

Hard Lessons from Paris Attack

In Official Washington, the talk is all about expanded wars and how tough to be on Syrian refugees. But elsewhere there is some serious reflection on how the West went wrong in its approach toward the Middle East, as reflected in Dennis J Bernstein's interview with Indian historian Vijay Prashad.

By Dennis J Bernstein

After the Paris terror attacks and a bloody hostage standoff in Mali, the focus has been on the West's plans to "intensify" the war against Islamic terrorists, especially the Islamic State (or ISIS), but some more thoughtful thinkers are calling for a critical examination of the past mistakes made and the lessons that can be learned.

For instance, Vijay Prashad, an Indian historian, journalist and commentator, warned against "clichéd policies" that could make the violence worse. Prashad spoke in an interview with Pacifica Radio host Dennis J Bernstein.

DB: Vijay Prashad writes, "A week of horrible carnage, bomb blasts in Beirut and Baghdad, then the cold-blooded shootings in Paris. Each of these acts of terror left dead bodies and wounded lives. There is nothing good that comes of them, only the pain of the victim, and then more pain, as powerful people take refuge in clichéd policies that once again turn the wheel of violence."

Meanwhile the BBC announced, "France is committed to destroying the so-called Islamic State group after last Friday's deadly attacks. President Francois Hollande has said France's military campaign against ISIS and Iraq will intensify." Imagine, intensify. Vijay, what is your overview?

VP: These attacks have been horrible. There's been an intensification of ISIS attacks – the one in Paris was part of a sequence. The reaction from the French president is to be expected. There's a kind of political grammar that he's forced to fall in line with. Two words apply here – you have to "do something," and you have to appear strong.

Something and *strong* are the key words in order to understand the French reaction just as we are to understand the US reaction after 9/11. There's no worked out strategy after 15 months of U.S. and Gulf air bombing Iraq and then Syria. The rollback, particularly in Syria, has been minimal. The French now want to intensify that. They had been part of the coalition previously, so there's nothing new here. It's the same strategy, which is not bringing dividends. On the other hand, it's producing acts of terror. I'm afraid the prognosis is very poor for what Francois Hollande is recommending.

DB: You have some suggestions for the French president. What are they?

VP: First, grieve for those who have been killed. Grief is important for a family, neighborhood, city, country, and the planet. There are terrible stories, and each one should be told. A 41-year-old woman at a cafe was shot in Paris. In Beirut, a four-month-old baby was sitting in his mother's lap. She cushioned the blow. Mother and father died, and the baby lived.

These stories are educational. They tell us who the victims of these terror attacks are. There was the killing by drones of an entire family in Yemen. We need to know their names – their lives – so that people don't just see them as statistics. First we need an accounting of who they are, and then grieve for them.

Secondly, states need to not believe that a response to a terrorist action is military force. They need to believe that it's got to be forensic. One needs to understand how this happened. How is it possible that the Turkish government handed over the names of one of these terrorists to the French – not once, but twice? Apparently, it was not acted upon.

These are the kinds of questions that were not asked after 9/11. The 9/11 Commission ducked many serious questions about how people on a watch list were not discovered. It's the same thing with any terrorist action, whether it's 9/11 or the Oklahoma City bombing. These were known characters on a certain list. We're supposed to have this enormous surveillance, but instead of forensic surveillance, we have blanket surveillance. Everybody's emails are checked. There needs to be a proper police accounting of what occurred.

DB: I like the next suggestion: Try to get to the root of the issue to what provoked the inhumanity. This is one the U.S. and the West aren't particularly interested in.

VP: We used to joke that somebody needs to tell the CIA that highlighter pens are yellow and not black. The 9/11 Commission did some accounting of the reason it occurred, but most of the 9/11 report was entirely blacked out, particularly the section that involved Saudi Arabia and its involvement – not the country, but individual sheiks. There needs to be a very serious and honest appraisal, not only of the culpability of people in the Arabian Peninsula, but also in the French and American government.

Just this year, the French government sent \$10 billion of arms to Saudi Arabia. The U.S. and Western Europe rely on Saudi oil money – not the oil itself, but the profits – to liquefy their banks. There's extreme complicity of the West with the Gulf Arab states. So any accounting of where this vicious ideology

spawns from, who finances the network of mullahs, some of these extremist groups – none of that is taken in hand.

Friends in Paris tell me that when a mosque is searching for a new cleric, often the government insists the cleric not be from the community, but they must be brought in from abroad. Often some Saudi-trained cleric arrives, so people feel these clerics are foisted upon them. This is the nature of the accounting that's necessary. You can't just say they are bad guys, ISIS. It's much deeper than that, because our complicity is quite considerable in these cases.

DB: Do you think U.S. and Western terrorism in the Middle East is the driving force behind growing acts of terrorism against the West? They tried to put a cork in Allah's mouth, and the whole world blew up?

VP: There's a lot of truth to what you are saying. There are different timelines by which you can sketch that story backwards, such as to the Iraq war of 2003. Now it's widely understood that the regime change in Iraq had a catastrophic impact on the region. It essentially produced the space for ISIS to grow, and brought us to where we are.

But we can go earlier, to the way the West and the Gulf Arab states first collaborated to send the mujahedeen to Afghanistan. This was also a regime change in process, where we financed anybody, mostly the most conservative and heinous forces on the ground. We legitimized them, gave them training, and then were surprised when out of the kernel of Afghanistan, Al Qaeda erupted.

Before that, in the 1950s, the U.S. collaborated with the Saudis, largely, to attack Arab nationalism, undermining and destroying the Left by promoting very virulent forms of Islam, pushed by the Saudis in particular. There's a lot to be said about the role of the West in producing the social conditions which lead to ISIS. Many serious questions must be asked about the role Saudi Arabia has played in West Asia and across the Muslim world, with its collaborators in Morocco and elsewhere, pushing a very heartless politics against the social democratic politics that had emerged from the people of the Arab lands.

DB: The more I see how the Saudis operate, the more it reminds me of Israel.

VP: The last UN report that came out from the Economic and Social Commission of West Asia addressed the sense of the Arab Spring, and stressed the importance of what happened in Tunisia. Then the report made a startling comparison. It had a section where it went after states that promote a kind of moral, ethnic, religious culture where there's no cultural diversity allowed or sanctified by the state.

The countries it used as an example were Israel and Saudi Arabia. The report

suggested that these two countries are creating an anachronistic form of nation vote for the world, and are not a good example for the region. Of course, Israel is furious with the comparison, because it prefers to be compared to European states, and would hate to be compared to Saudi Arabia. But there's something to be said for the way in which Israel is increasingly showing a very narrow understanding of ethnic or religious nationalism. If you were very uncharitable, you might call it racist nationalism.

DB: Where does this go now? Do you see a light at the end of the tunnel?

VP: There is the phrase, "May we always live in interesting times." In an essay I wrote after the Paris shootings, I call these pitiless times times without pity. We are going to prosecute a ruthless, pitiless war. Our political leadership, across the planet, has the imagination of yesterday. They don't want to see new ways of doing things, or acknowledge we are dealing with people, not aliens who can be smashed out of existence.

We need creative thinking. In Syria, as an example, all understand the West is trapped in a web of its relationships. Turkey is on one side, which understands terrorism to include the Kurds. The Kurdish fighters have been some of the most successful fighters against ISIS. Here's a major U.S. ally, and NATO member, which wants to attack the Assad government in Damascus, and the Kurds.

The Americans have been giving close air support to the Kurds against ISIS. Meanwhile, the U.S. is so compromised with the Saudis that it's unable to pressure the Saudis to back down from their proxies. We live in an age where the politics is yesterday – they are not able to look forward. [On Nov. 15], Obama and Putin had a private discussion for 35 minutes. My only hope is that they don't do more damage than they've already done. Our current political leadership is not capable of rolling back the damage, but we should have faith that they will not make it worse than it is already.

DB: After the Charlie Hebdo killing in Paris, we had the insanity of Netanyahu marching in the streets of Paris in solidarity with the people of France after he had slaughtered some 2,200 people, including many children. They say no peace in Palestine, no peace anyplace else in the world.

VP: In 2003, it was very gratifying to see India, Brazil and South Africa take a very strong position against the American war in Iraq. Then in 2011, the five BRICS countries happened to comprise the UN Security Council [BRICS is the acronym for an association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The grouping was originally known as "BRIC" before the inclusion of South Africa in 2010].

Sadly, Russia, China, India and Brazil abstained when the West and the Gulf Arab states wanted to bomb Libya. Only South Africa voted in favor, and President Jacob Zuma said that Obama personally called him to convince him to vote yes. So the five BRICS countries essentially allowed the West and Gulf Arabs to destroy Libya.

Now we have an extraordinarily introspective BRICS bloc, particularly India, Brazil, South Africa and China. The four of them seriously regret their vote about Libya. Unfortunately they've gone silent, but my hope is that these four countries will assert themselves on the global stage, and argue that the approach the West has taken has been catastrophic, and another way must be put forward. Thus far they haven't had the confidence to articulate an alternative, but I very much hope that these countries, which are very chastised by the vote in 2011, might now come out and say the West doesn't have all the answers.

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Tangled Threads of US False Narratives

Exclusive: Official Washington's many false narratives about Russia and Syria have gotten so tangled that they have become a danger to the struggle against Sunni jihadist terrorism and conceivably a threat to the future of the planet, a risk that Robert Parry explores.

By Robert Parry

One way to view Official Washington is to envision a giant bubble that serves as a hothouse for growing genetically modified "group thinks." Most inhabitants of the bubble praise these creations as glorious and beyond reproach, but a few dissenters note how strange and dangerous these products are. Those critics, however, are then banished from the bubble, leaving behind an evermore concentrated consensus.

This process could be almost comical as the many armchair warriors repeat What Everyone Knows to Be True as self-justifying proof that more and more wars and confrontations are needed but the United States is the most powerful nation on earth and its fallacious "group thinks" are spreading a widening arc of chaos and death around the globe.

We even have presidential candidates, especially among the Republicans but

including former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, competing to out-bellicose each other, treating an invasion of Syria as the least one can do and some even bragging about how they might like to shoot down a few Russian warplanes.

Though President Barack Obama has dragged his heels regarding some of the more extreme proposals, he still falls in line with the “group think,” continuing to insist on “regime change” in Syria (President Bashar al-Assad “must go”), permitting the supply of sophisticated weapons to Sunni jihadists (including TOW anti-tank missiles to Ahrar ash-Sham, a jihadist group founded by Al Qaeda veterans and fighting alongside Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front), and allowing his staff to personally insult Russian President Vladimir Putin (having White House spokesman Josh Earnest in September demean Putin’s posture for sitting with his legs apart during a Kremlin meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu).

Not surprisingly, I guess, Earnest’s prissy disapproval of what is commonly called “man spread” didn’t extend to Netanyahu who adopted the same open-leg posture in the meeting with Putin on Sept. 21 and again in last week’s meeting with Obama, who it should be noted sat with his legs primly crossed.

This combination of tough talk, crude insults and reckless support of Al Qaeda-connected jihadis (“our guys”) apparently has become *de rigueur* in Official Washington, which remains dominated by the foreign policy ideology of neoconservatives, who established the goal of “regime change” in Iraq, Syria and Iran as early as 1996 and haven’t changed course since. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “How Neocons Destabilized Europe.”]

Shaping Narratives

Despite the catastrophic Iraq War based on neocon-driven falsehoods about WMD and the complicit unthinking “group think” the neocons retained their influence largely through an alliance with “liberal interventionists” and their combined domination of major Washington think tanks, from the American Enterprise Institute to the Brookings Institution, and the mainstream U.S. news media, including The Washington Post and The New York Times.

This power base has allowed the neocons to continue shaping Official Washington’s narratives regardless of what the actual facts are. For instance, a Post editorial on Thursday repeated the claim that Assad’s “atrocities” included use of chemical weapons, an apparent reference to the now largely discredited claim that Assad’s forces were responsible for a sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013.

After the attack, there was a rush to judgment by the U.S. State Department

blaming Assad's troops and leading Secretary of State John Kerry to threaten retaliatory strikes against the Syrian military. But U.S. intelligence analysts refused to sign on to the hasty conclusions, contributing to President Obama's last-minute decision to hold off on a bombing campaign and to accept Putin's help in negotiating Assad's surrender of all Syrian chemical weapons (though Assad still denied a role in the sarin attack).

Subsequently, much of the slapdash case for bombing Syria fell apart. As more evidence became available, it increasingly appeared that the sarin attack was a provocation by Sunni jihadists, possibly aided by Turkish intelligence, to trick the United States into destroying Assad's military and thus clearing the way for a Sunni jihadist victory.

We now know that the likely beneficiaries of such a U.S. attack would have been Al Qaeda's Nusra Front and the spinoff known as the Islamic State (also called ISIS, ISIL or Daesh). But the Obama administration never formally retracted its spurious sarin claims, thus allowing irresponsible media outlets, such as The Washington Post, to continue citing the outdated "group think."

The same Post editorial denounced Assad for using "barrel bombs" against the Sunni rebels who are seeking to overthrow his secular government, which is viewed as the protector of Syria's minorities including Christians, Alawites and Shiites who could face genocide if the Sunni extremists prevail.

Though this "barrel bomb" theme has become a favorite talking point of both the neocons and liberal "human rights" groups, it's never been clear how these homemade explosive devices shoved out of helicopters are any more inhumane than the massive volumes of "shock and awe" ordnance, including 500-pound bombs, deployed by the U.S. military across the Middle East, killing not only targeted fighters but innocent civilians.

Nevertheless, the refrain "barrel bombs" is accepted across Official Washington as a worthy argument for launching devastating airstrikes against Syrian government targets, even if such attacks clear the way for Al Qaeda's allies and offshoots gaining control of Damascus and unleashing even a worse humanitarian cataclysm. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Obama's Ludicrous 'Barrel Bomb' Theme.](#)"]

False-Narrative Knots

But it is now almost impossible for Official Washington to disentangle itself from all the false narratives that the neocons and the liberal hawks have spun in support of their various "regime change" strategies. Plus, there are few people left inside the bubble who even recognize how false these narratives are.

So, the American people are left with the mainstream U.S. news media endlessly

repeating storylines that are either completely false or highly exaggerated. For instance, we hear again and again that the Russians intervened in the Syrian conflict promising to strike only ISIS but then broke their word by attacking Al Qaeda's Nusra Front and "our guys" in Sunni jihadist forces armed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and the CIA.

Though you hear this narrative everywhere in Official Washington, no one ever actually quotes Putin or another senior Russian official promising to strike only at ISIS. In all the quotes that I've seen, the Russians refer to attacking "terrorists," including but not limited to ISIS.

Unless Official Washington no longer regards Al Qaeda as a terrorist organization a trial balloon that some neocons have floated then the Putin-lied narrative makes no sense, even though every Important Person Knows It to Be True, including Obama's neocon-leaning Defense Secretary Ashton Carter.

The U.S. political and media big shots also mock the current Russian-Iranian proposal for first stabilizing Syria and then letting the Syrian people decide their own leadership through internationally observed democratic elections.

Okay, you might say, what's wrong with letting the Syrian people go to the polls and pick their own leaders? But that just shows that you're a Russian-Iranian "apologist" who doesn't belong inside the bubble. The Right Answer is that "Assad Must Go!" whatever the Syrian people might think.

Or, as the snarky neocon editors of The Washington Post wrote on Thursday, "Mr. Putin duly dispatched his foreign minister to talks in Vienna last weekend on a Syrian political settlement. But Moscow and Tehran continue to push for terms that would leave Mr. Assad in power for 18 months or longer, while, in theory, a new constitution is drafted and elections organized. Even a U.S. proposal that Mr. Assad be excluded from the eventual elections was rejected, according to Iranian officials."

In other words, the U.S. government doesn't want the Syrian people to decide whether Assad should be kicked out, an odd and contradictory stance since President Obama keeps insisting that the vast majority of Syrians hate Assad. If that's indeed the case, why not let free-and-fair elections prove the point? Or is Obama so enthralled by the neocon insistence of "regime change" for governments on Israel's "hit list" that he doesn't want to take the chance of the Syrian voters getting in the way?

Reality Tied Down

But truth and reality have become in Official Washington something like Gulliver being tied down by the Lilliputians. There are so many strands of lies and

distortions that it's impossible for sanity to rise up.

Another major factor in America's crisis of false narratives relates to the demonizing of Russia and Putin, a process that dates back in earnest to 2013 when Putin helped Obama sidetrack the neocon dream of bombing Syria and then Putin compounded his offense by assisting Obama in getting Iran to constrain its nuclear program, which derailed another neocon dream to bomb-bomb-bomb Iran.

It became ominously clear to the neocons that this collaboration between the two presidents might even lead to joint pressure on Israel to finally reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, a possibility that struck too close to the heart of neocon thinking which, for the past two decades, has favored using "regime change" in nearby countries to isolate and starve Lebanon's Hezbollah and Palestinian groups, giving Israel a free hand to do whatever it wished.

So, this Obama-Putin relationship had to be blown up and the point of detonation was Ukraine on Russia's border. Official Washington's false narratives around the Ukraine crisis are now also central to neocon/liberal-hawk efforts to prevent meaningful coordination between Obama and Putin in countering ISIS and Al Qaeda in Syria and Iraq.

