

# What Hillary Knew about Libya

**Exclusive:** In Official Washington's propaganda world, the U.S. government and its "allies" are always standing for what's right and good and the "enemies" are the epitome of evil doing the vilest things. But some emails to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton depicted a far different reality, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

To justify U.S. "regime changes," the U.S. government has routinely spread rumors and made other dubious claims which even when later doubted or debunked are left in place indefinitely as corrosive propaganda, eating away at the image of various "enemies" and deforming public opinion.

Even though this discredited propaganda can have a long half-life continuing to contaminate the public's ability to perceive reality for years President Barack Obama and his administration have shown no inclination to undertake a kind of HAZMAT clean-up of the polluted information environment that American citizens have been forced to live in.

A recent case in point was the emergence in the State Department's New Year's Eve release of more than 3,000 emails to and from former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton of evidence that two key propaganda themes used to advance violent "regime change" in Libya in 2011 may have originated with rebel-inspired rumors passed on by Clinton's private adviser Sidney Blumenthal.

A March 27, 2011 [email](#) from Blumenthal reminded Clinton that "I communicated more than a week ago on this story, [Libyan leader Muammar] Qaddafi placing bodies to create PR stunts about supposed civilian casualties as a result of Allied bombing, though underlining it was a rumor. But now, as you know, [Defense Secretary] Robert Gates gives credence to it."

Blumenthal's email, which was slugged "Rumor: Q[addafi]'s rape policy," then plunged ahead into his new rumor: "Sources now say, again rumor (that is, this information comes from the rebel side and is unconfirmed independently by Western intelligence), that Qaddafi has adopted a rape policy and has even distributed Viagra to troops. The incident at the Tripoli press conference involving a woman claiming to be raped is likely to be part of a much larger outrage. Will seek further confirmation."

A month later, this bizarre Viagra-rape angle became part of a United Nations presentation by then U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice who brought up the Viagra charge in a debate about the evils of Muammar Gaddafi's regime.

A U.N. diplomat at the closed session on April 28, 2011, told The Guardian that “It was during a discussion about whether there is moral equivalence between the Gaddafi forces and the rebels. She listed human rights abuses by Gaddafi’s forces, including snipers shooting children in the street and the Viagra story.”

On Blumenthal’s other propaganda point, it’s not clear where Defense Secretary Gates got the idea to accuse Gaddafi of “staging” scenes of U.S.-inflicted carnage, but Blumenthal’s email indicates that he was disseminating that rumor which might have been picked up by Gates, rather than independently confirmed by Gates. (It’s also true that the “staging” excuse has been used before when evidence emerges of U.S. bombs killing civilians.)

### **Media Self-Interest**

Yet, regardless of the truth or falsity of such U.S. claims and counter-claims, the chance that someone inside Official Washington is going to review the lies and exaggerations used to rationalize a major U.S. foreign policy initiative in this case, the violent overthrow of the Gaddafi regime to, in effect, “clear” Gaddafi’s name is remote at best.

The few cases of the media debunking U.S. propaganda, such as exposing the made-up claims about Iraqi soldiers killing babies on incubators before the Persian Gulf War in 1990-91, are rare exceptions to the rule. Even rarer are cases when the U.S. government admits that it relied on false information, such as the intelligence community recanting its pre-invasion claims about Iraq hiding WMD stockpiles in 2002-03.

The much more common approach is to simply leave the decaying propaganda in place and move on to the next target of opportunity. There is little benefit for anyone to undertake the painstaking work of separating whatever slices of truth exist within the rot of lies and exaggerations that were used to justify some war.

The way mainstream journalism usually works in America is that a reporter who challenges U.S. government propaganda aimed at a foreign “enemy” is putting his or her career at risk. The reporter’s patriotism will be questioned amid suggestions that he or she is a “fill-in-the-blank-with-the-villain’s-name” apologist.

And since the reality whatever it is is usually fuzzy, there is almost never any vindication for a brave stance. So, the smart career play is to go along with the propaganda or stay silent.

A similar reality exists inside the U.S. government. Honest intelligence analysts can expect no rewards if they debunk one of these propaganda themes,

especially after a number of important U.S. officials have gone out publicly and sold the falsehood to the people. Making the Secretary of State or the Defense Secretary or the President look bad is not a great career move.

