

America's War Hawks Back in Flight

With America's government-and-media war hawks back in full flight preparing to swoop down on Syria as well as Iraq wiser heads might reflect on the chaos that previous adventures have caused, as Danny Schechter recalls.

By Danny Schechter

Sound the bugle! Get the press to march along; we are going to war. Again!
Enemies R 'Us!

For a long time with the killing of bin Laden, a jihadi fatigue had set in. With the apparent shriveling up of the Al Qaeda menace, America's threat-defining and -refining machinery was somewhat adrift. What had been so simple turned too complex to fuse into one sound-bite.

Former CIA official Thomas Fingar, now at Stanford University, describes his own frustration in finding out what U.S. policy priorities should be in national intelligence. He asked his colleagues to share the threats they worried about. He was soon inundated.

"When I was given responsibility for the process known as the National Intelligence Priorities Framework, almost 2,300 issues had been assigned priorities higher than zero, " he explained. "My first instruction was, 'Reduce the number'."

He knew they needed only one bad-ass enemy to focus fears and attract appropriations to fight. He had too many threats to respond to. They had to go. Now, he and the Obama administration have that new bad guy: the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS.

Political scientist/analyst Michael Brenner says Washington is in an ISIS panic: "The grotesque beheading of James Foley is stirring passions in Washington policy circles. From the highest levels of the Obama administration to the media pundits, emotions are flaring over what the United States should/could do. The act in itself has changed nothing insofar as IS' threat to the United States and its significance for Middle East politics are concerned. It is the mood that has been transformed. Irresistible impulse is displacing cool deliberation. The flood of commentary, as usual, reveals little in the way of rigorous logic but much in the way of disjointed thinking and unchecked emotion."

The response? Give us a war plan, and not just against ISIS, let's throw in Syria too. Money is apparently no object.

Breaking Defense.com reports: "US operations against the Islamic State of Iraq

and the Levant (or whatever we're calling it these days) have probably cost the country about \$100 million so far, according to one of the top defense budget experts. It's difficult to come up with a precise estimate for what current operations in Iraq are costing."

Don't forget, as Glenn Greenwald didn't, before the current focus on ISIS, the U.S. was bombarding Syria's Bashar al-Assad with calls that he step down amidst threats of overthrowing him.

"It was not even a year ago," Greenwald writes, "when we were bombarded with messaging that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is a Supreme Evil and Grave Threat, and that military action against his regime was both a moral and strategic imperative. Now the Obama administration and American political class is celebrating the one-year anniversary of the failed 'Bomb Assad!' campaign by starting a new campaign to bomb those fighting against Assad the very same side the U.S. has been arming over the last two years."

Recall: the campaign for bombing Assad's military was undercut when public opinion in the U.S. turned against it. The Obama administration negotiated instead, and accomplished something, eventually destroying Syria's stash of chemical weapons. Why emulate a success when you can make more mistakes?

That was then, and this is now. ISIS is the new boogiemer. The next stage of our assault is underway as we can deduce from a build up of recent press reports:

Daily Beast: Obama Wants ISIS War Plan

President Barack Obama wants to make a decision by the end of this week whether or not to expand his war against ISIS into Syria, report Josh Rogin and Eli Lake. However, nobody knows yet how we can do it, or what will happen next. Still, there are plenty of ominous headlines:

Syria and Isis committing war crimes, says UN

Alawites prepare as IS, Jabhat al-Nusra close in on regime areas

Drones a Step Toward Expanding War Into Syria

U.S. Mobilizes Allies to Widen Assault on ISIS

Specialops.org (Elite Magazine for Elite Warriors) reports:

"Members of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIS, were trained in 2012 by U.S. instructors working at a secret base in Jordan, according to informed Jordanian officials. The officials said dozens of ISIS members were trained at the time as part of covert aid to the insurgents targeting the regime

of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Syria. The officials said the training was not meant to be used for any future campaign in Iraq.

“The Jordanian officials said all ISIS members who received U.S. training to fight in Syria were first vetted for any links to extremist groups like al-Qaida.”

Now, there are reports that the CIA is forming new hit squads to use ISIS tactics against ISIS with an ISIS-like assassination offensive, to “cut off the head of the snake.” (Sounds like beheading doesn’t it?) Shh! Sounds like we are headed back to the dark side with killings, torture, renditions, secret sites, etc. Will that long-awaited CIA report now be seen as a manual for more of the same.

The last time the U.S. organized assassination teams in Iraq in 2003, it didn’t work out that well, And guess who else was involved? Israel trains US assassination squads in Iraq:

“Israel helping train US special forces in aggressive counter-insurgency (CI) operations in Iraq, including the use of assassination squads against guerrilla leaders, US intelligence and military sources said. ... The new CI unit made up of elite troops being put together in the Pentagon is called Task Force 121, New Yorker magazine reported. ... One of the planners, highly controversial ... Lt. Gen. William ‘Jerry’ Boykin ... with calls for his resignation after he told an Oregon congregation the US was at war with Satan who ‘wants to destroy us as a Christian army’.”

Ten years later in 2013 the German magazine Der Spiegel reported U.S. training Syrian rebels in Jordan. And so it goes, as once again, around and around, we become more and more like the enemy we warn against.

Back to Michael Brenner’s take on how our media hysteria is not helping, “There is a more general lesson to be learned from this latest exercise in ad hoc policy-making by press conference. The insistence of senior officials to speak at length in public on these complex, sensitive matters when there is no set policy is inimical to serious planning and diplomacy. If they feel compelled to react to events to satisfy the media and an agitated populace, they should just say a few well-chosen words and then declare themselves on the way to an important meeting preferably not in Martha’s Vineyard.

“Silence, though, is taken to be tantamount to death in the egocentric media age where image is all confusing random motion with focused action.” Amen.

Why look back? No one wants to learn anything! Iraq 2.0 was a disaster for President George W. Bush. Can we expect Iraq 3.0 under President Obama to be any

better? Afghanistan is a disaster. Israel failed in its aims in Gaza, whatever bloody “urban renewal” was imposed at a high human toll. Libya is a mess.

Knock, knock: raise your hand if you think Syria will become our next miracle?

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Libya's 'Regime Change' Chaos

America's war hawks, including then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, were thrilled by the Libyan “regime change” engineered through a U.S.- European bombing campaign in 2011. But now with Libya torn by civil war and Arab powers intervening, the “victory” has a bitter aftertaste, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

Within the past week the United Arab Emirates, aided by Egypt, conducted airstrikes against Islamist militias in Libya. The targeted forces are among the contestants in the surging turmoil and civil warfare in Libya.

The airstrikes do not appear to be part of a large and bold new initiative by Egypt and the UAE, which did not even publicly acknowledge what they had done. Nonetheless the strikes were, as an anonymous U.S. official put it, not constructive.

The incident, along with some questions about whether it had caught the United States by surprise, has led to some of the usual hand-wringing about how U.S. relations with allies are not what they should be, how there supposedly is region-wide dismay with a U.S. failure to do more to enforce order in the region, and how if the United States does not do more along this line there may be an interventionist free-for-all.

This type of reaction is inappropriate for at least two reasons. One is that it fails to take account of exactly how differences between putative partners do or do not make a difference. Sometimes such frictions matter for U.S. interests and sometimes they don't. Assuaging an ally is good for the United States if there is some payoff, not necessarily immediately, for its interests in behavior from the ally that is different from what it otherwise would be.

The other reason is that to the extent the United States may have encouraged

interventionist free-for-alls, it is because it has done too much rather than too little. The United States' own penchant for military interventions has been probably the biggest factor in a breakdown of previous noninterventionist norms in international relations.

The United States also has acquiesced in similar norm-breaking behavior by others that is easy for the Egyptians and Emiratis to see. As former ambassador Chas Freeman notes, "Gulf states and Egypt have seen many instances of Israel doing whatever it wants without us. They're saying, if Israel can use U.S. weapons to defy the U.S. and pursue its own foreign policy objectives, why can't they?"

