nor particularly provocative.

If the New York Times and other leading U.S. outlets did their journalism in a professional way, the American people would have had a more nuanced understanding of what happened in Ukraine and why. Instead, the Times and the rest of the MSM resumed their roles as U.S. propagandists, much as they did in Iraq in 2002-03 with their usual preference for a simplistic “good-guy/bad-guy”

dichotomy.

In the case of Ukraine, that happy dichotomy has been challenged again by the reemergence of those inconvenient neo-Nazis.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[The Danger of False Narrative](#)."] ]

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](#).

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## Will 'Too-Big-to-Fail' Banks Fail Again?

Despite Wall Street's booming recovery, Main Street continues to struggle with high unemployment and low wages, making another bust more likely. And, the "too-big-to-fail" banks may be more vulnerable than they appear, writes Danny Schechter.

By Danny Schechter

Okay, I have to admit it, I feel as if my faith in economic justice is being tested with these "stress tests." Truth is, I am becoming more stressed than ever.

The reason: despite all the "regulations" in the Dodd-Frank Financial "reform" and the Volcker Rule and the Fed's "oversight," the banks seems to have free reign to do what they will despite the financial crisis and the pathetic "recovery."

There have been fines and settlements but nothing is settled. None of them have gone or will go to jail. Economic conditions continue to stress out millions even as the Fed announces "stress tests" that appear on the surface to be a way of insuring that big banks won't need more bailouts.

Sad to say, it's more of the charade. Partially that's because the banks dominate the Federal Reserve, a private, not public, institution. And, partially, because when it comes to economic crises, the stories are buried in

the business pages and rarely surface as topics of concern on popular talk shows and media that most folks watch.

Even the financial channels like CNBC prefer superficial sound-bite chatter to in-depth interviews according to "Money Honey," Maria Bartiromo who publicly criticized her old network when she took a better deal at Fox.

Many of us have seen the reports that Citibank is in trouble. That is Citibank, the biggest enchilada of finance, the bank that provided refuge to the likes of Bill Clinton's Treasury Secretary Robert "the great deregulator" Rubin and Barack Obama's budget director, whiz kid Peter Orzag, who has been in court lately hiding how much he made from Citi in a divorce proceeding.

Citi failed the Fed's latest stress test designed to see if it had adequate reserves to withstand the widely anticipated next financial jolt to the economy. Washington's Blog quotes the business news service, Bloomberg News, reporting:

"Citigroup Inc.'s capital plan was among five that failed Federal Reserve stress tests, while Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and Bank of America Corp. passed only after reducing their requests for buybacks and dividends.

"Citigroup, as well as U.S. units of Royal Bank of Scotland Group Plc, HSBC Holdings Plc and Banco Santander SA, failed because of qualitative concerns about their processes, the Fed said today in a statement. Zions Bancorporation was rejected as its capital fell below the minimum required. The central bank approved plans for 25 banks."

Washington's Blog then adds: "In reality, Citi 'flat lined' went totally bust in 2008. It was insolvent. And former FDIC chief Sheila Bair said the whole bailout thing was really focused on bringing a very dead Citi back from the grave.

"Indeed," Washington's Blog continues, "the big banks including Citi have *repeatedly* gone bankrupt."

Why didn't I read **that** in the news? Didn't Citi "pass" earlier tests? I thought they were stronger than ever.

Think again, says Washington's Blog: "So why did the U.S. government give Citi a passing grade in previous stress tests? Because they were rigged to give all of the students an 'A'. Time Magazine called then Secretary Treasury Tim Geithner a 'con man' and the stress tests a 'confidence game' because those tests were so inaccurate.

"But the bigger story is that absolutely nothing was done to address the causes of the 2008 financial crisis, or to fix the system."



That's one good reason for all of us to be stressed because we can have absolutely no confidence in the stability of our economy, whatever they say about how it's all getting better. (Geithner, however, was just rewarded by the banking industry, named president of the private equity firm, Warburg Pincus.)

Here's James Kwak of BaselineScenario.com, on the stress test story. He sees it as one more financial fraud:

"Despite the much-publicized black eye to Citigroup's management, the bottom line of the Federal Reserve's stress tests is that every other large U.S. bank will be allowed to pay out more cash to its shareholders, either as increased dividends or stock buybacks. And pay out more cash they will: at least \$22 billion in increased dividends (that includes all the banks subject to stress tests), plus increased buyback plans.

"Those cash payouts come straight out of the banks' capital, since they reduce assets without reducing liabilities. Alternatively, the banks could have chosen to keep the cash and increase their balance sheets, that is, by lending more to companies and households. The fact that they choose to distribute the cash to shareholders indicates that they cannot find additional, profitable lending opportunities."

Rather than speculate with my own cynical suspicions as well-grounded as I believe they are let me quote a few more experts like Mike Harrison, an expert on *Credit Write Downs*, who wrote earlier:

"I would say the stress tests were a mock exercise to instill confidence in the capital markets. This was important first and foremost because it would induce private investors to pay for bank recapitalization instead of taxpayers. But it was also important for the economy as a whole as the sick banking sector was dragging the whole economy down.

"The key, however, is that the tests were a mock exercise. Despite the additional capital, banks are still hiding hundreds of billions of dollars in losses in level three, hold to maturity, and off balance sheet asset pools. If asset prices fall and/or the economy weakens, all of this subterfuge would be for naught."

Harrison quotes Mike Konzcal who did his own line-by-line assessment of the actual numbers the banks report on earlier tests. He noted that banks often have to worry about several liens on the properties they have financed and hold mortgages on.

"So the original loss from second-liens, as reported by the stress tests, was \$68.4 billion for the four largest banks. If you look at those numbers again,

and assume a loss of 40% to 60%, numbers that are not absurd by any means, you suddenly are talking a loss of between \$190 billion and \$285 billion. Which means if the stress tests were done with terrible 2nd lien performance in mind, *there would have been an extra \$150 billion dollar hole in the balance sheet of the four largest banks.* Major action would have been taken against the four largest banks if this was the case.”

Are you still with me? What comes to mind is the old adage: “what a web we weave when first we practice to deceive.” Why are they doing this?

Here’s Harrison again, from his posts on the authoritative website, *Naked Capitalism*: “The real question is: why is the Obama Administration running victory laps, unrolling the ‘Mission Accomplished’ banner on the credit crisis, as Mike Konczal describes it? I suspect this is just a political stunt to provide cover in the mid-term elections to somehow demonstrate that the Democrats fixed the problem that the Republicans created.

“I think it could backfire if only because the (real) underemployment rate is still 17%. Nobody wants to hear the ‘I saved the economy routine’ when they’re unemployed and losing their home.”

Now, do you see why we should be stressed too?

