

# Playing Whack-a-Terrorist in Libya

The Libyan “regime change” of 2011 aggressively promoted by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton turned a relatively prosperous and secular country into another failed state where terrorism is finding a home, prompting new calls for a Western “whack-a-mole” intervention, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

The “next front against Islamic State,” as [a headline](#) in *The Economist* puts it, appears to be Libya. The chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, had talks last month with his French counterpart with an eye toward taking “decisive military action” against ISIS.

Regardless of how far such planning may or may not have come already, it is not surprising to hear such talk, given that ISIS reportedly has established as large a presence in Libya, a real, material presence, and not just one defined in terms of expressions of sympathy or allegiance, as it has anywhere outside of Iraq and Syria.

Opening up a real military front against it with Western armed forces might seem to be an appropriate going to where the action is, but it also would perpetuate a fundamentally flawed conception of counterterrorism as revolving around military offensives against whatever presence on the ground has been established by whatever radical group currently worries us the most.

This conception embodies the fallacy that control of a patch of distant real estate is to be equated with threats of terrorist attacks against the West and especially the United States. Even if the connection between distant real estate and proximate terrorism were greater than it really is, there is the further common but also fallacious corollary that whatever particular patch has most recently caught our attention is somehow more significant than other patches, including ones that have not yet come into being or gotten headlines as well as ones that have.

The case of ISIS in Libya ought itself to demonstrate the misguided nature of this corollary, showing as it does that the ISIS enclave in Iraq and Syria is not really as special in the world of counterterrorism or even in the world of ISIS as it has generally been regarded for most of the last couple of years. Similarly, the establishment of that prominent enclave belies the previously presumed special nature of the redoubt in Afghanistan of the Al Qaeda group from which ISIS broke away. Other Al Qaeda off-shoots, notably the one in Yemen, demonstrate the same thing.

The result is a game of whack-a-mole spanning multiple unstable foreign countries. The game is potentially endless, given that there is no shortage of such countries. The game is even worse than classic versions of whack-a-mole in that the perceived trouble spots seem to be additive rather than a matter of one substituting for another.

Our concern with Syria and Iraq has not eliminated our concern about Afghanistan. Jumping into Libya would not eliminate our concern about Syria and Iraq. This pattern is partly testimony to the counterproductive side of militarized counterterrorism, in which antagonism against foreign forces and the collateral damage they cause tend to breed more extremists and add credibility to the messaging of the group being targeted.

The underlying problem in a place such as post-Gaddafi Libya is a lack of good governance or of any governance. Inadequate governance has multiple bad effects, including the sort of chaos that violent extremists exploit. Libya does not have a governance problem because ISIS is there; ISIS is there because Libya has a severe governance problem.

Yet another fallacy in common thinking about counterterrorism is that whacking the offending group is progress. It is not, if what is left after the whacking is just more of the inadequate governance that led to the group establishing its presence there in the first place.

The prospects for creating a sound, strong and credible authority in Libya any time soon remain very weak. The spectacle of competing coalitions in the western and eastern portions of the country persists, and that does not even count some of the other smaller power centers.

The progress of the UN-sponsored reconciliation process has been so slow and meager that the slightest advance gets cheered, most recently, agreement by some but not all members of an interim collective presidency on the membership of a proposed unity government.

An anti-ISIS armed intervention in this situation would be without effective local coordination and probably would introduce the moral hazard of the competing Libyan factions feeling that much freer to continue the quarrels among themselves rather than doing more against ISIS.

The whole sequence of successive armed interventions is all the more depressing when one thinks about how the process not only has failed to kill the terrorist mole but has given it life. This was especially true, of course, of the war of choice in Iraq, which gave rise to the group that we now know as ISIS.

Libya was different in that an uprising was already taking place and the

intervention was more a European-promoted project than an American one. But otherwise the result is parallel. In knocking off another dictator whom everyone loved to loathe, the intervention killed off a ruler who had, through a negotiated agreement, not only gotten out of his previous involvement in international terrorism but had begun to cooperate effectively against radical Islamist terrorists.

Now look at what we have in his place.

**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.)**

---

## Behind Flint's Lead-Poisoned Water

Largely abandoned by auto manufacturers who shifted factories to low-wage areas, Flint, Michigan, suffers from a powerlessness that allowed Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder and other officials to ignore the city's lead-poisoned water, as Dennis J Bernstein reports.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The lead-poisoned water of Flint, Michigan, is a national scandal that bears on multiple American problems, from poverty and race, to the impact of industrialization and deindustrialization, to political attacks on the Environmental Protection Agency and other regulators who then fail to do their jobs protecting citizens from hazards.

Columbia University Professor David Rosner, a leading expert on the deadly history of the use of lead by U.S. corporations, most notably General Motors, has documented how lead in various ways was mainlined into the blood streams of Americans, throughout the Twentieth Century, as a result of corporate greed.

Co-author of seven books on industrial and occupational hazards, including *Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution* and *Lead Wars: The Politics of Science and the Fate of America's Children*, Dr. Rosner was interviewed by Dennis J Bernstein.

DB: Let's begin with the micro and work our way out to the macro. What's your best understanding of what happened in Flint? How did it come to pass that the people of Flint, mostly black and Latino, a bit less than half of them living

under the poverty line, were poisoned by their own government?

DR: Well, it's government, and its industry, and it's all of us, in some sense. The short story is that the water in the Flint River corroded pipe, and leached out of those pipes lead, into the faucets, and into the water the children were drinking. And that this was essentially something that was identified literally a couple of years ago, and the problem was never addressed, and was depicted as kind of a public relations problem, rather than a public health problem.

So children were ingesting this lead, and they were accumulating lead in their blood. And a young physician, Mona Hanna-Attisha, discovered that she was seeing in her hospital that children were coming in with elevated blood lead levels. And that this was strange, that there was a real spike, that the children were coming in poisoned. And she began to make an issue of it. And she got the attention of some legislators finally, and also community leaders who began to protest the fact that these children were coming in with lead poisoning. She was, at first, basically brushed off as kind of an overwrought, young physician, a pediatrician.

But slowly it began to emerge that there had been lots of correspondence about the polluted water. And that the water was corroding the pipes. And that there was a real problem here that ultimately made national headlines and became an issue of national importance. The tiny issue, the kind of microcosm is that there was a crisis identified luckily and became, by a whole set of circumstances, the focal point of national attention. The broader issue, of course, is much more complex, it goes deep into the history of, basically, our exploitation of this community, and of its people, and of poor communities around the country.

DB: I want to get there, right now, professor. You left it off at a good spot. This is a question [that] will get us into General Motors, about who knew what, when. A couple of details just are drilling through my brain. ... The fact that, on the one hand, the government made available water coolers for state workers in Flint and they were given the option to drink the water cooler water or the poison. That's one thing, and then we also find out that General Motors got a special dispensation from, I guess it's Lake Huron, because their parts were being corroded by the water that they were feeding to the people and the kids of Flint.

DR: Well, you know, the story goes deeper into Flint's history, industrial history. The first point is who knew what when? Anybody who knew anything about the history of Flint ... when an historian thinks of Flint what they think of is General Motors. What they think of is the fact that ... one of the largest labor disputes in American history occurred in Flint.

It was the sight of the formation, really, of the United Auto Workers. It was the sight of the formation of, really, major parts of the CIO in the 1930's, over working conditions, because [of] the working conditions and wages ... because this was the largest industrial auto plant in the country. Maybe with the exception of Ford. It was the place where Chevrolets were built, where Cadillacs were built, where Fisher Body Parts Company was.

This was [where] miles of the waterfront were literally plants, 80 acres of that city were literally industrial plants, building cars in the 1930s. And when you think about that, what you realize is that river was basically the sewer for, not only the car manufacturers, but the people who made batteries, and supplied batteries for those cars which were filled with lead and toxins; the people who made the glass which had lead in it and silica; the people who made oil and lubricating materials that went into the cars; the people who made the paint that was leaded paint that would ultimately cover the cars.

In some sense this was a giant industrial pollution site literally from the 1920s on. And [it] was the site of labor disputes because of working conditions, because of the exploitation of those people. So the history of Flint is rooted in this industrial production and also in the pollution of that river, because that river was the place where the refuse was dumped.

So the first thing that would occur to you is that this is a river and a piece of land that has to be really closely monitored. The second thing that should have occurred to them and would have occurred to them, is that for 50 years people stopped drinking out of that river. They stopped using Flint water over 50 years ago, because of the potential of pollution. They actually shipped the water all the way from Lake Huron because that river from basically Flint all the way up the river, to the Saginaw River, and up to Saginaw was one giant production line, for production of the car, the American motor car.

So that's what you would think of as an historian. [The river] they were drinking out of, in the first place, whether it had lead or not lead, whether it was corroding pipes or not corroding pipes, it was kind of a nutty idea, because you just know you had to really inspect that water. Then the other thing, as you raise and point out, General Motors itself stopped using that water because it destroyed the transmissions of their cars. It was not pure enough to use for manufacturing the car, the transmissions. So they stopped using it.

The other thing, of course, was that a couple of years ago, or a year ago, they started shipping water into state buildings. So there was a lot of suspicion about what that water was. It's not necessarily that they knew lead was in it, but they knew that something was wrong with it. And that they depicted this as a minor problem really talks to a much broader history of the domination of

industries, but also the political power structure in Flint, and in Michigan in general, which was essentially a power structure that emphasized low levels of regulation, little government, suspicion of government, attempts to make sure that government didn't do anything.

So, while we think that the government, the bureaucrats, the government regulators were at fault, in fact they had been subjected to 30 years of constant propaganda about how they shouldn't touch business, especially in a state which had just gone through major economic crises. You know, the idea of regulating companies or forcing them to clean up the messes they made, or to even start regulating the environment, would have been depicted as an assault on industries, an assault on jobs. ...

I think we all, watching the presidential elections, we know what would have happened. So on the one hand, I blame government for not doing anything. On the other hand, I understand how the EPA and the local water environmental quality people, and all the other people who should have had their fingers on this issue, were in some sense intimidated about ever raising this issue until it became a crisis. You know, there are many Flints. Flint, Michigan, is just one of many sites around the country that have been used for industrial production, and they were abandoned. And, so, in some sense we're experiencing many, many Flints. We just don't know about them yet.

DB: I was teaching in the New York City school system in the early and mid-seventies, and it became illegal to paint the schools with lead, in I think it was 1978. I do know that I was a teacher of emotionally disturbed children and I worked with therapists and all the things that I'm reading about again, reading about in terms of the impacts of lead poisoning on kids and learning is just, again, devastating.

And I want to ask you before we go on and paint a larger picture, here around the country, I want to ask you how bad ... what's your informed judgment in terms of how bad the damage is going to be to the people, to the children? What can we say about that? We have about 100,000 folks who live in Flint.

DR: Sure. Well, in Flint and in the rest of the country ... you know, first of all you have to understand that this epidemic is probably the longest running childhood, self-inflicted epidemic in American history. It's been going on since early 1900's. We've known about the dangers of lead paint specifically, and lead on the neurological development of the children. In the early part of the century, children went into convulsions, and comas and died from lead exposure. More recently, as it was put into gasoline, the kids breathed [it] in ...

I remember ethyl gasoline. It was in the paint, it covered every wall. And it

doesn't take much lead to really poison a child. It takes less than a thumb nail sized ... you know, one coat of a thumb nail could send a kid into convulsions. I mean, that's the amount of lead it takes to harm a child. It's the dust on the walls, it's not big chunks of lead, it's not a bullet that you swallow, it's not chips that come off the wall. It's dust. ...

Our country, many of our cities, in the East and, I guess, the West, particularly were covered with lead because the cities expanded dramatically at the end of the 19th and early 20th century, we built entire cities. The whole mid-western belt of...rust belt cities were built in that period of time. And they all used lead at one point or another.

I mean, just to give your listeners a sense of what we're talking about ... this isn't just a little bit of color, a little bit of lead in a can of paint, but throughout the early part of the century, at least the first half of the century, at least a half of every can of paint was composed of lead carbonate. At least in lead paint, I should say. There were other alternatives. But, if you painted with lead paint, you were talking about painting with 50 percent of the can of paint would be lead carbonate, which meant essentially every can of paint would smear up to 15 pounds of lead on the walls of a home.