Three valid observations are worth making about this episode. One is that the turmoil in Libya to which Egypt and the UAE are reacting followed directly from regime change in which Western intervention was instrumental. The United States played less of a leading role in that intervention than some other Western states did, and according to the Pottery Barn rule it does not own the resulting wreckage by itself. But that background is worth remembering.

Second, the airstrikes are a reminder that if forceful things are to be done in the Middle East, the United States doesn't necessarily have to be the one to do them. That principle applies to more constructive uses of force than hitting the Libyan militias. The UAE has a pretty good air force; maybe next time it can use it for more worthwhile purposes.

Third, the episode is a demonstration that even partners or allies are apt to be moved to action not to protect interests they share with us but to pursue objectives we do not share. Both Egypt and the UAE have reasons related to their own domestic politics and shaky legitimacy for taking sides in the Libyan internal war against the Islamists.

The United States, by contrast, has no good reason to weigh in on one side or the other in that war. If friends and allies of ours get impatient with us for not doing more on behalf of goals that are important to them but not to us, tough.

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A Late Summer Hiatus

We may not be filing our usual allotment of stories through the end of August due to vacations. So we invite readers to look back at earlier Consortiumnews.com stories, including those highlighted in our latest [“In Case You Missed”](#) posting for July.

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in July focused on the ongoing crisis in Ukraine (especially the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17), the Israeli war on Gaza, and the real history of Thomas Jefferson.

[“The Risk of a Ukraine Bloodbath”](#) by Ray McGovern, July 2, 2014

[“Itching for a Genocide”](#) by Robert Parry, July 3, 2014

[“Thomas Jefferson: America’s Founding Sociopath”](#) by Robert Parry, July 4, 2014

[“An Insider’s View of Nixon’s ‘Treason’”](#) by Robert Parry, July 5, 2014

[“NYT Dishes More Ukraine Propaganda”](#) by Robert Parry, July 6, 2014

[“Escalating Domestic Warfare”](#) by Brian J. Trautman, July 8, 2014

[“Plunging toward Armageddon in Israel”](#) by William R. Polk, July 9, 2014

[“NYT Protects the Fogh Machine”](#) by Robert Parry, July 9, 2014

[“The US Persecution of Sami al-Arian”](#) by Lawrence Davidson, July 10, 2014

[“The Brutal Failure of Zionism”](#) by John V. Whitbeck, July 11, 2014

[“No Lessons Learned at the NYT”](#) by Robert Parry, July 11, 2014

[“The Back Story of ‘Citizen Koch’”](#) by Jim DiEugenio, July 14, 2014

[“The Human Price of Neocon Havoc”](#) by Robert Parry, July 17, 2014

[“What Is Israel’s End Game in Gaza?”](#) by Dennis Kucinich, July 18, 2014

[“Facts Needed on Malaysian Plane Shoot-down”](#) by Ray McGovern, July 18, 2014

[“Airline Horror Spurs New Rush to Judgment”](#) by Robert Parry, July 19, 2014

["What Did Spy Satellites See in Ukraine?"](#) by Robert Parry, July 20, 2014

["Kerry's Latest Reckless Rush to Judgment"](#) by Robert Parry, July 21, 2014

["Kerry's Poor Record for Veracity"](#) by Ray McGovern, July 22, 2014

["The Kurds Eye Long-Desired State"](#) by Andres Cala, July 22, 2014

["The Mystery of a Ukrainian Army 'Defector'"](#) by Robert Parry, July 22, 2014

["Hiding War Crimes Behind a Question"](#) by Daniel C. Maguire, July 24, 2014

["US Complicity in Israeli War Crimes"](#) by Paul Findley, July 25, 2014

["Blaming Russia as Flat Fact"](#) by Robert Parry, July 27, 2014

["Obama Should Release Ukraine Evidence"](#) by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, July 29, 2014

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Forgetting Cheney's Legacy of Lies

The neocons aided by their "liberal interventionist" allies and the U.S. mainstream media are building new "group thinks" on the Middle East and Ukraine with many Americans having forgotten how they were duped into war a dozen years ago, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

As the world marks the centennial of World War I, the guns of August are again being oiled by comfortable politicians and the fawning corporate media, both bereft of any sense of history. And that includes much more recent history, namely the deceitful campaign that ended up bringing destruction to Iraq and widened conflict throughout the Middle East. That campaign went into high gear 12 years ago with a preview in late August before the full-scale rollout in September.

On Aug. 26, 2002, Vice President Dick Cheney who remains something of a folk

hero on Fox News formally launched the lies leading to the U.S.-UK attack on Iraq seven months later. And on Aug. 30, 2013, another late-summer pitch was made for war on Syria, which came within 20 hours of a major U.S. aerial assault after Secretary of State John Kerry claimed falsely no fewer than 35 times to “know” that the Syrian government was responsible for using sarin nerve gas in an attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013.

Unlike 12 years ago, however, when the Pentagon was run by Field Marshal Donald Rumsfeld and the military martinets who called themselves generals but danced to his tune, war with Syria was averted last year when Joint Chiefs Chairman Martin Dempsey talked sense into President Barack Obama who was on the verge of bending to the Cheney-esque hawks still perched atop the U.S. State Department.

Now, in late August 2014, as if to mark Cheney’s day of deceit a dozen Augusts ago, the Washington Post editorialized: “Stepping back into the fray: Stopping the Islamic State will require ‘boots on the ground.’” As is its custom, the Post offered no enlightenment on what motivates jihadists to do unspeakably evil things in other words, “why they hate us” or why Gulf allies of the U.S. fund them with such largesse.

Sadly, the thinking of Establishment Washington is no more refined today that it was on Jan. 8, 2010, when the late Helen Thomas asked then-White House counter-terrorism czar and now CIA Director John Brennan why the “underwear bomber,” who on Dec. 25, 2009, tried to down a U.S. passenger plane, did what he did. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Answering Helen Thomas on Why”](#).]

Hardwired to Hate

Thomas: “And what is the motivation? We never hear what you find out on why.”

Brennan: “Al Qaeda is an organization that is dedicated to murder and wanton slaughter of innocents They attract individuals like Mr. Abdulmutallab and use them for these types of attacks. He was motivated by a sense of religious sort of drive. Unfortunately, al Qaeda has perverted Islam, and has corrupted the concept of Islam, so that he’s (sic) able to attract these individuals. But al Qaeda has the agenda of destruction and death.”

Thomas: “And you’re saying it’s because of religion?”

Brennan: “I’m saying it’s because of an al Qaeda organization that used the banner of religion in a very perverse and corrupt way.”

Thomas: “Why?”

Brennan: “I think this is a, long issue, but al Qaeda is just determined to

carry out attacks here against the homeland.”

Thomas: “But you haven’t explained why.”

Neither has President Obama or anyone else in the U.S. political/media hierarchy. All the American public gets is boilerplate about how al-Qaeda evildoers are perverting a religion and exploiting impressionable young men. There is almost no discussion about why so many people in the Muslim world object to U.S. policies so strongly that they are inclined to resist violently and even resort to suicide attacks.

It is the same now. Lacking is any frank discussion by America’s leaders and media about the real motivation of Muslim anger toward the United States? Why was Helen Thomas the only journalist to raise the touchy but central question of motive? But I digress.

The Almost-War on Syria

Why did Kerry mislead the world last Aug. 30 in professing to “know” that the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was responsible for the chemical attack near Damascus nine days earlier when Kerry and other senior officials knew there were doubts and dissension within the U.S. intelligence community over who was responsible for the incident? It is crystal clear now that Kerry did not know with any certainty whether the army or the rebels fired the one missile that UN inspectors later found to have carried sarin.

Typically, Kerry adduced no verifiable evidence, and what his minions leaked over the following weeks could not bear close scrutiny. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Collapsing Syria-Sarin Case”](#)] (Parenthetically, Kerry also does not know what he professes to know about the shoot-down of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 on July 17.)

The key question today is whether Gen. Dempsey can hold off the hawks at the State Department again, as he did a year ago to prevent another ready-to-go U.S. attack on Syria ... or maybe Iraq again ... or how about Ukraine.

