

Fearing Sanders as 'Closet Realist'

Exclusive: To Washington's neocons like David Ignatius, Sen. Sanders should be disqualified as a presidential candidate for being a "closet realist." Sanders seems not to accept their forced "regime change" in Syria, nor their plans for more "nation building" like the neocon handiwork in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

How little Official Washington's neocon-dominated foreign policy elite has learned from the past couple of decades can be measured by reading the last line of Friday's Washington Post op-ed by David Ignatius, supposedly one of the deeper thinkers from the American pundit class.

Ignatius writes, regarding the Syrian mess, "It's never too late for the United States to do the right thing, which is to build, carefully, the political and military framework for a new Syria."

Reading Ignatius and other neocon-oriented policy prescribers, it's as if Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya not to mention other failed states following U.S. interventions never happened. Just like Iraq was a cakewalk, Syria will be one of those child puzzles with only 24 pieces, easy to assemble and reassemble.

Though Ignatius doesn't get into the nitty-gritty of his nation-building scheme, it should be obvious that for President Barack Obama to "do the right thing" in Ignatius's way of thinking, the U.S. military would first have to invade and occupy Syria, killing any Syrians, Iranians, Russians and others who might get in the way. Then there would be the tricky process of "carefully" putting Syria back together again amid the predictable IEDs, suicide bombings and sectarian strife.

One is tempted to simply dismiss Ignatius as not a serious person, but he is considered part of the crème de la crème of Official Washington's current foreign-policy establishment. He's sought after to moderate foreign policy conferences and he pontificates regularly from the well-read pages of The Washington Post.

But he is really just another example of how dangerous it was for the American people to exact no accountability from the hubristic neoconservatives and their "liberal interventionist" sidekicks for their many disastrous miscalculations and war crimes.

If Americans still had pitchforks, they should have chased down this arrogant

elite for inflicting so much pain and bloodshed on both the people of these tragic countries and on the U.S. soldiers who were dispatched so casually to make the benighted policies work. There's also the little issue of the trillions of dollars in taxpayers' money wasted.

But the neocons are impervious to criticism from the "little people." Within the neocon "bubble," the Syrian crisis is just the result of President Obama not intervening earlier and bigger by shipping even more weapons to Syria's mythical "moderate" rebels.

No one ever wants to admit that these "moderates" were always dominated by Sunni jihadists and by 2012 had become essentially their front men for receiving sophisticated U.S. weapons before passing the hardware on, willingly or not, to Al Qaeda's Nusra Front, Islamic State and other extremist groups.

Read, for instance, a remarkable account from veteran foreign affairs writer Stephen Kinzer, who describes in [a Boston Globe op-ed](#) the reign of terror that the Syrian rebels have inflicted on the people of Aleppo, while the mainstream U.S. news media painted pretty pictures about these noble insurrectionists.

Kinzer scolds his media colleagues for their malfeasance in reporting on the Syrian crisis, writing: "Coverage of the Syrian war will be remembered as one of the most shameful episodes in the history of the American press. Reporting about carnage in the ancient city of Aleppo is the latest reason why."

Another inconvenient truth is that the "moderate" rebels of Aleppo operate hand in glove with Al Qaeda's Nusra Front. So much so that a proposal for a partial Syrian cease-fire failed because U.S. diplomats wanted to extend its protections to Al Qaeda's forces, also known inside Syria as Jabhat al-Nusra.

As The Washington Post's Karen DeYoung nonchalantly mentioned deep inside [a story](#) on Saturday, "Jabhat al-Nusra, whose forces are intermingled with moderate rebel groups in the northwest near the Turkish border, is particularly problematic. Russia was said to have rejected a U.S. proposal to leave Jabhat al-Nusra off-limits to bombing as part of the cease-fire, at least temporarily, until the groups can be sorted out."

In other words, the cease-fire plan is being delayed – and possibly killed – because the Obama administration doesn't want the Syrian army and the Russian air force attacking Al Qaeda.

This strange reality underscores reporting by Mideast expert Gareth Porter who [wrote](#) that "Information from a wide range of sources, including some of those the United States has been explicitly supporting, makes it clear that every armed anti-Assad organization unit in those provinces [around Aleppo] is engaged

in a military structure controlled by Nusra militants. All of these rebel groups fight alongside the Nusra Front and coordinate their military activities with it." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Risking Nuclear War for Al Qaeda.](#)"]

Believing in Unicorns

However, to be accepted in Official Washington as a profound thinker, you must believe in the unicorns of "moderate" Syrian rebels, just like earlier you had to accept as "flat fact" that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was lying when he denied having weapons of mass destruction and that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was lying when he claimed to be under attack by terrorists.

But what is truly remarkable about these Washington "wise men and women" who are so unwise is that they simply move from one catastrophe to the next. The journalists and columnists among them routinely get basic facts wrong but are never fired by their editors and publishers, presumably because the editors and publishers are kindred ideologues.

And the neocon/liberal-hawk politicians also float above any meaningful accountability for their grotesque misjudgments and for their contributions to war crimes. On the Republican side, all the establishment candidates the likes of Marco Rubio, Jeb Bush and John Kasich favor doubling down on neoconservative foreign policies as they prove how "serious" they are.

On the Democratic side, the reputed frontrunner, Hillary Clinton, not only voted for the Iraq War but promoted similar warmongering as Secretary of State, pushing for a senseless escalation in Afghanistan, masterminding the mindless Libyan operation, and blocking any timely peace initiatives in Syria.

Her supporters may call her a "liberal" or "humanitarian" interventionist but there is no discernible difference between her policies and those of the neocons. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Hillary Clinton and the Dogs of War.](#)"]

There may be some hope from the anti-establishment candidates Donald Trump on the Republican side and Bernie Sanders in the Democratic race but that's mostly because they have steered clear of precise foreign policy prescriptions. They have, however, decried the Iraq War and suggested that collaboration with Russia makes more sense than confrontation.

Not surprisingly then, Washington's neocon-dominated foreign policy elite has been scathing toward both men, seeking to marginalize them so far from the mainstream that aspiring pundits and academics with hopes for professional advancement will obsequiously vouch for the diplomatic chops of Hillary Clinton and the seriousness of the GOP establishment contenders.

Sniffing Out 'Realism'

As for Sanders, David Ignatius has detected a clearly disqualifying characteristic, that the Vermont senator may be, gasp, a "closet realist."

On Feb. 12, Ignatius raised that shocking possibility in another Washington Post column: "Is Bernie Sanders a closet foreign policy 'realist'? Reading his few pronouncements on foreign policy, you sense that he embraces the realists' deep skepticism about U.S. military intervention."

Having sniffed out this foul odor of "realism," Ignatius further asks, "Now that Sanders has nearly tied Clinton in Iowa and won New Hampshire, there's a real possibility that he may emerge as the Democratic nominee. And the question is: How scared should mainstream Democrats be about Sanders as a foreign policy president?"

That's right, how scary would it be if there was a "realist" in the White House?

But Ignatius observes that President Obama already has demonstrated some of the same disturbing "realist" traits although Sanders might be even worse. The pundit prognosticates, "If I had to guess, I'd say that Sanders would continue and reinforce President Obama's wary approach to using force, whereas Clinton would be more hawkish. But that's just a guess. Perhaps Sanders would be far more dovish."

Like a hapless Inspector Clouseau, Ignatius then presses ahead trying to determine exactly how bad or "realistic" Sanders would be:

"Sanders's statements on Syria suggest that he would take a position embraced by many self-described realists. His first priority, he has said, would be a 'broad coalition, including Russia,' to defeat the Islamic State. 'Our second priority must be getting rid of [President Bashar al-Assad] through some political settlement, working with Iran, working with Russia.'"

Ignatius, of course, finds Sanders's priorities troubling and pulls out an old canard to make the point, reviving the long-discredited claim that Assad was responsible for the lethal sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Was Turkey Behind Syria-Sarin Attack?](#)" and "[A Call for Proof on Syria-Sarin Attack.](#)"]

Ignoring the lack of evidence against Assad, Ignatius writes: "Some critics would argue that it's immoral to make replacing a leader who used chemical weapons a secondary concern."

Yes, in neocon land, the moral thing is to accuse someone of a heinous crime

without any verifiable evidence and indeed with the evidence going in the opposite direction and then invading and occupying the country in defiance of international law, killing hundreds of thousands of its people, much like neocon policymakers did with Iraq as Ignatius and other foreign policy “moralists” cheered them on.

However, with Syria, Ignatius tells us, it would be so simple to follow up the invasion and occupation with a plan “to build, carefully, the political and military framework for a new Syria.” No wonder Ignatius and other neocons are so hostile to “realism” and to Bernie Sanders.

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](#)).

Turkey’s Perilous Crossroad

Turkey is at a dangerous crossroad, having plunged down the bloody route of “regime change” in Syria and getting drawn deeper into conflicts with Kurds, Iran and Russia. Can President Erdogan return to the more peaceful path he once followed, asks ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

What does Turkey need to do to overcome its present foreign policy fiasco, one of the worst in modern Turkish history? The irony of all this is that those directly responsible for this mess, the team of Recep Tayyip Erdogan (now president) and Ahmet Davutoglu, (former foreign minister and now prime minister), is exactly the team that one decade ago had made extraordinary steps in creating a new, creative and successful foreign policy.

What went wrong? And how can Ankara now climb back out of the deep hole that it has dug for itself? The answer is simple: Erdogan and Davutoglu should return to their original successful principles of a decade ago, now recklessly abandoned. The overwhelmingly most urgent task is for Ankara to get out of Syria.

Turkey’s Syrian policy has done more to destroy Turkey’s international position than any other single factor. But let’s be clear: Ankara is not primarily responsible for the present disaster in Syria. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is. But Erdogan has hugely exacerbated the problem, encouraged radical jihadist

elements fighting in Syria, helped stir up sectarian passions, and mishandled the Syrian Kurds.

All these policies have damaged relations with countries that really matter for Turkey: Iran, Iraq, Russia, China, the U.S., the European Union, Kurdish communities, and of course relations with Syria itself. Instead Ankara has opened a dubious, dangerous and futureless coalition with Saudi Arabia. And it has created a damaging confrontation with Russia in which Turkey is already the loser.

What should Ankara now do?

1. Acknowledge the reality that Assad is not going to fall anytime soon, even though that was a reasonable assumption after the outbreak of an uprising against him in 2011. Turkey must abandon the obsessive effort to overthrow him. Russia, the U.S., the E.U., China, Egypt and even large numbers of Syrians now correctly believe that what might come after Assad is likely to be far worse than Assad. Turkey has little to gain and much to lose in continuing this fruitless struggle.
2. Work with the major powers to bring about a peaceful solution in Syria: working with the U.S., Russia and the E.U., and rejecting Saudi Arabia's absurd vision of a massive international Sunni army seizing control of Damascus.
3. Return to Ankara's earlier policy of standing *above sectarian struggle* in the region. Turkey is predominantly Sunni, but it has large Shiite and Alevi (quasi-Shiite) populations. Turkey has not really sought to be the champion of Sunni Islam for several hundred years. Indeed, Turkey gained respect and clout when it sought to act impartially between Sunni and Shia groups a decade ago. It should play no favorites in that capacity now.
4. Work to improve its relations with *Iran*. Iran's role in the region is growing steadily. It is vital to Turkey strategically and economically. It is a democracy in the making. Relations were seriously damaged when Turkey went all out to overthrow Assad, an ally of Tehran.
5. Work closely with *Iraq* to help overcome sectarian problems, not simply as a supporter of Sunnis in Iraq. Turkey does not benefit from a divided Iraq. Nor does Iran, which would prefer to exert its influence in a united and stable Iraq. Turkey is well equipped to help bring sectarian reconciliation about in Iraq, with its excellent economic relations with Baghdad and shared interests in the wellbeing of Iraqi Kurdistan.
6. Back away from strategic ties with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia rejects everything that Turkey claims to value: moderate Islam, religious and ethnic tolerance, non-sectarianism, non-intervention, democracy, globalizing markets, cultural attractiveness and soft power. Saudi Arabia,

however, seeks only to draw Ankara in to be a Sunni champion and ally against Assad, against Iran, against the Iraqi Shiites and the Zaydi Shiites in Yemen.

