

MH-17 Probe Trusts Torture-Implicated Ukraine

Exclusive: The floundering inquiry into who shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in 2014 has relied heavily on a Ukrainian intelligence agency that recently stopped U.N. investigators from probing its alleged role in torture, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Ukrainian intelligence service that has been guiding the investigation of the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 shoot-down of July 2014 recently blocked a United Nations inquiry into alleged torture sites under Ukrainian government control.

The U.N. inspectors called off their torture investigation late last month because Ukraine's domestic intelligence service, the SBU, denied the team access to detention facilities where human rights groups have found evidence of torture.

"The United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) has suspended its visit to Ukraine after being denied access to places in several parts of the country where it suspects people are being deprived of their liberty by the Security Service of Ukraine, the SBU," [a U.N. statement](#) said, with Sir Malcolm Evans, head of the four-member delegation, adding:

"This denial of access is in breach of Ukraine's obligations as a State party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. It has meant that we have not been able to visit some places where we have heard numerous and serious allegations that people have been detained and where torture or ill-treatment may have occurred."

Ukraine's deputy justice minister Natalya Sevostyanova [said](#) the U.N. team was denied access to SBU centers in Mariupol and Kramatorsk, frontline towns in the simmering civil war between the U.S.-backed Ukrainian government and Russian-supported eastern Ukrainian rebels.

SBU director Vasyl Hrytsak said the reason for barring the U.N. team was to protect Ukrainian government secrets, adding: "If you arrive, for example, in the United States and ask to come to the C.I.A. or the F.B.I., to visit a basement or an office, do you think they will ever let you do it?"

But the relevance of this SBU secrecy to the MH-17 case, in which the airliner carrying 298 people was shot down over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, is that

the SBU is an integral part of the Dutch-led multinational Joint Investigation Team that is trying to determine who was responsible for the attack.

The obstruction of the torture inquiry suggests that the SBU also would steer the JIT away from any evidence that might implicate a unit of the Ukrainian military in the shoot-down, a situation that would be regarded as a state secret which could severely undermine international support for the U.S.-backed regime in Kiev. Among the SBU's official duties is the protection of Ukrainian government secrets.

A Breezy Report

Earlier this month, the JIT investigators published a breezy, notebook-style report on their progress, revealing how dependent they have become on information provided by the SBU and how they have grown to trust the Ukrainian intelligence service.

According to the report, the SBU helped shape the MH-17 investigation by supplying a selection of phone intercepts and other material. But the JIT seemed oblivious to the potentially grave conflict of interest, saying:

"Since the first week of September 2014, investigating officers from The Netherlands and Australia have worked here [in Kiev]. They work in close cooperation here with the Security and Investigation Service of the Ukraine (SBU). Immediately after the crash, the SBU provided access to large numbers of tapped telephone conversations and other data. ...

"At first rather formal, cooperation with the SBU became more and more flexible. 'In particular because of the data analysis, we were able to prove our added value', says [Dutch police official Gert] Van Doorn. 'Since then, we notice in all kinds of ways that they deal with us in an open way. They share their questions with us and think along as much as they can.'"

The JIT report continued: "With the tapped telephone conversations from SBU, there are millions of printed lines with metadata, for example, about the cell tower used, the duration of the call and the corresponding telephone numbers. The investigating officers sort out this data and connect it to validate the reliability of the material.

"When, for example, person A calls person B, it must be possible to also find this conversation on the line from person B to person A. When somebody mentions a location, that should also correlate with the cell tower location that picked up the signal. If these cross-checks do not tally, then further research is necessary.

“By now, the investigators are certain about the reliability of the material. ‘After intensive investigation, the material seems to be very sound’, says Van Doorn, ‘that also contributed to the mutual trust.’”

But would SBU turn over data that might reveal the role of a Ukrainian military unit in the shoot-down? Under the security agency’s secrecy mandate, could it even do so?

Further, the collegial dependence on the SBU has not led to a quick resolution of the MH-17 mystery, with the JIT’s investigative report now not expected until after the summer, i.e., more than two years after the shoot-down, and even then the report is to be kept secret.

In this month’s update, the JIT would not even endorse last fall’s finding by the Dutch Safety Board that MH-17 was likely brought down by a Buk anti-aircraft missile system fired somewhere in a 320-square-kilometer area in eastern Ukraine, territory that was then partly controlled by the rebels and partly by the government.

Nor does the JIT update address last October’s findings of Dutch (i.e., NATO) intelligence that the only operational anti-aircraft missile batteries capable of bringing down a plane at 33,000 feet on July 17, 2014, were in the possession of the Ukrainian military.