A Reluctant Soldier

Late last summer, Dempsey had the good sense to be a reluctant soldier. He had already told Congress that a major attack on Syria should require congressional authorization and that he was aware that the “evidence” adduced to implicate the Syrian government was shaky at best.

Besides, British intelligence had obtained a sample of the sarin used in the Aug. 21 attack and analysis demonstrated that the gas used didn’t match the

batches known to exist in the Syrian army's chemical weapons arsenal.

The British warning that the case against Syria wouldn't hold up was quickly relayed to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. According to journalist Seymour Hersh, American officers delivered a last-minute caution to the President, which they believe led to his cancelling the attack. [See Hersh's "[The Red Line and the Rat Line.](#)"]

Actually, it was no secret that Dempsey helped change President Obama's mind between when Kerry spoke on the afternoon of Aug. 30, all but promising a U.S. attack on Syria, and when Obama announced less than a day later that he would not attack but rather would seek authorization from Congress. Obama was explicit in citing Dempsey, [saying](#) on the early afternoon of Aug. 31:

"Our military has positioned assets in the region. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs has informed me that we are prepared to strike whenever we choose. Moreover, the Chairman has indicated to me that our capacity to execute this mission is not time-sensitive: it will be effective tomorrow, next week, or one month from now."

The failure to stampede Obama and the U.S. military into a bombing campaign against Syria was a major defeat for those who wanted another shot at a Mideast "regime change," primarily the neocons and their "liberal interventionist" allies who hold sway inside the State Department, not to mention in much of the U.S. mainstream news media. By happenstance, I was given a personal window into the neocon distress over the Syria bombing that wasn't when I found myself sharing a "green room" with some of them at CNN's main studio in Washington. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[How War on Syria Lost Its Way.](#)"]

How About Ukraine?

Many neocons fumed about Gen. Dempsey's role in pulling the plug on their Syrian war plans. And, if the world is lucky, the neocons may have more reason to grumble about Gen. Dempsey if he deters direct U.S. military involvements in one or another of their hoped-for wars now, especially their reckless efforts to escalate the confrontation with Russia over Ukraine. It is a safe bet that Dempsey is again warning the President that there are risks that the Russian bear will do more than just snarl if it continues to be poked by the U.S.-installed coup government in Kiev.

One can hope that at the Sept. 4-5 NATO summit in Wales, Dempsey and other cool heads, who have had some experience in war, will again be able to head off the hotheads advocating gratuitous threatening gestures toward Russia.

This will take courage and stamina, since ill-informed “group think,” aided and abetted by the mainstream media, has taken hold in Washington in a way reminiscent of this same time 12 years ago. Sadly, there was no Martin Dempsey at hand then.

The malleable careerist generals whom Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld picked to serve him like JCS Chairman Richard Myers could be counted on to salute smartly to all of the boss’ decisions even on torture. Ex-General Colin Powell who was Peter-Principled up to be Secretary of State was cut from the same cloth. So Rumsfeld together with his partner-in-crime Vice President Dick Cheney had a free hand.

By all appearances, except for Dempsey and his immediate staff, hawkish “group think” continues to reign supreme in the foreign policy and defense councils of Establishment Washington. It is as though nothing was learned from the destruction and chaos left behind after the U.S./UK invasion and occupation of Iraq beginning in March 2003.

Anatomy of a Consequential Lie

With Rumsfeld controlling the Pentagon, Vice President Dick Cheney led the charge exactly 12 years ago. Addressing the Veterans of Foreign Wars on Aug. 26, 2002, Cheney launched the propaganda campaign for war on Iraq, falsely claiming, “We now know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. ... Many of us are convinced that Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon.”

Cheney went on to warn that UN inspectors were worse than useless since they fostered a false sense of security.

Cheney’s speech provided the recipe for how the intelligence was to be cooked in September 2002. In effect, the speech provided the meretricious terms of reference and conclusions for a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) requested by Congress a few weeks later and completed on Oct. 1.

We now know that Robert Walpole, the intelligence official selected to chair the NIE, was receiving guidance from Cheney during the record-short drafting period. We also know that the NIE was wrong on every major judgment. Its purpose, though, was to deceive Congress out of exercising its constitutional prerogative to declare or otherwise authorize war. And the stratagem worked like a charm.

To their discredit, many in the intelligence community knew of Cheney’s and Walpole’s playing fast and loose with the evidence and the White House’s determination to pave the way to war. Those intelligence officials, however, simply held their noses. No one spoke out. Careers of bureaucrats were placed

before lives of soldiers and civilians.

The whole orchestration was a fairy tale, and Cheney and his co-conspirators knew it full well. A leading spinner of such tales, Iraqi National Congress leader Ahmed Chalabi, later bragged about his role in facilitating the spurious claims of WMD in Iraq. He said, "Saddam is gone. ... What was said before is not important. ... We are heroes in error."

Keeping Mouths Wide Shut

Back to the VFW convention on Aug. 26, 2002: sitting on the stage that evening was former CENTCOM commander Marine Gen. Anthony Zinni, who was being honored by the VFW. Zinni later said he was shocked to hear a depiction of intelligence (Iraq has WMDs and is amassing them to use against us) that did not square with what he knew.

Although Zinni had retired two years before, his role as consultant had enabled him to keep his clearances and stay up to date on key intelligence findings. Zinni is among a handful of senior officials, active duty and retired, who could have obstructed the path to war, had they spoken out at the time.

Three and a half years later, Zinni told NBC's "Meet the Press" that "There was no solid proof that Saddam had WMD. ... I heard a case being made to go to war." Zinni had earlier enjoyed a reputation as a straight shooter, with occasional displays of actual courage. And so the question lingers: why did he not make inquiries and if necessary go public *before* the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq?

It is an all too familiar conundrum. In such situations, when there is powerful political momentum for war, senior military leaders, like Bre'r Fox, usually don't say nuthin'. And, almost always, their reticence comes out badly for everyone else, but they still get to sit on corporate boards and make a ton of money.

It is a safe bet Zinni now regrets letting himself be guided or misguided – by what passes for professional courtesy and/or slavish adherence to classification restrictions, when he might have prevented the U.S. from starting the kind of war of aggression branded at Nuremberg as the "supreme international crime."

Tenet Completely Complicit

Zinni was not the only one taken aback by Cheney's words. Then-CIA Director George Tenet recounted in his memoir that Cheney's speech took him completely by surprise. Tenet wrote, "I had the impression that the president wasn't any more aware than we were of what his number-two was going to say to the VFW until he said it."

Tenet added that he thought Cheney had gone well beyond what U.S. intelligence was saying about the possibility of Iraq acquiring a nuclear weapon, adding piously, "Policy makers have a right to their own opinions, but not their own set of facts. ... I should have told the vice president privately that, in my view, his VFW speech had gone too far." Tenet doesn't tell us whether he ever summoned the courage to tell President George W. Bush, although he briefed him several times a week.

Actually, Cheney's exaggeration could not have come as a complete surprise to Tenet. We know from the Downing Street Minutes, leaked to the press on May 1, 2005, that on July 20, 2002 – more than a month *before* Cheney's speech – Tenet himself had told his British counterpart that President Bush had decided to make war on Iraq for regime change and that "the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy."

When Bush's senior advisers came back to town after Labor Day 2002, the next five weeks were devoted to selling the war, a major "new product" of the kind that, as then-White House chief of staff Andrew Card explained, no one would introduce in the month of August. Except that Cheney did.

After assuring themselves that Tenet was a reliable salesman, Cheney and then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld allowed him to play a supporting role in advertising bogus claims of yellowcake uranium from Niger, aluminum tubes for uranium enrichment, and mobile trailers for manufacturing biological warfare agents, in order to scare Congress into voting for war. It did on Oct. 10 and 11, 2002.

Bush's Knowledge

Was President Bush not warned of the likely impact of his attack on Iraq? He had been earlier, but the malleable Tenet opted to join the "group think" and told his minions that, if the President wants to make war on Iraq, it's our duty to provide the "evidence" to justify it. Forgotten or suppressed were earlier warnings from the CIA about how an attack on Iraq would mean a growth industry for manufacturing terrorists.

