

Petraeus Spared Ray McGovern's Question

Exclusive: New York City police arrested ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern to prevent him from attending a public event where he planned to pose a pointed question to retired Gen. David Petraeus, another sign of how much U.S. neocons love democracy, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern, who was arrested by New York City police on Thursday night to prevent him from attending a speech by retired Gen. and ex-CIA Director David Petraeus, told me the day before that he was planning to ask a question during the Q-and-A.

McGovern, who writes regularly for Consortiumnews.com, compared his goal in New York to his famous questioning of then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in Atlanta in 2006 when McGovern pressed Rumsfeld on false statements he had made about Iraq's WMD and ties to al-Qaeda.

But the 75-year-old McGovern was blocked from entering the event at the 92nd Street Y, was roughly put under arrest, and was held overnight in jail. He described his ordeal in an interview with RT, saying "I was warned as soon as I got to the ticket-taker, 'Ray, you're not welcome here.'"

McGovern, who was suffering from a shoulder injury, said he was caused sharp pain by being forcefully handcuffed. "If you've seen the footage, you can see me screaming in pain as they try to pin my left wrist around behind my back," McGovern told RT.

He was hauled off to a local precinct and charged with resisting arrest, criminal trespass and disorderly conduct. He said he spent the night on a stainless steel cot.

In our conversation a day earlier, on Wednesday, McGovern said he was calling from the bus traveling between Washington and New York en route to speak at his alma mater, Fordham University. But he said he also planned to attend the Thursday speech by Petraeus, who was one of President George W. Bush's favorite generals during the Iraq War. McGovern noted that prominent neocon theorist Max Boot was moderating the Petraeus talk.

During the Iraq War under President Bush and the Afghan War under President Barack Obama, Petraeus collaborated closely with leading neoconservatives as they pushed for escalations of the two conflicts. In 2009, Petraeus was part of a successful behind-the-scenes effort by Bush holdovers to trap Obama into a

“surge” of 30,000 troops into Afghanistan.

“Before Obama’s decision to dispatch 30,000 troops, the Bush holdovers sought to hem in the President’s choices by working with allies in the Washington news media and in think tanks,” I wrote in 2010. “For instance, early in 2009, Petraeus personally arranged for Max Boot [a neocon on the Council on Foreign Relations], Frederick Kagan and Kimberly Kagan [two other leading neocons] to get extraordinary access during a trip to Afghanistan.

“Their access paid dividends for Petraeus when they penned a glowing report in the Weekly Standard about the prospects for success in Afghanistan if only President Obama sent more troops and committed the United States to stay in the war for the long haul.”

Upon their return, the three wrote: “Fears of impending disaster are hard to sustain, if you actually spend some time in Afghanistan, as we did recently at the invitation of General David Petraeus, chief of U.S. Central Command.

“Using helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, and bone-jarring armored vehicles, we spent eight days traveling from the snow-capped peaks of Kunar province near the border with Pakistan in the east to the wind-blown deserts of Farah province in the west near the border with Iran. Along the way we talked with countless coalition soldiers, ranging from privates to a four-star general,” the trio said.

A Manipulated Obama

How Obama was manipulated into the Afghan “surge” by Bush’s holdovers with the help of the neocons was chronicled, too, in Bob Woodward’s 2010 book, *Obama’s Wars*, which revealed that Bush’s old team made sure Obama was given no option other than to escalate troop levels in Afghanistan. The Bush holdovers also lobbied inside neocon-friendly media for the troop increase behind Obama’s back.

Woodward’s book notes that “in September 2009, Petraeus called a Washington Post columnist to say that the war would be unsuccessful if the president held back on troops. Later that month, [Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, Adm. Mike] Mullen repeated much the same sentiment in Senate testimony, and in October, [Gen. Stanley] McChrystal asserted in a speech in London that a scaled-back effort against Afghan terrorists would not work.”

This back-door campaign infuriated Obama’s aides, including White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, Woodward reported. “Filling his rant with expletives, Emanuel said, ‘Between the chairman [Mullen] and Petraeus, everyone’s come out and publicly endorsed the notion of more troops. The president hasn’t even had a chance!’” Woodward reported.

Mouse-trapped by this clever maneuvering, Obama acquiesced to the 30,000-troop “surge” although he reportedly regretted his decision almost immediately. In the end the “surge” and Petraeus’s counterinsurgency strategy that went with it had little impact on the Afghan War beyond extending the carnage and adding another 1,000 or so U.S. troops to the rolls of “the fallen.”

Petraeus’s cozy relationship with Boot was also underscored in 2010 when the four-star general accidentally found himself in a public-relations kerfuffle because some of his prepared testimony to Congress had contained a mild criticism of Israel.

Concerned that his standing in Official Washington might be jeopardized if he were deemed “anti-Israel,” Petraeus begged Boot to help him head off the controversy. The e-mails from Petraeus to Boot revealed Petraeus renouncing his own testimony in March 2010 because it included the observation that “the enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests” in the Mideast.

Petraeus’s testimony had continued, “Israeli-Palestinian tensions often flare into violence and large-scale armed confrontations. The conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of U.S. favoritism for Israel. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support.”

Running Scared

Though the testimony was obviously true, many neocons regard any suggestion that Israeli intransigence on Palestinian peace talks contributed to the dangers faced by American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan or by the U.S. public from acts of terrorism at home as a “blood libel” against Israel.

So, when Petraeus’s testimony began getting traction on the Internet, the general turned to Boot at the high-powered Council on Foreign Relations, and began backtracking on the testimony. “As you know, I didn’t say that,” Petraeus said, according to one e-mail to Boot timed off at 2:27 p.m., March 18, 2010. “It’s in a written submission for the record.”

In other words, Petraeus was saying the comments were only in his formal testimony submitted to the Senate Armed Services Committee and were not repeated by him in his brief oral opening statement. However, written testimony is treated as part of the official record at congressional hearings with no meaningful distinction from oral testimony.

In another e-mail, as Petraeus solicited Boot’s help in tamping down any controversy over the Israeli remarks, the general ended the message with a

military “Roger” and a sideways happy face, made from a colon, a dash and a closed parenthesis, “:-)”.

The e-mails were made public by James Morris, who runs a Web site called “[Neocon Zionist Threat to America](#).” He said he apparently got them by accident when he sent a March 19 e-mail congratulating Petraeus for his testimony and Petraeus responded by forwarding one of Boot’s blog posts that knocked down the story of the general’s implicit criticism of Israel.

Petraeus forwarded Boot’s blog item, entitled “A Lie: David Petraeus, Anti-Israel,” which had been posted at the Commentary magazine site at 3:11 p.m. on March 18. However, Petraeus apparently forgot to delete some of the other exchanges between him and Boot at the bottom of the e-mail.

McGovern was aware of this history and told me that he thought an opportunity to question Petraeus in such a setting with Boot might prove illuminating. After his arrest and release, McGovern told RT that he had planned to ask Petraeus, who was responsible for training the Iraqi army, about his failure to train those forces sufficiently to stand up to a recent offensive by the Islamic State.

“Will you come out of retirement and try to do it better this time to train the Iraqi forces?” McGovern said, describing his intended question.

Petraeus retired from the U.S. Army in 2011 to become the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, which he left in disgrace in November 2012 after revelations that he had an extramarital affair with an admiring female biographer.

“This is no saint. This is actually no great strategist,” McGovern said of Petraeus. “He’s an embarrassment to the U.S. Army in which I used to be proud to have served.”

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](#).

Big Media Has Betrayed the People

For years, Americans relied on the mainstream U.S. news media for information; some folks were even convinced the MSM was “liberal.” But the current reality is that the major papers have become mouthpieces for the national security state while amassing a sorry record of deception, writes Greg Maybury.

By Greg Maybury

In his farewell address to the American people in 1961, President Dwight Eisenhower delivered what turned out to be his most memorable public utterance, famously warning Americans about the perils of the growing “military-industrial complex.” He went on to say: “Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

Although it was the “military-industrial” bit that most folks remember, it was the “alert and knowledgeable” part that also needed to resonate. Unfortunately, instead of an “alert and knowledgeable citizenry,” which Ike suggested was the only bulwark against the continued growth, power and influence of this monster within, much of the American citizenry remained oblivious to it all. They either fell asleep at the democratic wheel or chose to remain ignorant of the already disturbing implications of the military-industrial complex’s encroaching reach into every aspect of the American demos and polity.

When the torch was passed to the new generation as John F. Kennedy declared in his Inaugural Address just days after Ike’s warning – the “good life” beckoned. Few, it seemed, wished to rock the boat. More than a half century after Eisenhower’s warning and nearly 15 years into what some like to call the New American Century, the growth of this “military-industrial complex” has far exceeded anything even the Old Warhorse could have imagined. Yet despite this, most Americans are still asleep at the wheel. There seems little evidence that is likely to change anytime soon.