“For the investigation into the weapon system that was used, the well known seven questions need to be answered are: who, what, where, when, which, how and why,” the update said. “In this investigation only the question of ‘when’ has been established irrefutably: flight MH17 crashed on 17 July 2014. The remaining questions require intensive investigation, according to Gerrit Thiry (team leader) and Susanne Huiberts (operational specialist) of the National Criminal Investigation Service.”

Punishing Russia

The MH-17 case also has relevance to the decision later this month by the European Union on whether to extend sanctions against Russia for another six months as the U.S. government wants. The E.U. imposed the sanctions amid a frenzied rush-to-judgment in late July 2014 blaming the Russians and the rebels for the deaths of the 298 people on MH-17 flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur.

Immediately after the shoot-down, the U.S. government sought to pin the blame on ethnic Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine and their Russian government backers. However, after CIA analysts had time to evaluate U.S. satellite, electronic and other intelligence data, the U.S. government went curiously silent about what it had discovered, including the possible identity of the people who were

responsible. The U.S. reticence, after the initial haste to blame Russia, suggested that the more detailed findings undercut the original claims.

A source who was briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts told me that the CIA's conclusion pointed toward a rogue Ukrainian operation involving a hard-line oligarch with the possible motive of shooting down Russian President Vladimir Putin's official plane returning from South America that day, with similar markings as MH-17. The source said a Ukrainian warplane ascertained that the plane was not Putin's but the attack went ahead anyway, with the assumption that the tragedy would be blamed on the pro-Russian rebels or on Russia directly.

Officially, however, the U.S. government has not revised its initial claims that were made within five days of the shoot-down, fingering the rebels and the Russians. I have been unable to determine if the assessment of Ukrainian responsibility represented a dissident or consensus view inside the U.S. intelligence community.

Although Ukraine would have been an obvious suspect in the attack, the Ukrainian SBU was invited to play a key role in the investigation along with investigators from Australia and the Netherlands. Under the JIT agreement, participating governments, which also include Belgium and Malaysia, have the right to block the release of information to the public.

The recent JIT report hails the comradeship between the Australian and Dutch investigators and their Ukrainian hosts, despite some early difficulties.

"An incredible amount of research material; differing legal systems and initial unfamiliarity with each other. Despite this, both Australian and Dutch members working in the Field Office in Kiev have managed to build good relations with each other and with the Ukraine to effectively conduct the investigation into the MH17 crash," the report said.

"They are professionals who recognize each other's love for the police work. They understand each other's circumstances. And they are, regardless of their country of origin, motivated to do their utmost to uncover the truth. ...

"The thing is to see how you can keep it workable", says Van Doorn, 'we like practical solutions. That means 'poldering' [the Dutch practice of policy-making by consensus].'"

Yet, the idea of "poldering" – or reaching consensus – with Ukraine's SBU, an agency that has just thwarted a United Nations investigation into allegations that the SBU engages in the torture of ethnic Russian rebels, raises further questions about the objectivity and reliability of the MH-17 probe.

[For more background on this controversy, see Consortiumnews.com's "[More Game-Playing on MH-17.](#)"]

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](#)).

Campaign 2016's Brave New World

As the U.S. election shapes up as a battle between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, the prospect for the public hearing anything approaching a truthful exchange of ideas appears hopeless, writes David Marks.

By David Marks

In 1958, a quarter century after publishing *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley wrote a reflective essay on the themes of his book that ring with prescient truth. His analysis delves into the rise of deceptive candidates who prioritize personal interests over supporting democracy.

Huxley wrote: "From a pulpit or a platform even the most conscientious of speakers finds it very difficult to tell the whole truth. The methods now being used to merchandise the political candidate as though he were a deodorant positively guarantee the electorate against ever hearing the truth about anything."

Huxley's words precisely describe the techniques used in the current presidential campaign. The core issue is the motivation behind the candidates' words.

Hillary Clinton promotes herself as the first female presidential candidate without embracing the pacifist foundations of feminism. She has supported many of the aggressive military actions of the United States in recent years. Her use of liberal rhetoric belies her ties to military and corporate interests and membership in the American oligarchy. Clinton's deceptive techniques in gaining popularity rely mostly on omission of truth. Except for a few grudging mistakes-were-made formulations, she admits to no faults.

Donald Trump brings distortion of truth to a new level. He is an iconic salesman, offering a magic potion that will cure all social and political ills. And in that tradition, he repeatedly assails the status quo, claiming to

identify and empathize with the downtrodden and ignored. He intentionally attracts followers in hypnotic, pied-piper fashion, repeatedly asserting he will solve all their problems.