So when you think about painting a city that was built in the early part of the century, over and over again, when you think about the number, the coats of paint that go on each time, and the number of times you paint in any 50 year period, you're talking about every home having hundreds and hundreds of pounds of a neurotoxin of which the size of a nail is enough to send a kid into convulsions. So you're talking about a huge problem, a huge problem.

The simple fact is that kids began to be identified as having lead poisoning as early as 1904 in Australia, and increasing throughout the early part of the century. In the United States we began identifying children in the 19-teens, a century ago now, as having been exposed to lead and developing convulsions and dying. We had, in the 1920's, many articles that appeared in medical and public health journals, and yet, despite that, the lead industry, the lead pigment industry, began to push more and more, and harder and harder, to introduce lead into all the paints we used.

So the National Lead Company, for example, owned a company, I guess it's still in existence, I don't know if they own it anymore, Dutch Boy Paint. We've all seen the symbol of the Dutch Boy. The guy that sits on a swing with a brush in his hand. They marketed it to families. They told children to paint books that had the Dutch Boy in story land. Images of the Dutch Boy conquering old man gloom, and protecting the child from the evils of wall paper. I mean it's really bizarre stuff, of 19th century houses that had to be repainted and they're

saying get rid of old man gloom, this 19th century dark color, we can brighten up your home.

DB: I remember those Dutch Boy commercials. I loved them.

DR: Yeah, and these advertisements are quite astounding. And they gave out booklets to kids, in paint stores. And told their parents to go buy this paint. And they gave out costumes to use as paint. So at the same time that internally, in their own corporate records, they're talking about children dying from exposure to paint, they're talking about it as a public relations problem, not a public health problem.

They're saying "It's really terrible. But it's only happening..." they say at one point... "among Negro and Puerto Rican families. So let's not worry about it. We can't deal with it until we've torn down all the cities because all the cities' housing is filled with this stuff. So we can't really deal with it. And it's only among Negro and Puerto Rican families that [it's] happening. And it's among ignorant women, ignorant families that don't know how to take care of their kids, that's causing this problem in the first place."

This is the 1950's. In 1950's they're talking about this problem. And beforehand, they're identifying the kids dying, they fought legislation in Baltimore and elsewhere. And they fought warning labels that would indicate that lead was a problem. They threatened people with lawsuits, or physicians with lawsuits who identified lead poisoning among the children. They offered money and grants to people in order not to study it. It's a really ugly history, like it really rivals, in fact I think it precedes the tobacco industry's Joe Camel, and all the advertising and lies that they gave.

So you have this situation where in 1955 they're saying "Look, we have a real problem, there's a real problem here but it's only affecting those families and it's probably due to the fact that the parents are ignorant. They don't know how to stop the kid from crawling on the floor, and putting their hands in their mouth, or going near a wall, that's painted with lead."

It's a heartrending story that means that we've literally poisoned knowingly for a century, generations and generations of kids, most of whom were minority kids, most of whom were politically powerless. And we're, in some sense, just beginning to cope with the massive damage. Kids don't go into comas anymore, but they do get affected by this low-level exposure that causes them to develop subtle neurological problems: learning disorders, loss of IQ, behavioral problems, attention deficit, hyperactivity, all sorts of issues that interfere in their school performance, interfere in their lives, and interfere and literally change the course of their lives. So it's an ongoing tragedy.



And the CDC still says that there are about 500,000 children with elevated blood lead levels, now, in the country. And this is a century after we began identifying children as having exposure to lead, and lead being a terrible neurotoxin [] for children. I'm sorry I'm going on too long.

DB: No, no, it's incredibly important. There's a tremendous amount of information that we know. But there's a little blockage because of all the stuff you were talking about in terms of the way in which the corporations have suppressed real information, and corporate media really isn't all that interested. So it's very important to hear what you say Dr. Rosner. Just two more issues I want to hit. First of all, the broader picture, we're not just talking about Flint. I guess you have your eyes on a few other cities. Tell us about the broader picture.

DR: Well, the broader picture is that this is a problem in every community in the country, this low-level exposure. Every time a family moves into an older building, a Victorian house, and renovates, they're releasing lead. Every time they scrape a wall, every time they repaint and sand, you know, sand a wall to make it flat, every time they have a leak in the roof, that leads to paint puckering up, every time they drink out of the water fountain in older cities, where the pipes still exist, and the pipes are leaching lead, you've got a problem. And so we have to figure out how to address it. And everyone has been asking, "Why doesn't government change it?"

And the bigger question is, "Why," – and this is a problem that will take a lot of money, a lot of time, it can be done systematically, it doesn't have to break the bank, but, – "Why isn't the industry, why aren't the industries that actually profited for generations from the use of lead, and actually sold it and created this mess in the first place, why aren't they held accountable? Why aren't they being asked to contribute to lead poisoning?" There are big suits here in California. There was a big trial a couple of years ago, in which there was a lawsuit against the lead pigment manufacturers...

DB: And they won a bunch of money, right?

DR: Well, [the state] won \$1.15 billion from these companies. It's now under appeal in the Supreme Court. And everyone is wondering how it's going to turn out because it's a very big political issue, if the Supreme Court decides that this can go forward, this is legitimate and it's not going to be appealed. I'm not sure if it's the Supreme Court or the appeals court, actually. I'm not sure how you are structured there.

The point is, it's now being appealed and if it ultimately goes the way that the judge decided in the first place, this is a way of thinking about [how] other

cities are going to think about this. Because this is extremely important. It was an extremely groundbreaking and important suit, but you have to realize that this is just one set of communities, it's San Diego, and Los Angeles, and San Francisco, and Oakland and a couple of other major communities in the state, that brought the suit. And everyone's waiting with baited breath about how this is going to come out.

DB: In terms of the nature of racism in the communities that are subjected to this, these communities are the least able to fight back, to hire the ... legal power. All this kind of stuff. What are your thoughts, just ... back to the micro ... the governor [of Michigan] says he's not gonna show up [to Congressional hearings]. I guess they're having hearings, they asked him to come to hearings. But he had to do budget work in Michigan. One wonders if this budget is going to include clean water for the people of Flint.

But isn't it important to start investigating? The EPA has investigative powers, the Justice Department, all this kind of stuff. You poison people, you should be held accountable. Do you think that that would help start the ball rolling if the marshals went to gather up the governor of Michigan so he can testify and tell the truth about what happened?

DR: Well, to tell you the truth, I've never understood why these were always liability suits over individual amounts of money, when, in fact, this seems like criminal behavior. But, of course, it should be [investigated], ... This has to be investigated. I mean this is a paradigmatic case in a way. This is a paradigm for lots of other communities, and they have to know how it happened. And also you have to investigate and expose even if you don't ultimately win a victory in terms of holding somebody personally accountable or the state accountable, because you want to put other people on notice around the country.

You want to let other departments of health to know that it's not going to be easy to avoid. And that if they are not doing their job, or if they're not regulating, if they're not standing up for communities, they're going to be held accountable. So I think it's extremely important that investigations go forward if for no other reason to really publicly shame both public officials, and corporations and those individuals who allowed this to happen. There are kid's lives that are being affected.

DB: And it is true, right, that you really can't turn the clock back on lead poisoning. Once you got it, you got it.

DR: Well, once the damage is done, it's a very insidious poison because it affects the neurology at very young ages. It changes the course of children's lives, even in utero, it seems. But if a mother takes in lead, it will affect

the child on initial exposure. It will change the behavior. ... I'm not a neurologist, right? I feel awkward saying this, it will affect the brain, the development of the brain.

And once that pathway, or once the brain, is damaged it's never going to heal, so to speak, because it's still developing. It will develop around the problem, whatever the biochemical or physiological effects are, so that's what seems to be the latest understanding of lead poisoning. [A] very little amount can affect you literally before you're even aware of any developmental problems. It's not going to show up for years.

**Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of *Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom*. You can access the audio archives at [www.flashpoints.net](http://www.flashpoints.net).**

---

## The Disgrace of Flint's Poison Water

The case of Flint, Michigan, and its lead-poisoned water supply has exposed a U.S political disgrace, treating poor and minority communities with shocking disregard and showing little interest in punishing the officials responsible, as Marsha Coleman-Adebayo told Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

As a teacher in the mid-1970s, my middle-school students in Far Rockaway, Queens, one of the poorest communities of New York City, were celebrating Mayday, the international workers holiday. Marilyn, the proud-queen of the Mayday show, was dressed in a redesigned wedding gown, surrounded by the girls in the class who were admiring her classy attire.

When it came time to kick off the Mayday festivities, Marilyn rose to take her place at the Maypole, but she never made it to a full standing position. She grew extremely dizzy, fell back into her chair and was taken to the emergency room. I then learned that places where my students lived, played and studied were laced with lead-based products and their minds were being dulled and poisoned, even as I tried to expand them.



Now, four decades later, there is the case of Flint, Michigan, where an entire city has had its water systems poisoned by lead. Many in the community and environmental activists around the country are outraged at what was allowed to happen to Flint and the slow reaction of state and federal officials. And the more the people of Flint find out about what their politicians and officials knew and didn't do the angrier the citizens are getting.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, "Lead is a neurotoxic substance that has been shown in numerous research studies to affect brain function and development. Children who have been exposed to elevated levels of lead are at increased risk for cognitive and behavioral problems during development. Exposure to lead can result in a variety of effects upon neuropsychological functioning including deficits in general intellectual functioning, ability to sustain attention on tasks, organization of thinking and behavior, speech articulation, language comprehension and production, learning and memory efficiency, fine motor skills, high activity level, reduced problem solving flexibility, and poor behavioral self-control."

Marsha Coleman-Adebayo, an Environmental Protection Agency whistleblower, worked at the EPA for some 18 years and is the author of *No Fear: A Whistleblowers Triumph over Corruption and Retaliation at the EPA*. Her lawsuit led to the "No Fear Act," passed to protect government whistleblowers from intimidation and retaliation.

In a recent interview, with Dennis J Bernstein, Coleman-Adebayo called for a full-scale criminal investigation to ascertain, and if need be punish, EPA and Michigan officials at the highest level for their part in poisoning the water and the people of Flint.

DB: What I hope to cover in our interview is, first, if the EPA has the resources to investigate and the criminal mandate, if you will. And then I want to get into if they have the will to do it. So let's start with what's possible. What do you think the EPA could and should be doing?

MC: The EPA has the legal authority to prosecute. In fact, as you said, there

are criminal ... there are violations. There are provisions [of] The Clean Air Act that provide for criminal prosecutions. [] A lot of people really don't understand the breadth of the EPA, and the provisions by law that the EPA has to go against environmental criminals. EPA has 200 fully authorized federal law enforcement agents. And these agents actually are authorized to carry firearms in order to carry out their responsibility.

At EPA we have about 70 forensic scientists and technicians. We have ... 45 attorneys at EPA who do nothing but litigate environmental criminals. And so it's not the most extensive array of personnel but we certainly have the resources. It certainly does not take the 200 [environmental] law enforcement officers to arrest a governor, or even other people who have been involved in this criminal act, in Michigan. So we have the authority.

But the second question that you asked, "Do we have the will?" [] I think that's really where the fault line lies. And that is what the agency has shown, is that it may have the authority, but it certainly does not have the will to protect the people of this country from environmental criminals.

DB: I do want you to hone in on this. It's sort of an institutional decision that the EPA made not to prosecute in certain communities. You want to talk a little bit about the so-called sacrifice zones?

MC: Well, sacrifice zones are essentially primarily African[-American], Hispanic communities, low-income white communities that no longer have the [economic] ability to flex their muscles, in the overall environment, in the overall economics of our economy, of our country.

For example, Flint, Michigan, used to be an area where a lot of African-Americans [moved to] who were escaping from state-sponsored violence in the South, from the Ku Klux Klan, the White Knights, and all the organizations that were dedicated to killing black people in the early 1920's, 30's, 40's.

So a lot of these people who live in Flint now migrated from the rural South into cities like Detroit, into Flint, trying to escape state-sponsored violence. And they went to Flint seeking economic value, jobs in the auto industry.

And, then, of course, ... it's another economic betrayal, where these industries basically pick up through NAFTA and other kinds of economic [incentives] and they leave these cities. And they go to Mexico, or to some other place where they can pay workers very low wages, with almost no benefits, leaving these communities without a way of really recovering from that kind of economic devastation.