### **France's Designs**

Plus, the propaganda themes, which stress American righteousness in standing up to foreign evil, are useful in obscuring the self-interested motives that often circle around a killing field like the one that Libya has become.

For instance, another Blumenthal memo to Clinton explained France's political and pecuniary interests in toppling Gaddafi and thus thwarting his ambitious plans to use Libya's oil wealth as a means of freeing parts of Africa from French domination.

In an April 2, 2011 [email](#), Blumenthal informed Clinton that sources close to one of Gaddafi's sons were reporting that "Qaddafi's government holds 143 tons of gold, and a similar amount in silver" and the hoard had been moved from the Libyan Central Bank in Tripoli closer to the border with Niger and Chad.

"This gold was accumulated prior to the current rebellion and was intended to be used to establish a pan-African currency based on the Libyan golden Dinar. This plan was designed to provide the Francophone African Countries with an alternative to the French franc (CFA)."

Blumenthal then added that "According to knowledgeable individuals, this quantity of gold and silver is valued at more than \$7 billion. French intelligence officers discovered this plan shortly after the current rebellion began, and this was one of the factors that influenced President Nicolas Sarkozy's decision to commit France to the attack on Libya."

The email added: "According to these individuals, Sarkozy's plans are driven by the following issues: a. A desire to gain a greater share of Libya oil production, b. Increase French influence in North Africa, c. Improve his internal political situation in France, d. Provide the French military with an opportunity to reassert its position in the world, e. Address the concern of his advisors over Qaddafi's long term plans to supplant France as the dominant power in Francophone Africa."

In an earlier [email](#), dated March 27, 2011, Blumenthal also discussed the French interests in the conflict, citing "knowledgeable individuals" who said that Sarkozy "is pressing to have France emerge from this crisis as the principal foreign ally of any new government that takes power."

So do you think it would be easier for the Obama administration to rally

American support behind this “regime change” by explaining how the French wanted to steal Libya’s wealth and maintain French neocolonial influence over Africa or would Americans respond better to propaganda themes about Gaddafi passing out Viagra to his troops so they could rape more women while his snipers targeted innocent children? Bingo!

### **Seeing No Jihadists**

In selling the Libyan policy to the American people, it was also important to downplay another part of the crisis: that Gaddafi was right when he warned of the danger from Islamic radicals, including Al Qaeda’s North African affiliate, operating in eastern Libya.

Gaddafi’s original military offensive was aimed at these groups, but the Obama administration’s propagandists twisted the issue into Gaddafi supposedly committing “genocide” against the people of eastern Libya, thus requiring a U.S.-led “responsibility to protect” or “R2P” mission.

However, in the emails to Clinton, Blumenthal conveyed the actual reality that these supposedly innocent anti-Gaddafi rebels in the east indeed included jihadist elements. He wrote: “Sarkozy is also concerned about continuing reports that radical/terrorist groups such as the Libyan Fighting Groups and Al Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are infiltrating the NLC [the rebel’s National Transitional Council] and its military command.

“Accordingly, he [Sarkozy] asked [a] sociologist who has long established ties to Israel, Syria, and other nations in the Middle East, to use his contacts to determine the level of influence AQIM and other terrorist groups have inside of the NLC. Sarkozy also asked for reports setting out a clear picture of the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the rebel leadership.”

Blumenthal added: “Senior European security officials caution that AQIM is watching developments in Libya, and elements of that organization have been in touch with tribes in the southeastern part of the country. These [European] officials are concerned that in a post-Qaddafi Libya, France and other western European countries must move quickly to ensure that the new government does not allow AQIM and others to set up small, semi-autonomous local entities, or ‘Caliphates’, in the oil and gas producing regions of southeastern Libya.”

In other words, the danger of Islamic terror groups exploiting the power vacuum that the Obama administration and its Western allies were creating inside Libya was well understood in March 2011, but the supposed “R2P” mission pressed ahead nevertheless.

The “R2P” advocates also turned a blind eye to evidence that black Africans

working for Gaddafi's government were being systematically rounded up and murdered. As Blumenthal reported to Clinton, "Speaking in strict confidence, one rebel commander stated that his troops continue to summarily execute all foreign mercenaries captured in the fighting."

These so-called "mercenaries" were contractors from black Africa where many people viewed Gaddafi as a champion of the continent's development, independent of the former Western imperial powers and the harsh demands of the International Monetary Fund. While some of these blacks were part of Gaddafi's security structure, others were involved in construction projects.

