

# Neocons' Fateful Iraq 'Surge' Myth

After provoking the Iraq War debacle, America's neocons found themselves on the defensive but soon came up with a "theme" to salvage their reputations the myth of the "successful surge" what might be called the last lie of Iraq War I or the first lie of Iraq War II, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

One of the most persistently voiced myths about U.S. foreign policy of the past several years, and because of that persistent voicing, one apparently already entrenched in the minds of many Americans, concerns the status as of about five years ago of the big experiment in regime change and nation-building known as the Iraq War.

According to the myth, the war was all but won by then, with just a few more touches yet to be added to complete the forging of a stable Iraqi democracy, before the Obama administration snatched defeat from the jaws of victory by prematurely withdrawing the remaining U.S. troops that were needed to finish the job. No matter how often the myth gets repeated, it is just as false now as the first part of the myth was five years ago.

It is easy to see the motivations for promoting the myth. Probably the leading motivation is to relieve the cognitive dissonance and the blow to personal reputations of those who promoted or strongly supported the war itself, the grandest neoconservative project ever and the biggest foreign policy endeavor of the George W. Bush administration, only to see it materialize as one of the biggest and costliest blunders in the history of U.S. foreign policy.

Also rough on *amour-propre*, and in a way more worthy of understanding and even respect from the rest of us than is the case with the war-promoters, is how those in uniform who were given the task of carrying out the project have not been able to claim honestly that their efforts and sacrifices resulted in a victory. Yet another obvious motivation, which arises whenever Barack Obama's political opponents find a stick they can employ to beat him, is to use the troubles of Iraq today as one more such stick.

With regard particularly to that last motivation, it always has been puzzling how the part of the myth relating to Obama's policies gets propagated even though it was the Bush administration that established the schedule for withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq by 2011. The Obama administration merely carried out the terms of the agreement that the Bush administration had negotiated with the Iraq government.

In response to assertions that Mr. Obama “didn’t try hard enough” to negotiate a new agreement with different terms, which implication are we supposed to draw: that Mr. Bush did not try hard enough in the first place, or that when Bush people and Obama people each try to do the same thing we should expect the Obama people to be better at it? But the myth has more significant consequences than its effect on the partisan scorecard.

A reflection of the discrepancy between the myth and Iraqi reality arose in a public debate in which I participated a couple of months ago, the topic of which concerned the efficacy, or lack thereof, of additional applications of U.S. military force in the Middle East. One of my opponents on the pro-efficacy side (a prominent neocon pundit) asserted that Iraq was “at peace” in 2009.

As one measure of what this supposedly peaceful state looked like, consider the statistics compiled by the Iraq Body Count project, which show 5,309 civilian deaths from the continued violence in Iraq in 2009. For comparison, that is more than total U.S. combat deaths for the entire war. It also includes only documented civilian deaths, which are basically collateral damage, and does not reflect either undocumented casualties or the full toll among government forces and militias who were the principal combatants.

The civil war unleashed by the U.S. invasion and ouster of the Iraqi regime has had an unbroken history, from then through today. Like most wars, its intensity has ebbed and flowed. The surge of U.S. troops in 2007 and 2008 was one factor, but only one, involved in one of the ebbs. And if there are more than 160,000 U.S. troops in a country, as there were in Iraq at the peak of the U.S. occupation, we certainly should expect *some* effect on the ebb and flow.

Even with the temporary ebbing of the violence, the issues driving the civil war remained unsettled, fundamental issues involving distribution of political power in Iraq. The surge was intended to make it possible for Iraqis to resolve those issues, and in that respect the surge failed.

There is an unbroken history from the conflict of interests that caused the civil war and its associated mélange of insurgencies to break out a decade ago, to the conflict of interests, which is mostly the same unresolved conflict of interests among sectarian and ethnic communities, that underlies the violence in Iraq today.

There also is an unbroken history from the most violent and extreme of the groups in Iraq as of several years ago and the feared group ISIS, which is the same group with a new name and a new leader, that is such a preoccupation today.

There never has been a logic accompanying the myth. If eight-and-a-half years of

U.S troops in Iraq were not enough, then why should we expect a few more years (or would it turn out to be only a few?) of a troop presence to be sufficient? And if 160,000 troops were not enough, then why should we expect a smaller number (or would it re-escalate to a large number?) to be sufficient?