We call those kinds of communities where the economy is almost non-existent in

terms of supporting human activities, you know, good schools, and now, of course, even water, it seems, we call these kinds of communities sacrifice zones. These communities no longer have the ability to demand from the political system that they are treated as equal citizens in this country.

DB: Another thing that always comes up here is there are various ways to blame the victims for poisoning themselves. You already start to hear it reverberating, "Well, these people are too poor and stupid to know what's happening to them." You want to talk about that?

MC: Sure, I mean, it's such a pathetic argument, to be honest with you. This community started complaining almost two years ago, that the water had turned various colors: gray, brown. That there was an odor emanating from their faucets. And the governor, as well as all the other city officials, and also EPA, basically ignored them, made fun of them, basically tells them that there was nothing wrong with water that has [this] brown color.

In fact, there's a very interesting interview some government officials in Michigan actually were shown drinking, supposedly, the water from Flint. But the reality is that there are a number of people who actually knew that there was something terribly wrong. And one company, in fact, Ford Motor Company, realized that something was wrong because they refused to use the water because it was corroding the various parts they were creating. And they received some special compensation so that they could bring water in for the various parts that they were creating.

So they had enough sense to make sure that the water that they used to build cars was not polluted. But they, in fact, were allowing the children and the men and women of Flint to bathe in the water, to drink the water. It is a crime of such unbelievable proportion. The fact that no one has been charged with a crime is, in fact, absolutely astounding, at this point.

DB: It is indeed, and I'm somebody who spent about 12 or 14 years teaching in various areas, very poor communities in New York City. And I saw, first hand, the impact, what happened when kids were exposed to lead. It is beyond acceptance or understanding that this action would unfold like this, that these kids and this community would be poisoned.

It troubles me that, in fact, there is not even a clear and wide ranging education program in terms of what to do, how to deal with it, what's coming next. A lot of people still don't know all the dangers, or what's bad and what's good. And it's troubling because there has been so much disinformation from the government, in terms of Michigan, at all levels.

MC: And not only that, lead is irreversible. The poisoning is irreversible. And it's an inter-generational poisoning. So the children of the fetuses who have been poisoned through their mother's womb, their grandchildren will most likely be lead poisoned. So this is an inter-generational poisoning.

These children will never, to a large extent, see their God-given potential because of this lead poisoning. And the President hasn't even gone to Flint, to kiss these babies or hold their hands, or just make a head bow to the incredible disaster that Flint has become. And so one of the questions that I asked in my first Guardian piece on this issue is what would have happened, for example, if we can imagine if ISIS, for example, had lead poisoned an American city? How would the response have been different if "a terrorist" had poisoned hundreds of American children and thousands of adults? How would we have dealt with that situation?

And it's one of the really sad parts about this is that a lot of the people who are responsible for this kind of poisoning will get away with it. They will get away with it. We've already seen one sacrificial lamb sort of pushed under the bus and that was Susan Hedman, who was Region 5 Administrator, in EPA.

DB: I believe she tried to blow the whistle in April of 2015.

MC: No, she didn't. There was an EPA whistleblower named Miguel Del Toral and he tried to blow the whistle in April. And in EPA's culture, if you try to blow the whistle the first thing they do is demean you. They start spreading rumors that you've got mental illness or that you're not quite up to par in the EPA.

They demeaned his work, they discredited what he tried to do. And what's really fabulous about this particular man, he just refused to allow the people of Flint to be poisoned, on his watch, without sounding the alarm. And so he joined with a Virginia Tech scientist named Mark Edwards, who also, by the way, was the person who exposed the lead poisoning in Washington, D.C. And EPA and the CDC did the same thing to this professor. They also demeaned him, tried to discredit him. And he also refused to be intimidated by the EPA and the CDC.

And also a medical doctor who noticed that a lot of her patients were bringing their children in to see her. And when she evaluated them and performed tests she realized that they had 3 to 4 times the amount of lead in their system that's allowed. So there [are] some real heroes in this story. There's one EPA employee who [has] been really battered but he's still standing. But all the officials from Region 5, Chicago all the way to Washington, D.C., none of these officials lifted a finger to help the people of Flint, Michigan.

DB: Wow. It's very interesting when we look at the statement from the EPA

administrator talking about, I guess, letting Susan Hedman take the brunt of it and call her the scapegoat and she says, "Susan's strong interest in insuring that the EPA Region 5's focus remains solely on the restoration of Flint's drinking water." She's resigning.

MC: I mean you have to laugh at this stuff. It's just so silly. And so the question that we're posing to Congress is when did Gina McCarthy, who is head of the EPA, when did she know about this crisis, and what did she do about it when she found out about it?

In other words, we need to see the e-mails stream. E-mail traffic from Susan Hedman to Gina McCarthy. We need to find out when did the head of the EPA find out that an American city had been poisoned. And then, what did she do about it?

And if she didn't know that Susan Hedman was inadequate and should have been removed, was there any conversation between the head of the EPA and the White House? That, "I have an employee in Region 5, who's not up to snuff, who shouldn't be there." Either way, it seems to me that we need to really focus on the head of the EPA instead of all the people that she's basically pushing under the bus.

DB: You make the mighty powerful point that really at the core of this, this should be a criminal investigation.

MC: At the very least.

DB: At the very least, not only of the people at the EPA, but in terms of the role of the governor and the various officials and the appointed administrators, and the decisions that were made at all levels. I'm wondering about how you might carry out that part of the investigation, who you'd want to ask what to.

MC: Well, I think the responsibility to carry out this investigation lies with Congress. I was at the hearing last week, at the first hearing on this issue. There will be a second hearing on this hopefully, fairly soon. But we need to really get to the bottom of what happened. How were these people poisoned? And, by the way, Flint is not the only city that's being poisoned. I mean there are cities and municipalities around this country who are also being impacted by lead in the water. And so if people think, "Well this is just a problem for Flint," I think they're really in a fool's paradise at this point.

DB: Examples of other cities?

MC: For example, I found out about three cities in Pennsylvania today, that also have very high levels of lead. And we're trying to track that down now, and perhaps we'll do another piece for the Guardian, on those cities. And there are



obviously some municipalities that people are complaining about in California now.

Let me just say, citizens have a right to know whether the water coming from their faucet is clean and safe to drink. I mean, it sounds like such a simple statement but it's really very powerful. Because what is it that the EPA could have done in Flint?

The reason why I'm pointing my baton at the EPA is because EPA has the power of the federal government behind it. And even if state officials, the governor and the officials in Michigan had decided to hide the information from their citizens, the EPA had the overall responsibilities as the federal government to inform the citizens of Flint that their water was not safe.

They could have given the governor, for example, ten days to inform the citizens of Flint that there was a possibility that their water was not safe. And they could have said, "Until we've confirmed the results, we advise you to drink bottled water." That didn't happen. If the governor decided that he was not going to inform, it was the responsibility of the EPA then, to inform the citizens of Flint ... that there was a possibility that their water was not safe.

The EPA could have ordered a cease-and-desist order. They could have told the state, "You do not have the right to poison your people. And we are now going to step in as the federal government and we're going to take over this responsibility." EPA did not do that.

They could have referred the governor to the Department of Justice for criminal prosecution; for poisoning his residents. They didn't do [that]. There were so many tools that EPA had at its disposal, to step in and really make such a profound statement about the sanctity of life. Not only the planet, but the sanctity of human life, the EPA did not use. That's the reason why I'm really pointing my baton at EPA, because that was the responsibility of the agency, that when states fail to protect their population, the federal government must step in and protect the people.

DB: As I mentioned earlier, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder is turning down a request from the House to testify about his role in Flint. His spokesperson Anna Eaton said that the governor won't attend because he's due to present his annual budget proposal that day in Michigan. Now, would you suggest that Congress subpoena him, rather than offering him the possibility of not showing up?

MC: Absolutely. In fact, that came up at the hearing any number of times, where a number of the Democratic members of Congress strongly urged the chairman of the committee, Chaffetz, to subpoena the Michigan governor. Force him to stand

before Congress, and explain what happened in Michigan. So we're still waiting to see that kind of Congressional action.

In fact, there's one other person, I think he's a Michigan official, that Congress has now subpoenaed, and the chairman has actually ordered U.S. Marshal service to hunt him down. Direct quote, "hunt him down," and bring him to Congress. Congress can do the same thing with the Michigan governor, by the way. They could actually order the U.S. Marshal service to serve a subpoena against this governor. And to order him to stand before Congress. And that's the kind of action we're looking for at this point. Because this criminality deserves that kind of commitment to justice. And so we must, really, put a lot of pressure on Congress, to carry out its oversight responsibilities.

DB: So you would advocate ... subpoenaing the governor, and if he doesn't show up, just tracking him down and taking him into Congress?

MC: Absolutely. And that is what the law provides. And so we can't have two systems of justice. You know, where now a Michigan official has been ordered by U.S. Marshals, subpoenaed and ordered to appear before Congress. But the governor is sort of out of bounds for that kind of action. So we can't have citizens treated so differently in this country.

One of the things that, I just think is ... again, a two-tier system of justice, in this country: We have young men in prison now for possessing, you know, a little bit of marijuana, a couple of grams of marijuana and they're sentenced to 10, 20 years in prison. And we have federal government employees and we have state employees who have poisoned an entire city and no one has been charged. So we can't allow the government to operate with this two-tier system of justice. This isn't a democracy at this point. We need to really focus in on this. And then also the people of Flint, we need to really understand how the federal government is going to assist these families, going forward, with major medical and educational challenges before them.

And these families are going to really suffer a lot. I mean, they're already suffering because they're living in an economically depressed community. But now they're going to have children who are going to find it very difficult to learn.

And they're going to have other medical problems as a result of the lead poisoning. And so we need to try to understand how the government is going to assist these families, in helping these children with these enormous, enormous challenges that lie before them.

DB: Finally, I want to ask you, and I'm not being facetious here, if you were still in the EPA or if not ... what do you think would have happened if you're in

EPA and you tried to go right to the President, or send an epistle through somebody who might be a little bit closer. And what do you think he would have done if he heard from an official like you who was concerned, on the ground, the city being poisoned. Has that ever happened?

MC: Well, a lot of us at EPA have gone to Congress, when we've tried to go through the bureaucratic channels, and communities are being poisoned ... you know, in my case I also reported that a community had been poisoned.

DB: Where did that get you? It got you a lot of hell.

MC: Exactly. It was hell because you become the target. ... I became the target, death threats and rape threats. And, eventually, of course, I was fired. So, it is a process. But we don't know what the President knew and we don't know when he found out. So did the President find out about the lead poisoning when all of us found out about it? Did he find out about the lead poisoning 6 months ago ... or 3 months ago? And if he did, what did he do about it? We don't have any of those answers, yet.

So now we have to rely on Congress to help us figure out this puzzle. It's the same puzzle that they grappled with at Watergate. What did you know, and when did you know it? We need to find that out. And then once we have those answers, the officials who for 6 months, or 4 months, or 3 months, or a month or whatever it was, allowed the residents of Flint, Michigan to continue to drink poisoned water, bathe in poisoned water, feed their children, allow their children to drink poisoned water. Those officials must be held accountable.

DB: Well, the President might have learned a little bit more if he had gone down there for a couple of days, and started handing out water, and dialoguing with the people who were poisoned. Probably a bunch of them voted for him.

MC: What's really sad, of course, is that those residents are getting like a couple bottles of water a day. So that means that they have to bathe in that one bottle of water, they have to bathe their children, using that one bottle of water. ... I mean it's almost just too sad to talk about. And yet we haven't seen the National Guard sent out, and put up tents, and places, for example, where people can just go and take a bath once a day. You know, we do that when we have disasters, the Red Cross and other emergency operations will go out and they'll put up large tents, and allow people to take a bath, or have a place to have clean water. But we haven't seen that happen in Flint. So this story just remains a very heart breaking and very sad story.

**Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of [Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom](#). You can access the**

## Strangling the Israel Boycott

Brushing aside the free-speech rights of Americans, Sen. Mark Kirk and other members of the U.S. Congress are pushing Zionist-demanded legislation to stifle a boycott movement aimed at pressuring Israel to stop oppressing Palestinians, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

It was bound to happen an attempt by the U.S. Congress to support the attacks on the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement already taking place in some states and municipalities. The strategy is to legitimize an increasingly standard approach to undermining the boycott of Israel, an approach wherein the investment of any state funds, including pension funds, in any business or organization that boycotts the Zionist state is forbidden.

