

Bernie Sanders as Commander-in-Chief

Exclusive: Tulsi Gabbard, a Hawaii congresswoman and Iraq War veteran, stars in a stunning ad endorsing Bernie Sanders as “Commander-in-Chief,” a potential turning point in the Democratic race, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Sen. Bernie Sanders’s landslide victories in Washington State, Alaska and Hawaii on Saturday coincided with a long-awaited signal that he may finally be ready to challenge former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on the “Commander-in-Chief” question, which has been regarded as one of her key strengths.

In what may be the most striking campaign commercial of the presidential race, the Sanders campaign released an ad, entitled “The Cost of War” and featuring Hawaii’s Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, an Iraq War veteran who endorsed Sanders not just as her preference for President but as Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. military.

“Bernie Sanders voted against the Iraq War,” Gabbard says. “He understands the cost of war, that that cost is continued when our veterans come home. Bernie Sanders will defend our country and take the trillions of dollars that are spent on these interventionist, regime change, unnecessary wars and invest it here at home.”

Gabbard also counters another strong point of the Clinton campaign, its contention that Clinton’s plans for incremental change are more realistic than Sanders’s calls for sweeping reforms – or a “political revolution” – to reverse the nation’s steady drift toward a country of lavishly rewarded haves and increasingly desperate have-nots.

“The American people are not looking to settle for inches; they are looking for real change,” Gabbard says. But perhaps her most important statement comes at the end of the 90-second commercial when she says: “My name is Tulsi Gabbard and I support Bernie Sanders to be our next President and Commander-in-Chief.”

The phrase “Commander-in-Chief” is one that Sanders has largely sidestepped in the early phases of the Democratic presidential race, conceding Clinton’s superior qualifications on foreign policy though questioning her judgment when she voted for the Iraq War in 2002. Yet, what the Gabbard ad seems to recognize is that Sanders’s campaign could rally a substantial part of the Democratic “base” and win over many “regular” Democrats by challenging Clinton on her hawkish proclivity for “regime change” wars.

Though many political analysts argue that it is too late for Sanders to overcome

Clinton's substantial delegate lead – bolstered by the unelected “super-delegates” drawn from party politicians – Sanders's recent string of landslide victories suggest that many Democrats are uncomfortable with or opposed to Clinton, whose “negatives” are among the highest of national political leaders (in a race to the bottom with Donald Trump).

Many Democrats have a deep distrust of Clinton who – though now highlighting her more “progressive” positions – seems eager to “pivot to the center” once she nails down the nomination, a hunger that was reflected in her pandering speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee convention last week.

A Neocon Favorite

Many neoconservatives and “liberal interventionists” now see Clinton as the vessel carrying their hopes for more “regime change” wars.

From 2002-2006, Clinton famously supported President George W. Bush's invasion and occupation of Iraq, which – beyond costing more than \$1 trillion and killing hundreds of thousands of people (including nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers) – destabilized the Middle East and gave rise to “Al Qaeda in Iraq,” which has since morphed into the Islamic State.

Apparently having learned no lessons from the Iraq War, Clinton consistently took hawkish and interventionist positions as President Barack Obama's first Secretary of State.

In 2009, Clinton backed a coup in Honduras that removed democratically elected (and progressive) President Manuel Zelaya and reaffirmed control by the Central American country's oligarchy. Since then, Honduras's human rights situation has worsened, driving thousands of children to flee northward seeking safety and leaving environmental and political activists at the mercy of death squads.

Also, in 2009, Clinton joined with Bush-holdover Defense Secretary Robert Gates and neocon-favorite Gen. David Petraeus in pushing Obama into a major escalation of the Afghan War, a counter-insurgency “surge” that sent another 1,000 American troops to their deaths – and many more Afghans – but has since been abandoned as a failure.

In 2011, Clinton joined with “liberal interventionists” in again pushing Obama into a “regime change” war in Libya that led to the overthrow and torture-murder of Muammar Gaddafi – which she gleefully welcomed with the quip, “We came, we saw, he died” – but has since turned the once relatively prosperous North African country into a failed state with the Islamic State gaining another foothold.

