

A Congress that Disdains Science

America, the world's superpower, is becoming a country disconnected from evidence and reality with the Congress now controlled by a Republican Party that has assigned anti-science zealots to run committees responsible for addressing environmental dangers including the threat from global warming, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

On Jan. 17, the New York Times reported on a scientific study that showed 2014 to be “the hottest on earth since record-keeping began in 1880.” The report went on to explain that “records were set across large areas of every inhabited continent.”

Particularly hard hit in 2014 was the western portion of the United States: Alaska, Arizona, California and Nevada all experienced “extreme warmth.” Temperatures in parts of California “sometimes [ran] 10 to 15 degrees above normal for the season.”

The vast majority of climatologists believe that this warming will go on for a very long time and that it presents “profound long-term risks to civilization and nature.” Also, most scientists agree, global warming is caused by human activity such as the burning of fossil fuels.

According to Michael E. Mann, a climatologist at Penn State University, “it is exceptionally unlikely that we would be witnessing a record year of warmth, during a record-warm decade, during a several decades-long period of warmth that appears to be unrivaled for more than a thousand years, were it not for the rising levels of planet-warming gases produced by the burning of fossil fuels.”

This consensus has led the scientific community to the conclusion that “climate change is perhaps the major challenge of our generation.”

Well, that is the judgment of scientists who investigate matters of fact in the most objective way they know. Unfortunately, only a small number of them become convincing public spokespeople for their positions, and fewer still leave their day jobs to become politicians.

Meanwhile, when it comes to global warming, the investigative talents of the latest crop of Republican congressional leaders is anything but objective. Of course, that does not stop many of them from loudly voicing their opinions – opinions now coupled to the wielding of power. Consider the following short list:

–Representative Paul Broun of Georgia, a member of the House Science Committee, has recently declared “All that stuff I was taught about evolution and embryology and big bang theory, all that is lies straight from the pit of hell. And it’s lies to try to keep me and all the folks who are taught that from understanding that they need a savior.” As for human contributions to global warming, Broun considers it a “hoax” perpetrated by the scientific community.

–Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma is now chair of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. Inhofe has written a book entitled The Greatest Hoax, which presents climate change and global warming as a conspiracy of atheists and scientists who would deny the supremacy of Inhofe’s version of God.

He is upset at the “arrogance of people to think that we, human beings, would be able to change what He is doing in the climate.” Inhofe’s starting point for the congressional debate on climate change is “God is still up there” and in charge.

–Roger Wicker of Mississippi is the ranking member of the New Economy subcommittee of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. Wicker insists that climate change is just a disputed hypothesis and not the threat the vast majority of scientists present it as. He suspects the scientific position is part of a “war on coal” – that is, an effort to repudiate the use of fossil fuel.

–Arkansas Sen. John Boozman is about to take over the Senate Water and Wildlife Subcommittee. He really doesn’t believe that climate change is due to human activity. Rather, he speculates that it is just another natural “cycle that happens throughout the years, throughout the ages.” This is a very popular point of view in the “coal-fired” state of Arkansas.

–Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions will now head the Senate Clean Air and Nuclear Safety Subcommittee. He doesn’t believe that global warming is a problem and has asserted that he can interpret the data on climate change better than most climatologists. He does so by carefully selecting from the interpretations of the very small number of scientists who happen to agree with his point of view.

The Observational Context

Citizen views on climate change and global warming divide along the lines of conservative and liberal self-identification. Thus, according to a Pew Research poll conducted in June 2014, over 70 percent of those who identify themselves as conservatives either do not believe in global warming or don’t consider it a danger, nor do they believe that human activity is a serious contributing factor. Finally, many of these self-described conservatives believe that the U.S. has “gone too far in efforts to protect the environment.”

Why do conservative Americans feel this way? There are several factors:

Many of them are very religious. An outlook of Christian fundamentalism pervades large sections of the country and, at least since the time of the Reagan presidency, has become a factor in U.S. politics.