Bipartisan pairs in Congress Sen. Mark Kirk, R-Illinois, and Sen. Joe Manchin, D-West Virginia, and Congressional Representatives Robert Dold, R-Illinois, and Juan Vargas, D-California introduced into both houses the "[Combating BDS Act of 2016](#)" ([S.2531](#) and [H.R.4514](#)). We can be sure that all four of them are doing this at the coordinated behest of Zionist special interests to which they are financially tied.

In other words, acting in their official capacity, these members of Congress are engaged in paying back their Zionist benefactors who have helped facilitate money and other forms of election assistance by doing what the patrons want on things that touch on Israel-Palestine. Sadly, this is the way the U.S. campaign system works. Unless you are very wealthy, you are constantly scrounging for money. Under such circumstances one's pathway to success is made easier if you don't know the difference between your ethics and your elbow.

The four sponsors of the "Combating BDS Act" would, of course, deny any such tainted motives. Rather, they would insist that theirs is an effort to weigh in against anti-Semitism and defend the integrity the "only democracy in the Middle East." If they really believe this is so, the kindest thing that can be said for these legislators is that they are profoundly ignorant about Israel and its true character. It is also possible that they know the truth about their patron, but really don't care. It is all about the money.

**Intimations of the Real Israel**

For instance, are Senators Kirk and Manchin and Representatives Dold and Vargas aware that the Israeli legislature, the Knesset, recently voted down a bill to include the principle of equality among citizens in the wording of the country's "Basic Law" on Human Dignity and Liberty? Basic Laws stand in for a constitution in Israel. The bill was introduced by one of the few Arab-Israeli MKs (members of the Knesset), Jamal Zahalka, who noted that "All constitutions in modern countries begin with stressing the principle of equality amongst their citizens."

That did not matter to a majority of the Knesset who, following inherently discriminatory Zionist ideals, do not believe in equality between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. Yet to Israel's supporters in Washington the Zionist state remains a "democracy" much like the United States. Such an unquestioning assumption, so wide of the mark, displays a level of closed-mindedness that ought to require intensive remedial critical-thinking training before allowing someone to stand for office.

Are Senators Kirk and Manchin and Representatives Dold and Vargas aware that the Knesset "Ethics Committee" has suspended three Arab-Israeli MKs, including Mr. Zahalka, from participating in legislative sessions because they met with families whose members had been killed while violently resisting Israeli occupation?

The aim of the meeting was to assist the families in recovering from Israeli authorities the bodies of their slain relatives. The Israelis refuse to recognize the truism that the violence of the oppressed will eventually reach the level of the violence of the oppressor. Instead, any violent blowback occurring in response to their own violence is conveniently characterized as "terrorism."

In order for the action of the Arab MKs to make sense to most Israeli Jews and their Zionist supporters abroad, there has to be recognition of the historically established fact that the occupation of Palestinian land is real. This the Zionists will not do, and apparently, part of their deal with the U.S. politicians in Congress is that they too must echo that same denial.

Are Senators Kirk and Manchin and Representatives Dold and Vargas aware that the respected human rights organization Amnesty International has recently released a report accusing Israeli forces of using "intentional lethal force" against Palestinians in situations where such force was "completely unjustified"? Amnesty spokesman Philip Luther asserted that the Israelis had "ripped up the rulebook" by "flouting international standards" when it came to the use of force.

For the politicians in Washington who have made their pact with the Zionists, such behavior, if noted at all, is rationalized as self-defense on the part of the Israelis. However, suppression of resistance to illegal occupation cannot be judged self-defense either legally or logically. Who in Congress is aware of the Fourth Geneva Convention?

There are many other practices and policies of the State of Israel that must be ignored (including Israel's support of Al Qaeda in Syria) if Senators Kirk and Manchin and Representatives Dold and Vargas are to carry on with clear consciences. But this might be based on a false assumption that these politicians have a conscience to which they pay attention. After all, our system of politics, which all but demands submission to special interests, may well select for amoral personalities.

### **Ignoring the Question of Constitutionality**

The apparent indifference of Senators Kirk and Manchin and Representatives Dold and Vargas goes beyond Israel's flouting of international law. It carries over to these politicians' own disregard for the U.S. Constitution, which each gentleman has sworn to uphold.

Ever since the early 1980s, the Supreme Court has regarded domestically initiated boycotts as a legitimate form of political speech. There is little excuse for these four defenders of Israel not to know this. And what are we to say of them if they do in fact know? Only that they, like their patrons, are willing to "rip up the rulebook."

They are willing to act as if what is unconstitutional is, after all, acceptable when it protects the interests of a foreign rogue state on whose payroll they happen to be. Just how long can they get away with this? Is the answer really just as long as the Zionist money keeps coming?

Congressmen and senators tied to Zionist special interests will eventually have to rethink these alliances. Their connection with a state that has no compunction about violating international law has led them to become accomplices in the undermining of U.S. law.

Thus, the actions of politicians such as Kirk, Manchin, Dold and Vargas act as a barometer indicating the degree to which under-regulated special interests have corrupted the U.S. government. Those involved are walking a path that can lead only to on-going ethical decline and policy failures.

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

## Recalling the Slaughter of Innocents

**From the Archive:** The quarter-century anniversary of an early U.S. war crime in Iraq passed largely unnoticed this week, the bombing of a civilian air-raid shelter in Baghdad during President George H.W. Bush's Persian Gulf War, an atrocity that killed more than 400 women and children, as Ray McGovern recalled in 2011.

By Ray McGovern (Updated from the original publication on Feb. 14, 2011)

Twenty-five years ago, as Americans were celebrating Valentine's Day, Iraqi husbands and fathers in the Amiriyah section of Baghdad were peeling the remains of their wives and children off the walls and floor of a large neighborhood bomb shelter.

The men had left the shelter the evening before, so their wives would have some measure of privacy as they sought refuge from the U.S.-led coalition bombing campaign, which was at its most intense pre-ground-war stage.

All of the more than 400 women and children were incinerated or boiled to death at 4:30 a.m. on Feb. 13, 1991, when two F-117 stealth fighter-bombers each dropped a 2,000-pound laser-guided "smart bomb" on the civilian shelter at Amiriyah.

It was one of those highly accurate "surgical strikes." The first bomb sliced through 10 feet of reinforced concrete before a time-delayed fuse exploded, destroying propane and water tanks for heating water and food. Minutes later the second bomb flew precisely through the opening that had been cut by the first and exploded deeper in the shelter creating an inferno. Fire rose from the lower level to the area where the women and children were seeking shelter and so did the boiling water. Those who did not burn to death immediately or die from the bombs' impact were boiled or steamed to death in the intense heat.

The bombs hit toward the end of the month-long bombing campaign to "soften up" Iraq before the U.S.-led ground invasion to drive Iraqi troops from Kuwait. The aerial bombing had begun on Jan. 17, 1991; the coalition flew over 100,000 sorties, dropping 88,500 tons of bombs. U.S. government documents show that the bombs were targeted on civilian as well as military infrastructure. They were very accurate.

This is not to suggest that the targeters knew that some 400 women and children would be killed at Amiriyah. No, it was just one of those unfortunate mistakes to which many Americans have become accustomed, even inured whether the unintended-but-nevertheless-dead victims be in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, wherever.

Indeed, the stealth aircraft and the ordnance were a proud paragon of precision performing their mission. How was the Air Force to know that the targeting information was based on spurious "intelligence" reports that the shelter had become a military command site?

Actually, Brigadier General Buster Glosson, who had overall responsibility for targeting, later commented that the "intelligence" pointing to military use was not "worth a shit."

Human Rights Watch noted later in 1991: "It is now well established, through interviews with neighborhood residents, that the Amiriyah structure was plainly marked as a public shelter and was used throughout the air war by large numbers of civilians."

A BBC correspondent, Jeremy Bowen, was among the first TV reporters to arrive on the scene. He was given access to the site and found no evidence of military use. The Pentagon later admitted that it had known that "the Amiriyah facility had been used as a civil-defense shelter during the Iraq-Iran war" from 1980 to 1988.

So who was held responsible for this horrible "mistake"? Are you kidding? What planet did you say you were from?

### **A Time to Witness**

In "Death of a Salesman," Arthur Miller puts these words into the mouth of Willy Loman's wife, Linda, words that I believe also apply to the "small" people huddled that night in the shelter in Amiriyah: "I don't say he's a great man. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall in his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person."

This imperative was brought home to me when my friend Art Laffin of the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker in Washington, DC, called me on Feb. 12, 2003, as a fresh wave of "coalition" attacks on Iraq loomed. Art had visited the huge underground coffin at Amiriyah. He said: "I was there, Ray; I saw it; I talked to the men."

Art told me of a memorial liturgy to be held in front of the White House the next day, marking the 12th anniversary of the precision bombing at Amiriyah,



lest the massacre be forgotten.

"You should come with us," said Art in his soft-spoken but prophetically challenging way.

"But I am planning to write the kind of op-ed that might inform enough people about the lies upon which a new war on Iraq would be launched, that the juggernaut might be stopped," thought I to myself. "If people only knew the truth. "

Then Linda Loman's words started ringing in my ears, or perhaps they were coming from somewhere else, maybe a voice emerging out of my deep respect for the likes of Dorothy Day and Art Laffin. "Attention, attention must be finally paid."

So there we stood marking the day, and praying that somehow future days like it could be avoided. The wind-chill factor was well below zero, so there was some solace to being put in the paddy wagon. It was my first arrest and (brief) imprisonment.

And it was exhilarating. I may be biased, given the experience of this first arrest, but if you are going to risk arrest via non-violent civil disobedience, you can't have steadier, more prophetic companions than those of the Catholic Worker.

When we went to court for trial the new war had already begun. To our surprise, the judge announced that the arresting officer had not appeared and, thus, we were free to go. I rushed to get out the door, thinking the officer might still get there.

But Art blocked my way, turned to the judge, and asked if she would allow him to explain what we were doing on Feb. 13, 2003, and why. The crowded courtroom listened intently as Art held forth for about five minutes.

"Let's have some coffee," said Art as he caught up to me running down the street away from the courthouse. "Have you been able to reflect on what just happened? Do you remember how that African-American woman police officer was listening to us as we shared our hopes in the paddy wagon?"

"Do you think, Ray, that non-violent civil disobedience could be contagious?"

A day or two later, a short passage in Luke's gospel leaped out at me. Jesus of Nazareth is warning fledgling "Catholic workers" about what to expect if they remain faithful:

"Countries will fight each other there will be terrifying things coming from the sky. Before all these things take place, however, you will be arrested and

persecuted; you will be handed over to be tried you will be brought before kings and rulers for my sake Stand firm This will be your chance to tell the Good News.”

Duh! My big chance to tell the Good News, and I was running for the door. I was even more grateful that Art did not blow the chance to witness, and to remind me what it is all about.

I’ve matured to the point where witnessing and risking arrest comes more naturally and even more exhilarating. On the very snowy day of Dec. 16, 2010, when 131 witnesses against war were arrested at the White House gates at a rally arranged by Veterans for Peace, 42 of us insisted on standing trial.

The authorities, though, quickly lost their appetite for trying the likes of us, most of whom have defended our country and its constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and assembly, for “failure to obey a lawful order,” i.e. not moving, after being ordered not to remain standing on the sidewalk in front of the White House. The “paperwork” on us 42 had been misplaced, we were told.

As we celebrate Valentine’s Day and other holidays that stress love and peace, let’s keep in mind that the most painful anniversaries must also be marked; they must be witnessed to; attention must be paid the plight of “small” people still further diminished by the euphemism “collateral damage.”

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served as a CIA analyst and Army infantry/intelligence officer for almost 30 years, and is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).**

---

## Lost Lessons of Libya

**Exclusive:** Despite months of Western diplomatic efforts, Libya remains an object lesson in “regime change” arrogance, a failed state beset by rival militias and becoming a new base for Islamic extremists as the movie “Thirteen Hours” graphically depicts, writes James DiEugenio.