7. Cooperate with the other Gulf States, as long as it is on a *non-sectarian basis*. Ties with Qatar, in particular, could be productive.
8. Place priority on restoring Turkish relations with Russia. Stop trying to drag NATO into unwise confrontations with Russia. The reality is that Moscow's entry into the Syrian equation has all but eliminated Ankara's options and freedom of action there. And Ankara cannot defeat Russia diplomatically. Furthermore, like it or not, Moscow is in fact well-positioned to forge a political settlement in Syria.

If Turkey undertakes the policy shifts outlined above, its relations with Moscow will automatically improve.

9. Devote priority to close relations with *all Kurdish elements* in the region. Turkey, through the wisdom of its earlier policies, had won over the Iraqi Kurds as a close ally. But Erdogan has allowed his earlier path-breaking rapprochement with the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey, the PKK, to collapse. Ankara has refused to deal with the Syrian Kurdish movement, one of the few effective fighting groups against ISIS in Syria. It may be sliding into a general war against the Kurds which it might be able to win on the battlefield but will assuredly lose politically.

Growing Kurdish power in the entire region is a reality, it has been on an upward curve for the last 25 years, invariably benefiting from each regional conflict to achieve greater de facto autonomy and world awareness. If Ankara is determined to stop Kurdish progress towards greater autonomy, anywhere in the region, it will only alienate the Kurds; above all such a posture will only *hasten* the emergence of greater Kurdish political, economic and cultural demands. Efforts to block this process of Kurdish emergence will not only fail, but will guarantee an uglier and more dangerous relationship for Turkey and the entire regional Kurdish reality long into the future.

Ironically, handled right and granted broader autonomy, most Kurds will inevitably look to Turkey as a regional protector, economic entrepôt and cultural magnet, as long as Ankara does not alienate them. Where else could the Kurds look for valuable geopolitical ties in the region?

Ankara deserves great credit for having moved generously and humanely to accommodate more than 2½ million Syrian refugees inside Turkey. When Syrian domestic violence finally begins to end, many Syrians will go back home, but not all. This could be a problem for Turkey, but also a benefit.

The Ottoman tradition included an important role for Arabs within imperial rule. Today Turkey can only be enriched and strengthened through the acquisition of new Turkish Syrian citizens who can facilitate Turkish entree into the Arab world. Turkey is, after all, multinational already with huge numbers of other ethnic groups, from the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Balkans. A stronger Arab voice and expertise will only add to Turkey's regional clout, economic access, and skills.

Finally Turkey should cooperate with Washington where it can, but only to the extent that Washington's own policies in the region are wise and productive. Since 9/11 (and arguably even much before) U.S. policies in the Middle East have been disastrously bad, failing and destructive. Ankara would not cooperate.

President Obama in recent times, however, has dialed back the level of U.S. intervention and aggressiveness, especially now in Syria. If Ankara can undertake all these policy shifts its relations with Washington will much improve. That is assuming the next American president approaches the Middle East with wisdom, for which there is little guarantee.

All this also assumes that Erdogan will act wisely and not sacrifice Turkey's foreign policy interests to his own reckless and divisive drive for greater personal power. Erdogan's personal interests are not synonymous with the Turkish national interest.

Erdogan had once embraced and implemented Ataturk's wise adage: Peace at home and peace abroad. Now he has abandoned those principles and is left with neither.

Graham E. Fuller is a former senior CIA official, author of numerous books on the Muslim World; his latest book is *Breaking Faith: A novel of espionage and an American's crisis of conscience in Pakistan*. (Amazon, Kindle) grahamefuller.com

America's Slide toward Failed State

The blanket refusal of Senate Republican leaders to consider President Obama's choice to succeed Justice Scalia reflects a descent of the United States toward the kind of dysfunctional failed state that Washington normally upbraids, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

We Americans, usually quick to judge other societies by American standards, can

become more self-aware by reversing the direction of the comparison and thinking of what the attributes of other nations might highlight about our own deficiencies.

Such comparisons can work in either of two ways. One is to observe how far the United States has fallen behind others in endeavors at which others excel and set the standards. Investment in transportation infrastructure, for example. Ride a train in Switzerland after riding one in the United States and the point becomes clear.

The other sort of comparison is to examine the troubles of other countries that are deeply troubled, with an eye toward identifying underlying problems that might also be found in the United States even though the United States has not gone as far down the troubled path, at least not yet. There is no shortage of countries, from Syria to Somalia to South Sudan, that we commonly label as politically unstable and that present grief for their own citizens, challenges for U.S. policymakers, and fodder for foreign policy pundits.

An attempt to identify underlying problems can come up with many things, involving the structure of civil society, ethnic divisions, and the like. But two very fundamental necessities for stable liberal democracy are in short supply in those trouble lands. One is the acceptance as legitimate of interests and viewpoints different from one's own. Such acceptance does not preclude continued sharp differences. Recognized legitimacy is not the same as agreement.

Opposing political positions can grow out of different interests or different views about the best way of pursuing a shared interest. Either way, what is required is acknowledgment that one's own side in a political contest does not necessarily have a monopoly on what is just, wise or moral, and that those on the other side have as much right to be part of the contest and of the give-and-take that feeds into national policy.

The other big necessity is a commitment to the entire political system that is greater than commitment to any of the particular interests or objectives that get pursued through that system. This does not just mean an avowing of patriotism; expressions of nationalist sentiment are easy to come by even in troubled and unstable nations. What is needed is acknowledgment and genuine belief that the health and smooth functioning of the entire system are of paramount importance and that without them those more parochial interests could not be effectively pursued anyway.

The Republican posture of keeping the U.S. Supreme Court short-handed for a year, and thereby screwing up not just one but two terms of the court, solely to deny an appointment to the incumbent president and to try to hand that power to

a hoped-for Republican successor, is the latest and most salient of several episodes that indicate a growing shortfall in the United States of these two essential conditions for stable liberal democracy.

There have been other episodes occurring with increasing frequency in recent years. These include blanket rejection, begun even before Justice Antonin Scalia's death, of anyone Barack Obama would nominate as an appellate judge. They include automatic opposition to the President's most important legislative initiatives, as seen most vividly with health care, on which the opposition has become an obsession pursued without regard to the conceptual origins of the particular legislation or its actual effects once enacted. And they include the use of extortion, with threats involving default on debt or shutdown of government, in pursuit of some matter involving the budget or a social issue.

This pattern exhibits a lack of the first requirement involving an acceptance of the opposing side's legitimacy. The outlook involved has been clear on an issue such as abortion, in which an opposing side get defined as not just wrong but as immoral. The outlook also has been applied personally to Barack Obama more than to any other U.S. president in modern times.

Suffusing through much of the reflexive opposition to his policies, and punctuated by the birther nonsense, has been a sense that he is somehow, well, not quite one of us and not quite a real American, that he is less a legitimate occupant of the Oval Office and more of a transient interloper there. To what extent this attitude is due, as many African-American supporters of Mr. Obama believe, to his race is impossible to determine definitively, but the attitude is too obvious to ignore.

The pattern also exhibits a shortfall in the second key requirement of stable liberal democracy, the greater value that must be placed on the political whole than on any more parochial interests. This shortfall is obviously present with the extortionate tactics involving damage to the nation's credit rating or to the operation of the entire government, as it is now with tactics threatening to cripple the Supreme Court.

All of this goes beyond the damage that is due to intensified partisanship, which also has become worse in the United States over the past couple of decades and is bad enough just by itself. We are talking here about something more fundamental, and something that is alike in kind to what underlies the instability in any number of politically unstable countries on other continents.

The corresponding problem in the United States, though alike in kind, has not become alike in degree to those archetypical unstable countries from the Third World, again, not yet. But the trend is in the wrong direction, and those who

care about the health of American democracy ought to be worried about that trend.

American citizens who do care, and at least as much, those who have been participating in some of the disturbing episodes mentioned above, ought to look at those unstable countries abroad and think the following thoughts.

First, there but for the grace of wise forefathers and other lucky circumstances of America go we.

Second, the critical ingredients of successful and stable liberal democracy are precious, not all that common in the world, and vulnerable to being lost. It may sound oxymoronic but is nevertheless true that political stability is fragile.

And finally, we need to ask ourselves continually what is more important: whatever specific policy issue has gotten people's dander up at the moment, or having a political system, healthy and effective as well as free, that enables us to argue and compete about such issues at all.

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

How the Democratic Party Got Lost

Though the political odds still favor Hillary Clinton, her stumbling candidacy and dependence on vast sums of special-interest money reflect the weaknesses of the Democratic Party, which lost its way in the 1980s and 1990s, forgetting its historic role as defender of the little guy, as Michael Brenner explains.

By Michael Brenner

The Clinton juggernaut is losing traction. Powered by the full weight of the Democratic Establishment, it was designed to smoothly carry its idol across America and into the White House. It still may get there. But now it must traverse a far more treacherous and uncertain route than Hillary Clinton and her entourage ever imagined.

The course is lined with the pundits, operatives and analysts who will cover the spectacle with their usual attention to trivia and a faith in their own perspicacity which matches that of the heroine herself.

This was all predictable. For it conforms to the parochialism and inbreeding that for so long has infirmed the Democratic Party's leadership as well as the punditocracy. Fortunes could be made betting against the "Washington consensus" whose singular talent for getting it wrong extends from the country's endless skein of foreign misadventures to electoral politics.

They give the impression of all sipping out of each other's double-lattes at Starbucks in Dupont Circle. The resulting damage done to the party's traditional constituents, to the integrity of national discourse and to America's interests in the world is incalculable and may well be irreparable.

Still, it is worth recording the pathologies that this latest bruising encounter with reality reveal. Most obvious is the disconnect between political elites and the country they presume to know or aspire to govern. The success of Bernie Sanders makes that transparently clear. His greatest asset is simply that (even though he has served in the Senate as an Independent) he ran as a "Democrat" – that is, as representative of the party as forged in the mid-Twentieth Century and whose precepts conform to the socio-economic interests and philosophical truths typically held by most Americans today.

Sanders is the first presidential candidate to do so since Walter Mondale in 1984. Mondale's defeat convinced many pols that the future lay with the Reagan smorgasbord of discredited nostrums and myths repackaged by skillful political craftsmen as the new Revelation. Market fundamentalist economic models, a cartoonish version of American individualism a la Ayn Rand, financial libertinism, muscle-flexing abroad in the mantle of democratic proselytizing, and anti-government demagoguery were fashioned into an intoxicating cocktail.

It worked to the extent that the cheap high that it produced tapped latent racism, jingoism, evangelical Christian passions, and a new-found greedy selfishness which was the mutant offspring of 1960s liberation.

Disoriented Democrats badly miscalculated the danger, and in the process lost sight of who they were. Most damaging, many found a comfortable niche in this new world of hallucination. Among them are the careerists, the trendy intellectuals*, and the ambitious politicians who thought that they had discovered the one route to recouping power and glory.

Together, they reshaped the Democratic Party into a me-too auxiliary to a waxing conservative movement. Today, it is radical reactionary Republicans who sweep elections at state and local levels, who hold an iron grip on the Congress, who have used their power to ruthlessly transform the judiciary into an active ally.

True, Democrats have won the White House twice. Bill Clinton did thanks to Ross

Perot and then retained it against feeble opposition. In the process, he moved progressively to the Right in policy and philosophy (“the era of Big Government is over”). Republican ascendancy followed.