That is why men like Broun and Inhofe are where they are. They, and others like them, are often from what used to be known as the Bible Belt, a range of southern U.S. states from Oklahoma to Virginia. This is a stronghold of Southern Baptist and other basically fundamentalist sects.

Similar Christian sects are scattered throughout the north, central and western parts of the country. It is hard for those who adhere to these sects to see the sciences that touch on both human evolutionary processes and those of nature (such as global warming) objectively because they clash with biblical tenets.

This leads most religious conservatives to reject scientifically accepted criteria for truth. Science is a process that seeks to approximate what is true through the positing of testable hypotheses. Scientific beliefs must be supported by observable and replicated data.

In turn, new data can alter one's perspective on established hypotheses and even overthrow them. It is an ongoing process and it has proven so powerful a tool that modern civilization's physical attributes rest on its achievements.

On the other hand, religion is a form of ideology that is based on absolute positions that are not testable. Questioning these sorts of "truths" equates to a crisis of faith, and that is often looked upon as a personal failure or giving in to the temptations of some evil spirit. Questioning also alienates you from your community.

To this we may add the following: particularly in the United States, there is a surprisingly strong anti-intellectual sentiment that prejudices many people against those who are educated, whom they label bookworms, eggheads, nerds, brainiacs, geeks, know-it-alls, etc. The fact that American English has so many derogatory terms for those who are actively involved in intellectual pursuits is an indicator of this anti-intellectualism.

Therefore, if you have people that you already disparage because of their intellect, telling you things that question your faith, you are likely to go out of your way to oppose them, and "their" truth be damned.

Yet another kind of dismissive response is likely to come from those who have an economic stake in the pursuits contributing to global warming. In their case profits stand in for faith. The two groups come together when the business

people fund the campaigns of the politicians who, for religious reasons, do not believe in climate change.

Finally there is the almost natural tendency for all of us – conservative, religious or otherwise – to favor the local. By this I mean to favor what serves one's local interests here and now. If you are from the "coal-fired" state of Oklahoma, you are most likely to see anything that would hurt the coal industry as something that will economically hurt you, and do so with certainty.

Meanwhile, the future will be thought of as full of maybes. This will lead most people to hesitate to make major sacrifices today just because someone they may not particularly respect claims that, if they don't, greater sacrifices will have to be made in the next hundred years.

So here is the problem: on the one hand, it is a 95 percent certainty that human activity is causing global warming and it is certain that the effects, even in the near future, will be measurably negative (more damaging hurricanes, droughts, rising ocean levels, killer heat waves, etc.), getting increasingly severe as time goes on.

On the other, too many Americans either don't believe this or are too wrapped up in the present to care. However, the worst of it is that as voters they are putting into positions of power politicians who are willing to block any public policy that may slow, much less reverse the process. It makes little difference if the voters have more than one reason for voting for these politicians. The result for the environment is going to be the same.

We should keep in mind that the dispute over global warming is different from those over evolution or the age of the earth. If some American voters want to elect people who believe that the world is only 9,000 years old and that man is the product of a God looking for a supervisor for the Garden of Eden, they can do so without necessarily accelerating the melting of the polar ice caps. However, putting into office those who deny global warming and the human contribution to it is a catastrophe in the making.

The United States is a country whose prosperity and lifestyle depends strongly on scientific processes. The industrialists whose businesses drive climate change know this yet they and their stockholders are hopelessly fixated on today's profits.

It is less certain whether the large and growing number of religious fundamentalists make the connection. For them faith is stronger than reason and, in the end, "God is up there" and in control.

And for the rest of us? We are left with two choices: organize to get the

fundamentalists and other climate change deniers out of positions of power, or sit back and relax for *apres moi le deluge*.

