

Lost History of Iran's 1981 Coup

The U.S. mainstream media avoids the word “coup” when a disfavored leader is ousted, but the silence around Iran's 1981 coup also may have served Ronald Reagan's political self-interest in keeping secret his own “coup,” as Mahmood Delkhasteh reflects.

By Mahmood Delkhasteh

Brazil's suspended President Dilma Rousseff calls her impeachment a coup d'état. Many academics and political experts agree that the old guard and corrupt capitalist elite in Brazil have overthrown the president, despite the fact that all the legal procedures for her impeachment have been observed. As one pro-Rousseff Brazilian protester remarked, this is a “civilian coup – capitalism doesn't need guns and soldiers; it is enough to have an anti-democratic judicial system.”

Now go back 35 years to Iran. The 1979 Iranian Revolution is less than two-and-a-half years old. The clergy have, gradually, monopolized the state. The aim is, as the head of the Islamic Republic Party (Ayatollah Beheshti) has stated, to establish a “despotism of the pious.” The only remaining obstacle to the total monopolization of power is the office of the recently elected president, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr. He insists upon defending the democratic goals of the revolution despite being offered increased powers to reject them, therefore, he writes to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini:

“I joined you because I saw you as a man of belief and action. I accepted the post of presidency in order to serve the people according to my belief and spend all my power in defending the principles. However, it has become obvious that you do not want a man of belief and action, but a lackey. The title of presidency is not a status to violate my principles and belief for them. If I am not able to serve, I have no attraction to such titles. If you are looking for a lackey, there are so many lackeys, do not expect such a thing from me. The Shah was not overthrown to be replaced with a worse system.”

So Bani-Sadr refuses to bow to Ayatollah Khomeini's threats and warns people to resist the coup he sees is in motion. While Bani-Sadr is still president, the head of the Revolutionary Courts (Ayatollah Gillani) issues a fatwa for his execution seven times over. Army generals suggest that Bani-Sadr might conduct his own coup against the clergy but he refuses on two grounds.

First, Bani-Sadr opposes military intervention into politics; second, he does not want to weaken the forces defending Iran against the Iraqi army, which still holds some Iranian territory under its control. The clergy are not so concerned;

as Khomeini's grandson, (Syed Hussein) later revealed, the leaders of the Islamic Republic Party – Ayatollah Beheshti, Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ali Khamenei – would prefer to lose half of Iran's territory than for Bani-Sadr win the war with Iraq.

"I have debated with them [the IRP]," he said, "and they told me that even if we lose Khuzestan and even half of Iran, it is better than Bani-Sadr winning this war."

Driving Bani-Sadr Underground

Bani-Sadr's enemies bring Revolutionary Guard units from the warfront to Tehran in order to carry out their coup. At this point, President Bani-Sadr goes underground and sends a message to the Iranian people. He says:

"What is important is not the elimination of the president, but the fact that the demon of despotism and oppression once again wants to impose itself upon you, the people, and to make the precious blood shed for Islam and freedom, worthless."

His house is bombed, the presidential office is attacked, and many members of his staff are arrested. Some of them are executed: Manuchehr Masudi, the advisor to the president on human rights who exposed the widespread use of torture in prisons; Navab Safavi, a journalist and presidential advisor of the president; Rashid-Sadr-Alhefaazi, whose detailed investigation showed that Ayatollah Khomeini and Ronald Reagan had made a clandestine agreement to postpone the release of over 52 American hostages in Iran to increase Reagan's election chance (over Democratic candidate) President Jimmy Carter.

This agreement later became known as the "October Surprise." [For the most detailed account of the evidence regarding the alleged Republican/Iranian deal, see Robert Parry's [America's Stolen Narrative](#).]

During this time, the Offices of Cooperation of the People with the President, the only political organizations to have emerged democratically and horizontally across the country, are relentlessly attacked. Thousands of people are arrested, and many are tortured and executed. Other people who shelter the president while he is underground are arrested and executed.

Ayatollah Beheshti then tries to remove the president through the Supreme Court on the ground that he has violated the country's constitution. The judges, who until this point have maintained their independence (unlike Brazil's "anti-democratic judicial system"), resist and argue that there are no constitutional grounds for removing the president. Later, Ayatollah Musavi Ardebili, the country's public prosecutor, revealed why the attempt to remove Bani-Sadr

through the Supreme Court failed.

He said: "the court in the Judiciary in those days was not ready; the judges were not cleansed yet and of those who were like minded to the president and supporters of liberalism and small organizations [*goroohakhaa*, a derogatory term for organizations like the Mojaheddin and Marxist Fedaeeyaan organization] were in top jobs in courts."