Only the Bush era collapse into disaster abroad and at home made possible Barack Obama who presented himself not as the embodiment of Democratic values but as a transcendent bipartisan healer – with just a few vermilion strokes. A prophet without message or mission. Whatever liberal ideas he had sounded were swiftly abandoned in what is surely the most shameless bait-and-switch in American political history.

This was predictable. After all, he thrice cited Ronald Reagan as the man who most influenced his view of the Presidency. His administrations arguably were oriented to the Right of Richard Nixon on civil liberties as well as on economic and social programs. Look it up.

His White House actually took delight in maligning “Progressives” as made manifest in Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel’s cursing out of their representatives personally within its walls. That was the administration of which Hillary Clinton, the born-again “progressive,” was a mainstay.

The cause already was abandoned in his first months in office when the Democrats held majorities in both houses of Congress. Indeed, Obama’s embrace of the Wall Street barons was what allowed the Tea Party to channel popular anger and fear into a well-financed anti-government, know-nothing movement which nowadays dominates the political landscape. Hence, Obama drove the final nails into the coffin of the old Democratic Party.

This evolution of American politics in effect disenfranchised something like 20 percent of the electorate. They are Bernie Sanders’s constituency. It’s as simple as that. Personalities do play a role, but it is a secondary one. Sanders as a person stands out for his integrity, his earnestness, for his truth-telling, for his transparent decency. It is the message, though, that counts above all.

An old Brooklyn Jew who advertises himself as a “Socialist” is not a compelling figure on the political stage. Intelligent and well-informed on domestic matters, he is not a phrase-maker, not verbally nimble, an incurably respectful gentleman, and largely disengaged from foreign policy where Hillary was custodian of ACT II in the pageant of American failure and fiasco in the Middle East.

In addition, Sanders feels inhibited about attacking the misdeeds of the Obama years out of a concern for estranging black voters, and turning the President

from Hillary's tacit ally into an active ally. Yet, he has made history with unprecedented accomplishments in the teeth of implacable opposition from the entire political and media establishment. At the moment, Sanders nearly has caught Hillary in the national polls and actually performs marginally better in hypothetical contests against the major Republican contenders.

Clinton's shortcomings and failures are aggravated by the widespread distrust that she engenders. That was evident a year ago. She has had higher "negatives" in polls than any serious candidate ever. So why was she crowned even before the contest began? Why did no other candidates present themselves? Why did Democratic bigwigs feel so complacent at the prospect of another electoral setback?

One common answer is that there was nobody else. Decimated at the state level, and lacking fresh blood in the Senate, they have a very thin squad. For the better part of a decade, Harry Reid has been the face of the Democratic Party outside of the White House and during Obama's romantic non-partisanship phases, its face country-wide.

Still, someone like former Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley could have been promoted as a credible candidate had the party leaders the will to do so. Compare him to George W. Bush in 2000. The Republicans molded that non-entity into a winner with relative ease. Democrats had much more to work with in O'Malley.

Or, they could have rallied behind Elizabeth Warren. Admittedly, she wasn't interested. Just think, though, of what could have happened had she been persuaded to run. For one thing, she quickly would have eclipsed Hillary as the frontrunner. Razor sharp, personable, with a blue-steel edge to her words, and resolute she likely would have delivered the Last Rites to Clinton by Super Tuesday.

And then imagine her against any of the Republicans hopefuls whose only chance of winning turns on Clinton's negatives. A Warren Republican X contest, moreover, would have raised the prospect of a Democratic comeback across the board that is utterly beyond Clinton's capabilities.

The principal reason the Democratic Establishment lined up behind Hillary Clinton in lockstep is their lack of conviction and a political timidity that arises from 1) capture by the big donors, and 2) past failures that have sapped self-confidence. Their uniform commitment to a flaccid orthodoxy has been evident for all to see these past few weeks as Hillary Clinton's supporters hit the panic button. It has not been a pretty performance.

From the Editors of *The New York Times* and Paul Krugman (who now sees Hillary Clinton as the heir to Obama whom he hagiographically refers to as “one of the most consequential and successful Presidents in American history”) to the feminist brigade headed by Gloria Steinem and Madeleine Albright, Democratic stalwarts have embarrassed themselves by their contrived and specious arguments for Clinton.

This is not to say that there isn't a reasonable and logical case to be made for voting for her. It is the falsity of the presentation by those eminences that reveals the hollowness at the party's core. Its leaders never miss an opportunity to display their political obtuseness and fearfulness about leaving their very narrow, personal comfort zone.

The blunt truth is that the Democratic leadership has been meek and fearful for decades. They can't stand the sight of blood especially if it's their opponents. It took Newt Gingrich in 2012 to make an issue of predatory hedge funds and private equity. Reluctantly picked up by Obama, it resonated well so well that a gaggle of Wall Street operatives led by Steven Ratner called the White House to express vehemently their displeasure. Obama pulled the ads. (Jane Meyer *Dark Money*).

Now it is Donald Trump who boldly steps forth to declare that the intervention in Iraq was based on lies, and that it is the source of our current troubles in the region. No Democrat, including Sanders, is ready to make that case with equal force. None has since 2008. One can go on and on. It's a loser's mentality. You don't get to the White House by walking on eggshells.

In the end, Hillary Clinton in all likelihood will be the nominee. Equally true, she will arrive at the convention in Philadelphia D.O.A. That is to say, D.O.A. if the Republicans somehow free themselves from their adrenalin-soaked tantrum to nominate a sensible candidate. For the Democrats' one hope is that the opposition continue on its suicidal track that runs parallel to their own. Such is the state of American politics.

Michael Brenner is a professor of international affairs at the University of Pittsburgh.

The Big Issue Is Big Money

The biggest falsehood of Hillary Clinton's campaign is to call Bernie Sanders a “single-issue” candidate, since he has actually addressed many issues. But

Michael Winship says there's some truth in the charge because Sanders has identified Big Money as the root of many problems and that is true.

By Michael Winship

Maybe it's that 50,000-year-old, Neanderthal DNA scientists say a lot of us possess, but this feels like the most brutal, vicious and mendacious political year since the days when politicians traded jugs of corn whiskey for votes, fought duels, and flagellated opponents to near death with canes.

In last Saturday night's Republican debate, the words "lie," "lying" and "liar" were fired off by the candidates against each other like volleys in a paintball tournament. On the other hand, statements that were, in fact, true were greeted with booing. Booing.

In one of his rare, stopped-watch-is-right-twice-a-day moments, Donald Trump said, "Obviously the war in Iraq was a big, fat mistake, all right? George Bush made a mistake, we can make mistakes. But that one was a beauty." Who could argue with that? Boos.

Trump continued, "They lied. They said there were weapons of mass destruction there were none. And they knew there were none. There were no weapons of mass destruction." More and louder boos.

Jeb Bush protested and Trump threw in, "The World Trade Center came down during your brother's reign, remember that. That's not keeping us safe." The boos turned into roars of anger.

Even debate moderator John Dickerson came under attack. Just hours after Antonin Scalia's death had been revealed, Ted Cruz claimed, "We have 80 years of precedent of not confirming Supreme Court justices in an election year." Dickerson corrected him, pointing out that Justice Anthony Kennedy was confirmed 28 years ago in an election year, 1988. The GOP crowd booed as if Dickerson had just announced that the national anthem was being changed to "Midnight at the Oasis."

Have we so lost touch that the truth no longer sets us free but inspires braying derision? Have so-called "reality television," and social media plagued with trolling and conspiracy theories so melted our brains that when facts get in the way of whatever nonsense we prefer to believe, we bellow like wounded beasts?

In comparison, two nights earlier, the Democratic debate co-sponsored by the *PBS NewsHour* was more *Downton Abbey* than *Duck Dynasty*. (Truth: While different members of the *Duck Dynasty* clan actually have endorsed Trump and Cruz, the aristocrats at *Downton* are still debating primogeniture and the three-field

system.)

Although tempers flared between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, and the discussion of Henry Kissinger's role in U.S. diplomatic history veered toward Cloud Cuckooland, about as heated as it got was the moment Sanders told Clinton she had leveled "a low blow" when she accused him of not loving Barack Obama and his administration as much as she does.

"Last I heard we lived in a democratic society." Sanders replied. "Last I heard, a United States senator had the right to disagree with the president, including a president who has done such an extraordinary job." Not much was made of the derision Hillary and Bill Clinton cast toward Barack Obama during the 2008 primary campaign.

But the major falsehood of the evening happened at the very end of the debate in Hillary Clinton's closing remarks. "You know," she began, "we agree that we've got to get unaccountable money out of politics. We agree that Wall Street should never be allowed to wreck Main Street again." So far, so good.

"But here's the point I want to make tonight," she continued. "I am not a single-issue candidate," she declared, "and I do not believe we live in a single-issue country." She was accusing Sanders of ignoring all the other troubles facing America at home and abroad by fixating on Wall Street and money in politics.

Having tried it out on the debate stage, this has become Secretary Clinton's campaign theme ever since; that Sanders' vision is too tunnel-like for him to be president. But note first that she focuses that argument on Sanders' desire to punish the financial industry while almost completely ignoring his position on the corrosive influence of money on all aspects of politics and government. Maybe because she is the beneficiary of so much of it.

In Nevada last Saturday she asked, "If we broke up the big banks tomorrow, would that end racism? Would that end sexism? Would that end discrimination against the L.G.B.T. community? Would that make people feel more welcoming to immigrants overnight?"

And in Harlem on Tuesday she declared, "I am absolutely committed to ensuring that no bank is too big to fail, and no executive too powerful to jail. But Flint reminds us, my friends, there's a lot more going on in our country that we should be concerned about."

To which Sanders replied, as he told reporters last weekend, "The American people understand that we are the only major nation on earth that doesn't guarantee health care for all people. The American people understand that we

have got to aggressively deal with climate change, in order to give our children and our grandchildren a planet that is healthy and habitable. The idea in terms of education that we must make public colleges and universities tuition free. We have got to raise the minimum wage to a living wage. It's not one issue."

But in a way, it is, and Sanders sort of sells himself short when he argues too much in the other direction. For in fact, until the door is slammed shut on money in politics and until the banks are pummeled into line, most of our other problems aren't going away any time soon. What's more, everything stems from one bigger issue that affects and overwhelms all else.

First, let's run through some of the aforementioned problems. Flint?

Environmental and institutional racism to be sure, but perpetrated by the administration of Rick Snyder, a rich Republican governor, his election funded by his plutocrat pals, committed to cutting back government as he raised taxes on the poor and slashed corporate taxes by \$1.7 billion a year.

"The tragedy in Flint was a choice," United Steelworkers President Leo Gerard recently wrote at *In These Times* magazine. "This was a values decision about what was important. Giving a break to big business was the top priority for venture capitalist Snyder. Operating a shoddy government, over-taxing pensioners and poisoning Flint's children was the result."

Nor is real, significant progress going to be made on climate change until we do something about the \$31.8 million given to candidates by energy and natural resource interests in 2015-16. (Top recipients: Ted Cruz, Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski, Jeb Bush and Hillary Clinton.)

The notions of free college tuition (which Clinton opposes) and a living wage are fiercely fought against by lobbyists overseeing millions in campaign contributions. The growth of Hillary Clinton's opposition to Medicare-for-all seems correlated to the cash donations received, David Sirota at *International Business Times* reports, "Clinton has vacuumed in roughly \$13.2 million from sources in the health sector, according to data compiled by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics. That includes \$11.2 million from the sector when Clinton was a senator and \$2 million from health industry sources during her 2016 presidential campaign."

Even when discussing institutional racism, as happened on Chris Hayes' MSNBC talk show Monday night, Clinton spokesperson Karen Finney started talking about "housing and redlining and access to capital" all things that are part of the stranglehold on financing for people of color perpetrated by the very financial institutions Bernie Sanders has pledged to punish.