Both as Secretary of State and since her departure in 2013, Clinton has pressed to escalate the “regime change” war in Syria, seeking a “no-fly zone” that would require the U.S. military to destroy the Syrian government’s air force and air defenses, apparently without regard to the risk that the U.S. intervention could pave the way for Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front and/or the Islamic State to march into Damascus.

Though the Syrian “regime change” strategy that Clinton has advocated has failed to oust President Bashar al-Assad, it has transformed another reasonably functional Mideast state into a bloody killing field and driven millions of refugees into what is now a destabilized Europe.

In 2014, Clinton also embraced the neocon-backed coup in Ukraine that has touched off a new and costly Cold War with Russia. Again showing her “tough-gal” side, Clinton likened Russia’s President Vladimir Putin to Adolf Hitler. Two years later, the Ukraine “regime change” has not only given the Ukrainians a corrupt and dysfunctional government – kept afloat with billions of dollars from the U.S. and Europe – but the heightened U.S. hostility toward Russia has impaired chances for big-power cooperation on a number of these other conflicts.

All of this may fit the neocon agenda of removing or punishing governments that are viewed as unfriendly to Israel, but these Clinton-embraced strategies have been highly destructive to a peaceful and prosperous world. There is also the increased danger that Clinton might represent as Commander-in-Chief when her most hawkish inclinations are not tempered or restrained by President Obama’s general resistance to interventionist wars.

For months, Clinton has been identified by top neocons as their best hope to maintain influence at the highest levels of Washington, especially if “America First” Republican Donald Trump secures the GOP nomination.

Robert Kagan, a co-founder of the Project for the New American Century, which drew up the Iraq War and other “regime change” plans in the 1990s, was among the influential neocons to abandon the Trump-dominated Republican Party and announce support for Hillary Clinton.

A month ago in a Washington Post [op-ed](#), Kagan excoriated the Republican Party for creating the conditions for Trump’s rise and then asked, “So what to do now? The Republicans’ creation will soon be let loose on the land, leaving to others the job the party failed to carry out.” Then referring to himself, he added, “For this former Republican, and perhaps for others, the only choice will be to vote for Hillary Clinton.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Neocon Kagan Endorses Hillary Clinton.”](#)]

Kagan, whom Clinton appointed to a State Department advisory panel, is married to Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, a former senior aide to Vice President Dick Cheney who rose under Clinton and helped orchestrate the Ukraine coup which sabotaged Obama's behind-the-scenes cooperation with Putin on touchy issues such as Iran and Syria.

The Ukraine coup also opened the U.S. military-spending spigot even wider to pay for a new Cold War. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[A Family Business of Perpetual War.](#)"]

Unpopular Warmongering

Though much of Clinton's neocon-style warmongering is unpopular with the Democratic "base," Sanders has treaded lightly in these areas during his primary challenge to her long-anticipated coronation as the Democratic presidential nominee.

When foreign policy comes up, Sanders contrasts his opposition to the Iraq War to Clinton's support but returns as quickly as possible to his overriding theme of income inequality and his opposition to a political-economic system rigged for the One Percent.

Sanders's hesitation to challenge Clinton on her perceived foreign-policy "strength" ignores a key football lesson often attributed to New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick, who reversed a longstanding belief that teams should look for their opponents' weaknesses. Belichick instead focused on taking away his opponents' strengths and making them play to their weaknesses.

With the help of Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, Sanders appears to have finally grasped that lesson. With Gabbard praising Sanders as her choice for "Commander-in-Chief," she implicitly seeks to neutralize Clinton's supposed strong suit – her foreign-policy experience – and transform it into a weakness.

The question now is whether Gabbard's assistance to Sanders has come too late.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

Cutting Off Syrian Rebels' Weapons

Finally, the Obama administration may be demanding that its Mideast allies stop smuggling arms to jihadist rebels in Syria, a move that makes a negotiated settlement possible, says Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

When Russian President Vladimir Putin had a substantive meeting with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry last week, it was an extremely rare departure from normal protocol. Yet, there was some political logic to the meeting because Putin and Kerry have clearly been the primary drivers of their respective governments' recent policies toward Syria and their negotiations have led to a stunningly successful Syrian ceasefire and possible Syrian negotiations on a political settlement.