Once again, Ayatollah Khomeini intervenes. In direct violation of the constitution, he orders the head of parliament, Rafsanjani, to start a process of removing the president through the parliament. Instead of pointing out that this demand is in violation of the constitution, Rafsanjani enthusiastically starts the process and in less than two hours gathers 120 signatures of ministers of parliament to debate the removal of the president on grounds of incompetency through numerous and repeated violations of the constitution.

Widespread Intimidation

MP Ahmad Ghazanfar-pour dares to read a message from the president in parliament. In it, Bani-Sadr informs people that the Iraqi government has agreed to a peace deal which is advantageous to Iran, as Saddam Hussein had agreed to remove his troops out of Iran's occupied land and pay a hefty compensation. (It should also be noted that had the process of overthrowing the president been postponed by even one week, a peace deal with Saddam Hussein would have been signed.)

Attempts are made to assassinate Ghazanfar-pour and his colleague as they left the parliament, but they are able to dodge the bullets.

During an ensuing two-day debate about Bani-Sadr's presidential competence, the parliament is surrounded and occupied by *hezbollahis* threatening to kill whoever dares to speak in favor of the president, chanting "Bani-Sadr, anti-God, should be executed" (*Banisadr zedo-allah-edaam bayaad gardad*). Later, Rafsanjani raised this terrorization of the pro-president MPs, stating: "and now the real force, which was *Hezbollah*, had entered the front, the real force of Imam's line. There were these *hezbollahis* who surrounded the parliament and inflicted so much suffering on [the opposition] MPs."

Thus, while 10 MPs had enrolled to talk in support the president, half of them are so terrorized that they absent themselves and three switch sides to demand the removal of the president. Just one, Ali-Akbar Moin-Far, openly defends the president. Significantly, he ends his defense with a verse from the Koran which is always spoken at the time of death: "To Allah we belong and to Him/Her we shall return," as he had readied himself to die at the hands of the mob.

Those MPs in favor of removing the president fail to present any evidence to demonstrate that the president has violated the constitution. The most important reasons given for his incompetency are: his opposition to the occupation of American embassy; his opposition to torture and the execution of prisoners; his opposition to the doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih* (the rule of jurist); his advocacy of human rights and democracy; and his opposition to creating a cult of personality around Khomeini.

Moin-Far argues that the reasons introduced for Bani-Sadr's incompetency are in fact cases for his competence in trying to uphold the constitution, and that he should be praised for it. [For Bani-Sadr's own account of the October Surprise case, see Consortiumnews.com's "'October Surprise' and 'Argo.'"]

Why 35 Years of Silence?

The removal of Abolhassan Bani-Sadr as president of Iran in June 1981 drastically altered the outcome of the Iranian Revolution and post-revolutionary Iranian politics, in particular, closing its democratic path and institutionalizing its dictatorial trajectory.

The question is why, after 35 years, does the academic community still fail to recognize these events as a coup d'état and continue to endorse the official narrative of the president's removal, describing it in terms of "dismissal," "impeachment," "ousting," and his being "thrown out"?

In response to an article I attempted to publish about this case in a reputable academic journal, for example, one reviewer argued that the "legal process was carefully drawn up and constitutional shortcomings ... were bridged using legislation." Why, in 35 years, has no research been done to interrogate the nature of such an historical event, with so many documents and testimonies clearly pointing towards a coup being ignored and left to the dust?

It is understandable that those in Iran's ruling regime, both conservative and reformist, have every interest in portraying Bani-Sadr's removal as legal and constitutional: they all actively participated in the coup, and recognizing the events as a coup would render all the subsequent governments as unconstitutional.

However, this does not explain why many experts in the field who are working in the West passively or even actively support this official line, even at the cost of academic freedom and critical thinking, particularly as they do not have to tiptoe around the regime.

Why, instead of providing space for counter-narratives, are they are doing their best to snuff them out the critical exploration of an historical event

whose reinterpretation could fundamentally transform our understanding of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and current Iranian politics?

A Mystery of Silence

Apart from the political and ideological forces which clearly bear on this debate, maybe such unbending resistance to the entrance of this narrative into the literature can be understood in terms of the discourse which needs to make such an event invisible.

After all, as Michael Foucault has illustrated, one of the main functions of discourse in regimes of truth is to make anything outside as other, unthinkable and unsayable. Maybe an alteration of the broader discourse framing these events would undermine the foundation of existing scholarly work.