Inside Official Washington's bubble, the crisis in Ukraine is routinely described as a simple case of Russian "aggression" against Ukraine, including an "invasion" of Crimea.

If you relied on The New York Times or The Washington Post or the major networks that repeat what the big newspapers say, you wouldn't know there was a U.S.-backed coup in February 2014 that overthrew the elected Ukrainian government of Viktor Yanukovich, even after he agreed to a European compromise in which he surrendered many powers and accepted early elections.

Instead of letting that agreement go forward, right-wing ultra-nationalists, including neo-Nazis operating inside the Maidan protests, overran government buildings in Kiev on Feb. 22, 2014, causing Yanukovich and other leaders to flee for their lives.

Behind the scenes, U.S. officials, such as neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, had collaborated in the coup plans and celebrated the victory by Nuland's handpicked leaders, including the post-coup Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, whom she referred to in an earlier intercepted phone call as "Yats is the guy."

Nor would you know that the people of Crimea had voted overwhelmingly for President Yanukovich and after the coup voted overwhelmingly to get out of the failed Ukrainian state and reunify with Russia.

The major U.S. news media twists that reality into a Russian “invasion” of Crimea even though it was the strangest “invasion” ever because there were no photos of Russian troops landing on the beaches or parachuting from the skies. What the Post and the Times routinely ignored was that Russian troops were already stationed inside Crimea as part of a basing agreement for the Russian fleet at Sevastopol. They didn’t need to “invade.”

And Crimea’s referendum showing 96 percent approval for reunification with Russia though hastily arranged was not the “sham” that the U.S. mainstream media claimed. Indeed, the outcome has been reinforced by various polls conducted by Western agencies since then.

The MH-17 Case

The demonization of Putin reached new heights after the July 17, 2014 shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine killing all 298 people onboard. Although substantial evidence and logic point to elements of the Ukrainian military as responsible, Official Washington’s rush to judgment blamed ethnic Russian rebels for firing the missile and Putin for supposedly giving them a powerful Buk anti-aircraft missile system.

That twisted narrative often relied on restating the irrelevant point that the Buks are “Russian-made,” which was used to implicate Moscow but was meaningless since the Ukrainian military also possessed Buk missiles. The real question was who fired the missiles, not where they were made.

But the editors of the Post, the Times and the rest of the mainstream media think you are very stupid, so they keep emphasizing that the Buks are “Russian-made.” The more salient point is that U.S. intelligence with all its satellite and other capabilities was unable both before and after the shoot-down to find evidence that the Russians had given Buks to the rebels.

Since the Buk missiles are 16-foot-long and hauled around by slow-moving trucks, it is hard to believe that U.S. intelligence would not have spotted them given the intense surveillance then in effect over eastern Ukraine.

A more likely scenario of the MH-17 shoot-down was that Ukraine moved several of its Buk batteries to the frontlines, possibly fearing a Russian airstrike, and the operators were on edge after a Ukrainian warplane was shot down along the border on July 16, 2014, by an air-to-air missile presumably fired by a Russian plane.

But after rushing out a white paper five days after the tragedy pointing the finger at Moscow the U.S. government has refused to provide any evidence or intelligence that might help pinpoint who fired the missile that brought down

MH-17.

Despite this remarkable failure by the U.S. government to cooperate with the investigation, the mainstream U.S. media has found nothing suspicious about this dog not barking and continues to cite the MH-17 case as another reason to despise Putin.

How upside-down this “Everything Is Putin’s Fault” can be was displayed in a New York Times “news analysis” by Steven Erlanger and Peter Baker on Thursday when all the “fundamental disagreements” between Obama and Putin were blamed on Putin.

“Dividing them are the Russian annexation of Crimea and its meddling in eastern Ukraine, Moscow’s efforts to demonize Washington and undermine confidence in NATO’s commitment to collective defense, and the Kremlin’s support of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria,” Erlanger and Baker wrote.

Helping ISIS

This tangle of false narratives is now tripping up the prospects of a U.S.-French-Russian-Iranian alliance to take on the Islamic State, Al Qaeda and other Sunni jihadist forces seeking to overthrow Syria’s secular government.

The neocon Washington Post, in particular, has been venomous about this potential collaboration which while possibly the best chance to finally resolve the horrific Syrian conflict would torpedo the neocons’ long-held vision of imposed “regime change” in Syria.

In editorials, the Post’s neocon editors also have displayed a stunning lack of sympathy for the 224 Russian tourists and crew killed in what appears to have been a terrorist bombing of a chartered plane over the Sinai in Egypt.

On Nov. 7, instead of expressing solidarity, the Post’s editors ridiculed Putin and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi for not rushing to a judgment that it was an act of terrorism, instead insisting on first analyzing the evidence. The Post also mocked the two leaders for failing to vanquish the terrorists.

Or as the Post’s editors put it: “While Mr. Putin suspended Russian flights on [Nov. 6], his spokesman was still insisting there was no reason to conclude that there had been an act of terrorism. While Western governments worried about protecting their citizens, the Sissi and Putin regimes were focused on defending themselves.

“Both rulers have sold themselves as warriors courageously taking on the Islamic State and its affiliates; both are using that fight as a pretext to accomplish

other ends, such as repressing peaceful domestic opponents and distracting attention from declining living standards. On the actual battlefield, both are failing.”

Given the outpouring of sympathy that the United States received after the 9/11 attacks and the condolences that flooded France over the past week, it is hard to imagine a more graceless reaction to a major terrorist attack against innocent Russians.

As for the Russian hesitancy to jump to conclusions earlier this month, that may have been partially wishful thinking but it surely is not an evil trait to await solid evidence before reaching a verdict. Even the Post’s editors admitted that U.S. officials noted that as of Nov. 7 there was “no conclusive evidence that the plane was bombed.”

But the Post couldn’t wait to link the terrorist attack to “Mr. Putin’s Syrian adventure” and hoped that it would inflict on Putin “a potentially grievous political wound.” The Post’s editors also piled on with the gratuitous claim that Russian officials “still deny the overwhelming evidence that a Russian anti-aircraft missile downed a Malaysian airliner over Ukraine last year.” (There it is again, the attempt to dupe Post readers with a reference to “a Russian anti-aircraft missile.”)

The Post seemed to take particular joy in the role of U.S. weapons killing Syrian and Iranian soldiers. On Thursday, the Post wrote, “Syrian and Iranian troops have lost scores of Russian-supplied tanks and armored vehicles to the rebels’ U.S.-made TOW missiles. Having failed to recapture significant territory, the Russian mission appears doomed to quagmire or even defeat in the absence of a diplomatic bailout.”

Upping the Ante

The neocons’ determination to demonize Putin has upped the ante, turning their Mideast obsession with “regime change” into a scheme for destabilizing Russia and forcing “regime change” in Moscow, setting the stage for a potential nuclear showdown that could end all life on the planet.

To listen to the rhetoric from most Republican candidates and Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton, it is not hard to envision how all the tough talk could take on a life of its own and lead to catastrophe. [See, for instance, Philip Giraldi’s [review](#) of the “war with Russia” rhetoric free-flowing on the campaign trail and around Official Washington.]

At this point, it may seem fruitless even naive to suggest ways to pierce the various “group thinks” and the bubble that sustains them. But a counter-argument

to the fake narratives is possible if some candidate seized on the principle of an informed electorate as vital to democracy.

An argument for empowering citizens with facts is one that transcends traditional partisan and ideological boundaries. Whether on the right, on the left or in the center, Americans don't want to be treated like cattle being herded by propaganda or "strategic communication" or whatever the latest euphemism is for deception and manipulation.

So, a candidate could do the right thing and the smart thing by demanding the release of as much U.S. intelligence information to cut this Gordian knot of false narratives as possible. For instance, it is way past time to declassify the 28 pages from the congressional 9/11 report addressing alleged Saudi support for the hijackers. There also are surely more recent intelligence estimates on the funding of Al Qaeda's affiliates and spin-offs, including ISIS.

If this information embarrasses some "allies" such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey so be it. If this history makes some past or present U.S. president look bad, so be it. American elections are diminished, if not made meaningless, when there is no informed electorate.

A presidential candidate also could press President Obama to disclose what U.S. intelligence knows about other key turning points in the establishment of false narratives, such as what did CIA analysts conclude about the Aug. 21, 2013 sarin attack and what do they know about the July 17, 2014 shoot-down of MH-17.

The pattern of the U.S. government exploiting emotional moments to gain an edge in an "info-war" against some "enemy" and then going silent as more evidence comes in has become a direct threat to American democracy and in regards to nuclear-armed Russia possibly the planet.

Legitimate secrets, such as sources and methods, can be protected without becoming an all-purpose cloak to cover up whatever facts don't fit with the desired propaganda narrative that is then used to whip the public into some mindless war frenzy.

However, at this point in the presidential campaign, no candidate is making transparency an issue. Yet, after the deceptions of the Iraq War and with the prospects of another war based on misleading or selective information in Syria and potentially a nuclear showdown with Russia it seems to me that the American people would respond positively to someone treating them with the respect deserving of citizens in a democratic Republic.

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 here](#).

How Russians See the West and Russia

The U.S. mainstream media's recent depictions of Russia amount to little more than crass propaganda, including the inside-out insistence that it is the Russian people who are the ones brainwashed by their government's propaganda. Author Natylie Baldwin found a different reality in a tour of Russian cities.

By Natylie Baldwin

After a year and a half of conducting research on Russia, the world's largest country, mostly for [a book](#) I co-authored on the history of post-Soviet U.S.-Russia relations and its context for the Ukraine conflict, it was time for me to finally go see this beautiful, fascinating and complex nation in person and to meet its people on their own terms and territory.

On this maiden voyage to Russia, I visited six cities in two weeks: Moscow, Simferopol, Yalta, Sevastopol, Krasnodar and St. Petersburg. In each city, I talked to a cross-section of people, from cab drivers and bus riders to civil society workers, professionals, and entrepreneurs of small- to medium-sized businesses.

I even had an opportunity to hear what teenagers had to say in two of those cities as my travel mate and I participated in a Q&A session with students of a private high school in St. Petersburg and teens who were part of various youth clubs in Krasnodar. Their questions reflected a thoughtful engagement with the world as they led to discussions on environmental sustainability, socially responsible economics and how to promote initiative, goodwill and peaceful conflict resolution.

Many of the adults were no less thoughtful during the formal interviews and informal conversations I had with them. Admittedly, I wondered how I would be received as an American during one of the most acrimonious periods of U.S.-Russia relations since the end of the Cold War.

It helped that my travel mate has been going in and out of Russia since the 1980s, lives part-time in St. Petersburg, and has developed good relations with

many Russians across the country. Once most Russians realized that I came in goodwill and did not approach them or their country with a superiority complex, they usually responded with some combination of curiosity, honesty and hospitality.

Below is a summary of what Russians that I spoke to thought about a range of issues, from their leader to their economy to the Ukraine war, Western media's portrayal of them and what they wanted to say to Americans.

What Russians Think About Putin

In every place I visited in Russia, there was a consistent attitude among the people on a number of significant issues. First of all, there was consensus that the Yeltsin era in the 1990s was an unmitigated disaster for Russia, resulting in massive poverty, an explosion in crime, the theft of the Soviet Union's resources and assets by a small number of well-connected Russians who went on to become the oligarchs, and the worst mortality crisis since World War II.

As Victor Kramarenko, an engineer and foreign trade relations specialist during the Soviet period and, more recently, a years-long executive with a major American corporation in Moscow, explained the Yeltsin era: "The Russian economy was devastated. We went from being an industrial power that defeated the Nazis, showed resilience, rebuilt quickly, and had great achievements in aviation and space to a place where morale collapsed and a lack of trust and a pirate mentality emerged."

I learned from my interviews that Russians credit Vladimir Putin with taking the helm of a nation that was on the verge of collapse in 2000 and restoring order, increasing living standards five-fold, investing in infrastructure, and taking the first steps toward reigning in the oligarchy. Many stated that they wished Putin would do more to decrease corruption.

A couple of people I spoke to said they believed that Putin would like to do more on this front but has to work within certain limitations at the top. However, according to a recent [report](#) by Russian news magazine, *Expert*, Putin may be initiating a serious anti-corruption drive using a secret Russian police unit that is outsmarting corrupt officials who are used to evading investigation and accountability. Time will tell how successful and far-reaching this turns out to be.

Russians also think Putin has been a good role model in certain respects. As Natasha Ivanova told me over lunch at an Uzbek restaurant in Krasnodar, "He's fit and doesn't drink alcohol or smoke. Now you see young people more interested in sports and fitness and not smoking and drinking."

After the mortality crisis of the 1990s when millions of Russians died premature deaths from heart problems and complications from alcoholism, this development is celebrated. Natasha Ivanova's friend, Anna, chimed in, "Putin's also orderly and has common sense."

Natasha Shidlovskaia, an ethnic Russian who grew up in western Ukraine and now lives in St. Petersburg, admires Putin's sharp mind: "He's very smart. His speech is very structured and organized. When a person speaks, you know how he thinks."

Jacek Popiel, a writer and consultant with first-hand experience in Russia and the former Soviet Union, has commented on the Russian historical experience of constant invasions and periodic famines and how it has shaped their view of government and leadership: "Russians will readily accept an authoritarian government because such is needed when national survival is at stake – which, in Russia's history, has been a recurring situation."

But Russian acceptance of powerful central authority also includes a check on it. This is the concept of *Pravda*. The literal translation of this word is "truth," but it has a deeper and wider significance – something like "justice" or "the right order of things." This means that while accepting authority and its demands, Russians nevertheless require that such authority be guided by moral principle. If authority fails to demonstrate this they will, in time, rise against it or remove it.

A group of professionals in Krasnodar echoed this when they insisted during a discussion one evening that a strong leader was needed to get things done, but the leader needed to be responsible to the people and their needs. Most believed that Putin successfully met this criteria as is confirmed by his nearly 90 percent approval rating. Moreover, when the subject of freedom and its definition was raised, one participant asked, "Does freedom presuppose a framework of rules and order? Or does it just mean that everyone does whatever they want?"

One criticism I heard from two women in Krasnodar was disappointment that Putin had divorced, particularly in the same time frame as when he'd declared "The Year of the Family."

Another four women, who were involved in civil society work, were upset that some authentic Russian non-governmental organizations (or NGO's) were getting caught in the dragnet of the foreign agents law – legislation they understood was motivated by a desire to crack down on provocateurs associated with the National Endowment for Democracy.

But, due to the effects it was having on genuine NGO's in the country, they believe the law is ultimately a mistake. Three of the four were prepared to continue their work, including reform of the law's implementation, while the fourth was considering leaving Russia.

Economic Conditions

Russians acknowledge that they are in a recession and attribute it to a combination of sanctions, low oil prices and lack of economic diversity and access to credit. But they generally do not blame Putin and did not express despair, or resentment that money was being invested in Crimea. Instead, they are putting their heads down, adapting and getting through it.

As the participants at the Krasnodar meeting of professionals explained, Russian entrepreneurs were becoming more creative by forming cooperatives to get new ventures off the ground; for example, finding one person in their network who has access to raw materials and another who has needed skills.

Despite what some commentators in the western corporate media have said, Russians are not going hungry. I saw plenty of food in the markets and some Russians told me that there were pretty much the same everyday products on store shelves as before, they just noticed higher prices due to inflation, which has started to come down. That downward trend is expected to continue into 2016, according to the International Monetary Fund.

We ate out frequently during our stay and most restaurants were doing decent business while some were very busy, including during non-rush hours. I did not notice any significant number of vacant or shuttered buildings, although many were under renovation. Russians in every city I visited were as well dressed as people in American cities and suburbs and looked as healthy (although, I noted fewer overweight people in Russia).

And, alas, the smart phone was nearly as ubiquitous among Russian youth as American.

Ukraine, Crimea and Foreign Policy

Almost everyone I spoke with strongly supported what they view as Putin's calm but decisive policies of standing up to major provocations from the West, including attempts to exploit historical ethnic and political divisions in Ukraine, resulting in the illegitimate removal of a democratically elected leader.

Kramarenko explained a sentiment I've often heard from Russians about the high hopes they had after the end of the Cold War and how Russians have subsequently

become disillusioned over the years with the actions of Washington policymakers. It also helps one to understand the more negative attitudes toward the West that the independent polling agency, Levada Center, has reported in recent months:

“‘Back to the civilized world.’ That was the motto. Russians were fairly open about wanting to cooperate and integrate [with the West]. But they have gotten three wake-up calls over the years. The first was the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. It was painful and wrong but we figured ‘let bygones be bygones.’ The second wake-up call was the Sochi Olympics. I worked with a sponsor and there was a flood of anti-Russian sentiment, Russia was always in the wrong. Russians asked why do they characterize us so black when it doesn’t correspond to reality? Ukraine was the third wake-up call. We were under no illusions about Yanukovich’s corruption, but the turning point came when the [Maidan] protests became violent and the police were attacked. There was a split among Russian intellectuals at that point, but the general people turned against it.”