**News Dissector Danny Schechter edits Mediachannel.org and blogs at [newsdissector.net](http://newsdissector.net). He investigated financial fraud in *The Crime of Our Time (Disinformation)*. His latest book is *Madiba A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela* ([Madibabook.com](http://Madibabook.com). Comments to [dissector@mediachannel.org](mailto:dissector@mediachannel.org)**

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## Forgetting the Lessons of Deterrence

“Tough-guy/gal-ism” is rampant again in Official Washington with many New Cold Warriors lusting for a military confrontation with Russia. But few of these hawks have a clear idea how deterrence worked during the real Cold War, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

An irony of how the events in Ukraine and the associated altercation with Russia have thrown many commentators and policy critics into a Cold War mode is that those same commentators and critics seem to have forgotten (or never learned) much relevant doctrine that was developed and honed during the real Cold War.

The doctrine in question embraces many principles involving any attempt to exert power and to exercise influence over other states. The most relevant aspects of doctrine involve deterrence, using threats to dissuade someone from doing something we do not want done, as well as some related concepts also involving coercive methods of trying to influence an adversary's behavior.

Sophisticated treatment of these topics can become somewhat complicated, getting into such matters as multiple levels of deterrence and stability-instability paradoxes. But what much of the commentary on current issues ignores is really rather simple. It is stuff that should be apparent upon careful but straightforward thinking about the objectives, costs, and benefits that apply to the people on the other side of a conflict.

Although applications of the principles have endless variations, the principles themselves are immutable. Probably what is still the clearest statement of them came during the height of the Cold War from Thomas Schelling, who received the Nobel memorial prize in economics largely for that work.

One major point of doctrine that has been routinely ignored in the recent commentary is that successful deterrence depends on much more than just the reputation of the deterring state and its demonstrated willingness to use coercion. It depends at least as much on characteristics of the particular conflict, including how much of a stake each side feels it has in it.

We should have learned this lesson with the Vietnam War. The United States went so far in demonstrating its willingness to use costly force that it built up an army of over a half million in Vietnam and fought so long that it suffered over 50,000 combat deaths. But it was unable to deter the regime in the north from waging continued war in the south because the nationalist objective of uniting a Vietnam free of foreign domination was much more important to that regime than the United States' objectives in Vietnam were to it.

I have commented previously on the fallacious nature of the notion that for the United States not to take up a gauntlet in one conflict makes it more likely that some adversary in an unrelated conflict elsewhere on the globe would do aggressive things that it would not otherwise have done. Yet that notion persists, most recently in the assertion that Vladimir Putin would not have seized Crimea if the United States had only shown more toughness elsewhere.

For many, of course, such an assertion is just one more disingenuous way for Barack Obama's political opponents to bash him. But the notion gets repeated so often that many who hear it, and at least some who say it, probably believe it.

This mistaken belief is related to another erroneous notion about deterrence,

which is that taking coercive action against an adversary provides deterrence, rather than making such action conditional on the adversary doing certain carefully defined things we do not want him to do. Sen. John McCain exhibited this mistake when he bemoaned how the modest steps the Europeans have taken in response to the situation in Ukraine would not deter Putin. He's right about that, but not because, as he further comments, commercial interests of the Europeans keep them from implementing harsher measures now.

From exactly what are we trying to deter Putin? He says he has no intention of seizing any more of Ukraine after Crimea. We may have good reason to worry about the possibility that he might do so anyway, but he has not done so yet. Unconditionally imposing costs when he has not yet done so may satisfy political and other urges on our side, but it lacks deterrence value.

In some situations there may be a grain of truth, which can be found in Schelling's writings, in the idea that doing something forceful now can enhance deterrence against a future contingency, if the forceful action demonstrates a willingness to act in response to that particular contingency and there was reason to doubt that we would so act. But if there is not good reason for that doubt, again there is no deterrence value.

The clearest recent instance of this fallacy was the failed attempt in the U.S. Congress to enact more anti-Iran sanctions legislation under the rationale that this would deter the Iranians from stalling or abandoning the negotiations. In fact, one of the *least* needed things to demonstrate to Tehran, given the now long history of overwhelming support in the Congress for serial enactment of sanctions against Iran, is a willingness to impose quickly still more sanctions if the Iranians did not negotiate seriously.

There was disingenuousness here, too, in that much of the push for the legislation came from those who want negotiations with Iran to fail. But once again there were others who sincerely, but mistakenly, believed in the rationale.

A principle repeatedly ignored in American discourse is that in attempting to influence an adversary's behavior, getting him to believe he will not be punished if he behaves as we wish is just as important as getting him to believe that he will be punished if he does not so behave. This is true not only in situations of true deterrence, in which we want to prevent something from happening, but also in situations, for which Schelling created the term compellence, in which we want the other side to take action it is not currently taking.

The principle is repeatedly ignored in discussions about the nuclear

negotiations with Iran, in which a challenge much greater than convincing Iranians of American willingness to inflict more punishment is to convince them that punishment will end if they strike a deal satisfactory to us.

A similar deficiency in thinking has begun to infect the public discourse about Ukraine. Exactly what do we want from Putin at this point? Presumably it is more than just not invading eastern Ukraine, and includes positive, cooperative behavior in fashioning a settlement in which a Crimea-less but otherwise whole Ukraine can live in greater peace and prosperity and have positive relations with all its neighbors. What that behavior should be must be clear in our own minds and statements and thus clear in Putin's mind as well for any coercive or punitive action at this time to have compelling value.

Also too frequently ignored is attention to the costs of carrying out a threat, costs not just to the target of the threat, but to the side that would execute it. This attention is important not only to calculate costs and benefits if the threat ever did get carried out, but also because of how this affects credibility of the threat itself.

If the other side does not believe the threat ever would be executed because doing so would be highly costly and damaging to the side making the threat, there again is no deterrent value. Such threats are worse than useless, because they risk exposing us as bluffers.

Any show of military force by the United States in the vicinity of Ukraine (not the minor redeployments that merely provide some reassurance to Poland and the Baltic states) would exhibit this problem, given the patent folly for the United States to engage in a war with Russia, especially in Russia's backyard and especially given the much greater importance to Russia than to the United States of the distribution of power in this region.

Anyone guilty of exhibiting any of these mistaken ideas should take a refresher course in deterrence. If you yearn to be a Cold Warrior again, that should be one of the first things to do. Reading (or re-reading) Schelling would be a good way to fulfill that requirement.

**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.)**

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# Recalling a Proud American Moment

United Farm Workers founder Cesar Chavez, with quiet dignity and nonviolent tactics, rallied millions of Americans behind the cause of oppressed farm workers in the 1960s, a remarkable moment recalled in a new movie by Diego Luna, interviewed by Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Cesar Chavez, founder of the United Farm Workers and the subject of a new movie, was an unlikely leader of a movement that not only unionized one of the most oppressed segments of American labor but galvanized much of the United States behind the justice of their nonviolent cause.

Chavez, who died in 1993 at the age of 66, was a person known for listening to others, not for loud exhortations. And, he infused the movement with a quiet dignity that won support from a broad cross-section of Americans who supported the farm workers with a boycott of grapes that forced growers to recognize the union.