By James DiEugenio

American foreign policy leaders are not great at learning lessons from the past. The cautionary tale about “regime change” from George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq in 2003 did not even last until 2011 when President Barack Obama at the urging

of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton plunged into “regime change” in Libya, creating one more failed state and another humanitarian catastrophe.

Different presidents, different parties, very similar results.

In the case of Libya, many of the failings from that enterprise are recounted in the book, *Thirteen Hours*, along with one of the tragic consequences of that adventure, the death of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans in Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012, an event highlighted in a movie by the same name.

But the failure of Obama and Clinton to heed the warnings from the Iraq disaster has historical precedents in other prescient warnings that were ignored by impetuous leaders, such as early doubts expressed about the gathering storm clouds in Vietnam in the 1950s.

In 1958, William Lederer, a former Navy officer, and Eugene Burdick, a political scientist, submitted their draft of a non-fiction book called *The Ugly American* to W.W. Norton Company. An editor at Norton suggested it would probably be more dramatically effective if it was rewritten as a roman a clef, that is as a thinly disguised fiction based on actual people and events.

From a marketing standpoint at least, the editor was correct. *The Ugly American* became a sensational success, spending 76 weeks on the best-seller lists and eventually selling over four million copies. [*New York Times*, Nov. 29, 2009]

### **Arrogance and Stupidity**

Essentially, the authors were criticizing the arrogance and stupidity of American foreign policy in Indochina. They were particularly hard on the State Department. They pictured its employees as being insensitive and unknowledgeable about the true circumstances and conditions of the cultures they were dealing with. Even the best of their representatives were blinded by the distortions of the Cold War. Their consuming anti-communism kept them from perceiving that they had become their own worst enemies.

Sen. John F. Kennedy, a skeptic about U.S. interventions in Third World conflicts, mailed a copy of *The Ugly American* to each member of the U.S. Senate, but the United States plunged nonetheless into the Vietnam killing fields, with Kennedy as president deploying the Green Berets and other military advisers to the South Vietnamese army and then after Kennedy’s death President Lyndon Johnson escalating the war dramatically by committing more than a half million U.S. soldiers.

But even the devastating failure in Vietnam did not instill any lasting sense of

caution and humility in the U.S. foreign policy establishment. Bristling with boasts about "American exceptionalism," President George W. Bush rushed off to invade Iraq in 2003 and President Barack Obama launched an air war in Libya in 2011 in support of an uprising against longtime strongman Muammar Gaddafi.

Like his predecessors in other U.S. interventions, Obama was either ignorant of or chose to ignore history, since Libya had a long record of suffering under and resisting foreign powers.

For three centuries, the Ottoman Empire had controlled Libya until 1890. In 1912, Italy took over the northern African country, but was cast out eight years later. However, in 1931, Italian fascist Benito Mussolini invaded again. His forces captured and hanged the Moslem leader Omar Mukhtar, who became a martyred hero, especially in eastern Libya.

It was not until after World War II, with Italy and its fascist Axis allies defeated, that Libya became free and independent. In 1951, a constitutional monarchy under the Senussi Moslem leader Idris al-Senussi was formed. At that time, Libya was one of the poorest and most illiterate countries in the world. [*Thirteen Hours*, by Mitchell Zuckoff, e-book version, p. 11]

In 1969, the king was overthrown in a bloodless military coup led by Colonel Muammar Gaddafi who then exercised what was essentially one-man rule over Libya for over 40 years during which Libya grew rich from oil fields mostly located in the east around Benghazi, although political power was concentrated in the west around Tripoli, which Gaddafi made the permanent capital and the home for the National Oil Corporation. Most of the improvements Gaddafi made, such as hospitals and schools, were also in the west. [ibid, p. 11]

### **Backing a Rebellion**

So, in 2011, when a rebellion broke out against Gaddafi, it understandably started in east Libya and was partly fueled by the slighting of the east for the west. Once this happened, in the context of other uprisings known as the Arab Spring, President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton assisted by then U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice and National Security staffer Samantha Power decided to seize the opportunity to eliminate Gaddafi, long considered a thorn in the side of U.S. foreign policy.

But as with Bush in Iraq they did not appear to have asked themselves: 1.) What do we have to replace him? and 2.) Will the situation in Libya be better or worse when he is gone? Some observers cautioned about any American intervention, simply because of the Pandora's Box effect: Who could possibly predict what would happen afterwards?

The rebellion against Gaddafi began in February 2011 in east Libya, and then spread westward. It included the Islamist organizations, the Libyan Fighting Group and the Obaida Ibn Jarrah Brigade. These organizations appear to have fought Gaddafi because he allowed a secular form of government, including many rights for women.

The anti-Gaddafi opposition also included elements of Al Qaeda, though the rebel groups denied this at the time. The role of Islamic extremists was confirmed by a West Point study of captured Al Qaeda documents called the Sinjar Records, which showed that a disproportionate number of jihadists who flocked to fight American troops in Iraq came from eastern Libya. Also, according to documents released by Wikileaks, one of the rebel leaders had joined the Taliban. [*The Daily Telegraph*, Oct. 29, 2011]

So, although there were pro-democratic elements in the rebellion against Gaddafi, mainly among the professional classes, there was a real danger that, if the rebels won out, the result could be a hardline Islamist state that would revoke rights for women and create a new stronghold for terrorism.

Secretary Clinton also was made aware of the role of regional rivalries seeking Gaddafi's demise as well as Western motives that had nothing to do with protecting the lives or improving the lot of Libyans. For instance, among Clinton's recently declassified emails, private adviser Sidney Blumenthal informed her that Egyptian special operations units were training and arming Libyan militants along the Egypt/Libya border and in Benghazi even before the uprising began. [Brad Hoff, *The Levant Report*, Jan. 4, 2016]

### **France's Motives**

France also parachuted weapons to the rebels, including anti-tank rockets. [*Le Figaro*, June 28, 2011] And, as Blumenthal explained to Clinton, France's motives were not entirely noble. French President Nicolas Sarkozy wanted a greater share of Libyan oil production than he was getting from Gaddafi. Also, Sarkozy was interested in a new government in Libya because Gaddafi had plans to supplant the French franc with the Libyan golden dinar in Francophone Africa. In other words, Gaddafi wanted to free Africa from the neocolonial interests of the old colonial powers.

Blumenthal warned Clinton, too, that elements of Al Qaeda were infiltrating upward into the rebel umbrella group called the NTC, the National Transitional Council. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[What Hillary Knew about Libya.](#)"]

Retired UK Prime Minister Tony Blair was alerted to the terrorist role directly by Gaddafi. While in power, Blair had visited Gaddafi a number of times and the

Libyan leader considered him a friend.

In two phone calls on Feb. 25, 2011, Gaddafi told Blair that the forces he was fighting were similar to Osama Bin Laden. He said, "We are not fighting them, they are attacking us. An organization had laid down sleeping cells in North Africa. Called the Al Qaeda Organization in North Africa. The sleeping cells in Libya are similar to dormant cells in America before 9/11." [*The Telegraph*, Jan. 7, 2016] As the author of this story, Robert Mendick noted Gaddafi was prophetic about this considering the later attacks in France.

But the Western leaders ignored these warnings. Following the Lederer-Burdick script from Indochina, France and the U.S., for different reasons, decided to team up again to attack a Third World country, this time in Africa.

While there were covert operations already going on in Libya, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton were working more or less out in the open at the United Nations.

### **Tricking the Russians**

In February 2011, the U.S., France, Germany and England teamed up to pass Security Council Resolution 1970. This act condemned Gaddafi for using lethal force against civilians in Tripoli (which, as many commentators have written, probably did not happen.) The UN then passed a series of sanctions against Libya, including freezing some assets and enacting an arms embargo. At the same time Western countries were aiding some of the worst elements of the rebellion.

One month later, the Obama administration returned to the United Nations, wanting to go even further. Resolution 1973 proposed the establishment of "a no-fly zone" over Libya, supposedly for humanitarian purposes. It also contained a clause that allowed all necessary means to protect civilians, short of an occupying force. Russia and China were lobbied not to veto it but rather to abstain from the vote, which they did despite concerns that the use of military force could result in unintended consequences.

The pretense for this intervention was that Gaddafi's forces, which had isolated the rebels near Benghazi, would inflict a bloodbath. So, soon after the "humanitarian" resolution passed, the Western military operation unleashed fierce attacks against Gaddafi's army in the east and quickly expanded the intervention into a "regime change" project headed by NATO, bombing a wide range of Libyan government targets and blockading ports.

Codenamed "Operation Unified Protector," over 9,000 strike sorties were flown and over 400 artillery batteries were destroyed along with 600 tanks or armored vehicles. [*Final Mission Stats*, published by NATO, Nov. 2, 2011]

Some critics argued at the time that the Obama administration was exaggerating the potential for a bloodbath. For instance, University of Texas professor Alan Kuperman pointed out that neither Amnesty International nor Human Rights Watch warned of any impending massacre in Libya and neither did the U.S. intelligence community.

In March 2011, Kuperman wrote that there was no photographic evidence to support the administration's claims but rather mostly rebel propaganda transmitted to the White House, which uncritically accepted it. [*Foreign Affairs*, "Who Lost Libya", April 21, 2015] Kuperman said the intervention was actually driven by the fact that Gaddafi was close to stifling the rebellion. ["Obama's Libya Debacle," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2015]

The true aim of the UN/NATO enterprise was not humanitarian relief but "regime change." Once the rebel forces sensed that, they decided to reject each and every offer of a truce with negotiations that the Libyan government extended.

### **Call for 'Regime Change'**

Obama signaled U.S. support for the rebel intransigence by announcing on March 3, 2011, that Gaddafi "must step down from power and leave." (op. cit. "Who Lost Libya") The State Department then ordered U.S. Africa Command to stop peace negotiations on March 22. Even though Gaddafi made two more offers for a truce, with minimal demands on his side requesting only that his inner circle be allowed to leave the country peacefully and that Libya retain a military force strong enough to fight Al Qaeda and ISIS elements of the rebellion. (ibid)

Former Rear Admiral Charles Kubic, who had a major role in the negotiations, confirmed that Gaddafi was willing to step down and that his military leaders were willing to withdraw their forces from the cities to the outskirts in order to begin a truce process. Kubic was puzzled by the refusal of Western officials to accept, not only this but also the offer to discuss constitutional changes and pay compensation to victims of the fighting.

Kubic came to the conclusion that, "It wasn't enough to get him out of power; they wanted him dead." (ibid) Gaddafi's olive branches were rebuffed, dismissed out of hand.

If Gaddafi's death was indeed the goal a kind of head-on-a-spike, tough-guy/gal moment of blood lust the goal was achieved. Due to the massive NATO bombing and repeated refusals of a negotiated settlement, Tripoli was taken in the autumn of 2011. Gaddafi retreated to his hometown of Sirte, where he was captured on Oct. 20, 2011, tortured (sodomized with a knife) and then murdered.

Secretary Clinton could hardly contain her glee. Basking in her "Mission

Accomplished" moment, she famously declared to a broadcast reporter, "We came, we saw, he died."

But as George W. Bush had shown, when proper geopolitical conditions are not considered, a seeming victory can become a disaster. It turned out Gaddafi was correct. There were strong elements of radical Islam incorporated into the rebellion against him. And although an interim government was constructed, it could not control the anarchy that had been unleashed by the civil war. The government simply could not coax or order the guerrillas, militias and Islamists to disarm.

### **Benghazi Chaos**

There was so little order that huge arms bazaars materialized overnight and sold sophisticated weapons on the street. Even before the outbreak of violence against Americans at the State Department compound and the CIA annex in Benghazi, there were two major violent clashes in 2012: the Sabha tribal dispute, resulting in 147 dead and 395 wounded, and the Zuwara conflict between Gaddafi loyalists and local militias, with estimates of more than 50 dead and over 100 wounded.

In the face of this escalating violence and the inability of the new government to quell the disorder, several foreign embassies shuttered their windows and closed their doors. However, the United States did not withdraw, even from the anarchic situation surrounding Benghazi.

In Benghazi, the United States had allied itself with a less radical group called the February 17<sup>th</sup> Martyrs Brigade which supplied hired guards to protect State Department buildings. [Zuckoff, p. 19] But perhaps the most powerful militia in Libya at the time of the Benghazi attack was the Ansar al Sharia Brigade, which translates as Partisans of Islamic Law.