Washington and Moscow had to cooperate in order to get that ceasefire along with the jump-starting of intra-Syrian negotiations, now scheduled to begin next month, according to United Nations special envoy Steffan de Mistura. But the diplomatic maneuvering did not involve equal influence on each other's policies. Putin's Russia has now demonstrated that it has effective leverage over the policy of Kerry and the United States in Syria, whereas Kerry has no similar leverage over Russian policy.



Kerry had appeared to be the primary driver of a political settlement last year, propelled by a strategy based on exploiting the military success of the Nusra Front-led opposition forces, armed by the United States and its allies, in northwestern Syria. Kerry viewed that success as a way of put pressure on both the Assad regime and its Russian ally to agree that President Bashar al-Assad would step down.

But that strategy turned out to be an overreach when Putin surprised the outside world by intervening in Syria with enough airpower to put the jihadists,

including Al Qaeda's Nusra Front, and their "moderate" allies on the defensive. Still in pursuing the U.S. strategy, we now know Kerry asked President Barack Obama to carry out direct attacks on Assad's forces, so Kerry could have some "leverage" in the negotiations with the Russians over a ceasefire and settlement. But Obama refused to do so, and the Russian success, especially in January and February, conferred on Putin an even more clear-cut advantage in the negotiations with the United States over a Syrian ceasefire.

The agreement between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Kerry also was more far-reaching than what has been made public and the ceasefire has proven to be far more effective than anyone had expected. It is now clear that the reason is that Putin was able to convert his new-found leverage into the one U.S. diplomatic concession that is necessary to any possibility of ending the war.

According to a report last week by Elijah J Magnier, who writes on regional politics and diplomacy for Al Rai, Kuwait's leading daily newspaper, "high officials present in Syria" – which his report makes clear were Iranian – said the United States had pledged as part of the ceasefire deal to "enforce on its regional Middle Eastern allies the cessation of the flow of weapons" into Syria.

In response to an e-mail query from this writer, Magnier said he had learned from his sources that no weapons have crossed the border into Syria from either Turkey or Jordan since the ceasefire went into effect. This crucial element of the U.S.-Russian understanding, about which the Obama administration has maintained a discrete silence, evidently left the leadership of Nusra Front and its allies with little choice but to go along with the ceasefire for an indeterminate period.

The entire armed opposition has thus apparently been shut down in Syria on the insistence of the United States because it was a requirement for the Russians to halt the offensive against them.

That far-reaching U.S. concession explains why Putin surprised the entire world by announcing on March 14 that he was withdrawing the bulk of the Russian aircraft participating in the offensive. Contrary to the speculation of many pundits about his motive in doing so, Putin was actually enhancing his leverage over both the military situation and the political negotiations still to come. Magnier's sources told him that when Putin had informed Iran of his intention to withdraw the planes, he had emphasized that they could be returned to Syria within 24 hours if necessary.

Magnier's Iranian sources also made it clear that Iran was unhappy about the timing of Putin's decisions on the ceasefire. They believed that it came at least a month too soon, just as Iranian forces were in a position to gain

significantly more territory.

But Putin's agreement to the ceasefire and partial withdrawal on condition that outside patrons would not move to resupply their clients served the larger Russian strategy of checkmating the aim of Turkey and Saudi Arabia of bringing down the Assad regime – an aim in which the United States had become deeply involved, even as it insisted it wanted to preserve the structure of the Syrian state security apparatus.

Coming after a demonstration of the effectiveness of Russian airpower in frustrating the 2015 's jihadist-led offensive, Putin's seizing the opportunity to nail down the agreement with Washington and then pulling out most of his airpower conveyed a message to the jihadists' external patrons that it was in their interest not to restart the war.

By shifting the conflict to the negotiating table, Putin's moves have also added to Russian leverage on the Assad regime, and the Russians can be expected to be active in suggesting ways to craft a Syrian agreement on new elections and constitutional reform. The Russians have ruled out any requirement for Assad to resign, but the Iranians are afraid that assurance is not ironclad. Iranian officials strongly hinted privately in Vienna that they believed the Russians made a deal with the United States on a key sanctions relief issue at Iran's expense in the final stage of the nuclear negotiations. They fear something similar may happen on Syria.