Trump drives this home by encouraging the disenchanting to project their discontent onto current leadership, rather than considering their own role in, or awareness of the dysfunctions in U.S. politics and economy. He offers no real solution to the individual except, *"Vote for me."*

This subversive approach of spewing emotion while ignoring facts appeals to the darkest recesses of the human psyche and has become the norm in elections. In that sense, U.S. politics has reached a new low with the Trump candidacy. Very few of Trump's supporters can delineate his policy or position; rather they cite his attack on the establishment or his "honesty" or "strength" as reason for allegiance. Trump's act uses manipulative tactics aimed at stirring the unconscious forces of repressed discontent and frustration.

Trump repeatedly compliments himself on his own simple common sense values as his rhetoric fuels the hostile impulses of his followers. Trump's intolerance and bullying are symptomatic of undisguised fascism.

Different Styles

Candidate Clinton relies on more subtle techniques. She promotes conventional wisdom and the false premise that the U.S. is the arbiter of democracy in the world to justify military intervention. She makes her case for use of force citing "strategic" interests, omitting the corporate and financial motives that are the foundation of her policies. While her arguments appear more logical than her opponent's, they are no less deceptive.

Though candidate Trump criticizes Clinton's penchant for "regime change," he often suggests that forceful intervention or violence is a viable remedy in resolving international crises, stopping extremism, or punishing those who voice protest against him. This resonates with frustrated voters and encourages followers to act out personal anger against those who would doubt the supremacy of their leader. Trump's arrogance and self-absorbed persona are catalysts for unchecked hostility both domestically and internationally.

In his essay of nearly 60 years ago, Huxley describes how propaganda is used to justify violence:

"Propaganda in favor of action dictated by the impulses that are below self-interest offers false, garbled or incomplete evidence, avoids logical argument and seeks to influence its victims by the mere repetition of catchwords, by the furious denunciation of foreign or domestic scapegoats, and by cunningly

associating the lowest passions with the highest ideals, so that atrocities come to be perpetrated in the name of God and the most cynical kind of Realpolitik is treated as a matter of religious principle and patriotic duty.”

Huxley had observed the rise and fall of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. His evaluation of the social psychology of U.S. politics did not shy away from the universal similarities in human behavior at its worst. That perspective is no less valid today. Both presidential candidates can be assailed for their use of propaganda with “incomplete evidence.”

Clinton’s appeal is to the status quo, supporting a United States where military expenditures represent the highest proportion of tax revenues, where interests of big business and banking come first, and where mass shootings are a cultural norm. She has an advantage because of her appeal to the majority of voters who cling to normalcy. Clinton attacks Trump as unpredictable and dangerous.

Trump counterattacks by portraying her as deviant, abnormal and criminal, “Crooked Hillary.” He also taps into the dissatisfaction with government and the reasonable belief that politicians have led the country astray, calling American leaders weak and incompetent in contrast to his supposed strength and skill.

He relies on a cult of personality and a searing indictment of current leadership to raise his status. Rather than appealing to factual data and proposing viable solutions, Trump is the supreme authoritarian targeting the unchecked emotional forces of those who are entranced by his bravado.

Riding the Discontent

Trump is the voice of collective dissatisfaction, projecting and revealing one version of the American reality. He describes a political world that he also embodies: “Washington is broken, and our country is in serious trouble and total disarray. Very simple. Politicians are all talk, no action. They are all talk and no action. And it’s constant; it never ends.”

Trump gladly enters this disarray, the realm where he is most comfortable. His stream of consciousness oratory and narcissistic candidacy bring a new bizarre character to the stage in U.S. politics, yet his rise in popularity is the extension of a growing phenomenon. For decades presidential candidates have harvested the bounty from conflicted emotions and despair to gain votes. Their empty sales tactics are often forgotten when they are elected. (In 1988, even the supposedly responsible Republican George H.W. Bush exploited racism with the Willie Horton commercials and promised, “read my lips, no new taxes,” before raising taxes as President.)

Fear of Trump’s words and demeanor has prompted critics and rivals to show

distain, but attacks on him are hurled back with vindictive force. He succeeds in deflecting criticism and bringing former enemies into his camp. We witness the potential rise of an unpredictable tyrant.

Trump initially flaunted his independent wealth, claiming immunity from the pressure of lobbyists. With this, he unwittingly confessed allegiance to personal economic interests and policies that also favor the wealthiest Americans. Many of these same power brokers come to his side as he becomes the likely Republican presidential candidate.

Now that he could be elected, Trump's conflicted presentations of domestic and foreign policy have yet to alienate the politicians, millionaires and billionaires who join his campaign. The real list of priorities for them is short: little else matters but money and profits. Despite concerns about the personality and idiosyncrasies of their candidate, those who not long ago scorned the idea of a President Trump join an extremely dangerous bandwagon.