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Rushing to Judge NFL's Patriots Guilty

Exclusive: The hottest news in the U.S. this past week wasn't President Obama's State of the Union speech but did the New England Patriots deflate footballs to gain a competitive edge, a story that suffered from the same rush to judgment that has afflicted other aspects of U.S. journalism, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Given how bad mainstream American journalism has become, I sometimes turn to ESPN for relief and generally find the sports network's reporting based on statistics and observable facts to be superior to the rushes to judgment that have come to define U.S. political and foreign reporting.

But it seems the disease of sloppy and opinionated journalism has spread to ESPN, too, as demonstrated by the network's unseemly rush to judgment over the so-called "Deflate-gate" scandal swirling around the New England Patriots' 45-7 victory over the Indianapolis Colts in the AFC Championship game on Jan. 18.

Immediately after the game, all anyone was talking about was whether the Patriots intentionally deflated the footballs used in the first half to gain an unfair competitive advantage, by taking the balls from a legal minimum 12.5 pounds per square inch (PSI), down about 2 PSI below the legal standard.

And, though this controversy is about football not about whether to go to war in some faraway country the scandal does touch on journalistic principles that should be applied everywhere, especially where people's reputations are affected.

As a longtime investigative reporter, I have always found it important when addressing a suspicion of wrongdoing to consider possible innocent explanations before concluding that someone committed an offense. Otherwise, you become easily drawn into conspiracy theories, assuming guilt rather than assessing evidence.

However, as “Deflate-gate” jumped from the sports pages onto the news shows and news pages, what was lacking across the board was any skepticism regarding the Patriots’ assumed guilt. The principle of presumed innocence was jettisoned and the only question was who was more guilty, coach Bill Belichick or quarterback Tom Brady, and what the punishment should be.

It became common for commentators on ESPN as well as regular news shows and talk radio to call Brady a liar and Belichick a chronic cheater. Yet, those conclusions were reached in the absence of direct evidence that anyone working for the Patriots had actually deflated the footballs.

Obviously, if there were an equipment manager who confessed or photographic evidence of someone tampering with the footballs, that would have changed things. But so far at least that sort of evidence has been lacking.

Therefore, the proper journalistic approach should have been to test out the innocent explanations first. For instance, was it possible that the referees who checked the footballs before the game made a mistake or that their equipment was faulty?

If one assumes that the referees were diligent and that their equipment was properly calibrated, then is it possible that the game conditions heavy rain at about 50 degrees combined with the pre-game conditioning of the footballs and their rough handling during the first half could have resulted in a decline in internal air pressure?

Testing the Footballs

That was the testing that Belichick said the Patriots conducted in their internal investigation. Belichick told reporters on Saturday that the pre-game conditioning of the footballs “rubbing” them down to make them tackier and the weather conditions during the game could explain a 2 PSI drop. In other words, he was presenting an innocent explanation.

But Belichick, who noted that he was “not a scientist,” was ridiculed by nearly everyone who later appeared on ESPN. A week into the controversy, it seemed that a “group think” had taken hold, much like we’ve seen in the Washington press corps, jumping to conclusions about Iraq’s WMD and other foreign issues.

And, once the media “big boys” have committed to a position, they are loathe to reconsider. It’s easier to simply make fun of any alternative explanations. (On a more serious topic, we saw how the major newspapers destroyed journalist Gary Webb for reviving the Contra-cocaine scandal after the big papers had mistakenly dismissed it.)

Fitting with ESPN's defensiveness, an [article](#) on Sunday was largely dismissive of Belichick's explanation while burying at the bottom of the story this item from a Pittsburgh-based sports science organization which essentially replicated the Patriots' experiment:

"HeadSmart Labs in Pittsburgh [conducted a study](#) that indicated the pressure in the footballs used in the AFC Championship Game could have dropped 1.95 PSI from weather and field conditions alone.

"HeadSmart said it tested 12 new footballs that were inflated to 12.5 PSI in a 75 degree room to imitate the indoor conditions where the referees would have tested the footballs 2 hours and 15 minutes before kickoff. The footballs were then moved to a 50-degree environment to simulate the temperatures that were experienced throughout the game and were dampened to replicate the rainy conditions.