In a major speech in Cincinnati on Oct. 7, 2002, four days before Congress voted for war, the President warned that "the risk is simply too great that Saddam Hussein will use instruments of mass death and destruction, or provide them to a terror network."

In a sad irony, on that same day, a letter from the CIA to the Senate Intelligence Committee asserted that the probability is low that Iraq would initiate an attack with such weapons or give them to terrorists, UNLESS: "Should

Saddam conclude that a US-led attack could no longer be deterred, he probably would become much less constrained in adopting terrorist actions.”

In a same-day assessment of Colin Powell’s deceptive speech at the UN on Feb. 5, 2003, we Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) warned the President to beware of those who “draw a connection between war with Iraq and terrorism, but for the wrong reasons. The connection takes on much more reality in a post-US invasion scenario. Indeed, it is our view that an invasion of Iraq would ensure overflowing recruitment centers for terrorists into the indefinite future. Far from eliminating the threat it would enhance it exponentially.” We continued:

“We recommend you re-read the CIA assessment of last fall [2002] that pointed out ‘the forces fueling hatred of the US and fueling al Qaeda recruiting are not being addressed,’ and that ‘the underlying causes that drive terrorists will persist.’ We also noted that a “CIA report cited a Gallup poll last year of almost 10,000 Muslims in nine countries in which respondents described the United States as ‘ruthless, aggressive, conceited, arrogant, easily provoked and biased.’”

But the “group think” had already set in. And courage at senior ranks in the military was in short supply. No one had the guts to properly discharge the responsibility of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the principal military adviser to the President. This is the role that Gen. Martin Dempsey stepped up to a year ago and, in the process, prevented wider war in the Middle East.

One can only hope that President Obama, in current circumstances, will keep listening to military advisers who know something about war – and why it should never be casually commenced.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was an Army infantry/intelligence officer and CIA analyst for 30 years and is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Washington’s Latest War Fever

War fever is running high again in Official Washington with pols and pundits demanding that President Obama order a major military intervention in Iraq and Syria to stop the violent jihadists of ISIS, a group that got its start with the

U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, as ex-CIA analyst Paul Pillar recalls.

By Paul R. Pillar

Americans, following a long tradition of finding monsters overseas to destroy, are now focusing their attention and their energy on a relatively new one: the group variously known as ISIS or ISIL or the Islamic State. The group has become a major disruptive factor in the already disrupted internal affairs of Iraq and Syria, and it is legitimately a significant object of concern for U.S. policy as far as instability and radicalism in the Middle East are concerned.

The outsized role that this group has come to play in discourse about U.S. foreign policy, however, including hyperbolic statements by senior officials, risks a loss of perspective about what kind of threat it does or does not pose to U.S. interests, and with that a possible loss of care in assessing what U.S. actions in response would or would not be wise.



Several attributes of ISIS have repeatedly and correctly been identified as measures of the group's strength, and aspects of the group's rise that are worthy of notice. These include its seizure of pieces of territory in both Iraq and Syria, acquisition of financial resources, and enlistment of substantial numbers of westerners.

Although these are impressive indicators of the group's success, none of them is equivalent to a threat to U.S. interests, much less a physical threat to the United States itself, at least not in the sense of a new danger different from ones that have been around for some time.

Money, for example, has never been the main determinant of whether a group constitutes such a danger. Terrorism that makes a difference can be cheap, and one does not need to rob banks in Mosul or to run an impressive revenue collection operation in order to have enough money to make an impact. Even a terrorist spectacular on the scale of 9/11 is within the reach of a single wealthy and radically-minded donor to finance.

The involvement of western citizens with terrorist groups has long been a focus of attention for western police and internal security services. To the extent this represents a threat, it is not a direct function of any one group's actions or successes overseas, be they of ISIS or any other group.

Several patterns involving westerners' involvement with foreign terrorist groups are well established. One is that the story has consistently been one of already radicalized individuals seeking contact with a group rather than the other way around. If it isn't one particular group they seek out, it will be another.

A further pattern is that, despite frequently expressed fears about westerners acquiring training overseas that they then apply effectively to terrorist operations in the West, this hasn't happened. Faisal Shahzad and his firecracker-powered attempt at a car bomb in Times Square illustrate the less ominous reality.

Yet another pattern is that apart from a few westerners whose language skills have been exploited for propaganda purposes, the westerners have become grunts and cannon fodder. They have not been entrusted with sophisticated plots (unsuccessful shoe bomber Richard Reid being the closest thing to an exception), probably partly because of their evident naiveté and largely because of groups' concerns about operational security and possible penetration.

Dubious Value of Land

The control by a group of a piece of territory, even if it is mostly just sand or mountains, is what most often is taken mistakenly as a measure of the threat a group poses, and this phenomenon is occurring in spades with ISIS. Probably seizure of land is interpreted this way because following this aspect of the progress of a group is as simple as looking at color-coded maps in the newspaper.

The history of terrorist operations, including highly salient operations such as 9/11, demonstrates that occupying some real estate is not one of the more important factors that determine whether a terrorist operation against the United States or another western country can be mounted. To the extent ISIS devotes itself to seizing, retaining, and administering pieces of real estate in the Levant or Mesopotamia, and imposing its version of a remaking of society in those pieces, this represents a turn away from, not toward, terrorism in the West.

Significant friction between ISIS (then under a different name) and al-Qaeda first arose when the former group's concentration on whacking Iraqi Shias was an unhelpful, in the view of the al-Qaeda leadership, digression from the larger

global jihad and the role that the far enemy, the United States, played in it.

Traditionally an asset that non-state terrorist groups are considered to have, and a reason they are considered (albeit wrongly) to be undeterrable is that they lack a "return address." To the extent ISIS maintains a mini-state in the Middle East, it loses that advantage.

Any such mini-state would be more of a burden to the group than an asset, beyond whatever satisfaction the group gets from installing its warped version of an Islamic order in its little piece of land. Maintaining and exerting power in the mini-state would be a difficult, full-time job. The place would be a miserable, ostracized blotch on the map with no ability to project power at a distance. It would be a problem for the immediate neighbors, and even more of one for the governments out of whose territories the mini-state had been carved, but its existence would not make ISIS any more of a threat to the United States than it otherwise would be.

Introspection Needed

We Americans need to exercise some introspection regarding how and why we are reacting to the ISIS phenomenon the way we are, beyond the way we interpret shadings on a newspaper map (and beyond the usual politicized biases that infect any policy discussion in Washington).

To some extent the group is filling a need for a well-defined, personified adversary. We don't have Osama bin Laden to fight anymore, but now we have Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. We also are reacting quite understandably to the group's methods, which are despicably inhumane, and to its objectives, which are disgustingly medieval.

The burst of attention to the group over the past week clearly results largely from the grisly killing of a captured American photojournalist. We all abhor that event, and we should. But we also should bear in mind that an emotional reaction to such an incident produces the wrong frame of mind for debate, and cool-headed deliberation, about public policy.

What may be most disturbing about the tenor of current discourse on the subject is how much of it is expressed in absolute terms, with many proclaiming that ISIS "must be destroyed," or words to that effect. Such absolutism undermines the consideration that should be given to other U.S. interests and objectives (as there always will be) affected by pursuit of that one objective, and consideration of costs as well as benefits (there always will be both) of any U.S. action taken in pursuit of that objective.

We have heard similar absolutism before, and we have seen the results. We heard

it with the post-9/11 false syllogism that if terrorism is considered a serious problem then we must recognize that we are at "war," and if we are at war then that means we must rely principally on military force. We heard it also in the dictum that if there is even a one percent chance of something awful happening to us, then we must treat that as a certainty.

The absolutist approach leads to inappropriate derision and dismissal of policy steps as "half measures" when they may in fact be, considering the costs, benefits and other U.S. interests at stake, the most prudent steps that could be taken. Some actions that would set back ISIS may be, given the circumstances, sensible and cost-effective. Other possible measures may seem aimed more directly at the goal of destroying ISIS but, given the circumstances, would not be sensible.