Ultimately, deep down, no matter the candidate, the fact is there is only one true issue here in these United States. As a banker says in *The Mark and the Void*, Paul Murray's recent novel, "What's the one reliable area of growth in the twenty-first century? Inequality."

Now let the booing commence.

Michael Winship is the Emmy Award-winning senior writer of Moyers & Company and BillMoyers.com, and a former senior writing fellow at the policy and advocacy group Demos. Follow him on Twitter at [@MichaelWinship](https://twitter.com/MichaelWinship). [This story first appeared at <http://billmoyers.com/story/maybe-it-is-a-single-issue-election/>]

Feeling the Bern Across America

Many political pundits see Bernie Sanders's New Hampshire landslide as a fluke and look to Hillary Clinton's Southern "firewall" to bring the Democratic race back to its expected course. But Lisa Pease has examined the Sanders campaign and sees an opening instead for a national course correction.

By Lisa Pease

Bernie Sanders can absolutely win the Democratic Party's nomination. He's still way behind Hillary Clinton in a number of Super Tuesday states. But you have to have worked on or followed presidential campaign politics to understand the power of momentum. If you ask any campaign leader which they'd rather have, the lead or momentum, they will usually choose momentum.

Leads can dissolve quickly in the face of momentum. Nationally, Hillary Clinton used to lead Sanders by an average of about 20 percentage points. But in the wake of Sanders's surprising performance in Iowa and his 22-point margin of victory in New Hampshire, [the latest Quinnipiac poll](#) shows he and Hillary are statistically tied across the country.

How did this happen? Did people suddenly remember they didn't like Hillary Clinton? No. Many are suddenly finding out that they actually like Bernie Sanders, a lot.

Where Sanders has actively campaigned, he's closed, to borrow his Brooklyn vernacular, "Yuge" polling gaps to tie or pass Clinton in several states. For most of last year, Sanders was behind Clinton in New Hampshire by a large margin. These were, we were told, the people who "knew" him "well" because he was their "next-door" neighbor. But that wasn't true. People really didn't know

him. When they found out who he was, not only did he win, he got more votes in New Hampshire than any other candidate, Democrat or Republican, in history.

The polls in South Carolina currently show Clinton well ahead. But guess what? Sanders only personally entered the state as part of his official South Carolina campaign this week. And Sanders is now running a powerful four-minute ad featuring Erica Garner, the daughter of Eric Garner, who was tragically choked to death in New York by the police even as he said "I can't breathe."

The ad, which features Erica Garner for more than three minutes and Sanders for less than one, is heartbreaking and genuine. People are learning, through Erica Garner, someone many in the Black Lives Matter movement know and trust, who Sanders is and why they should care.

Before New Hampshire, Sanders was pretty far behind in Nevada. After a few days of actively campaigning there, he is statistically tied with Clinton in a state he "couldn't" win because there's a large bloc of minority voters, mostly Hispanic. If Sanders pulls off a victory in Nevada this weekend, the boost from that win might put him in a position to pull off an upset in South Carolina as well.

Hillary Clinton's campaign understands this. Even before the polls closed in New Hampshire, the Clinton campaign had issued a statement to the media not only downplaying Sanders's impending victory, but emphasizing Clinton's lead in Super Tuesday states, as if foreshadowing a possible loss in Nevada and South Carolina. But if Sanders wins Nevada and South Carolina, what will he have? Yuge momentum.

What fuels Sanders's popularity? When Bill Clinton ran for office, on the wall in the War Room his team posted the message, "It's the economy, stupid." Bill Clinton wanted to talk about everything under the sun and his campaign had to keep refocusing him on the thing that mattered most, not to Bill Clinton, but to the voters.

Today, for a significant number of Americans, the economy is still the thing that keeps them awake at night, wondering how they'll pay their bills, making awful choices between buying food or medicine because they can't afford both in the same week. Sanders doesn't need anyone to post a message in his war room. This is his life's cause. He's been preaching economic fairness since he first entered politics. He's as focused as a beacon on this.

Sanders grew up without a lot of money. And even after college, Sanders was at times without work and had to learn to live on next to nothing. He understands at the most visceral level what it's like to not know where your next paycheck

is coming from.

Hillary Clinton has tried to make Sanders's focus on economics into a flaw, calling him a "one-issue candidate." First, that's simply untrue, because Sanders does speak on many issues. He brings up health care, climate change, and college affordability at every speaking event. A Washington Post reporter this week counted 20 different issues in Sanders's recent talk in Michigan.

But second, it still *is* "the economy, stupid." That's the common concern among the vast majority of Americans. When you're living paycheck to paycheck, it's hard to care about much else.

That's why Bernie gains in popularity the more people know about him. That's why when voters get to listen to him directly, via ads or appearances, his polling numbers rise. That's why people who attend his rallies can't stop talking about him to their friends. They've seen the truth and they want to share it.

Sanders is "the one who cares," said a Rolling Stone editor in an article where Matt Taibbi, one of the most cynical political commentators on the scene, wrote unabashedly, "Sanders genuinely, sincerely, does not care about optics. He is the rarest of Washington animals, a completely honest person. If he's motivated by anything other than a desire to use his influence to protect people who can't protect themselves, I've never seen it. Bernie Sanders is the kind of person who goes to bed at night thinking about how to increase the heating-oil aid program for the poor."

The "Socialist" Bogeyman

The dreaded "socialist" label people thought would be the death of his candidacy just doesn't have the punch it once did. Most people under 50, who didn't grow up associating that word with the ideologies of Lenin or the horrors of war, don't have the same negative feeling that older people were, for decades, programmed to evince.

One of the most surprising things of this campaign season is that, despite Clinton having hired a number of Obama's operatives from his successful presidential runs, it's Sanders's campaign that is attracting the creativity many experienced in the Obama campaign in 2008.

The popular Twitter hashtag #FeelTheBern was concocted not by campaign staff but by a digital strategist named Winnie Wong and her team. It's caught on like wildfire. In fact, it was that hashtag that inspired me to learn more about his campaign.

In a flash, I realized how big Sanders was going to be. It was the same feeling

I had when I first saw Windows and knew the future of computing was going to be a graphical interface. It was the same feeling I had when I saw the first Netscape browser giving me access to the newly public "Worldwide Web." I realized that Sanders was going to be, as his campaign crowds now echo when he says the word, "YUGE."

Activists wrote a song for him called Bernie Bae (Bae = before anyone else). Others are creating cool artwork. One of my favorites is a remake of a Michael Jordan silhouette showing present-day Bernie going up for a basket. I find myself drawn not to just to the man and the issues but to the creativity of the campaign itself. Say what you want about who has more experience or is better qualified to run the country. Currently, Sanders has put together a staff that is outperforming Clinton's at every turn.

And that should alarm Hillary Clinton and her supporters, because she's been here before. Another candidate came and swept the youth vote out from beneath her and rode that wave all the way to the White House just eight years ago. Hasn't she learned from past mistakes? What's the good of having experience if you don't learn the lessons presented?

Clinton also carries baggage that Sanders does not. She's received millions of dollars from Wall Street and is therefore not credible when she speaks to reining in their excesses. And her history shows her "evolving" on issues in direct correlation to public polling on those same issues. Sanders came out in support of gays and gay marriage long before polling told him he could. Hillary Clinton didn't.

And then there's Clinton's Iraq War vote. Like the blood on Lady MacBeth's, it's the stain on her record she can never wash away, no matter how many times she's tried. Her vote helped pave the way to the killing of more than a million Iraqis, who never did have WMDs, and who had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks. Even I, sitting in California reading only public sources, could see that there were no WMD in Iraq. I want the president to be at least as smart as I am, and preferably a lot smarter.

Momentum as King

If momentum is king in campaigns, losing momentum usually indicates a campaign in trouble. And as commentators have noted, when a campaign is in trouble, it's usually the candidate, not the campaign staff, that is at fault.

In Bernie Sanders's unprecedented win in New Hampshire, a serious issue appeared. Clinton had lost in every demographic but one: voters over 65 years old. That's terrible news for Clinton, because according to the Pew Research

Center, as of 2015, the largest voting bloc was no longer Baby Boomers, but Millennials. Her campaign thought she had the female vote locked up. But a generational divide has split the party asunder, and the youth, ironically, favor the septuagenarian.

A Demographic Revolution

In the 1950s, Hillary could have been a sure thing. There were only three TV networks and nearly everyone watched them. Controlling the media narrative was easy if you were a favorite of the Establishment. But in 2016, many Millennials have turned off their cable and become pull, not push, consumers of news.

These young voters “Google” the articles they want to read. They don’t wait to be told what their opinion should be by Chris Matthews. They read a lot of sources and make up their own minds.

In the 1950s, a candidate could be “reinvented” and repackaged in a way more palatable to the voters, based on polling. But today, once you say anything as a public figure, it can live on the Internet forever. You cannot reinvent yourself. If Sanders’s biggest problem is that, to many voters, he’s still an unknown quantity, Hillary Clinton’s got the opposite problem: voters know too much about her, and according to exit polls, they don’t trust her.

Sanders’s campaign on the other hand is perfectly timed. He could never have won in the political/media environment of the 1950s. His candidacy is only now possible for the same reasons that Clinton’s campaign may prove impossible: people can find out for themselves who he really is (and who she really is). People can find the back story he won’t put on his campaign site even as the mainstream media barely discusses him. (According to Media Matters, in 2015 ABC World News Tonight gave Bernie Sanders roughly 20 seconds of coverage while giving Donald Trump 81 minutes).

Millennials can attend his rallies virtually via a YouTube channel. They can watch him shooting hoops while waiting for Clinton to give her concession speech before he could give his victory one. (Even Fox News host Megyn Kelly was amazed that Sanders was making all his baskets and blurted out, “Nicely done, Bern!”).

Most of all, Sanders is the candidate of consistent pragmatism. While Clinton likes to say she’s a “Progressive who gets things done,” in reality, Sanders has a longer and deeper record of achievements. As Mayor of Burlington, Vermont, a position he won against a popular Democratic incumbent, he balanced his budgets and took care of his people so much that he was reelected in a landslide.

As a Vermont Representative and, later, a Senator, Sanders became known as the

Amendment King. Even in the most partisan of times, Bernie Sanders still found ways to reach across the aisle and make the system work for veterans and others.

Several of my friends have expressed the fear that Sanders is the new George McGovern who will go down in a landslide. I remember vividly watching the 1972 election on TV and that horrible sinking feeling as each new state gave its Electoral College votes to Richard Nixon. But Nixon was an incumbent president in his second term.

And Sanders is not McGovern in another way. Economic disparity is far greater now than it was in 1972. And there is no “conventional wisdom” narrative to overcome for Internet-savvy voters.

When the markets go too far in an insupportable direction, inevitably, a course correction ensues. I’m convinced the same thing happens in politics, and that we are in such a moment. It’s rare that there’s an opening for someone like Bernie Sanders. We should not miss this incredible opportunity.

I’m confident that if America gets the chance to know Bernie Sanders, the nonbelievers will start to “feel the Bern” and help this smart, honest, hardworking and able man issue a course correction. For too long, our Ship of State has been listing too far to the right. It’s time to add heft to the left to bring our Ship back to an upright position.

Lisa Pease is a writer who has examined issues ranging from the Kennedy assassination to voting irregularities in recent U.S. elections.

Hillary Clinton and the Dogs of War

Former Secretary of State Clinton grudgingly admits her Iraq War vote was a “mistake,” but it was not a one-off misjudgment. Clinton has consistently stood for a war-like U.S. foreign policy that ignores international law and relies on brinkmanship and military force, writes Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

A poll taken in Iowa before the presidential caucus found that 70 percent of Democrats surveyed trusted Hillary Clinton on foreign policy more than Bernie Sanders. But her record as Secretary of State was very different from that of her successor, John Kerry, who has overseen groundbreaking diplomatic breakthroughs with Iran, Cuba and, in a more limited context, even with Russia and Syria.