The myth seems to be predicated on some strange process of telepathic osmosis by which democratic thoughts in the minds of American troops in Iraq would somehow have gotten former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to have turned away from his sectarian and authoritarian habits and nourished an inclusive, tolerant, multi-confessional democracy.

What else exactly could U.S. troops in Iraq have done if they had lingered longer in Iraq to have made such a political difference? Threaten to overthrow Maliki, through a kind of U.S.-led military coup, if he didn't get with the program? If U.S. forces instead would have been helping to provide security against the extremist groups and Sunni insurgents whose support has been rooted all along in opposition to the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad, that would only have reduced rather than increased Maliki's incentive to reform and to be more inclusive.

If telepathic osmosis was not expected to work and whatever good U.S. troops would have done would be in spite of the unhelpful ways of Iraqi politicians such as Maliki, then the job would *never* be done, if the job is defined as making way for a stable Iraqi democracy standing on its own.

Or at least it would not be done on any time scale less than generational, a time scale, measured in decades, long enough for a new political culture to evolve. Until then, U.S. troops would have been sitting forcefully and indefinitely on the ingredients of a volatile stew, a little like how Saddam Hussein sat on top of it in a much more brutal way, before the U.S. removed him and the stew boiled over.

No, we never won, or almost won, the Iraq War. One of the uniformed leaders who was given the task to try to do that, now retired three-star general Daniel Bolger, has painfully, but honestly, and not buying into myths that would be soothing for him and his colleagues, acknowledged this by writing:

"The surge in Iraq did not 'win' anything. It bought time. It allowed us to kill some more bad guys and feel better about ourselves. But in the end, shackled to a corrupt, sectarian government in Baghdad and hobbled by our fellow Americans' unwillingness to commit to a fight lasting decades, the surge just forestalled today's stalemate. Like a handful of aspirin gobbled by a fever patient, the surge cooled the symptoms. But the underlying disease didn't go away."

The damage that the myth about Iraq inflicts is not limited to fostering public misunderstanding about an important episode in modern American history, although that is indeed harmful. It is not limited to fostering misunderstanding about who was right and who was wrong about that episode and thus who should and should not be listened to on similar matters, a misunderstanding that also is harmful.

The damage extends to the encouragement of more general misconceptions about efficacy of the exertion of U.S. power overseas.

George Kennan made a somewhat similar observation about an earlier set of myths and recriminations concerning developments in another faraway country that has been a preoccupation of Americans. The belief that we “lost China,” wrote Kennan, “seriously distorted the understanding of a great many Americans about foreign policy, implying that our policy was always the decisive mover of events everywhere in the world; that in any country of the world, including China, we had it in our power to prevent the rise to positions of authority of people professing Marxist sympathies...”

The ideologies that Americans fear the most now are ones other than Marxism. And the myth involving Iraq is a more extensive one than the one involving China in that it posits the United States having “won” Iraq before “losing” it. But the damage Kennan identifies, the mistaken belief that if U.S. power and especially military power is applied with sufficient determination and persistence, the governments of other countries will be composed of people who are to our liking or at least act in accordance with our liking, is the same.

For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Reviving the ‘Successful Surge’ Myth.”](#)]

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as [a blog post at The National Interest’s Web site](#). Reprinted with author’s permission.)**

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## Punishing a Professor’s Criticism of Israel

Criticism of how Israel treats Palestinians has become a firing offense in some circles, including academia where professors must muzzle themselves or face accusations of anti-Semitism. In the case of Steven Salaita, Twitter posts about

Gaza cost him his job, as Dennis J. Bernstein explores in an interview.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

As bombs rained down on the people of Gaza this past summer, Palestinian-American professor Steven Salaita shared his outrage and horror about the Israeli assault via Twitter. Then, as he prepared to move his family and start his new job as a tenured professor in American Indian Studies at the University of Illinois, Salaita was abruptly un-hired.

Wealthy donors had objected to his tweets and pressured the university to keep him out, part of a broader campaign to silence people advocating for Palestinian rights, as Salaita described in a recent interview on Pacifica's "Flashpoints" program.