Once, Albert Einstein asked fellow physicist Niels Bohr whether he believed that “the moon does not exist if nobody is looking at it.” Bohr replied: “he would not be able to prove that it does.”

And once the philosopher George Berkley asked, “If a tree falls in a forest and nobody is there to hear it, does it make a sound”? The answer is no, since in order to hear a sound there should be a listener. The question is, if a thing takes place within social reality and is observed, but the ones who guard the borders of “what is permissible knowledge” refuse to acknowledge them, what happens to this experience?

Foucault was interested in what he called “subjugated knowledges,” which he described in two forms: first, “historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations,” and second, “knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity.”

The question is how to bring such knowledge to the fore. Foucault argued that archaeological and genealogical methods of critique can “desubjugate” these historical knowledges in order “to set them free, or in other words to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal and scientific theoretical discourse.”

Thomas Kuhn, in his ground-breaking analysis of paradigm shifts in scientific knowledge, demonstrated that shifts in scholarly consensus of this sort emerge from continuous struggle as the beliefs and institutions of “normal science” depend on the consensus for their survival.

It seems that such determination is also needed to challenge the consensus within political and academic discourse. The battle to crack the consensus on the nature of president Bani-Sadr's removal in 1981 can be fought by exposing the anomalies between the existing historical consensus and the alternative interpretations.

We can fundamentally transform our understanding of the Iranian revolution by letting the untold stories to be told.

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Israel's Water Siege of Palestinians

Neocon domination of the U.S. foreign policy establishment has foreclosed serious debate over Israel's strangling control of Palestinian water resources and what that means for the future of that ghetto-ized population, as Chuck Spinney explains.

By Chuck Spinney

Access to water is one of the most fundamental and least discussed issues underpinning the Israeli – Palestinian conflict (as well as the recurring pattern of Israel's conflicts with Syria and Lebanon). Control of the West Bank's water resources is intimately tied into the growing pattern of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and, if left unchecked, Israel's inevitable annexation of Area C (60 percent) of the West Bank (thereby formalizing the Gazification of Areas A & B). Water resources are also intimately woven into pattern of destruction in Israel's siege of the Gaza ghetto.

Most Americans remain unaware of water's central importance in this conflict. Yet a fair and equitable solution to this issue is a necessary albeit not sufficient condition for ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on terms that do not sow the seeds for future conflict.

The parameters of the water question in the Jordan River Valley have been long understood, if ignored, by American policy makers (see the 1955 Johnston Plan and the Johnston Plan Revisited). Indeed, in its current context, these

parameters reach back to the Feb. 3, 1919 Zionist proposal to the Versailles Peace Conference for a Jewish national home (do a word search for “water” and think about the implications of the highlighted text).

More generally, the history of access to water in this region reaches back to the dawn of civilization and the creation of agriculture. The Jordan River drainage system (along with Lebanon’s surface water systems) together with the aquifers in the highlands of the West Bank (and Lebanon) connect the two wings of the Fertile Crescent stretching from the Nile River system in the West to Tigris and Euphrates River systems in the East.

It is no accident that the location of one of the world’s oldest cities, the Palestinian canton of Jericho, was determined in large part by its access to the wells and springs in the center of this link.

I first became interested in this issue in 2001 (and did a subsequent, more extensive analysis in 2003 here). Since 2001, the water question has worsened with each passing year, yet it still receives almost no attention in the mainstream media.

The attached analysis by Camilla Corradin in Aljazeera is an excellent update of this steadily worsening question. The links in her report are particularly important sources of information. I urge readers to read the links as well as her essay.

Chuck Spinney is a former military analyst for the Pentagon who was famous for the “Spinney Report,” which criticized the Pentagon’s wasteful pursuit of costly and complex weapons systems.

Israel: Water as a tool to dominate Palestinians

Israel deliberately denies Palestinians control over their water sources and sets the ground for water domination.

By Camilla Corradin, Aljazeera, 20 June 2016

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/israel-water-tool-dominate-palestinians-160619062531348.html>

Occupied West Bank – As temperatures rise and summer months approach, yet again this year, thousands of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank are being deprived of their most basic need – access to water – as the Israeli national water company Mekorot restricted the water supply to villages and towns in northern West Bank.

Although extremely worrying for the livelihood and health impact on the affected

tens of thousands of Palestinians, this comes to little surprise.

Since it occupied the West Bank in 1967, Israel has laid hands on Palestinian water resources through discriminatory water-sharing agreements that prevented Palestinians from maintaining or developing their water infrastructure through its illegal planning and permit regime. As a result, thousands of Palestinians are unable to access sufficient water supplies and became water-dependent on Israel.