And what does "destroying" the group really mean? Our experience with al-Qaeda should have taught us to ponder that question long and hard. We killed innumerable "number three" leaders of al-Qaeda, we killed bin Laden himself, and we have rendered Ayman al-Zawahiri a largely irrelevant fugitive. We have in effect destroyed the organization, or at least as much as can be expected from more than 13 years (yes, the process started before 9/11) of destruction.

But the methods we really were worried about lived on through a metastasis that led to the emergence of other organizations. ISIS is one of those organizations. If ISIS is "destroyed," there is little reason to believe that the methods we most worry about, and associated ideologies, will not take still other forms.

The seeds of the death of ISIS lie within its own methods and objectives, which are as abhorrent to many of its would-be subjects as they are to us. The group rode to its dramatic gains, in both Iraq and Syria, on larger waves of opposition to detested incumbent regimes. Its losses can be just as dramatic if the political circumstances that led to such opposition are changed. They already are changing in Baghdad, and it still is possible for political change of some sort, which excludes any groups as extreme as ISIS, to take place in Syria.

The extent of any terrorist threat to the United States does not depend on killing any one organization. It will depend partly on those political processes in countries such as Iraq and Syria. It also will depend on how well the United States, in going after any one monster, does not create other ones.

In that regard we cannot remind ourselves often enough, especially because this fact seems to have been forgotten amid the current discussion of ISIS, that ISIS itself was born as a direct result of the United States going after a different monster in Iraq.

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Selective Outrage over Ukraine POWs

Exclusive: The U.S. news media regularly engages in selective outrage, piously denouncing some adversary for violating international law yet hypocritically silent when worse abuses are committed by the U.S. or allied governments, as the New York Times has shown again, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The New York Times has taken deep umbrage over an unseemly parade staged by ethnic Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine featuring captured Ukrainian soldiers. The Times noted that the Geneva Conventions prohibit humiliation of POWs, surely a valid point.

But the Times in its profoundly biased coverage of the Ukraine crisis apparently feels that other aspects of this nasty civil war are less newsworthy, such as the Kiev government's bombardment of eastern Ukrainian cities sending the death toll into the thousands, including children and other non-combatants. Also downplayed has been Kiev's dispatch of neo-Nazi storm troopers to spearhead the urban combat in ethnic Russian towns and cities in the east.

When the Times [finally noticed this street-fighting role of neo-Nazi militias](#), that remarkable fact the first time armed Nazis were dispatched by any government to kill people in Europe since World War II was consigned to the last three paragraphs of a long article on a different topic, essentially a throwaway reference.

Similarly, the Kiev regime's artillery fire on residential areas killing many civilians and, over the weekend, damaging a hospital has been treated by the Times as a minor afterthought. But Times' readers are supposed to get worked up over the tasteless demonstration in Donetsk, all the better to justify more killing of ethnic Russians.

Though no one was killed or injured during Sunday's anti-Ukrainian march and rebel troops protected the captured soldiers from angry citizens the Times led its Ukraine coverage on Monday with the humiliation of the POWs. The [article](#) by

Andrew E. Kramer and Andrew Higgins made a point of contrasting the ugly scene in Donetsk with more orderly celebrations of Ukrainian independence elsewhere. The story began:

“On a day when Ukrainians celebrated their independence from the Soviet Union with parades and speeches, pro-Russia separatists in the eastern part of the country staged a grim counter-spectacle: a parade that mocked the national army and celebrated the deaths and imprisonment of its soldiers.

“Leading the procession was an attractive young blond woman carrying an assault rifle, followed by several dozen captured Ukrainian soldiers, filthy, bruised and unkempt, their heads shaved, wearing fetid camouflage uniforms and looking down at their feet.

“Onlookers shouted that the men should be shot, and pelted the prisoners with empty beer bottles, eggs and tomatoes as they stumbled down Artyomovsk Street, Donetsk’s main thoroughfare. ... People in the crowd shouted ‘fascists!’ and ‘perverts!’ and separatist fighters held back a man who tried to punch a prisoner.”

The Times then noted: “The Geneva Conventions’ rules for treating prisoners of war prohibit parading them in public, but the treatment of the wounded, disheveled prisoners seemed to offend few of those watching, who in any case had turned out for the promise of seeing a ghoulish spectacle. ‘Shoot them!’ one woman yelled.”

Kiev’s Abuses

While it’s certainly true that POWs shouldn’t be mistreated, it should be at least equally newsworthy when civilians, including children, are being killed by indiscriminate artillery fire directed into cities or when right-wing storm troopers under Nazi banners are attacking and occupying eastern Ukrainian cities and towns. But the Times’ bias in favor of the Kiev regime has been most obvious in the newspaper’s selective outrage.

At the start of the crisis last winter, the Times sided with the “pro-democracy” demonstrators in Kiev’s Maidan square as they sought to topple democratically elected President Viktor Yanukovich, who had rebuffed an association agreement with the European Union that included harsh austerity measures prescribed by the International Monetary Fund. Yanukovich opted for a more generous offer from Russia of a \$15 billion loan.

Along with the entire U.S. mainstream media, the Times cheered on the violent overthrow of Yanukovich on Feb. 22 and downplayed the crucial role of well-organized neo-Nazi militias that surged to the front of the Maidan protests in

the final violent days. Then, with Yanukovych out and a new coup regime in, led by U.S. hand-picked Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, the IMF austerity plan was promptly approved.

Since then, the Times has behaved as essentially a propaganda organ for the new regime in Kiev and for the State Department, pushing “themes” blaming Russian President Vladimir Putin for the crisis. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com’s “Ukraine, Though the US ‘Looking Glass.’”]

Some of the most egregious New York Times reporting has been its slanted and erroneous summations of the Ukraine narrative. For instance, immediately after the violent coup (from Feb. 20-22), it was reported that among the 80 people killed were more than a dozen police officers. But, as the Times’ pro-coup sympathies hardened, the storyline changed to: “More than 80 protesters were shot to death by the police as an uprising spiraled out of control in mid-February.” [NYT, March 5]

Both the dead police and the murky circumstances surrounding the sniper fire that inflicted many of the casualties simply disappeared from the Times’ narrative. It became flat fact: evil “pro-Yanukovych” police gunned down innocent “pro-democracy” demonstrators.

Whose Life Matters

Just as the deaths of those early demonstrators were played up by the Times and even spun to create a more black-and-white narrative the more recent deaths of thousands of ethnic Russians have been played down. And, the anger of eastern Ukrainians over the brutal assaults on their cities as displayed in Sunday’s Donetsk demonstration is then used by the Times to, in effect, justify Kiev’s continued “anti-terrorist” operation. In other words, it seems that the Times places a greater value on the lives of the Maidan demonstrators in Kiev than the ethnic Russians in the east.

The Times also displayed this bias after dozens of ethnic Russian protesters were killed by arson and other violence in Ukraine’s southern port city of Odessa on May 2. The victims had taken refuge in a trade union building after a clash with a pro-Kiev mob.

Even the neocon-dominated Washington Post led its editions with the story of “Dozens killed in Ukraine fighting” and described the fatal incident this way: “Friday evening, a pro-Ukrainian mob attacked a camp where the pro-Russian supporters had pitched tents, forcing them to flee to a nearby government building, a witness said. The mob then threw gasoline bombs into the building. Police said 31 people were killed when they choked on smoke or jumped out of

windows. [The death toll later grew.]

“Asked who had thrown the Molotov cocktails, pro-Ukrainian activist Diana Berg said, ‘Our people but now they are helping them [the survivors] escape the building.’” [In actuality, some of the survivors who jumped from windows were beaten by the pro-Kiev mob.]

By contrast, here is how the New York Times reported the event as part of a story by C.J. Chivers and Noah Sneider which focused on the successes of the pro-coup armed forces in overrunning some eastern Ukrainian rebel positions.

“Violence also erupted Friday in the previously calmer port city of Odessa, on the Black Sea, where dozens of people died in a fire related to clashes that broke out between protesters holding a march for Ukrainian unity and pro-Russian activists. The fighting itself left four dead and 12 wounded, Ukraine’s Interior Ministry said. Ukrainian and Russian news media showed images of buildings and debris burning, fire bombs being thrown and men armed with pistols.”