In fact, Clinton's use of the term "diplomacy" in talking about her own record is idiosyncratic in that it refers almost entirely to assembling "coalitions" to support U.S. threats, wars and sanctions against other countries, rather than to peacefully resolving international disputes without the threat or use of force, as normally understood by the word "diplomacy" and as required by the UN Charter.

There is another term for what Clinton means when she says "diplomacy," and that is "brinkmanship," which means threatening war to back up demands on other governments. In the real world, brinkmanship frequently leads to war when neither side will back down, at which point its only value or purpose is to provide a political narrative to justify aggression.

The two main "diplomatic" achievements Clinton gives herself credit for are: assembling the coalition of NATO and the Arab monarchies that bombed Libya into endless, intractable chaos; and imposing painful sanctions on the people of Iran over what U.S. intelligence agencies concluded by 2007 was a peaceful civilian nuclear program.

Clinton's claim that her brinkmanship "brought Iran to the table" over its "nuclear weapons program" is particularly deceptive. It was in fact Secretary Clinton and President Obama who refused to take "Yes" for an answer in 2010, after Iran agreed to what was originally a U.S. proposal relayed by Turkey and Brazil. Clinton and Obama chose instead to keep ratcheting up sanctions and U.S. and Israeli threats. This was a textbook case of dangerous brinkmanship that was finally resolved by real diplomacy (and real diplomats like Kerry, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif) before it led to war.

That Clinton can peddle such deceptive rhetoric to national prime-time television audiences and yet still be considered trustworthy on foreign policy by many Americans is a sad indictment of the U.S. corporate media's coverage of foreign policy, including a willful failure to distinguish between diplomacy and brinkmanship.

But Michael Crowley, now the senior foreign affairs correspondent for *Politico*, formerly with Time and the New Republic, has analyzed Clinton's foreign policy record over the course of her career, and his research has shed light on her Iraq War vote, her personal influences and her underlying views of U.S. foreign policy, all of which deserve serious scrutiny from American voters.

The results of Crowley's research reveal that Clinton believes firmly in the post-Cold War ambition to establish the U.S. threat or use of force as the ultimate arbiter of international affairs. She does not believe that the U.S.

should be constrained by the UN Charter or other rules of international law from threatening or attacking other countries when it can make persuasive political arguments for doing so.

This places Clinton squarely in the “humanitarian interventionist” camp with her close friend and confidante Madeleine Albright, but also in underlying if unspoken agreement with the “neocons” who brought us the Iraq War and the self-fulfilling and ever-expanding “war on terror.”

Neoconservatism and humanitarian interventionism emerged in the 1990s as parallel ways to exploit the post-Cold War “power dividend,” each with its own approach to overcoming legal, diplomatic and political obstacles to the unbridled expansion of U.S. military power. In general, Democratic power brokers favored the humanitarian interventionist approach, while Republicans embraced neoconservatism, but their underlying goals were the same: to politically legitimize U.S. hegemony in the post-Cold War era.

The most self-serving ideologues, like Robert Kagan and his wife Victoria Nuland, soon mastered the nuances of both ideologies and have moved smoothly between administrations of both parties. Victoria Nuland, Dick Cheney’s deputy foreign policy adviser, became Secretary Clinton’s spokesperson and went on to plan the 2014 coup in Ukraine. Robert Kagan, who co-founded the neocon Project for the New American Century with William Kristol in 1997, was appointed by Clinton to the State Department’s Foreign Affairs Policy Board in 2011.

Kagan wrote of Clinton in 2014, “I feel comfortable with her on foreign policy. If she pursues a policy which we think she will pursue, it’s something that might have been called neocon, but clearly her supporters are not going to call it that; they are going to call it something else.”

In the Clinton White House

In her husband’s White House in the 1990s, Hillary Clinton was not an outsider to the foreign policy debates that laid the groundwork for these new ideologies of U.S. power, which have since unleashed such bloody and intractable conflicts across the world.

In 1993, at a meeting between Clinton’s transition team and Bush’s National Security Council, Madeleine Albright challenged then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell on his “Powell Doctrine” of limited war. Albright asked him, “What’s the point of having this superb military you’re always talking about if we can’t use it?”

Hillary Clinton found common ground with Albright, and has likewise derided the Powell doctrine for limiting U.S. military action to “splendid little wars” like

the invasions of Grenada, Panama and Kuwait, apparently forgetting that these are the only wars the U.S. has actually won since 1945.

Hillary Clinton reportedly "insist(ed)" on Albright's nomination as Secretary of State in December 1996, and they met regularly at the State Department during Bill Clinton's second term for in-depth foreign policy discussions aided by White House and State Department staff. Albright called their relationship "an unprecedented partnership."

With Defense Secretary William Cohen, Albright oversaw the crystallization of America's aggressive post-Cold War foreign policy in the late 1990s. As UN Ambassador, she maintained and justified sanctions on Iraq, even as they killed hundreds of thousands of children. As Secretary of State, she led the push for the illegal U.S. assault on Yugoslavia in 1999, which set the fateful precedent for further U.S. violations of the U.N. Charter in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Syria.

James Rubin, Albright's State Department spokesman, remembers strained phone calls between Albright and U.K. Foreign Secretary Robin Cook during the planning for the bombing of Yugoslavia. Cook told Albright the U.K. government was having problems "with its lawyers" because attacking Yugoslavia without authorization by the U.N. Security Council would violate the UN Charter. Albright told him the U.K. should "get new lawyers."

Like Secretary Albright, Hillary Clinton strongly supported NATO's illegal aggression against Yugoslavia. In fact, she later told Talk magazine that she called her husband from Africa to plead with him to order the use of force. "I urged him to bomb," she said, "You cannot let this go on at the end of a century that has seen the major holocaust of our time. What do we have NATO for if not to defend our way of life?"

After the U.S.-U.K. bombing and invasion, the NATO protectorate of Kosovo quickly descended into chaos and organized crime. Hashim Thaci, the gangster who the U.S. installed as its first prime minister, now faces indictment for the very war crimes that U.S. bombing enabled and supported in 1999, including credible allegations that he organized the extrajudicial execution of Serbs to harvest and sell their internal organs.

On Clinton's holocaust reference, the U.S. and U.K. did carpet-bomb Germany at the height of the Nazi Holocaust, but bombing could not stop the genocide of European Jews any more than it can have a "humanitarian" impact today. The Western allies' decision to rely mainly on bombing throughout 1942 and 1943 while the Red Army's "boots on the ground" and the civilians in the concentration camps died in their millions cast a long shadow on today's policy

debates over Syria, Iraq and Libya.

War is always an atrocity and a crime, but relying on bombing and drones to avoid putting “boots on the ground” is uniquely dangerous because it gives politicians the illusion that they can wage war without political risk. In the longer term, from London in the Blitz to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos to Islamic State and drone victims today, bombing has always been the surest way to provoke righteous anger, stiffen resistance and reap a whirlwind of blowback.

The 140,000 bombs and missiles the U.S. and its allies have rained down on at least seven countries since 2001 are the poisonous seeds of a harvest of intractable conflict that is still gathering strength after 14 years of war.

The Clinton administration formalized its illegal doctrine of unilateral military force in its 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review, declaring, “When the interests at stake are vital we should do whatever it takes to defend them, including, when necessary, the unilateral use of military power. U.S. vital national interests include preventing the emergence of a hostile regional coalition (and) ensuring uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies and strategic resources.”

Arguments based on “vital interests” are dangerous precisely because they are politically persuasive to the citizens of any country. But this is precisely the justification for war that the U.N. Charter was designed to prohibit, as the U.K.’s senior legal adviser, Sir Gerald Fitzmaurice, explained to his government during the Suez crisis in 1956. He wrote, “The plea of vital interest, which has been one of the main justifications for wars in the past, is indeed the very one which the U.N. Charter was intended to exclude.”

Senator Clinton’s Iraq War Vote

Sixteen years after the bombing of Yugoslavia, bombing to “prevent holocausts” and wars to “defend” ill-defined and virtually unlimited U.S. interests have succeeded only in launching a new holocaust that has killed at least 1.6 million people and plunged a dozen countries into intractable chaos.

As Republican Senator Lincoln Chafee wrote of his colleagues who voted to authorize war on Iraq in 2002, “Helping a rogue President start an unnecessary war should be a career-ending lapse of judgment...”

As the results of that decision keep spinning farther out of control, it seems increasingly remarkable that U.S. officials who authorized a war based on lies with millions of lives in the balance still have careers in public policy. If it costs Clinton another presidential nomination, that is a small price to pay when weighed against the holocaust she helped to unleash on tens of

millions of people.

But what if her vote for an illegal and devastating war was not a momentary “lapse of judgment”, but was in fact consistent with her views then and her views now?

As the Bush administration lobbied senators to support the Iraq AUMF in 2002, Senator Clinton had several private chats with Deputy National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, an old friend from Yale Law School. An unnamed Bush official, possibly Hadley, told Michael Crowley, “I was kind of pleasantly surprised by her attitude.”

But Albright’s former assistant James Rubin was not surprised by Clinton’s vote on Iraq. He found it consistent with the position of the Clinton administration and Albright’s State Department that U.S. “diplomacy” must be backed up by the threat of military force.

“I think there is a connection to her vote,” Rubin told Michael Crowley, “which is recognizing that the right combination of force and diplomacy (sic) can achieve America’s objectives. Sometimes, to get things done – like getting inspectors back into Iraq – you do have to be prepared to threaten force.”

But this evades the critical question of U.S. obligations under the U.N. Charter, which prohibits the threat and use of force. Senator Levin introduced an amendment to the Iraq AUMF bill that would have only authorized the use of force if it was approved by the U.N. Security Council. Senator Clinton voted against that amendment, making it clear that she supported the threat and use of force against Iraq whether it was legal or not.

Clinton has defended her vote on the basis of providing a credible threat of force to back up the call for inspections, in keeping with her long-standing preference for threats and brinkmanship over diplomacy. But the problem with threats of force is that they often lead to the use of force, as we have now seen repeatedly since the U.S. has embraced this aggressive and illegal approach to international affairs.

This is exactly why the U.N. Charter prohibits the threat as well as the use of force. The absolute priority of world leaders in 1945 was peace, and so the U.N. Charter prohibited both the threat and use of force, based on bitter experience of how the one so easily leads to the other.

The fundamental shift in U.S. foreign policy since the 1980s has been to renounce peace as an overriding priority and to politically legitimize U.S. war-making. The U.S. has therefore, without public debate, abandoned FDR’s post-WWII “permanent structure of peace” based on the U.N. Charter. The U.S. also

withdrew from the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, after it found the U.S. guilty of aggression against Nicaragua in 1986, and it likewise rejects the jurisdiction of the new International Criminal Court.

U.S. government lawyers now pass off political arguments as legal cover for aggression, torture, killing civilians and other war crimes, secure in the knowledge that they will never be forced to defend their legally indefensible opinions in impartial courts.

When President George W. Bush unveiled his illegal “doctrine of preemption” in 2002, Sen. Edward Kennedy called it, “a call for Twenty-first Century American imperialism that no other nation can or should accept.”