And here we should ponder at least one of the main reasons why this is so.

For those folks who retain any faith or confidence that the mainstream or corporate media is providing us with all the insight we need to make sense of the world and the driving forces behind the big trends and developments, a reality check of the first order is in order. What was once called the Fourth Estate, a public institution of journalism intended to check on the powerful,

has become a Fifth Column against democracy, a means for the Power Elites in business, finance and politics to manage the people, not a way for the people to keep tabs on the powerful.

The big fix is in on behalf of the Agenda Benders of the National Security State. The game is rigged. And it is decidedly not in favor of equality, democracy, freedom, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness of the majority; nor is it for that matter, designed to nurture “an alert and knowledgeable citizenry.”

The fundamental principles of journalism sound hunky-dory in theory. But when the rubber hits the road these standards are all too quickly deep-sixed in favor of more prosaic and less lofty goals. Professionalism becomes careerism. The “public interest” becomes “private gain.” But finally much of the public is figuring this game out.

The extraordinary growth of the independent and alternative media underscores this premise and surely points to more people looking for news, viewpoints and opinions outside the MSM. The “marketplace of ideas” isn’t just expanding; the monopoly is breaking down and whole new niches are opening up.

This is of course a welcome development although no one should underestimate the residual power of the MSM and the difficulty of producing truly independent journalism. Although there are promising signs the MSM’s readership is waning, there remain many folks implacably wedded to their daily fix of “*impropaganda*” from the establishment newsmakers and the “*opinionocracy*” whose positioning statement might well read: “*Here is the news we choose, to give you all today.*”

The Great Malaise

Yet, as long as we are not relying on the MSM for our daily dose of context and perspective, examples underscoring the broader trend abound everywhere we care to look. Writer Ulson Gunnar reported in an article at the New Eastern Outlook website that Vladimir Putin’s recent address to the Valdai Discussion Club was wide ranging and well worth reading.

But it is Gunnar’s article that’s pertinent here. After applauding Putin’s willingness to point to Washington’s hypocrisy in key foreign policy areas and noting the seemingly irreversible loss of “respect and legitimacy once commanded” by the U.S. in the international arena, Gunnar then cites the MSM’s “utter failure to hold accountable, poor policy driven by corrupt, criminal special interests” as one of the main reasons:

“Leaving it to Putin to point out the sorry state of American foreign policy grants Russia the respect and legitimacy the US would have otherwise held onto

were it capable of putting its own house in order. The inability of America's media to serve public interests is a symptom of America's greater malaise." [My Emphasis]

But the reality is even worse than that. The major U.S. media has not simply failed to hold U.S. officials accountable for their destructive arrogance. The MSM chose to mock Putin for his undeniably accurate remarks. For instance, *The Washington Post* published an editorial entitled (in print editions), "Putinoia on full display," which said, about Putin's Valdai remarks, "out poured a poisonous mix of lies, conspiracy theories, thinly veiled threats of further aggression and, above all, seething resentment toward the United States."

The *Post* editors then cited examples of Putin's "Putinoia" such as his statements that the United States had "declared itself the winner of the Cold War" and promoted a "unipolar world [that] is simply a means of justifying dictatorship over people and countries." Other examples of Putin's madness, according to the *Post*, included his observations that Washington's interventions have created chaos around the world and that the overthrow of Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich was a "coup d'etat." In other words, Putin made observations that were either obviously true or certainly arguably true but the *Post* insisted on its own reality, one that grossly misleads its readers and implicitly sets the boundaries of MSM-approved debate.

For another exemplary case study of this MSM phenomenon of distortion and deception, we might look at the recently released "Kill the Messenger," a film treatment of the life and times of investigative journalist Gary Webb. Webb attempted in 1996 to shed light on the CIA's connections to, and knowledge of, cocaine distribution by the CIA-backed Nicaraguan Contras and their associates, and the consequent crack epidemic that spread across America throughout the 1980s.

Ultimately Webb's career was destroyed by a concerted, relentless character assassination and disinformation campaign by the Big Three of the U.S. print media *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times*, each one of which variously, yet ruthlessly distorted, and then refuted, Webb's claims, setting up straw men and then knocking them down. Several years later, in 2004, his career and marriage over, and financially destitute, Webb pulled the pin by committing suicide.

If Webb's fate had resulted from a rare manifestation of an unholy mix of journalistic *nonfeasance*, *misfeasance* and *malfeasance* in the history of reportage and public opinion-making, we might be tempted to view this case as an aberration. But sadly it is not. It is part of a pattern of covering up criminal nonfeasance, misfeasance and malfeasance at the highest levels of the U.S.

government, especially in matters of “national security” or in Eisenhower’s phrase, the “military-industrial complex.”

In the Webb case, his destruction also camouflaged the MSM’s own venality and incompetence, since the same Big Three newspapers had missed or disparaged reports of Contra-cocaine trafficking when the crimes were occurring in the 1980s (and when the American people needed to be informed of what the Reagan administration was doing and not doing). It is notable that it was not one but *three* of the so-called newspapers of record in established MSM circles that led the attack against a fellow journalist.

Taking into account the extraordinary significance of Webb’s reportage, along with the fact it is now generally accepted he largely got his story right, his own personal and professional odyssey is a savage, wholly justifiable indictment on all things MSM in the Home of the Brave. Yet insofar as we can gather, none of them has openly or unequivocally acknowledged its complicity in covering up the details of Webb’s revelations and/or for what they did in destroying his career, his family and ultimately his life. No one has been held to account, and no one has forthrightly apologized.

The fact that at least one of these papers the redoubtable *Washington Post* is still trying to defend the indefensible is surely another nail in the coffin of the *ancien régime* of the corporate-controlled media, information and news industry. It seems though the *Post* may only be rubbing salt into its own wounds, as any number of more independent media folk seem determined to set the record straight on Webb’s behalf.

Weapons of Mass Disinformation

As for the rest of the MSM cohorts who jumped onto the Big Three’s “Get Gary Webb” bandwagon, it would appear they are letting sleeping dogs lie in the wake of the film’s release. It’s unknown if they are doing this to preserve whatever integrity they might have left over their own attacks on Webb and/or failure to undertake their own investigations, or whether it is because they really don’t care one way or another. Webb may just have been collateral damage an “expendable” in the perennial War on Truth in mainstream media circles.

If Watergate was a high-water mark in investigative reportage and political news coverage in the U.S. and by some accounts there are compelling reasons after all these years to view this assessment with some skepticism then the Webb affair would have to qualify as a suitable case study at the other end of the spectrum.

As significant as the destruction of Gary Webb was in its implications for a free, fair and fearless mainstream press in America, this MSM behavior has now

become the norm, not the exception. (Indeed, President George W. Bush was able to mislead the American people into the disastrous Iraq War with the MSM especially the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* aiding and abetting his WMD deceptions of the American people).

With this in mind, we can hardly expect that we are going to get the kind of news and information we need to remain "alert and knowledgeable" from the MSM in an age when being so has possibly never been more important in homo sap's sorry-ass history on the Big Blue Ball. There are now so many examples of that Unholy Trinity's nonfeasance, misfeasance and malfeasance in journalistic reportage that it's a challenge to list them all, from Vietnam to the Iran-Contra Scandal; from the first Gulf War to the Balkans War; from Iraq's WMDs to the War on Terror. And these only skim the surface. If these bastions of fair and fearless reportage are the newspapers of record, the record is patchy indeed. Tragically so.

Moreover, there can be no better example of the double standards that prevail in U.S. politics and in its relationship with the Fourth Estate than Obama's 2013 honoring of Ben Bradlee the iconic *Washington Post* editor who famously presided over the paper's coverage of the Watergate scandal, the outcome of which was the downfall of an American president with a *Presidential* Medal of Freedom.

But the real irony is that Obama the president who has done more to curtail and then criminalize the activities of investigative journalists, leakers and whistle-blowers in ways that even Richard Nixon might never have contemplated extolled Bradlee's determination to ensure Americans are not denied the truth about what their increasingly secretive and subversive government does.

Obama's own home-grown hypocrisy in these matters is itself something to behold. We should recall this was a president whose government he promised would be truly accountable and more transparent than previous ones.

In an article in OpEdNews recently, contributor Sherwood Ross takes the President to task for his stance against investigative reporters in particular. Among other examples, Ross cites the case of James Risen, whose book *State of War* looks like it could land Risen in jail in the foreseeable future for refusing to betray a source. Briefly the case which has become something of a *cause celebre* in the mainstream and alternative media circles involves the Justice Department under first the Bush administration and now under Obama seeking to force Risen to reveal a key source for the book, which the journalist has refused to do.