Volodya Shestakov, a lifelong resident of St. Petersburg, agrees:

“Yanukovich was extremely corrupt and ripe for a revolt. The original Maidan protesters wanted to get rid of oligarchy, but they didn’t get less oligarchy. The Ukrainian economy is in very bad shape. Western corporations like Monsanto planned to go in. There are also shale gas deposits. It will be an environmental nightmare. [Current President Petro] Poroshenko is a puppet of Washington.”

The conclusion that Kiev’s current leadership consists of Washington lackeys came up often in conversations with both continental Russians and Crimeans. Tatyana, a professional tour guide from Yalta, a resort city in Crimea, told me:

“No one asked us if we wanted to go along with Maidan. There are Russians as well as people who are a mix of Russian and Ukrainian here. We are not against Ukraine as many of us have relatives there, but Maidan was not simply a spontaneous protest. We are aware of the phone call with Victoria Nuland and Geoffrey Pyatt, we saw the photos of her with Yatsenyuk, Tiagnibok [leader of Svoboda, the neo-fascist group that was condemned by the EU in 2012], and Klitschko on television. We saw the images of her handing out cookies to the protesters.”

Crimeans saw the violence that erupted on the Maidan as well as the slogans being chanted by a segment of the protesters [“Ukraine for Ukrainians”] and became very concerned. The citizens of Sevastopol, a port city in Crimea and longtime home to Russia’s Black Sea fleet, had meetings on what they should do

if events in Kiev spiraled further out of control, possibly creating dangerous consequences for the majority ethnic Russian population there.

They believe that those dangerous consequences were prevented when Putin intervened and agreed to requests from Crimeans to be reunited with Russia. Crimeans and continental Russians believe that this intervention protected Crimea from those extremist elements that had hijacked the Maidan protests and risen to power in Kiev, threatening Crimeans' safety and interests.

Moreover, Crimeans that I interviewed who participated in or were witness to events that led up to what is variously referred to as the "Crimean Spring" or the "Third Defense of Sevastopol," did not expect the Russian government to step in and assist them or to accept their requests for reunification. This was due to the numerous times since the 1990s when Crimeans voted, either directly or through their parliament, for reunification, which Russia had always ignored.

According to Anatoliy Anatolievich Mareta, leader (ataman) of the Black Sea Hundred Cossacks, a turning point came after the Feb. 21, 2014 agreement (in which Yanukovich agreed to reduced powers and early elections) was rejected by armed ultra-nationalists on the Maidan and the Europeans subsequently abandoned their role as guarantors:

"A one-day meeting of anti-Maidan supporters was held in Sevastopol. Thirty thousand Crimeans gathered in the center of the port city to resist and declare that they didn't recognize the coup government in Kiev and would not pay taxes to it. They then decided to defend Sevastopol and the Crimean isthmus with arms. They chose a people's mayor, Aleksai Chaly, and checkpoints were set up. After extremist Tatars and Ukrainian ultra-nationalists showed up in Simferopol, throwing bottles, teargas, and beating busloads of ethnic Russians with flag poles, our help was requested."

As the situation deteriorated further, with a standoff between local residents and local police officials who were beholden to and taking orders from Kiev underway, Mareta admitted that the Cossacks realized that theirs was a revolt that amounted to a suicide mission if Kiev gave the order to put it down with full force. "Their hearts were in it, but their minds knew they might lose," Mareta said.

This was confirmed by Savitskiy Viktor Vasilievich, a retired Russian naval officer and resident of Crimea who served as an election monitor during the Crimean referendum in Sevastopol. "The Russian military was very cautious and waited for the order to intervene," he said. "It was an unexpected gift."

From Feb. 28-29, 2014, Cossacks from parts of continental Russia, including

Kuban and Don, began to arrive to reinforce the isthmus after Ukrainian planes were blocked from landing at the local airport as Russian soldiers, stationed legally in Crimea under contract, manned the gates.

Crimeans told me that it was understood at the time that the “little green men” who appeared on the streets in the coming days were Russian soldiers under lease at the naval base who had donned unmarked green uniforms. The people viewed them as protectors who allowed them to peacefully conduct their referendum without interference from Kiev, not invaders.

The population expressed gratitude to the Russian president for protecting them. I saw billboards throughout Crimea with Putin’s image on them, which read: “Crimea. Russia. Forever.” I asked several residents if this represented the general sentiment among the population. They confirmed enthusiastically that it did.

While in country, I attempted to get an interview with a representative of the Crimean Tatars, an ethnic minority population in which there is reportedly division in terms of support for the reunification with Russia, but was unsuccessful.

But the overall support for reunification with Russia should not come as a surprise to those familiar with Crimea’s history. The Russian naval fleet has been based at Sevastopol since Catherine the Great’s reign in the Eighteenth Century. During the Soviet era, Premier Nikita Khrushchev – who was Ukrainian – decided to move Crimea from Russian administration and give it as a gift to Ukraine.

Since both Russia and Ukraine were part of the Soviet Union at the time, the possible future consequences of such a decision were not considered. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Crimea remained in Ukraine as an autonomous region while Russia kept its naval base there as part of a legal agreement (lease) with the Ukrainian government.

Not only is Sevastopol Russia’s only warm water port, it is the place where the Soviet army blocked the Nazi advance for eight months during World War II. By the time, the siege was over, around 90 percent of the city had been devastated.

Kramarenko summed up continental Russians’ view of the reunification: “Most people, both Crimean and Russian, think Crimea is Russian. The referendum, along with the lack of violence, gives it legitimacy.”

Surveys of Crimean and Russian opinion by Pew, Gallup and GfK within a year of the referendum show consistent support for Crimea’s reunification with Russia and the legitimacy of the referendum itself. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Western Media

When I asked Russians if they had access to Western media, they all said they did, through both satellite and the Internet. But they did not find the Western media to be accurate or thorough in their coverage of Russia in general and the Ukraine crisis in particular.

Volodya Shestakov told me, "The Western media narrative of Russia is distorted. The corporate media distorts news in its own interests ... and to suit politics. Americans are the first target of corporate propaganda."

Nikolay Viknyanschuk, originally from eastern Ukraine and also a resident of St. Petersburg explained further: "There are certain patterns used [within the Western media] and they prefer to stay within those patterns. What they cannot explain, they cut off or ignore. If Russia is an aggressor, why didn't it take Kiev?"

He also lamented Western media's over-reliance on a short news cycle, sound bites and talking heads who lead the audience in what to think, "Commentators and so-called journalists' interpretations are relied upon instead of presenting primary source material."

Lack of context was another complaint about the Western media's presentation of the Ukraine issue. I can personally attest to this as the conversations I had with educated Americans about the Ukraine crisis reflected little to no historical understanding of the country as having been under the control of different political and cultural entities, creating divisions that, combined with poverty and deep corruption, made it vulnerable to instability.

As Shestakov explained: "Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia [Belarus] are ethnically and culturally the same. There are only mild differences. Russia started in Kiev [Kiev Rus] but expanded and the capital moved to Moscow. When Ukraine got independence in 1991, a fictitious narrative was pushed in school textbooks of an independent people who were repressed by Russia. The Ukrainians have been manipulated. Russians don't hate Ukrainians. There is no hostility on our part. We regret what has happened."

Vasilievich reiterated these historical points: "There was resentment that Ukraine was always viewed as the 'little brother' in the relationship after Russia united to become its own independent nation. Parts of Ukraine were always under the rule of Russia [in the east], Poland or the Austro-Hungarians [in the west]. Ukraine is a vast area with rural villages and there is an ideology of small rural areas with Polish influence in the western most regions. The Americans knew what divisions they were manipulating."

According to the extensive research of Walter Uhler, president of the Russian-American International Studies Association, there was no historical reference to even a clearly defined, much less independent, territory called Ukraine until the Sixteenth Century when the term was used by Polish sources, but “with the demise of Polish rule, the name *Ukraine* fell into disuse as a term for a specific territory, and was not revived until the early Nineteenth Century.”

Tatyana confirmed that Western media is freely available online in Crimea as well for those who understand English, but it is often seen as distorted.

Additionally, most Russians find the demonization of their president by Western media and politicians to be childish and a reflection of the observation that Washington policymakers seem to have assigned Russia the role of enemy long ago for their own reasons, regardless of what Russia actually is or does in reality.

As Valery Ivanov, a 25-year old college graduate who earns a living as an emcee and a translator in Krasnodar, said, “The Western media and government portrays Russia as an aggressor because Russia is a strong country and a potential competitor.”

What to Say to Americans

One thing that stood out in my discussions with Russians was how they almost always made a point of differentiating between the American people and the government in Washington. They like and admire the American people for their openness and achievements, but they find Washington policymakers’ penchant for interfering in other parts of the world in which they don’t understand the consequences of their actions to be profoundly misguided and dangerous.

At the end of my interview with each person, I asked them if there was one thing they could say to the American people, what would it be. It was interesting how, even though they all worded it differently, the essence of their answers was identical: we are all the same; we may have minor differences in language, culture and geography that influence us but we all want the same things – peace and a stable, prosperous future for our children and grandchildren.

Several Russians underscored the point that if Russians and Americans got together and related to each other as regular people, there would be no real conflict. Valery Ivanov said, “If we were to meet in a bar for a drink, over American whiskey or Russian vodka, we would become good friends.”

Nikolay Viknyanschuk added, “Let’s be friends on a personal and family level. We should strengthen friendship between San Francisco and St. Petersburg. You are people and we are people. We all have five fingers on each hand.”

Volodya Shestakov offered this insight about his own transformation in how he saw Americans during the Cold War versus how he saw them afterward, when he was able to travel and to meet them: “When I looked at U.S. people, I saw them as alien, like from another planet. When I met American people, I no longer saw them that way. The liquid in our bodies is all from the same ocean.”

They also would like more Americans to come visit Russia and open themselves up to what Russia has to offer. Marina and Irina, two of the civil society activists in Krasnodar emphasized, “Let’s cooperate. Let’s share experience and meet each other. We have a rich history and culture to share and we want to invite Americans to come and meet us.”

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Reform Judaism’s Israeli Critique

Israel’s nearly seven decades of repressing Palestinians has soured many ethical Jews on the idea that the Jewish state should get unqualified support for its behavior, including now Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the leader of U.S. Reform Judaism, as Lawrence Davidson describes.

By Lawrence Davidson

Something significant recently happened in the ongoing political-ethical drama that grips Israel and, by extension, Jewish communities worldwide. As reported by the *Jewish Daily Forward* on Nov. 6, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the president of the Union for Reform Judaism (a position that makes him the leader of the largest Jewish denomination in the United States), publicly broke with Israel’s political and religious leadership.

In a major speech at the Union’s biennial conference he said, “Asking Jews around the world only to wave the flag of Israel and to support even the most misguided policies of its leaders drives a wedge between the Jewish soul and the Jewish state.”

Going public in this fashion is significant and welcome. However, as we shall see, this aspect of his critique has a long history.

Jacobs then got more specific: “the treatment of Israel’s minorities” and the “way ultra-Orthodox views of Judaism are being enshrined in secular law” are indications that Israeli society is “broken” and that Reform Jews will not be quiet about this.

Jacobs offers the concept of *Tikkun olam* or “good works that benefit the wider community” and the “power and wisdom of pluralism” as antidotes that can help “repair” Israel. This is potentially powerful stuff for the situation here in the U.S., if not in Israel itself.

If Jacobs moves to mobilize America’s Reform Jews behind a campaign opposing present Israeli behavior, it will constitute a major challenge to Zionist tribalism. It might also help liberate the U.S. Congress from its present role of accomplice to Israeli crimes.

Past as Prologue

While the Zionists will never admit it and it is unlikely that the great majority of Reform Jews are aware of it, Rabbi Jacobs’s criticism is not new. Indeed, warnings and skepticism of what Zionism meant for the Jews and Judaism go back to the late Nineteenth Century and intensified with the announcement of the Balfour Declaration in 1917.

I wrote a long essay on this subject in 2004. It is entitled “Zionism and the Attack on Jewish Values” and appeared in the online journal of ideas *Logos* (Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 2004). Here are some excerpts:

,Ahad Ha-am (the pen name of the famous Jewish moralist Asher Ginzberg) noted as early as 1891 that Zionist settlers in Palestine had “an inclination to despotism. They treat the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, deprive them of their rights, offend them without cause, and even boast of these deeds; and no one among us opposes this despicable and dangerous inclination.”

,In England, on May 24, 1917, the Joint Foreign Committee of two Jewish organizations, the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anglo-Jewish Association, issued a statement which asserted, “the feature of the Zionist program objected to proposes to invest Jewish settlers in Palestine with special rights over others. This would prove a calamity to the whole Jewish people who hold that the principle of equal rights for all denominations is essential. The [Zionist program] is all the more inadmissible because it might involve them in most bitter feuds with their neighbors of other races and religion.”

,Hannah Arendt, one of the most insightful Jewish political philosophers of the Twentieth Century, characterized the Zionist movement in a 1945 essay as a “German-inspired nationalism.” The result of this was a modern form of tribal

ethnocentrism that led to virulent, politicized racism. In 1948, she and 27 other prominent Jews living in the United States wrote a letter to the *New York Times* condemning the growth of right-wing political influences in the newly founded Israeli state.

,Toward the end of his life, Albert Einstein warned that “the attitude we adopt toward the Arab minority will provide the real test of our moral standards as a people.” An investigation of the conclusions drawn by every human rights organization that has examined Israeli behavior toward the Palestinians over the last 50 years, leaves no doubt that the Zionists have failed Einstein’s test.

Yet that is just the conclusion that today’s Zionists cannot face. Any revival of these early and prescient objections as part of a contemporary critique of Zionism represents, to the ardent Zionist, the promotion of supposedly traitorous anachronisms that are not only an embarrassment, but also politically dangerous.

Jews who express such concerns are systematically denigrated and non-Jews who are critical of Zionism are slandered with charges of anti-Semitism.

Judaism Divided

Thus, Rabbi Rick Jacobs is the latest in a long line of important critics. Now that he has joined their ranks, the question is: Will Jacobs be able to popularize his critique while withstanding the enormous pressure that is certainly about to befall him?

He will be libeled and threatened in an effort to force him to back down. The movement of Reform Judaism might itself come under fire as subversive. After all, officially Israel doesn’t even see Reform Jewry as real Jews.

Though an effort to discredit Jacobs and the Reform movement will be made, it will only make matters worse for the Zionists and Israel. Thanks to its racist policies and brutal aggressiveness, the Zionist state has become the most divisive issue for Jews throughout the Western world. Jacobs’s pronouncement is a sure sign of this. A Zionist counterattack on Reform Jewry will make it more so.

The truth is that Zionism has always divided Jews. On one side have been those sensitive to humanitarian issues and the religion’s traditional championship of egalitarianism and justice. And on the other side have been those who have committed themselves to a Jewish future defined in Zionist ideological terms.

Before World War II those on the humanitarian side were mainly outspoken intellectuals. At that time the Zionists were better organized than those who opposed them and they were politically savvy and assertive. However, apart from areas of Eastern Europe, the vast majority of ordinary Jews remained neutral. With the advent of Nazi persecution the entire balance shifted in favor of the Zionists, who saw vindication for their statist philosophy in the Holocaust. By 1948, few Jews said a word against Zionism and the state of Israel.

But that pro-Zionist balance could not last. Eventually Israel's combining of religion and state power produced the worst of both worlds. In the name of defending Judaism, Israel has conquered, persecuted and massacred, and it has self-righteously refused to acknowledge its own culpability for the ongoing tragedy of both itself and its victims. Now, more and more Jews are disgusted and alienated, or just mightily confused, by the ongoing malfeasance of a movement that was supposed to create their ultimate safe haven.

As the journalist Laurie Goodstein noted in a Sept. 22, 2014 article in the international edition of the *New York Times*, ever greater numbers of younger American Jews are turning against Zionism and Israel. However, older and more conservative Jews still remain ardent Zionists. These are the big donors not only at their local congregational level, but also when it comes to politics.

They will continue to try to intimidate Jewish skeptics into silence and to sway members of Congress. Hopefully, the efforts of men like Rabbi Jacobs will make it easier for those Jews who support more progressive and humane policies to stand up and compete for influence.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest; €€America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism.

Baiting Obama to 'Shock and Awe'

Official Washington's armchair warriors are pounding their drums again, demanding a larger U.S. invasion of Syria and decrying President Obama as "feckless" for showing some restraint. But these hawks offer little thinking about the consequences of another long-term occupation, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

President Barack Obama has repeatedly made adjustments to what he probably considered privately to have been the best U.S. policy toward armed conflicts overseas, as he has had to cope with the pressures from public discourse in Washington, to count his available political capital, and to decide which political battles to fight at home while also deciding which military battles the United States should fight abroad.

He has adjusted too much in the view of some of his critics on the left, who have not been happy about the extension of the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan or the reinsertion of some U.S. troops into Iraq. Far louder criticism, however, has come from the opposite direction and has called for more, not less, use of military force in foreign conflicts, especially conflicts in the Middle East.