By building on the myth of a water-scarce region – Ramallah has more rainfall than London – Israel has deliberately denied Palestinians control over their water resources and successfully set the ground for water domination, granting itself a further tool to exercise its hegemony over the occupied population and territory.

Palestinian water resources in the West Bank wouldn't be scarce – they include the Jordan River, running all along the eastern border of the West Bank, and the Mountain Aquifer underlying the West Bank and Israel. Both water resources are transboundary – meaning that, by international law, they should be shared in an equitable and reasonable manner by Israel and Palestine.

Yet, since Israel took over the West Bank in 1967, Israel has remained in near full control over Palestinian water resources in the West Bank.

Israel fully prevents Palestinians from accessing the Jordan River and using its water. As for the Mountain Aquifer, the 1995 Oslo II interim agreement – which also defined the water-sharing arrangements between Palestine and Israel – came to consolidate the Israeli control that had been in place since 1967.

Israel was granted access to over 71 percent of the aquifer water, while Palestinians were only granted 17 percent. While the agreement was supposed to last five years only, 20 years later, it is still in place.

Water-sharing agreement discussions are left to the long-awaited final status negotiations.

While the Palestinian population of the West Bank has almost doubled since, allocations have remained capped at 1995 levels. Today, Palestinians have access to less water than they were granted by the already-inequitable Oslo agreements: 13 percent, with Israel abstracting the remaining 87.

Indeed, as pointed out by the World Bank in its 2009 report about the water sector in Palestine, due to the dual Israeli permit regime, Palestinians have been unable to maintain and develop their water infrastructure.

In Palestinian wells where the water table has dropped, for instance, the Israeli restrictions on drilling, deepening and rehabilitation have made the wells un-usable and Palestinian water abstraction levels decline.

On the one hand, Palestinian water projects all over the West Bank need an approval by the Joint Water Committee (JWC), where Israel has a de facto veto power. Only 56 percent of Palestinian projects regarding water and sanitation were granted permits by the JWC (against a near 100 percent approval rate for the Israeli projects), and only one-third of those could actually be implemented.

Concerned by the asymmetry in the JWC functioning, Palestinians have refused to sit in the committee since 2010.

In addition to the JWC approval, all projects in Area C also require a permit by the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA), which are notoriously difficult to obtain. As reported by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the ICA has refused between 2010 and 2014 98.5 percent of the Palestinian building permit applications for Area C projects.

Over 50 water and sanitation structures have been demolished by Israel since the beginning of 2016 already (more than in the entire 2015) on grounds that they were lacking the Israeli permits.

Israel's claims that the failing water infrastructure is the cause of the water cuts in the West Bank fail to acknowledge that the poor infrastructure is a direct result of the Israeli permit regime in the West Bank.

The lack of water and other basic services resulting from Israeli policies has created a coercive environment that often leaves Palestinians with no choice but to leave their communities in Area C, allowing Israel's land takeover and further expansion of its settlements.

But as recent events have shown, Areas A and B are not safe havens either. Due to the lack of sufficient water resources available, Palestine heavily depends on water bought from Mekorot (18.5 percent in 2014). Ironically, this is water that Israel takes from the rightful Palestinian share – which they are denied – before selling it back to them.

This has granted Israel further control over Palestinian access to water. As soon as water demand increases in the hot spring and summer months, supplies to settlements are privileged over Palestinian areas in the West Bank.

Every year, water supply to Palestinian towns and villages is cut off for days – if not weeks – during which Palestinians are forced to buy trucked water at five

times the price of network water – as well as reduce their already low consumption.

Water consumption figures are telling: While Israelis have access to around 240 litres of water per person per day, and settlers over 300, Palestinians in the West Bank are left with 73 litres – well below the World Health Organization's minimum standard of 100.

OCHA report that in Area C, where 180 Palestinian communities are not connected to the water network and 122 have a connection with no or irregular supply as a result of Israeli restrictions, water consumption can drop to 20 litres of water per person per day as people have to buy expensive trucked water.

Here, vulnerable households spend up to one-fifth of their salary on water.

For instance, while people in the Palestinian community of al-Hadidiya in the northern Jordan Valley have access to as little as 20 litres of water per person per day – settlers in the neighbouring settlement of Ro'i enjoy 460 litres of water per person for domestic use only, a swimming pool and flourishing agriculture.

Israel, as the occupying power has an obligation under international humanitarian law to ensure the dignity and wellbeing of the population under its control.

This includes obligations regarding the provision of and access to humanitarian relief and basic services, including water and sanitation.