To an investigative journalist revealing the identity of sources that provide information on condition of anonymity is akin to a priest revealing someone's

confession in a sermon from the pulpit at Sunday Mass; to refuse to do so is an article of faith of the profession. But Risen's courage in reporting important facts about the national security state and resisting government pressure to surrender his source (and thus make other sources much less likely to talk) is now the exception in the MSM, not the rule. Many such stories simply go unwritten. Career-wise, that's a lot safer.

There is also the reality that as resources for real reporting continue to decline spending on public relations and other manipulation of the public continues to soar. The highly sophisticated multi-billion dollar lobbying and public relations industries in America are almost entirely employed on the dime of the Powers that Be (industry bodies, political parties, think tanks, Super PACs, sundry foundations, corporations and institutions etc.) Unless the ordinary news consumers go out of their way to seek out reliable sources of information, they don't hazard a chance in Hades of ever getting anything resembling credible, untainted insight into the zeitgeist, so as to be able to maintain whatever might remain of their "alert and knowledgeable" status.

Yet, the MSM still commands attention from many folks. Why in this day and age of accessible and independent-minded news sources is a mystery inside a conundrum. Perhaps it's simply because of the MSM's size and inertia, living off its past reputation for supplying "responsible" news. Maybe people are too busy in their frantic lives or too afraid of being deemed "outside the mainstream," so they stick with what's considered traditional and safe.

But it's no longer possible for anyone who truly wants to be an "alert and knowledgeable" citizen to ignore the establishment media's lengthening reputation as one collective Weapon of Mass Disinformation.

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Israel Tests the Bounds of Its US Clout

Israeli resistance to deals on Palestinian peace and Iran's nuclear program has strained U.S.-Israeli relations and will test if Congress is more loyal to Prime Minister Netanyahu or President Obama. But the tension underscores a deeper division between the two countries, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

A [piece by Jeffrey Goldberg](#) at *The Atlantic*, bearing the title "The Crisis in U.S.-Israeli Relations is Officially Here," has performed a useful service in at

least two respects. One is that Goldberg's piece highlights how friction in the U.S.-Israeli relationship is primarily an epiphenomenon of an Israeli policy trajectory that is detrimental to Israel itself, no matter what U.S. officials may or may not say about the policies, publicly or privately, and not only detrimental to others.

In commenting, for example, on the latest insertion of right-wing Jewish settlers into Arab areas of East Jerusalem, which many Palestinians unsurprisingly see as another step in de-Palestinianizing East Jerusalem so much that it could not become capital of a Palestinian state, Goldberg writes, "It is the Netanyahu government that appears to be disconnected from reality. Jerusalem is on the verge of exploding into a third Palestinian uprising."

He's right about the potential for a new intifada, one that could emerge spontaneously from bottled-up frustration and anger and would not need to be ordered or directed by anyone.

Another service by Goldberg is to portray the relationship far more realistically than one would conclude from the boilerplate that both governments routinely serve up about supposedly unshakeable ties between close, bosom-buddy allies. The fact is that the interests that this Israeli government pursues (not to be confused with fundamental, long-term interests of Israel and Israelis generally) are in sharp and substantial conflict with U.S. interests. No amount of pabulum from official spokespersons can hide that fact.

For both these reasons, Goldberg's article deserves a wide readership.

The most recent expressions that reflect the true nature of the relationship are not just a matter of unnamed U.S. officials mouthing off. Goldberg notes in the third sentence of his piece that the comments he is reporting are "representative of the gloves-off manner in which American *and Israeli* [emphasis added] officials now talk about each other behind closed doors."

So the barbed tongues extend in both directions, but with two differences. One is that in this relationship the United States is the giver (of many billions in aid, and much political cover in international organizations) and Israel is the taker; harsh comments are far harder to justify when they are directed by an ungrateful beneficiary to its patron rather than the other way around.

The other difference is that Israeli leaders insult the United States not just through anonymous comments to journalists but also publicly and openly; the current Israeli defense minister is one of the more recent and blatant practitioners of this.

One can legitimately question some of the particular accusations by the U.S.

officials that Goldberg reports, not to mention the scatological and indecorous terminology employed. But to concentrate on this is to overlook the larger and far more important contours of the relationship. The most fundamental truth about the relationship is that, notwithstanding routine references to Israel as an "ally," it is not an ally of the United States beyond being the recipient of all that U.S. material and political largesse.

An ally is someone who offers something comparably significant and useful in return, particularly on security matters. That this is not true of Israel's relationship with the United States is underscored by the priority that the United States has placed, during some of its own past conflicts in the Middle East such as Operation Desert Storm, on Israel *not* getting involved because such involvement would be a liability, not an asset.

The core policy around which much of this Israeli government's other behavior revolves, and which defines Israel in the eyes of much of the rest of the world, is the unending occupation of conquered territory under a practice of Israel never defining its own borders and thus never permitting political rights to Palestinians under either a two-state or a one-state formula. This policy is directly contrary to U.S. interests in multiple respects, not least in that the United States through its close association with Israel shares in the resulting widespread antagonism and opprobrium.

One of the biggest and most recent U.S. foreign policy endeavors is the negotiation of an agreement to restrict and monitor Iran's nuclear program to ensure it stays peaceful. Completion of an agreement would be a major accomplishment in the interest of nonproliferation and regional stability. The Israeli "ally" has been doing everything it can to sabotage the negotiations and prevent an agreement.

It is a fallacy to think that making nice to the Israeli government will get it to back off from its opposition. It is a fallacy because that government has shown it does not want any agreement with Iran no matter what the terms, and because it is dishonest in expressing its opposition.

There certainly is genuine concern in Israel about the possibility of an Iranian nuclear weapon, but that is clearly not what is behind the Israeli government's opposition because the sort of agreement that is shaping up would make it markedly *less* likely, in terms of both Iranian motivations and capabilities, for Iran ever to make a nuclear weapon than would be the case with no agreement. That's the very purpose of the agreement.

The Israeli government instead seeks to keep Iran permanently in diplomatic exile, precluding any cooperation between Iran and the United States on other

issues (which would dilute Israel's claim to being the only worthwhile U.S. partner in the Middle East) and retaining the specter of Iran and a nuclear threat from it as the "real problem" in the Middle East supposedly more worthy of international attention than the occupation and unresolved plight of the Palestinians.

These objectives, as well as the setback for the cause of nonproliferation that collapse of an agreement with Iran would entail, also are directly contrary to U.S. interests.

The best way to handle the implacable opposition to an Iranian deal from Netanyahu, who, according to Goldberg's reporting, has "written off" the Obama administration, is to write off Netanyahu and any hope that he could be brought around on the subject. Needed instead is to expose, to Israelis, as well as to members of Congress and other Americans, the fundamental dishonesty of Netanyahu's opposition.

Maybe a useful step in doing that would be to bring back Netanyahu's cartoon bomb that he displayed at the United Nations General Assembly and point out how the preliminary agreement reached with Iran last year (and which the Israeli prime minister consistently denounced) has already drained the bomb and moved the Iranian program back from the lines that the Israeli prime minister drew with his red marker.

Calling Netanyahu to account certainly is not a sufficient condition to achieve political change in Israel, with its ever steeper rightward tilt, but it is probably a necessary condition. The state of the relationship with the United States is highly salient and highly important to many Israelis, but it will not be a driver of political change as long as it remains masked by all that boilerplate about how great the "alliance" is.

There are a couple of problems with the title of Goldberg's piece (which is probably the doing of an editor, not Goldberg). One is that there isn't "officially" a crisis. The fact that official statements continue to talk about a supposedly rosy relationship is part of what is, as explained above, wrong.

The other problem is that in this context the word *crisis* is a misnomer. The term usually indicates a potential for a big turn for the worse, especially the outbreak of a war between whatever two parties are experiencing a crisis. That's not what's involved here.

The only reason the term *crisis* comes up regarding U.S.-Israeli relations is the fictional, deliberately inflated view of the relationship as something qualitatively different that ought to defy any of the usual rules that apply to

any patron and client or to any bilateral relationship. Sweep aside the politically-driven fiction about two countries that supposedly have everything in common and nothing in conflict and instead deal with reality, and the concept of crisis does not arise at all.

What you have instead is a bilateral relationship that is like many others the United States has, with some parallel interests and objectives along with other objectives that diverge, sometimes sharply, and with honest recognition of the latter being a normal part of business. Being honest and realistic is good for U.S. interests, and in this case it would be good for the long-term interests of Israel as well.

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Russia's Key Role in Iran-Nuke Deal

Though the Ukraine crisis drove a wedge between Presidents Obama and Putin, their cooperation remains crucial to a negotiated agreement to constrain but not end Iran's nuclear program, as Gareth Porter makes clear in reporting on a possible breakthrough for Inter Press Service.