Now, Chavez's struggle is the focus of a new movie, "Cesar Chavez: History Is Made One Step at a Time," which itself represented a struggle for writer-director Diego Luna who has spent the last four years raising the money to make the picture. Luna, who is also an actor (starring in Alfonso Cuarón's 2001 film *Y Tu Mamá También* ), has had no shortage of roles being offered to him, but he considered the making of "Cesar Chavez" a work of love and commitment.

"It's important we don't forget this is part of American history," he told Dennis J Bernstein in an interview for the Flash[joints] show on Pacifica Radio. The film opened in theaters on Friday.

DL: I am happy to be to talk about the film. It is a feature film which talks about ten years in the life this man and everyone around the movement. It's about the amazing message they sent in this country in the 1960s, how they created the first union for farm workers in this country, and the grape boycott they did to connect with consumers in America.

DB: I would like to ask you about the multiple struggles to make the film.

DL: At the beginning, everyone was very supportive and the film business was shocked that there was no film about Cesar Chavez. When we tried looking for the financing, that's when we started to find trouble. Not many wanted this film to be made, or to participate as financiers. We went back to Mexico and started raising money there. We got together a good 70 percent of the financing, and then we found the right partners on this side of the border. We had to go the other way around. It was a paradox. We had to go to Mexico to tell the story of an American hero.

DB: This film that you spent four years on, what was at the core for you? Why did you decide to take this on, and what do you want the American people to come away with from this film?

DL: First of all, people need to learn about who Cesar was. You would be surprised at how little is known about the life of Cesar. I've been asking and finding out that many people don't know who he was, what they achieved, what they had to go through. It's important we don't forget this is part of American history. It's important for young people to know that this happened, is part of who they are and is a fantastic inspiring story that can show that change is in your hands.

It's a powerful film for kids to see. But it's also an important one for our community. If you are part of the Latino community, there are not many films that celebrate who we are. There are not many chances to go to the cinema and see a film that is about us. This one is, so it's about that journey. It's one of so many stories about our community that should be celebrated. It is about sending the message to everyone in Hollywood that our stories have to get to the screen.

DB: What did you learn from this film? What were you surprised about that you didn't know before?

DL: I knew they achieved something, but I didn't know the whole strategy behind it. I didn't know how ahead of their time they were. They organized that boycott with a non-violent movement, and sent a message to this country that a change was happening if we got involved. They went out and connected with consumers. They made a movement viral before viral was even in their heads. They connected with people in the whole country who thought they had nothing in common with farm workers, and then realized they had a lot in common.

Parents talked to other parents, mothers talked to mothers, saying when you buy a grape, you are supporting child labor. My six-year-old cannot go to school

because he is working to support the family. We don't make enough money to assure we can give an education to our kids. Then mothers stopped buying grapes. It's as simple as that. I learned that it's about telling personal stories. About getting out there and telling your story and finding out who thinks like you do. We are not alone here.

DB: It's been over 50 years since Edward R. Murrow made his famous documentary "Harvest of Shame." As I speak to you, between 1,000 and 1,100 undocumented workers who do some of the hardest work that we all depend on, are being removed from this country, at an accelerated rate. We are going to reach about two million under Obama. How do you see your film in that context? Would you like it to play a part in this transformation, bringing awareness to help end this type of suffering?

DL: I definitely hope this film participates in the bigger struggle that is happening today by reflecting on how this country can allow more than 11 million workers not to have the rights of those who consume the fruit of their labor. Arturo Rodriguez, [president] of the United Farm Workers, said that 80 percent of the workers are undocumented. That is ridiculous. It is a new form of slavery, where these people are feeding the country but can barely feed their families.

I was talking to some people in Miami the other day who did a little documentary on the fields, and they found eight-year-old kids working still today. Conditions have changed for a few farm workers – in a few places in this country they have better conditions. But there is still a big change needed. It will happen if we consumers get involved, if we make sure we understand that their stories are our stories. I think the great and beautiful message of this movement that we need to be reminded of today is that it was about being united, about finding those things that connect each community in order to find the strength to collapse the very powerful industry in this country. They achieved it.

DB: Have you been to Arizona lately? How do you think your film is going to play in Phoenix, where being a brown person and speaking Spanish can be a major crime that can cost you up to your life?

DL: I was there. We did a big screening of the film, with a big celebration for the Cesar Chavez Foundation and the UFW. We were very loud and clear about the message that needs to be sent from Arizona to the rest of the country. Our community is very important to this country today. What this community has given to this country needs to be recognized. We cannot call this the land of freedom without immigration reform. It just doesn't connect.



DB: Earth Day is coming up. Cesar Chavez was very conscious of the earth, the vegetables. The farm workers are constantly struggling with the chemistry that makes the crops grow so well. Can you talk about his broad consciousness around food, eating and the bigger picture around the work?

DL: Today people worry so much about being organic, how the food grows, what is inside the product you are eating and how it affects you. But not many people think about the labor, the work behind it. You don't want to be part of a chain that is abusing people, that is making kids work, and does not respect the basic rights that every human being should have. You don't want to be part of that.

So we cannot worry so much about organic or not organic or grass fed. We need to think about all the human work behind the product we are eating. That is something Cesar brought attention to. There was a big boycott organized around pesticides, yet today pesticides are still a big, big issue in the health of this community. It is ridiculous that we are still debating so many things that to me sound so obvious.

DB: What is the role that Dolores Huerta played? How did her first-hand knowledge from being in the fields impact her work as the co-founder of the UFW with Chavez? Since she is still with us, was her testimony and experience an important part of making the film?

DL: Yes, but not just Dolores – there's many people. Since Cesar passed away, and we wanted to honor him, we sat down with his family. I worked closely with Paul Chavez who runs the Cesar Chavez Foundation, and many other people who were part of this movement like Gilbert Padilla and Jerry Cohen. I worked closely with Mark Grossman, who was his publicity person and who traveled more than 10 years with Cesar all around the country.

I am not doing a film that should play as a history lesson. It is a film that has to work as a film. It must connect and engage emotionally with the audiences. It's all about that personal and intimate angle that you can get. I concentrated a lot about what happened before and after the big events that are well documented – before that great speech, before the pilgrimage to Sacramento. What mattered to me were the little moments when he was a husband, a father.

To get all that information, I needed everyone around Cesar to feed me with the information and details you cannot find in books. Dolores read the script and gave us notes, then she saw the film. The family gave me tons of notes. Helen Chavez, his wife, was very important. I had a beautiful conversation with her for 3-4 hours. She came to say hi and give us her blessing. She started talking, and talking and suddenly she really opened up and gave us so many details that I

had to go back and re-write the script.

DB: That's very beautiful. I assume you recorded that conversation?

DL: Yes, I recorded it. When she started talking about Fernando, I said this is going to be the core of the film – his relation with this son. Cesar was just a man like us all. He was a father struggling to communicate with his son. While Cesar is doing this amazing sacrifice, he was giving away the opportunity to be next to his kids, for change to happen, to be able to deliver something better for them and the people around them.