A billionaire with no leadership experience rises as the voice of the maligned and economically downtrodden. A candidate whose wealth is more telling than any of his stated positions has become the defender of those who suffer from an economy that overtly favors the richest individuals and corporations.

Beyond recognizing and criticizing his blustering racism and fascism, there is minimal challenge to Trump's most ludicrous claim: to represent any other economic class than his own. Trump's greatest vulnerability lies in his status as the super-rich candidate who dubiously presents himself as someone who will come to the aid of the economically challenged.

Allies of the Wealthy

Yet neither wealthy presidential contender – Trump nor Clinton – can be expected to do much that will discomfort the comfortable. While claiming to have altruistic motivations, they are inextricably tied to the forces that drive policies favoring profiteering over basic needs. The most costly impact of Trump's candidacy to America's economic elite will come when the public finally recognizes that the wealthiest Americans have gained vastly disproportional influence.

The founding principles and structure of the U.S. democracy rest on keeping power out of the hands of a small clique of people and their indiscriminate financially based decisions. An oligarch reaching for political office by any means confirms that the interests of an elite class are an entrenched priority.

Yet despite his crude emergence, Trump is not an anomaly. The rise of extreme nationalism in the face of economic crisis is a consequence of decades of

corrupt domestic and international policies. The crisis that faces the United States is certainly exemplified by the rise of Donald Trump and would be seriously exacerbated by his presidency, but will not be resolved by his electoral defeat.

Huxley, as early as 1958, adds perspective to a continuing syndrome: "At this point we find ourselves confronted by a very disquieting question: Do we really wish to act upon our knowledge? Does a majority of the population think it worthwhile to take a good deal of trouble, in order to halt and, if possible, reverse the current drift toward totalitarian control of everything?"

"In the United States of America is the prophetic image of the rest of the urban-industrial world as it will be a few years from now; recent public opinion polls have revealed that an actual majority of young people in their teens, the voters of tomorrow, have no faith in democratic institutions, see no objection to the censorship of unpopular ideas, do not believe that government of the people by the people is possible and would be perfectly content, if they can continue to live in the style to which the boom has accustomed them, to be ruled, from above, by an oligarchy of assorted experts."

Trump, the self-absorbed snake-oil salesman, may self-destruct as quickly as he has risen; however we cannot dismiss the illness allowing his candidacy. Materialism cloaked as patriotism needs to be faced head on and not blamed on a single candidate.

Perhaps Hillary Clinton is more subtle about the forces she is tied to; and clearly has more political experience and a better understanding of the constitutional system. Yet whoever is elected president of the United States will be wed to the identical economic forces. The presidential election of 2016 will be remembered as when Americans were forced to realize that their power has been handed to the economic elite.

Huxley's question becomes more relevant: "Do we really wish to act upon our knowledge?"

Aldous Huxley's full 1958 essay, *Brave New World Revisited*, can be read at:

<http://www.huxley.net/bnw-revisited/>

David Marks is a veteran documentary filmmaker and investigative reporter. His work includes films for the BBC and PBS Frontline, including "Nazi Gold," on the role of Switzerland in WWII.

America's Many Mideast Blunders

Official Washington's neocon foreign policy establishment looks forward to more "regime change" wars in the Mideast and more "blank checks" for Israel, but ex-Ambassador Chas W. Freeman Jr. sees such actions as a continued march of folly.

By Chas W. Freeman Jr. (A June 9 speech to the Center for the National Interest, Washington)

I have been asked to speak about the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East, the realignments occurring among states there, and the prospects for the achievement of renewed stability in the region. I'm tempted to suggest that you read my latest book, *America's Continuing Misadventures in the Middle East*. So much has gone wrong that it is hard to be either brief or optimistic.

Two hundred and eighteen years ago today, Napoleon was preparing to take Malta. His purpose was to clear an obstacle to his seizure of Egypt for revolutionary France. He was able to invade Egypt on July 1, 1798. Napoleon's campaign there and in Palestine kicked off a two-century-long effort by the West to transform the Middle East.

European imperial powers and, latterly, the United States, have repeatedly sought to convert Arabs, Persians, and Turks to the secular values of the European Enlightenment, to democratize them, to impose Western models of governance on them in place of indigenous, Islamic systems, and more recently to persuade them to accept a Jewish state in their midst.

This experiment in expeditionary, transformative diplomacy has now definitively failed. The next administration will inherit a greatly diminished capacity to influence the evolution of the Middle East. Amidst the imbecilities of our interminably farcical election season, it has proven expedient to blame this on President Obama. If only he had bombed Syria, repudiated his predecessor's agreement to withdraw the U.S. military from Iraq, refused to compromise with Iran on nuclear matters, knuckled under to Netanyahu, or whatever, the old order in the Middle East would be alive and well and the United States would still call the shots there.

