

# What to Do about the ISIS 'Caliphate'

While the first necessity in dealing with a threat like ISIS is to finally get Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to cut off its financial and military life lines, the terror group's claim to a territorial caliphate presents a unique problem for the international community, as ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller explains.

By Graham E. Fuller

Enthusiasts for U.S. or NATO intervention to destroy the ISIS are lining up, especially among those who have never shrunk from any U.S. military intervention in the Middle East. Some even invoke a call for initiating a "World War IV."

While there is every reason for deep skepticism towards yet another (failing) exercise in U.S. imperial interventionism, a powerful case nonetheless exists for an exception here, as to why, in the ISIS case today, a truly broad international coalition should undertake the destruction of the territorial, administrative, military and social structure of the ISIS "state" in Syria and Iraq. Non-interventionism by the West in the Middle East, normally a sound principle, cannot be taken in every case as an invariable principle of foreign policy.

Why make the exception here? Given the choreographed brutality of ISIS policies it is very hard indeed not to vigorously oppose ISIS (also known as ISIL, Islamic State or Daesh). The victims of ISIS terrorism are tragic to behold, in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Turkey, as well as in Paris.

But there are perhaps deeper reasons than immediate terrorist attacks that make (truly international) military intervention, in this specific case now, an important task. That argument hinges on the fateful "collateral damage" wrought by ISIS.

We witness this most vividly in the frightening resurgence of extreme right-wing, nationalist, "nativist" and neo-fascist reactions to ISIS in Europe and the U.S. Such reactions are, of course, virulently anti-Muslim, in which the actions of a few jihadi fanatics are generating a blanket Western condemnation of an entire civilization and all its members.

Over-the-top and hysterical Republican campaign rhetoric may fade after an election, but it is already deepening its mark and impact upon U.S. political discourse, in permanently damaging ways. This is far from the American ideal of receiving the "huddled masses" of the oppressed on American shores. It is deeply damaging to American integrationism and sparks racism that extends beyond Islamophobia.

But worse, ISIS and its attacks summon up deeper anti-immigration impulses all across Europe, North America and beyond. This is the reality: flight from large parts of the world will be the hallmark of the rest of this century as people flee hardship, poverty, war, plague, injustice, hopelessness, and climate degradation. This is not the time, especially in large immigrant-based societies such as the U.S., Canada and Australia, for a hardening of hearts against the phenomenon of immigration. Mass migration will have to be managed, dealt with creatively at the source, and involve major expenditures, but it is coming.

The refugee flow now caused by ISIS poses a deep, long-term threat to the very nature of the European Union experiment, that is surely a signal innovation in human political history. In simplest terms, Europe will easily and quickly find itself drowning, even with the best of intentions, in trying to provide shelter, social services and social integration.

European societies represent highly distinctive and discrete socio-cultural entities that are relatively small and fragile in the face of massive refugee surges. European populations and territories are small, dense, and culturally highly integrated. There is only one Holland, one Poland, or one Norway in this world; they cannot be replicated elsewhere. Europe, and especially Germany under Chancellor Angela Merkel, have made honorable and noble efforts to promote a vision of an accommodating Europe, but Europe's receptive capacity is severely limited. This civilizational experiment is at risk.

Furthermore, Angela Merkel, arguably the only responsible adult in power in Europe today, is threatened by backlash to her generous pro-immigration values. Europe will be much the poorer and dangerously blind on East-West issues if she falls.

Meanwhile ISIS is serving to radicalize a small but younger generation of disaffected Muslim youth in the West and elsewhere who crave Muslim authenticity, restoration of Muslim power and principled statehood, and a return to the idealized values of early Islam. (Sadly for them, they won't find it in the Islamic State, and many will die in the quest.) But it is easier to migrate to an "Islamic state" structure than to join up with Al Qaeda somewhere in the mountains of Yemen.