Note how the Times evades placing any responsibility on the pro-coup mob for trying to burn alive the “pro-Russian activists” who had sought refuge in the building. From reading the Times, you wouldn’t know who had died and who had set the fire.

Embarrassing Lapses

In the Times’ haste to perform its propaganda function, there also have been some notable journalistic embarrassments such as the Times’ front-page story touting photographs that supposedly showed Russian special forces in Russia and then the same soldiers in eastern Ukraine, allegedly proving that the popular resistance to the coup regime was simply clumsily disguised Russian aggression.

Any serious journalist would have recognized the holes in the story since it wasn’t clear where the photos were taken or whether the blurry images were even the same people but that didn’t bother the Times, which led with the scoop. However, only two days later, the scoop blew up when it turned out that a key photo supposedly showing a group of soldiers in Russia who later appeared in eastern Ukraine was actually taken in Ukraine, destroying the premise of the entire story.

There’s also the issue of U.S. selectivity in defending the principle of not parading or otherwise humiliating POWs. That issue arose last decade during the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq when the U.S. news media showed little outrage over the treatment of “war on terror” captives who were displayed in humiliating postures at the U.S. prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, or when

Iraqi soldiers were paraded before U.S. cameras to demonstrate American military success in Iraq.

By contrast, there was a firestorm during the early days of the U.S. invasion of Iraq when five U.S. POWs were questioned by Iraqi television reporters in the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriya.

U.S. officials immediately denounced the brief televised interviews with the prisoners as a violation of the Geneva Conventions, a charge that was repeated over and over by U.S. television networks. "It's illegal to do things to POWs that are humiliating to those prisoners," declared Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

Yet, the mainstream U.S. media stayed silent about the obvious inconsistency between its outrage over the footage of the American soldiers and the U.S. media's decision only a few days earlier to run repeated clips of Iraqis identified as prisoners of war.

In that case, Iraqi POWs were paraded before U.S. cameras as "proof" that Iraqi resistance was crumbling. Some of the scenes showed Iraqi POWs forced at gunpoint to kneel down with their hands behind their heads as they were patted down by U.S. soldiers. Yet neither U.S. officials nor U.S. reporters covering the war for the major news networks observed how those scenes might be a violation of international law.

Nor did the U.S. media see fit to remind viewers how President George W. Bush had stripped prisoners of war captured in Afghanistan of their rights under the Geneva Conventions. Bush ordered hundreds of captives from Afghanistan to be put in tiny outdoor cages at Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay.

The prisoners were shaved bald and forced to kneel down with their eyes, ears and mouths covered to deprive them of their senses. The shackled prisoners were filmed being carried on stretchers to interrogation sessions. Their humiliation was broadcast for all the world to see but the treatment was accepted by the U.S. press as just fine. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[International Law a la Carte.](#)"]

That selective outrage was on display again on Monday in the New York Times.

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.](#)

Bringing War Home to America

From the “war on drugs” to the “war on terror,” U.S. society has grown increasingly militarized with police now armed to the teeth with weapons of war to deploy against American citizens, a process that apes U.S. violence-oriented actions abroad, says Brian J. Trautman.

By Brian J. Trautman

The police response to public protests in Ferguson, Missouri, in the wake of the deadly Aug. 9 shooting of Michael Brown, Jr., an unarmed 18-year-old black man killed by a white police officer, was a prime illustration of the hyper-aggressive nature of policing in America today.

The residents of Ferguson fed up with hostile and abusive police behavior continue to flood the streets to demand justice for Mike Brown and other victims of police brutality. They have been joined in solidarity by people of conscience in other cities (e.g., Oakland, NYC).

Their anger and frustration was exacerbated by the heavy-handed tactics used against the mostly peaceful protestors in Ferguson during the first week or so of the demonstrations tear gas, rubber bullets, smoke, deafening sirens as well as assault rifles fixed on protestors were some of the violent methods employed by law enforcement.

In addition, a mandatory curfew imposed by the Missouri governor, verbal threats of physical harm from police, and arrests of journalists, among other ill-advised and counterproductive reactions, only escalated the tensions between protestors and police.

The police action in Ferguson sparked a much-needed and long overdue national discussion about the rise of the police-industrial complex. One important outcome of this conversation has been an increased awareness among the American public of how local and state police became armed with equipment meant for war.

The fact that government programs and funding provided police with military-grade weaponry and that these arms have been deployed against American citizens has provoked the ire of liberal and conservative lawmakers alike a rare show of bipartisanship in today’s political climate.

The national media has now joined independent media in shining a spotlight on the paramilitary structure of modern-day policing. However, even now, the vast majority of media and politicians continue to ignore the fundamental causes of the increasingly violent policies and procedures of law enforcement, as it would require critically questioning and challenging the systems and institutions that produce them.

To better understand, effectively reduce, and eventually prevent the underlying factors which led to the police slaying of Mike Brown and other unarmed citizens, we must openly debate two major forms of violence prevalent in the United States: systemic violence (aka structural violence) and militarism.

Systemic violence is the type of violence that is deeply-embedded in a nation's social, economic, educational, political, legal and environmental frameworks, and tends to be rooted in government policy. It is organized violence with an historical context, and often manifests in subtle but very specific and destructive ways.

Examples include entrenched racism, classism and discrimination and economic inequality and relative poverty. Systemic violence paves the way for authoritarian and undemocratic values such as exploitation, marginalization and repression, especially of underrepresented, underprivileged populations.

Militarism is the ideology that a nation must maintain a strong military capability and must use, or threaten to use, force to protect and advance national interests. America's militaristic approach to overseas conflicts can be found in many aspects of its domestic policies.

Systemic violence and militarism are interconnected and mutually dependent. They go hand in hand, building on and reinforcing each other. Both define and direct American policing, which regularly treats citizens like enemies of the state. We need not look further for an example than the military-style police assault in Ferguson.

Systemic violence and militarism are responsible for the flow of military-grade equipment such as mine resistance vehicles and semi-automatic weapons to police departments across the country.

In an op-ed I wrote last month entitled "Escalating Domestic Warfare," I discussed a report from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on the emergence of a militarist ethos in American policing. The ACLU's research showed that the militarization of police has become excessive and lethal.

For example, SWAT teams are being deployed primarily to serve search warrants in low-level drug cases, and these teams are using methods and equipment

traditionally reserved for war to do so. The ACLU also found that police militarization increased substantially after each of three major national events: the initiation of the "War on Drugs," the attacks of 9-11, and a series of Supreme Court decisions which have eroded the rights guaranteed in the Fourth Amendment.

Over the past two decades, the violent crime rate in the United States has decreased sharply. The militarization of policing, then, is counter-intuitive. Historically, nations that have militarized their police have done so not because of violent crime but rather to rapidly quell potential mass civil uprisings against tyranny, oppression and injustice.

A statement released by Veterans for Peace (VFP), a global organization of military veterans and allies working to build a culture of peace, calls for justice for Mike Brown and his family through, in part, "a complete, swift and transparent investigation" into his death.

VFP strongly condemns the use of violence in any form to secure justice. Instead, they implore protestors "to continue to channel their anger towards building power, solidarity and creating change nonviolently."

The organization expresses deep outrage for the state violence in Ferguson: "police over reaction to community expressions of grief and anger is the outcome of a national mindset that violence will solve any problem."

According to VFP, the military-industrial complex and a permanent war mentality are two major sources of this violence: "Thirteen years of war has militarized our whole society. We see equipment designed for the battlefield used in our nation's streets against our citizens. We see police in uniforms and using weapons indistinguishable from the military."

This militaristic approach to domestic policing, says VFP, has resulted in tragedy on our streets: "Week after week we see reports of police abuse and killings of innocent and unarmed civilians." Justice for the victims is often denied: "time and time again we see police given impunity for their crimes and citizens left in disbelief wondering where to turn next."