"'Out of the 12 footballs we tested, we found that on average, footballs dropped 1.8 PSI when being exposed to dropping temperatures and wet conditions,' the lab's report states."

In other words, an independent organization that specializes in the science of athletic equipment essentially confirmed what Belichick had said. And there is the additional loss of PSI that one might expect from 300-pound players landing on the footballs.

Of course, one still must acknowledge that it may turn out that the Patriots are indeed guilty as charged by ESPN's and other commentators. A witness may turn up who was involved in tampering with the footballs or some photographic evidence may appear revealing an equipment manager deflating the footballs.

But journalists should hold back from accusing people of wrongdoing until after the innocent possibilities have been swatted aside or until there is real evidence. This is a lesson that should apply whether the issue is sports, politics or world affairs.

I suppose that I should add that I grew up in Massachusetts and was initially a Cleveland Browns fan (in the days of Jim Brown and Bobby Mitchell), but I began following the Boston Patriots after the American Football League opened in 1960.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). 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](#)

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Hiding the Political Subtext of Sterling Trial

Whenever lawyers for ex-CIA officer Jeffrey Sterling sought to illuminate the political context for his prosecution as a leaker, prosecutors objected with the support of the federal judge, but politics has always lurked in the case's background, writes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

Continuing to deliberate as this week gets underway, the jurors in the CIA leak trial might ponder a notable claim from the government: "This case is not about politics."

The prosecution made that claim a few days ago in closing arguments, begun with a somber quotation from former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice about the crucial need to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. Of course prosecutor Eric Olshan was not foolish enough to quote Rice's most famous line: "We don't want the smoking gun to become a mushroom cloud."

During the seven days of the trial, which received scant media coverage, Rice attracted the most attention. But little of her testimony actually got out of the courtroom, and little of what did get out illuminated the political context of the government's case against former CIA officer Jeffrey Sterling.

A heavy shroud over this trial, almost hidden by news media in plain sight, has been context: the CIA's collusion with the Bush White House a dozen years ago, using WMD fear and fabrication to stampede the United States into making war on Iraq.

And part of the ongoing context of the Sterling case has been the Obama administration's unrelenting pursuit of Sterling for allegedly leaking classified information, revealed in the last chapter of a book by James Risen, about a now-15-year-old CIA operation that's far more suitable for Freedom of Information Act disclosures than criminal prosecution. The jury is weighing nine felony counts, including seven under the atrociously misapplied Espionage Act.

It was just six weeks after the invasion of Iraq when, at the end of April 2003, Rice then President George W. Bush's national security adviser hosted a meeting at the White House to tell representatives of the *New York Times* that the

newspaper should not report on Operation Merlin, the CIA's ill-conceived and dangerous maneuver that had provided a flawed design for a nuclear weapon component to Iran three years earlier.

The Times management caved within a week. Only Risen's book *State of War*, published in January 2006, finally brought Operation Merlin to light.

Rice was in her usual smooth form at the Sterling trial. Emphatic that the CIA's Operation Merlin was hardly known to anyone, Rice testified: "This program was very closely held. It was one of the most closely held programs during my tenure." Yet the CIA manager in charge of Operation Merlin ("Bob S," who appeared at the trial behind a screen) testified that the operation was known to more than 90 people.

Helping to lay groundwork for the Iraq invasion, Rice was a key enabler for the CIA's slam-dunk mendacity about Saddam Hussein's purported weapons of mass destruction. More than a decade later, she has used the Sterling trial as an opportunity for more distortion of the historical record, as though her quash-the-Merlin-story meeting at the White House in 2003 was free of self-service.

The prosecution helped Rice settle into her stance:

Question: "Now, was the purpose of your convening this meeting out of any sort of embarrassment that it would get out that there had been a botched operation?"