And ISIS has now turned Syria into an intense cockpit of a dozen nations fighting a proxy war on its soil, something other terrorist organizations have not managed. It has driven Russian-Western confrontation (unnecessarily) into deeper confrontation. We could be looking at the Balkans on the eve of World War I.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's recent irresponsible willingness to

shoot down a Russian aircraft in this volatile border area raises extremely dangerous prospects of wider confrontation, even by error. Fortunately his dangerous bid for full NATO backing backfired.

Russia, of course, has undeniable longstanding and legitimate interests in Syria. But Russia's new role in Syria, potentially quite positive, is lending grist to the viscerally anti-Russian contingent in Washington for whom the very idea of a Russian military role in the Middle East is an ideological affront to American domination of Middle Eastern land and skies. No other terrorist organization has accomplished this.

The evolution of ISIS has operationalized and entrenched the worst of the ugly and violent Wahhabi interpretations of Islam, even if Saudi Wahhabism does not directly advocate violence itself. Violence is the ultimate logic of Wahhabi denunciation and delegitimization (*takfir*) of other Muslims, even though Islam professes that no Muslim can judge the beliefs of another Muslim, only God can.

The significant role of the Kurds on the barricades against neighboring ISIS has now driven Turkish foreign policy in ever more dangerous, obsessive and authoritarian directions.

The *very territoriality and state pretensions* of ISIS are what distinguishes it from other terrorist groups driven by much the same ideology.

Warning: Even if a broad-based international coalition succeeds in destroying ISIS as an institution in Syria and Iraq, no one should expect that there will be no more terror issuing from the Middle East. That will not happen until the deeper causes of Muslim political crisis and disaffection are dealt with. But a formal state territory and infrastructure will have been dismantled. International political solution in Syria becomes slightly more feasible.

Finally, yes, the Middle East desperately needs a reform agenda. But Muslims there will not be able to bring something like that about in the middle of ongoing wars, killings, interventions, and recrudescing dictatorships.

These are the grounds for urgency of international action against ISIS now. Terrorism will not go away after ISIS is destroyed. You cannot bomb radicalizing environments and soul-searing, grievances out of existence. But ISIS in Syria will cease to be a geographical rallying point. Syria will eventually be able to go back to being a state, however miserably administered.

For many it is reassuring to view the problem as residing in Islam rather than in inherent political, social and economic problems of the region. The real question is, when will both the West and East deal with the complex and long-standing specific components of anger and hostilities between the two sides. The

presence of ISIS has done more to exacerbate this “civilizational conflict” than anything else since 9/11. (And East-West friction did not begin with 9/11.)

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## A Way Forward on Israel-Palestine

Prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace have rarely looked dimmer with Prime Minister Netanyahu unwilling to make concessions and President Obama incapable of applying pressure, but one option would be to abandon the so-called Quartet and embrace the Arab Peace Initiative, says Alon Ben-Meir.

By Alon Ben-Meir

During several meetings I recently had with European Union officials in Brussels, they argued that it is time to revive the Middle East Quartet, which consists of the U.S., E.U., Russia, and the United Nations, to resurrect the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. I took the opposite position because I believe that the Quartet failed from the onset to breathe new life into the peace negotiations; in fact, it has become a major impediment to the peace process.

The Quartet's three preconditions, which require Hamas to recognize Israel, accept previous agreements and obligations, and forsake violence before it can become a legitimate partner in the peace talks, are outdated and impractical because these preconditions are tantamount to surrender.

The Quartet's demands on Hamas make it impossible for its leadership to negotiate under those terms, and without Hamas' full participation as an integral part of the Palestinian delegation, no Israeli-Palestinian peace can endure even if achieved. In fact, any Israeli leader who genuinely seeks a peace agreement should not demand that Hamas first meet the Quartet's requirements.

Having suffered the indignities of the blockade for so long, even if Hamas agreed to negotiate under duress from its current position of weakness a peace agreement or a long-term ceasefire (hudna), it would only be a question of time when they will rise again to reclaim their dignity.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu supports the Quartet's preconditions because he knows full well that Hamas will not accept them. Thus, the Quartet

has de facto been providing Netanyahu with the political cover he needs to forestall any substantive negotiations, claiming that the Palestinians are bent on destroying Israel while playing Hamas against the Palestinian Authority and vice versa.