DB: Before we get into the ugly details. Tell us a little bit about your own background. You were going to be teaching Native American Studies. Tell us about your history as a teacher.

SS: I was set to teach in the American Indian Studies program. I specialize in Native Literatures, Native politics, and Native decolonization and so I got my PhD in Native American Studies at the University of Oklahoma, in 2003.

I've been working at the intersections of Palestine and North America, and the similarities of the colonial discourses between the two spaces for quite some time. And so that was, I think, what led the American Indian Studies Program to their interest in me.

DB: Our senior producer for this show Miguel Gavilan Molina is indigenous Chicano and he always makes the connection, and in fact, now we've got the Israelis securing the borders not only here at the Mexican border, but all the way down between Mexico and Guatemala. I mean, you see the Mexican military, it looks like the Israeli army. ... So, you were hired as a tenured professor? Why tenured?

SS: Because I had already been tenured at Virginia Tech.

DB: That must have meant that there was a great deal of respect in bringing you on, giving you the tenure, and letting you carry that across. So they must have really wanted you.

SS: Absolutely, correct. And it came along with an extra intensive round of vetting. A tenured hire always passes through a lot more committees and external referees than an untenured hire.

DB: And then came the latest slaughter in the Gaza Strip and you were not happy

about that. You were speaking out.

SS: Of course.

DB: What was on your mind?

SS: The images of destruction, the many war crimes that reporters and human rights organizations were reporting. ... What ended up being the murder of around 519 children. The bombing of the shelters to which so many people had been displaced; just the overall horror of the situation.

DB: It was a rather abject slaughter. It wasn't a war, it was a slaughter. There was ... not even a close sense of equal power on both sides.

SS: Exactly. It was a colonial power ... raining death and destruction on the colonized population.

DB: So, you were outraged. I guess you have friends there, maybe family?

SS: No family, lots of friends.

DB: Lots of friends and you were hearing it first hand, what the slaughter looked like.

SS: Yes.

DB: So talk about ... what did you tweet?

SS: I tweeted all kinds of things. I've been tweeting about the Israel/Palestine conflict for a very long time, ever since I got onto the platform. ... About 5 or 6 tweets ... were isolated by right-wing groups, who ended up decontextualizing them from a broader narrative. And they were ... misread. They were consciously misread.

I was accused of antisemitism. ... To conceptualize criticism of Israeli government policy as antisemitism transforms the meaning of the word into something honorable and, therefore, it's kind of a dangerous move to make. Or at the very least, a troublesome move to make.

Otherwise, I think the tweet that rankled people was ... when I noted that if you support what Israel is doing in Gaza right now, you are an awful human being.

DB: Do we know exactly who responded and who the university responded to in terms of these complaints?

SS: We know right now. ... It started publicly with a hit piece on me from Tucker Carlson's website, the Daily Caller. And then the local paper, in Champaign-

Urbana, the News Gazette, picked up on it. And then it sort of spiraled out of control.

We do know the Simon Weisenthal Center had some contact with the university administration. And we know from the FOIA, the Freedom of Information Act request that at least a handful of wealthy donors was involved and that the University of Illinois Foundation (that is the fundraising branch of the university) was involved in the conversations as well. But all of the names, at this point, have been redacted.

DB: Tell us ... in this thorough vetting of your history, they must have known, in terms of your theories, about the relationship between indigenous communities in this country and the nature of Palestinians, who don't have a country to live in at this point.

SS: Oh yeah, of course. And the tweets aren't part of the dossier. If they're going to be part of the hiring dossier then they need to also count as part our labor. They don't count as part of our labor. So if they're going to count our tweets as part of our academic profile then my cv is going to get a lot longer than it already is. And ... I have listed on my cv, front and center, my most recent book published by a university press called *Israel's Dead Soul*.

I've never made any secret as to what my politics are. In fact, I've been on the job market a number of times since I've gotten out of graduate school. And I've always liked hiring committees to know exactly where I stand, so there are no surprises. They ... know what my politics are, they know how my scholarship engages in a particular set of material politics, of de-colonial politics. They knew all of this. If you look at the sum total of people at UIUC [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign] who had looked over my dossier, the number is probably more than one hundred.