Not only is Israel failing to provide for such basic needs. Its discriminatory water policies also prove that Israel is using water as a tool to dominate Palestinians, exercise its power, and punish an entire population by deliberately depriving its inhabitants the most basic of rights.

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US Game-Playing Means Hot Syrian Summer

As Iran and Russia sense they've been "had" by President Obama over the Syrian "cease-fire" – and other U.S. deceptions – the prospects rise for a climactic battle in Syria, writes ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke from Beirut.

By Alastair Crooke

Gradually, the mist of ambiguity and confusion hanging over Syria is lifting a little. The landscape is sharpening into focus. With this improved visibility, we can view a little more clearly the course of action being prepared by Iran, Russia and the Syrian government.

Russia is emerging from an internal debate over whether the U.S. is truly interested in an entente or only in bloodying Russia's nose. And what do we see? Skepticism. Russia is skeptical that NATO's new missile shield in Poland and Romania, plus military exercises right up near its border, are purely defensive actions.

Iran, meanwhile, is studying the entrails of the nuclear agreement. As one well-informed commentator put it to me, Iran is "coldly lethal" at the gloating in the U.S. at having "put one over" Iran. Because, while Iran has duly taken actions that preclude it from weaponizing its nuclear program, it will not now gain the financial normalization that it had expected under the agreement.

It's not a question of slow implementation – I've heard directly from banks in Europe that they've been visited by U.S. Treasury officials and warned in clear terms that any substantive trade cooperation with Iran is closed off. Iran is not being integrated into the financial system.

U.S. sanctions remain in place, the Europeans have been told, and the U.S. will implement fines against those who contravene these sanctions. Financial institutions are fearful, particularly given the size of the fines that have been imposed – almost \$9 billion for the French bank BNP a year ago.

In principle, sanctions have been lifted. But in practice, even though its sales of crude are reaching pre-sanctions levels, Iran has found that, financially, it remains substantially hobbled. America apparently achieved a double success: It circumscribed Iran's nuclear program, and the U.S. Treasury has hollowed out the nuclear agreement's financial quid pro quo, thus limiting Iran's potential financial empowerment, which America's Gulf allies so feared.

Some Iranian leaders feel cheated; some are livid. Others simply opine that the U.S. should never have been trusted in the first place.

The Failed Cease-Fire

And Damascus? It never believed that the recent cease-fire would be a genuine cessation of hostilities, and many ordinary Syrians now concur with their government, seeing it as just another American ruse. They are urging their government to get on with it – to liberate Aleppo.

"Just do it" is the message for the Syrian government that I've heard on the

streets. A sense of the West being deceitful is exacerbated by reports of American, German, French and possibly Belgian special forces establishing themselves in northern Syria.

All this infringement of Syrian sovereignty does not really seem temporary but rather the opposite: there are shades of Afghanistan, with all the “temporary” NATO bases. In any case, it is no exaggeration to say that skepticism about Western motives is in the air – especially after Ashton Carter, the U.S. defense secretary, raised the possibility of NATO entering the fray.

As Pat Lang, a former U.S. defense intelligence officer, wrote last week:

“The Russians evidently thought they could make an honest deal with [U.S. Secretary of State John] Kerry [and President] Obama. Well, they were wrong. The U.S. supported jihadis associated with [Jabhat al-Nusra, al Qaeda’s Syria wing] ... merely ‘pocketed’ the truce as an opportunity to re-fit, re-supply and re-position forces. The U.S. must have been complicit in this ruse. Perhaps the Russians have learned from this experience.”

Lang goes on to note that during the “truce,” “the Turks, presumably with the agreement of the U.S., brought 6,000 men north out of [Syria via the] Turkish border ... They trucked them around, and brought them through Hatay Province in Turkey to be sent back into Aleppo Province and to the city of Aleppo itself.”

Reports in Russian media indicate that Nusra jihadists, who have continued to shell Syrian government forces during the “truce,” are being commanded directly by Turkish military advisers. And meanwhile, the U.S. supplied the opposition with about 3,000 tons of weapons during the cease-fire, according to I.H.S. Jane’s, a security research firm.

Protecting AL Qaeda’s Nusra Front

In brief, the cease-fire has failed. It was not observed. The U.S. made no real effort to separate the moderates from Nusra around Aleppo (as Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has affirmed). Instead, the U.S. reportedly sought Nusra’s exemption from any Russian or Syrian attack.

It reminds one of that old joke: “Oh Lord, preserve me from sin – but not just yet!” Or in other words, “preserve us from these dreadful jihadist terrorists, but not just yet, for Nusra is too useful a tool to lose.”