Iran has long regarded Assad and his regime as a key in the "axis of Resistance," so it views his removal from power under any formula as unacceptable. Magnier's sources told him that Iran believes Putin would accept a formula under which Assad would name someone else to run for president in a future election, according to Magnier.

Once the negotiations reach that stage of the negotiations, however, Putin will have a range of options for compromise that wouldn't require Assad's withdrawal from the regime. In a new constitution, for example, Assad could assume the role of chief of state with more ceremonial functions and an "advisory" role, while policymaking powers are assumed by a prime minister. Such a compromise could be seen as preserving the legitimacy and stability of the present regime, even though Kerry could claim that the opposition's main interest had been achieved.

Of course, despite the remarkable diplomatic leverage Putin has achieved, the negotiations could still fail. That could happen because the opposition's negotiators are unwilling to agree to a settlement that appears to preserve the Assad regime more and because the Obama administration proves unwilling to compel its allies to maintain the arms supply suspension. But the longer the

negotiations continue, the greater John Kerry's personal stake in seeing them reach a compromise agreement and thus avoiding the resumption of full-scale war.

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*. [This article originally appeared at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/how-putins-leverage-shaped-syrian-ceasefire-403859331#sthash.1bWEuJNc.dpuf>]

Explaining Belgium's Vulnerabilities

Brussels is called the capital of Europe but it also the capital of an ethnically and politically divided Belgium that has made it an easy target for Islamic extremists, writes Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

In the immediate aftermath of the March 22 terrorist attacks in Brussels, the most watched television news stations in Europe, the BBC and Euronews, broadcast extensive live coverage of the scenes of horror at the airport in Zaventem and outside the Metro station near the European Institutions in central Brussels.

Then we were shown senior politicians, in particular the Belgian Prime Minister and French President, delivering pious words on European solidarity in times of crisis and their shared revulsion at the cowardly deadly acts just perpetrated by jihadists for which responsibility was claimed by the Islamic State.

Next came coverage of the popular reaction to the terror acts, the lighting of candles, leaving flowers and sharing messages of condolences at the Place de la Bourse in downtown Brussels, all so reminiscent of the popular reaction that followed terror attacks at a concert hall and on the streets of Paris on Nov. 13, 2015, and still earlier following the attack on the editorial offices of Charlie Hebdo in January 2015. These maudlin exercises brought out the "human interest" nature of events which the media could feed on hungrily.

Phase Two of media coverage stayed within the category of "human interest" but moved on to the flow of information about the identities of the jihadists. We learned about their personalities, their past whereabouts, and their interconnections. The overriding approach was at the psychological level: trying to explain to a confused and shocked public how someone unexceptional in their midst, cleaning staff at the airport or a tram driver, as it turned out, could

fall under the influence of radical Islam and carry out kamizake attacks on fellow civilians.

At this point, what some observers found to be a profound insight passed from the pages of *The New York Times* to talking heads in Europe: the fact that in Brussels, as with other infamous recent acts of terrorism on two continents, the actors were mostly brothers, bound we are told, by unbreakable familial bonds that made it so hard for police agents to enter their conspiracies and thwart their plans.

The psychological approach to terror suspects clearly sells newspapers and magazines. Of course, it can be done by journalists of greater or lesser professionalism. One highly professional essay of this kind appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine back in June 2015. It is relevant to mention here because it was devoted precisely to the story of Belgian jihadists: "Journey to Jihad" by Ben Taub.

I do not deny that this delving into personal motivation of the perpetrators of evil is a valid dimension to the news, even if it smacks of voyeurism. But it is only one dimension to the complex problem we face in these attacks, and it carries an important flaw. Reading these personal details of criminals, society does not hold up a mirror to itself. Without introspection and seeking faults in ourselves, in acts committed or omitted, we cannot devise ways to thwart the phenomenon of terror, which definitely can be controlled or rooted out by effective police measures if other dimensions are considered.

These other dimensions are sociological, especially socio-economic and socio-political. In this essay, my primary focus will be on how they play out in Belgium because this is where the latest attacks occurred within the specific context of Belgian society and its political structures. Moreover, the whole question of domestic security remains at the level of the sovereign states everywhere on the Continent.