DB: More than one hundred. ... Did you ever hear from the people who hired you again, after you were fired? Were they sorry? What was the reaction? Because in a hiring structure like this, you must have had a chance to really meet a couple of people. ... Tell us about what they said, after the fact.

SS: They were upset, and they continue to be upset. This has been a tremendous blow to the American Indian Studies Program. They uniformly wanted me to be there and continue to want me to be there. The administration really stomped on their hiring autonomy as a department. They trampled on university by-laws in making this unilateral decision.

Even the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences wasn't informed that this decision was being made. So there's a huge group of faculty across the

campus who are dismayed by the university's decision and want me to come join them as a colleague.

DB: And, just to be clear, is this a done deal? You've been unhired?

SS: It seems to be a done deal but I'm hoping ... a lot of us are hoping that reinstatement will still be possible.

DB: Did you get a letter?

SS: I got a letter, yeah.

DB: What did the letter say?

SS: It really didn't say anything. It was an exceptionally vague letter. I actually had to read it about three or four times to make sure that I had actually been fired, or unhired, or whatever you want to call it.

But it basically said "We..." ... it was signed by Phyllis Wise, the Chancellor, and Christophe Pierre, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and it simply noted that they don't expect Board of Trustee approval for my hire and that therefore there is no reason for me to turn up. They didn't give any reason, nothing specific, nothing.

DB: And did you hear from those folks you got to know in the department, about what the behind the scenes dialogue was about?

SS: See, they didn't know either.

DB: They didn't even know that you were unhired...?

SS: They didn't know until I knew. The Dean of the College didn't know. The Chair of my Department didn't know. The members of the hiring committee didn't know. We all sort of found out at the same time.

DB: So who fired you?

SS: We don't know for sure. It is the responsibility of Chancellor Wise, the Board of Trustees, and I think the system President Robert Easter. I don't exactly know who made the decision but it appears that it was donors who made the decision. And that the board and the chancellor and the president are just carrying water for them.

DB: In terms of the content ... I mentioned the senior producer here considers indigenous folks in this country, the Palestinians of North America. These parallels are made all the time. There's extraordinary unity between these communities across global lines, and at the United Nations, when they work



together. Tell us what you think we're all losing by this kind of action.

SS: I think so many people are invested in the outcome of this process because a lot of people inside and outside of academe understand that first of all we're losing a legal definition and a notion of practice of academic freedom. We're losing the ability to criticize a foreign nation state without recrimination. We're losing ability to question the imperatives of the American government without recrimination. We're losing the First Amendment, as problematic as its practice has been throughout American history. It still has remained an important protection against government incrimination, for political speech.

We're losing faculty governance and democratic educational practices in the universities. And it's really in some way ... symbolic of what's become of the country in general. And so in universities we have boards of trustees, made up of business people, sort of making decisions about the university in which campuses are becoming, U.C. Berkeley, among them, completely corporatized and models of neo-liberal engagement, just like American society in total.

DB: We're just down the block from the University of California, Berkeley, and there they have honored a professor named John Yoo with a special chair. And he wrote, essentially, the torture justifications for the Bush administration. And he's promoted. He's got his own life chair now. At first they had to hide where his classes were because there were so many protests. There really does seem to be a dual standard in this country ... and on the university campus.

SS: Oh, absolutely. And this certainly didn't start with me. ... Just even in the case of Palestine and Israel. There have been so many people who have been fired or who haven't been tenured or who faced public scrutiny. Or in many cases, who have never been hired in the first place.

But even before that, the suppression of African-Americans, of indigenous peoples, of queers – of any sort of deviant body or deviant idea – has a longstanding history. And what I think the distinction comes down to, more than anything, is whether your speech is critical of the exercise of state power or whether it reinforces or supplements the practices of state power. And if you fall into the latter category, like John Yoo, then you get rewarded.

DB: You know somebody who teaches at the University of Illinois, Urbana Law School is Francis Boyle.

SS: Yes.

DB: Who was, among other things, a representative for the PLO [Palestinian Liberation Organization] at various peace talks. And has represented them in various potential cases of crimes against humanity, human rights. Any of the

other professors there, at the university, speaking out? Or maybe they haven't even heard about it.

SS: Tons of professors at that university are speaking out. There's been a huge group of faculty and graduate students and community members who have spoken out as Jews, specifically as Jews, saying that the university is totalizing this as Proto-Zionists and invoking a particular ethnic heritage for nefarious purposes that [they] don't want to be implicated in or involved with.