The violence escalated because of the easy availability of weapons, including grenades, mortars, rocket launchers and heavy machine guns. [ibid, p. 20] In June 2012, a rocket-propelled grenade was fired at the British ambassador, contributing to the United Kingdom's decision to depart Benghazi. (ibid, p. 22)

In June 2012, Ambassador Christopher Stevens sent a cable to Washington, warning that Al Qaeda influence was spreading in Libya and he had seen their flags flying. Around the same time, Stevens had sent another cable to Washington seeking more bodyguards. He described the security conditions in Libya as being "unpredictable, volatile and violent." [ibid, p. 63]

This request was denied, as were similar ones. Altogether, Stevens' requests for added security were denied three times, even though the State Department



classified the conditions for staffers there as critical. In late August 2012, the department circulated a travel warning to Libya declaring that "Political violence in the form of assassination and vehicle bombs have increased in both Benghazi and Tripoli. Inter-military conflict can erupt at any time or any place in the country." [ibid, p. 65]

So the questions become: 1.) If the U.S. was going to stay, why was State not willing to fully protect its own personnel? and 2.) If not willing to fully protect the personnel, why should they stay? Whatever the answer to those questions, one of the main functions of the State Department compound in Benghazi, which did not technically qualify as a consulate, was to gather intelligence on the growing influence of Al Qaeda. (ibid, pgs. 35, 61)

Whenever one of the State Department employees went out to meet with a citizen, whoever it may have been, they were escorted by at least one bodyguard. That guard was either employed by Diplomatic Security (DS) or the CIA's Global Response Staff (GRS). The former arose after the Beirut bombing in 1983; the latter after 9/11. The GRS is largely staffed by former special operations officers, e.g. Navy Seals. Two of the men who died at Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012, were part of the GRS, Glen Doherty and Tyrone Woods.

### **A Fatal Visit**

Ambassador Stevens had arrived for a five-day visit in Benghazi from Tripoli on Sept. 10. He attended a ribbon cutting at a local school, and opened up an "American Corner" on a city street: a place where Libyans could get bilingual books and films and magazines. (ibid, p. 65) He had five DS agents assigned to him, plus a computer technology officer, Sean Smith.

The State Department compound in Benghazi was not secure even from the Libyan guards hired to defend it. A post-incident review stated that the compound "had been vandalized and attacked by some of the same guards who were there to protect it." [ibid, p. 67] In fact, at the time Stevens was in Benghazi there was a work dispute going on with these very same guards.

For security reasons, Stevens had not planned on leaving the compound on Sept. 11, which was the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. During the day, Stevens heard from an assistant that protesters had stormed the U.S. Embassy in Cairo over an insulting video about Islam that had been placed on YouTube, called *Innocence of Muslim*. (p. 76)

A State Department warning was sent out about a danger to local government buildings from Libyans. Stevens was alerted to this but disregarded it. In his last diary entry that night, Stevens wrote about how much he enjoyed being in

Benghazi, except for the “Never ending security threats”

Shortly after 9 p.m., a Toyota pick-up truck pulled up in front of the compound. The car had police insignia. It stayed awhile, and then left. An explosion rang out. Dozens of men swarmed the gate firing AK-47s into the air. Some had walkie-talkies. To this day, there is a debate about whether the gate was left open or whether the Libyan guards were coerced into opening it. [Zuckoff, pgs. 83-85]

The militia leader who seemed to have organized the attack was Abu Khattala. [New York Times, Dec. 28, 2013] He had been a leader of the Al Jarrah brigade, which had helped depose Gaddafi with extensive American aid. Some witnesses interviewed by David Kirkpatrick of the *New York Times* said that, during the rioting inside the compound, *Innocence of Muslims* was mentioned. Yet, whether or not the film was the casus belli of the attack or it was simply a pretense used by the main organizer, perhaps Khattala, has become part of a partisan debate, which has obscured some of the larger questions involved.

As calls went out for help, Stevens took refuge with Smith in a safe room part of his villa, led there by a security officer. The attackers could not get into the room but managed to set fire to most of the area outside. The security officer tried to lead Smith and Stevens to a bathroom with an escape window onto a terrace. But en route, he lost Stevens and Smith. He tried going back several times to find them, but could not. He was later overcome with smoke inhalation and collapsed on the terrace.

After a delay of about 20-30 minutes, six GRS officers left the CIA annex, which was about a mile from the State Department compound. They managed to counter the attackers, and they found the body of Sean Smith who was dead from smoke inhalation. They also tried to find Stevens but could not get into the safe room due to fire and smoke.

After the rescuers returned to the CIA annex, they took positions on the rooftops of the main buildings. Several more men arrived from Tripoli in the middle of the night, with the defenders repulsing an attack on the CIA annex. The attackers regrouped and launched a mortar barrage. In the shelling, Bud Doherty, one of the men who arrived from Tripoli, and Ty Woods, part of the rescue team, were killed.

Stevens' body was later recovered by locals. He was taken to a hospital and pronounced dead from smoke inhalation. Stevens was the first American ambassador to die in office in the line of duty since 1988.

## **A Political Football**

The administration sent UN Ambassador Susan Rice out that weekend to make the circle of talk shows relying on talking points that played up the impact of the YouTube video as provoking the attack. [ibid, *New York Times*.] The Republicans seized on Rice's statement, insisting that it was part of an Obama administration cover-up. But as Kirkpatrick noted in his six-part series, the Republicans went overboard in their painting of a conspiracy theory. (ibid)

Yet, there were clearly errors in Secretary Clinton's and the State Department's handling of the Libyan conflict and the resulting chaos. Benghazi was one of the most dangerous State Department outposts in the world, perhaps the most dangerous, yet pleas for enhanced security were bureaucratically rebuffed. The other key error was the delay in getting help to the compound sooner.

But the question that neither side wants to address is the one that Professor Kuperman confronts head on: Would it have been better for Libya and America if the State Department had negotiated with Gaddafi to ease his ouster and, perhaps, have had his son Saif al-Islam take over Libya? Due to the insistence on "regime change," Libya is now listed by the State Department as a failed state. In 2014, it descended into its second civil war in three years. And now Al Qaeda and ISIS have operational cells there.

Lederer and Burdick could not have written a more nightmarish scenario to show the arrogance and short sightedness of American foreign policy. Prominent neocon Richard Perle could not have done worse. Yet, the overriding failure of "regime change" strategies was not the focus of Republican investigations. The Republican-controlled Congress insisted instead on focusing on what Secretary Clinton knew and when she knew it.

As the Benghazi political firestorm swept across Washington, author Mitchell Zuckoff got in contact with the surviving GRS officers who rode from the CIA annex to rescue Stevens that night. Zuckoff, a former journalist and author, relied on those accounts in *13 Hours: The Inside Account of What Really Happened at Benghazi*, written as a deliberate attempt to sidestep all of the partisan issues that had enveloped the incident.

The book concentrated on the characters of the six GRS contractors, Ambassador Stevens, computer expert Smith, and the CIA chief of station who was fictionally named Bob. The book details the firefights at both the State Department Compound and the CIA annex in extraordinary detail.

Considering the focus of the book, director-producer Michael Bay was a decent enough choice to transform the book into a movie. Producer Jerry Bruckheimer had hired Bay to direct action films like *Bad Boys*, *The Rock*, *Armageddon*, *Pearl Harbor* and *Bad Boys 2*. Bay is strong on technical elements: visuals, sound and

editing. He is not so interested in things like story, character development, subtlety, and dramatic structure. But, in truth, Zuckoff's book is not really interested in those aspects either.

To adapt the book, Bay hired author Chuck Hogan, who wrote novels including *Prince of Thieves*, which was adapted into the Ben Affleck film *The Town* in 2010.

### **Book into Movie**

In comparing the book, *Thirteen Hours*, with the film by the same name, there seems to me to be only one really exaggerated scene of dramatic license. When a militia at a checkpoint stops two of the GRS agents, the book does not describe any shooting which followed. (Zuckoff, pgs. 23-25) Bay does show an exchange of fire.

There has been some controversy over whether the CIA station chief actually delayed the rescue attempt and resisted the GRS involvement. But this is all in Zuckoff's book, and he details it profusely. (pgs. 94-102) If it did not happen, then the GRS agents are lying. I suspect the CIA is probably covering for the reluctance of "Bob" to let the agents leave the station relatively unprotected.

One of the problems with the film is that, although it is an action movie, there is a lot of time between the set pieces of violence. And, the running time of the film is well over two hours. Thus, we have a lot of dialogue and scenes where people at the CIA annex are interacting, not one of Bay's strengths. He also didn't seem interested in casting acutely either.

Because of the subject matter, the film spent heavily on the production value and not on performance value. With the exception of Toby Stephens as Bud Doherty, the acting performances are not notable or dynamic. However, with the action scenes, Bay does a decent enough job. They are vividly presented, especially the last mortar attack in which the shells are seen arriving at the CIA annex in super slow motion.

Zuckoff's book does mention the Internet video in more than one place. But Bay's film makes very little comment on that topic. At the end, after the last attack, the film takes a nihilistic attitude toward the whole affair. The Arab linguist, who the GRS team employed as a translator on their rescue mission, decides not to go with them to the infirmary. He shakes his head in disgust and says words to the effect, none of this should have ever happened.

Before the end titles roll, the film tells us that Libya is classified as a failed state today. We then learn that the five surviving agents who tried to rescue Stevens all resigned shortly after this mission. This is as close as director Bay gets to any kind of political statement, a reflection of the

Lederer-Burdick sense of how U.S. foreign policy ambitions often outstrip American ability to achieve those goals and how the misguided efforts result in grave human catastrophes.

**James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His most recent book is Reclaiming Parkland.**

---

---

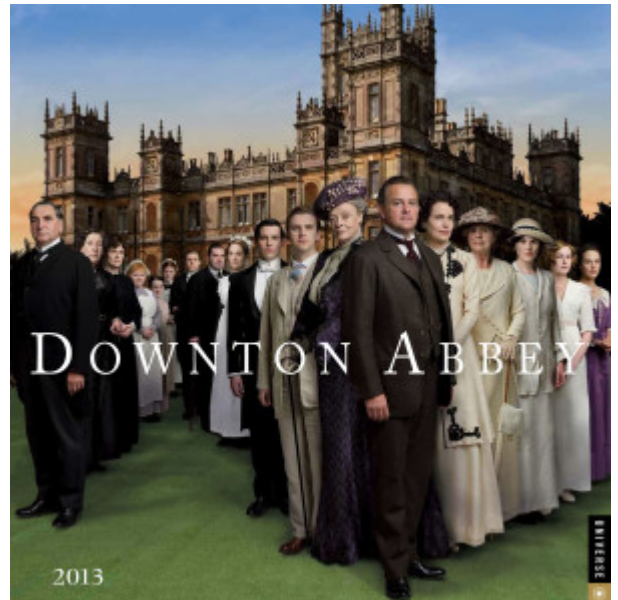
## The ‘Downton Abbey’ Generals

As Official Washington lusts for a new Cold War all the better to fleece the taxpayers on behalf of the Military-Industrial Complex there are also smaller perks that the powerful prefer, like U.S. generals having enlisted soldiers perform as their personal servants like the wait staff on “Downton Abbey,” notes Mike Lofgren.

By Mike Lofgren

If there is one refrain that officials at the Department of Defense repeat with dogged persistence, it is that our military is underfunded. DOD testimony to Congress brims over with references to budget cuts. This meme has spread to the point where many in the public think that we spend too little on defense. Republican presidential candidates certainly talk as if they believe it.

This is despite the fact that the Pentagon’s budget has nearly doubled since 9/11. Adjusted for inflation, we are spending substantially more on the military than the average Pentagon budget during the Cold War.



A related complaint is a purported lack of military personnel. As the saying goes, the military is “stretched thin” and has to “do more with less.” Accordingly, several candidates would increase the “end strength” (the congressionally authorized personnel numbers) of the various services.