Whatever their assignments, executing prisoners of war is a war crime and the image of U.S.-backed rebels singling out black Africans for execution turns the pretense of an "R2P" mission on its head or perhaps all those noble humanitarian arguments were just phony from the start.

As Brad Hoff of the Levant Report wrote, "historians of the 2011 NATO war in Libya will be sure to notice a few of the truly explosive confirmations contained in the new emails: admissions of rebel war crimes, special ops trainers inside Libya from nearly the start of protests, Al Qaeda embedded in the U.S. backed opposition, Western nations jockeying for access to Libyan oil, the nefarious origins of the absurd Viagra mass rape claim, and concern over Gaddafi's gold and silver reserves threatening European currency."

### **Reality's Hard Sell**

But it probably would have been a hard sell to the American people if the U.S. government explained the dark side of the "R2P" mission that it involved systematic executions of blacks and rapacious Western officials grasping for oil and gold as well as creating a vacuum for jihadists. Instead, it worked much better to promote wild rumors about Gaddafi's perfidy.

It is in this way that U.S. citizens, the "We the People" who were supposed to be the nation's sovereigns, are treated more like cattle herded to the slaughterhouse.

Some of us did try to warn the public about these risks. For instance, on March 25, 2011, days before Blumenthal's emails, I described the hazard from the neocon "regime change" strategies in Libya and Syria, writing:

"In rallying U.S. support for these rebellions, the neocons risked repeating the mistake they made by pushing the U.S. invasion of Iraq. They succeeded in ousting Saddam Hussein, who had long been near the top of Israel's enemies list, but the war also removed him as a bulwark against both Islamic extremists and Iranian influence in the Persian Gulf.

“By embracing these uprisings, the neocons invited unintended consequences, including further Islamic radicalization of the region and deepening anti-Americanism. Indeed, a rebel victory over Gaddafi risked putting extremists from an al-Qaeda affiliate in a powerful position inside Libya.

“The major U.S. news media aided the neocon cause by focusing on Gaddafi’s historic ties to terrorism, including the dubious charge that he was behind the Pan Am 103 bombing in 1988. There was little attention paid to his more recent role in combating the surge in al-Qaeda activity, especially in eastern Libya, the base of the revolt against him.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Neocons Regroup on Libyan War.”](#)]

Though the 2011 concerns about Al Qaeda have since morphed into worries about its spinoff, the Islamic State, the larger point remains valid regarding Libya, which descended into the status of failed state after Gaddafi’s ouster and his brutal torture-murder on Oct. 20, 2011. Secretary Clinton greeted the news of Gaddafi’s demise with glee, [exulting](#), “we came, we saw, he died” and then laughed. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Hillary Clinton’s Failed Libya Doctrine.”](#)]

More than four years later, the Obama administration still struggles to piece together some order from the chaos in Libya, where Western governments have even abandoned their Tripoli embassies. Meanwhile, the Islamic State and other jihadist groups continue to expand their control of Libyan territory.

In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad has hung on despite continued efforts by the Obama administration and its regional Sunni allies to remove him. The four years of war waged mostly by jihadists armed and financed by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Western powers have killed a quarter million people and made millions homeless, now spreading the Mideast’s disorders into Europe where the refugee crisis is dividing the European Union.

Of course, in the U.S. mainstream media, the Syrian deaths and destruction are blamed almost entirely on Assad, much as the conflict in Libya was blamed on Gaddafi and the U.S. invasion of Iraq was blamed on Saddam Hussein. In the world created by U.S. propaganda, it is always some other guy’s fault.

In the Syrian case, the major decaying propaganda theme that continues to contaminate public understanding of the crisis has been the accusation that Assad “gassed his own people” with sarin on Aug. 21, 2013. Although independent evidence has long been pointing in the direction of a rebel provocation, perhaps aided by Turkey, the old rotting propaganda is routinely dug up by neocons and their liberal interventionist sidekicks to justify why “Assad must go!” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Collapsing Syria-Sarin Case.”](#)]

In the case of Libya, Blumenthal's emails provide a useful window into what was actually happening behind the scenes and what Secretary of State Clinton knew.