Rice: "My concern in convening this meeting was that we had a very sensitive, extremely important program for the security of the country that was about to be compromised . . . That was my concern."

But one of the prosecution's main concerns, no doubt shared by Rice, had to do with insulating the trial from intrusive context, a context that could explain why any whistleblower or journalist might want to expose and debunk Operation Merlin, an operation targeting a supposed nuclear weapons program in Iran, a country that the Bush administration was eager to attack with the goal of regime change.

When the time came for Rice to face cross-examination, defense lawyer Barry Pollack tried to blow away some fog:

Question: "[P]reventing working nuclear weapons from falling into the hands of rogue states is one of the most important missions of your, the administration you worked for certainly "

Rice: "Yes."

Question: " and any other administration, correct?"

Rice: "That's correct."

Question: "And certainly counterproliferation was of great interest at this particular time, correct?"

Rice: "That's correct."

Question: "The United States had invaded Iraq the earlier month?"

Prosecutor Olshan: "Objection."

Judge Leonie Brinkema: "Well, we've heard that before. Let's just move this along, Mr. Pollack. Sustained."

A week later, in the closing arguments, Pollack, who noted that "the government has great lawyers", told the jury: "Make no mistake. This is a very important case for the government." He pointedly reminded jurors that the last chapter in Risen's book "made the CIA look bad."

Minutes later, wrapping up the prosecution's closing statement, Assistant U.S. Attorney James Trump declared: "This case is not about politics. It's not about salvaging the reputation of the CIA."

But, no matter how great the government's lawyers may be, the case of *United States of America v. Jeffrey Alexander Sterling* has everything to do with politics and the CIA's reputation.

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Neocons Dig in to Bomb-Bomb Iran

America's neocons remain determined to sink nuclear talks with Iran, even seeking help from Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to reopen the path to bomb-bomb-bomb Iran and reassert a direct U.S. combat role in the Mideast. But that doesn't serve U.S. interests, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

It has not been a smooth month for those who want to keep Iran in pariahdom forever and thus seek to kill any international agreement on Iran's nuclear program. The sanctions bill that is the deal-killers' principal vehicle at the

moment and is in the Senate Banking Committee has not been attracting the hoped-for Democratic co-sponsors.

The strong position taken on the issue by President Barack Obama obviously is a major reason for this. And however unlikely this may seem with almost anything that happens these days in Congress, reason and good sense have probably had some effect, among those who realize that the bill adds no negotiating value whatever in threatening additional sanctions on an Iran that already knows full well such sanctions would follow any breakdown of negotiations.

With the exception of Sen. Robert Menendez (who has alienated himself from the President by wanting not only Iran but also Cuba to be in pariahdom forever), the deal-killing campaign has increasingly taken on an all-Republican flavor. That makes all the more obvious how, in addition to the other motivations behind the campaign, it has become a partisan endeavor to deny Mr. Obama a foreign policy achievement.

There also has been the widespread and thoroughly justified criticism of Speaker of the House John Boehner's invitation to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address Congress on the subject, criticism that has been wider than Boehner probably expected.

The inappropriateness of this invitation was apparent even to many people who may not fully appreciate how much Netanyahu has been trying to undermine U.S. foreign policy, and how he is much more of an adversary of the United States than an ally on this issue. His unwavering opposition to any agreement with Tehran, even an agreement that moves Iran farther away from having a nuclear weapon, is motivated by objectives the United States does not share and in some respects, such as the objective of limiting U.S. freedom of action regarding whom it cooperates with on Middle Eastern issues, is directly opposed to U.S. interests.

Many people also recognized the narrowness and cheapness of what Boehner did. He ignored the usual procedure, as former Speaker Nancy Pelosi described it, of consulting with Congressional leaders of both parties before offering someone the high honor and exceptional privilege of addressing a joint session of the U.S. Congress.

People recognize that it debases the currency of this privilege to extend it a third time to Netanyahu when the only person so far to have addressed Congress three times is Winston Churchill. (We Americans knew Winston Churchill well. Winston Churchill was a friend. Bibi, you're no Winston Churchill.)