This latter criticism is partly a matter of the usual reflexive rhetorical attacks with a heavy partisan tinge, which seem to have become especially habitual when aimed at the current president. But there is an additional dynamic that comes into play no matter who is in the White House and that produces a bias in the Washington discourse in favor of more rather than less use of military force, notwithstanding the notice that may be taken from time to time of the public's lack of appetite for getting involved in another costly ground war.

This dynamic partly comes out of the tendency to look at any problem overseas as not only a U.S. problem but also a problem the United States ought to be able to solve, and thus a black mark on whoever happens to be U.S. president. It comes as well from the false equating of doing something visible and forceful with the solving of a problem.

There also are false equations between the use of military force and being tough, and between being tough and exercising leadership. There is the further luxury in opposition of being able to carp and criticize without the responsibility of implementing a policy that will actually improve matters. All of these patterns are accentuated at times of high emotional reaction to salient, jarring events, which is why they are especially apparent now in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Paris.

Mr. Obama, to his credit, is not adjusting his course in response to the current pressure to make the pseudo-tough move of significantly escalating U.S. military operations in Syria to battle the so-called Islamic State or ISIS, beyond the current carefully targeted airstrikes and the small Special Forces contingent that is already there. In particular, putting U.S. ground combat forces in Syria would be a bad idea for multiple reasons.

One reason is that it would not resolve the problem that it ostensibly would be intended to deal with, which is anti-Western terrorism conducted under the banner of ISIS. Whether an ISIS mini-state lives or dies in northeast Syria is not a critical variable that will determine whether radical and resourceful individuals and small groups determined to wreak havoc in Western cities will do so.

Maybe something will yet emerge from investigation of the Paris attacks to suggest that the fate of the mini-state is such a variable, but so far nothing has. So far the picture is one of a Belgium-based gang being responsible for the attack, with only vague connections to Syria and not necessarily to an ISIS decision-making structure. If there is any evidence (and an after-the-fact claim statement is not it) of an order from an ISIS high command in Raqqa to conduct this operation, we in the public have not been told about it.

An expanded U.S.-led military operation would play directly into narratives favored by ISIS and like-minded radicals, about Middle Eastern Muslims being the targets of forceful domination by a predominantly Christian West. The United States should stand side by side with France with regard to the latter's role as a victim of terrorism. The United States has no interest in identifying with France as a colonial overseer of Syria in the interwar years, or a France that might be seen as trying to re-assert its dominance there. Problems of mistaken beliefs about a religious dimension of American intentions are made only worse by the abominable call from some presidential candidates to apply a religious test to decisions whether to admit refugees from Syria.

An expanded U.S.-led military expedition expands the radicalizing resentment, and the resulting recruiting ability of ISIS and extremist groups, from collateral damage from the military operations. This would be a result not only of a ground war but also a more indiscriminate air war. It certainly would be a result of following Ted Cruz's foolish advice that we should just not care about collateral damage.

The direct costs to American blood and treasure are what should be an obvious reason not to embark on something like a ground war in Syria, especially given the historical record of costs in such endeavors going well beyond what was originally projected.

James Jeffrey, who calls for just such a U.S. ground war in an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, assures us that this time would be different because, you see, an offensive in Syria would not be like those other messy endeavors but instead would be a "short," "crisp," "rapid takedown" of ISIS. We have heard similar assurances before. Reality has had a way of becoming much different from the images in the pre-war assurances. Shock and awe, anyone?

A reality in Syria is that rapidly taking down ISIS would leave the sort of chaos in that part of Syria that is itself fuel for radicalism, at least as long as the rest of the multifaceted Syrian war continues, and at least without a long foreign military occupation that would have huge direct costs as well as providing still more fuel for radicalizing resentment. Jeffrey is remarkably casual in brushing aside such considerations. All he has to say is that “while figuring out the ‘day after’ might be difficult and implementing any solutions costly,” he thinks a continuation of ISIS would be worse.

President Obama spoke trenchant truths at his press conference in Turkey on Monday. In response to a series of questions that were all just reworded versions of “Gee, those Paris attacks were really awful, don’t you think you should do something much different from what you have been doing so far about ISIS?”

Mr. Obama demonstrated much better understanding of the challenges involved than his “do something, anything” critics. In describing the nature of the terrorist threat we face, he explained, “It’s not their sophistication or the particular weapon that they possess, but it is the ideology that they carry with them and their willingness to die.”

He acknowledged that the success of ISIS in establishing and maintaining its so-called caliphate is indeed a factor in the terrorist equation, but mainly as a matter of perceptions; it makes the group “more attractive to potential recruits.”

Given that this is largely a problem of perceptions and beliefs and related emotions and resentment, it is important not to do things that only make matters worse along that dimension. In that regard, the President observed, “We play into the [ISIS] narrative when we act as if they’re a state, and we use routine military tactics that are designed to fight a state that is attacking another state. That’s not what’s going on here.”

As for launching a U.S.-led ground war, Mr. Obama accurately said, “We can retake territory. And as long as we leave our troops there, we can hold it, but that does not solve the underlying problem of eliminating the dynamics that are producing these kinds of violent extremist groups.”

The President also indirectly commented on the false equations that so much of the carping in Washington involves. He will not do things that “somehow, in the abstract, make America look tough, or make me look tough.” He is not interested, he said, “is posing or pursuing some notion of American leadership or America winning, or whatever other slogans they come up with that has no relationship to what is actually going to work to protect the American people.”

One of the oft-voiced but invalid comments about the previous administration's signature military adventure is that the escalation, several years into the Iraq War, that became known as the "surge" was an "act of courage" on the part of President George W. Bush. It was nothing of the sort. It was a way to tamp down temporarily the surging violence in Iraq and to hold it at a less egregious level long enough to get out of Washington and bequeath the remaining mess, including all the still-unresolved political problems in Iraq, to the next administration.

President Obama, with just 14 months left in his presidency and getting all the political flak he is getting about ISIS, must feel tempted to do the same sort of thing now in Syria. Think about it: if he did so he would not only take wind out of the sails of hawkish critics but also be able to claim a place in history as the leader who smashed ISIS.

Of course, the terrorism and the chaos would still be there, as would an even messier and more complicated situation than before in Syria. But that would all be a problem for the next administration. We should be glad that President Obama is showing enough responsibility and true leadership not to do anything like that.

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Neocons Make Rubio Their Favorite

With Sen. Marco Rubio surging in the polls closing the gap on Donald Trump and easily besting Hillary Clinton in some general-election match-ups the neocons have found their favorite candidate, a fresh face who would put them firmly back in the driver's seat of U.S. foreign policy, as JP Sottile explains.

By JP Sottile

"We'll be fine." That's what neoconservative scion William Kristol [told Beltway insiders](#) on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" when asked about the prospect of Donald Trump winning the GOP nomination.

Although he was [initially warm](#) to Trump's candidacy, Kristol quickly cooled during the "Summer of Trump" as the GOP's surprise frontrunner began piling up insults and, more importantly, as he began piling-on the disastrous foreign

policy legacy of President George W. Bush. Trump's barrages against the Iraq War on the stump, on Sunday shows and, most entertainingly, on Twitter transformed the main foreign policy "achievement" of the neoconservative movement into a toxic campaign issue for the GOP's Establishment-friendly candidates.

To wit, Trump's relentless critique of the neocon-driven Iraq debacle wounded, perhaps mortally, the presidential prospects of "The Next Bush in Line" and, in so doing, jeopardized the most obvious governmental re-entry point for the restive cadre of neocon men and women currently languishing at the American Enterprise Institute. Many are also among Jeb Bush's closest foreign policy advisers.

With the Bush brand in jeopardy and Trump unwilling to either parrot long-standing GOP talking points or regurgitate their partially-digested tropes on foreign policy, things looked bleak for the Republican Party's bellicose backbenchers.

And its big-money benefactors have been left wanting ever since Wisconsin wunderkind Scott Walker ignominiously left the race with a whimper. Unlike the rest of the field, Troublesome Trump is not running for a big payday in the Sheldon Adelson primary. And Trump is not beholden to big-dollar bundlers nor is he quietly coordinating with a well-funded Super PAC.

The prospect of a Republican nominee who is, whether for good or for ill, entirely free from traditional levers of influence led Kristol to go so far as to declare he'd support a third-party candidate if Trump became the standard bearer of a party the neoconservatives have dominated for three decades.

But the big GOP Establishment freak-out over the possibility of a string-less presidential nominee may be coming to an end. And Kristol, who is a notoriously flat-footed prognosticator, anticipated it a week before the punditocracy crowned Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Florida, the winner of the now-notorious CNBC "dumpster fire" debate and long before the Paris Attack refocused both the GOP race and the tragedy-obsessed media on national security.

This is Sen. Marco Rubio's best chance yet to turn his national security candidacy into the Establishment's main alternative to both Trump and to the Evangelical-fueled anomaly of Dr. Ben Carson. Rubio's recent move to the Establishment's pole position, complete with the public backing of billionaire Paul Singer and the Weekly's Standard's recent pronouncement that Jeb's flaccid candidacy was "dead", also presents the best opportunity for neoconservatives eager to retake control of U.S. foreign policy.

Ironically, Trump may have done them a favor. By burning Bush on his well-funded

ties to SuperPAC puppet-masters and by relentlessly linking him with the worst memories of his brother's tenure, Trump cleared the way for the ultimate neoconservative dreamboat, Marco Rubio.

Which may be why, after reassuring everyone that "We'll be fine," the Conservative Cassandra told the "Morning Joe" scrum that a "Rubio-Fiorina or a Fiorina-Rubio ticket's going to win in November" and that "everyone should calm down."

Who Is 'We'?

When Bill Kristol says "we'll be fine," who is the "we" he's talking about? The country? The Republican Party?

Or is he talking specifically about the neoconservative brand and the much-maligned "shoot first, spend copiously and don't bother to ask questions later" approach to foreign policy that turned the "neocon" name into pejorative term while also tarnishing the Republican Party and, in many ways, opening it up to outsiders and insurgents.

When pundits refer to Trump as an "outsider" who is running afoul of the "Establishment," in many ways the Establishment they are talking about is the neoconservativeneoliberal alliance that has dominated the GOP since neoconservatives began exerting control over Ronald Reagan's often-brutal and occasionally-illegal policies in Central America and their neoliberal soul-mates ushered-in the era of low taxes, high spending and wholesale deregulation most people refer to as "Reaganomics."

Over time, this has opened up a schism in the Republican Party between this dominant force and so-called paleo-conservatives, assorted libertarians and lingering "country-club" moderates who've failed to regain traction in a party dominated by Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and the ghost of Milton Friedman.

At the end of the grand neocon experiment, also known as "Bush-43," a potent combination of runaway spending, painful skepticism about the grinding Iraq War and, most directly, the hastily-engineered bailout of Wall Street blew that rift wide open. That's when the Tea Party rushed in and wrested control of the GOP agenda away from the Establishment.

And, like him or not, Donald Trump has, like the Tea Party before him, exploited that rift in the GOP to great effect, particularly on the issue of interventionism. Unlike most of the other candidates, Trump's evisceration of the Iran Nuke Deal stops short of "ripping it up" on "day one" of his presidency. Rather, he proclaims he'll be all over the Iranians like a cheap suit, pressing the enforcement of the deal like no other leader could.

And he's one of the few major political figures of either party to state bluntly that both Iraq *and* Libya would both be better off if the United States hadn't taken it upon itself to replace Saddam Hussein and Col. Gaddafi with swirling maelstroms of chaos. But even worse in the neocon universe is Trump's position on Syria and his approach to Vladimir Putin.

In a direct challenge to the neoconservative policy of relentless Middle Eastern fight-picking and their decades-long obsession with crippling Russia, a President Trump would, according to his repeated statements, prefer to let Russia and Iran have at it in the fight against the Islamic State. Trump is also willing to let Syrian President Bashar al-Assad stay in power if that would keep a lid on the beheading badguys.

And, in what has become one of the ultimate neocon "no-nos", Trump said he'd work to "get along" with Putin. To coin a phrase, "That's huge."

Trump's transgression of neoconservative orthodoxy set off warning bells at Commentary and its sirens have been ringing like a shrill car alarm ever since. Noah Rothman warned that if elected, Trump would start cutting some of his famous deals directly with "the devil." The devil is, of course, not in the details. The devil is, according to neoconservatives, Vladimir Putin.

And Max "Don't Call Me Jack" Boot summarily labeled Trump an "apologist for dictators," while Rothman tarred Trump's demonstrable claim that America was not, in fact, "safe" on 9/11 as tantamount to a dreaded "conspiracy theory."

Meanwhile, The Weekly Standard has subtly jabbed Trump with petty guilt-by-association blurbs about Mike Tyson and Barack Obama even as the folks at Commentary have accused Trump of going "full Democrat." But the irony is that Trump is not pulling Democratic ideas into the GOP race. Rather, Trump is leveraging a long-simmering feud between GOP insurgents, one that dates back to Pat Buchanan's challenge to then-President George H.W. Bush in 1992, and the GOP Establishment.

The "outsiders" are now a hodge-podge of Tea Party activists, Dr. Ben Carson's disgruntled Evangelicals and the traditional, cautious conservatism expressed by The American Conservative. It is also found in the lingering, almost rock-star appeal of longtime Libertarian representative and former presidential candidate Ron Paul.

Trump's support, which often overlaps with the Tea Party, exemplifies its split on foreign policy. Like Trump, Tea Partiers are vociferous hawks, but also not necessarily interventionist. Rather, the Tea Party harbors a range of views from the knee-jerk militarism of Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Arkansas, to the surprisingly

less enthusiastic stance of another presidential hopeful, Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas.

On "Meet the Press," Cruz told Chuck Todd, "I don't believe we should be engaged in nation building. I don't believe we should be trying to transform foreign countries into democratic utopias, trying to turn Iraq into Switzerland. But I do think it is the job of our military to protect this country, to hunt down and kill jihadists who would murder us."

Obviously, Americans have heard that one before and it's entirely likely that the opportunistic Cruz is simply positioning himself to soak-up Trump's base of support if and when he falters. But it's notable that the astute political move to capture Trump's support is to position yourself *in opposition to* knee-jerk interventionism and, therefore, to neoconservatism.

This lingering war-weariness and unease with empire is often derided by neoconservatives and, for that matter, by the foreign policy establishments of both parties, as "isolationism." In many ways, the choice between "interventionism" and "isolationism" is Beltway Establishment's ultimate litmus test. When politicians and pundits label a candidate as "isolationist" it's usually the kiss of death. Nothing is more dangerous than someone who threatens to derail 75 years of hegemonic momentum.

And unlike Trump, it is this test that Sen. Marco Rubio has purposefully and methodically passed since he announced his candidacy last April. He quickly followed up with a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations in May that hit all the interventionist sweet spots.

According to the Guardian, Rubio stopped short of appointing Uncle Sam as the "world's policeman," yet also wanted to "arm the Ukrainian military, pull back from negotiations with Iran, increase air strikes in Iraq, increase naval activity in the China Sea, [and] reverse the 'normalization' of relations with Cuba."

Rubio further differentiated himself from Trump and "America Firsters" in a Weekly Standard feature article inauspiciously titled, "The Republican Obama." In an interview for the story, Rubio stakes out a decidedly neoconservative position on the increasingly failed state of Libya. According to Rubio, the bloody chaos is not a result of the vacuum created by intervention, but because President Obama failed to "help quickly bring the civil war to a decisive conclusion."

In other words, Obama's intervention did not go far enough. And, as he told John McCormack, neither did the base of his own party: "When I called for us to be

more aggressive in Libya, there were a lot of people in the base of my party who were against that," he said in the interview. "I wouldn't call it isolationism per se, but there was a growing movement in that direction in 2011, 2012, and 2013 that really didn't end until ISIS beheaded two Americans."

And if this stark contrast with Trump's blistering critique of U.S. foreign policy and Cruz's admonition against transforming other nations into "democratic utopias" doesn't expose the fissure between the GOP's insurgents and its increasingly discredited Establishment, Rubio's stance on Russia and Vladimir Putin shows the extent to which Trump stands in direct contraposition to the neoconservative agenda and how qualified Rubio is to be its standard bearer.

In October, The Wall Street Journal detailed Rubio's ever-hardening line on Putin which is, by subtle extension, an attack on Trump's foreign policy bona fides. Rubio said, "We are barreling toward a second Cold War, and strong American leadership is the only force capable of ensuring that peace and security once again prevail," and promised that "under my administration, there will be no pleading for meetings with Vladimir Putin. He will be treated as the gangster and thug that he is. And yes, I stand by that phrasing."

The Standard Bearer

Remember the last time someone proposed a "New American Century"? That was The Project for a New American Century (PNAC), which formed in the late 1990s, and its roster read like a who's who of neoconservative busybodies, defense industry enthusiasts and future functionaries of President George W. Bush's Global War on Terror.

In September of 2000, the now-defunct "Project" infamously outlined its principles in a document titled "Rebuilding America's Defenses." In it, PNAC lamented the lagging military power of the United States in absence of the Cold War. It also detailed an expensive plan to militarize every level of existence from microbes to space and, most notoriously, said this massive "rebuilding" of "defenses" would be impossible to sell to the American people without a catalyzing event like "a new Pearl Harbor."