By Gareth Porter

U.S. and Iranian negotiators are working on a compromise approach to the issue of Iran's uranium enrichment capabilities, which the Barack Obama administration has said in the past Iran was refusing to make concessions on.

The compromise now being seriously discussed would meet the Obama administration's original requirement for limiting Iran's "breakout capability" by a combination of limits on centrifuge numbers and reduction of Iran's stockpile of low enriched uranium, rather than by cutting centrifuges alone. That approach might permit Iran to maintain something close to its present level of operational centrifuges.

The key to the new approach is Iran's willingness to send both its existing stockpile of low enriched uranium (LEU) as well as newly enriched uranium to Russia for conversion into fuel for power plants for an agreed period of years.

In the first official indication of the new turn in the negotiations, Iranian

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Marziah Afkham acknowledged in a briefing for the Iranian press on Oct. 22 that new proposals combining a limit on centrifuges and the transfer of Iran's LEU stockpile to Russia were under discussion in the nuclear negotiations. The briefing was translated by BBC's monitoring service but not reported in the Western press.

Undersecretary of State Wendy Sherman, who heads the U.S. delegation to the talks, has not referred publicly to the compromise approach, but she appeared to be hinting at it when she said on Oct. 25 that the two sides had "made impressive progress on issues that originally seemed intractable."

Despite the new opening to a resolution of what had been cited for months as the main obstacle to a comprehensive agreement, the negotiations could nevertheless stall in the final weeks over the timing of sanctions removal. Iran's willingness to negotiate such arrangements with the U.S. delegation will depend on Russia's agreement to take the Iranian enriched uranium.

The beginning of discussions on the new approach was reported in September just days after Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Russian President Vladimir Putin had met to discuss key issues in Iranian-Russian cooperation on the building of two nuclear power plants and fuel supply for Bushehr.

The proposed reduction of Iran's accumulation of LEU by shipping it to Russia could achieve the Obama administration's original minimum objective for an acceptable agreement, which was defined by a minimum number of months it would take Iran to enrich enough uranium for a single nuclear weapon.

Secretary of State John Kerry presented the administration's requirement for that period last April as being six to 12 months. The six- to 12-month requirement has been translated into a demand in the negotiations for a draconian cut to a few thousand centrifuges. However, that demand is not justified on technical calculations of a "breakout timeline."

David Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security, who supported the demand for a cut to a few thousand centrifuges, acknowledged in an analysis published in June that the reduction of the Iranian LEU stockpile to 1,000 kilograms would increase the breakout time for the present level of 10,000 Iranian operational centrifuges to six months, and a reduction to zero would increase it to nearly a year.

A deal that would reduce Iran's stockpile to a minimum would be consistent with the proposal Iran had presented to the P5+1 early in the negotiations. As Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif outlined the proposal to this writer in June, Iran proposed to guarantee immediate conversion of each batch of low-

enriched uranium to oxide powder to be used to make fuel assemblies for the Bushehr reactor.

But the plan did not explicitly address how Iran would dispose of the existing stockpile of LEU, and the United States has dismissed any plan in which Iran maintained large quantities of oxide powder, on the ground that it could be reversed. Iran could not negotiate such arrangement with the P5+1 without first reaching agreement with the Russians.

But the problem of shipping LEU to Russia for conversion to nuclear fuel was linked to a larger set of difficult issues in Iran's nuclear cooperation with Russia. Iran and Russia already have a commercial agreement for Russian provision of fuel for Iran's Bushehr reactor until 2021. But Iran and Russia have been negotiating on the construction of two new nuclear reactors by Russia, and Iran wanted Russia to agree to Iranian participation in enrichment for the fuel as well as in making the fuel assemblies for the reactors.

A "preliminary agreement" on a contract for building the two new reactors was announced March 12, but negotiations on key points involving the additional Iranian demands were still pending. Anton Khlopkov, director of the Center for Energy and Security Studies in Moscow, told IPS that the Russian acceptance of Iranian LEU would pose serious commercial issues for Russia.

It would lose significant profits it expected from doing the enrichment itself by agreeing to use Iranian LEU for conversion into fuel assemblies rather than uranium available in Russia. Iranian uranium is much more expensive than the uranium to which Russia has access, Khlopkov said. Iran also wants to do at least some of the enrichment for the new reactors to be built, which would increase the compensation required for the deal.

Explaining the rationale for the Iranian enrichment demand, Ali Akbar Salehi, the director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said in early July that Iran had no desire to "carry out all the enrichment inside Iran" but added that "the other parties must know that if some day they don't give us the fuel for power plants, Iran has the ability to produce it."

The second major commercial issue in the negotiations with Russia is Iran's desire to take over the fabrication of fuel assemblies for Bushehr and other power plants from the Russians after 2021. In a Sept. 29 interview with this writer, Salehi said that the negotiations with Russia "include a wide spectrum of issues," which include Iran's desire to "share in the technology of the power plants."

Iran is years away from having the capacity to do that, however, and it would

need technical assistance from Russia. The United States, meanwhile, has made it clear it believes Iran could and should continue to rely on Russia to provide the fuel for the Bushehr reactor, even after the current contract for the fuel expires in 2021.

Khlopkov did not rule out the possibility of “some kind of partnership for fuel production,” but only if Iran is ready to compensate Russia for its commercial losses. Fuel fabrication is a “big business, which nobody wants to lose,” Khlopkov said.

On June 24, the spokesman for AEOI, Behrooz Kamalvandi, announced that the contract for the two nuclear power plants would be signed within weeks during a visit by Salehi to Moscow, but he acknowledged “some elements” in the agreement remained unresolved.

In a sign that Russia and Iran were close to agreement on the unresolved issues connected with the reactor deal, the heads of government were brought into talks. On Sept. 12, Putin’s foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov said the two presidents would meet on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, and that both bilateral cooperation on nuclear power and the Iran-P5+1 talks would be among the topics to be discussed.

On Sept. 19, one week after the Rouhani-Putin meeting, the Associated Press reported that a new U.S. proposal involving a trade-off between reducing the LEU stockpile and the size of the cut in centrifuges had been discussed in bilateral talks between the United States and Iran. Iran was reported to have been “cautiously receptive”.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. He is the author of the newly published *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*. He can be contacted at porter.gareth50@gmail.com

Last Call on Fall Fundraiser

From Editor Robert Parry: We are at the end of our fall fund drive, but remain about \$7,500 short of our goal of \$25,000. If you can, please help so we can continue Consortiumnews as a source of independent and investigative journalism. We also are offering some special gifts.

Here are several ways that you can help:

You can make a donation to our tax-exempt non-profit. You can use a credit card online (we accept Visa, Mastercard or Discover) or you can mail a check to Consortium for Independent Journalism (CIJ); 2200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 102-231; Arlington VA 22201. For readers wanting to use PayPal, you can address contributions to our account, which is named after our e-mail address: "consortnew @ aol.com". (Since we are a 501-c-3 non-profit, donations by American taxpayers may be tax-deductible.)

For donations of \$100 or more, we are offering special thank-you gifts. If you want one of the gifts, just send us an e-mail at consortnew@aol.com including your mailing address and saying whether you would like either:

A CD of the historic joint appearance of the late Gary Webb and me, speaking in December 1996 about the Contra-cocaine scandal at the Midnight Special bookstore in Santa Monica, California. Plus, an autographed copy of my book, *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press and Project Truth*, which describes how the CIA's inspector general finally acknowledged that the CIA did know about the Contra-cocaine smuggling and helped cover it up. (This information is featured in the new movie, "Kill the Messenger.")

Or a DVD of the 1991 Frontline documentary, "Election Held Hostage," which examines whether Ronald Reagan's campaign exploited the 1980 Iran hostage crisis to win the presidency. Plus, a signed copy of my newest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, which provides the latest documentary evidence on that Republican skullduggery.

Another way to help Consortiumnews survive is to buy my three-book trilogy on the Bush dynasty *Secrecy & Privilege*, *Neck Deep* and *America's Stolen Narrative* for the discount price of only \$34, less than half the cover price. Just go to Consortiumnews.com's "Donate" button and make a \$34 "donation" using Visa, Mastercard or Discover. We will read a "donation" of that amount as an order for the trilogy. If your mailing address is the same as your credit card billing address, we will ship the books to that address. If your mailing address is different, just send us an e-mail at consortnew@aol.com and we will make the adjustment.

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If you purchase items through Amazon, you can go to AmazonSmile and select Consortium for Independent Journalism as your preferred charity to receive a fraction of each purchase that you make at Amazon at no extra cost to you.