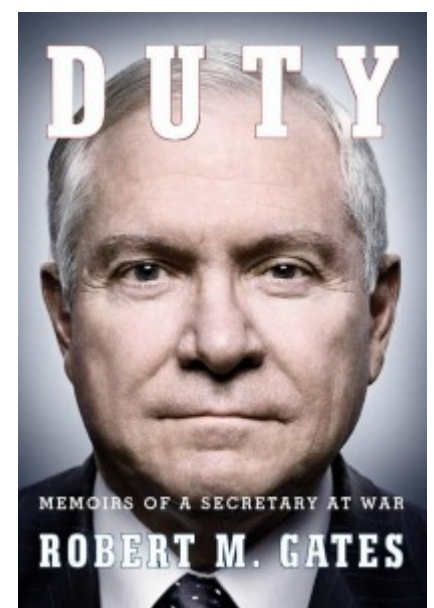
But the same must be said of this entire decades-long effort by the Clintons, Bushes, Albright, Cheney and others to liberate the U.S. military industrial complex from the restraints placed upon it by the rule of international law.

Secretary of State – Iraq and Afghanistan

Hillary Clinton’s actions as Secretary of State were consistent with her role working with her husband and Madeleine Albright in the 1990s, and in the Senate with the Bush administration, to fundamentally corrupt U.S. foreign policy.

Robert Gates’s book, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, has provided revealing insights into Clinton’s personal contributions to White House foreign policy debates on the vital issues of Obama’s first term, in which she was always the most hawkish of Obama’s senior advisers, more hawkish than his Republican Secretary of Defense.

At Clinton’s first “town hall” with foreign service officers at the State Department, Steve Kashkett of the American Foreign Service Association asked Clinton how soon the State Department’s deployment of 1,200 staff to the massive U.S. occupation headquarters in Baghdad would be reduced “to that of a normal diplomatic mission” to ease critical understaffing at other U.S. embassies all over the world.



Clinton instead launched a “civilian surge,” doubling the

already overweight State Department deployment in Baghdad to 2,400. When the Iraqi government refused to allow 3,000 U.S. troops to remain in Iraq to protect the embassy staff – and Clinton had wanted even more than that – she hired 7,000 heavily-armed mercenaries to do the job instead.

As Clinton doubled down on the failed U.S. effort to control a puppet government in Iraq whose courageous people's resistance had already made U.S. military occupation unsustainable, she was also keen to put the lives of more U.S. troops on the line in the even longer-running quagmire in Afghanistan.

When President Obama took office, there were 34,400 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, but only 645 had been killed in seven years of combat. A Pew poll found that only 18 percent of Afghans surveyed wanted more U.S. troops in their country.

Secretary Clinton backed Obama's first decision to commit an additional 30,000 troops to the war. Then, in mid-2009, General Stanley McChrystal submitted a request for a second increase of 40,000 troops. He also submitted a classified assessment that a genuine campaign to defeat the Taliban and its allies would require 500,000 U.S. troops for five years, acknowledging that neither 65,000 nor 105,000 troops could possibly achieve that.

Clinton supported McChrystal's request and was eager to match it with a State Department "civilian surge" like the one in Iraq. Among Obama's other advisers, Vice President Joe Biden opposed any further escalation, while Secretary Gates recommended a smaller increase of 30,000 troops, which was what Obama ultimately approved.

When Obama and his aides debated the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, Clinton was again the most hawkish, arguing for no reduction in troop strength until 2013. In a typically arbitrary political compromise, Obama split the difference between Clinton and the doves and ordered the first withdrawals to begin in September 2012.

By the time the U.S. "combat mission" ended in 2014, 2,356 U.S. troops had met their deaths in the "graveyard of empires." In 2016, the Taliban and its allies control more of Afghanistan than at any time since 2001, as they fight to expel the 10,000 U.S. troops still deployed there.

A complete withdrawal of foreign troops has always been the Taliban's first precondition for opening serious peace talks with the government, so the 2009-10 escalations, which Clinton backed to the hilt, served only to kill 1,711 more Americans and tens of thousands of Afghans, prolonging the war and undermining diplomacy in the futile hope of saving a corrupt regime of U.S.-backed warlords and drug-lords.

President Obama's latest plan, to keep at least 5,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan indefinitely, ensures that the war will continue into the next administration, even as Islamic State begins to move into another failed state already devastated by more than 60,000 U.S. bombs and missiles.

Secretary of State – Libya and Syria

President Obama's advisers were even more divided over launching a new war to overthrow the government of Libya. Despite Secretary Gates telling a Congressional hearing that the first phase of a "no-fly zone" would be a bombing campaign to destroy Libyan air defenses, a Pew poll found that, while 44 percent of the public supported a "no-fly zone," only 16 percent supported "bombing Libyan air defenses." Even after being caught with its pants down over Iraq, the U.S. corporate media has not lost its talent for confusing Americans into war.

Secretary Gates wrote in *Duty* that he was so opposed to U.S. intervention in Libya that he considered resigning. President Obama was so undecided that he called his final decision a "51-49 call." The other advocates for bombing were U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice and National Security Council staffers Ben Rhodes and Samantha Power, so Secretary Clinton was the most senior, and almost certainly the decisive voice in sealing the fate of Muammar Gaddafi and the people of Libya.

Despite a U.N. resolution that authorized military force only to "protect civilians," the U.S. and its allies intervened to support forces who were explicitly fighting to overthrow the Libyan government. NATO and its Arab monarchist allies conducted 7,700 air strikes in seven months, while NATO warships shelled coastal cities. The rebel forces on the ground, including Islamist fundamentalists, were trained and led on the ground by Qatari, British, French and Jordanian special forces.

In their short-sighted triumphalism over Libya, NATO and Arab monarchist leaders thought they had finally found a model for regime change that worked. Seduced by the blood-drenched mirage in the Libyan desert, they made the cynical decision to double down on what they knew very well would be a longer, more complicated and bloodier proxy war in Syria.

Only a few months after a gleeful Secretary Clinton hailed the sodomy and assassination of Gaddafi, unmarked NATO planes were flying fighters and weapons from Libya to the "Free Syrian Army" training base at Iskenderum in Turkey, where British and French special forces provided more training and the CIA and JSOC infiltrated them into Syria.

Residents of Aleppo were shocked to find their city invaded, not by Syrian

rebels, but by Islamist fighters from Chechnya, Uzbekistan, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Egypt. Despite the already brutal repression of the Syrian government, a Qatari-funded YouGov poll in December 2011 found that 55 percent of Syrians still supported their government, understanding that the alternative could be much worse.

Secretary Clinton and French President Nicolas Sarkozy assembled the Orwellian "Friends of Syria" coalition that undermined Kofi Annan's 2012 peace plan by committing more funding, arms and support to their proxy forces instead of pressuring them to honor Annan's April 10th ceasefire and begin negotiations for a political transition.

When Annan finally got all the countries involved to sign on to the Geneva communique on June 30, 2012, providing for a new ceasefire and a political transition, he received assurances that it would quickly be formalized in a new U.N. Security Council resolution. Instead, Clinton and her allies revived their precondition that President Assad must resign before any transition could begin, the critical precondition they had set aside in Geneva. With no possibility of agreement in the Security Council, Annan resigned in despair.

Almost four years later, hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been killed in an ever more convoluted and dangerous war, now involving the armed forces of 16 countries, each with their own interests and their own relationships with different proxy forces on the ground. In many areas, the U.S. supports and arms both sides.

Turkey, a NATO member and major U.S. arms buyer, is attacking the YPG Kurdish forces who have been the U.S.'s most effective ally on the ground against Islamic State. And the sectarian government to whom the U.S. handed over the ruins of Iraq is sending U.S.-armed militias to fight U.S.-armed rebels in Syria.

Obama's and Clinton's doctrine of covert and proxy war, by which they still tout drone strikes, JSOC death squads, CIA coups and local proxy forces as politically safe "tools" to project U.S. power across the world without the deployment of U.S. "boots on the ground," has destroyed Libya, Yemen, Syria and Ukraine, and left U.S. foreign policy in an unprecedented crisis.

Hanging over this escalating, out-of-control crisis is the existential danger of war between the U.S. and Russia, who together possess 14,700 nuclear weapons with the destructive power to end life on Earth as we know it. With her demonstrated, deeply-held belief in the superiority of threats, brinkmanship and war over diplomacy and the rule of law, surely the last thing the world needs now is Hillary Clinton playing chicken with the Russians while the fate of

life on Earth hangs in the balance.

Based on Sen. Bernie Sanders' record in Congress, his prescient floor speech during the Iraq War debate in 2002 and his campaign's position statement on "War and Peace", he at least understands the most obvious lesson of U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, that it is easier to unleash the dogs of war than to call them off once they have tasted blood. Incredibly, this makes him almost unique among U.S. leaders of this generation.

But there are real flaws in Sanders's position statement. He cites "vital strategic interests" as a justification for war, dodging the thorny problem that international disputes typically involve "vital strategic interests" on both sides, which the U.N. Charter addresses by requiring them to be resolved peacefully without the threat or use of force.

And instead of pointing out that Clinton's brinkmanship with Iran risked a second war in 10 years over non-existent WMDs, he repeats the canard that Iran was "developing nuclear weapons" before the signing of the JCPOA in 2015.

Sen. Sanders has launched an unprecedented campaign to challenge the way powerful vested interests have corrupted our elections, our political system and our economy. But the same interests have also corrupted our foreign policy, squandering our national wealth on weapons and war, killing millions of people and plunging country after country into war, ruin and chaos.

To succeed, the Sanders "revolution" must restore integrity to our country's role in the world as well as to our political and economic system.

Nicolas J S Davies is the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*. He also wrote the chapters on "Obama at War" in *Grading the 44th President: a Report Card on Barack Obama's First Term as a Progressive Leader*.

Which Democrat Stood for Civil Rights?

The conventional wisdom is that Hillary Clinton is more committed to the African-American community than Bernie Sanders and thus deserves the black vote but Clinton supported the drive toward mass incarceration, vowing to bring young "super-predators to heel," as Marjorie Cohn recalls.

By Marjorie Cohn

Twenty years after the so-called “trial of the century,” FX is presenting the miniseries “The People v. O.J. Simpson.” Like 100 million other people across the country, I watched the 1995 murder trial on television. I also was a legal commentator for CBS News and Court TV.

Cameras in the Courtroom: Television and the Pursuit of Justice, a book I co-authored with veteran CBS News correspondent David Dow, was based largely on the Simpson case. I use transcripts and examples from the trial in my evidence and criminal procedure classes at Thomas Jefferson School of Law in San Diego. I am still convinced that race played a major role in the not-guilty verdict.

It is no surprise that the miniseries begins with the vicious 1991 beating of Rodney King and the riots that ensued after the 1992 acquittal of the four Los Angeles Police Department officers who assaulted King. The incident, which had been recorded on videotape, went viral.

The jurors in the Simpson trial were well aware of the King case. Nine of the jurors were African-American, and one was Latino. The case was tried in downtown Los Angeles. These jurors knew the LAPD was notorious for committing misconduct, especially against blacks, and they could well believe that the police had framed Simpson. The prosecution made several strategic errors that enabled the jury to find reasonable doubt. Since the jurors were sequestered for nine months, they became a tight unit. It didn't take them long to agree on the not-guilty verdict.

During the preliminary hearing, LAPD Detective Mark Fuhrman denied that he had used the N-word in the previous 10 years. At trial, the defense presented two witnesses who testified that Fuhrman had recently used the expletive. Since the preliminary hearing was televised, these defense witnesses came forward after seeing Fuhrman's testimony on TV. The issue shifted from Simpson's guilt to Fuhrman's racism.

As prosecutor Marcia Clark intoned during the trial, there was “a mountain of evidence” against Simpson. His blood was discovered at the crime scene in Brentwood, an affluent neighborhood of Los Angeles, and blood matching the victims, Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman, was found on a glove. Three different laboratories analyzed the DNA, but Simpson's “dream team” of top lawyers challenged the collection of the blood evidence and raised the issue of possible contamination. The jury apparently believed that Fuhrman, a racist, could have planted the bloody glove on Simpson's property.