Sadly, that catalyzing event came on 9/11. But the subsequent "project" for a new American century quickly turned into a burning tire around the neck of neoconservatives. It also opened a financial sinkhole in the U.S. budget and it visited a multigenerational disaster on the inhabitants of the Middle East.

For critics, PNAC's big plan looked a lot like a smoking gun that demonstrated the premeditated opportunism of Administration insiders who quickly and effectively turned the Saudi-dominated attack on 9/11 into the wholesale

destruction of a sovereign, bystander nation, Iraq, under patently false pretenses.

Yet, as if on cue, PNAC pulled their plug in 2006. That was just about the same time their much-ballyhooed “transformative” War on Iraq was devolving into a much-maligned quagmire. Thus, PNAC quietly disbanded just as public opinion finally turned on President Bush and after the neocons had engineered a global, full-spectrum war against an age-old asymmetrical tactic called terrorism.

Since then, and since the election of Barack Obama in 2008, the neoconservatives have been relegated mostly to the pundit peanut gallery. William Kristol, Bush functionary Dan Senor and PNAC signatory Robert Kagan rebooted PNAC as the much-less confrontationally named Foreign Policy Initiative.

Kagan’s wife, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland, lorded over Ukraine’s chaotic shift away from neocon nemesis Vladimir Putin, but Kristol’s Emergency Committee for Israel failed to derail President Obama’s nuclear deal with another favorite target, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

And although Kristol seems to have found an acolyte in Tea Party-propelled Sen. Tom Cotton, neocon pundit Max Boot recently lamented the failure of Congress to force through the kind of bloated defense budget that has long animated his fellow travelers.

The rub is that although the GOP is still reflexively pro-military, there is also a strong strain of budgetary squeamishness built into the anti-government appeal of the Tea Party. In part, that led to the infamous “budget sequester” deal with the President in 2011 that put caps on everything, including defense spending.

Since then, according to Boot, the defense budget hasn’t been “serious”, and by “serious” he means that an annual budget of nearly a trillion dollars (a total including ALL defense-related spending) simply isn’t enough if America plans on seriously dealing with a panoply of “threats” from China, ISIS, Iran and Russia, among others.

Not coincidentally, all those “threats” also appear on Sen. Marco Rubio’s laundry list of doom. Also not coincidentally, the boyish charmer with a Hispanic name, Cuban roots and a compelling immigrant back story is pitching his transformative candidacy with a catchy campaign slogan that sounds vaguely, perhaps even ominously familiar: “Marco Rubio: A New American Century.”

Yes, Rubio has gone “Full-Neocon” and the echoes of grand designs past don’t stop with his blatant campaign slogan. On Nov. 5, Rubio gave a sweeping

speech in New Hampshire outlining his defense policies that could, according to an expert at the Cato Institute, add upwards of \$1 trillion dollars on top of current budget projections over the next decade.

It was that extra trillion dollars that GOP hopeful Sen. Rand Paul, R-Kentucky, attacked as "not conservative" in the FOX Business Debate. Rubio responded predictably by labeling Paul as an "isolationist."

But Sen. Paul highlighted the key difference between the Tea Party and Rubio, who is not a real conservative in the fiscal sense. Rather, Rubio is a neoconservative armed with global aspirations and a staggering military-industrial wish-list to boot. No doubt, it certainly is the type of "serious" defense budget that makes Max Boot dance. Rubio calls it his plan to "Restore Military Strength," which sounds an awful lot like PNAC's "Rebuilding America's Defenses."

Among the pricy "restorations" on Rubio's To-Do List:

–Reverse the current cuts and maintain the Marine Corps and the Army at their pre-9/11 end-strengths of 182,000 and 490,000 respectively.

–Immediately begin to increase the size of the Navy to a minimum of 323 ships by 2024.

–Build at least two attack submarines every year to preserve America's undersea dominance amid intensifying naval competition.

–Develop and field the Long Range Strike Bomber capable of both conventional and nuclear missions to replace our current aging fleet of B-52, B-1, and B-2 bombers.

–Expand missile defense by speeding up deployment of interceptors in Europe, deploying a third site in the United States, and ensuring that advanced programs are adequately funded.

–Increase the Missile Defense Agency's Research & Development budget and create a rapid-fielding office to focus on fielding directed energy weapons, railguns, UAV-enabled defenses, and other means to defeat a threat missile across its entire flight trajectory.

–Modernize the nuclear arsenal and stop the Obama administration's proposed cuts to the nuclear arsenal.

–Improve anti-submarine capabilities; procure advanced air warfare capabilities; sustain our advantage in precision strike from land, air, and sea; and invest in electronic warfare capabilities.

–Reposture the tactical Air Force for increased presence in Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia.

–Build a “full spectrum” force able to maintain security simultaneously in Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

–Maintain the Army’s proficiency across the full spectrum of war in order to combat state actors, defeat non-state threats, and shape the security environment to America’s advantage.

This emphasis on “full-spectrum dominance” was exactly the thrust of the neoconservative agenda outlined in “Rebuilding America’s Defenses” and is, in essence, a *de facto* program for complete military dominance of the entire planet on the land, the sea, in space and, for the tech-enthusiastic Rubio, in cyberspace.

And it also puts him in good company with the neoconservative agenda outlined by the Executive branch backbenchers at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI).

In what cannot be written off as a mere coincidence, PNAC’s former executive director Gary J. Schmitt is now at AEI and his name tops the header of AEI’s new, daunting 87-page plan “To rebuild America’s military.” In addition to wanting to expand U.S. capabilities to be able to fight wars in **three** theaters simultaneously, the neoconservative’s latest assessment details these “key points” of concern about America’s military power:

–The current U.S. military force is too small, its equipment is too old, and it is not trained or ready for a large or long fight.

–The decline of U.S. military power has severe implications for security and prosperity not just in America but also in Europe, in East Asia, and especially across the greater Middle East.

–Defense planning for the next administration must take a long-term perspective, adopting a three-theater force construct, increasing military capacity, introducing new capabilities urgently, and increasing and sustaining defense budgets.

Not surprisingly, the issues highlighted in this latest neocon manifesto would all be resolved by Rubio’s suspiciously simpatico wish list. Perhaps more troubling is that Rubio is also being supported by a secretive non-profit that is, for all intents and purposes, running a shadow campaign to get Rubio elected.

The Shadow Campaign

Amidst a dizzying array of heavily-funded SuperPACs, billionaire benefactors and the troubling news that nearly half of the cash poured into presidential campaign came from just 158 families, The Conservative Solutions Project (CSP) is quietly reshaping the already skewed campaign finance system.

“The Project” is a non-profit “social welfare” organization that has thus far raised \$15 million. There’s nothing wrong with that. However, their novel idea of social welfare centers on a single-minded “project” to elect Sen. Marco Rubio as America’s first truly neoconservative president.

Unlike Jeb Bush’s much-discussed \$100+ million Right to Rise PAC, the Conservative Solutions Project is *not* a “SuperPAC.” In post-Citizens United America, SuperPACs can raise and spend unlimited amount of cash, but also have to disclose the names of donors and the amounts of their donations. But, because CSP is officially registered as a “501(c)(4) social welfare organizations,” it is able to keep the names and amounts of its financially unfettered donors completely secret.

Like SuperPACs, social welfare organizations cannot coordinate directly with a candidate. But unlike SuperPACs, that shouldn’t even be an issue because social welfare organizations are not supposed to advocate directly for political campaigns at all. Period.

The IRS states bluntly, “The promotion of social welfare does not include direct or indirect participation or intervention in political campaigns on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.” They can “engage in some political activities, so long as that is not its primary activity.”

Yet, the Conservative Solutions Project has been the primary source of an “ad blitz” starring none other than Marco Rubio. And, according to the National Journal, that’s quite literally “none other.” S.V. Dãite reported in late October that “every single one of the group’s thousands of television ads, in fact, has featured Rubio” and it shouldn’t come as a surprise since “its leader co-founded a political consulting firm with the manager of Rubio’s presidential campaign.”

Even more glaring is that “there have been no TV ads touting Rubio thus far other than those by Conservative Solutions Project.”

Apparently, the impressive roster of GOP insiders at CSP believe there is no conflict in running \$3 million worth of ads touting Rubio’s anti-Iran Nuke Deal stance. Nor is there any problem with the \$3 million ad-buy showing Rubio at the Iowa State Fair. Nor is there any problem with the \$2 million they’ve allocated to run even more Rubio-centric ads through this coming February, according to

Associated Press.

But the campaign finance watchdogs at The Campaign Legal Center and Democracy 21 disagree. According to The Hill, both sent letters to the Justice Department requesting an investigation of CSP's specious interpretation of IRS code. And those requests come on the heels of an earlier complaint filed directly with the IRS by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW). Noah Bookbinder, director of CREW, bluntly told the Associated Press that CSP's Rubio-centric media blitz "is an abuse of the nonprofit status."

Those allegations are simply not true, according to Conservative Solutions Project spokesperson Jeff Sadosky. He claims that CSP meets the IRS requirement of "promoting greater social welfare" by using its website to tout the accomplishments of a few other Republicans besides Marco Rubio.

Still, it's a strange interpretation of social welfare. But, then again, this is the sort of shameless spin you might expect from a person who is doing double-duty as spokesperson for both a faux non-profit *and* for a pro-Rubio super-PAC that is named, and this is not a joke, Conservative Solutions PAC.

So, Rubio's candidacy is not only being propelled by a SuperPAC that cannot officially coordinate with his campaign, his SuperPAC is working hand-in-glove with a secretly-funded social welfare organization that cannot legally be engaged in wholesale political activities.

The kicker is that their idea of "social welfare", beyond touting the "accomplishments" of various and sundry politicians, is an "Agenda for American Exceptionalism" that includes "reforming the tax code" (meaning tax cuts) and "shrinking and restructuring the federal government" while also "restoring our military and America's standing in the world to promote peace, freedom, and prosperity", all of which Rubio dutifully and robotically regurgitates in every speech and during each debate.

As noted previously, Rubio's PNAC-echoing national security plan is called "Restore Military Strength" which, of course, is reflected in CSP's "Agenda for American Exceptionalism."

While it is true that this could all be mere coincidence, what is not coincidental is, as Scott Bland reported in the National Journal last April, the incestuous relationships behind Rubio's bid for the White House. Bland revealed that CSP "commissioned a minutely detailed, 270-page political research book on early-state primary voters last year, and the report was prepared by a firm on Rubio's own political payroll."

That firm is Optimus Consulting and it has a remunerative relationship with

Rubio's leadership PAC dating back to 2013. According to the National Journal, Rubio's leadership PAC, Reclaim America PAC, paid Optimus "\$200,000 in 2013 and 2014 for data and analytics consulting, according to federal campaign-finance disclosures."

Although Rubio's campaign cannot coordinate with Conservative Solutions PAC and *neither* his campaign *nor* the SuperPAC is allowed to sync-up activities with the Conservative Solutions Project because it is *forbidden* to do so by the IRS, the 270-page research book is not only available on Conservative Solutions Project's website, but Bland reported that it is "also on the Optimus website, where a description says it was produced 'in conjunction with the Conservative Solutions PAC,' though the report itself is branded with the nonprofit's name."

Thus far, the Conservative Solutions Project has raised somewhere around \$15 million dollars and spent about \$8 million on the Rubio ad blitz. Conservative Solutions PAC has, as of the last report in June, raised \$16 million and spent almost none of it.

That two-headed beast allows Rubio's federally regulated campaign to conserve cash while it engages in a pitched battle on the airwaves with the SuperPAC and the campaign of the other Establishment option, Jeb Bush. Jeb's SuperPAC, which is not "officially" coordinating with his campaign, spent over \$17 million in ads to keep his flagging campaign afloat.

Of course, The Next Bush in Line also has a non-profit "social welfare" organization lingering in the shadows of the campaign. But Right to Rise Policy Solutions doesn't have the money nor is it poised to capture the biggest fish in the muddy waters of modern moneyed electioneering. That's what Rubio's supposedly uncoordinated "social welfare" group is about to do.

The Center for Responsive Politics tracked past giving and found that Sheldon Adelson and his wife "combined to be the biggest campaign donors of the 2012 cycle." Now, The Guardian reports that insiders believe the billionaire casino mogul is leaning toward spilling million of dollars of largesse into the Conservative Solutions Project. It stands to reason because Rubio reportedly calls upon Adelson regularly and CSP's pet project over the summer was a multimillion ad campaign trumpeting Sen. Rubio's hardline opposition to dealing with the dreaded mullahs of Iran.

And Adelson, who is closely connected to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has in the decidedly anti-Iranian and reflexively pro-Israel Rubio a perfect recipient for his lavish financial attention. But Adelson is not alone. Florida billionaire and former Philadelphia Eagles owner Norman Braman is a long-time supporter willing to dip deep into his pocket for Rubio, and for his

wife, who, the Washington Post reported, works part-time for the Braman family foundation. Like Adelson, U.S. policy toward Israel is one of Braman's primary concerns.

The same is true for billionaire Paul Singer, who previously teamed up with Adelson, billionaire hedge funder Seth Klarman and Home Depot founder Bernard Marcus to pump "a combined \$11.5 million to some of the biggest opponents of the Iran negotiations from 2011 through 2013, and pumped \$115 million into Republican Party super PACs in the 2012 and 2014 elections," according to Huffington Post.

A noted Wall Street wizard, Singer's recent endorsement burnishes Rubio's establishment credentials. But Singer has a long history of supporting the junior Senator from Florida. The Center for Responsive Politics lists Singer's hedge fund Elliott Management as the second most prolific giver to Rubio between 2009 and 2014 (right between Club for Growth and Goldman Sachs) and there's little doubt he will give copiously to Rubio's shadowy social welfare-SuperPAC hybrid.

Although Rubio is well-positioned to be the "rational" alternative to Trump and Carson, it also puts him squarely on the other side of the rift that has half of GOP voters supporting the two outsiders. And, like he did with Jeb Bush, Trump characterized Rubio ties to billionaires as puppet strings, calling him a "perfect little puppet" of Sheldon Adelson in one particularly lively tweet.

Strings Attached

This is Marco's moment. Like the neoconservative brand he has franchised, Rubio has been waiting for the catalyzing event he can leverage into to transformative program to "rebuild" the world's largest military and extend its already global-spanning reach.

Within hours of the Islamic State's stunning attack on Paris, the ever-vigilant Rubio turned it into a profligate fundraising pitch and an anti-refugee addendum to his artful dodge on the one issue that Trump and newly-rising Ted Cruz can use against him, immigration.

But that's the double-edged sword of Rubio's Establishment bid, he's a perfectly-crafted neoconservative Ken Doll who hits all their marks, but, at the same time, he's an animatronic Establishment robot who reliably recites a well-worn message at least half of all GOP voters are currently rejecting out of hand.

This isn't the 2000 election, when George W. Bush touted humility and a discomfort with nation building in the campaign before flipping the switch to a

messianic mission after the “new Pearl Harbor” changed everything.

The GOP’s America Firster and Tea Party elements are distrustful of the Establishment and the nation as a whole is not keen on the neoconservative legacy. In perhaps the ultimate insult, noted lefty commentator Peter Beinart hilariously labeled neocon nemesis Vladimir Putin as the Russian equivalent of a neocon.

But the danger is that neoconservatives know that they are not popular and that’s why they’ve re-booted themselves into the Foreign Policy Initiative, into the recently launched John Hay Initiative (purposefully named after Secretary of State John Hay, the man behind America’s neo-colonial “Open Door” policy in China) and, by every indication, into the not-so-stealthy candidacy of Marco Rubio.

If there is such a thing as “truth” in political advertising, perhaps Rubio’s catchy campaign refrain says it all. His election looks like it’s their latest “project” for a “new American century.”

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CIA Whistleblower Kiriakou Honored

CIA officer John Kiriakou, the first U.S. official to confirm that waterboarding was used to torture “war on terror” detainees, then faced a retaliatory prosecution and 30 months in prison. Recognizing his sacrifice, the literary group PEN gave Kiriakou its First Amendment Award, observed ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Editor’s Note: On Nov. 16, PEN Center USA, the West Coast branch of PEN International, gave former CIA officer John Kiriakou its First Amendment Award for his role in exposing waterboarding as torture used during President George W. Bush’s “war on terror.” Kiriakou then faced retaliation which led to a 30-month prison term for revealing classified information.

PEN International, a human rights and literary arts organization that promotes the written word and freedom of expression, asked former CIA analyst Ray McGovern to write an essay describing Kiriakou’s contribution and sacrifice.

McGovern wrote:

John Kiriakou was just a name in the news until early 2012 when I got a call from Jesselyn Radack, mutual friend, whistleblower and intrepid attorney, who suggested I have lunch with him. John had been arrested in January and charged with unauthorized disclosure of classified information. Over lunch I learned how John had transitioned from highly decorated CIA officer to target of a government vendetta.

John, you see, had refused to be trained in how to torture. Even worse, he had the temerity to confirm publicly that our government was implementing a White House-approved program of torture techniques that turned out to be virtually identical to those listed in the Gestapo *Handbuch*.