After hearing this unremitting dirge about military austerity, it may come as a surprise to learn that the Army is soliciting its troops to become full-time aides to generals. What does this involve? According to the *Army Times*, “duties typically include:

- Maintaining the general’s uniforms.
- Planning and executing official military social events.
- Daily meal preparation, to include menu development, shopping and storing of rations.
- Administrative requirements and record-keeping of finances.
- Household management, to include the upkeep of a general’s assigned quarters.
- Perform other tasks that assist the general in the performance of his or her official duties.”

Translated into plain English, the Army is looking for Mr. Carson from *Downton Abbey*, with our generals playing the role of the Earl of Grantham. Given that there are around 300 U.S. Army generals, this means that a similar number of enlisted personnel is involved. The equivalent number of soldiers could fill out the combat slots for two full infantry companies, which makes you wonder about the Army’s priorities.

When then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney ordered a comprehensive privatization of military logistics in 1992, support functions like Army mess halls were

privatized. As a consequence, our military cannot feed itself, and must rely on contractors like Halliburton (of which Cheney, conveniently, was CEO from 1995 to 2000) for meals, including in combat zones. Even what formerly counted as core military functions, like guarding military installations, are now largely privatized. Yet preparing canapés for a dinner party is a core military mission that cannot be privatized.

Does a general, in addition to free lodging not subject to taxation and subsidized food, need a full-time government-supplied servant? If the social whirl in which they engage is so exhausting, perhaps a caterer could supply the eats and booze.

Members of Congress, by the way, are prohibited from using their publicly paid staff for purely personal tasks. Although this rule is sometimes honored more in the breach than the observance, former Congressman Jim Traficant landed in the federal slammer for (among other charges) using his staff to do chores at his home.

Perhaps there is the perception that a general, with a salary limited by statute, needs this perk in view of responsibilities vastly greater than his paycheck. Unfortunately, the image of Cincinnatus, the Roman commander who returned to his plow once victory was won, has faded.

General Robert E. Lee, it is said, lived out his life in near penury, refusing to shill as a product endorser because it would mean cashing in on the blood his men had spilled. George C. Marshall, America's organizer of victory in World War II, also spent his retirement following the stern code of a soldier in a constitutional republic.

Now the overwhelming drive among general and flag officers is to cash in. As it is with so many congressmen and executive branch officials, their time in office is really just a stepping stone to making a killing.

Just as Robert Rubin and Trent Lott profited beyond the dreams of avarice after leaving government service, General David Petraeus, despite the embarrassing denouement to his career, became a partner at Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. L.P., a Wall Street leveraged buyout firm. His previous experience in investment banking is doubtful, but obviously KKR was in the market for a Beltway-connected door opener.

Petraeus is the exception in one respect: about 70 percent of his colleagues end up in the executive suites or board rooms of the very defense contractors they were supposed to have kept honest during their military careers.

According to a 2011 Bloomberg News article, "The top 10 U.S. defense contractors

have 30 retired senior officers or former national security officials serving on their boards. Press releases issued by those companies since 2008 announced the hiring of almost two dozen prominent flag officers or senior officials as high-ranking executives.” The article also states that senior executives at the largest U.S. defense contractors are paid from \$1 million to \$11 million a year.

Beyond the fact that the Army, if we believe its doomsaying about its budget, can't spare valuable active-duty personnel for a frivolous activity, and that generals are not exactly underpaid, there is something degrading about the whole business. The tradition of military commanders being fawned over by uniformed servants is a hangover from the feudal-aristocratic tradition of Europe, when officers were noblemen and the troops were considered, in the testimony of the Duke of Wellington, “the scum of the earth, enlisted for drink.”

It is hardly fitting for a democratic republic to think of generals as nobility or of soldiers as servants. It's time to end this silly anachronism.

**Mike Lofgren is a former congressional staff member who served on the House and Senate budget committees. His new book, The Deep State: The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government, appeared January 5, 2016.**

---

## France Dumps Libert  for Security

**Exclusive:** France's response to last year's terror attacks in Paris imposed draconian measures that waived basic civil rights during the immediate “emergency,” but the French parliament is now considering making those rules permanent, as Jonathan Marshall explains.

By Jonathan Marshall

When Islamist radicals destroy centuries-old artifacts, from Bamyas to Palmyra, civilized people everywhere register their outrage. Yet in the name of fighting those same Islamists, some Western governments are destroying their own architecture of legal and human rights that took centuries to build.

The United States, post-9/11, offers countless examples. But now the government of French President Fran ois Hollande is bucking condemnations from local and international human rights groups, the United Nations, and the European Council to ram through parliament constitutional amendments that would permanently enshrine the government's emergency powers.

In the classic words of authoritarian leaders everywhere, France's interior



minister insists, "it is terrorism that is the threat to freedom not the state of emergency."

France is today living under a temporary national state of emergency, imposed after the Nov. 13, 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris that killed 130 people and injured hundreds. Already extended once, the emergency will expire Feb. 26, unless extended again by parliament.

The national emergency, based on legislation dating back to the Algerian War in 1955, gives the government extraordinary rights to search homes and hold people under house arrest without warrants, ban public protests, and censor the media. The French bar association condemned it as "a judicial and social model which breaks with republican values."

The constitutional amendments, if adopted, would not only bar legal challenges to the emergency powers, but would strip French-born nationals of their citizenship if they are convicted of terrorism. Hollande's Justice Minister, Christiane Taubira, resigned in protest against the latter proposal. She tweeted, with a nod to Charles de Gaulle, "sometimes resisting means leaving."

Critics point out that France's police have widely abused their extraordinary powers, making life miserable for innocent suspects and generating more sympathy for Islamist radicals among the country's marginalized Muslim population.

In early February, Human Rights Watch released a report based on interviews with 18 people who had suffered unjustified police raids on their homes, restaurants or mosques, or been detained under house arrest for no apparent cause. In the process, these police actions have terrified parents and children and left some adults unable to earn a living. In some cases, judges have harshly condemned the raids, after the fact.

"In one house raid, police broke four of a disabled man's teeth before they realized he wasn't the person they were looking for," the organization reported. "In another case, a single mother's children were transferred to foster care following a raid. Many of those interviewed said they were now scared of the police and have been shunned by their neighbors."

"France has a responsibility to ensure public safety and try to prevent further attacks, but the police have used their new emergency powers in abusive, discriminatory, and unjustified ways," said Izza Leghtas, Western Europe researcher at Human Rights Watch. "This abuse has traumatized families and tarnished reputations, leaving targets feeling like second-class citizens."

Since November, French police have conducted more than 3,200 raids and put about 400 people under house arrest. Yet for all that, prosecutors had initiated only

five terrorism-related investigations as of Feb. 2.

“This state of emergency seems to have had relatively limited concrete effects in terms of fighting against terrorism,” commented Nils Muiznieks, the Council of Europe’s human rights commissioner, “but it has on the other hand greatly restricted the exercise of fundamental liberties and weakened certain guarantees of the rule of law.”

French human rights observers note that such heavy-handed tactics may in fact be counterproductive. “These measures are aimed at a specific movement and at very observant Muslims,” said Jacques Toubon, the French human rights ombudsperson. “That can give rise to a feeling of injustice and of defiance towards public authorities.”

Like Washington’s own commitment to fighting an open-ended “war on terrorism,” the French government envisions governing under a state of emergency virtually in perpetuity. Prime Minister Manuel Valls told a reporter the extraordinary powers must remain in effect “until we can get rid of” Islamic State. “As long as the threat is there, we must use all the means,” he said.

France has been increasing police powers for years. In 2013, the legislature quietly passed a law codifying sweeping electronic surveillance powers available to the country’s intelligence agencies, with no judicial review. It passed sweeping new anti-terrorism legislation in 2014 and again in 2015, after the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* magazine.

Yet none of those laws prevented incompetent police from letting known terrorists freely cross European borders to strike last November.

As Leela Jacinto, a reporter for *France 24*, commented, “Even before the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, French anti-terrorism laws were so tight, they didn’t need further tightening, they simply had to be put to better use. Under the controversial 1996 anti-terrorism statute known as . . . ‘terrorist criminal association,’ thousands have been arrested and hundreds convicted. Prosecutors have sought and won convictions not by proving the existence of a terrorist plot, but by simply showing ‘participation in a grouping or an agreement established with a view to the preparation’ of a terrorist act.

“Defense lawyers complain their clients have been declared guilty of ‘address book’ crimes. Worse, this paint-by-numbers scheme only accelerated the flow of young, mostly Muslim, men into notorious French prisons . . . where, ironically, they have associated with hardened criminals-turned-jihadis, emerging from the system more dangerous than they were before they entered.”

**Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international affairs,**

including *The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War and the International Drug Traffic* (Stanford University Press, 2012). Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were "Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions"; "Neocons Want Regime Change in Iran"; "Saudi Cash Wins France's Favor"; "The Saudis' Hurt Feelings"; "Saudi Arabia's Nuclear Bluster"; "The US Hand in the Syrian Mess"; and "Hidden Origins of Syria's Civil War." ]

---

## Obama's 'Moderate' Syrian Deception

**Exclusive:** President Obama, who once called the idea of "moderate" Syrian rebels a "fantasy," has maintained the fiction to conceal the fact that many "moderates" are fighting alongside Al Qaeda's jihadists, an inconvenient truth that is complicating an end to Syria's civil war, explains Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

Secretary of State John Kerry insisted at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday that the agreement with Russia on a temporary halt in the war in Syria can only be carried out if Russia stops its airstrikes against what Kerry is now calling "legitimate opposition groups."

But what Kerry did not say is that the ceasefire agreement would not apply to operations against Al Qaeda's Syrian franchise, the Nusra Front, which both the United States and Russia have recognized as a terrorist organization. That fact is crucial to understand why the Obama administration's reference to "legitimate opposition groups" is a deception intended to mislead public opinion.

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.

Kerry's language suggests that those other "legitimate opposition groups" are not part of Nusra's military structure but are separate from it both organizationally and physically. But in fact, there is no such separation in either of the crucial provinces of Idlib and Aleppo.

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.

This reality even slips into mainstream U.S. news accounts on occasion, such as Anne Barnard's New York Times article last Saturday about the proposed Syrian cease-fire in which she reported, "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."

At least since 2014 the Obama administration has armed a number of Syrian rebel groups even though it knew the groups were coordinating closely with the Nusra Front, which was simultaneously getting arms from Turkey and Qatar. The strategy called for supplying TOW anti-tank missiles to the "Syrian Revolutionaries Front" (SRF) as the core of a client Syrian army that would be independent of the Nusra Front.

However, when a combined force of Nusra and non-jihadist brigades including the SRF captured the Syrian army base at Wadi al-Deif in December 2014, the truth began to emerge. The SRF and other groups to which the United States had supplied TOW missiles had fought under Nusra's command to capture the base.

And as one of the SRF fighters who participated in the operation, Abu Kumayt, recalled to The New York Times, after the victory only Nusra and its very close ally Ahrar al-Sham were allowed to enter the base. Nusra had allowed the groups supported by the United States to maintain the appearance of independence from Nusra, according to Abu Kumayt, in order to induce the United States to continue the supply of U.S. weapons.

### **Playing Washington**

In other words, Nusra was playing Washington, exploiting the Obama administration's desire to have its own Syrian Army as an instrument for influencing the course of the war. The administration was evidently a willing dupe.

Former U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford, who had been supporting an aggressive program of arming opposition brigades that had been approved by the CIA, told a January 2015 seminar in Washington, "For a long time we have looked the other way while the Nusra Front and armed groups on the ground, some of

which are getting help from us, have coordinated in military operations against the regime.”

Reflecting the views of some well-placed administration officials, he added, “I think the days of us looking the other way are finished.” But instead of breaking with the deception that the CIA’s hand-picked clients were independent of Nusra, the Obama administration continued to cling to it.

Nusra and its allies were poised to strike the biggest blow against the Assad regime up to the time the capture of Idlib province. Although some U.S.-supported groups participated in the campaign in March and April 2015, the “operations room” planning the campaign was run by Al Qaeda and its close ally Ahrar al Sham.

And before the campaign was launched, Nusra had forced another U.S.-supported group, Harakat Hazm, to disband and took all of its TOW anti-tank missiles.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia and Qatar were financing the “Army of Conquest,” commanded by Nusra, and were lobbying the administration to support it. U.S. strategy on Syria was then shifting toward a tacit reliance on the jihadists to achieve the U.S. objective of putting sufficient pressure on the Assad regime to force some concessions on Damascus.