But this is nonsense. Our estrangement from the Middle East derives from trends that are much deeper than the manifest deficiencies of executive and congressional leadership in Washington. Americans and our partners in the Middle East have developed contradictory interests and priorities. Where shared values existed at all, they have increasingly diverged. There have been massive changes in geo-economics, energy markets, power balances, demographics,

religious ideologies, and attitudes toward America (not just the U.S. government).

Many of these changes were catalyzed by historic American policy blunders. In the aggregate, these blunders are right up there with the French and German decisions to invade Russia and Japan's surprise attack on the United States. Their effects make current policies not just unsustainable but counterproductive.

Blunder number one was the failure to translate our military triumph over Saddam's Iraq in 1991 into a peace with Baghdad. No effort was ever made to reconcile Iraq to the terms of its defeat. The victors instead sought to impose elaborate but previously undiscussed terms by UN fiat in the form of the UN Security Council Resolution 687 – "the mother of all resolutions."

The military basis for a renewed balance of power in the Gulf was there to be exploited. The diplomatic vision was not. The George H. W. Bush administration ended without addressing the question of how to replace war with peace in the Gulf.

Wars don't end until the militarily humiliated accept the political consequences of their defeat. Saddam gave lip service to UNSCR 687 but took it no more seriously than Netanyahu and his predecessors have taken the various Security Council resolutions that direct Israel to permit Palestinians to return to the homes from which it drove them or to withdraw from the Palestinian lands it has seized and settled. Like Israel's wars with the Arabs, America's war with Iraq went into remission but never ended. In due course, it resumed.

The United States needs to get into the habit of developing and implementing war termination strategies.

Blunder number two was the sudden abandonment in 1993 of the strategy of maintaining peace in the Persian Gulf through a balance of power. With no prior notice or explanation, the Clinton administration replaced this longstanding approach with "dual containment" of both Iraq and Iran.

For decades, offshore balancing had permitted the United States to sustain stability without stationing forces other than a very small naval contingent in the Gulf. When the regional balance of power was undone by the Iran-Iraq War, Washington intervened to restore it, emphasizing that once Kuwait had been liberated and Iraq cut back down to size, U.S. forces would depart.

The new policy of "dual containment" created a requirement for the permanent deployment of a large U.S. air and ground force in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar as well as an expanded naval presence in Bahrain and the United Arab

Emirates. The political and socioeconomic irritants this requirement produced led directly to the founding of al Qa`ida and the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington. "Dual containment" was plausible as a defense of Israel against its two most potent regional adversaries, Iran and Iraq. But it made no sense at all in terms of stabilizing the Gulf.

By writing off Iraq as a balancer of Iran, dual containment also paved the way for the 2003 American experiment with regime removal in Baghdad. This rash action on the part of the United States led to the de facto realignment of Iraq with Iran, the destabilization and partition of Iraq, the destabilization and partition of Syria, the avalanche of refugees now threatening to unhinge the E.U., and the rise of the so-called "Islamic state" or Da`esh.

With Iraq having fallen into the Iranian sphere of influence, there is no apparent way to return to offshore balancing. The U.S. is stuck in the Gulf. The political irritations this generates ensure that some in the region will continue to seek to attack the U.S. homeland or, failing that, Americans overseas.

The United States needs to find an alternative to the permanent garrisoning of the Gulf.

Blunder number three was the unthinking transformation in December 2001 of what had been a punitive expedition in Afghanistan into a long-term pacification campaign that soon became a NATO operation. The objectives of the NATO campaign have never been clear but appear to center on guaranteeing that there will no Islamist government in Kabul.

The engagement of European as well as American forces in this vague mission has had the unintended effect of turning the so-called "global war on terrorism" into what appears to many Muslims to be a Western global crusade against Islam and its followers. Afghanistan remains decidedly unpacified and is becoming more, not less Islamist.

The United States needs to find ways to restore conspicuous cooperation with the world's Muslims.

Blunder number four was the inauguration on February 4, 2002 – also in Afghanistan – of a campaign using missiles fired from drones to assassinate presumed opponents. This turn toward robotic warfare has evolved into a program of serial massacres from the air in a widening area of West Asia and northern Africa. It is a major factor in the metastasis of anti-Western terrorism with global reach.

What had been a U.S. problem with a few Islamist exiles resident in Afghanistan

and Sudan is now a worldwide phenomenon. The terrorist movements U.S. interventions have spawned now have safe havens not just in Afghanistan, but in the now failed states of Iraq and Syria, as well as Chad, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Sinai, Somalia, and Yemen. They also have a growing following among European Muslims and a toehold among Muslim Americans. We have flunked the test suggested by the Yoda of the Pax Americana, Donald Rumsfeld. We are creating more terrorists than we are killing.