For these reasons, the tendency of many global commentators on the events this week to speak of it as a European Union event resulting from E.U. practices is both incorrect and unhelpful. The fact that Brussels is the capital of Europe is only slightly relevant. The jihadists attacked here because this is where they lived, this is where their views were shaped, and because they understood perfectly that the kingdom of Belgium was an easy touch.

Intelligence Failure

On Day Three following the terror attacks, the Belgian common front of lighting candles, delivering pious speeches and preaching national solidarity in the face

of the terrorist threat finally cracked.

This was touched off by harsh criticisms of the Belgian authorities from outside the country. Although Israelis and others weighed in, the most destructive salvo was launched by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who said one of the suicide bombers had been deported from Turkey to Belgium (actually to The Netherlands) a year ago for terrorist activities about which the Belgian authorities were warned but took no action. Erdogan called the Belgians incompetent to their faces.

This blackening of their names forced Belgian politicians to defend themselves publicly to the press and put the blame on their domestic political opponents, all of which cuts in a very interesting pattern in a kingdom which has a Left of center and a Right of center that lead coalitions only in combination with the gradations of opinion on either side thanks to proportional representation.

And the whole set of parties is multiplied by two because the political parties do not cross the North-South language divide between Dutch speakers and French speakers respectively. We will go into these mutual recriminations in a moment, to see what failures in Belgian policies and personalities the actors chose to highlight and what they either did not see or preferred not to talk about.

But first, I would like to mention one additional outside stimulus to debate in Belgium that drew attention of the leading French daily newspaper, *Le Soir*: an analytical article published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine on March 24 by researchers at the Brookings Institution in Washington who allege a particular susceptibility to radical jihadism in French-speaking countries with French political culture that also happen to have a high degree of urbanization and a high level of youth unemployment, such as the Molenbeek district of Brussels, the home grounds of the March 22 attackers and also of the Paris attacks. See William McCants and Christopher Meserole, ["The French Connection: Explaining Sunni Militancy Around the World."](#)

This article infuriated Belgian journalists, who quoted the rebuttal offered by the French ambassador to Washington, Gerard Araud. His most notable argument was a reminder that "Belgium is 45% French speaking. Its political culture is appreciably different from that of France."

On the one hand, we must congratulate McCants and Meserole for approaching the question of the March 22 terrorist attacks from a sociological viewpoint and seeking explanations that can potentially guide political changes. On the other hand, the complaint of the French ambassador goes to the weakness of their analytic toolkit, which the authors themselves tell us amounts to number-crunching to arrive at causality.

Number-crunching in this way is not a substitute for area knowledge, though regrettably throughout American studies of International Relations, that is precisely what has taken the upper hand over the last decade or more. Study of history, language, culture have gone to the wall to make way for the universally applicable quantitative analysis that NGOs, banks and international institutions generally expect from their recruits.

In this instance, it seems the authors are blind to the language divide in Belgium. They also appear to ignore the national backgrounds and historical baggage of the various Sunni minority populations in Belgium and France or how this compares with the background of Sunni populations in neighboring Germany, for example.

Different Backgrounds

In point of fact, the Sunni Muslim residents in France have been predominantly Algerian, whose feelings towards their French neighbors carry collective memory of colonization and of a long and bitter war of liberation that led to independence. Algerians are viewed in Belgium as aggressive, potentially violent and spongers on the French welfare state.

Sunni Muslims living in Belgium have been Moroccans in the majority. The Kingdom of Morocco was never colonized and Moroccan immigrants here have no historical complexes about the country of their residence and they are seen as enterprising. But their settlement is almost exclusively in the French-speaking regions of Wallonia and Brussels, where they share a common language, not in the Flemish north.

Indeed, their arrival in Belgium has been resented by the Flemish for distorting the linguistic balance in the country in favor of French speakers. To be sure, Flanders has its own substantial Sunni Muslim minority, but they are largely Turks, whose relations with the Flemish majority are rather like those of the Turks in Germany. Turks had a special relationship with Germany going back to before the fall of the Ottoman Empire and, by extension, do well in a territory (Flanders) that is within the family of Germanic languages.