The cease-fire did not hasten any political solution, and Russia’s allies – Iran and Hezbollah – have already paid and will continue to pay a heavy price in terms of casualties for halting their momentum toward Aleppo. The opposition now has renewed vigor – and weapons.

It is hard to see the cease-fire holding value for Moscow much longer. The original Russian intention was to try to compel American cooperation, firstly in the war against jihadism and, more generally, to compel the U.S. and Europe to acknowledge that their own security interests intersect directly with those of Moscow and that this intersection plainly calls for partnership rather than confrontation.

The present situation in Syria neither facilitates this bigger objective nor the secondary one of defeating radical jihadism. Rather, it has led to calls in Russia for a less conciliatory approach to the U.S. and for the Kremlin to acknowledge that far from preparing for partnership, NATO is gearing up for a hybrid war against Russia.

It is also hard to see the cease-fire holding any continuing value for Tehran either. While the Iran nuclear agreement seemed to hold out the promise of bringing Iran back into the global financial system, such expectations seem now to be withering on the vine.

As a result, Iran is likely to feel released from self-imposed limitations of their engagement in Syria and in other parts of the Middle East. Damascus, meanwhile, only very reluctantly agreed to leave its citizens in Aleppo in some semi-frozen limbo. Iran and Hezbollah were equally dubious.

A Hot Summer

All this suggests renewed military escalation this summer. Russian President Vladimir Putin will probably not wish to act before the European summit at the end of June. And neither would he wish Russia to figure largely as an issue in the U.S. presidential election. Yet he cannot ignore the pressures from those within Russia who insist that America is planning a hybrid war for which Russia is unprepared.

The Russia commentator Eric Zuesse encapsulated some of these concerns, writing that “actions speak louder than words.” Earlier this month, he notes, the U.S. refused to discuss with Russia its missile defense program:

“Russia’s concern is that, if the ‘Ballistic Missile Defense’ or ‘Anti Ballistic Missile’ system, that the U.S. is now just starting to install on and near Russia’s borders, works, then the U.S. will be able to launch a surprise nuclear attack against Russia, and this system, which has been in development for decades and is technically called the ‘Aegis Ashore Missile Defense System,’ will annihilate the missiles that Russia launches in retaliation, which will then leave the Russian population with no retaliation at all.”

Zuesse goes on to argue that the U.S. seems to be pursuing a new nuclear

strategy, one that was put forward in 2006 in a *Foreign Affairs* article headlined “The Rise of Nuclear Primacy,” and scrapping the earlier policy of “mutually assured destruction.”

The new strategy, Zuesse writes, argues “for a much bolder U.S. strategic policy against Russia, based upon what it argued was America’s technological superiority against Russia’s weaponry – and a possibly limited time-window in which to take advantage of it – before Russia catches up and the opportunity to do so is gone.”

So, what is going on here? Does the U.S. administration not see that pulling Russia into a debilitating Syrian quagmire by playing clever with a cease-fire that allows the insurgency to get the wind back in its sails is almost certain to lead to Russia and Iran increasing their military engagement?

There is talk both in Russia and Iran of the need for a military surge to try to break the back of the conflict. Does the U.S. see that ultimately such a strategy might further entangle it – just as much as Russia and Iran – in the conflict? Does it understand Saudi Arabia’s intent to double down in Syria and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s political interest in continuing the Syrian crisis? Does it judge these very real dangers accurately?

Democrats Act Tough

No, I think not: the political calculus is different. More likely, the explanation relates to the presidential election campaign in the U.S. The Democratic Party, in brief, is striving to steal the Republican Party’s clothes.

The latter holds the mantle of being credited as the safer pair of hands of the two, as far as America’s security is concerned. This has been a longstanding potential weakness for the Democrats, only too readily exploited by its electoral opponents. Now, perhaps the opportunity is there to steal this mantle from the Republicans.

All this hawkishness – the American shrug of the shoulders at making Iran feel cheated over the nuclear agreement; at Russia, Iran and Damascus seething that the Syria cease-fire was no more than a clever trap to halt their military momentum; at the psychological impact of NATO exercising on Russia’s borders; at the possible consequences to Obama’s refusal to discuss the ballistic defense system – all this is more likely about showing Democrat toughness and savvy in contrast to Donald Trump.

In short, the Democrats see the opportunity to cast themselves as tough and reliable and to transform foreign policy into an asset rather than their Achilles’ heel. But if all this bullheadedness is nothing more than the

Democratic Party espying an apparent weakness in the Trump campaign, is this foreign policy posturing meaningful? The answer is that it is not meaningless; it carries grave risks.