The United States needs a strategy that does not continuously reinforce blowback.

Blunder number five was the aid to Iran implicit in the unprovoked invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003. This rearranged the region to the severe strategic disadvantage of traditional U.S. strategic partners like Israel and Saudi Arabia by helping to create an Iranian sphere of influence that includes much of Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

It showed the United States to be militarily mighty but geopolitically naive and strategically incompetent. Rather than underscoring American military power, it devalued it. The U.S. invasion of Iraq also set off a sectarian struggle that continues to spread around the globe among the Muslim fourth of humanity. The U.S. occupation culminated in a "surge" of forces that entrenched a pro-Iranian regime in Baghdad and that only its authors consider a victory.

The United States needs to deal with the reality and the challenges to others in the region of the Iranian sphere of influence it helped create.

Blunder number six has been to confuse the motives for terrorism with the religious rationalizations its perpetrators concoct to justify its immorality. Many of those who seek revenge for perceived injustices and humiliations at the hands of the West and Western-backed regimes in the Middle East, or who are treated as aliens in their own countries in Europe, give voice to their anger in the language of Islam.

But their political grievances, not heretical Islamic excuses for the mass murders they carry out, are what drive their attempts at reprisal. Islamism is a symptom of Arab anguish and rage. It is a consequence, not a cause of Muslim anger.

Religious ideology is, of course, important. It is a key factor in justifying hatred of those outside its self-selected community. To non-believers, arguments about who is a Jew or whether someone is a true Muslim are incomprehensible and more than a little absurd.

But to the intolerant people doing the excommunicating, such debates define

their political community and those who must be excluded from it. They separate friend from foe. And to those being condemned for their disbelief or alleged apostasy, the judgments imposed by this intolerance can now be a matter of life or death.

In the end, the attribution of Muslim resentment of the West to Islam is just a version of the facile thesis that "they hate us because of who we are." This is the opiate of the ignorant. It is self-expiating denial that past and present behavior by Western powers, including the United States, might have created grievances severe enough to motivate others to seek revenge for the indignities they have experienced.

It is an excuse to ignore and do nothing about the ultimate sources of Muslim rage because they are too discomfiting to bear discussion. Any attempt to review the political effects of American complicity in the oppression and dispossession of millions of Palestinians and the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of deaths caused by U.S. sanctions, bombing campaigns, and drone warfare is ruled out of order by political correctness and cowardice.

The United States needs to work with its European allies, with Russia, and with partners in the Middle East to attack the problems that are generating terrorism, not just the theology of those who resort to it.

Blunder number seven was the adoption after the 1973 Yom Kippur War of a commitment to maintain a "qualitative military edge" for Israel over any and all potential adversaries in its region. This policy has deprived Israel of any incentive to seek security through non-military means.

Why should Israel risk resting its security on reconciliation with Palestinians and its other Arab neighbors when it has been assured of long-term military supremacy over them and relieved of any concern about the political or economic consequences of using force against them?

Confidence in Israel's qualitative military edge is now the main source of moral hazard for the Jewish state. Its effect is to encourage Israel to favor short-term territorial gains over any effort to achieve long-term security through acceptance by neighboring states, the elimination of tensions with them, and the normalization of its relations with others in its region. U.S. policy inadvertently ensured that the so-called "peace process" would always be stillborn. And so it proved to be.

Israel's lack of concern about the consequences of its occupation and settlement of the West Bank and its siege of Gaza has facilitated its progressive abandonment of the universalist Jewish values that inspired Zionism and its

consequent separation from the Jewish communities outside its elastic borders. U.S. subsidies underwrite blatant tyranny by Jewish settlers over the Muslim and Christian Arabs they have dispossessed.

This is a formula for the moral and political self-delegitimization of the State of Israel, not its long-term survival. It is also a recipe for the ultimate loss by Israel of irreplaceable American political, military, and other support.

The United States needs to wean Israel off its welfare dependency and end the unconditional commitments that enable self-destructive behavior on the part of the Jewish state.