People also recognize that it is an indignity for the People's House if a

foreign leader is to use it as a prop to berate the host country's policies as well as to try to score points with his voters in his own country in an election just a couple of weeks after he is scheduled to speak. He would be using Congress as a prop just as he used as a prop a cartoon drawing of a bomb, which he doesn't use anymore because the preliminary agreement that Netanyahu has always denounced drained his cartoon bomb by ending Iran's medium-level enrichment of uranium.

Zbigniew Brzezinski summarized well the nature of Boehner's move: "Speaker Boehner has an odd definition of leadership: inviting a foreign leader to undermine our President's policy in front of Congress?"

The opponents of an agreement may be increasingly aware that their fiction about supposedly just wanting to strengthen the U.S. negotiating position is wearing thin. There have been compromises of this cover story that have become difficult to hide, such as the direct, willing, and repeated admission of the freshman senator from Arkansas that the purpose of new sanctions legislation would be to kill the negotiations, not to aid them.

Further wearing away of the fiction has come from Israel, where the director of Mossad, Tamir Pardo, told visiting U.S. officials that new sanctions legislation would serve as a grenade that would blow up the negotiations. Pardo later tried to spin the story backward by saying that yes, the negotiations would blow up but what he meant was that this would be a good thing because negotiations could reconvene later under more favorable circumstances.

That was a nice try by the Mossad chief to minimize the apparent rift with his Prime Minister, and a politically prudent try, given how already well known it has been that heads and former heads of Israel's security services disagree with Netanyahu's declared positions on Iran, but there won't be any more favorable circumstances.

The current political circumstances in Iran are as good as they're going to get for this sort of deal for the foreseeable future, and if the current negotiations are blown apart by a legislative act of bad faith they will not come back together for a long time.

Against the backdrop of these setbacks to the anti-agreement campaign, the campaigners have recently been relying more on a strategy that isn't really new but has a new twist. That strategy involves going beyond the nuclear question and repeatedly voicing alarm about other aspects of Iranian policy and behavior.

The strategy tacitly recognizes that the campaigners do not have logic and reason on their side regarding the objective of preventing an Iranian nuclear

weapon, because an agreement of the sort that is being negotiated clearly would be much better at achieving that objective than the alternative, which would be the absence of an agreement and the loss of all the special restrictions on, and monitoring of, the Iranian program that already have been won through negotiations.

The strategy of reminding people of everything Iran does that we don't like, or that the campaigners tell us we're not supposed to like, operates on two levels. To some extent the anti-agreement forces try to make an argument that letting Iran out of its international penalty box will enable an ill-intentioned state to do even more ill-intentioned things.

But to a large extent the appeal is simply an emotional, non-intellectual one that relies on popular distaste for doing any business with people we don't like. It is the sort of appeal that tacitly rejects the principle that the need for diplomacy and doing business with other states is at least as great with one's adversaries as it is with one's allies.

The newest twist is to recite some of the most recent turmoil in the region, such as the governmental collapse in Yemen, to interpret that turmoil as the consequence of Iran's evil doings, and to suggest that regional messiness is all of a piece with the nuclear question.

Thus Charles Krauthammer, in his column on Friday under the headline "Iran's emerging empire" sounds an alarm about how "Iran's march toward a nuclear bomb" has combined with "Iran's march toward conventional domination of the Arab world" to make for an Iranian-created threatening mess in the Middle East.

Yemen, Syria, Iraq, along with terrified Gulf Arab states, the whole set of conflicts is all, according to Krauthammer, one big Iranian campaign to establish an empire throughout the region. And then in the last part of the piece he says that he does not like those nuclear negotiations at all, and that given all that Iranian empire-building we should not like the negotiations either.