You can donate stock or other equities, which can offer a tax advantage to you if the stock has appreciated in value. If this stock-donation option appeals to you, I suggest you discuss it with your broker and then contact me at consortnew@aol.com for specific instructions on how to transfer the stock.

Again, thanks for your support and for making our 19 years of honest journalism possible.

Robert Parry is a longtime investigative reporter who broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for the Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 to create an outlet for well-reported journalism that was being squeezed out of an increasingly trivialized U.S. news media.

Reminder About Comment Rules

From Editor Robert Parry: At Consortiumnews, we welcome substantive comments about our articles, but comments should avoid abusive language toward other commenters or our writers, racial or religious slurs, and allegations that are unsupported by facts. There are plenty of conspiracy theory sites; this is a journalistic one.

If we notice violations of this comment policy, we will take down such comments. If readers spot such violations, they can bring them to our attention at consortnew@aol.com. Repeat offenders will be placed on a watch list requiring case-by-case approval of their comments.

Obviously, our preference is for commenters to show self-restraint and to make their observations in a respectful and thoughtful way. We have plenty of work to do without having to police the comment section.

Also, because of annoying SPAM, we have installed a SPAM filter that sometimes catches legitimate comments. We try to check the filter during the day to recover these comments, but please do not be upset if occasionally one of your comments suffers this fate.

Robert Parry is a longtime investigative reporter who broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for the Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 to create an outlet for well-reported journalism that was being squeezed out of an increasingly trivialized U.S. news media.

How the Washington Press Turned Bad

Exclusive: There was a time when the Washington press corps prided itself on holding the powerful accountable Pentagon Papers, Watergate, Vietnam War but those days are long gone, replaced by a malleable media that puts its cozy relations with insiders ahead of the public interest, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Following the death last week of legendary Washington Post executive editor Ben Bradlee at age 93, there have been many warm remembrances of his tough-guy style as he sought “holy shit stories,” journalism that was worthy of the old-fashioned demand, “stop the presses.”

Many of the fond recollections surely are selective, but there was some truth to Bradlee’s “front page” approach to inspiring a staff to push the envelope in pursuit of difficult stories at least during the Watergate scandal when he backed Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in the face of White House hostility. How different that was from Bradlee’s later years and the work of his successors at the Washington Post!

Coincidentally, upon hearing of Bradlee’s death on Oct. 21, I was reminded of this sad devolution of the U.S. news media from its Watergate/Pentagon Papers heyday of the 1970s to the “On Bended Knee” obsequiousness in covering Ronald Reagan just a decade later, a transformation that paved the way for the media’s servile groveling at the feet of George W. Bush last decade.

On the same day as Bradlee’s passing, I received an e-mail from a fellow journalist informing me that Bradlee’s longtime managing editor and later his successor as executive editor, Leonard Downie, was sending around a Washington Post [article](#) attacking the new movie, “Kill the Messenger.”

That article by Jeff Leen, the Post’s assistant managing editor for investigations, trashed the late journalist Gary Webb, whose career and life were destroyed because he dared revive one of the ugliest scandals of the Reagan era, the U.S. government’s tolerance of cocaine trafficking by Reagan’s beloved Nicaraguan Contra rebels.

"Kill the Messenger" offers a sympathetic portrayal of Webb's ordeal and is critical of the major newspapers, including the Washington Post, for denouncing Webb in 1996 rather than taking the opportunity to revisit a major national security scandal that the Post, the New York Times and other major newspapers missed or downplayed in the mid-1980s after it was first reported by Brian Barger and me for the Associated Press.

Downie, who became the Post's managing editor in 1984 and followed Bradlee as executive editor in 1991 and is now a journalism professor at Arizona State University passed Leen's anti-Webb story around to other faculty members with a cover note, which read:

"Subject line: Gary Webb was no hero, say[s] WP investigations editor Jeff Leen
"I was at The Washington Post at the time that it investigated Gary Webb's stories, and Jeff Leen is exactly right. However, he is too kind to a movie that presents a lie as fact."

Since I knew Downie slightly during my years at the Associated Press he had once called me about my June 1985 article identifying National Security Council aide Oliver North as a key figure in the White House's secret Contra-support operation I sent him an e-mail on Oct. 22 to express my dismay at his "harsh comment" and "to make sure that those are your words and that they accurately reflect your opinion."

I asked, "Could you elaborate on exactly what you believe to be a lie?" I also noted that "As the movie was hitting the theaters, I put together an article about what the U.S. government's files now reveal about this problem" and sent Downie [a link](#) to that story. I have heard nothing back. [For more on my assessment of Leen's hit piece, see Consortiumnews.com's "[WPost's Slimy Assault on Gary Webb](#)."]]

Why Attack Webb?

One could assume that Leen and Downie are just MSM hacks who are covering their tracks, since they both missed the Contra-cocaine scandal as it was unfolding under their noses in the 1980s.

Leen was the Miami Herald's specialist on drug trafficking and the Medellin cartel but somehow he couldn't figure out that much of the Contra cocaine was arriving in Miami and the Medellin cartel was donating millions of dollars to the Contras. In 1991, during the drug-trafficking trial of Panama's Manuel Noriega, Medellin cartel kingpin Carlos Lehder even testified, *as a U.S. government witness*, that he had chipped in \$10 million to the Contras.

Downie was the Washington Post's managing editor, responsible for keeping an eye on the Reagan administration's secretive foreign policy but was regularly behind the curve on the biggest scandals of the 1980s: Ollie North's operation, the Contra-cocaine scandal and the Iran-Contra Affair. After that litany of failures, he was promoted to be the Post's executive editor, one of the top jobs in American journalism, where he was positioned to oversee the takedown of Gary Webb in 1996.

Though Downie's note to other Arizona State University professors called the Contra-cocaine story or "Kill the Messenger" or both a "lie," the Huffington Post's Ryan Grim recounted recently in [an article](#) about the big media's assault on Webb that "The Post's top editor at the time, Leonard Downie, told me that he doesn't remember the incident well enough to comment on it."

But there's more here than just a couple of news executives who find it easier to pile on a journalist no longer around to defend himself than to admit their own professional failures. What Leen and Downie represent is an institutional failure of American journalism to protect the American people, choosing instead to protect the American power structure.

Remember that in the mid-1980s when Barger and I exposed the Contra-cocaine scandal, the smuggling was happening in real time. It wasn't history. The various Contra pipelines were bringing cocaine into American cities where some was getting processed into crack. If action had been taken then, at least some of those shipments could have been stopped and some of the Contra traffickers prosecuted.

Yet, instead of the major news media joining in exposing these ongoing crimes, the New York Times and Washington Post chose to look the other way. In Leen's article, he justifies this behavior under a supposed journalistic principle that "an extraordinary claim requires extraordinary proof." But any such standard must also be weighed against the threat to the American people and others from withholding a story.

If Leen's principle means in reality that no level of proof would be sufficient to report that the Reagan administration was protecting Contra-cocaine traffickers, then the U.S. media was acquiescing to criminal activity that wreaked havoc on American cities, destroyed countless lives and overflowed U.S. prisons with low-level drug dealers while powerful people with political connections went untouched.

That assessment is essentially shared by Doug Farah, who was a Washington Post correspondent in Central America at the time of Webb's "Dark Alliance" series in 1996. After reading Webb's series in the San Jose Mercury News, Farah was eager

to advance the Contra-cocaine story but encountered unrealistic demands for proof from his editors.

Farah told Ryan Grim: "If you're talking about our intelligence community tolerating – if not promoting – drugs to pay for black ops, it's rather an uncomfortable thing to do when you're an establishment paper like the Post. ... If you were going to be directly rubbing up against the government, they wanted it more solid than it could probably ever be done."

In other words, "extraordinary proof" meant you'd never write a story on this touchy topic because no proof is 100 percent perfect, apparently not even when the CIA's inspector general confesses, as he did in 1998, that much of what Webb, Barger and I had reported was true and that there was much, much more. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Sordid Contra Cocaine Scandal.](#)"]

What Happened to the Press?

How this transformation of Washington journalism occurred from the more aggressive press corps of the 1970s into the patsy press corps of the 1980s and beyond is an important lost chapter of modern American history.

Much of this change emerged from the political wreckage that followed the Vietnam War, the Pentagon Papers, the Watergate scandal and the exposure of CIA abuses in the 1970s. The American power structure, particularly the Right, struck back, labeling the U.S. news media as "liberal" and questioning the patriotism of individual journalists and editors.

But it didn't require much arm-twisting to get the mainstream news media to bend into line and fall on its knees. Many of the news executives that I worked under shared the view of the power structure that the Vietnam protests were disloyal, that the U.S. government needed to hit back against humiliations like the Iran-hostage crisis, and that the rebellious public needed to be brought back into line behind more traditional values.