From the perspective of his son, he's been abandoned. That's a very dramatic thing and I don't know if I would be able to take it as far as Cesar did, as a father. That is something that can connect with everyone. We are all sons, parents. We can see it from one or the other perspective. That is what reminds us that this is just another regular man. He said many times, this is the story of an ordinary man who did something extraordinary.

DB: His declaration for non-violence, fasting, made this ordinary man compared with people like Mahatma Gandhi. Are there films that you used as models? People are talking about films like "Salt of the Earth" and "Grapes of Wrath." Are these films that you would like this film to be contextualized with?

DL: These are films that I saw in the process of making this one, and they definitely served as an inspiration. What I wanted to avoid was to create a saint, to idolize a character so that he becomes unreal. I always wanted to remind everyone that this is a movement of people who have their feet on the ground. They are here with us. We could be one of them. We could bring change to whatever issue we have in our community. We can be a part of change.

I wanted to do a film that would feel personal and intimate. It would have its epic moments, but would always remind you that it's more about the feeling that you are the only one allowed into a personal world, to feel the intimacy. Trying to portray the family was very important to me. It was a very complex family with eight kids that spoke English to their kids, but Spanish to their parents. I showed the troubles of Helen, as the mother who had to work as well as contribute to the union, where she worked hard. Cesar was great at organizing, putting the strategy together. He wasn't a great speaker. He didn't like attention, to grab the mike and be in front of everything.

DB: He was better at silence.

DL: Yes, silence, and listening was a great tool for him. It was great for his community because they were ignored for such a long time. Somebody finally came and took the time to listen to their stories. It gave them confidence. I love

that. I always wanted the film to feel real, that you could touch and smell it, to feel a part of it. I didn't want people to feel alienated, that it was the story of someone that is so special that it's unreachable.

I hope people can see the film and choose to be part of what is going on right now. This is not just about Cesar Chavez, but is about our whole community that needs celebration. They did amazing things. The film should be part of that celebration.

**Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of *Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom*.**

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## Finding a Way to Execute

In a Red State like Oklahoma, the death penalty is politically popular, especially among Republican politicians looking over their shoulders at possible Tea Party challengers. So the state government is taking no chances that a couple of inmates escape execution, writes Richard L. Fricker.

By Richard L. Fricker

For the second time in less than a month Oklahoma's Republican Gov. Mary Fallin and Attorney General Scott Pruitt have suffered a judicial smackdown in their attempts to execute two inmates. This time the state legislature also took the hit as another "ideologue law" was struck down by the courts.

Oklahoma County District Court Judge Patricia Parish ruled Wednesday that the 2011 state law making execution protocol secret was unconstitutional because it denied inmates access to the courts. The law in question deprives the public access to any information as to how executions are carried out specifically the types of drugs used on inmates, suppliers, amounts paid, or names of doctors and pharmacists.

The ruling came as the result of a lawsuit filed by death row inmates Clayton Derrell Lockett and Charles Fredrick Warner, originally slated to die by lethal injection this month for separate murders committed in the 1990s. The pair challenged the state's protocol because drugs previously used are unavailable and earlier executions had been marked by claims of pain by inmates as they died and by prolonged struggles during the death process.

Attorney General Pruitt issued a statement on Wednesday saying the decision would be appealed. Members of his staff have openly vowed the pair would be

executed, eventually.

The debate began five years ago as manufacturers of pentobarbital, the execution drug of choice, began refusing to supply states using the drug for executions. Most of the manufacturers are owned by European corporations where the death penalty is banned. Participating in an execution at any level could result in serious sanctions and fines.

As sources for the drug began to become scarce, various states including Oklahoma and Missouri turned to "compounding pharmacies." These outlets mix designer drugs not commonly manufactured by mainline pharmaceutical companies. Compounding pharmacies are largely unregulated and were able to substitute untested combinations of drugs to induce death. In general these pharmacies were paid in secret and in cash.

The Oklahoma legislature passed HB 1991 during the 2011 session in an attempt to protect these pharmacies and to conceal the type of drug cocktail being administered, the monies paid and the regimen for testing and maintaining the drugs. HB 1991 was enacted after a pharmaceutical supplier called Oklahoma administrators twice to say the drug would no longer be made available.

The portion of the law under challenge says, "The identity of all persons who participate in or administer the execution process and persons who supply the drugs, medical supplies or medical equipment for the execution shall be confidential and shall not be subject to discovery in any civil or criminal proceedings. The purchase of drugs, medical supplies or medical equipment necessary to carry out the execution shall not be subject to the provisions of the Oklahoma Central Purchasing Act."

State Sen. Constance Johnson, one of only three senators to vote against the act, said Wednesday, "They rushed this thing through; it was fast-tracked. I doubt many of the senators even knew what they were voting on."

Sen. Johnson, an ardent death penalty opponent, said abolitionists were celebrating the ruling. "It's wonderful" the Democrat said. "They only passed this to keep the conservative agenda going."

When the bill was introduced on Feb. 15, 2011, she said, "we didn't know all the behind-the-scenes shenanigans they were pulling." After passage, Oklahoma began substituting statute-prescribed drugs for cocktails from compounding pharmacies.

ACLU Executive Director Ryan Kiesel said Judge Parish's ruling was "a tremendous victory for both the abolitionists and the champions of transparency."

AG spokesman Aaron Cooper said in a prepared statement, "The entire reason for

Oklahoma's confidentiality statute is to protect those who provide lethal injection drugs to the state from threats, coercion and intimidation."

Cooper did not address why the types of drugs, amount and source of payment should also remain secret. It is known that Oklahoma has paid out nearly \$50,000 for death drugs since HB 1991 passed from what is termed "petty cash."

Early this month, the Court of Criminal Appeals granted a stay of execution by a 5-0 vote, noting they doubted that Attorney General Pruitt would be able to secure proper drugs within the original execution timeframe. Just this week, the state announced it had changed the execution protocol, but declined to say how it intended to carry out the executions.

Judge Parish said it is precisely the unwillingness to disclose such information that deprives the inmates of access to the courts because they have no information on which to file appeals and must accept death at the hands of the state by whatever means the state chooses.

In a state that has passed several "sanctity of life" laws against abortion and contraception, Oklahoma has shown itself vigorously up to the task of killing convicts and even installed a back-up plan if the drug scheme was rejected by the courts.

HB 1991 provides that "B. If the execution of the sentence of death as provided in subsection A of this section is held unconstitutional by an appellate court of competent jurisdiction, then the sentence of death shall be carried out by electrocution.

"C. If the execution of the sentence of death as provided in subsections A and B of this section is held unconstitutional by an appellate court of competent jurisdiction, then the sentence of death shall be carried out by firing squad."

Lockett and Warner remain under a death sentence with their execution set for April 22 and 29, respectively. In the meantime, politics is the backdrop of this death struggle in a state said to value life. The governor and attorney general wait nervously to see if they draw a Tea Party primary opponent who will accuse them of being soft on crime.

Filing deadline for state offices ends April 11 11 days before Lockett is currently set to meet his death, by whatever means the state shall choose, or maybe not. But the decision whether Lockett and Warner live or die rests not with Gov. Fallin or AG Pruitt but with the courts.