Published on the same day as Krauthammer's column, a piece by Dennis Ross, Eric Edelman, and Ray Takeyh centers on the same notion that "Iran is on the march in the Middle East." (Evidently the current talking points from the anti-agreement war room recommend generous use of the term *march*.)

Ross et al. say that "the American alliance system stands bruised and battered" while "our friends" in the region see the Iranian advance as even more rapid than a march: they "perceive Iran and its resistance-front galloping across the region." The piece maintains the fiction about supposedly wanting an agreement,

while recommending aggressive measures that, like new sanctions legislation, would be designed to derail the negotiations and prevent an agreement.

The measures include a “revamped coercive strategy” that is vague but seems to consist of intentionally butting heads with the Iranians in any civil war we can find, as well as a “political warfare campaign” against Tehran and, in the most direct sort of negotiation-derailer, willingness of U.S. diplomats “to walk away from the table and even suspend the talks.”

One of the problems in these two pieces is that what is depicted as a grand Iranian scheme for achieving regional hegemony is instead a matter of diverse conflicts with many different causes and instigators and in which any Iranian roles have been largely reactive. Krauthammer draws our attention, for example, to the presence of Hezbollah fighters and an Iranian officer who were near the armistice line in the Golan Heights and were killed the other day by an Israeli airstrike, and mentions dark possibilities about Iran wanting to open a new front against Israel.

In fact, the target of Hezbollah and its Iranian ally in that area was much more likely the Al Qaeda-associated Al Nusra Front, which had expanded its operations in that area within the past few months. The most noteworthy thing about the incident was the Israeli airstrike itself, which appeared aimed at eliciting a Hezbollah response and benefiting Netanyahu’s party in the coming election, although Hezbollah did not take the bait.

Even if one assumes the worst about Iranian intentions, a more fundamental deficiency of these two articles and similar anti-Iranian broadsides is that they lose all sight of the key question in evaluating the current nuclear negotiations and any final agreement that emerges from them: will Iranian policies and behavior be better for our interests with such an agreement or without it? (Of course, insofar as such broadsides are an emotions-based appeal for us not to want to have anything to do with Iranians, losing sight of this question is the whole idea.)

The policy question involved is not to be equated with a popularity contest in which Iran is a contestant. There will be plenty of things for us to dislike about Iranian policies, both foreign and domestic, with or without a nuclear agreement.

An agreement will very much make a difference with regard to one set of Iranian policies important to us; it will help to keep the Iranian nuclear program peaceful. Any follow-on effects on other matters require further analysis. Krauthammer and Ross et al. don’t address this at all and give us no reason to believe that any of the Iranian behaviors they consider so nasty would be any

better without an agreement than with one.

Making Iran a permanent pariah does nothing to improve those behaviors, and instead is more likely, out of an absence of alternative channels for Iran to pursue its interests, to make them even worse. By contrast, the opening of greater communication and patterns of cooperation that a nuclear agreement would encourage presents better opportunities for getting Iran to act constructively on some of the very conflicts and problems that these two pieces highlight.

That leads to another fundamental deficiency of the broadsides, which is that they make no effort to sort out what is good, bad, or neutral for U.S. interests in what the Iranians do. Instead there is just the blanket, and because of that, erroneous, assumption that any Iranian action, participation, or influence on anything anywhere in the region is ipso facto bad.

This approach is remarkable in light of how much U.S. and Iranian interests run parallel on some of the most salient conflicts involved. This is most obvious with regard to ISIS and efforts to check its expansion. Ross et al. try to disguise this fact with a reference regarding Iraq to what “appears to be Iran’s invasion of the country under the banner of disarming the Islamic State.”

So what exactly are the alternative scenarios in Iraq they have in mind, which of those are better for U.S. interests and why, and what is the Iranian role in each? They don’t say. If Iranians are doing heavy lifting on the ground in killing ISIS fighters, and in the process getting their own people killed and sustaining other costs in the process, rather than that happening to us, why should that make us unhappy?