At the Associated Press, its most senior executive, general manager Keith Fuller, gave a 1982 speech in Worcester, Massachusetts, hailing Reagan's election in 1980 as a worthy repudiation of the excesses of the 1960s and a necessary corrective to the nation's lost prestige of the 1970s. Fuller cited Reagan's Inauguration and the simultaneous release of the 52 U.S. hostages in Iran on Jan. 20, 1981, as a national turning point in which Reagan had revived the American spirit.

"As we look back on the turbulent Sixties, we shudder with the memory of a time that seemed to tear at the very sinews of this country," Fuller said, adding that Reagan's election represented a nation "crying, 'Enough.'"

“We don’t believe that the union of Adam and Bruce is really the same as Adam and Eve in the eyes of Creation. We don’t believe that people should cash welfare checks and spend them on booze and narcotics. We don’t really believe that a simple prayer or a pledge of allegiance is against the national interest in the classroom.

“We’re sick of your social engineering. We’re fed up with your tolerance of crime, drugs and pornography. But most of all, we’re sick of your self-perpetuating, burdening bureaucracy weighing ever more heavily on our backs.”

Fuller’s sentiments were not uncommon in the executive suites of major news organizations, where Reagan’s reassertion of an aggressive U.S. foreign policy was especially welcomed. At the New York Times, executive editor Abe Rosenthal, an early neocon, vowed to steer his newspaper back “to the center,” by which he meant to the right.

There was also a social dimension to this journalistic retreat. For instance, the Washington Post’s longtime publisher Katharine Graham found the stresses of high-stakes adversarial journalism unpleasant. Plus, it was one thing to take on the socially inept Richard Nixon; it was quite another to challenge the socially adroit Ronald and Nancy Reagan, whom Mrs. Graham personally liked.

The Graham family embraced neoconservatism, too, favoring aggressive policies against Moscow and unquestioned support for Israel. Soon, the Washington Post and Newsweek editors were reflecting those family prejudices.

I encountered that reality when I moved from AP to Newsweek in 1987 and found executive editor Maynard Parker, in particular, hostile to journalism that put Reagan’s Cold War policies in a negative light. I had been involved in breaking much of the Iran-Contra scandal at the AP, but I was told at Newsweek that “we don’t want another Watergate.” The fear apparently was that the political stresses from another constitutional crisis around a Republican president might shatter the nation’s political cohesion.

The same was true of the Contra-cocaine story, which I was prevented from pursuing at Newsweek. Indeed, when Sen. John Kerry advanced the Contra-cocaine story with a Senate report issued in April 1989, Newsweek was uninterested and the Washington Post buried the story deep inside the paper. Later, Newsweek dismissed Kerry as a “randy conspiracy buff.” [For details, see Robert Parry’s *Lost History*.]

Fitting a Pattern

In other words, the vicious destruction of Gary Webb following his revival of the Contra-cocaine scandal in 1996 when he examined the impact of one Contra-

cocaine pipeline into the crack trade in Los Angeles was not out of the ordinary. It was part of the pattern of subservience to the national security apparatus, especially under Republicans and right-wingers but extending to Democratic hardliners, too.

This pattern of bias continued into last decade, even when the issue was whether the votes of Americans should be counted. After the 2000 election, when George W. Bush got five Republicans on the U.S. Supreme Court to halt the counting of votes in the key state of Florida, major news executives were more concerned about protecting the fragile "legitimacy" of Bush's tainted victory than ensuring that the actual winner of the U.S. presidential election became president.

After the Supreme Court's Republican majority made sure that Florida's electoral votes and thus the presidency would go to Bush, some news executives, including the New York Times' executive editor Howell Raines, bristled at proposals to do a media count of the disputed ballots, according to a New York Times executive who was present for these discussions.

The idea of this media count was to determine who the voters of Florida actually favored for president, but Raines only relented to the project if the results did not indicate that Bush should have lost, a concern that escalated after the 9/11 attacks, according to the account from the Times executive.

Raines's concern became real when the news organizations completed their unofficial count of Florida's disputed ballots in November 2001 and it turned out that Al Gore would have carried Florida if all legally cast votes were counted regardless of what standards were applied to the famous chads dimpled, hanging or punched-through.

Gore's victory would have been assured by the so-called "over-votes" in which a voter both punched through a candidate's name and wrote it in. Under Florida law, such "over-votes" are legal and they broke heavily in Gore's favor. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[So Bush Did Steal the White House](#)" or our book, [Neck Deep](#).]

In other words, the wrong candidate had been awarded the presidency. However, this startling fact became an inconvenient truth that the mainstream U.S. news media decided to obscure. So, the major newspapers and TV networks hid their own scoop when the results were published on Nov. 12, 2001.

Instead of stating clearly that Florida's legally cast votes favored Gore and that the wrong man was in the White House the mainstream media bent over backwards to concoct hypothetical situations in which Bush might still have won

the presidency, such as if the recount were limited to only a few counties or if the legal "over-votes" were excluded.

The reality of Gore's rightful victory was buried deep in the stories or relegated to data charts that accompanied the articles. Any casual reader would have come away from reading the New York Times or the Washington Post with the conclusion that Bush really had won Florida and thus was the legitimate president after all.

The Post's headline read, "Florida Recounts Would Have Favored Bush." The Times ran the headline: "Study of Disputed Florida Ballots Finds Justices Did Not Cast the Deciding Vote." Some columnists, such as the Post's media analyst Howard Kurtz, even launched preemptive strikes against anyone who would read the fine print and spot the hidden "lede" of Gore's victory. Kurtz labeled such people "conspiracy theorists." [Washington Post, Nov. 12, 2001]

An Irate Reporter

After reading these slanted "Bush Won" stories, I wrote an article for Consortiumnews.com noting that the obvious "lede" should have been that the recount revealed that Gore had won. I suggested that the news judgments of senior editors might have been influenced by a desire to appear patriotic only two months after 9/11. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Gore's Victory](#)."]]

My article had been up for only a couple of hours when I received an irate phone call from New York Times media writer Felicity Barringer, who accused me of impugning the journalistic integrity of executive editor Raines.

Though Raines and other executives may have thought that what they were doing was "good for the country," they actually were betraying their most fundamental duty to the American people to give them the facts as fully and accurately as possible. By falsely portraying Bush as the real winner in Florida and thus in the Electoral College, these news executives infused Bush with false legitimacy that he then abused in leading the country to war in Iraq in 2003.

Again, in that run-up to the Iraq invasion, the major news media performed more as compliant propagandists than independent journalists, embracing Bush's false WMD claims and joining in the jingoism that celebrated "the troops" and the initial American conquest of Iraq.

Despite the media's embarrassment that later surrounded the bogus WMD stories and the disastrous Iraq War, mainstream news executives faced no accountability. Howell Raines lost his job in 2003 not because of his unethical handling of the Florida recount or the false Iraq War reporting, but because he trusted reporter Jayson Blair who fabricated sources in the Beltway Sniper Case.

How distorted the Times' judgment had become was underscored by the fact that Raines's successor, Bill Keller, had written a major article "[The I-Can't-Believe-I'm-a-Hawk Club](#)" hailing "liberals" who joined him in supporting the Iraq invasion. In other words, you got fired if you trusted a dishonest reporter but got promoted if you trusted a dishonest president.

Similarly, at the Washington Post, editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt, who reported again and again that Iraq was hiding stockpiles of WMD as "flat-fact," didn't face the kind of journalistic disgrace that was meted out to Gary Webb. Instead, Hiatt is still holding down the same prestigious job, writing the same kind of imbalanced neocon editorials that guided the American people into the Iraq disaster, except now Hiatt is pointing the way to deeper confrontations in Syria, Iran, Ukraine and Russia.

So, perhaps it should come as no surprise that this thoroughly corrupted Washington press corps would lash out again at Gary Webb as his reputation has the belated chance for a posthumous rehabilitation.

But how far the vaunted Washington press corps has sunk is illustrated by the fact that it has been left to a Hollywood movie of all things to set the record straight.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

The Arab Spring Hangovers

Neocons and their "liberal interventionist" sidekicks thought Arab Spring "regime changes" in Libya and Syria (and a counterrevolution in Egypt) were great ideas, but the unleashed chaos has spread violence across the Mideast. A lone bright spot has been Tunisia, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Look across North Africa, and at three adjacent countries in particular, and one can see the best and some of the worst of what the Arab Spring has produced so far. Comparing the experiences of the three countries is a lesson in what helps

move a country toward something resembling stable democracy, and what moves it in the opposite direction. History has determined some of the factors at play, but others are more amenable to being shaped by policy.

If there is any one bright spot after nearly four years of flux and upheaval in much of the Middle East, it is the place where the Arab Spring began: Tunisia. That country certainly has greater political liberty now than it did under the previous regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The road from Ben Ali's ouster has not been smooth, but it has been pointing in a favorable direction.