***Richard L. Fricker lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoma Observer. His latest book, The Last Day of the War, is available***

at <https://www.createspace.com/3804081> or at [www.richardfricker.com](http://www.richardfricker.com). A version of this story appeared at [okobserver.net](http://okobserver.net).

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## The Danger of False Narrative

**Exclusive:** Like a decade ago with Iraq, Official Washington's pundits and pols are locked shoulder-to-shoulder in a phalanx of misguided consensus on Ukraine, presenting a false narrative that is taking U.S. policy into dangerous directions, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The American people got a nasty taste of the danger that can come with false narrative when they were suckered into the Iraq War based on bogus claims that Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction that he planned to share with al-Qaeda.

Nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers died in the conflict along with hundreds thousands of Iraqis. The war's total financial cost probably exceeded \$1 trillion, a vast sum that siphoned off America's economic vitality and forced cutbacks in everything from education to road repair. Plus, the war ended up creating an Iraqi base for al-Qaeda terrorists that had not existed before.

But perhaps an even more dangerous problem coming out of the Iraq War was that almost no one in Official Washington who pushed the false narrative whether in politics or in the press was held accountable in any meaningful way. Many of the same pols and pundits remain in place today, pushing similar false narratives on new crises, from Ukraine to Syria to Iran.

Those false narratives and their cumulative effect on policymaking now represent a clear and present danger to the Republic and, indeed, to the world. The United States, after all, is the preeminent superpower with unprecedented means for delivering death and destruction. But almost nothing is being done to address this enduring American crisis of deception.

Today, Official Washington is marching in lockstep just as it did in 2002-03 when it enforced the misguided consensus on Iraq's WMD. The latest case is Ukraine where Russian President Vladimir Putin is accused of committing "aggression" to expand Russian territory at the expense of noble "democratic" reformers in Kiev.

Not only is this the dominant storyline in the U.S. media; it is virtually the

only narrative permitted in the mainstream press. But the real narrative is that the United States and the European Union provoked this crisis by trying to take Ukraine out of its traditional sphere of influence, Russia, and put it in to a new association with the EU.

While there's nothing inherently wrong with Ukraine joining with the EU or staying with Russia (or a combination of the two) depending on the will of the people and their elected representatives this latest U.S./EU plan was motivated, at least in part, by hostility toward Russia.

That attitude was expressed in a Sept. 26, 2013, op-ed in the Washington Post by Carl Gershman, the neoconservative president of the National Endowment for Democracy, which doles out more than \$100 million in U.S. funds a year to help organize "activists," support "journalists" and finance programs that can be used to destabilize targeted governments.

Gershman, whose job amounts to being a neocon paymaster, expressed antagonism toward Russia in the op-ed and identified Ukraine as "the biggest prize," the capture of which could ultimately lead to the ouster of Putin, who "may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself."

The NED, which was founded in 1983 to do in relative openness what the CIA had long done in secret, listed 65 projects that it was financing in Ukraine, using U.S. taxpayers' money. In other words, Gershman's op-ed reflected U.S. policy at least inside the State Department's still-neocon-dominated bureaucracy which viewed the EU's snatching of Ukraine from Russia's embrace as a way to weaken Russia and hurt Putin.

### **'European Aspirations'**

Later, as the Ukrainian crisis unfolded, another neocon, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, reminded Ukrainian businessmen that the United States had invested \$5 billion in their "European aspirations," implying that the U.S. expected something for all this money.

You might wonder why the American taxpayers should spend \$5 billion on the "European aspirations" of Ukraine when there are so many needs at home, but a more relevant question may be: Why is the United States spending that much money to stir up trouble on Russia's border? The Cold War is over but the hostility continues.

Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates described this thinking in his memoir, *Duty*, explaining the view of President George H.W. Bush's Defense Secretary Dick Cheney: "When the Soviet Union was collapsing in late 1991, Dick wanted to see the dismantlement not only of the Soviet Union and the Russian empire but of

Russia itself, so it could never again be a threat to the rest of the world.”

As Vice President, Cheney and the neocons around him pursued a similar strategy during George W. Bush’s presidency, expanding NATO aggressively to the east and backing anti-Russian regimes in the region including the hardline Georgian government, which provoked a military confrontation with Moscow in 2008.

Since President Barack Obama never took full control of his foreign policy apparatus leaving the Bush Family apparatchik Gates at Defense and naming neocon-leaning Democrat Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State the bureaucratic momentum toward confronting Russia continued. Indeed, the elevation of operatives like Nuland, the wife of prominent neocon Robert Kagan, gave new impetus to the anti-Russian strategy.

Secretary of State John Kerry, who got his “dream job” last year with the considerable help of his neocon chum Sen. John McCain, has acted as a kind of sock puppet for this neocon-dominated State Department bureaucracy.

Either because he is overly focused on his legacy-building initiative of an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal or because he has long since sold out his anti-war philosophy from the Vietnam War era, Kerry has repeatedly taken the side of the hawks: on Syria, Iran and now Ukraine.

On Syria and Iran, it was largely the behind-the-scenes cooperation between Obama and Putin that tamped down those crises last year and opened a pathway for diplomacy much to the chagrin of the neocons who favored heightened confrontations, U.S. military strikes and “regime change.” Thus, it became a neocon priority to divide Obama from Putin. Ukraine became the wedge.

## **The Crisis**

The Ukrainian crisis took a decisive turn on Nov. 21, 2013, when President Viktor Yanukovich rebuffed a deal offered by the EU and the International Monetary Fund because it would have imposed harsh austerity on the already suffering Ukrainian people. Yanukovich opted instead for a more generous aid package of \$15 billion from Russia, with few strings attached.

But Yanukovich’s turning away from the EU infuriated the U.S. State Department as well as pro-European demonstrators who filled the Maidan square in Kiev. The protests reflected the more anti-Russian attitudes of western Ukraine, where Kiev is located, but not the more pro-Russian feelings of eastern and southern Ukraine, Yanukovich’s strongholds that accounted for his electoral victory in 2010.

Though the Maidan protests involved hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians simply



eager for a better life and a less corrupt government, some of the most militant factions came from far-right parties, like Svoboda, and even neo-Nazi militias from the Right Sektor. When protesters seized City Hall, Nazi symbols and a Confederate battle flag were put on display.

As the protests grew angrier, U.S. officials, including Assistant Secretary Nuland and Sen. McCain, openly sided with the demonstrators despite banners honoring Stepan Bandera, a World War II-era fascist whose paramilitary forces collaborated with the Nazis in the extermination of Poles and Jews. Nuland passed out cookies and McCain stood shoulder to shoulder with right-wing Ukrainian nationalists. [For more on the role of Ukrainian neo-Nazis, watch this report from the BBC.]

On Feb. 20, the violence intensified as mysterious snipers fired on both protesters and police. As police fought back, neo-Nazi militias hurled Molotov cocktails. More than 80 people were killed including more than a dozen police officers, but the U.S. press blamed the Yanukovich government for the violence, portraying the demonstrators as innocent victims.