A lot of faculty, especially those in ethnic studies units have spoken out. But really across the humanities and social sciences there's been uniform condemnation. It seems to be at the center of campus life this semester.

DB: It's not exactly a precedent as you say, this happens all the time. I can tell you that ... every time we get a new manager [here at KPFA] the Israeli Consulate shows up at the station and they start talking about "If you can just get rid of that Bernstein guy..." In fact, I always have to regularly check my Wikipedia. And it just so happens on the Flashpoints Wikipedia this weekend one of our key contributors, an editor with the Electronic Intifada, Nora Barrows-Friedman is ... all of a sudden there's a write up there that "Flashpoints is a radical program with a radical anti-semitic." And this is on and on. My Wikipedia looks like a slash and burn because of the level and intensity of the attacks.

And sometimes you have to threaten to sue these folks to bring down what is an obvious conjecture and obvious lie. It's hard to imagine how they can make a case after such a vetting and a hire with tenure a professor. It would seem to me that there would need to be some kind of civil rights action. Any grounds for that, any exploration on that front?

SS: Yeah. I'm being represented by the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York, which is a terrific organization with really smart attorneys. And they are definitely exploring all of these options. And what you say has happened to you and continues to happen to you is, I think, common for a lot of folks who speak ... in even hushed support of the Palestinians ... or even mild criticism of the Israeli government.

I think that with my case, people are seeing this as an opportunity to say "Enough! Enough of going to such extraordinary lengths to shut down democratic institutions, and democratic participation, in the service of shielding a colonial nation state from criticism that it so richly deserves."

DB: But the attackers are fully defended, they're allowed to say just about anything you can ... the e-mails that I get sound something like "Bernstein, if you're lucky, maybe one day one of your Palestinian friends will slit your

throat, Daniel Pearl style, and then you'll learn something about why it's important to not be a self-hating Jew." They can almost say anything, anywhere and this includes major journalists.

SS: Exactly. That comes out of the dynamics of a particular American racism. Those who speak in support of Palestine constantly have to avow their humanity. So in order to even be heard, to even raise our voices, we have to proclaim that we're not anti-semitic, we have to disavow violence, we have to condemn Hamas. There's a whole list of things that we have to do, in order to be able to speak in the first place. But those who support Israel never, ever have to disavow themselves of anti-Arab racism. So they occupy the normative position.

DB: If you had a moment to address the writer who wrote that vague letter that unhired you, what would you want to tell them?

SS: I would say that universities are not actually corporate marketplaces and that we cannot conduct hiring and firing based on the desires of donors. If we are going to walk down that road then the university as we know it in the United States will cease to exist and by caving into the outside donor pressure you have set a horrible precedent and you have abdicated your responsibilities to look out for the best interest of the campus, the faculty and the students.

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

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## Letting the Neocons Lead

**Exclusive:** At the G-20 meeting, Putin-bashing was all the rage, as President Obama and other Western leaders berated Russian President Putin for his supposed "aggression" in Ukraine. The mainstream media also piled on. But the reality is much more complex, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In a rational political system, the American neocons would be the most discredited group in modern U.S. history. If not in the dock for complicity in war crimes from Central America in the 1980s to Iraq last decade they would surely not be well-regarded scholars at prominent think tanks and welcomed as op-ed columnists at major publications.

But the United States doesn't currently have a rational political system.

Instead of being prosecuted or ostracized, the neocons continue to dominate Official Washington's foreign policy thinking. They and their "liberal interventionist" sidekicks continue to demonize disfavored "enemy" leaders just as they did in Central America and Iraq and bait doubters for "weakness" if they don't climb onboard.

And, the mainstream U.S. news media, led by the likes of the New York Times and the Washington Post, falls into line or is actually led by neocons. Then, politicians, even those who should know better like President Barack Obama, don't dare alienate the opinion leaders and thus end up reinforcing the neocon themes by sounding "tough."

It may be highly naive at this point to think that President Obama will ever demonstrate true leadership by repudiating the neocon "group think" regarding a whole variety of issues including today's hotspots, such as Iran, Syria, Iraq, Russia and Ukraine.