Those of you who have seen the documentary *Silenced* already know of the key role Jesselyn Radack has been playing in defending whistleblowers like John Kiriakou. What? This is the first you have heard of *Silenced*? Well, there's a subject for another discussion. Suffice it to note here that the powers-that-be in the distribution business simply chickened out, as they so often do.

Silenced chronicles behavior by faux lawyers at the Department of Justice that is anything but just or lawful. But, hey, who, in this day and age, wants to take on a notoriously vindictive DOJ? And so, with supreme irony, *Silenced* has been silenced.

The documentary shows in a poignant way how, after Jesselyn Radack's own ordeal at the hands of DOJ where she had been an adviser on legal ethics, she decided to devote the rest of her professional life to defending other whistle blowers. John Kiriakou and NSA whistleblower Thomas Drake are also featured all three playing their own roles.

The film presents an extraordinary example of how personal involvement with innocent suffering with injustice suffered first hand or by others can move the heart and the will so deeply that experience becomes catalyst for solidarity and action.

And healing. This came second nature to the community that immediately enfolded the Kiriakou family and helped John's wife Heather and their three young children 2, 7, and 9 at the time survive the ordeal of two years with dad stuck in prison. There were lots of us many no strangers to jail or prison for whistleblowing or nonviolent resistance and Code Pink, as usual, stepped up to share leadership.

Making an Example of John

At CIA's urging, DOJ was coming after John Kiriakou big time. And Heather, herself a widely respected CIA analyst, was let go. In effect, government retaliation created a situation of "two-less" replacing the "twofer" that had been serving with such distinction and integrity at CIA.

When John went to prison, I could identify albeit in a very small way with what it means to be away from wife and children for what seems like forever. Decades ago I had spent three months alone in the Soviet Union, away from my wife and three small children. I ached; I missed the hugs so much that I dreamed of finding a way to send my arms home in the diplomatic pouch.

It's harder still, of course, for wives. It always is. It was challenging enough for my wife to cope with our three children all of them under ten for three months. The mind boggles at what it must have been like for Heather with three still younger children.

And in the midst of all this, with zero warning, Heather's mother had a fatal heart attack. She had been an anchor against the wind for Heather and also a large part of her grandchildren's lives. With our own three daughters, I have witnessed first-hand the sanctity of the unique bond between mother and daughter. Maybe only a woman can fully understand the depth of the challenge Heather faced with the sudden death of her treasured soul mate and with no husband nearby to lean on.

The "Dark Side"

John Kiriakou had become CIA's Enemy No. 1 because he was the first insider to disclose that his former colleagues had been suborned into implementing a program of torture. Alarm bells had sounded at CIA: What if some of John's former colleagues retrieved their consciences and followed his example? This could not be allowed to happen. Swift retribution was indicated.

The broader question, of course, is why had it been so easy to get CIA operatives to walk on Dick Cheney's "Dark Side." The context, of course, is 9/11. We keep hearing: "AFTER 9/11 EVERYTHING CHANGED." Really? Everything? Did torture somehow slip out of the moral category it had long inhabited together with rape and slavery the category ethicists call "intrinsic evil?"

No way, said John Kiriakou. And thus began a cruel duel between two unequal adversaries: an exceedingly ruthless, vindictive government and a CIA professional determined not to violate his conscience.

What happened not only to many of John's colleagues but also to Americans at large parallels what happened to Germans after their "9/11," the burning of the Parliament building in Berlin on Feb. 27, 1933. Be afraid, they were told, be

very afraid. It worked. With what a young German lawyer (later a writer with the pen-name Sebastian Haffner) living in Berlin at the time called “sheepish submissiveness,” Germans acquiesced in the most draconian, one might say “Patriot Act”-type, violations of their own Constitution. Haffner wrote:

“The sequence of events ... is wholly within the normal range of psychology, and it helps to explain the inexplicable. The only thing that is missing is what in animals is called ‘breeding.’ This, a solid inner kernel that cannot be shaken by external pressures and forces, something noble and steely, a reserve of pride, principle, and dignity to be drawn on in the hour of trial.”

Missing? Missing in many; anchored in Greek marble in John Kiriakou.

In exposing torture, John found himself in the company of other officials with integrity and guts like Gen. John Kimmons, head of U.S. Army Intelligence. On the very day (Sept. 6, 2006) that President George W. Bush publicly disclosed and bragged about the supposed effectiveness of what he called “an alternative set of procedures” for interrogation (then given the euphemism “enhanced interrogation techniques”), Kimmons arranged his own press conference at the Pentagon and said:

“I am absolutely convinced [that] no good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years, hard years, tells us that.”

Actually, Kimmons could have gone back 70 years not just five. It turns out that “enhanced interrogation techniques” is a literal translation of the Gestapo *Handbuch*’s “Verschaerfte Vernehmung.” And most of those Nazi “techniques” are the same ones blessed by the Bush-Cheney administration (with just a few further enhancements).

The award from PEN seems all the more appropriate inasmuch as John is now a writer and speaker of truth as well as a consultant on films and TV shows. And as many of us know only too well, he has his work cut out for him, whether writing about intelligence, torture, or how our prisons must be humanized.

The Challenge

Polling shows that most Americans continue to support brutal methods of interrogation, even in the wake of the Senate Intelligence Committee report made public last December that, using CIA’s own cables, disproved claims that torture “worked.” Trouble is, Americans don’t read Senate reports; they watch TV and movies. That’s how they “know” torture works. Think Fox TV’s series “24.” Think Columbia Pictures’ “Zero Dark Thirty.”

"Jack Bauer, the hero of "24," breaks captives' fingers to elicit information that "keeps us safe." And Americans applaud. Worse still, interrogators are misled and corrupted. Lt. Col. Diane Beaver, a military lawyer at Guantanamo, told British author Philippe Sands that Bauer "gave people lots of ideas. We saw '24' on cable ... It was hugely popular."

Sands wrote, "She [Beaver] believed the series contributed to an environment in which those in Guantanamo were encouraged to see themselves as being on the frontline and to go further than they otherwise might." Sands added that "24" also made it more difficult for those who objected to the abuse to stop it.

In fact, "24" was making torture appear so effective and even glamorous that U.S. military officials appealed to the creators of the show to tone down the torture scenes and give less play to the fiction that torture is "effective."

Some psychological research has shown that fiction is as effective as non-fiction at deeply moving people even when they know that what they are being moved by is a fictional account. People tend to be "transported" by a good story providing "truths" that appear just as powerful (or even more so) as those we encounter in the real world.

'Zero Dark Thirty'

Which brings us to "Zero Dark Thirty." And this, I believe, would be of particular interest to PEN. How in the world will John Kiriakou be able to open minds to the reality that the issue of morality aside torture does not "work," when so many have actually seen it "work" watching "Zero Dark Thirty," as well as "24?"

True, John Kiriakou has an abundance of experience and credibility. But what are these, stacked up against seeing torture work "with your own eyes?" John can cite the following facts until he is blue in the face, but the odds remain high against him.

On Dec. 21, 2012, two days after "Zero Dark Thirty" premiered, CIA's acting director took the unusual step of formally addressing agency employees with these words:

"[T]he film takes significant artistic license, while portraying itself as being historically accurate. ... [It] creates the strong impression that the enhanced interrogation techniques that were part of our former detention and interrogation program were the key to finding Bin Laden. That impression is false. ... I want you to remember that 'Zero Dark Thirty' is not a documentary."

Sen. John McCain, who was tortured as a POW in North Vietnam, said the film left

him sick “because it’s wrong.”

Historian Karen J. Greenberg, Director of Fordham University Law School’s Center for National Security, wrote this about the film’s director: “Bigelow has bought in, hook, line, and sinker, to the ethos of the Bush administration and its apologists.” Greenberg called the film “the perfect piece of propaganda, with all the appeal that naked brutality, fear, and revenge can bring.”

And Peter Maass of *The Atlantic* wrote that the film “represents a troubling new frontier of government-embedded filmmaking.” And Maass, too, is right.

Looking Forward

I’m not sure John Kiriakou would qualify for PEN Center USA’s specific program for “Emerging Voices,” but I am sure that, just the same, this year’s First Amendment Awardee is a very important emerging voice both as writer and as a consultant on films and TV shows. Of this we can also be sure; nothing John gets involved in will glorify torture or otherwise bend to prevailing winds of dishonesty.

With the support of Heather and many others, he has already bucked a powerful system arrayed against him. John Kiriakou will give no quarter in his passion for spreading truth around, no matter how many additional systemic hurdles he may be required to surmount.

Besides, he has “backing.” If you don’t believe me, download *Silenced*.

Ray McGovern was a CIA analyst for 27 years from the administration of John F. Kennedy to that of George H. W. Bush. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), which welcomed John Kiriakou into membership from federal prison.

Lost on the ‘Dark Side’ in Syria

The full story of how the U.S. ended up allied with some Sunni extremists in Syria while at war with others is a convoluted tale dating back to President George W. Bush’s neocons venturing off into Vice President Cheney’s “dark side” to work with violent jihadists, writes British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

When, in early August, the Pentagon’s former highest ranking intelligence official, Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, said that it had been a “willful decision” by

the “West” to back the establishment of “a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in Eastern Syria” in order to bring pressure on the Syrian government, and then went on to confirm that the recently declassified 2012 U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency report on the rise of ISIS in Syria, had explicitly warned of the possibility of “an Islamic State” being declared “through a union with other terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria,” there was almost silence in the mainstream media.

No one wanted to touch the “live wire” of possible U.S. collusion with Caliphate forces. But it was clear enough what the American General was saying: the jihadification of the Syrian conflict had been a “willful” policy decision, and that since Al Qaeda and the ISIS embryo were the only movements capable of establishing such a Caliphate across Syria and Iraq, then it plainly followed that the U.S. administration, and its allies, tacitly accepted this outcome, in the interests of weakening, or of overthrowing, the Syrian state.

Many in the West found General Flynn’s comments hard to believe in spite of his direct knowledge of events. How could this be? It must have seemed so counter-intuitive to most viewers or readers. And it is something which touches on a still suppurating wound to the Western psyche: 9/11.

But now, with Russia and Iran’s military intervention, the Syria mess in which the West finds itself is only too evident: Russia is providing air cover to the Syrian army, intent on severing the insurgent supply lines from Turkey, on the one hand, and to cutting the Mosul to Aleppo supply route, on the other – as a precursor to the strategic defeat of ISIS.

But in face of these actions, Western leaders are widely seen to be prevaricating, and even seem to wish to impede, and to inflict direct pain, on Russian and others’ attempts to defeat the radical Caliphate forces, by endorsing a wave of TOW missiles and MANPADS reaching Syria from their Gulf suppliers. So where exactly does the West stand?

The forces which the 4+1 Alliance (Russia, Syria Iran and Iraq plus Hezbollah) has to defeat sometimes are not ISIS, but Al-Nusra and Ahrar ash-Sham – jihadist, Caliphate forces, in short, that have absolutely no interest in any political settlement other than their own victory. Yet Western leaders shout “foul,” and imply that these are somehow “our boys” and should not be attacked.

The West’s Mess

The “mess” that the West is in is apparent to all across the region: the U.S. and its allies are both ostensibly “at war” with head-chopping, radical Sunni forces, and “in bed” with them, at the same time. How could this have

happened? How can this mess be resolved?

The roots to U.S. ambivalence towards fired-up radical Sunni Islam (as I have previously noted) lie primarily with the group of American neoconservatives who formed an influential “Cold-Warrior” nexus around Vice President Dick Cheney, and who were obsessed with rolling-back Soviet influence in the Middle East, and in overturning the Arab socialist-nationalist states who were viewed both as Soviet clients, and as threats to Israel.

David Wurmser, Cheney’s Middle East adviser, stressed (in 1996) that “limiting and expediting the chaotic collapse” of Ba’athism must be America’s foremost priority in the region. Secular-Arab nationalism should be given no quarter, *not even*, he added, *for the sake of stemming the tide of Islamic fundamentalism*.

In setting the destruction of secular nationalism as its overwhelming priority, America by default found itself compelled to be allied with the Gulf Kings and Emirs who traditionally have resorted to Sunni jihadism as the inoculation against democracy.

But America’s (and Britain’s) use of radical Sunni jihadist movements for their “greater geo-political ends” was already well-embedded long before 1996. When asked whether he regretted the CIA giving covert support to jihadists in Afghanistan *six months prior* to the Soviet military intervention (at Kabul’s request), President Carter’s National Security Adviser, Zbig Brzezinski, replied:

“Indeed, it was July 3, 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul [the Soviets intervened on Dec. 24, 1979]. And that very day, I wrote a note to the President in which I explained to him that in my opinion this aid [to radical Islamic forces] was going to induce a Soviet military intervention [in Afghanistan].”

Q: Despite this risk, you were an advocate of this covert action. But perhaps you yourself desired this Soviet entry into war, and looked to provoke it?

Brzezinski: It isn’t quite that. We didn’t push the Russians to intervene, but we knowingly increased the probability that they would.

Q: When the Soviets justified their intervention by asserting that they intended to fight against a secret involvement of the United States in Afghanistan, people didn’t believe them. However, there was a basis of truth. You don’t regret anything today?

Brzezinski: Regret what? That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap and you want me to regret

it? The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter: We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam War

Q: And neither do you regret having supported the Islamic mujahedeen, having given arms and advice to future terrorists?

Brzezinski: What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?

Q: Some stirred-up Moslems? But it has been said and repeated: Islamic fundamentalism represents a world menace today.

Brzezinski: Nonsense!

The Neocon Scheme

Though the principle of using fired-up Sunni jihadism for U.S. geopolitical ends was already well-established, the roots to today's American Syria imbroglio lie more with the events of 2006 and 2007: the 2003 war in Iraq had not brought about the pro-Israeli, pro-American regional bloc that had been foreseen by the neocons, but rather, it had stimulated a powerful "Shia Crescent" of resistance stretching from Iran to the Mediterranean – and Gulf leaders had become frightened.

The Sunni states "were petrified of a Shiite resurgence, and there was growing resentment with our gambling on the moderate Shiites in Iraq," a U.S. government consultant said at the time. "We cannot reverse the Shiite gain in Iraq, but we can contain it."

It had been Israel's failure in its 2006 war to seriously damage Hezbollah, that had been the straw, as it were, that broke the camel's back – so unnerving Israel and Gulf leaders. And it provoked, too, a fierce debate within Washington:

"It seems there has been a debate inside the government over what's the biggest danger, Iran or Sunni radicals," Vali Nasr, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, told Seymour Hersh: "The Saudis and some in the administration, have been arguing that the biggest threat is Iran; and the Sunni radicals are the lesser enemies. This is a victory for the Saudi line."

It was also, in a sense, a victory for the closely, Saudi-aligned Sunni leadership of Lebanon, which over the preceding years, had deepened its connection with Sunni extremist groups that espoused a militant vision of Islam (such as *Fatah al-Islam*), and were hostile to America and sympathetic to Al

Qaeda.

These covert allies of March 14th [a Lebanese anti-Syrian coalition named after the date of the so-called Cedar Revolution] were viewed by the Lebanese Sunni Älite as the putative foot soldiers “war experienced” from the Iraq conflict who could be nurtured, and eventually would rise sufficiently in their capabilities, to take on Hezbollah militarily in Lebanon: they were to be March 14th’s Sunni shock-troops, in other words, who would contain Shia influence, and perhaps even ultimately defeat it.

This Lebanese experience was held up to the U.S. administration by those such as Jeff Feltman (then U.S. ambassador in Beirut) as the “pilot” strategy for what could be achieved in Syria. March 14th leaders argued that they could safely manage these radical elements: that despite inclining towards an al-Qaeda orientation, they stood somehow within the broad Sunni “tent,” erected and led by Saad Hariri and Saudi Arabia.

The fall of Syria held out the prospect of a wedge being jammed in between Iran and Israel’s nemesis: Hezbollah. It was a prospect that enticed the U.S. administration: “This time, the U.S. government consultant told me,” wrote Seymour Hersh, “Bandar and other Saudis have assured the White House that ‘they will keep a very close eye on the religious fundamentalists. Their message to us was “We’ve created this movement, and we can control it.” It’s not that we don’t want the Salafis to throw bombs; it’s *who* they throw them at, [they should throw them at] Hezbollah, Moqtada al-Sadr, Iran, and at the Syrians – [should] they continue to work with Hezbollah and Iran.’”

‘Sick and Hateful’

Not all Saudis however were so sure: one former Saudi diplomat, speaking to Hersh, accused Hezbollah’s leader, Nasrallah, of attempting “to hijack the state,” but he also objected to the Lebanese and Saudi sponsorship of Sunni jihadists in Lebanon: “Salafis are sick and hateful, and I’m very much against the idea of flirting with them,” he said. “They hate the Shiites, but they hate Americans more. If you try to outsmart them, they will outsmart us. It will be ugly.”

Cheney and his team nevertheless were intrigued by Bandar’s ideas for Syria, but remained cautious: “We need to do everything possible to destabilize the Syrian regime and exploit every single moment they strategically overstep.” (As Cheney famously said, “We also have to work – though sort of on the dark side – if you will.”)