Official Washington's narrative was set. Yanukovich, who had been something of a hero when he was moving toward the EU agreement in the early fall, became a villain after he decided that the IMF's demands were too severe and especially after he accepted the deal from Putin. The Russian president was undergoing his own demonization in the U.S. news media, including an extraordinary denunciation by NBC at the end of the Sochi Winter Olympics.

In the U.S. media's black-and-white scenario, the "pro-democracy" demonstrators in the Maidan were the good guys who were fired upon by the bad-guy police. The New York Times even stopped reporting that some of those killed were police, instead presenting the more pleasing but phony narrative that "more than 80 protesters were shot to death by the police as an uprising spiraled out of control in mid-February."

To this day, the identity of the snipers who touched off the conflagration remains in serious doubt. I was told at the time that some U.S. intelligence analysts believed the shooters were associated with the far-right opposition groups, not with the Yanukovich government.

That analysis gained support when a phone call surfaced between Estonia's Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and European Union foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton, Paet reported on a conversation that he had with a doctor in Kiev who said the sniper fire that killed protesters was the same that killed police officers.

As reported by the UK Guardian, "During the conversation, Paet quoted a woman named Olga who the Russian media identified her as Olga Bogomolets, a doctor blaming snipers from the opposition shooting the protesters."

Paet said, "What was quite disturbing, this same Olga told that, well, all the evidence shows that people who were killed by snipers from both sides, among policemen and people from the streets, that they were the same snipers killing people from both sides.

"So she also showed me some photos, she said that as medical doctor, she can say it is the same handwriting, the same type of bullets, and it's really disturbing that now the new coalition, that they don't want to investigate what exactly happened. So there is a stronger and stronger understanding that behind snipers it was not Yanukovych, it was somebody from the new coalition."

Ashton replied: "I think we do want to investigate. I didn't pick that up, that's interesting. Gosh."

Though this exchange does not prove that the opposition used snipers to provoke the violence, it is relevant information that could have altered how Americans viewed the worsening crisis in Ukraine. However, except for an on-the-scene report from CNN with the same doctor, the Paet-Ashton phone call disappeared into the U.S. media's black hole reserved for information that doesn't fit with a preferred narrative.

### **Black Hats/White Hats**

So, with giant black hats glued onto Yanukovych and Putin and white hats on the protesters, the inspiring but false U.S. narrative played out in heroic fashion, with only passing reference to the efforts by Yanukovych to make concessions and satisfy the protesters' demands.

On Feb. 21, Yanukovych tried to defuse the violence by signing an agreement with three European countries in which he accepted reduced powers, moved up elections so he could be voted out of office, and pulled back the police. That last step, however, opened the way for the neo-Nazi militias to seize government buildings and force Yanukovych to flee for his life.

Then, on Feb. 22, under the watchful eye of these modern-day storm troopers, a rump parliament in violation of constitutional procedures voted to impeach Yanukovych, who reemerged in Russia to denounce the actions as a coup.

Despite this highly irregular process, the U.S. government following the lead of the State Department bureaucracy immediately recognized the new leadership as Ukraine's "legitimate" government. Putin later appealed to Obama in support of

the Feb. 21 agreement but was told the ouster of Yanukovych and the installation of the U.S.-backed government were a *fait accompli*.

The rump parliament in Kiev also accused Yanukovych of mass murder in connection with the shootings in the Maidan – an accusation that got widespread play in the U.S. media – although curiously the new regime also decided not to pursue an investigation into the identity of the mysterious snipers, a point that drew no U.S. media interest.

And, a new law was passed in line with the desires of right-wing Ukrainian nationalists to eliminate Russian as one of the country's official languages. New government leaders also were dispatched to the Russian-ethnic regions to take charge, moves that, in turn, prompted resistance from Russian-ethnic citizens in the east and south.

It was in this context and with appeals from Yanukovych and ethnic Russians for help that Putin got permission from the Duma to intervene militarily if necessary. Russian troops, already stationed in bases in Crimea, moved to block the Kiev regime from asserting its authority in that strategic Black Sea peninsula.

Amidst this political chaos, the Crimean parliament voted to break away from Ukraine and join Russia, putting the question to a popular vote on March 16. Not surprisingly, given the failed Ukrainian state, its inability to pay for basic services, and Crimea's historic ties to Russia, Crimean voters approved the switch overwhelmingly. Exit polls showed about a 93 percent majority, just three points less than the official results.

Russia then moved to formally reclaim Crimea, which had been part of Russia dating back to the 1700s, while also massing troops along the borders of eastern Ukraine, presumably as a warning to the Kiev regime not to crush popular resistance to the anti-Yanukovych coup.

### **A Divergent Narrative**

So, the factual narrative suggests that the Ukrainian crisis was stoked by elements of the U.S. government, both in the State Department and in Congress, encouraging and exploiting popular resentments in western Ukraine. The goal was to pull Ukraine out of Russia's orbit and put it into the EU's gravitational pull.

When Yanukovych balked at IMF's demands, a process of "regime change" was put in motion with the U.S. and EU even turning their backs on the Feb. 21 agreement in which Yanukovych made a series of concessions negotiated by European countries. The deal was cast aside in a matter of hours with no attempt by the West to

uphold its terms.

Meanwhile, Putin, who was tied up with the Sochi Olympics and obsessed over fears that it would be targeted by Islamist terrorists, appears to have been caught off-guard by the events in Ukraine. He then reacted to the alarming developments on Russia's border, including the emergence of neo-Nazis as prominent figures in the coup regime in Kiev.

In other words, a logical and indeed realistic way to see the Ukraine-Crimea crisis is that Putin was largely responding to events that were outside his control. And that is important to understand, because that would mean that Putin was not the aggressor spoiling for a fight.

If there was premeditation, it was coming from the West and particularly from the neocons who remain highly influential in Official Washington. The neocons also had motive to go after Putin, since he helped Obama use diplomacy to quiet down dangerous crises with Syria and Iran while the neocons were pushing for more confrontation and U.S. military strikes.

But how did the U.S. news media present the Ukraine story to the American people?

First, there was the simplistic and misleading depiction of the pro-EU demonstrations as "democratic" when they mostly reflected the discontent of the pro-European population of western Ukraine, not the views of the more pro-Russian Ukrainians in the east and south who had pushed Yanukovych to victory in the 2010 election. Last time I checked, "democracy" referred to rule by the majority, not mob rule.

Then, despite the newsworthiness of the neo-Nazi role in the protests, the U.S. news media blacked-out these brown shirts because that ugly reality undercut the pleasing good-guys-vs.-bad-guys storyline. Then, when the snipers opened fire on protesters and policemen, the U.S. news media jumped to the conclusion that the killers were working for Yanukovych because that, too, fit with the desired narrative.

The violent overthrow of the democratically elected Yanukovych was hailed as an expression of "democracy," again with the crucial role of the neo-Nazi militias largely airbrushed from the picture. The unanimous and near unanimous parliamentary votes that followed as storm troopers patrolled the halls of government buildings were further cited as evidence of "democracy" and "reform."