Although it is unlikely that the Obama administration will push for the resumption of peace talks during an election year, 2016 does provide a unique opportunity for the U.S. and the E.U., which are the only effective players in the Quartet, to pave the way for serious negotiations in 2017 and beyond, provided that they make the Arab Peace Initiative (API) framework (not the Quartet's) central to any future talks.

The API makes recognition of Israel conditioned upon Israel's acceptance of a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders with some land swaps, agreed upon between Arab foreign ministers and Secretary of State John Kerry.

In addition, the API would open the door for Hamas to return to the Arab states' fold and no longer be labeled as a terrorist organization. Indeed, Hamas is not a terrorist organization by any classic definition because many countries, including Brazil, Switzerland, Qatar and Turkey, transact with Hamas as a normal entity. Israel itself deals with Hamas daily and on many fronts, including trade, travel, and tacitly on matters of security concerns, to maintain the informal ceasefire.

Contrary to the prevailing view among many Israelis, the API has not been presented to Israel on a take-it or leave-it basis, and it provides several common denominators between Hamas and Israel to achieve a two-state solution while offering Hamas a face-saving way out.

The U.S. and the E.U. can persuade several Arab/Muslim states, especially Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, and Turkey, which enjoy considerable influence on Hamas, to exert political and material pressure on its leadership to formally adopt the API.

On more than one occasion (including in 2011, 2013, and 2014), Hamas clearly stated that it is willing to negotiate a peace agreement with provisions almost identical to the API. Hamas understands that Israel is there to stay and is now looking for ways to further ease the blockade and eventually lift it altogether, which can be facilitated in the context of the API.

In the same vein, the U.S. along with the E.U. should relentlessly exert intense pressure on Israel to embrace the API as well. Currently, thousands of Israeli notables, including former President Shimon Peres, Yuval Rabin (the son of Yitzhak Rabin), former heads of security agencies including ex-Mossad chief Meir

Dagan, much of the academic community, think tanks, retired generals, and more than half of the Israeli public support the API.

A poll commissioned by the Israel Peace Initiative in 2013 found that 55 percent of respondents support the API; that jumps to 69 percent if it is supported by the prime minister. Moreover, there are several political parties in the opposition who view the API as central to reaching an enduring peace.

Yair Lapid, the leader of the centrist Yesh Atid party, recently stated: "Convening a regional conference as the opening shot for a comprehensive regional arrangement is the most effective tactical and political tool for getting this process going. The framework of the discussions at this conference must be the Saudi-Arab initiative [the API] of 2002."

The adoption of the API by both Israel and Hamas would be a game changer, especially now that the Arab states are more disposed to normalize relations with Israel because of the regional turmoil and because both Israel and the Arab states have a common enemy in Iran.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is becoming ever more intractable each passing day. It is time for the U.S. and the E.U. to chart a new path and disabuse themselves of the notion that they must stick to past frameworks for peace, especially the Quartet, when in fact it has not advanced the peace process one single iota.

Times have changed; the Quartet was defunct from day one, and it will not succeed now by trying to resuscitate it. Instead, the focus must be on the universality of the API, around which a majority of Israelis and Palestinians, as well as the Arab states and the international community, can rally.

Israelis and Palestinians alike must focus throughout 2016 to assuage the psychological barrier by taking reconciliatory measures with the support and the encouragement of the U.S. and the E.U. and pave the way for the resumption of credible peace negotiations with unwavering commitment.

Such commitment could lead to an Israeli-Palestinian agreement in the context of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, which the Israelis seek and only the API can provide. The Quartet must be abandoned in favor of the API, which has been gaining momentum in recent months absent any other viable alternative framework for peace.

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# Who Wants to Weaponize Outer Space?

U.S. military hardliners are pushing for military dominance of outer space and U.S. diplomats are blocking international efforts to ban its weaponization but the Obama administration pretends that Russia and China are the problem, as Sam Hussein explains.