The mutual recriminations among Belgian politicians over the alleged laxness and incompetence at the federal ministerial level that allowed the murderous March 22 bombings to take place began with the acknowledgement by the two most exposed officials, Minister of Justice Koen Geens and Deputy Prime Minister holding the portfolio of Internal Affairs and Security Jan Jambon, that cues may have been missed. They offered to resign but this was refused by Prime Minister Charles Michel, who invoked the need for his team to stick together in the midst of the crisis.

But the rest of the political establishment was not so forgiving. Both ministers are politically on the Right and came to office as defenders of law and order. Thus, they were fair game for the Socialist opposition. Moreover, both are Flemish, and one, Jambon, is a leading figure in the Flemish separatist or independence party, the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA).

A somewhat odious personality in the view of the Francophone parliamentarians due not only to his aspiration for tearing the country apart but also for his scandalous expressions of sympathy for war-time collaboration with Nazi Germany, Jambon happens to be a political hack with no evident experience or skills to hold down the demanding position of Minister of the Interior and State Security.

In this respect, he was even less prepared for his responsibilities than the Police Chief of Cologne, a German political hack, at the time of the scandalous rampage of Muslims including refugees outside the Cologne main station on New Year's Eve. But then again, in fairness to Jambon, he is not the only Belgian minister holding a portfolio for which he has no claim other than party loyalty. Here we have the key issue that none of the politicians has so far named but which distinguishes the Belgian political culture: power-sharing.

Power-sharing is not just the result of proportional representation whittling away single-party majorities and forcing coalitions. Power-sharing is the glue that holds Belgium together given the mutual antipathy of the French-speaking and Dutch-speaking halves of the country. It results in behind-closed-door allocations of office and in endless rotation of the same handful of people within successive cabinets led by prime ministers of different parties.

Lack of Democracy

Finally, it is a kind of institutionalized corruption concealed by democratic-sounding principles that belie a distrust of the general population's maturity. This is Belgium's dirty little secret.

With his protégé Jambon squirming under the spotlight, Belgium's real power broker, chairman of the N-VA and mayor of Antwerp Bart De Wever, went on the offensive against the Socialists for wrong-headed tolerance of criminality and for naïve encouragement of social diversity and multiculturalism.

Of Philippe Moureaux, the long-time burgomaster of the Molenbeek district known for coddling the one-third of the population who are Muslim, two of whom he brought into his council, De Wever asked accusingly "how can he dare show himself in public now?"

De Wever also fulminated against Brussels for allowing native-born sons to become radicalized killers, something which could never happen in Antwerp, in

his view. Given that the Belgian radical Salafist organization Sharia4Belgium was founded in 2010 and recruited its members precisely in Antwerp, De Wever would be advised to reconsider his smugness.

Power-sharing means you cannot “throw the bums out.” It also means that the changing will of the majority is always frustrated, that the political institutions cannot easily recalibrate to new circumstances, to new challenges, such as the current threat from radicalized Islam.

Though *mixité sociale* has fallen out of fashion with the general public in the past couple of years, political correctness of the political establishment has not yet adjusted to the new facts. Similarly the system of justice has not moved in any significant way from extreme defense of individual rights to a greater weighting towards public security at the expense of deviant behavior of the few.

Put in simple English, the Belgium system of justice is a revolving door through which several of the participants in this week’s terror attacks easily passed.

Possibilities of preventive detention of suspects in terrorism are not used. And whole communities are no-go zones for the police. While Belgium, like most other Continental states, has draconian laws on the books regarding registration of residence going back to the Code Napoleon, they are not enforced.

In communes like Molenbeek, whole buildings are said to be occupied by unregistered foreigners living in hostel-like conditions without proper papers. All of this will have to change if the city and the country is to be made safe from a repetition of what we have seen or worse.

Police actions are useless against terrorism in the face of community support for the radicals. And this is precisely what we saw on television during the police siege in Molenbeek on March 18 that ended in the capture of Europe’s most wanted man, Salah Abdeslam. The cameraman providing the feed for the Euronews live coverage turned his camera on a row of matronly Muslim women in traditional jilbab dress waving their fists angrily at the cameras.