But the idea that an independent “moderate” armed opposition still existed and that the United States was basing its policy on those “moderates” was necessary to provide a political fig leaf for the covert and indirect U.S. reliance on Al Qaeda’s Syrian franchise’s military success.

When the fall of Idlib led to the Russian intervention last September, the U.S. immediately resorted to its propaganda line about Russian targeting of the “moderate” armed opposition. It had become a necessary shield for the United States to continue playing a political-diplomatic game in Syria.

As the current Russian-Syrian-Iranian offensive between Aleppo and the Turkish border unfolds, the Obama administration’s stance has been contradicted by fresh evidence of the subordination of non-jihadist forces to the Nusra Front. In late January, Nusra consolidated its role as the primary opposition military force in the eastern part of Aleppo City by sending a huge convoy of 200 vehicles loaded with fighters, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights in London.

BBC reported that “thousands of troops” had just arrived in Aleppo for the coming battle. Ahrar al-Sham confirmed on Feb. 2 that its ally, the Nusra Front, had deployed a large convoy of “reinforcements” to Aleppo. The pro-Assad Beirut daily As-Safir reported that the convoys also included artillery, tanks and armored vehicles, and that Nusra had taken over a number of buildings to serve

as its headquarters and offices.

### **How Al Qaeda Controls**

An assessment published on Saturday by the Institute for the Study of War, which has long advocated more U.S. military assistance to Syrian anti-Assad groups, provides further insights into the Nusra Front's system of control over U.S.-supported groups. One way the jihadist organization maintains that control, according to the study, is Ahrar al Sham's control of the Bab al Hawa border crossing with Turkey, which gives Nusra and Ahrar power over the distribution of supplies from Turkey into Aleppo City and surrounding areas.

ISW points out that another instrument of control is the use of "military operations rooms" in which Nusra and Ahrar al Sham play the dominant role while allocating resources and military roles to lesser military units.

Although the Nusra Front is not listed as part of the "Army of Aleppo" formally announced to combat the Russian offensive, it is hardly credible that it does not hold the primary positions in the operations room for the Aleppo campaign, given the large infusion of Nusra troops into the theater from Idlib and its history in other such operations rooms in the Idlib and Aleppo regions.

Yet another facet of Nusra's power in Aleppo is its control over the main water and power plants in the opposition-controlled districts of the city. But the ultimate source of Nusra's power over U.S.-supported groups is the threat to attack them as agents of the United States and take over their assets. Al Qaeda's franchise "successfully destroyed two U.S.-backed groups in Northern Syria in 2014 and early 2015," ISW recalls, and initiated a campaign last October against one of the remaining U.S.-supported groups, Nour al Din al Zenki.

The official U.S. posture on the current offensive in the Aleppo theater and the proposed ceasefire obscures the fact that a successful Russian-Syrian operation would make it impossible for the external states, such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, to resupply the Nusra Front and Ahrar al Sham and thus end the military threat to the Syrian government as well as the possibility of Al Qaeda's seizure of power in Damascus.

Russian-Syrian success offers the most realistic prospect for an end to the bloodletting in Syria and would also reduce the likelihood of an eventual Al Qaeda seizure of power in Syria.

The Obama administration certainly understands that fact and has already privately adjusted its diplomatic strategy to take into account the likelihood that the Nusra Front will now be substantially weakened. But it cannot

acknowledge any of that publicly because such a recognition would infuriate many hardliners in Washington who still demand “regime change” in Damascus whatever the risks.

President Obama is under pressure from these domestic critics as well as from Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other GCC allies to oppose any gains by the Russians and the Assad regime as a loss for the United States. And Obama administration must continue to hide the reality that it was complicit in a strategy of arming Nusra in part through the mechanism of arming Washington’s “moderate” clients to achieve leverage on the Syrian regime.

Thus the game of diplomacy and deceptions continues.

**Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. He is the author of the newly published *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*.**

---

## Obama’s Most Momentous Decision

**Exclusive:** President Obama must decide if he will let the Syrian civil war come to an end with Russian-backed President Assad still in power or if he will escalate by supporting a Turkish-Saudi invasion, which could push the world to the brink of nuclear war, writes Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

With the Russian-backed Syrian army encircling Aleppo, cutting off Turkish supplies to rebels and advancing on the Islamic State’s capital of Raqqa, a panicked Saudi Arabia and Turkey have set up a joint headquarters to direct an invasion of Syria that could lead to a vast escalation of the war. And there’s only one man who could stop them: President Barack Obama.

It is probably the most important decision Obama will make in his eight years in office since a Turkish-Saudi invasion risks a direct showdown between Russia and NATO, since Turkey is a member of the alliance.

The U.S. traditionally has held tremendous power over client states like Turkey and Saudi Arabia. So, an order from Washington is usually enough to get such governments to back down. But Ankara and Riyadh are being led by reckless men whose continued existence in power might well depend on stopping a Syrian government victory helped by Russia, Iran and the Kurds and a humiliating defeat

of the Turkish-Saudi-backed Syrian rebels, who include some radical jihadist groups.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prince Mohammad bin Salman have shown increasing defiance of Washington. Neither man is the legal ruler of his respective country. But both have seized power nonetheless.

Erdoğan is technically in a symbolic post, a presidency without power. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu should be leading the country the way Erdoğan did when he was prime minister, but Davutoğlu is still letting Erdoğan call the shots.

Erdoğan is campaigning for a referendum that would make Turkey a presidential system to legalize the power he already has. But that hasn't happened yet. So, he is simply acting as a de facto executive leader while potential rivals are afraid to contest his overreach of power.

Erdoğan's increasing authoritarianism is alarming some people in Washington. He is routinely throwing in jail journalists and academics who dare criticize him. After a brutal crackdown in the Kurdish city of Cizre inside Turkey this month, leaving much of the city in ruins, Erdoğan has turned his attention to the Syrian Kurds.

They are among the best fighters on the ground against the Islamic State and are supported by both the U.S. and Russia. And they are threatening to formalize their de facto autonomy inside Syria, which Erdoğan has vowed to crush. By fighting the Islamic State, the Kurds are also messing with Erdoğan's goal of overthrowing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Erdoğan has staked much of his power on overthrowing Assad. A Syrian victory against Erdoğan's five-year project of "regime change" in Damascus could mean the end of him politically. Sensing this danger, Erdoğan has been increasingly belligerent toward anyone standing in his way.

Erdoğan showed his defiance of the Obama administration when he said, "How can we trust [you]? Is it me who is your partner or the [Kurdish] terrorists in Kobane?"

### **Turkey Shells Syria**

On Sunday, Erdoğan began shelling Syrian Kurdish areas in Aleppo province, especially the city of Azaz. "We will not allow Azaz to fall," Prime Minister Davutoğlu vowed on Monday, reflecting Erdoğan's hard line. Turkey's attacks also are aimed at preventing the Syrian government from sealing the Turkish border where the Islamic State and other jihadist groups have smuggled across fighters, weapons and other supplies into Syria as well as oil from Syria into



Turkey.

With his aggressive strategies toward his neighbors, Erdoğan has been accused of wanting to establish a new Ottoman empire. Azaz is near Dabiq, the town where the Ottoman Empire began in 1516. Because of that symbolism, Turkey's defeat there could mean the death of Erdoğan's neo-Ottoman dreams and perhaps of his presidency. (For the Islamic State, Dabiq is the place where a future Christian-Muslim battle will take place heralding the end of the world.)

The Saudis appear equally spoiling for a fight. Prince Mohammed bin Salman is deputy crown prince, second in line to the crown. But his father, King Salman, is suffering from dementia and the current crown prince, Mohammad bin Nayef, 56, is considered loyal to the U.S. But 30-year-old Mohammed has launched the most independent Saudi military policy in the history of the modern Saudi state. He is said not to trust the United States. And as defense minister, he has recklessly launched a disastrous war in Yemen, where despite widespread death and destruction the most powerful Arab army cannot defeat the poorest Arab nation. Mohammed has staked his credibility on the outcome of the Yemen war. But he also has vowed to check Iranian regional influence. So, he may be going for broke now by threatening to invade Syria.

Turkey and Saudi Arabia have established a joint headquarters at Turkey's Incirlik base, 62 miles from the Syrian border. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu told a Turkish newspaper last week that Saudi warplanes and troops would be arriving at the base.

The Saudis are also planning war games inside the Kingdom with 150,000 troops from 20 Arab nations. Jordan, however, sensibly said it would not take part in an invasion unless it is led by U.S. and British troops and has a U.N. Security Council mandate "with full coordination with Russia."

However, the war clouds continued to darken along the Syrian border. On Sunday, Turkey began shelling Syrian Kurdish positions, including the town of Azaz in Aleppo province. And, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said Russia "will fail to save" Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, whom Jubeir vowed to overthrow. In response to Saudi threats, Hezbollah said it would "slaughter Saudi troops" if they invade.

### **Assad Confronting Fanatical Erdoğan**

For his part, Assad has not ruled out that Turkey and Saudi Arabia will invade. He told the French Press Agency (AFP) on Monday: "Logically, intervention is not possible, but sometimes reality is at odds with logic, particularly when there are irrational people leading a certain state. That's why I don't rule that out

for a simple reason: Erdoğan is a fanatical person with Muslim Brotherhood inclinations. He is living the Ottoman dream..

“He believes that he has an Islamist mission in our region. The same applies to Saudi Arabia. The collapse of the terrorists in Syria is a collapse of their policies. I tell you that this process is surely not going to be easy for them, and we will certainly confront it.”

The risks of a Saudi-Turkish invasion of Syria are enormous. If soldiers from NATO-member Turkish are killed by the Syrian army or Russian air force, will they seek NATO protection? If Saudi or its allied troops are killed how would the U.S. respond? An invasion could pit Saudi troops against Iranian forces on the same battlefield in what could be an historic Sunni-Shia battle.

Despite the tough Turkish and Saudi rhetoric, Saudi Arabia at least, has made it clear that it won't invade without the U.S. leading the way. That puts the ball squarely in the Oval Office where President Obama has resisted committing U.S. combat troops to another war in the Middle East but reportedly wants to avoid further alienating U.S. “allies,” Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

At the State Department, John Kerry has made no statement about a possible invasion. Instead he's using his close ties to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to try to nail down a partial ceasefire that is supposed start on Friday. The ceasefire would allow continue fighting against terrorists, but the U.S. and Russia disagree on exactly who should be included on the list of terrorists. Further, many of the U.S.-backed rebel groups collaborate with Al Qaeda's Nusra Front in some areas, making targeting difficult even when there is U.S.-Russian agreement of who's the terrorist.

Other mixed signals have come from the Pentagon where Defense Secretary Ashton Carter has “welcomed” the Saudi offer of ground troops. The matter was discussed at a NATO defense ministers meeting last week, but the only outcome was the acceptance of special forces from the United Arab Emirates.

Obama has given no public indication of what he will do if Turkey and Saudi Arabia press ahead with an invasion. It's not even clear that he still has the leverage to stop Turkey and Saudi Arabia if they press ahead.

Obama could simply cut U.S. losses in its disastrous Syrian “regime change” policy and accept a Russian and Iranian-backed Syrian government victory, but he would come intense criticism from Washington's influential neoconservatives as well as Republicans. But does he have another choice if he wants to avoid war with Russia?

On Saturday, Obama called Russian President Vladimir Putin. It's not known what

they discussed about a possible invasion of Syria. However, if Obama threatened to intervene if Russia doesn't end its military support for the Syrian military offensive, we could be in the middle of the most serious game of chicken since the Cuban missile crisis.

Nor do we know what Obama is telling the Turks and Saudis. On Monday, both countries toned down their bellicose rhetoric. Perhaps Obama delivered the only sane message possible: avoid a military confrontation with Russia at all costs. But it seems the lights will remain on at the Kremlin and the White House as the two nuclear powers look for some way to avoid a collision.

**Joe Lauria is a veteran foreign-affairs journalist based at the U.N. since 1990. He has written for the Boston Globe, the London Daily Telegraph, the Johannesburg Star, the Montreal Gazette, the Wall Street Journal and other newspapers. He can be reached at [joelauria@gmail.com](mailto:joelauria@gmail.com) and followed on Twitter at [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe).**

---