By Sam Hussein

The recent box-office hit “The Martian” directed by Ridley Scott and starring Matt Damon depicts crucial coordination between the U.S. and Chinese space programs, but that’s not the way it’s playing out in the real world.

Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James on Wednesday at the National Press Club responded to a question about the U.S. blocking efforts by Russia, China and over 100 other countries to ensure the disarmament of outer space by alleging that China and Russia are engaging in activities in space that are “worrisome.”

Secretary James stated “we don’t have weapons in space in the United States.” She then added: “Now what has been very worrisome in recent years is that some other countries around the world, notably China and Russia, are investing and they’re testing in different types of capabilities which could shoot satellites out of orbit, and do other things to our capabilities and the capabilities of allies in space, which is worrisome.” [Question at 54:00, [video of event](#).]

James’s comments were in response to a question that I submitted citing a United Nations vote last month which was [122 in favor to 4 against disarmament of outer space](#). The U.S. was one of the nations voting against the resolution.

John Hughes, the president of the National Press Club and moderator of the event, in his introduction of James, noted that she was recently made “the principal space adviser with expanded responsibilities of all Pentagon space activities.” Yet, Secretary James stated that she was “not familiar” with the UN vote.

Alice Slater, who is with Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and the Abolition 2000 coordinating committee and is a leading activist on disarmament, said: “It’s hard to believe that the U.S. Secretary of the Air Force is unaware of the U.S. military program to ‘dominate and control the military use of space’ as set forth in Pentagon documents such as Vision 2020 [[PDF](#)] or that the U.S. also has tested [anti-satellite weapons in space](#).”

Summarizing UN votes on the military use of outer space, the UN's website states: "The text, entitled 'No first placement of weapons in outer space,' reaffirmed the importance and urgency of the objective to prevent an outer space arms race and the willingness of States to contribute to that common goal." The UN summary references a "draft treaty, introduced by China and the Russian Federation. ... The draft was approved by a recorded vote of 122 in favour to 4 against (Israel, Ukraine, United States, Georgia), with 47 abstentions." Yet, James, in her National Press Club remarks, painted Russia and China as the aggressors.

But consider Secretary James's exact words. While she says "we don't have weapons in space," she sets a different standard when talking about Russia and China, which "are investing and they're testing in different types of capabilities which could shoot satellites out of orbit," which the U.S. obviously is doing as well.

There is a race to weaponize space though it would seem Russia, China and most other nations are making moves through the UN to stop it while the U.S. government appears to be hindering that effort.

In addition to Vision 2020, the influential neoconservative Project for a New American Century also called for U.S. control of space as one of its goals: "CONTROL THE NEW 'INTERNATIONAL COMMONS' OF SPACE AND 'CYBERSPACE,' and pave the way for the creation of a new military service – U.S. Space Forces – with the mission of space control." [[archived PDF](#)]

Slater added: "It is common knowledge that when [the Cold War was nearing its end, Soviet President Mikhail] Gorbachev and [U.S. President Ronald] Reagan met in Reykjavik and were prepared to negotiate the total elimination of nuclear weapons, except the negotiations were aborted because Reagan refused to give up his dream of a U.S. military shield in space, commonly referred to at the time as Star Wars.

"Less well known, but nevertheless true, is that [Russian President Vladimir] Putin offered [U.S. President Bill] Clinton a deal to cut our arsenals of 16,000 nuclear weapons to 1,000 weapons each and call all the parties to the table to negotiate for nuclear abolition if the U.S. would cease its plans to put missile bases in Eastern Europe. Clinton refused and Putin backed out of his offer. Shortly thereafter, [President George W.] Bush actually walked out of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and put U.S. missiles and bases in Turkey, Romania and Poland. ...

"In 2008, Russia and China proposed a draft treaty to ban space weapons which the U.S. blocked from going forward in the consensus-bound committee on

disarmament in Geneva. This year, the U.S. voted to abstain from a Russian proposal to ban weapons in space at the UN First Committee of the General Assembly, joining only Israel and Palau, in not going forward to support the ban.”