This Sunday Tunisians voted freely for the second time since the revolution to elect a parliament. The election was scheduled after increased popular dissatisfaction with the performance, especially economic performance, of a coalition government led by the Ennahda Movement generated strikes and political gridlock. Ennahda did the responsible thing by stepping down and handing the reins of government to a caretaker cabinet.

Next door to Tunisia, Libya is in what can only be described as an awful mess. It may not be the very worst post-Arab Spring place in the Middle East, probably Syria deserves that distinction, but it comes close. Combat between dueling militias is far more prominent than anything that resembles a democratic political process.

Moving over one more country to the east brings one to Egypt, which is not as chaotic as Libya but has moved in a direction that may turn out to be at least as bad, for Egypt itself, and because of its greater size and weight in the region, for the Middle East. The regime of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi resembles the pre-Arab-Spring regime of Hosni Mubarak in that it is led by a figure who rose to power through the military and for whom the military is still the critical source of support, while governing with the forms of a representative republic and even with some genuine popular support.

But Sisi has promptly become more harshly authoritarian than Mubarak ever was, and in that respect political change in Egypt over the past four years represents a step backward. Sisi's regime has been mercilessly extinguishing all dissent and independent civil society. All political activity on university campuses is effectively banned.

One respect in which the repression is likely to spell an even worse future for Egypt is that the absence of peaceful channels for expressing opposition and pursuing political objectives means that much more resort to violent channels. Sisi's Egypt already has become plagued by heightened terrorism, with a couple of attacks last week being recent and especially deadly demonstrations of this.

Some of the reasons for the widely varying results of upheaval in the Maghreb can be found in conditions that existed before the upheaval began. Tunisia, for example, has had the advantage of a relatively small and homogeneous population that has been a bit closer than the others to Europe not only geographically but probably in the mental habits of its citizens.

Libya had the disadvantage of four decades of Muammar Gaddafi's rule, after which there was hardly anything left in the way of independent institutions, and thus almost nothing on which to build once the regime was gone. Egypt has had a military that is used to getting its way, including deciding when presidents ought to come and go.

The varying results demonstrate a couple of other principles, however, that are more a matter of policy discretion. One is the principle that if sentiments are not permitted to be expressed in a normal and peaceful way, they will find abnormal and violent outlets. This principle is especially illustrated by the handling of the main Islamist movements in each country.

In Tunisia that movement is Ennahda. It has been treated as a responsible and legitimate political actor in a democratic process, and it has behaved as a responsible and legitimate actor. Its relinquishing of power to open the way for fresh elections, after Ennahda had lost too much public confidence to enable it to govern effectively, is an emphatic rebuttal to the "one man, one vote, one time" label that has routinely been placed on Islamist parties.

Here a useful contrast is with the next country to the west, Algeria, where, more than 20 years ago, a military coup that preempted a likely victory in a free election by the principal Islamist party there led to a ghastly civil war that may have killed upwards of 100,000 people.

Algeria has been conspicuously absent from the Arab Spring, and probably a major reason is the fear of Algerians that any upsetting of the status quo would mean a return to such butchery. And so Algeria muddles along under the undemocratic influence of the mostly military power structure known as *le pouvoir*.

The Sisi regime has treated the largest Islamist group in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, far differently than Ennahda has been treated in Tunisia. The treatment of the Brotherhood is also much different from how it was handled under Mubarak, when, although officially outlawed, it was permitted to participate politically in various indirect ways.

The Sisi regime by contrast has been doing everything it can to smash the Brotherhood. What is left of the Brotherhood's leadership says it remains committed to peaceful methods, but it is a safe bet that some former adherents

of the Brotherhood are now being swayed by the extremist message that peaceful methods will always be smashed and that the only route to meaningful change is a violent one.

Another principle being illustrated is that getting rid of a disliked and distrusted leader is not necessarily a step toward democracy and stability. The United States and its European allies should have learned that lesson by now regarding their role in ousting Gaddafi.

Those Egyptians who were not favorably inclined toward the Muslim Brotherhood and who smiled upon the military's coup that ousted the elected president, Mohamed Morsi, may also now be having some buyer's remorse. If anyone in the Maghreb is apt to demonstrate what "one man, one vote, one time" means, it probably will be Sisi.

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.)

Is Latin America's 'Pink Tide' Ebbing?

Exclusive: Many in Official Washington still consider Latin America their "backyard," a place where U.S. interests rule and where leftist and reformist governments have historically faced "regime change" tactics. But the region has finally broken from U.S. control and isn't ready to go back, reports Andrés Cala.

By Andrés Cala

A string of elections in Latin America, recent and upcoming, had many pundits asking whether the so-called Pink Tide, the continent-wide resurgence of the political Left, was nearing its end. But these rumors of the Left's demise appear premature. Despite some erosion of support, most electoral results indicate that the region's leftist evolution over the past 15 years is being validated, not repudiated.

On Sunday, in Uruguay, the left-of-center candidate Tabare Vazquez of the ruling Broad Front won a plurality of about 45 percent against Luis Lacalle Pou of the right-wing National Party and other candidates, but falling short of a majority means Vazquez will have to face Lacalle Pou in a possibly close runoff election.

Meanwhile, in neighboring Brazil, President Dilma Rousseff won reelection in a tightly contested runoff, winning 51.6 percent of the votes and thus ensuring that South America's largest country, the regional trend-setter with the biggest economy, will stay in the hands of the left-of-center Workers Party which is committed to fighting inequality.

Rousseff's victory extends the 12-year rule of the Workers Party, which was founded by former President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, a leading light of the Pink Tide who remains a popular political figure because he helped redefine Brazilian politics with a commitment to lift up the poor. He is also credited with facilitating Brazil's emergence as the region's economic powerhouse.

The Workers Party's legacy is now so engrained in Brazil's politics that even Rousseff's pro-market challenger Aécio Neves of the conservative Social Democracy Party promised to preserve the socialist and environmental gains of the Left while seeking to rekindle the country's once-rapid economic growth.

Yet, Rousseff's narrow victory reflects the public's disappointment with an economy now in a recession partially induced by the global slowdown but also blamed on the government's policy missteps as well as wasted resources in the energy and construction sectors. But voters apparently were not ready to risk the gains that they experienced from the Workers Party's reign.

Regionally, the message seems to be that the rowdy initial phase of Latin America's awakening is giving way to a more mature and circumspect one, led by a new generation that has grown up with rising prosperity and higher expectations. Indeed, the competitive challenges facing the Left may be symptomatic of the Pink Tide's success in building a more secure population confident enough to demand accountability from their governments rather than fearful of brutal reprisals for dissent.

In general, there has been a pivot toward a more pragmatic center that addresses the public's demand for economic growth but without sacrificing a pursuit of greater economic equality. One enduring change in most Latin American countries has been a commitment to reduce the region's crushing poverty, a break from past oligarchic regimes that repressed the poor and protected the local rich and foreign investors.

While many social problems remain and political resistance has stiffened from pro-business groups, the overall trend continues in a progressive direction. But it would be a mistake to assume that the Pink Tide narrative means that there is a homogenous political Left in Latin America. Each country is following its own path, even if there are obvious overlaps in policies.

Popular demands also are similar throughout South America with many people impatient with the pace of economic growth while others are uncomfortable with liberal social changes but there is general satisfaction with the continent's overall direction and there is no real threat from the extreme Right with perhaps the exception of Colombia where conservative forces remain very popular.

Latin America is also witnessing a moderation of the harder-line Left as in Venezuela. And, much of the Right is shifting to the center, as in Peru.

Youthful Middle Class

The first generation that grew up under the Pink Tide now represents a growing middle class that is demanding change, especially a more efficient welfare state and a more flexible economic model to encourage entrepreneurship. Generally speaking, this new middle class wants more private and public investment and less poverty and crime.

That has meant that even candidates who present themselves as pro-business say they want to preserve and consolidate the gains of the Pink Tide. It also translates into the left-of-center candidates promising reforms to address corruption and offering to make other corrective changes to government programs.

In Brazil, Rousseff supports working within Mercosur, the trade bloc that also includes Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela, while Neves said that either Mercosur would have to change drastically or Brazil should go its own way, which could have meant signing a free-trade agreement with Europe and splitting with Argentina, which is engaged in several diplomatic and commercial disputes. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Argentina v. the Hedge Funds.](#)"]

The Uruguayan presidential election, which is now headed to a runoff, centered on a somewhat different dynamic, with the left-of-center government having built up a strong private-sector economy along with arguably the most progressive, democratic institutions and social reforms in the region, having more in common with the more urbane European socialism than Venezuela's fiery Chavismo and similar populist movements in Latin America.