In an interview with the *Telegraph* in 2007, David Wurmser (former adviser to

Cheney and John Bolton) confirmed, “that [this] would include the willingness to escalate as far as we need to go to topple the [Syrian] regime if necessary.” He said that “an end to Baathist rule in Damascus could trigger a domino effect that would then bring down the Teheran regime.”

Bandar had boasted of his ability to manage the jihadists: “Leave that aspect to me.” Cheney’s then National Security Adviser, John Hannah, later noted the consensus at the time: “Bandar working without reference to U.S. interests is clearly cause for concern. But Bandar working as a partner against a common Iranian enemy is a major strategic asset.”

This point the entry of Saudi Arabia into a major initiative against Syria – also marked the start of the strategic alliance between Israel and Saudi Arabia, united in their common hostility to Iran.

In fact, the former Saudi diplomat had been right. Neither Hariri, nor Prince Bandar, was able to control the inflamed Caliphate forces with which they were working. What moderates there were, simply kept migrating politically towards the Al-Qaeda and the ISIS Caliphate camp and CIA-supplied weapons migrated too. The Syrian conflict was becoming, in character, increasingly jihadist, just as General Flynn was warning as early as 2012.

President Barack Obama is clear that, from the outset, he never believed in the notion of “moderates.” In 2012, he told Jeffrey Goldberg, “When you have a professional army that is well-armed and sponsored by two large states who have huge stakes in this, and they are fighting against a farmer, a carpenter, an engineer who started out as protesters and suddenly now see themselves in the midst of a civil conflict—, the notion that we could have, in a clean way that didn’t commit U.S. military forces, changed the equation on the ground there was never true.” (Emphasis added).

Obama did not believe in the moderates, but was under pressure from the “hawks,” including his own envoys, Fred Hof and General Allen, to expedite President Assad’s ouster. But the President was adamant that “We’re not going to just dive in and get involved with a civil war that in fact involves some elements of people who are genuinely trying to get a better life but also involve some folks who would over the long term do the United States harm.”

The answer as so often was to move to more covert means in order to mollify the “hawks” by increasing the clandestine operations in support of the opposition including the jihadists:

President Obama: And it is our estimation that [President Bashar al-Assad’s] days are numbered. It’s a matter not of if, but when. Now, can we accelerate

that? We're working with the world community to try to do that. ()

Goldberg: Is there anything you could do to move it faster?

President Obama: Well, nothing that I can tell you, because your classified clearance isn't good enough. (Laughter.)

No 'Clean Way'

But plainly, the administration could see how others not in "a clean way" were changing "the equation on the ground." In 2014, Vice President Biden was rather more candid:

"The fact of the matter is the ability to identify a moderate middle in Syria wasâ€there was no moderate middle because the moderate middle are made up of shopkeepers, not soldiersâ€

"And what my constant cry was that our biggest problem is our alliesâ€our allies in the region were our largest problem in Syria. The Turks â€the Saudis, the Emiratis, etc. What were they doing? They were so determined to take down Assad and essentially have a proxy Sunni-Shia war, what did they do? They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens, thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad except that the people who were being supplied were Al Nusra and al-Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world

"And we could not convince our colleagues to stop supplying them. So what happened? Now all of a sudden I don't want to be too facetious but they had seen the Lord [that is to say, the Gulf States said they would join a coalition against ISIS]. Now we have the President's been able to put together a coalition of our Sunni neighbors, because America can't once again go into a Muslim nation and be seen as the aggressor it has to be led by Sunnis to go and attack a Sunni organization."

Paradoxically, John Hannah perhaps with the benefit of experience had this to say about Obama's Syria policy, referring to Obama's June 2015 meeting with Gulf leaders at Camp David. Hannah noted that having "stressed his understanding of the threat Iran poses to the region":

"[Obama] let loose with this little gem: The Arabs, according to the president of the United States, need to learn from Iran's example. In fact, they need to take a page out of the playbook of the Qods Force, by which he meant developing their own local proxies capable of going toe-to-toe with Iran's agents and defeating them. The president seemed to marvel at the fact that from Hezbollah to the Houthis to the Iraqi militias, Iran has such a deep bench of effective

proxies willing to advance its interests.

“Where, he asked, are their equivalent on the Sunni side? Why, he wanted to know in particular, have the Saudis and their partners not been able to cultivate enough Yemenis to carry the burden of the fight against the Houthis? The Arabs, Obama suggested, badly need to develop a toolbox that goes beyond the brute force of direct intervention. Instead, they need to, be subtler, sneakier, more effective, well, just more like Iran.”

To which John Hannah reflected (clearly now with the benefit of experience):

“Think about it. Feeling threatened, desperate, uncertain of U.S. support, and in an existential death match with an intensely sectarian Shiite Iran, who do you think the Wahhabis are most likely to turn to as potential proxies in a pinch? AQAP in Yemen? Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria? The Islamic State in Iraq? Impossible, you say? Maybe. But maybe not.

“The past isn’t necessarily prologue, but it’s certainly reason to proceed very, very cautiously. The president appears to have a special infatuation with the relatively low cost, under-the-radar utility of black ops, covert action, and paramilitary activities. He also seems eager, even desperate, to ease the burdens of U.S. global leadership by compelling difficult allies to step up and police their own neighborhoods.

“Combine these impulses together and it all sounds great in theory as a means of countering Iran. But this is the Middle East and the coming jihad vs. jihad sectarian conflagration is only just getting started. So be careful what you wish for.”

Obama’s Muddle

Hence the nature of the mess in Syria: Sometimes it is just not possible to “square a circle” by conceding a little to all sides to domestic “hawks,” to the Special Ops industry, to Gulf allies – whilst trying to hold on to the line of no decisive U.S. military intervention. Semantics and “horse-trading” aside, no matter how frequent the re-branding, Al-Qaeda/Al-Nusra and their ilk (Ahrar Ash-Sham, etc.), cannot be conceived as “moderate” in a peculiarly British “Weybridge” sense, nor in any other sense.

Tom Friedman put it well: “Obama has been right in his ambivalence about getting deeply involved in Syria. But he’s never had the courage of his own ambivalence to spell out his reasoning to the American people. He keeps letting himself get pummeled into doing and saying things that his gut tells him won’t work, so he gets the worst of all worlds: His rhetoric exceeds the policy, and the policy doesn’t work.”

Not surprisingly, then, some in America are (cautiously) beginning to see President Putin's military initiative as the only way to cut the Gordian knot and release President Obama from his "knot" of ambivalence: Let Russia and its allies defeat ISIS, and let "the farmer, a carpenter, an engineer who started out as protesters and suddenly now see themselves in the midst of a civil conflict" – in Obama's words become somehow assimilated into the political process.

Now that could become an "achievement."

Alastair Crooke is a British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum, which advocates for engagement between political Islam and the West. [This article previously appeared at the Conflicts Forum's Web site and is republished with permission.]

Falling into the ISIS Trap

Special Report: The Islamic State has entered into "phase two" of its plan. After establishing a rudimentary "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq (phase one), it is now seeking to provoke the West into a self-defeating overreaction, a trap that "tough" politicians are falling into, as historian William R. Polk describes.

By William R. Polk

The terrorist outrage in Paris has brought the reaction that "the ISIS strategist" assuming there is such a singular person expected and wanted, a massive, retaliatory bombing raid.

The strategist knows that such military action by the West has proven self-defeating in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere. These predictable reactions and overreactions not only did not stop the insurgents, but helped them recruit more supporters by hurting a lot of uncommitted bystanders. ISIS learned the lesson; our leaders apparently have not.

Anger and revenge are emotionally satisfying but not productive. The issue we face is not just how to retaliate against ISIS, which is easy, but how to achieve affordable world security. The first steps are to understand where these extremists come from, why some people support them and what they want. Only then can we cope with them.

But, as I read the press, listen to the statements of world leaders and watch the takeoff of fighter-bombers, I see little sign our leaders have found the road toward security. I do not find the satisfactory beginnings of a careful and sophisticated analysis in what is now being said or done. So, drawing on many years of observation, discussions and research, I here offer a few notes on terrorism and our counterinsurgency policies and will focus on ISIS (also known as ISIL, Daesh or the Islamic State).

I cast my comments in five areas: (1) our assets and those of our opponents; (2) their strategies and ours; (3) what drives their actions; (4) the results of our actions; and (5) our options. I begin with our advantages and weaknesses and theirs:

–The United States, the major West European states and Russia employ large intelligence services that are informed by a variety of surveillance devices (telephone tapping, radio intercepts, code breaking, aerial and satellite imagery and other, even more esoteric, means of tracking, observing and identifying people).

In addition, our security services continue to employ traditional covert activities and have virtually unlimited funds to buy information, encourage defection and “rent” temporary loyalty. Plus, the bulk of the community from which the attacks are mounted wish the attacks would stop. Thus, our most important asset is the desire among the vast majority of people in all societies who simply do not want their lives deranged. They want to live in peace.

Picking Sides

–Resident populations in rebel-held areas are probably neutral. But they are caught between two dangers: ISIS and us. What we do and what we do not do will sway them in one direction or the other. The “ISIS strategist” understands this and seeks to get us to harm or frighten the bystanders. When and where they can, many will run away from the near danger (as hundreds of thousands have).

But, in today’s counterinsurgency weapon of choice aerial bombing there is little difference between “near” and “far.” Targeted killings may kill leaders (and people in close proximity), but aerial bombings are more massive and less discriminating. The “ISIS strategist” knows that the heavier our attacks the more they will rally support to the ISIS banner.

–ISIS’s major asset is the asymmetrical nature of the targets that the two sides expose to one another: modern industrial states like ours are highly articulated and are, necessarily, complex whereas ISIS’s organization is loose, inexpensive and scattered. We saw this contrast clearly, even before the rise of ISIS, in

the Sept. 11, 2001 al-Qaeda attack on America. The attack cost the lives of only a couple of dozen terrorists and probably less than \$100,000 but killed several thousand victims and cost the American economy perhaps \$100 billion (a cost compounded by the long-running follow-on wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In addition, there were the psychological, legal and political costs. Al-Qaeda had little to lose in terms of law and morality, but it pushed the United States into activities that weakened its traditional values and created distrust among its citizens. For al-Qaeda, it was a very cheap victory.

-ISIS's vulnerability is that the vast majority of Muslims want, as people everywhere have always wanted, to go about "mundane affairs," gathering and consuming, working and playing, competing and procreating. They are not fanatics and do not want to be martyrs or heroes.

Indeed, the "ISIS strategist" takes a dim view of these common people. In the document that forecast ISIS strategy *Idarah at-Tawhish: (The Management of Savagery)* the strategist or strategists wrote:

"Notice that we say that the masses are the difficult factor. We know that they not generally dependable on account of [how the foreign imperialists and native turncoats have shaped them and we realize that there will be] no improvement for the general public until there is victory. [Consequently, our strategy] is to gain their sympathy, or at the very least neutralize them."

How does the "ISIS strategist" propose to do that? His answer is a socio-political program aimed at "uniting the hearts of the people" by means of money, food and medical services and by providing a functioning system of justice to replace the corrupt system of its domestic rivals. That program has had some success but is vitiated or potentially undermined by ISIS violence and the terror it projects.

(Sayyid Qutb, an Islamic theorist who was executed in Egypt in 1966, may be taken as the philosopher behind Muslim Fundamentalism, and Abu Bakr Naji, perhaps a *nom de guerre* or even a committee, may be – or may have been – what I call "the strategist." For more details, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Understanding Islamic Fundamentalism.](#)")

Ill-Advised Wars

-The American-European and Russian strategies against guerrillas and terrorists have both relied primarily on military action. This was obvious in our campaigns in Afghanistan. The Russians are now at least in part repeating in Syria the strategy they employed in Afghanistan just as we repeated much of our Vietnam war strategy in our engagement in Afghanistan. The U.S., our allies and Russia

are now apparently embarked on the same general strategy in Syria and Iraq.

The supposedly more sophisticated strategies (such as encouraging training, anti-corruption campaigns, "security" programs, jobs creation, various forms of bribery and other economic activities) are given relatively minor attention. Least attended is the political dimension of insurgency.

Yet, at least by my calculation, the reality of insurgency is the reverse of how we are spending our money and devoting our efforts. I have calculated that in insurgency politics accounts for perhaps 80 percent of the challenge; administration is about 15 percent; and the military-paramilitary component is only about 5 percent. A look at the program numbers shows that our allocations of money, political savvy, administrative know-how and military power are in reverse order.

—Three reasons explain why these allocations which, although proven ineffective, are still employed: the first is failure to understand the political dimension of insurgency as I believe most of the counterinsurgency "experts" fail to do; the second is that "standing tall," beating the drum and calling for military action win plaudits for political leaders; and the third is that arms manufacturers and the workers who make the weapons want to make money.

On that last point, President Dwight Eisenhower was right: the military-industrial complex (to which we have added the lobby-corrupted Congress) is "the tail that wags the dog" of American politics.

We don't have to guess what the strategy of ISIS is. Their leaders have told us what it is. *The Management of Savagery* (using the Arabic word *tawhish*, which evokes a sense of dread and is applied to a desolate area, the haunt of wild beasts, where there is no humanity or softness but only savagery, terror or cruelty) specified the long-term campaign to destroy the power of those societies and states that ISIS calls "the Crusaders," i.e., the Western powers, which ISIS identifies as imperialists, and to cleanse Islamic society of the turncoats who support them.

The Three Stages

—The ISIS campaign falls into three stages:

The first stage is "vexation" of the enemy aimed at creating chaos in which the forces of the foreign powers and their local proxies are distracted and exhausted while Muslim terrorists and guerrillas learn how to use their power effectively.

The second stage is the "spread of savagery," which begins locally with small-

scale attacks and metastasizes. Individuals and local groups take up the cause and act either on their own or with limited coordination. Those who carry out ISIS programs will do so because they have adopted its ideas not because they are directed by any central authority.

As their campaigns spread, ISIS's enemies, and particularly the United States, will seek to retaliate but will be frustrated. "America will not find a state on which it can take its revenge, because the remaining [states] are its clients," according to the plan. "It has no choice but to [occupy] the region and set up military bases. [This will put it at] war with the population in the region. It is obvious at this very moment that it stirs up movements that increase the *jihadi* expansion and create legions among the youth who contemplate and plan for resistance."

"So," the "ISIS strategist" writes, the correct tactic is to "diversify and widen the vexation strikes in every place in the Islamic world, and even outside of it if possible, so as to disperse the efforts of the alliance of the enemy and thus drain it [of energy, will and money] to the greatest extent possible.

"For example: If a tourist resort that the Crusaders patronize in Indonesia is hit, all of the tourist resorts in all of the states of the world will have to be secured by the work of additional forces, which [will cause] a huge increase in spending."

As though implementing this plan, ISIS claimed that its supporters downed a Russian airliner in recent days in the Sinai Peninsula as it returned from the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm al-Shaikh.

The plan continues: "If a usurious bank belonging to the Crusaders is struck in Turkey, all of the banks belonging to the Crusaders will have to be secured in all of the countries and the draining [that is, the costs of security] will increase.

"If an oil interest is hit near the port of Aden, there will have to be intensive security measures put in place for all of the oil companies, and their tankers, and the oil pipelines in order to protect them and draining will increase. If two of the apostate authors are killed in a simultaneous operation in two different countries, they will have to secure thousands of writers in other Islamic countries.

"In this way, there is a diversification and widening of the circle of targets and vexation strikes which are accomplished by small, separate groups. Moreover, repeatedly (striking) the same kind of target two or three times will make it clear to them that this kind (of target) will continue to be vulnerable."

The attack on Paris was not, as *The New York Times* announced on Nov. 16, a change of ISIS tactics; it was an event that fit exactly into the second stage of the long-range strategy.

'Fighting Society'

The third stage is the "administration of savagery" to establish "a fighting society." To minimize the air power of its enemies, ISIS has turned itself into an almost nomadic state, virtually without frontiers. But within the areas it controls, it has set out a socio-political program that aims at "uniting the hearts of the people by means of money, food and medical services and by providing a functioning system of justice under *Sharia* [Islamic] governance. From this base it will become possible to create a rudimentary state."

The "ISIS strategist" draws a lesson from the defeat of the Russians in Afghanistan. Since the Afghans could not defeat the Russians in formal battles, they aimed to provoke the Russians so that their forces over-extended themselves and they were caught in a wasting, unwinnable conflict. This conflict bankrupted the Soviet economy while the harsh tactics the Russian army employed cost the Soviet Union the support both of their own people and the Afghans. America and Europe, the "ISIS strategist" believes, can be lured into a similar trap.

In this struggle, the "ISIS strategist" believes, violence is the key. It weakens the enemy while it performs as the school almost the social "hospital" needed to transform corrupt societies into tomorrow's Islamic "true believers." In this policy, ISIS may have been inspired by Frantz Fanon, the Afro-French-Caribbean psychiatrist, whose book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, reached a vast audience in the Third World.

As Fanon wrote, violence is a "cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect."

The "ISIS strategist" thought of violence both in those terms and in the impact of violence on its opponents, writing: *Jihad* "is naught but violence, crudeness, terrorism, frightening (others), and massacring."