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## The Power of Exaggerated Fear

As the American middle class shrinks and citizens feel vulnerable and angry, politicians have found that exaggerating the dangers from some bogeyman "the Muslim terrorists are out to get you!" works wonders in distracting them from far more serious threats, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar describes.

By Paul R. Pillar

Journalists have noticed how much current political campaigns are trading on fear. As observed in [a recent article](#) in the *Washington Post*, "Most of the Republican presidential contenders and their allies are now waging campaigns focused on fear, bombarding voters with ominous television spots that warn of national security threats and amping up their alarming rhetoric on the stump."

ISIS and foreign terrorism figure prominently in the bombardment. As a media tracker cited in the same article observes, such scare tactics usually don't get relied on until late in an election campaign. (The famous "[Daisy](#)" ad that Lyndon Johnson's campaign used to associate Barry Goldwater with nuclear war in 1964 aired only once, in September of that year.)

But in the current campaign, the GOP candidates are trying to outdo each other with the fear factor as a way of getting attention before the primaries have even started, and trying to use the scaring of people as "the fastest way to create an ad that resonates."

There is a long history across many nations of fear-based demagoguery leading to extreme and sometimes disastrous political results. Even if that isn't the result in this U.S. election year, even if the candidates using the scare candidates do not really believe their rhetoric, and even if any one of them, once in office, would try to take a less fearful and more measured approach to business, the rhetoric and the public fear that it stokes have consequences. They help to create a political milieu in which anyone in office will have to operate.

The rhetoric of fear promotes emotion rather than clear thinking as the prime shaper of public attitudes. It engages the amygdala rather than the cortex. That is not what makes for sound policy, or for the sort of political environment that supports sound policy.

The rhetoric exacerbates mass misperception of the seriousness of whatever is the rhetoric's focus, with a loss of any accurate sense of proportion. Much of the speeches and the advertising would lead one to believe that the superpower that is the United States is existentially threatened by a foreign group such as ISIS, when in fact that is nowhere near the case.

The loss of proportion discourages sober consideration of the trade-offs inevitably involved in national security policy and encourages exaggerated swings of the pendulum in which fearful Americans accept compromises to their liberty and privacy that they will oppose once the fear subsides.

The loss of proportion also encourages lashing out in costly and dangerous ways, along the line of ads that link the San Bernardino shooters to a supposed need to use more military force against a group like ISIS in the Middle East, even though the only link in real life was a shooter's invoking of the brand name of ISIS.

Disproportionate focus by the fear-mongers on the scary topics they choose leads to distortion of, or insufficient attention to, related issues. This has been happening to a large degree with the issue of gun control, which often gets portrayed as an alternative to combating terrorism, despite an incident such as the San Bernardino shooting, which was an instance of mass murder in the United States with firearms, and was *not* the work of a foreign terrorist group.

A similar process has been involved in the insufficient attention given to violent antigovernment groups in the United States, which have accounted for the major share of political violence committed within the United States over the past decade and are a growing problem.

Because bandwidth is limited with both public emotions and serious policy analysis, the focus on fear also crowds out attention to unrelated issues. For example, Sen. Marco Rubio says in one of his ads, "While ISIS is beheading people and burning them in cages, he [President Obama] says climate change is our greatest threat." That's right, Senator, it is; climate change is on track to cause far greater harm to Americans as well as to others than ISIS will ever be capable of doing.

Beyond the effects on domestic policy debate are the untoward effects overseas of the highly salient fear-inducing rhetoric. This includes accentuating



perceptions of the United States as a threatening, Islamophobic power, along with foreign reactions to those perceptions that redound to the disadvantage of U.S. interests and the security of U.S. citizens.

Such perceptions and reactions are exactly what ISIS wants from the United States, as a tool for recruitment and a stimulus to more damage that might be inflicted independently but in its name inside the United States.

Traditionally the main worries about lingering ill effects of a political campaign concern specific campaign promises and commitments that the successful candidate carries with him or her into office and might work much less well as policy than as a campaign applause line. There certainly are good reasons to worry about that sort of problem with the current campaign, regarding both foreign policy and domestic matters such as the fiscal health of the country.

But we also should worry about the broader public mood and political milieu that represent the leftovers from the campaign and that even the most flip-flop-friendly politician may have difficulty changing once in office.

The fear-mongering about threats from abroad is the most significant such worry with this year's campaign. We have seen this sort of thing before, but it is at least as bad this year as it has been in most elections in recent memory.

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