VFP reminds us of the repeated targeting of communities of color by police. The Ferguson protests are a natural reaction to this legacy of mistreatment and injustice. Police brutality against young black males, in particular, VFP argues, was a powder keg waiting to explode: "the unrest in Ferguson and similar incidents of citizen rebellions are the outcome of state abuse and neglect, not of hoodlums and opportunists. Eventually, any people who are held down will attempt to standup."

VFP's statement also warns that militarism at home cannot be solved until we end our nation's militarism abroad: "We cannot call for peace in the streets at home and at the same time conduct war for thirteen years in the streets of other nations."

America's violent system of policing and its antagonistic foreign policy are interrelated. Therefore, they must be addressed together before reforms can be effective and help to end our culture of violence.

Solutions-based approaches begin with local, state and federal legislators acknowledging that many current laws and policies create and fuel systemic violence and militarism. They must then find the wisdom and muster the courage to act to change or abandon those laws and policies.

One strategy that our towns and cities can adopt to contribute to this process is nonviolent community policing. Retired police captain Charles L. Alphin, who served for over 26 years in the St. Louis City Police Department, offers suggestions for such a policing model in an article titled "Kingian Non-violence: A Practical Application in Policing."

Alphin believes Kingian nonviolence holds great potential for American policing. He gives examples of how this model of policing can work using Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of nonviolence. Alphin contends, as Dr. King did, that how we approach policing cannot stand alone from teaching nonviolence in the school, home, streets and in every phase of life.

Alphin also explains that he applied Kingian philosophy effectively in interrogation of criminal suspects and in the organization of communities to get at the root causes of violence and drugs, effectively empowering communities to identify and work on these problems at the grassroots level (note: this community-based solution to violence is a feature of the theory and practice of transformative justice).

There is an urgent need for models of paramilitary policing to be replaced with models of nonviolent community policing. Freedom and democracy are at stake. So are the lives of our innocent citizens.

The killing of Mike Brown can be a pivotal moment for how we treat the systemic violence and militarism that produced the policing system of today. Ferguson has awakened many Americans to the realities of police militarism on their streets and to the urgent need to demilitarize the police.

We cannot afford public apathy on this issue any longer. The people must insist on alternative models of policing that respect and protect civil and human rights. To reverse the trend of police violence in this country, we must work to

eliminate the systemic and militaristic roots of this violence, remembering that military-style policing is inextricably linked to America's belligerence abroad.

No matter how you slice it, the weapons of war and other violent tactics used against Ferguson protestors will go down as a tragic chapter in American history. Still, robust and meaningful people-powered action for progressive social change can help make this chapter a turning point toward the positive transformation of policing in the United States. This action, change, and transformation are inevitable because justice demands it.

Brian J. Trautman is an instructor of peace studies at Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, a peace activist with Berkshire Citizens for Peace and Justice, and an Army veteran. He is also a member of Veterans for Peace. On Twitter @BriTraut.

Russia's Humanitarian 'Invasion'

Exclusive: Official Washington's war-hysteria machine is running at full speed again after Russia unilaterally dispatched a convoy of trucks carrying humanitarian supplies to the blockaded Ukrainian city of Luhansk, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Before dawn broke in Washington on Saturday, "Ukrainian pro-Russian separatists" more accurately described as federalists of southeast Ukraine who oppose last February's coup in Kiev unloaded desperately needed provisions from some 280 Russian trucks in Luhansk, Ukraine. The West accused those trucks of "invading" Ukraine on Friday, but it was a record short invasion; after delivering their loads of humanitarian supplies, many of the trucks promptly returned to Russia.

I happen to know what a Russian invasion looks like, and this isn't it. Forty-six years ago, I was ten miles from the border of Czechoslovakia when Russian tanks stormed in to crush the "Prague Spring" experiment in democracy. The attack was brutal.

Once back in Munich, West Germany, where my duties included substantive liaison with Radio Free Europe, I experienced some of the saddest moments of my life listening to radio station after radio station on the Czech side of the border playing Smetana's patriotic "Ma vlast" (My Homeland) before going silent for more than two decades.

I was not near the frontier between Russia and southeastern Ukraine on Friday as the convoy of some 280 Russian supply trucks started rolling across the border heading toward the federalist-held city of Luhansk, but that “invasion” struck me as more like an attempt to break a siege, a brutal method of warfare that indiscriminately targets all, including civilians, violating the principle of non-combatant immunity.

Michael Walzer, in his *War Against Civilians*, notes that “more people died in the 900-day siege of Leningrad during WWII than in the infernos of Hamburg, Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki taken together.” So the Russians have some strong feelings about sieges.

There’s also a personal side for Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was born in Leningrad, now Saint Petersburg, eight years after the long siege by the German army ended. It is no doubt a potent part of his consciousness. One elder brother, Viktor, died of diphtheria during the siege of Leningrad.

The Siege of Luhansk

Despite the fury expressed by U.S. and NATO officials about Russia’s unilateral delivery of the supplies after weeks of frustrating negotiations with Ukrainian authorities, there was clearly a humanitarian need. An International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) team that visited Luhansk on Aug. 21 to make arrangements for the delivery of aid found water and electricity supplies cut off because of damage to essential infrastructure.

The Ukrainian army has been directing artillery fire into the city in an effort to dislodge the ethnic Russian federalists, many of whom had supported elected President Viktor Yanukovich who was ousted in the Feb. 22 coup.

The Red Cross team reported that people in Luhansk do not leave their homes for fear of being caught in the middle of ongoing fighting, with intermittent shelling into residential areas placing civilians at risk. Laurent Corbaz, ICRC head of operations for Europe and Central Asia, reported “an urgent need for essentials like food and medical supplies.”

The ICRC stated that it had “taken all necessary administrative and preparatory steps for the passage of the Russian convoy,” and that, “pending customs checks,” the organization was “therefore ready to deliver the aid to Luhansk ... provided assurances of safe passage are respected.”

The “safe passage” requirement, however, was the Catch-22. The Kiev regime and its Western supporters have resisted a ceasefire or a political settlement until the federalists deemed “terrorists” by Kiev lay down their arms and surrender.

Accusing the West of repeatedly blocking a “humanitarian armistice,” a Russian Foreign Ministry statement cited both Kiev’s obstructionist diplomacy and “much more intensive bombardment of Luhansk” on Aug. 21, the day after some progress had been made on the ground regarding customs clearance and border control procedures: “In other words, the Ukrainian authorities are bombing the destination [Luhansk] and are using this as a pretext to stop the delivery of humanitarian relief aid.”

‘Decision to Act’

Referring to these “intolerable” delays and “endless artificial demands and pretexts,” the Foreign Ministry said, “The Russian side has decided to act.” And there the statement’s abused, plaintive tone ended sharply with this implied military threat:

“We are warning against any attempts to thwart this purely humanitarian mission. ... Those who are ready to continue sacrificing human lives to their own ambitions and geopolitical designs and are rudely trampling on the norms and principles of international humanitarian law will assume complete responsibility for the possible consequences of provocations against the humanitarian relief convoy.”

Despite all the agreements and understandings that Moscow claims were reached earlier with Ukrainian authorities, Kiev insists it did not give permission for the Russian convoy to cross its border and that the Russians simply violated Ukrainian sovereignty no matter the exigent circumstances they adduce.

More alarming still, Russia’s “warning” could be construed as the Kremlin claiming the right to use military force within Ukraine itself, in order to protect such humanitarian supply efforts and perhaps down the road, to protect the anti-coup federalists, as well.

The risk of escalation, accordingly, will grow in direct proportion to the aggressiveness of not only the Ukrainian armed forces but also their militias of neo-fascists who have been dispatched by Kiev as frontline shock troops in eastern Ukraine.

Though many Russian citizens have crossed the border in support of their brethren in eastern Ukraine, Moscow has denied dispatching or controlling these individuals. But now there are Russians openly acknowledged to have been sent by Moscow into Ukraine even if only “pilots” of “Russian military vehicles painted to look like civilian trucks,” as the White House depicted the humanitarian mission.