Krauthammer does something similar regarding Yemen, where he laments how the current turmoil there is interfering with U.S. drone operations against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). And the cause of the turmoil, he says, is the advance by the rebel Houthis, who are “agents” of Iran (they aren’t, although they probably do get some Iranian aid).

In fact, the Houthis hate AQAP. They fight against AQAP. And again, if such people fight and die while acting against this Al Qaeda affiliate, why should we be unhappy about that? If that kind of action on the ground means fewer U.S. drone strikes, and thus less of the accompanying grief the United States gets from such strikes because of the symbolism and the collateral damage involved, that is a good thing for us.

But Krauthammer evidently gets a rise out of drone strikes and considers them more important than facilitating the most cost-effective way (from the standpoint of U.S. interests) of reining in a group such as AQAP.

Yet another fundamental deficiency in these sorts of attempts to undermine the nuclear negotiations is that they say nothing about internal Iranian politics. The outcome of the nuclear negotiations will have significant effects on Iranian politics, with consequences for the sorts of Iranian regional policies that these authors don't like.

Specifically, failure of the negotiations will be a major blow to the moderate and pragmatic elements represented by President Hassan Rouhani, and a boost to the hardliners who, just like hardliners on our side, don't want an agreement and thrive on perceived threats from the other country. Failure of the negotiations would be more apt to increase, and certainly would not decrease, the sorts of Iranian behavior about which Krauthammer and Ross et al. are raising such alarms.

These more fundamental flaws hardly exhaust what is badly mistaken about these two pieces. Krauthammer, for example, is seemingly unaware of all the official, disinterested judgments on the subject when he asserts that Iran is "marching toward a nuclear bomb." In fact, Iranian leaders probably have not decided to build a bomb.

When bemoaning extensions of the negotiations he says not a word about the critical limitations on Iran's program that the negotiations already have achieved. And most of his picture of supposed region-wide Iranian empire building is really an observation about the salience of the Sunni-Shia divide and its role in contemporary Middle Eastern conflict. If he is going to focus on that, he needs to explain why the United States should have any interest in taking sides in that sectarian dispute within the Muslim world.

Ross et al. are living in an alternative universe when it comes to just about everything they say about the nuclear negotiations. According to them, the talks are "stalemated"; no, as arms control and similar multilateral endeavors go, the progress has actually been rather rapid, on what is necessarily a complex and technical set of topics.

The authors repeatedly talk about a "generous catalogue of concessions from the West" as contrasted with supposed Iranian inflexibility. Even a cursory look at the Joint Plan of Action, the preliminary agreement that established the obligations that the parties are observing now, shows how false that picture is.

The West got what it wanted most, which included ending medium-level enrichment, restricting work on the most suspect reactor, limiting stockpiles of low-enriched uranium, and unprecedented levels of international monitoring inspection. The Iranians have not yet gotten what they want most, which is relief from the debilitating financial and oil sanctions that are still firmly

in place.

There is so much vagueness in Ross et al.'s call for a "revamped coercive strategy" that we are left to wonder exactly what they have in mind. Their call for Washington to "reengage in the myriad conflicts and civil wars plaguing the region," given that they are looking for more involvement than is going on right now, does not sound encouraging.

It does not sound like what is wanted by the American people, who are not anxious right now to get bogged down in myriad conflicts and other people's civil wars. And if the authors are worried about the extent of Iranian influence in Iraq, they need to explain how whatever they have in mind would reduce that influence, given that an eight-and-a-half year war with a peak of 170,000 U.S. troops left Iraq with more, not less, Iranian influence than before.

Ross, et al. conclude by stating, "The United States and Iran are destined to remain adversaries." Oh, so it's not a matter of facts and analysis and experience, but instead of destiny. Or rather, we are supposed to consider Iran to be forever nothing but an adversary because people such as these authors tell us that's what we should believe.

As long as enough people believe that, the United States and Iran really will be adversaries forever. Don't believe people who want to lead us down such a path.

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