But just pause for a minute and contemplate what would have happened if President Obama had followed neocon advice last year and launched massive air strikes to take out Syria's military over dubious allegations that it was responsible for a Sarin gas attack.

Though Official Washington's "group think" is that somehow, magically, the virtually non-existent "moderate" Syrian opposition would have taken over and everything would have worked out just wonderfully, the much more likely result would have been that radical Islamists, either the Islamic State or Al-Qaeda's Nusra Front, would have seized power. The black jihadist flag might very well have been flying over Damascus.

And then what? Could the West tolerate a Syria, in the heart of the Middle East, controlled by Al-Qaeda or the even more extremist Islamic State? Plus, with the relatively secular government of Bashar al-Assad gone, one could bet that there would be horrendous accounts of massacres against Christians, Shiites, Alawites and other minorities that have supported Assad's regime.

Would the United States and Europe stand by and watch? There would be more demands for Obama to "do something." And, at that point, the only "something" would be a massive U.S. military intervention, meaning hundreds of thousands of troops and hundreds of billions of dollars without any realistic possibility of ultimate success.

### **How We Got Here**

One should also remember how we got here. There was no Al-Qaeda presence in Iraq or Syria before President George W. Bush embraced the crazy neocon scheme of

invading and occupying Iraq in 2003. The brutal Islamic State arose in Iraq in resistance to the U.S. military occupation as “Al-Qaeda in Iraq.”

Under the leadership of Jordanian extremist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, “Al-Qaeda in Iraq” developed an ultra-violent strategy of relying on extreme brutality, including the slaughter of Shiites and Westerners, to drive these supposedly heretical forces out of Muslim land.

Though Zarqawi was killed by a U.S. airstrike in 2006, his strategy lived on, inspiring the unapologetic cruelty of the Islamic State, which even Al-Qaeda has renounced in favor of its preferred Syrian affiliate, the Nusra Front.

So, if the neocons hadn’t prevailed a decade ago in their insistence on invading and occupying Iraq with the enthusiastic support of the mainstream U.S. media’s “liberal” careerists there might not be the current crisis in Iraq and Syria. Yet, Official Washington continues to submit to a neocon-driven consensus about what must be done in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Granted, the situation is now such a mess that it is hard to decide what the best course of action is. But rational policymaking would surely rule out the advice of the people who created the mess in the first place.

Instead of being sent to sit in the corner in dunce caps, the neocons have been allowed to expand the range of their operations, now spreading their influence to the conflict over Ukraine and the decision to make Russia and its President Vladimir Putin the latest bogeymen to justify a new Cold War.

The neocons charted this geopolitical strategy by stirring up trouble in Ukraine, knowing its sensitivity to Russia’s security. In September 2013, as Putin was helping Obama avert the neocon-desired, U.S. bombing campaign against the Syrian government, neocons decided to take aim at Ukraine and Putin.

The plan was even announced by U.S. neocons such as National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman who took to the op-ed page of the neocon-flagship Washington Post to call Ukraine “the biggest prize” and an important interim step toward eventually toppling Putin in Russia.

Gershman, whose NED is funded by the U.S. Congress, wrote: “Ukraine’s choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents. Russians, too, face a choice, and Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

In other words, from the start, Putin was the target of the Ukraine crisis, not the instigator. But even if you choose to ignore Gershman’s clear intent, you would have to concoct a bizarre conspiracy theory to support the conventional

wisdom about Putin's grand plan of "aggression" against Ukraine as a first step toward rebuilding the Russian Empire. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Why Neocons Seek to Destabilize Russia.](#)"]

## **Distracted by Sochi**

The truth is that when the Ukrainian crisis erupted in February 2014, Putin was distracted by the Sochi Winter Olympics and he was supporting the status quo in Ukraine, i.e. the government of elected President Viktor Yanukovich, not seeking to expand Russian territory into Ukraine.

It was the United States and the European Union behind neocons like Gershman, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland and Sen. John McCain that were supporting the toppling of Ukraine's constitutionally elected government.

These facts are obvious and indisputable. They were even recognized by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who said in [an interview](#) with Der Spiegel:

"Putin spent tens of billions of dollars on the Winter Olympics in Sochi. The theme of the Olympics was that Russia is a progressive state tied to the West through its culture and, therefore, it presumably wants to be part of it. So it doesn't make any sense that a week after the close of the Olympics, Putin would take Crimea and start a war over Ukraine."