Here is background material relating to the questions posed to Secretary James:

I submitted in writing a couple of other questions about air wars and killer drones which were not posed to James, though several questions were asked about drones, including one about killing of civilians. Here were the questions I submitted in writing before the event:

Q: [airwars.org](http://airwars.org) estimates that the current bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria over the last 482 days has leveled about 8,600 strikes and killed 682 to 2,104 civilians. Do you have an estimate for the number of civilians killed by U.S. airstrikes?

Q: The [Guardian reports](#) on four former drone pilots who recently wrote an impassioned plea to the Obama administration, calling for a rethink of a military tactic that they say has “fueled the feelings of hatred that ignited terrorism and groups like Isis, while also serving as a fundamental recruitment tool similar to Guantánamo Bay ... We cannot sit silently by and witness tragedies like the attacks in Paris, knowing the devastating effects the drone program has overseas and at home.” Do you have any information on the long term consequences of the US government’s killer drone program? Can you tell us what countries US drones operate in? How do you respond to their letter from the former drone pilot whistleblowers – these are people who left lucrative careers operating drones because they concluded it was morally contemptible to continue.

Neither was asked, though the moderator, Hughes, did ask a number of questions about drones and raised the issue of civilian deaths in this question:

Q: “You talked about the effort to minimize collateral damage, or civilian deaths, in this effort how satisfied are you that you’ve been able to minimize civilian deaths in this campaign? And as you step up this effort now, will the risk of more civilian deaths rise?”

Deborah Lee James: “I am satisfied that our combined efforts and the way we are approaching this campaign is unprecedented in the history of warfare in terms of the care that we take to do everything possible to try to avoid civilian casualties. Is it 100 percent? No, because there are, from time to time, terrible tragedies. But with the thousands of sorties [a deployment or dispatch of one military unit, be it an aircraft, ship, or troops, from a strongpoint] that have been flown, the fact that there have only been a handful of these

incidents, I think, is almost a miracle. So I am convinced we're doing a good job, I saw some of it in action myself when I was in the CAOC [Combined Air and Space Operations Center] and the CGOC [Company Grade Officer's Council], and enormous care is taken."

Here's the full question about weaponization of space:

Q: "This questioner says, 'One month ago at the UN there was a vote for disarmament in space. The vote was 122 for and 4 against, the U.S. was one of the four against. Why is the U.S. against disarmament in space?'"

Deborah Lee James: "Well, I'm not familiar with that vote, but what I will tell you about space and the proposition of space is this – number one, we don't have weapons in space in the United States. Number two, we're very focused on not creating debris in space. So to back up for just a minute, if you go back 20, 30 years there were relatively few countries, and few companies for that matter, who even could get themselves to space, but flash forward to the present day and there are many more countries and many more companies. Plus there is debris in space, there is space junk. So you've got thousands of these pieces of material whirling around at 40 or 50 thousand miles per hour and even a small piece of debris can do some serious damage to a billion dollar satellite. So debris is bad and we want to make sure that we minimize that at all costs. Now what has been very worrisome in recent years is that some other countries around the world, notably China and Russia are investing and they're testing in different types of capabilities which could shoot satellites out of orbit, and do other things to our capabilities and the capabilities of allies in space- which is worrisome. And so what we have said is we need to focus more attention on space, we need to invest more in space, the resiliency of space, and we need to at all times get this point across- particularly to some of these other countries that are investing and testing in these ways – that debris is bad, that debris hurts all of us."

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## Learning to Love the 'Drone War'

The mainstream U.S. news media is so in the tank on the "war on terror" that it ignores critical information that the American people should know, such as the public complaint from four former Air Force drone operators that the lethal program is killing innocents and creating terrorists, writes John Hanrahan.

By John Hanrahan

The polls show it and commentators of all political stripes often cite the figures: Killer drone attacks by the U.S. military and the CIA in the Greater Middle East and Africa have strong U.S. public support.

According to the Pew Research Center's most recent poll in May, 58 percent, up slightly from 56 percent in February 2013, approve of "missile strikes from drones to target extremists in such countries as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia." The numbers of Americans disapproving of drone attacks actually increased from 26 percent to 35 percent over that two-year period, a hopeful sign, but still very much a minority view.