Blacks and whites, by and large, reacted differently to the not-guilty verdict, according to a Los Angeles Times poll. While most white people thought Simpson was guilty, many African-Americans felt vindicated by the verdict. For blacks,

Columbia professor John McWhorter wrote in The New York Times, "it was about the centrality of police brutality to black Americans' very sense of self."

Viewing the verdict 20 years later through the prism of the Black Lives Matter movement, it is not difficult to understand. We see unjustified killings of black men all too often. Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Michael Brown and many others come to mind. "Talk to most black people about racism," McWhorter noted, "and you need only count the seconds before the cops come up."

The country's polarization between "black lives matter" and "all lives matter" and the pundits' divergent opinions on Beyoncé's Super Bowl halftime performance parallel the racial divide we saw in the aftermath of the Simpson trial.

Many white people have tried to dilute the critical slogan "black lives matter" by saying, well, "all lives matter." Of course they do, but the history of this country is permeated with institutional racism and prejudice. Beyoncé's dancers were dressed as Black Panthers, and in her video for her newest single, "Formation," released the day before the Super Bowl, she dramatized the racist response to the Katrina tragedy by lying on a New Orleans police car as it sank into floodwaters.

We have come a long way since the days of slavery and Jim Crow, and we do have a black president. But institutional racism is unfortunately alive and well in the United States. Mass incarceration, racial profiling, infant mortality and lack of access to quality education and health care all disproportionately affect African-Americans.

As we ponder whom to support in the presidential primaries, let us ask ourselves which candidate will passionately and tirelessly fight racism on the institutional level. That means creating jobs, implementing universal health care, ending the militarism of the police and advocating legislation to reduce the draconian sentences that disproportionately impact African-Americans.

It is commonly thought that Hillary Clinton is more committed to the black community than Bernie Sanders is. But in the 1980s, when Clinton was the first lady of Arkansas, she vilified public school teachers and their union. Many or most of them were African-American, and as legal scholar and The New Jim Crow author Michelle Alexander has pointed out, the U.S. prison population increased more under Bill Clinton than any other president. He supported racial disparity in sentencing and the heavy-handed "three strikes."

When Hillary Clinton advocated for the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which created 60 new death penalty offenses, provided \$9.7

billion for prisons and eliminated inmate education programs, “she used racially coded rhetoric to cast black children as animals,” Alexander wrote in *The Nation*.

Clinton said at the time, “They are not just gangs of kids anymore. They are often the kinds of kids that are called ‘super-predators.’ No conscience, no empathy. We can talk about why they ended that way, but first we have bring them to heel.” *Bring them to heel. ...*

When civil rights icon John Lewis announced that the political action committee of the Congressional Black Caucus was endorsing Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election, he said he had never encountered Bernie Sanders during the civil rights movement. But as Tim Murphy points out in *Mother Jones*, Sanders was very active in the movement at the University of Chicago. As president of the University of Chicago’s Congress of Racial Equality, Sanders organized pickets and sit-ins. He was arrested for resisting arrest when he protested segregation.

As Democrats make their choice for presidential nominee, all of us must ask which candidate would better serve the interests of all of us and work to end racism in every possible way.

Marjorie Cohn is a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, criminal defense attorney, and former president of the National Lawyers Guild. She is co-author (with David Dow) of “Cameras in the Courtroom: Television and the Pursuit of Justice.” See <http://marjoriecohn.com/>. You can follow her on Twitter at @marjoriecohn. [This article first appeared on Truthdig http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/lessons_from_the_oj_simpson_case_for_the_presidential_race_20160217]

Hillary Clinton’s Hypocrisy on Dissent

Exclusive: Hillary Clinton says she’s a great defender of American veterans, but when Army vet (and ex-CIA analyst) Ray McGovern was assaulted for silently protesting one of her speeches, she did nothing and newly released emails show she rebuffed an adviser’s proposal to apologize, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Five years ago, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s personal adviser Sidney Blumenthal urged her to apologize to former Army officer (and ex-CIA analyst) Ray McGovern after he was roughly arrested when he stood silently with his back

turned in protest against a Clinton speech, ironically condemning foreign leaders who show intolerance of dissent.

According to an internal email recently released from former Secretary Clinton's private email server, Blumenthal cited "an unfortunate incident" that occurred at her speech at George Washington University in Washington on Feb. 15, 2011. Blumenthal wrote that "something bad happened" and urged Clinton to have someone reach out and apologize to McGovern.

Instead, Clinton, who has declared that "supporting veterans is a sacred responsibility," denied any responsibility for McGovern's brutal arrest, which left the 71-year-old who was wearing a "Veterans for Peace" T-shirt, bloodied and bruised. She also offered no explanation for why she failed to stop the police when the arrest was occurring right in front of her; instead she just continued on with her speech about the need for leaders to respect the rights of dissidents.

In the email, Clinton did tell Blumenthal, "I'll see what else can be done," but it's not clear what that may have been. Afterwards, McGovern became a government target because of what the State Department called his "political activism, primarily anti-war."

Though the criminal charges against McGovern were dropped, he was placed on the State Department's "Be On the Look-out" or BOLO alert list, instructing police to "USE CAUTION, stop" and question him and also contact the State Department's Diplomatic Security Command Center.

After learning of the BOLO alert, the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund (PCJF), which is representing McGovern in connection with the 2011 incident, interceded to have the warning lifted. But McGovern wondered if the warning played a role in 2014 when he was aggressively arrested by New York City police at the entrance to the 92nd Street Y where he had hoped to pose a question to a speaker there, one of Clinton's friendly colleagues, former CIA Director and retired General David Petraeus.

After that arrest on Oct. 30, 2014, McGovern wrote, "God only knows (and then only if God has the proper clearances) what other organs of state security had entered the 'derogatory' information about the danger of my 'political activism' into their data bases. Had my 'derog' been shared, perhaps, with the ever-proliferating number of 'fusion centers' that were so effective in sharing information to track and thwart the activists of Occupy including subversives like Quakers and Catholic Workers?"

Clinton's Speech

On Feb. 15, 2011, McGovern attended Clinton GWU speech, deciding on the spur of the moment after feeling revulsion at the “enthusiastic applause” that welcomed the Secretary of State “to dissociate myself from the obsequious adulation of a person responsible for so much death, suffering and destruction.

“The fulsome praise for Clinton from GW’s president and the loud, sustained applause also brought to mind a phrase that as a former Soviet analyst at CIA I often read in *Pravda*. When reprinting the text of speeches by high Soviet officials, the Communist Party newspaper would regularly insert, in italicized parentheses: ‘*Burniye applaudismenti; vce stoyat*’ , *Stormy applause; all rise*.

“With the others at Clinton’s talk, I stood. I even clapped politely. But as the applause dragged on, I began to feel like a real phony. So, when the others finally sat down, I remained standing silently, motionless, wearing my ‘Veterans for Peace’ T-shirt, with my eyes fixed narrowly on the rear of the auditorium and my back to the Secretary.

“I did not expect what followed: a violent assault in full view of Madam Secretary by what we Soviet analysts used to call the ‘organs of state security.’ The rest is history, as they say. A short account of the incident can be [found here](#).

“As the video of the event shows, Secretary Clinton did not miss a beat in her speech as she called for authoritarian governments to show respect for dissent and to refrain from violence. She spoke with what seemed to be an especially chilly *sang froid*, as she ignored my silent protest and the violent assault which took place right in front of her.

“The experience gave me personal confirmation of the impression that I reluctantly had drawn from watching her behavior and its consequences over the past decade. The incident was a kind of metaphor of the much worse violence that Secretary Clinton has coolly countenanced against others.

“Again and again, Hillary Clinton both as a U.S. senator and as Secretary of State has demonstrated a nonchalant readiness to unleash the vast destructiveness of American military power. The charitable explanation, I suppose, is that she knows nothing of war from direct personal experience.” [For more of McGovern’s account of his arrest, see Consortiumnews.com’s “[Standing Up to War and Hillary Clinton](#).”]

In a civil court filing, the PCJF lawyers described the scene: “As Secretary Clinton was reading from her prepared remarks regarding Egypt’s dictatorship [and] saying, ‘Then the government pulled the plug,’ the then-71-year-old McGovern was forcibly and falsely arrested by GWU police officers, grabbed by

the head, assaulted, and as Secretary Clinton continued undisturbed stating, 'the government ... did not want the world to watch,' Mr. McGovern was removed from public view with excessive and brutal force, taken to jail, and left bleeding with bruises and contusions."

In a press release about Clinton's emails on Thursday, McGovern's attorneys said they had sought State Department emails related to McGovern's arrest but had not received Clinton's email exchange with Blumenthal. Those emails surfaced in connection with congressional inquiries about Clinton conducting State Department business using a private server outside U.S. government control.

Based on the new disclosures, it was clear Clinton knew a great deal about the incident from Blumenthal, including receiving photos of McGovern's injuries.

Blumenthal suggested that Clinton "have someone apologize to Ray McGovern," but referred to the incident and McGovern in condescending terms, noting that McGovern's mistreatment has "become a minor cause célèbre on the Internet among lefties." As for McGovern, Blumenthal said the former CIA analyst who was a presidential briefer to George H.W. Bush has "become a Christian antiwar leftist who goes around bearing witness. Whatever his views, he's harmless."

Clinton responded, "I appreciate your sending thgis [sic] to me. Neither State nor my staff had anything to do w this. The man stood up just as I was starting and GW—which claims their quick actions were part of their standard operating procedures to remove anyone who stands up and starts speaking while an invited guest is talking—moved to remove him. GW claims he was not in any way injured."

However, McGovern was not speaking, simply standing quietly until he was attacked by the police. As for Clinton, no apology was forthcoming, nor any further explanation of why she failed to stop police from roughing up a peaceful protester in her presence.

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](#)).

Risking Nuclear War for Al Qaeda?

Exclusive: The risk that the multi-sided Syrian war could spark World War III continues as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and U.S. neocons seek an invasion that could kill Russian troops – and possibly escalate the Syrian crisis into a

nuclear showdown, amazingly to protect Al Qaeda terrorists, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

When President Barack Obama took questions from reporters on Tuesday, the one that needed to be asked but wasn't was whether he had forbidden Turkey and Saudi Arabia to invade Syria, because on that question could hinge whether the ugly Syrian civil war could spin off into World War III and possibly a nuclear showdown.

If Turkey (with hundreds of thousands of troops massed near the Syrian border) and Saudi Arabia (with its sophisticated air force) follow through on threats and intervene militarily to save their rebel clients, who include Al Qaeda's Nusra Front, from a powerful Russian-backed Syrian government offensive, then Russia will have to decide what to do to protect its 20,000 or so military personnel inside Syria.

A source close to Russian President Vladimir Putin told me that the Russians have warned Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that Moscow is prepared to use tactical nuclear weapons if necessary to save their troops in the face of a Turkish-Saudi onslaught. Since Turkey is a member of NATO, any such conflict could quickly escalate into a full-scale nuclear confrontation.

Given Erdogan's megalomania or mental instability and the aggressiveness and inexperience of Saudi Prince Mohammad bin Salman (defense minister and son of King Salman), the only person who probably can stop a Turkish-Saudi invasion is President Obama. But I'm told that he has been unwilling to flatly prohibit such an intervention, though he has sought to calm Erdogan down and made clear that the U.S. military would not join the invasion.

So far, Erdogan has limited Turkey's direct military attacks on Syria to cross-border shelling against U.S.-backed Kurdish forces that have seized territory from the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) in northern Syria. Turkey considers the Kurdish fighters, known as YPG, to be terrorists but the U.S. government sees them as valuable allies in the fight against Islamic State terrorists, an Al Qaeda spinoff that controls large swaths of Syria and Iraq.

But Erdogan's short fuse may have grown shorter on Wednesday when a powerful car bomb killed at least 28 people in Turkey's capital of Ankara. The bomb apparently targeted a military convoy and Turkish officials cast suspicion on Kurdish militants who also have been under assault from Turkish forces inside Turkey.