Ostensibly this posture may appear clever in a domestic campaigning context, where Russia is widely viewed in a negative light. But externally, if the Syrian cease-fire comes to be viewed as nothing more than a cynical ploy by the U.S. to drag Russia deeper into the Syrian quagmire in order to cut Putin down to size, then what will likely follow is escalation. Hot months ahead in Syria. Russia will gradually reenter the conflict, and Iran and Iraq will likely increase their involvement as well.

Locking in for War

There are those in the U.S., Turkey and the Gulf who would welcome such a heightened crisis, hoping that it would become so compellingly serious that no incoming U.S. president, of either hue, could avoid the call to do something upon taking office. In this way, the U.S. could find itself dragged into the maw of another unwinnable Middle Eastern war.

We should try to understand the wider dangers better, too. Baiting Russia, under the problematic rubric of countering Russian “aggression,” is very much in fashion now. But in Russia, there is an influential and substantial faction that has come to believe that the West is planning a devastating hybrid military and economic war against it.

If this is not so, why is the West so intent on pushing Russia tight up into a corner? Simply to teach it deference? Psychologists warn us against such strategies, and Russia finally is reconfiguring its army (and more hesitantly, its economy) precisely to fight for its corner.

As another noted Russia commentator, John Helmer, noted on his blog on May 30, the new NATO missile installations in Eastern Europe “are hostile acts, just short of casus belli – a cause of war.” According to Reuters, Putin warned that Romania might soon “be in the cross hairs” – the new NATO missile installations there will force Russia “to carry out certain measures to ensure our security.”

“It will be the same case with Poland,” Putin added.

Did you hear that sound? That was the ratchet of war, which has just clicked up a slot – or two.

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the West. [This article originally appeared as a blog post at HuffingtonPost, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alastair-crooke/syria-cease-fire-russia_b_10510126.html]

WPost's 'Agit-Prop' for the New Cold War

Exclusive: The Washington Post, the neocons' media flagship, has fired a broadside at a new documentary after it blasted a hole in the side of the anti-Russian Magnitsky narrative, which helped launch the new Cold War, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A danger in today's Western journalism is that the people in charge of the mainstream media are either neocon ideologues or craven careerists who will accept any official attack on geopolitical "enemies" without checking out the facts, such as with the Iraq War's WMD myth or the curious case of Sergei Magnitsky.

Magnitsky's 2009 death in a Russian jail became a Western cause célèbre with the accountant for hedge-fund executive William Browder hailed as a martyr in the cause of whistleblowing against a profoundly corrupt Russian government. After Magnitsky's death from a heart attack, Browder claimed his "lawyer" had been tortured and murdered to cover up official complicity in a \$230 million tax-fraud scheme involving companies ostensibly under Browder's control.

Because of Browder's wealth and political influence, he succeeded in getting the European Parliament and the U.S. Congress to buy into his narrative and move to punish the presumed villains in the tax fraud and in Magnitsky's death. The U.S.-enacted Magnitsky Act in 2012 was an opening salvo in what has become a new Cold War between Washington and Moscow.

The Magnitsky narrative has now become so engrained in Western geopolitical mythology that the storyline apparently can no longer be questioned or challenged, which brings us to the current controversy about a new documentary that turns the case upside-down and again reveals the superficiality, bias and hypocrisy of the West's politicians and news media.

The West's reaction has been to block the public airing of the documentary – to any significant audience – while simultaneously branding it Russian "agit-prop," the attack line used by The Washington Post in [a Monday editorial](#). In other words, the treatment of the film is reminiscent of a totalitarian society where

the public only hears about dissent when the Official Organs of the State denounce some almost unknown person.

In this case, the Post's editorial writers under the direction of neocon editor Fred Hiatt note the film's showing in a rented room at Washington's Newseum and then seek to discredit the filmmaker, Andrei Nekrasov, without addressing his avalanche of documented examples of Browder's misrepresenting both big and small facts in the case.

Instead, the Post accuses Nekrasov of using "facts highly selectively" and insinuates that he is merely a pawn in the Kremlin's "campaign to discredit Mr. Browder and the Magnitsky Act." The Post concludes smugly:

"The film won't grab a wide audience, but it offers yet another example of the Kremlin's increasingly sophisticated efforts to spread its illiberal values and mind-set abroad. In the European Parliament and on French and German television networks, showings were put off recently after questions were raised about the accuracy of the film, including by Magnitsky's family. We don't worry that Mr. Nekrasov's film was screened here, in an open society. But it is important that such slick spin be fully exposed for its twisted story and sly deceptions."