But how well informed can U.S. citizens be on this subject when the major news media time and again ignore or under-report drone-strike stories, as we have discussed [here](#) and [here](#) in recent weeks? Stories, such as *The Intercept's* October series based on a trove of classified materials provided by a national security whistleblower, that would likely raise serious questions about the drone program in many more Americans' minds if they were actually given the information?

And now, in the latest example of journalistic negligence, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and other mainstream news organizations in late November continued their apparent policy of no-bad-news-reporting-about-drones.

This time, the major media chose to ignore four former Air Force drone-war personnel who went public with an [open letter](#) to President Barack Obama. The letter urged the President to reconsider a program that killed "innocent civilians," and which "only fueled the feelings of hatred that ignited terrorism and groups like ISIS, while also serving as a fundamental recruiting tool [for extremists] similar to Guantanamo Bay."

In strong, dramatic language, the four men, in the letter and subsequent press appearances, challenged the official Obama White House/Pentagon/CIA public view that civilians are rarely killed by drones, and that drones make Americans safer and are helping defeat terrorists. Rather, they said that the U.S. drone war plays right into the hands of ISIS and other extremist groups by terrorizing local populations and killing innocent civilians, resulting in heightened anti-U.S. feeling and more recruits for ISIS.

Now it's not every day that four former drone operators go public with their anguish-filled stories of the drone program killing innocent people and creating blowback against the United States.

In fact, there has not been any day like that. Until now, that has never

happened. You would think that this would meet some textbook definition of news, something new, uncommon, dramatic and consequential. When President Obama or a proven liar about the drone program, CIA Director John Brennan, propagandize about drones and how wonderful and precise and well-nigh infallible they are in crushing extremists, not killing civilians and making us safe, that is what the mainstream media dutifully reports as news.

But when four drone whistleblowers, who sat at the very heart of the system guiding Hellfire missiles from Predator drones to human targets in Afghanistan and Iraq, come forward to undermine that tidy little story, those same news outlets turn their collective back.

Voicing such sharp criticism of a top-secret program with which they were all involved is an especially risky move given that the Obama administration has shown itself to be the most anti-whistleblower administration ever. Obama's Justice Department has prosecuted more than twice as many whistleblowers under the Espionage Act as all previous presidents combined since the passage of the law in 1917.

The letter to Obama, also addressed to Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter and CIA Director Brennan, said that the Bush and Obama administrations "have built a drone program that is one of the most devastating driving forces for terrorism and destabilization around the world." They expressed guilt, and are experiencing PTSD, as a result of "our roles in facilitating this systematic loss of innocent life."

In a pointed reference to the Obama administration's statements in support of the drone program, the letter stated: "We witnessed gross waste, mismanagement, abuses of power, and our country's leaders lying publicly about the effectiveness of the drone program."

And, drawing a link between the recent Paris attacks and drone killings creating more terrorists and blowback, the whistleblowers added: "We cannot sit silently by and witness tragedies like the attacks in Paris, knowing the devastating effects the drone program has overseas and at home. Such silence would violate the very oaths we took to support and defend the Constitution."

These former Air Force personnel, three former Predator sensor operators (Staff Sergeant Brandon Bryant, Senior Airman Stephen Lewis and Senior Airman Michael Haas), and one former drone program infrastructure technician (Senior Airman Cian Westmoreland), had a combined 20-plus years of remotely operating drone strikes in Afghanistan and Iraq from Creech Air Force Base, Nevada.

All had Afghanistan drone experience, and all but Westmoreland also had Iraq

experience. This gave them special, first-hand insight into a program whose operators, in Haas's words, viewed targeted human beings as "ants just black blobs on a screen" and considered children who came into view on their screens as "fun-sized terrorists."