The anger and fear of Ukrainians in the east and south were dismissed as Russian "propaganda" and Crimea's move to extract itself from this political chaos was denounced as Russian "aggression." U.S. news outlets casually denounced Putin as

a “thug.” Washington Post columnist George F. Will called Putin “Stalin’s spawn.”

Former Secretary of State Clinton cited the Crimea situation to compare Putin to Hitler and to suggest that Putin was intent on recreating the old Soviet empire, though Crimea is only 10,000 square miles, about one-tenth of one percent the size of the old Soviet Union.

And, it wasn’t just that some or nearly all mainstream U.S. news organizations adopted this one-sided and misguided narrative. It was a consensus throughout all major U.S. news outlets. With a uniformity that one would normally associate with a totalitarian state, no competing narrative was permitted in the Big Media, regardless of the actual facts.

Whenever any of the more complex reality was included in a story, it was presented as Russian claims that were then followed by argumentative challenges. Yet, when U.S. officials made preposterous remarks about how uncivilized it was to violate another country’s sovereignty, the hypocrisy of their points went uncontested.

For instance, Secretary of State Kerry denounced Putin’s intervention in Crimea by declaring, “you just don’t in the 21st Century behave in 19th Century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped-up pretext.” But you had to look on the Internet to find any writer who dared note Kerry’s breathtaking double standard, since he voted in 2002 to authorize the U.S. invasion of Iraq in pursuit of hidden WMD stockpiles that didn’t exist.

This cognitive dissonance pervaded the U.S. press and the political debate over Ukraine and Crimea. The long history of U.S. interventions in foreign countries almost always in violation of international law was forgotten, except for the rare occasion when some Russian “claim” about American hypocrisy was cited and then swatted down. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“America’s Staggering Hypocrisy.”](#)]

### **Careerism Prevails**

Having worked many years in the mainstream U.S. news media, I fully understand how this process works and why it happens. Amid the patriotic chest-thumping that usually accompanies a U.S. military operation or American righteous outrage over some other nation’s actions, it is dangerous for your career to go against the flag-waving.

But it’s always been my view that such self-censorship is faux patriotism, as much as the happy storylines are false narratives. Even if many Americans don’t want the truth, it is still the job of journalists to give them the truth. Otherwise, the U.S. democratic process is distorted and made dangerous.

Propaganda leads to bad policies as politicians even when they know better start parroting the errant conventional wisdom. We've seen this now with President Obama who more than anyone realizes the value of Putin's cooperation on Syria and Iran but now must join in denouncing the Russian president and demanding sanctions.

Obama also surely knows that Yanukovich's ouster violated both Ukraine's constitution and principles of democracy, but he pretends otherwise. And, he knows that Crimea's secession reflected the will of the people, but he must insist that their vote was illegitimate.

At a March 25 news conference in the Netherlands, Obama toed the line of the hypocritical false narrative. He declared, "we have said consistently throughout this process is that it is up to the Ukrainian people to make their own decisions about how they organize themselves and who they interact with." He then added that the Crimean referendum was "sloppily organized over the course of two weeks" and thus a sham.

If Obama were telling the truth, he would have noted that Yanukovich for all his faults was democratically elected in a process that was deemed fair by international observers. Obama would have acknowledged that Yanukovich agreed on Feb. 21 to a process that would have allowed for an orderly and legal process for his replacement.

Obama would have admitted, too, that the violent coup and the actions of the rump parliament in Kiev were both illegal and, indeed, "sloppily organized" and that the U.S. government acted hastily in recognizing this coup regime. But double standards seem to be the only standards these days in Official Washington.

What is perhaps tragic about Obama is that he does know better. He is not a stupid man. But he doesn't dare go against the grain for fear of being denounced as "naive" about Putin or "weak" in not facing down "Russian aggression." So, he reads the lines that have been, in effect, dictated by neocons within his own administration.

I'm told that Obama, like Putin, was caught off-guard by the Ukraine crisis. But Obama's unwillingness or inability to recast the false narrative left him with no political choice but to join in the Putin-bashing. That, in turn, means that Putin won't be there to help Obama navigate around future U.S. war plans that the neocons have in mind for Syria and Iran.

Indeed, neutralizing the Obama-Putin relationship may have been the chief reason why the neocons were so eager to stoke the Ukrainian fires – and it shows how

false narratives can get people killed.

[For more of Consortiumnews.com's exclusive coverage of the Ukraine crisis, see ["Why Europe Shies from Ukraine Showdown"](#); ["WPost's Anti-Putin Group Think"](#); ["Neocons' Ukraine-Syria-Iran Gambit"](#); ["Mainstream US Media is Lost in Ukraine"](#); ["Corporate Interests Behind Ukraine Putsch"](#); ["Can Obama Speak Strongly for Peace?"](#); ["Neocons Have Weathered the Storm"](#); ["Crimea's Case for Leaving Ukraine"](#); ["The 'We-Hate-Putin' Group Think"](#); ["Putin or Kerry: Who's Delusional?"](#); ["America's Staggering Hypocrisy"](#); ["What Neocons Want from Ukraine Crisis"](#); ["Ukraine: One 'Regime Change' Too Many?"](#); ["A Shadow US Foreign Policy"](#); ["Cheering a 'Democratic' Coup in Ukraine"](#); ["Neocons and the Ukraine Coup."](#)]

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](#).

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## Sheldon Adelson's Own GOP Primary

Part of Ukraine's crisis stems from the political power of 10 "oligarchs," billionaires in a society with vast income inequality. It is a future that Americans seem headed toward, as one U.S. "oligarch," Sheldon Adelson, picks his Republican presidential favorite, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

From the 1890s until finally outlawed by the Supreme Court some 50 years later, one device used in the segregated South to maintain the white power structure and to prevent blacks from any effective political role was called the white primary.

This was a sort of preliminary election, open only to white Democrats, that ostensibly was a nonofficial event not run by the state and thus did not adhere to laws and constitutional principles providing for equal treatment and universal voting rights. There would be a later official election in which blacks could vote, but it usually was meaningless because electoral contests had in effect already been decided in the white primary.

Now we have a procedure reminiscent of the white primary that is being called

the “Sheldon primary,” as in political bankroller Sheldon Adelson. Republican presidential hopefuls are kneeling at the feet of the casino magnate in the hope of receiving his blessing, and thus his money, as the party’s nominee for 2016.

It seems that Adelson, who together with his wife dropped \$93 million on political campaigns in 2012, has concluded that he erred in that year in backing for too long candidates whose ideology appealed most to him but ultimately proved unelectable. This time he wants to anoint early on someone he can stick with right through the general election. He doesn’t want to see messy primary contests that would weaken the eventual nominee.

If things work the way Adelson wants, and that he is willing and able to pay to make them work that way, caucuses in Iowa or the primary in New Hampshire will matter less than the Sheldon primary. Last time he let us have a good hard look at the likes of Newt Gingrich while votes in Republican primaries still meant something. Next time he doesn’t want primary voters to have that much of a choice.