Though showing no evidence, Turkish officials suggested the attack may have been

sponsored by Iran or Russia, another sign of how complicated the geopolitical morass in Syria has become. "Those who think they can steer our country away from our goals by using terrorist organizations will see that they have failed," declared Erdogan, according to The Wall Street Journal.

(On Wednesday night, Turkey retaliated for the Ankara bombing by launching airstrikes against Kurdish targets in northern Iraq.)

The dilemma for Obama is that many traditional U.S. allies, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have been the principal backers and funders of Sunni terror groups inside Syria, including Al Qaeda's Nusra Front and to a lesser degree the Islamic State. Now, the "allies" want the United States to risk a nuclear confrontation with Russia to, in effect, protect Al Qaeda.

Biden Blurts Out Truth

The twisted reality was acknowledged by no less an authority than Vice President Joe Biden during a talk at Harvard in 2014. Biden answered a student's question by saying Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had "poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens, thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against [Syrian President Bashar al-] Assad." The result, Biden said, was 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."

The risks from these tangled alliances were also highlighted by a Defense Intelligence Agency report in August 2012, warning the Obama administration that the growing strength of Al Qaeda and other Sunni jihadists in Syria could lead to the creation of "an Islamic state" whose militants could move back into Iraq where the threat originated after the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

The DIA said Al Qaeda's growing strength in Syria "creates the ideal atmosphere for AQI [Al Qaeda in Iraq] to return to its old pockets in Mosul and Ramadi and will provide a renewed momentum under the presumption of unifying the jihad among Sunni Iraq and Syria and the rest of the Sunnis in the Arab world against what it considers one enemy, the dissenters [i.e. the Shiites].

"ISI [Islamic State of Iraq, forerunner of ISIS, also known as the Islamic State] could also declare an Islamic state through its union with other terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria, which will create grave danger in regards to unifying Iraq and the protection of its territory."

Despite the prescient DIA report and Biden's blunt admission (for which he quickly apologized), President Obama failed to put a stop to the strategy of supporting Assad's opponents. He let Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey continue funneling weapons to the most extreme elements of the rebellion. Meanwhile, the

U.S. government insisted that it was only arming “moderate” rebels, but those groups were largely subsumed or controlled by Al Qaeda’s Nusra and/or ISIS, a hyper-violent spinoff from Al Qaeda.

In Syria, rather than cooperate with Russia and Iran in helping Assad’s military defeat the jihadists, the Obama administration has continued playing it cute, insisting as Secretary of State John Kerry has said recently that armed “legitimate opposition groups” exist separately from Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front.

In reality, however, the so-called “moderate” rebels around Aleppo and Idlib are Al Qaeda’s junior partners whose value to the cause is that they qualify for CIA weaponry that can then be passed on to Nusra as well as Nusra’s key ally Ahrar al-Sham and other jihadist fighters.

Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, the chief elements of the Saudi-created “Army of Conquest,” deployed U.S. TOW missiles to devastating effect against the Syrian army in the jihadists’ victory last year in Idlib province, a success that finally prompted Putin to commit Russian air power to defend the Syrian government last September.

Helping the Islamic State

Meanwhile, Turkey has left about 100 kilometers of its border open for various jihadist groups to bring in reinforcements and weapons while letting the Islamic State smuggle out oil for sale on the black market. Last fall, after Russia (and a reluctant United States) began bombing ISIS oil-truck convoys, Turkey shot down a Russian bomber near Turkey’s border, leading to the deaths of the pilot and a rescuer.

Now, as the Russian-backed Syrian army makes major gains against the Nusra-dominated rebels around Aleppo and encroaches on Islamic State territory near Raqqa and as U.S.-backed Kurdish forces also advance against ISIS Turkey’s Erdogan has grown frantic over the prospects that his five-year project of aiding Syrian jihadists may be collapsing.

Amid this desperation, Turkey has been urging President Obama to support a limited invasion of Syria to create a “safe zone,” supposedly to protect Syrian rebels and civilians in northern Syria. But that humanitarian-sounding plan may well be a cover for a more ambitious plan to march to Damascus and forcibly remove President Assad from power.

That is a goal shared by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Sunni states along with Israel and America’s influential neoconservatives and their “liberal interventionist” sidekicks. For his part, Obama has called on Assad “to go” but has favored diplomatic negotiations to achieve that end. Russia has advocated a

political settlement with free elections so the Syrian people can decide Assad's future themselves.

The Russians also keenly remember the West's subterfuge regarding Libya in 2011 when the U.S. and its NATO allies pushed a "humanitarian" resolution through the United Nations Security Council supposedly to protect Libyan civilians but then used it to achieve violent "regime change," a classic case of the camel getting its nose into the tent.

On Syria, Russia watched for years as the United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Sunni states supported various Sunni rebel groups seeking to overthrow Assad, an Alawite, representing a branch of Shiite Islam. Though Assad has been widely criticized for the harsh response to the uprising, he maintains a secular government that has protected Christians, Alawites, Shiites and other minorities.

Besides being a target of Sunni regional powers, Assad has long been on the Israeli-neocon hit list because he's seen as the centerpiece of the "Shiite crescent" stretching from Iran through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon. Since Israeli leaders (and thus the American neocons) see Iran as Israel's greatest enemy, the goal of collapsing the "Shiite crescent" has concentrated on bringing down Assad – even if his ouster would create a political/military vacuum that Al Qaeda and/or Islamic State might fill.

Making Syria the site for this proxy war has inflicted particularly savage results on the Syrians. For five years the violence by both the rebels and the army has destroyed much of the country and killed more than 250,000 people while also sending waves of desperate refugees crashing into Europe, now destabilizing the European Union.

However, as the U.S. and its Mideast allies especially Saudi Arabia and Turkey escalated the conflict last year by supplying the rebels, including Al Qaeda's Nusra Front, with American TOW missiles and other sophisticated weapons, Russian President Putin decided it was time to help Syria's government stop the spread of Sunni terrorism, a threat that has also plagued Russia.

Mocking Russia

Initially, Official Washington mocked the Russian effort as incapable of accomplishing much, but the Syrian military's recent victories have turned that derisive laughter into shocked fury. For one, the neoconservative flagship Washington Post has unleashed a stream of editorials and op-eds decrying the Syrian-Russian victories.

"Russia, Iran and the Syrian government are conducting a major offensive aimed

at recapturing the city of Aleppo and the rebel-held territory that connects it to the border with Turkey," the Post lamented. "They have cut one supply route to the city and are close to severing another, trapping rebel forces along with hundreds of thousands of civilians."

Though one might think that driving Al Qaeda's forces out of a major urban center like Aleppo would be a good thing, the Post's neocon editors pretend that the rebels controlling that area are only noble "moderates" who must be protected by the United States. No mention is made of Al Qaeda's Nusra Front, so as not to spoil the desired propaganda theme.

The Post then badgered Obama to do something: "In the face of this onslaught, which promises to destroy any chance of an acceptable end to the Syrian civil war, the Obama administration has been a study in passivity and moral confusion. President Obama is silent."

In another hysterical editorial, the Post's editors conjured up what they called "the real world" where "the best-case scenario after five years of U.S. inaction is a partial peace that leaves Syria partitioned into zones controlled by the [Assad] regime and the Islamic State, with a few opposition and Kurdish enclaves squeezed in. Even that would require the Obama administration to aggressively step up its military support for rebel groups, and confront Russia with more than rhetoric."

However, in the actual "real world," the Obama administration has been funneling military equipment to rebels seeking to overthrow an internationally recognized government for years. That assistance has included averting U.S. eyes from the fact that many of those rebel groups were collaborating with Al Qaeda's Nusra Front and/or the Islamic State.

As Mideast expert Gareth Porter reported, "The Russian airstrikes in question are aimed at cutting off Aleppo city, which is now the primary center of Nusra's power in Syria, from the Turkish border. To succeed in that aim, Russian, Syrian and Iranian forces are attacking rebel troops deployed in towns all along the routes from Aleppo to the border. Those rebels include units belonging to Nusra, their close ally Ahrar al-Sham, and other armed opposition groups some of whom have gotten weapons from the CIA in the past.

"Information from a wide range of sources, including some of those the United States has been explicitly supporting, makes it clear that every armed anti-Assad organization unit in those provinces is engaged in a military structure controlled by Nusra militants. All of these rebel groups fight alongside the Nusra Front and coordinate their military activities with it."

But The Washington Post and its mainstream U.S. cohorts don't want you to know the real "real world" reality that Syria's sainted "moderate" rebels are fighting side by side with Al Qaeda, which was responsible for killing nearly 3,000 Americans on 9/11 and for drawing the U.S. military into a series of Mideast conflicts that have claimed the lives of about 8,000 U.S. soldiers.

The bizarre goal of saving Al Qaeda's skin presumably would not be a very good selling point to get Americans behind a new war that could pit nuclear-armed Russia against nuclear-armed America with all the horrors that such a conflict could entail.

Still, the inconvenient truth about Al Qaeda's role occasionally slips into mainstream news accounts, albeit only in passing. For instance, New York Times correspondent Anne Barnard reported last Saturday about a proposed Syrian cease-fire, writing: "With the proviso that the Nusra Front, Al Qaeda's branch in Syria, can still be bombed, Russia puts the United States in a difficult position; the insurgent groups it supports cooperate in some places with the well-armed, well-financed Nusra in what they say is a tactical alliance of necessity against government forces."

Obama's Quandary

So, the quandary that Obama faces is whether the United States should join with Turkey and Saudi Arabia in a blatant invasion of Syria to salvage Al Qaeda's cause. Of course, that's not how it would be sold to the American people. The project would be couched in pretty words about "humanitarianism" and the need to maintain U.S. "credibility."

But Obama seems to recognize enough of the actual reality that he has so far resisted the frantic cries of Official Washington's neocons and liberal hawks. I'm told Obama also has discouraged Turkey and Saudi Arabia from taking matters into their own hands.

After all, a full-scale invasion by Turkey and Saudi Arabia in support of Al Qaeda and other Sunni rebels would pit the invading force against not only the Syrian army but its Iranian and Hezbollah (Shiite) allies and most dangerously Russia, which lacks the manpower inside Syria to match up with the Turkish army but could deploy tactical nuclear weapons if necessary to save the lives of Russian soldiers.

So, here is a significant difference between Obama and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. She has publicly called for the U.S. military to establish a "safe zone" inside Syria along with a "no-fly zone." While all that sounds very nice and peaceful, it would actually require the same invasion that Turkey is

now seeking and it would require the U.S. air force to eliminate much of the Syrian air force and air defenses. It would be a major act of war.

On Tuesday, Obama was asked about the Syrian conflict at a news conference but it was within the typical mainstream frame of suggesting that Obama is too weak in dealing with Putin. For five years, the mainstream U.S. media can't get beyond goading Obama to increase U.S. intervention in Syria and thus bring about another "regime change."

Despite the contrary evidence, it has remained a beloved Washington delusion that some "moderate" oppositionists would replace Assad and bring a happy democracy to Syria. Similar delusions preceded the catastrophes of "regime change" in Iraq and Libya and one could even go back to the Reagan administration's "regime change" goal in Afghanistan that led to the emergence of the Taliban, Al Qaeda and modern jihadism in the first place.

But today the stakes include a potential nuclear showdown with Russia – with the United States being urged to take on that existential risk for all humankind on behalf of preserving Al Qaeda's hopes for raising its black flag over Damascus. If there has ever been a crazier demand by major foreign policy players in Official Washington, it is hard to imagine what it might have been.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Tangled Threads of US False Narratives](#)," "[Hidden Origins of Syria's Civil War](#)," and "[Obama's Most Momentous Decision](#)."]

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](#)).