Haas and other whistleblowers expanded on the points in their letter in an interview with *Guardian* reporters, which resulted in two eye-opening articles by Ed Pilkington and Ewen MacAskill. This was followed by a lengthy appearance on *Democracy Now!* and a news conference in connection with the premiere in New York of a new documentary, "Drone," in which two of the whistleblowers (Bryant and Haas) make appearances. Agence France-Presse (AFP), *Reuters* and Newsweek all carried stories, as did The Intercept, Shadowproof and other online news sites.

Did you read about any of that whistleblower criticism in *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, or see a segment about it on television news? No, you did not. If you know about it at all, it's probably because of *The Guardian*, *Democracy Now!*, and online political and progressive blogs and websites.

This marked the second time in just the last two months that mainstream news outlets have given a thumbs-down to a significant drone story. In October, *The Washington Post* ignored it and *The New York Times* ran two paragraphs at the end of a 25-paragraph piece about a series of significant drone articles posted in *The Intercept*. The articles were derived from documents, referred to as the "Drone Papers," that were provided to *The Intercept* by an anonymous intelligence whistleblower. (We wrote about that here.)

As ExposeFacts has previously noted, mainstream news organizations make only occasional forays once or twice a year into reporting that is critical of the drone program (for example, this *New York Times* article from 2012 and one earlier this year).

What many Americans see or hear most of the time from the self-censoring mainstream media is superficial reporting on the latest drone strike that killed a certain number of what are almost always described in sketchy news stories as militants of one type or another. They also get frequent doses of propaganda and soothing assurances from the President and other Obama administration officials that the program of drones and other aerial bombardments is precise, takes special precaution not to kill civilians, but most importantly is making America safer by killing militants while keeping U.S. troops out of harm's way.

Typical was Obama's speech in May 2013 at the National Defense University, where he said this: "And before any [drone] strike is taken, there must be near-

certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured the highest standard we can set." He said civilian deaths constituted "a risk that exists in all wars."

But as Commander-in-Chief, he went on, "I must weigh these heartbreaking tragedies against the alternatives. To do nothing in the face of terrorist networks would invite far more civilian casualties not just in our cities at home and facilities abroad, but also in the very places like Sana'a and Kabul and Mogadishu where terrorists seek a foothold."

And who, if they were paying attention at the time, can ever forget major-league truth abuser John Brennan, when he was Obama's top counterterrorism adviser, saying in June 2011 that for almost a year, "there hasn't been a single collateral death because of the exceptional proficiency, precision of the capabilities we've been able to develop."

In reporting that whopper, *The New York Times* in August 2011 further reported this: "Other officials say that [Brennan's] extraordinary claim still holds: since May 2010, C.I.A. officers believe, the drones have killed more than 600 militants including at least 20 in a strike reported Wednesday and not a single noncombatant."

Given the Obama administration's control of the drone narrative and the paucity of mainstream press coverage, the 35 percent opposition figure shown in the Pew Research Center's poll in May is a bit surprising for being as high as it is. Especially given that so many Americans buy into the notion that the nation is in a war against terrorism, that drones make us safe, and that killing remotely by drones is preferable to sending U.S. soldiers into combat areas and risking their lives.

Curiously, that same Pew Research Center poll, in addition to showing 35 percent opposition, found that 48 percent said "they are very concerned that U.S. drone strikes endanger the lives of innocent civilians." This higher figure suggests that even some Americans currently favoring drone attacks have doubts about how well civilians are protected, and thus might be open to opposing drone use if the mainstream media would let them know what the four whistleblowers said.

Or if the mainstream press would let them know what was contained in *The Intercept's* "Drone Papers" articles, such as the revelation that during one five-month period of Operation Haymaker in northeastern Afghanistan, "nearly 90 percent of the people killed in airstrikes were not the intended targets. In Yemen and Somalia where the U.S. has far more limited intelligence capabilities to confirm the people killed are the intended targets, the equivalent ratios may well be much worse."

It's worth noting that *The Guardian*, *AFP* and *Reuters*, outlets that did cover the four drone whistleblowers, are all headquartered outside the United States and are not part of the inside-the-Beltway media crowd that influence what is and isn't news at the national and U.S. governmental level.