For this man who will likely have such enormous influence on who will be the Republican presidential nominee, the Republican Party isn’t even his first love among political parties. That would be the Likud party. Adelson’s money also plays a very big role in Israeli politics, much of it in subsidizing a free-distribution newspaper, *Israel HaYom*, which has the largest circulation of any daily newspaper in Israel and functions as a cheerleader for Benjamin Netanyahu and Likud.

Nor is the United States Adelson’s first love among countries. He has said that when he performed military service as a young man it “unfortunately” was in a U.S. uniform rather than an Israeli one. He has expressed the wish that his son become a sniper in the Israeli Defense Forces.

Back in the United States, Adelson does have some unsurprising plutocratic impulses, but with a blatantly narrow focus. Perhaps when the objective is to advance the interests not only of the one percent, but of whatever small fraction of one percent that an estimated net worth of \$38 billion makes a person a part of, narrowness is inevitable.

Adelson’s biggest push for, and most lavish financing of, a domestic U.S. issue is his attempt to get online gambling outlawed. The ostensible purpose is to protect the morals of our youth, but of course it also would protect the market share of his casinos.

Adelson’s most distinctive foreign policy pronouncement is that a nuclear weapon should be dropped on Iran.



The Sheldon primary is the sort of thing we get when the Supreme Court, an earlier incarnation of which eliminated the white primary, shreds efforts to limit the role of money in U.S. elections.

Even if that mistake cannot be corrected, voters, including those Republican primary voters in New Hampshire and elsewhere, ought at least to be fully aware of what type of man is trying to use his wealth to make their choice for them.

**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.)**

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## GOP Looks to Take the Senate

Leading political prognosticators see the Republicans winning total control of the U.S. Congress this fall, meaning that President Obama's political agenda would be effectively finished. But will this bleak prospect finally force Democrats to fight back, wonders Beverly Bandler.

By Beverly Bandler

The Democrats are facing a tough political map in their fight to keep control of the U.S. Senate in 2014. Most of the states that will be casting ballots for the Senate in 2014 are Republican leaning; seven of the 21 Democratic-held seats are in states carried by Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney in 2012, while just one of the 15 contested Republican seats is in a state won by President Barack Obama.

Also, with the exception of three Senate races to replace senators who died or resigned, the seats in play this year were last contested in 2008, "an extraordinarily strong year for Democrats," notes the respected political prognosticator Nate Silver.

In July 2013, Silver forecast that the race for Senate control was a toss-up, but his most recent forecast on March 23 [stated](#), "We think the Republicans are now slight favorites to win at least six seats and capture the chamber."

The Democrats' position has deteriorated somewhat since last summer, with President Obama's approval ratings down to 42 or 43 percent from an average of about 45 percent before, Silver said. Furthermore, as compared with 2010 or 2012, it has been suggested that the GOP has done a better job of recruiting

credible candidates.

Silver said Democrat-held seats likely to be picked up by Republicans are in West Virginia, South Dakota, Montana and Arkansas, with Republicans then having to win just two toss-up races in Alaska, North Carolina or Michigan, or pull off a modest upset in a state like New Hampshire. They'll also have to avoid losses in Georgia and Kentucky, he said.

Democrats have challenged Silver's prediction. Guy Cecil, the executive director of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, issued a rebuttal on Monday, saying: "Silver was wrong in 2012" when he also projected a likely Republican Senate takeover.

"In fact, in August of 2012 Silver forecast a 61 percent likelihood that Republicans would pick up enough seats to claim the majority," Cecil said. "Three months later, Democrats went on to win 55 seats."

But Silver is not alone in seeing the GOP advantage. "Senate Republicans seem to have a strong chance at gaining the six seats they need for a majority in the chamber," according to political professor John J. Pitney Jr., "but their task will be tougher if they drop any of the seats that they already have."

Late last year, political analyst Charlie Cook said "Democrats need to win 3 of the 7 most competitive Senate races to hold the chamber," while "Republicans would need to win 5 of these 7 seats including unseating 3 Democrats to win a 51 seat majority on the Senate. Six of these seven states were won by Romney in 2012 (AK, AR, LA, NC, GA, KY), and one was won by Obama (MI)."

But control of the Senate would likely be in play again in 2016, a presidential election year, Cook and other observers believe.

The Senate "will be very closely divided after the 2014 election and could swing to the other side in 2014 and again in 2016." Cook concluded this March. "It's hard to see how the GOP doesn't score a net gain of at least four seats, shaving the Democratic majority to 51 seats. At the other extreme, it would not be impossible for Republicans to score a net gain of seven or eight seats, giving the GOP a 52-48 majority, or even one of 53-47."

Cook believes, "The odds are high after this election that the majority party will have 53 seats or less, but it is important to remember that in 2016, the shoe will be on the other foot in terms of seat exposure. This year, Democrats have 21 seats up, compared with 15 for Republicans; in 2016, the GOP will have 24 seats up, while Democrats will only have 10. It's not implausible that Republicans could pick up a majority in 2014 only to lose it again in 2016, with the Senate teetering on the edge for the foreseeable future."

The view of Kyle Kondik of *Sabato's Crystal Ball* is that 16 races are potentially competitive at the moment. "Of those races, 14 are currently held by Democrats, and just two are held by Republicans," Kondik said. "Nearly all the competitive seats this cycle are in places where Democrats are playing defense."

The chief Republican worry is that some of the GOP primaries will produce Tea Party nominees who could be weak general election candidates, as has happened in the past two election cycles. These GOP primaries have been identified as key to watch: Georgia, Iowa, Colorado, Kentucky, Mississippi, Texas, Tennessee and South Carolina.

But it appears safe to say even months before the midterm elections that for Americans the days a half century ago when political scientist Clinton Rossiter could boast that America's party system reflected genius and that U.S. political parties were "creatures of compromise, coalitions of interest in which principle is muted and often even silenced" are long gone.

Congressional scholars Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein offered a worrisome assessment in 2012: "One of these parties has taken on the role of insurgent outlier; the Republicans have become ideologically extreme, scornful of compromise, and ardently opposed to the established social and economic policy regime."

Journalist Robert Parry, the editor of *ConsortiumNews*, has suggested that: "We've allowed the madness to dominate for three decades. Now, it may be impossible to govern responsibly with such a huge apparatus behind the madness."

Perhaps the only way to reverse the current trends is for Democrats to get out of their defensive crouch and stop being so averse to confrontation. Yet, even if they go on the offensive and marshal the evidence to support their positions, the odds may be against them, given the vast sums of money available to Republicans and the Right.

Political observer Bill Moyers calls the current struggle against extremist authoritarians masquerading as conservatives "the fight of our lives." But informed and decent American voters still have an opportunity to make a difference a vote is a voice.

The hard reality is that we are in a fight to save our representative democracy and we must face battle after battle, with 2014 midterms the next one looming.

**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.**