I have been told by some insiders at a Brussels television production unit that these “accidental” images of community feelings enraged Euronews directors because it could be prejudicial to public thinking about Muslims. Political correctness dies very slowly.

Deep Alienation

The alienation of the Molenbeek Muslim population has to be examined in-depth. But one can safely assume that it has roots in two factors, one of which was named by the Brookings Institution experts: high youth unemployment. The other

is blowback for Belgium's participation in every NATO and Western military expedition in the Middle East and North Africa (Libya) since the start of the new millennium.

Youth unemployment in Molenbeek is over 25 percent. The more shocking fact is that this is not the result of some post-2008 crisis but a situation going back at least two decades. The still more shocking fact is that the same is true of Brussels as a whole, not just the pockets of the Muslim residence.

Regardless of the ruling coalition of the day, Belgium and the Region of Brussels-Capital have completely failed to attract jobs for working-class citizens. At the same time, the authorities have been very successful creating high-paying professional jobs in pharmaceuticals, in Information Technology and Communication, in the European Institutions and NATO for people like themselves.

The participation of Belgium in the Western military interventions has generated ill-will among its Muslim minority and so prepared fertile ground for propagation of radical Islam. The foreign policy has represented a mindless commitment to a philosophy of "go along and get along."

In this way, one of the first acts of the newly installed Minister of Foreign Affairs Didier Reynders was to commit six Belgian fighter jets to the campaign that brought down and murdered Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. Six jets! The military value of this contribution was negligible, but the damage done to domestic peace in Belgium was vast.

There can be no way to find dialogue with the Muslim community if its views on these interventions are ignored. And, in the end, Belgium's army is being drained of resources to maintain order on the streets of Brussels.

At a minimum, the first conclusions from the events of the past week are that Belgium must once again consider constitutional changes and revise its political structure and culture to meet not only the new challenges of home-grown terrorists but long festering problems. These festering problems come from the paradoxical democracy deficit that results from very progressive, expert-designed power-sharing solutions that presently frustrate the will of the majority at every turn by excessively protecting the interests of minorities.

If power-sharing is the only way to prevent a permanent Flemish takeover of the federal institutions, then Belgium must either break up into two states along linguistic lines or it must become a confederal state each part of which protects the rights of minorities to speak their native language at all government instances, as is due under European conventions but is not honored in Belgium today, where each territory has only one official state language.

At the same time, it must abandon the automatic right of linguistic minorities to seats in governing institutions. The first part of this proposition, break-up or confederalism, has been a basic plank of the Flemish nationalists. It is high time that the French speakers understand it to be in their interests as well.

Secondly, proportional representation must be eliminated, because it denies government the possibility of quick response to new challenges, to new priorities and to new ways of thinking. The Belgians should adopt the Anglo-Saxon first-past-the-post method if they want to leave behind the wishy-washy coalitions of these past decades that only breed corruption, undeserved complacency in the ruling elite, and apathy in the general population. Generalized apathy is not conducive to solving tough problems of security that Belgium faces today.

Where will this end if the country does not begin to pay attention to its own constitutional and political deficiencies? The outlook is not bright.

Terrorist Ambitions

The latest news reveals that the ambitions of the terrorists went way beyond the apparently limited damage they achieved by their terror attacks at the airport in Zaventem and the Metro near the European institutions, which netted 32 deaths and 300 seriously wounded bystanders.

The attackers' major objective was, and likely remains, Belgium's nuclear installations, as we learned from the murder on Thursday evening (reported only on Saturday) of a guard at one of Belgium's nuclear plants, whose electronic pass was stolen. That comes on top of the news that one of the senior nuclear researchers here was under jihadist surveillance cameras for some time.

The governments of The Netherlands and Germany have for some time been protesting over the risks inherent in Belgium's aged nuclear installations. The threat of jihadist attacks on Belgian stations has given them a lot more to worry about.

Gilbert Doctorow is the European Coordinator, American Committee for East West Accord, Ltd. His latest book *Does Russia Have a Future?*(August 2015) is available in paperback and e-book from Amazon.com and affiliated websites. For donations to support the European activities of ACEWA, write to eastwestaccord@gmail.com. © Gilbert Doctorow, 2016