Also, because those news outlets all have high levels of newspaper and Internet-based circulation in numerous countries, what they report can make citizens of other countries better informed than Americans about certain aspects of U.S. life. This meant, for example, that Singapore readers of *The Straits Times* and the Dublin, Ireland readers of *TheJournal.ie* got to read about the four whistleblowers via an AFP article online. Meanwhile, sadly and ironically, readers of *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* were left in the dark.

Across the waters in the drone-deploying United Kingdom, public opinion on drone use appears to be the direct opposite of the United States. A Pew Research Center poll in July 2014 found that the U.K. public opposed the use of drones by a 59-33 percent margin.

With *The Guardian* and others providing more critical coverage of drones than U.S. mainstream media, and with the London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism regularly pumping out information that challenges U.S. government claims about limited civilian drone-strike deaths, it's a good bet that U.K. citizens are more exposed to criticisms of the drone programs than are their U.S. counterparts.

Additionally, many members of Parliament are much more critical of Britain's drone policies than are members of Congress critical of U.S. policies, and they are often in the news with their criticisms and concerns. Not so in the United States where, with no serious congressional oversight or debate about drones, there is seldom any anti-drone news generated in the House or Senate, which means citizens hear nothing from the legislative branch to counter the White House views.

As long as major U.S. news organizations continue to ignore, downplay or under-report drone stories, much of the American public will remain under-informed or ill-informed about what our drone strikes are doing to the citizens of many other countries, while at the same time turning ever more people against the United States.

**[Disclosure: The four drone whistleblowers are represented by attorney Jesselyn Radack, who is national security and human rights director of the ExposeFacts WHISPeR program.]**

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## When Mass Killings Aren't 'News'

The 24/7 coverage of the San Bernardino mass killing, perpetrated by a Muslim husband and wife, has alarmed and frightened Americans, but there is next to no mainstream interest in disclosures about far worse mayhem carried out by the U.S. government's lethal drone program, writes David Swanson.

By David Swanson

We now know this. A young man who had successfully killed on a large scale went to his religious leader with doubts and was told that mass killing was part of God's plan. The young man continued killing until he had participated in killing sprees that took 1,626 lives – men, women, and children.

I repeat: his death count was not the 16 or 9 or 22 lives that make top news stories, but 1,626 dead and mutilated bodies. Do such things bother you?

What if you learned that this young man's name was Brandon Bryant, and that he killed as a drone pilot for the U.S. Air Force, and that he was presented with a certificate for his 1,626 kills and congratulated on a job well done by the United States of America? What if you learned that his religious leader was a Christian chaplain? Do such things still bother you?

What if you learned that most of the people killed by U.S. drones are civilians? That the pilots "double-tap," meaning that they send a missile into a wedding party or a house and then wait for people to try to help the injured and send a second missile into them? That as a result one hears the injured screaming for hours until they die, as no one comes to help? That a drone pilot sent a missile into a group of children from which three children survived who recognized their dead brothers but had no idea that various pieces of flesh were what was left of their Mom and Dad and consequently cried out for those now gone-forever individuals? Is this troubling?

What if President Obama's claim of few or no civilian deaths was proven false by

well-documented reporting? And by the fact that most victims are targeted without even knowing their names?

What if a leading candidate for president in the past week were to both declare that the way to win a war is to start killing whole families, and stage a public Christian prayer session in order to win over a certain demographic of voters? Is that bothering?

What if it became clear that police officers in the United States have been murdering people at a higher rate than drone pilots? Would you want to see police videos of their killings? Would you want to see drone videos of their killings? We have thus far gained limited access to the former and none to the latter.

What if it were discovered that gun murders in San Bernardino are almost routine. Would they all be equally tragic?

My point is not to cease caring about the tragedy that the television stations tell you to care about. I wish everyone would care 1,000 times more, and even better do something to take away the guns and the hatred and the culture of violence and the economic injustice and the alienation.

My point is that there are other tragedies that go unmentioned, including larger ones. And exploiting one tragedy to fuel hatred toward a large segment of the human population of earth is madness.

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