Uruguay's reforms have included gay marriage, abortion rights and decriminalization of marijuana, policies that have unleashed a social-conservative backlash to Vazquez's ruling party. That backlash has cut across the traditional right-left economic lines, much as the Religious Right in the United States often votes against its economic interests in protest of what it considers "moral" issues.

There is also a generational component with the Left's candidate in Uruguay,

Vazquez, who was elected president in 2005 and is seeking to reclaim that office now, is 74. The right-of-center candidate, Lacalle Pou, is 41 and represents a fresh face.

It is Uruguay's young generation, which the Left nurtured, that now seems to want a break from the near-decade-old rule of Vazquez's left-of-center Broad Front, making the runoff's outcome hard to predict. Still, a change of government would probably not threaten the popular social model that Vazquez pioneered.

Elsewhere, the Pink Tide has shown few signs of ebbing. In Bolivia, President Evo Morales won reelection by an overwhelming margin, which included middle-class areas and even conservative bastions that once opposed his rule, such as Santa Cruz.

Bolivia and Ecuador are aligned, though with different economic and political models adapted to their own circumstances. Both share a mix of populist rhetoric with pragmatic policies that spur private investment. They tend to increasingly seek a more moderate version of the hardcore Left, represented by Venezuela and Argentina.

In those two countries, the populism of Chavismo and Peronism, respectively, are very different as are their goals. But both Venezuela and Argentina are under increasing pressure to moderate their aggressive social and economic policies that have lifted millions from poverty but are blamed for stalling their economies.

U.S. Interference

Unlike some other Latin countries, Venezuela and Argentina have demonstrated more resentment toward U.S. economic and political pressure although acknowledging the need for foreign investment and implementing urgent reforms to their economies. The governments in Caracas and Buenos Aires also are the primary targets of Washington's hostility, along with Cuba and Nicaragua.

Thus, Venezuela and Argentina may have the least time to make adjustments and soften their radicalism or face the possibility of Washington-encouraged destabilization and "regime change." Still, Venezuela and Argentina hope to sustain their revolutions by applying the wealth from their natural resources.

Argentina will hold an election in 2015, and anti-government forces in Venezuela have sought a recall referendum to remove President Nicolas Maduro, who otherwise is elected to serve until 2019.

However, perhaps most important, Latin America appears at little risk of

returning to the U.S.-backed regimes of last century, brutal dictatorships which committed widespread human rights abuses and protected the privileged few against the impoverished masses.

Yet, while such old-fashioned right-wing dictatorships long favored by Washington's Cold Warriors may be a thing of the past, there still could be a trend toward more market-friendly policies in countries such as Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Peru. But even those countries have not shown the subservience toward Washington that was common in the old days.

In 2012, Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Peru established the Pacific Alliance, a trade bloc meant to boost free trade and to jointly expand economic ties to Asia but the bloc lacked any specific ideological agenda. The Pacific Alliance countries are seeking different ways to reach the center, whether from the Right or the Left.

Among the Pacific Alliance countries, there is significant diversity of governing approaches. Chile is socialist, yet very business friendly. Colombia this year reelected a moderate-right president who has invested more than any of his predecessors in a welfare state while also seeking peace with a powerful Marxist-Leninist guerrilla force.

Peru is still a long way from elections, but like Colombia, its policies have gradually moved toward a moderate-right orientation. And Mexico has entered a long-overdue reformist cycle under a pro-market government, but its destiny remains tied to the U.S. and shaped by a bloody war on crime and corruption.

But the celebration among some Washington pundits about the fading Pink Tide seems premature at best. The legacy built by the modern Left in Latin America is now deeply engrained amid a popular consensus favoring a progressive direction, albeit with a number of course corrections.

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Powerful Lobbies v. Public Interest

Some American lobbies are so powerful that U.S. politicians cringe in fear, knowing that standing up for the broader national interest would be career-threatening, a reality most notable on issues of Israel and guns, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

The problem of special interests or lobbies was one of the foremost concerns of the Founding Fathers of the United States. In their day these pressure groups were called factions.

James Madison, who is considered the architect of the U.S. Constitution, devoted the entire tenth Federalist Paper (1787) to the problem. He defined a faction as "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority actuated by some common interest, adverse to the aggregate interests of the community," and believed that within the context of liberal republicanism, they could never be eliminated.

However, Madison did feel they could be controlled. To this end he sought to create representative bodies with high numbers of delegates and a wide diversity of interests in the hope that they would counterbalance each other.

When George Washington delivered his famous Farewell Address in 1796, he too noted the problem. Washington warned of "combinations and associations" which attempt to "direct, control, counteract and awe the regular deliberation and action of the constituted authorities" and thereby substitute their own desires for the "delegated will of the nation."

As Washington's continued concern implied, James Madison's approach to controlling special interests or factions never proved adequate.

Lobbification

Today, the problem is still with us and is worse than ever. That is why in April 2011 I coined the word "lobbification" to describe the corruptive process that bends politicians to the will of special interests that is, to the will of lobbies. The vehicle that makes this process possible is, of course, money, usually in the form of campaign contributions to a politician.

If the politician defies the lobby making the offer (a rare event but not unheard of), that special interest will throw its support to the defiant politician's electoral opponent. The result is that most politicians are in lockstep with the demands of multiple powerful special interests.

James Madison believed that this corruptive process is a consequence of human nature – self-interest in action. Perhaps that is so, but the results are no less debilitating. So Pavlovian are the responses created by lobbification that, today, politicians in this state of mind cannot tell the difference between the parochial interests of those powerful factions to which they are indebted and the actual national or local interests of their country or community.

Two Examples

Here are two recent examples of the power of lobbification. On July 18, acting in response to the urgings of the Zionist lobby, the U.S. Senate unanimously voted to support Israel's ongoing attack on the Gaza Strip. This from a Congress known for its inability to agree on just about any legislation important to its own country!

The senators voted their support even though the Israeli action was of the same character as the German attacks on London during the Blitz and the Allied destruction of the German city of Dresden toward the end of World War II. In other words, the Israelis were engaged in a large-scale operation targeting a civilian population. That is a war crime and cannot be justified as an act of self-defense. Yet the U.S. Senate, to a person, publicly supported this criminal behavior.

It might be noted here that there were serious divisions of opinion about Israeli behavior among the American public – that is, the Senate's constituency. But the senators seemed immune from the popular debate and responded as if they represented the Zionist lobby, not the American public.

On the domestic front, meaningful regulatory gun legislation, be it national or local, appears to be politically impossible because of the influence of the National Rifle Association (NRA). This is so despite a proliferation of gun-related deaths and injuries in our homes, on our streets, and in our schools.

The arguments of NRA supporters usually imply that regulation of firearms would be the death knell of hunting, of target shooting, and of gun collecting, and even the ability to act in self-defense. Yet rational and reasonable gun regulation is not the same as prohibition, and to act as if they are the same is, in my opinion, a paranoid point of view.

Then there is the Second Amendment argument that allows many supporters of the NRA to fantasize that they are enrolled in a "well regulated militia" without which the U.S. cannot remain a free society. Free from what? From the authoritarian potential of the state with its immensely better armed police and military branches? This is just naive. If the government wants to act in a dictatorial fashion, armed members of the NRA will not be able to stop it.

In truth, rational control of firearms does not threaten our freedom. It makes us freer by enhancing our safety from the growing plague of gun violence that NRA lobbying presently forces most of our politicians to ignore or deny.

Here it is important to note that the National Rifle Association leadership often fails to accurately represent its own membership, much less that of the

general public. A 2013 Pew survey found that 74 percent of NRA members supported universal background checks for private gun sales (as did 94 percent of the general American public). Nonetheless, at the urging of the NRA the Senate voted against this requirement in the same year.

As with the Zionist lobby and public concern over its particularistic foreign policy, many senators are immune from the popular debate on gun control and respond as if they represent the NRA lobby and not the American public.

Need for Regulation

Madison was right in one regard: regulation of the power of factions/special interests/lobbies to influence politicians and policies is an absolute necessity. However, here we run up against a real Catch-22 dilemma. That regulatory legislation, and other related efforts such as campaign finance reform, must come from the same politicians who are financially bound to special interests.

Like those with a strong addiction, these politicians seem unable to free themselves from the monkey on their back.

If there is a way out of this dilemma it must come from the general public. The long-standing dissatisfaction with politicians, especially on the national level, must be channeled into a popular campaign to free the legislators and policy makers from the influence of narrow interests.

Think of this as an effort to clear away an historical obstacle to good governance. If this does not happen, the foreign policies that have promoted so much anti-American hostility worldwide, and the domestic policy that has allowed the indiscriminate murder of so many innocent citizens, will continue and indeed grow worse.

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