Blunder number eight has been basing U.S. policies toward the Middle East on deductive reasoning grounded in ideological fantasies and politically convenient narratives rather than on inductive reasoning and reality-based analysis. America's misadventures cannot be excused as "intelligence errors." They are the result of the ideological politicization of policy-making. This has enabled multiple policy errors based on wishful thinking, selective listening, and mirror-imaging. Examples include:

–The conviction, despite U.N. inspections and much evidence to the contrary, that Saddam's program to develop weapons of mass destruction was ongoing, representing an imminent danger, and could only be halted by his overthrow;

–The supposition that, despite his well-documented secularism, because he was an Arab, a Muslim, and a bad guy, Saddam must be colluding with the religious fanatics of al Qaeda;

–The assumption that the U.S. military presence in Iraq would be short, undemanding, and inexpensive;

–The belief that the overthrow of confessional and ethnic balances would not cause the disintegration of societies like Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Lebanon or ignite a wider sectarian conflict;

–The spurious attribution to people in Iraq of political attitudes and aspirations found mostly among exiles abroad;

–The ludicrous expectation that U.S. forces invading Iraq would be greeted as liberators by all but a few;

–The unshakeable presumption that Israel must want peace more than land;

–The impulse to confuse mob rule on the Arab street with a process of democratization;

–The confidence that free and fair elections would put liberals rather than Islamist nationalists in power in Arab societies like Palestine and Egypt;

–The supposition that the removal of bad guys from office, as in Libya, Yemen, or Syria, would lead to the elevation of better leaders and the flowering of peace, freedom, and domestic tranquility there; and

–Imagining that dictators like Bashar Al-Assad had little popular support and could therefore be easily deposed.

I could go on but I won't. I'm sure I've made my point. Dealing with the Middle East as we prefer to imagine it rather than as it is doesn't work. **The United States needs to return to fact-based analysis and realism in its foreign policy.**

All these blunders have been compounded by the consistent substitution of military tactics for strategy. The diplomatic success of the Iran nuclear deal aside, the policy dialogue in Washington and the current presidential campaign have focused entirely on the adjustment of troop levels, whether and when to bomb things, the implications of counterinsurgency doctrine, when and how to use special forces, whether to commit troops on the ground, and the like, with nary a word about what these uses of force are to accomplish other than killing people. When presented with proposals for military action, no one asks "and then what?"

Military campaign plans that aim at no defined political end state are violence for the sake of violence that demonstrably create more problems than they solve. Military actions that are unguided and unaccompanied by diplomacy are especially likely to do so. Think of Israel's, our, and Saudi Arabia's campaigns in Gaza, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, and Yemen.

By contrast, military interventions that are limited in their objectives, scale, and duration, that end or phase down when they have achieved appropriate milestones, and that support indigenous forces that have shown their mettle on the battlefield can succeed. Examples include the pre-Tora Bora phase of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and the first round of Russian intervention in Syria.

The objectives of what was initially conceived as a punitive raid into Afghanistan in October 2001 were (1) to dismantle al Qaeda and (2) to punish its Taliban hosts to ensure that "terrorists with global reach" would be denied a continuing safe haven in Afghanistan. The United States pursued these objectives by supporting mostly non-Pashtun enemies of the mostly Pashtun Taliban who had proven politico-military capabilities and staying power.

A limited American and British investment of intelligence capabilities, special

forces, air combat controllers, and air strikes tilted the battlefield in favor of the Northern Alliance and against the Taliban. Within a little more than two months, the Taliban had been forced out of Kabul and the last remnants of al Qaeda had been killed or driven from Afghanistan. We had achieved our objectives.

But instead of declaring victory and dancing off the field, we moved the goal posts. The United States launched an open-ended campaign and enlisted NATO in efforts to install a government in Kabul while building a state for it to govern, promoting feminism, and protecting poppy growers. The poppies still flourish. All else looks to be ephemeral.

Mr. Putin's intervention in Syria in 2015 relied for its success on ingredients similar to those in the pre-Tora Bora U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. The Russians committed a modest ration of air power and special forces in support of a Syrian government that had amply demonstrated its survivability in the face of more than four years of Islamist efforts to take it down. The Russian campaign had clear political objectives, which it stuck to.

Moscow sought to reduce the complexities of Syria to a binary choice between life under the secular dictatorship of the Assad regime and rule by Islamist fanatics. It cemented a Russian-Iranian entente. It hedged against the likelihood that the Syrian Humpty Dumpty cannot be reassembled, ensuring that, whatever happens, Russia will not lack clients in Syria or be dislodged from its bases at Tartus and Latakia.

Russia succeeded in forcing the United States into a diplomatically credible peace process in which regime removal is no longer a given and Russia and Iran are recognized as essential participants. It retrained, reequipped, and restored the morale of government forces, while putting their Islamist opponents on the defensive and gaining ground against them. The campaign reduced and partially contained the growing Islamist threat to Russian domestic tranquility, while affirming Russia's importance as a partner in combating terrorism.

Moscow also put its hands on the stopcock for the refugee flow from West Asia that threatens the survival of the European Union, underscoring Russia's indispensable relevance to European affairs. It demonstrated its renewed military prowess and reestablished itself as a major actor in Middle Eastern affairs.