It also must be conducted ruthlessly: "*Jihad* cannot be carried out with softness. Softness is one of the ingredients of failure for any *jihadi* action. Regardless of whether we use harshness or softness, our enemies will not be merciful to us if they seize us. Thus, it behooves us to make them think one thousand times before attacking us.

"Consequently, there is nothing preventing us from spilling their blood; rather, we see that this is one of the most important obligations since they do not

repent, undertake prayer, and give alms [as required in Islam]. All religion belongs to God.”

Making the enemy “pay the price” can occur anywhere: “if the apostate Egyptian regime undertakes an action to kill or capture a group of *mujahids* [combatants] *mujahids* in Algeria or Morocco can direct a strike against the Egyptian embassy and issue a statement of justification, or they can kidnap Egyptian diplomats as hostages until the group of *mujahids* is freed.

“The policy of violence must also be followed such that if the demands are not met, the hostages should be liquidated in a terrifying manner, which will send fear into the hearts of the enemy and his supporters.”

As we know, liquidating captives in a terrifying manner is an ISIS specialty. But, as we look over guerrilla wars, we see it to have been generally practiced.

Guerrilla Playbook

–**The ISIS politico-military doctrine** that the “strategist” lays out can be described as a religious version of what Mao Zedong and Ho Chi-minh proclaimed as their kind of war: a combination of terrorism when that is the only means of operation, guerrilla warfare when that becomes possible as areas of operation are secured, and ultimately – when the conflict “matures” – the creation of a warlike but minimal state. This sequence often has played out in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries all over the world as I have reported in my book *Violent Politics*. It is ugly, brutal and costly, but it has nearly always eventually succeeded. ISIS has adopted it.

As ISIS leaders tells us, they regard their struggle “not as an economic, political, or social battle” with state-like opponents for territory but “a battle for minds,” underwritten by a determined proclamation of Islam. Nothing quite like it has been on the world stage since the great wars of religion in Europe some 400 years ago.

Why would Western nations today plunge into the kind of battle? If we cannot answer that question and ultimately cope with the answer we have many painful years ahead of us.

–**The ISIS guidebook, *Management of Savagery***, begins with an interpretation of the world Muslims inherited from imperialism and colonialism. Not only Muslims but most of the peoples of the Third World suffered grievously. And their descendants harbor painful memories of “the ghastly destruction of souls.” According to ISIS, the great powers and their native proxies “killed more people than have been killed in all of the wars of the *jihadis* in this century.”

Is this just hyperbole, designed to inflame hatred of us? Unfortunately, it is not. Whether we remember these events or not, the descendants of the victims do.

Memories of the years beginning after Columbus led the way across the Atlantic become increasingly bitter. As first the Europeans, then the Russians and later the Americans – the world's "North" – gained in relative power, they thrust into the "South," destroying native states, upending societies and suppressing religious orders. Imperialism, with the resulting humiliation and wholesale massacres of populations, although largely forgotten by the perpetrators, remains today vivid to the victims.

The numbers are staggering: in one relatively small part of Africa, the Congo, where one in ten is a Muslim, the Belgians are estimated to have killed about twice as many natives as the Nazis killed Jews and Roma – some 10 million to 15 million people.

Hardly any society in what I call "the South" lacks memories of similar events inflicted by "the North." Look at just the more recent military record:

In Java, the Dutch imposed a colonial regime on the natives and, when they tried to reassert their independence, killed about 300,000 "rebels" between 1835 and 1840; they similarly suppressed Sumatra "rebels" between 1873 and 1914.

In Algeria, after a bitter 15-year-long war that began in 1830, the French stole the lands of the natives, razed hundreds of villages, massacred untold numbers of natives and imposed an apartheid regime on the survivors.

In Central Asia, the Russians and Chinese impoverished or drove away previously thriving populations. While in a bitter war in the Caucasus, as Tolstoy recounts, the Russians virtually wiped out whole societies.

In India, after the attempted revolt of 1857, the British destroyed the Mughal Empire and killed hundreds of thousands of Indians. In Libya, the Italians killed about two-thirds of the population of Cyrenaica.

Old Grievances and New

One may reasonably say that these things are long in the past and should be forgotten. Perhaps, but there are other slaughter, just in the last few decades, that cannot be so excused. In the American campaign in Vietnam (a non-Muslim society), napalm, cluster bombs and machineguns were followed by defoliation, cancer-causing chemicals and assassination programs that, in total, killed perhaps 2 million civilians.

In Afghanistan, the numbers are smaller because the population was smaller but,

in addition to about half a million deaths, a whole generation of Afghan children have been “stunted” and will never grow to their normal size or, perhaps, mental abilities. Afghan casualties in the Russian war are unknown but could not be less than half a million. In Iraq, as a result of the U.S. invasion in 2003, estimates run up to about a million Iraqi deaths.

Death is only one result of war; the survivors face continuing terror, starvation, humiliation and misery. As the structure of societies is severely damaged or destroyed, civic life has often been replaced by gang warfare, torture, kidnapping, rape and desperate fear.

Studying these events, I am reminded of Thomas Hobbes’s description of mankind before civilization, “poore, nasty, brutish and short.”

Collectively these and other results of imperialism, colonialism and military intrusions into “the South” of the world constitute a holocaust as formative to current Muslim action as the German holocaust has been to Jewish action.

The scars still have not healed in many societies. We see the legacy in the fragility or complete destruction of civic organizations, the corruption of governments and the ugliness of violence.

As the “ISIS strategist” writes, and as I have heard from many informants in Africa and Asia, we of the “North” practice racial and religious double standards. When “they” kill a European, we rightly react with horror. Any killing is abominable. But when “we” kill an African or Asian, or even large numbers of Africans or Asians are killed by ISIS or another terror group, we hardly notice.

On Nov. 13, the day before the attack on Paris, a similar attack was carried out in Beirut, Lebanon, in which 41 people were killed and about 200 were injured. Almost no one in Europe or America even noticed. This is not merely a moral issue although it is certainly also that but cuts to the quick of the issue of terrorism.

Memories of events such as these go far to explain why young men and women, even those from relatively affluent and secure societies are joining ISIS. To “airbrush” the record, as an English journalist with wide experience in Asia has recently written, is to fail to understand what we are up against and what we might be able to do to gain affordable world security.

Successful Insurgencies

—The results of insurgency are described in my book *Violent Politics*. There I have shown that in a variety of societies over the last two centuries in various

parts of Africa, Asia and Europe, guerrillas have nearly always accomplished their objectives despite even the most draconian counterinsurgency tactics.

Consider just one example, Afghanistan: the Russians and then the United States deployed hundreds of thousands of soldiers, large numbers of mercenaries and native troops and used unprecedented amounts of lethal force over nearly half a century of warfare.

While the outcome is not yet definite, it is obvious that, at minimum, the guerrillas have not been defeated. Afghanistan has been called "the graveyard of imperialism." Its role in destroying the Soviet Union has been well-documented. It is not through with us yet.

Consider also results in those parts of the world where hostilities have been relatively subdued. When I was a young man, in the 1940s and 1950s, I could go into villages practically anywhere in Africa or Asia and been received cordially, fed and protected. Today, in virtually all of those places, I would be in danger of being shot.

So what are our options in this increasingly dangerous world? Let us be honest and admit that none is attractive. Public anger and fear will certainly make some of them difficult or impossible to effect. But I will here put them all "on the table" and evaluate them in terms of cost and potential effectiveness.

The first response, which was announced by both Presidents François Hollande and Barack Obama in the first hours after the Paris attacks is to engage in all-out war. The French Air Force immediately bombed areas where ISIS is believed to have training camps.

The next step, presumably, although neither leader was specific, will probably include the sending of ground troops to fight in Syria and Iraq in addition to the bombing campaigns now being mounted by both countries and Russia. This is an extension and intensification of current policy rather than a new venture, and, to judge by the Russian experience in Afghanistan and ours in Afghanistan and Iraq, the chances for destroying ISIS are small. Those chances will be lessened if we also attempt to "regime change" in Syria.

A second option, which I assume is being broached in Washington as I write, is for Israel to volunteer to invade Syria and Iraq as well as using its air force to supplement or replace the other air forces operating there. This option would be militarily painful for ISIS but would fit exactly into its long-range strategy.

Moreover, it would play havoc with the emerging anti-ISIS bloc of Iran, Russia and Syria. If Israel advances this idea, as I think likely, it will probably be

rejected while Israel will be “compensated” with a large new grant.

A third option is for the United States to reverse its anti-Assad policy and join with his regime and with Russia and Iran in a coordinated campaign against ISIS. While this policy would be more rational than either of the first two options, and might be initially more successful, I do not believe that alone it will accomplish its objective.

Drone and special forces strikes are already being employed and will almost certainly be continued as an adjunct to whatever is adopted as the main thrust, but they have not proven decisive where tried elsewhere. Indeed, at least in Afghanistan, they have proven to be self-defeating.

As the “ISIS strategist” predicted, such attacks will increase local hostility to the foreigner while, if the ISIS combatants are wise, they will simply melt away to return another day. Worse, by “decapitating” scattered guerrilla units, they will open the way for younger, more aggressive and ambitious leaders to emerge.

Domestic Repression

Coordinated with any of the above three options, I think it is almost certain that the United States and the European powers will tighten their domestic security programs. Controls on movement, expulsion (particularly in France) of alien or quasi-alien populations, mounting of raids on poorer urban areas, increased monitoring and other activities will increase.

These tactics are what ISIS hoped would happen. Outlays for “security” will rise and populations will be “vexed.” But these policies are unlikely to provide complete security. When terrorists are prepared, as those in the Paris attack were, to blow themselves up or be killed, attacks can be expected regardless how tight security measures are.

So what about non-military and non-police measures? What are the options that could be considered? Two combinations of economics and psychology come to mind:

The first is amelioration of the conditions in which the North African Muslim community now lives in France. The slums circling Paris are a breeding ground for supporters of ISIS. Improvement of living conditions might make a significant difference, but experience in America and also in France suggests that “urban renewal” is far from a panacea.

Even if it were, it would be hard for any French administration to undertake. It would be expensive when the French government believes itself to be already overburdened, and French anti-Muslim feeling was strong long before the Paris

attacks. Now, the public mood is swinging away from social welfare toward repression.

As in other European nations, the combination of fear of terrorism and the influx of refugees will make implementation of what will be described as a pro-Muslim program unlikely.

Perhaps even more unlikely is one that I think ISIS would most fear. The "ISIS strategist" has told us that the major resource of the movement is the community, but he recognized that, despite horrific memories of imperialism, the public has remained relatively passive.

This attitude could change dramatically as a consequence of invasion and intensification of aerial bombing. ISIS believes it will, turning increased numbers of now "neutral" civilians into active supporters of the *jihadis* or into *jihadis* themselves.

Obviously, it would be to the advantage of other countries to prevent this happening.

Some prevention of ISIS violence can be accomplished, perhaps, with increased security measures, but I suggest that a multinational, welfare-oriented and psychologically satisfying program could be designed that would make the hatred that ISIS relies upon less virulent.

Inadvertently, ISIS has identified the elements for us: meeting communal needs, compensation for previous transgressions, and calls for a new beginning. Such a program need not be massive and could be limited, for example, just to children by establishing public health measures, vitamins and food supplements.

Organizations (such as Médecins Sans Frontières, the Rostropovich Foundation, the Red Cross and Red Crescent) already exist to carry it out and indeed much is already being done. The adjustment is mainly in psychology the unwillingness for nations to admit wrongdoing as we have seen in the German "apology" for the Holocaust and the failure of the Japanese to apologize for the Rape of Nanking. It would cost little and do much, but, in these times, it is almost certainly a non-starter.

So, sadly, I fear that we are beginning to move toward a decade or more of fear, anger, misery and loss of basic freedoms.

[For more on these topics by William R. Polk, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Why Many Muslims Hate the West.](#)" and "[Muslim Memories of West's Imperialism.](#)"]

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The Need for a Syrian Deal

In the wake of the Paris terror attacks and other mass killings in Beirut and aboard a Russian airliner there are new demands for military action. But the one step that might help matters is a more pragmatic approach to resolving the political crisis in Syria, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

As usual after a terrorist event as salient and jarring as the attacks in Paris, instant analysis and exhortation have gotten well ahead of the availability of information about the genesis of the attacks. A claim statement, a general pronouncement by the French president, and the few investigative tidbits that have become public so far are not nearly enough to reach sound conclusions about exactly where and how this operation was conceived, prepared, and directed, and thus what the most appropriate policy responses to it will be.

The way that the name *Islamic State* or *ISIS* has been used to date leaves a range of possibilities in that regard. Nonetheless a strong public consensus has quickly been reached that this attack was ordered and organized by the people who, under that name, have been trying to run a radical mini-state from Raqqa, Syria. That may turn out to be the case, but whether it does or doesn't, Western policymakers have at least a political imperative to respond as if this were already established fact.

The dominant theme in the surge of commentary in the first couple of days after the attack has been that ISIS is a global threat, not just a regional one, and must be confronted as such. Policymakers will be expected to respond in a way consistent with that theme, too. As they do, however, they should be wary of the common conflation between military outcomes in other regions and terrorism and counterterrorism in the West.

Any escalation of military efforts in Iraq and Syria should be undertaken with our eyes open to two realities. One is that we may be sustaining the motive for

ISIS to strike back in retaliation in the West, even though the group earlier had every reason to stay focused on trying to build its so-called caliphate in the Middle East rather than to embark on a campaign of transnational terrorism.

We may already be seeing a pattern in that regard with what has happened in the last two weeks in Beirut and the Sinai as well as Paris. The West and especially the United States already has crossed this particular Rubicon, however, and so the practical effect of awareness of this reality may be nil.

The other reality is that military success on a distant battlefield is not to be equated with elimination of a terrorist threat at home. Despite all the attention given to terrorist havens, possession of a sandy and distant piece of real estate is not one of the more important variables that determine who poses or doesn't pose a terrorist threat to one's homeland.

The motivations and the tactical opportunities that are more significant variables will still be there. The chief beneficial effect, as far as transnational terrorism is concerned, of any military success against ISIS is to refute the belief that the group's expansion is inevitable and thus to dampen the group's attraction to would-be recruits.

Years of experience confronting Al Qaeda provide some relevant lessons in this regard. One is that smashing a center does not eliminate transnational terrorism from the periphery, with a group such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula having become more significant in that regard than Al Qaeda central. (And lest we forget, ISIS was once one of those Al Qaeda affiliates.)

Another lesson, looking at such post-9/11 anti-U.S. terrorists as Faisal Shahzad and Nidal Hasan, is that lethality does not necessarily correlate with training received from a group overseas.

Most of the effective counterterrorist work against the universe of radicals operating under the ISIS label will involve the same unspectacular security work that is commonly performed outside of public view. This fact will be a frustration for policymakers looking for more visible ways of responding to demands for action.

The incidence of terrorism in the West under the ISIS label also will involve, as such terrorism always has, social and economic issues within Western countries. One does not have to be a Le Pen-style exploiter of the Paris tragedy to note that according to one of those early tidbits, one suspected perpetrator was a French citizen with a long criminal record who had been on an extremist watch list since 2010.

We should also think about the diplomatic effects of the Paris attacks,

especially given how efforts to counter ISIS have been badly impeded and confused by other quarrels involved in the complicated war in Syria. Secretary of State Kerry is correct that continuation of that war provides continued opportunities for ISIS.

This is one example of how such strife has traditionally aided radical groups, both by breaking down whatever order would have prevented them from emerging in the first place and by enabling them to fill the role of the most forthright opponent of a despised power structure. In the case of ISIS, the group was born under a different name as a direct result of the internal warfare touched off by the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and it got a later boost by exploiting the civil war in Syria.

Curbing such benefits for ISIS is the principal reason for the U.S. to expend much effort on multilateral diplomacy aimed at somehow resolving the Syrian conflict. The idea is that if some workable compromise can be reached among the other players, both internal and external, a more organized and coherent effort against the ISIS presence in the country can ensue.

The concept is sound as far as it goes, but it risks holding a coherent anti-ISIS effort hostage to resolution of other disputes that are so messy and involve such irreconcilable players that a stable and lasting compromise might not be achieved for years.

An alternative approach would be to devote more effort searching for ways to make the anti-ISIS effort at least marginally more organized even in the face of continued disagreement over the other power struggles in Syria. This approach has plenty of problems as well, and obvious formulas for implementing it do not present themselves.

But the Paris attacks have strengthened arguments that could be used in favor of moving in this direction. Western governments can say, with even more conviction than before, to the other players both inside and outside Syria, "Look, the main reason we are interested in this mess is because of the connection it may have to threats against our citizens back home. Compared to that issue, we really don't care much about disputes over who has how much power in Damascus. We will deploy our resources, our leverage, and our attention accordingly."

Such a message ought to have some resonance among other important outside players. The Russians say they are concerned about countering ISIS, and they may have received a taste of how ISIS-related transnational terrorism can affect their interests with the plane crash in the Sinai. The Iranians received a taste with the attacks on their Shiite and Hezbollah friends in Lebanon last week.

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