In other words, Putin actually wanted to cooperate with the United States and the West, as he had demonstrated both in getting Syria to surrender its chemical weapons arsenal and in encouraging Iran to agree to an interim agreement for constraining its nuclear program.

But both policies represented a challenge to the neocon agenda, which continues to seek "regime change" in countries considered hostile to Israel. Thus, Putin and his behind-the-scenes collaboration with Obama on finding political solutions to disputes with Syria and Iran had become threats to what the neocons ultimately want to accomplish, i.e., [more wars](#). So, Putin became the new target.

Yet, the Western news media and virtually all of the West's political leaders embraced the neocon narrative that the Ukraine crisis was entirely the fault of Putin and Russia, both in the larger context and in each and every incident, including the Kiev regime's slaughter of thousands of ethnic Russians. The West's double-think went that if Putin hadn't caused the crisis in the first place, these people wouldn't have to be killed.

Thus, the U.S.-backed coup regime in Kiev got almost a free pass on its brutal "anti-terrorism operation" against ethnic Russian rebels in the east and south

who have resisted the overthrow of their leader Yanukovych and the imposition of a new order that seeks to enact harsh International Monetary Fund “reforms.”

When ethnic Russians in Crimea voted to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia a move accepted by Moscow the Western press mocked the referendum as a “sham” and accused Russia of an “invasion” though Russian troops were already in Crimea as part of an agreement for maintaining the naval base at Sebastopol.

As Kiev’s “anti-terrorist operation” killed thousands of ethnic Russians in the east even enlisting neo-Nazi militias to do much of the dirtiest work the U.S. mainstream media either ignored the brutality or somehow shifted the blame onto Russia again.

### **The Shoot-down: Whodunnit?**

On July 17, when Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine, the Kiev regime, Washington’s officialdom and the MSM rushed to blame the rebels for killing all 298 people onboard and Russia for supposedly supplying powerful anti-aircraft missiles capable of bringing down a commercial airliner at 33,000 feet.

Soon after the shoot-down, I began hearing indirectly from U.S. intelligence analysts that their investigation was actually going in a different direction, that there was no evidence that the Russians had supplied such sophisticated weapons, and that suspicions were focusing on extremist elements of the Ukrainian government. I’m further told that President Obama was apprised of this intelligence analysis.

But Obama has been unwilling to correct or even update the record. Why step on a useful propaganda theme? He also may fear being called “soft” on Putin by deviating from the “tough-guy” conventional wisdom that blames Putin for everything. Obama has even continued to imply that Russia was at fault for the atrocity.

Speaking in Australia on Nov. 15, Obama left the impression of Russian guilt as he reprised the self-congratulatory “America is No. 1” themes favored by the neocons. He declared: “As the world’s only superpower, the United States has unique responsibilities that we gladly embrace.

“We’re leading the international community in the fight to destroy the terrorist group ISIL [Obama’s preferred acronym for the Islamic State]. We’re leading in dealing with Ebola in West Africa and in opposing Russia’s aggression against Ukraine – which is a threat to the world, as we saw in the appalling shoot-down of MH17, a tragedy that took so many innocent lives, among them your fellow citizens.

“As your ally and friend, America shares the grief of these Australian families, and we share the determination of your nation for justice and accountability.”

If you parse Obama’s phrasing carefully, you might note that he does not explicitly blame Russia for the shoot-down of MH-17, but he leaves that inference. It seems clear that hope is quickly fading if it ever existed that Obama would seize the post-election opportunity to chart a more realistic and honest approach to U.S. foreign policy.

Obama seems content to follow the lead of the neocons, albeit sometimes reluctantly and possibly deviating from their most extreme policies at the last minute as he did in deciding not to bomb the Syrian military in summer 2013.

But there are grave dangers in Obama not honestly informing the American people about what he knows regarding these crises. Yes, he would face condemnation from the insider community of Official Washington and face broader Republican accusations of “weakness” and “capitulation.”

Still, he would at least give the thoughtful part of the U.S. populace a chance to resist the next neocon-scripted disaster.

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

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