And it showed that Russia could be counted upon to stand by protégés when they are at risk, drawing an invidious contrast with the American abandonment of Hosni Mubarak in 2011. The cost of these achievements has been collateral damage to Russia's relations with Turkey, a price Moscow appears willing to play.

But state failure in Syria continues, as it does in Iraq, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen. Jordan and Bahrain are under pressure. Tunisia and Turkey – once avatars of democratic Islamism – seem to be leaving democracy behind. Israel is strangling Gaza while swallowing the rest of Palestine alive. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain are in a near state of war with Iran, which is in the midst of a breakthrough in relations with Europe and Asia, if not America. Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar are trying to stay out of the fight. Once the region's Arab heavyweight, Egypt now subsists on handouts from the Gulf Arabs and cowers under martial law. Sudan has been partitioned, sidelined, and ostracized by the West.

The Middle East kaleidoscope has yet to come to rest. We can see that the region's future political geography will differ from its past and present contours. But we cannot yet say what it will look like.

"More-of-the-same" policies will almost certainly produce more of the same sort of mess we now see. What is to be done? Perhaps we should start by trying to correct some of the blunders that produced our current conundrums. The world's reliance on energy from the Gulf has not diminished. But ours has. That gives us some freedom of maneuver. We should use it.

We need to harness our military capabilities to diplomacy rather than the other way around. The key to this is to find a way to reenlist Iraq in support of a restored balance of power in the Gulf. That would allow us reduce our presence there to levels that avoid stimulating a hostile reaction and to return to a policy of offshore balancing.

This can only be done if Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Sunni states rediscover the differences between the varieties of Shi'ism in Iraqi Najaf and Iranian Qom. The Shi'ism of Najaf tends to be fatalistic and supportive of Iraqi nationalism. The Shi'ism of Qom is more assertively universalistic and activist. The Saudis and their allies need to make common cause with Shi'ite Iraqis as Arabs rather than castigate them as heretics.

The limited normalization of Iranian relations with the West, including the United States, is an inevitability. The strategies of our Arab partners in the region need to anticipate and hedge against this. And we need to prepare them to do so.

Such an adjustment will take some very tough love from the United States. It will require the Saudis and their allies to back away from the policies based on Salafi sectarianism they have followed for the better part of this decade and reembrace the tolerance that is at the heart of Islam. It will also require some measure of accommodation by them with Iran, regardless of the state of U.S. -

Iranian relations.

Without both a turn away from sectarianism and the achievement of a modus vivendi with Iran, the Saudis and their allies will remain on the defensive, Iraq will remain an extension of Iranian influence, and the region will remain inflamed by religious warfare. All this will spill over on Americans and our European allies.

Islamism is an extreme form of political Islam – a noxious ideology that invites a political retort. It has received none except in Saudi Arabia. There a concerted propaganda campaign has effectively refuted Islamist heresies. No effort has been undertaken to form a coalition to mount such a campaign on a regional basis.

But such a coalition is essential to address the political challenges that Muslim extremists pose to regional stability and to the security of the West. Only the Saudis and others with credibility among Salafi Muslims are in a position to form and lead a campaign to do this. This is an instance where it makes sense for the United States to “lead from behind.”

For our part, Americans must be led to correct our counterproductive misunderstanding of Islam. Islamophobia has become as American as gun massacres. The presumptive candidate of one of our two major parties has suggested banning Muslims from entry into the United States. This is reflective of national attitudes that are incompatible with the cooperation we need with Muslim partners to fight terrorist extremism. If we do not correct these attitudes, we will continue to pay not just in treasure but in blood. Lots of it.

Finally, the United States must cease to provide blank checks to partners in the region prone to misguided and counterproductive policies and actions that threaten American interests as well as their own prospects. No more Yemens. No more Gazas or Lebanons. No more military guarantees that disincentivize diplomacy aimed at achieving long-term security for Israel.

The obvious difficulty of making any of these adjustments is a measure of how far we have diverged from an effective approach to managing our relations with the Middle East and how impaired our ability to contribute to peace and stability there has become. Our mainstream media is credulous and parrots the official line. Our politicians are devoted to narratives that bear almost no relation to the realities of the Middle East. Our government is dysfunctional. Our politics is ... well, ... you pick the word.

Frankly, the prospects that we will get our act and our policies together are

not good. But history will not excuse us for acting out Einstein's definition of insanity: doing more of the same and expecting different results. We won't get them.

Ambassador Freeman chairs Projects International, Inc. He is a retired U.S. defense official, diplomat, and interpreter, the recipient of numerous high honors and awards, a popular public speaker, and the author of five books.

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