Moscow’s move is a difficult one to parry, except for those and there are many, both in Kiev and in Washington who would like to see the situation escalate to a

wider East-West armed confrontation. One can only hope that, by this stage, President Barack Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry and the European Union realize they have a tiger by the tail.

The coup regime in Kiev knows which side its bread is buttered on, so to speak, and can be expected to heed the advice from the U.S. and the EU if it is expressed forcefully and clearly. Not so the fanatics of the extreme right party Svoboda and the armed "militia" comprised of the Right Sector. Moreover, there are influential neo-fascist officials in key Kiev ministries who dream of cleansing eastern Ukraine of as many ethnic Russians as possible.

Thus, the potential for serious mischief and escalation has grown considerably. Even if Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko wants to restrain his hardliners, he may be hard-pressed to do so. Thus, the U.S. government could be put in the unenviable position of being blamed for provocations even military attacks on unarmed Russian truck drivers over which it has little or no control.

Giving Hypocrisy a Bad Name

The White House second-string P.R. team came off the bench on Friday, with the starters on vacation, and it was not a pretty scene. Even if one overlooks the grammatical mistakes, the statement they cobbled together left a lot to be desired.

It began: "Today, in violation of its previous commitments and international law, Russian military vehicles painted to look like civilian trucks forced their way into Ukraine. ...

"The Ukrainian government and the international community have repeatedly made clear that this convoy would constitute a humanitarian mission only if expressly agreed to by the Ukrainian government and only if the aid was inspected, escorted and distributed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). We can confirm that the ICRC is not escorting the vehicles and has no role in managing the mission. ...

"Russian military vehicles piloted by Russian drivers have unilaterally entered the territory controlled by the separatist forces."

The White House protested that Kiev had not "expressly agreed" to allow the convoy in without being escorted by the ICRC. Again, the Catch 22 is obvious. Washington has been calling the shots, abetting Kiev's dawdling as the supply trucks sat at the border for a week while Kiev prevented the kind of ceasefire that the ICRC insists upon before it will escort such a shipment.

The other issue emphasized in the White House statement was inspection of the

trucks: "While a small number of these vehicles were inspected by Ukrainian customs officials, most of the vehicles have not been inspected by anyone but Russia." During a press conference at the UN on Friday, Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin took strong exception to that charge, claiming not only that 59 Ukrainian inspectors had been looking through the trucks on the Russian side of the border, but that media representatives had been able to choose for themselves which trucks to examine.

Regardless of this latest geopolitical back-and-forth, it's clear that Moscow's decision to send the trucks across the border marked a new stage of the civil war in Ukraine. As Putin prepares to meet with Ukrainian President Poroshenko next week in Minsk and as NATO leaders prepare for their summit on Sept. 4 to 5 in Wales the Kremlin has put down a marker: there are limits to the amount of suffering that Russia will let Kiev inflict on the anti-coup federalists and ethnic Russian civilians right across the border.

The Russians' attitude seems to be that if the relief convoys can be described as an invasion of sovereign territory, so be it. Nor are they alone in the court of public opinion.

On Friday at the UN, Russian Ambassador Churkin strongly objected to comments that, by its behavior, Russia found itself isolated. Churkin claimed that some of the Security Council members were "sensitive to the Russian position among them China and the countries of Latin America." (Argentina and Chile are currently serving as non-permanent members of the Security Council.)

The Polemic and Faux Fogh

Charter members of the Fawning Corporate Media are already busily at work, including the current FCM dean, the New York Times' Michael R. Gordon, who was at it again with a story titled "Russia Moves Artillery Units Into Ukraine, NATO Says." Gordon's "scoop" was all over the radio and TV news; it was picked up by NPR and other usual suspects who disseminate these indiscriminate alarums.

Gordon, who never did find those Weapons of Mass Destruction that he assured us were in Iraq, now writes: "The Russian military has moved artillery units manned by Russian personnel inside Ukrainian territory in recent days and was using them to fire at Ukrainian forces, NATO officials said on Friday."

His main source seems to be NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who famously declared in 2003, "Iraq has WMDs. It is not something we think; it is something we know." Cables released by WikiLeaks have further shown the former Danish prime minister to be a tool of Washington.

However, Gordon provided no warning to Times' readers about Rasmussen's sorry

track record for accuracy. Nor did the Times remind its readers about Gordon's sorry history of getting sensitive national security stories wrong.

Surely, the propaganda war will be stoked by what happened on Friday. Caveat emptor.

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Judging Israeli-Palestinian Demands

Neither side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict wants to accept a return to the status quo prior to the latest bloodshed, but there are differences between the reasonableness of the conflicting demands and how the world should see them, as John V. Whitbeck explains.

By John V. Whitbeck

After the breakdown in the six-day "pause" to permit negotiations on a long-term Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire and the resumption of Israel's onslaught against the caged people of Gaza, concerned people everywhere are wondering how the conflicting demands of the two sides can possibly be reconciled when each side feels a compelling need to achieve some gain to justify its sacrifices.

On the Palestinian side, there are over 2,000 dead, over 10,000 wounded and massive destruction of homes and infrastructure and, on the Israeli side, 64 dead soldiers and two dead civilians. Neither side wants to agree to anything that its own people could view as accepting failure or defeat.

Considering the reasonableness or unreasonableness of the respective demands may assist any foreign governments which are genuinely interested in ending the infernal cycle of violence and making progress toward a durable peace with some measure of justice to decide which side they should be seeking to convince or compel to be reasonable.

Is it unreasonable to demand, as Palestine does, that residents of Gaza be permitted to leave their cage; to build a proper port; to rebuild their airport (destroyed by Israel in 2002); to farm their fields, even within three kilometers of their border with Israel; to fish their waters more than three nautical miles offshore; to export their produce and to import basic

necessities?

Additionally, is it unreasonable to demand that the 61 Palestinians released in the Shalit prison swap and effectively kidnapped by Israel soon after the kidnapping in the West Bank of three young settlers be re-released?

This is all that Palestine has been demanding. To what other people could such modest demands be denied, as they have been throughout seven years of siege and blockade?

On the other hand, is it reasonable to demand, as Israel does, that, prior to any definitive agreement ending the occupation, Gaza be completely “demilitarized”, thereby stripping its people of any means of resisting their 47-year-long occupation (a right of resistance to foreign occupation being recognized by international law) or even of reminding a world which has preferred to ignore them of their miserable existence.

A high degree of “demilitarization” of the State of Palestine might well be agreed to in a definitive agreement ending the occupation, since Palestinians would not wish to give Israel any future excuse to re-invade and re-occupy Palestine, but what is needed now is not acquiescence in the occupation but the end of the occupation.

For the Israeli government, the best result that it can now realistically hope for is to maintain the status quo ante (including the siege of Gaza) and to again get away with murder, and, with Western powers exerting enormous pressures on Palestine not to join the International Criminal Court or otherwise seek recourse to international law to protect the Palestinian people, Israel should be able to achieve this simply by not agreeing to anything with the Palestinians. Such a result would clearly be unjust and unsatisfactory for Palestine and ensure yet another round of death and destruction in the near future.

Only serious and principled outside pressure on Israel to accede to most of the reasonable Palestinian demands, accompanied by credible threats of meaningful adverse consequences for Israeli obstinacy, would offer any hope of achieving a win-win result which could make yet another replay of this latest onslaught unlikely. Unfortunately, with the United States, the major European states and Egypt all firmly aligned on Israel’s side, any such serious and principled pressure is difficult to imagine in the absence of some game-changing Palestinian initiative.

With a view to saving Israeli face while ending the siege of Gaza (and subsequently the occupation of the entire State of Palestine), the Palestinian

leadership should publicly request the deployment of UN, U.S. or NATO troops to both Gaza and the West Bank to protect both Israelis and Palestinians from further violence pending a full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied State of Palestine.

Neither Israelis nor Palestinians will have peace or security until the occupation ends on either a decent two-state or a democratic one-state basis, and the current round of Gaza massacres may have produced a moment when even Western governments, notwithstanding their knee-jerk pro-Israel public pronouncements, are conscious of this reality and could, if given a significant prod and incentive to act on this consciousness, actually do so.

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