Watching the Film

After reading the Post's editorial, I managed to get a password for viewing the documentary, "The Magnitsky Act. Behind the Scenes," on the Internet and I was struck by how thoroughly dishonest and "highly selective" the Post's editors had been in their attack on the film.

For instance, the Post writes, "The film is a piece of agitprop that mixes fact and fiction to blame Magnitsky for the fraud and absolve Russians of blame for his death." While it is correct that Nekrasov "mixes fact and fiction," that is because the documentary is, in part, the story of his planned docu-drama which was intended to embrace and dramatize Browder's narrative. Nekrasov begins the project as Browder's friend and ally.

It was during the docu-drama's production that Nekrasov begins to detect inconsistencies and contradictions in Browder's storyline, including how a woman executive in one of Browder's shell companies alerted police to the tax-fraud scam, not Magnitsky, and that Magnitsky as an accountant in the business was called in for questioning by police. In other words, Magnitsky comes across as a criminal suspect, not a noble whistleblower.

As the documentary proceeds, Nekrasov struggles with the dilemma as his scripted docu-drama portraying Magnitsky as a martyr falls apart. When Nekrasov's questions become more pointed, his friendship with Browder also painfully

unravels.

One of the powerful aspects of the film is that it shows Browder grow petulant and evasive as his well-received narrative begins to come undone, both in interviews with Nekrasov and in a videotaped deposition from a related civil case.

Key points of the deception are revealed not by Kremlin officials but by Magnitsky's supporters who challenge pieces of Browder's embroidered story, such as elevating Magnitsky from an accountant to a "lawyer."

Another key piece of Browder's tale – that corrupt police raided his offices to seize original corporate records and seals to set up shell companies to perpetrate the tax fraud – crumbles when Nekrasov shows Russian laws that don't require such records and discovers that the registrations were accomplished by straw men apparently controlled by Browder and operating under powers of attorney.

Though I am no expert on the Magnitsky case – and there surely may be flaws in the documentary – what is clear is that the widely accepted version of the Magnitsky case, portraying him and his boss as noble do-gooders who become victims of a convoluted police conspiracy, is no longer tenable or at least deserves a serious reexamination.

But preventing the Western public from seeing this important film – and then demonizing it in a Washington Post editorial on the assumption that almost no one will see it – amount to the behavior of a totalitarian society where "agit-prop" does rule, except in this case it is anti-Russian agit-prop that escapes any serious scrutiny.

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](#)).

Destroying the Magnitsky Myth

A new documentary blows apart the West's Russia-bashing narrative about the 2009 death of Sergei Magnitsky, so the response has been to stop the public from seeing the film while calling it Russian "agit-prop," as Gilbert Doctorow explains.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Despite all the threats of lawsuits and physical intimidation which hedge fund executive William Browder brought to bear over the past couple of months to ensure that a remarkable investigative film about the so-called Magnitsky case would not be screened anywhere, it was shown privately in a museum of journalism in Washington, D.C., last week.

The failure of the intimidation may give heart to others. There is talk that the film may be shown publicly in Norway, where its production company is located, but where an attempt several weeks ago to enter it into a local festival for documentaries was rejected by the hosts for fear of lawsuits. Moreover, a Norwegian court has in the past week declined to hear the libel charges which Browder's attorneys were seeking to bring against the film's director and producers.

Browder was more successful in intimidating the European Parliament where a screening of the film was cancelled in late April while I was in the audience. But I have now seen the banned documentary privately and "The Magnitsky Act. Behind the Scenes" is truly an amazing film that takes the viewer through the thought processes of well-known independent film maker Andrei Nekrasov as he sorts through the evidence.

At the outset of his project, Nekrasov planned to produce a docu-drama that would be one more public confirmation of the narrative that Browder has sold to the U.S. Congress and to the American and European political elites, that a 36-year-old whistleblower "attorney" (actually an accountant) named Sergei Magnitsky was arrested, tortured and murdered by Russian authorities for exposing a \$230 million tax fraud scheme.

This shocking tale of alleged Russian official corruption and brutality drove legislation that was a major landmark in the descent of U.S.-Russian relations under President Barack Obama to a level rivaling the worst days of the Cold War.

But what the film shows is how Nekrasov, as he detected loose ends to the official story, begins to unravel Browder's fabrication which was designed to conceal his own corporate responsibility for the criminal theft of the money. As Browder's widely accepted story collapses, Magnitsky is revealed not to be a whistleblower but a likely abettor to the fraud who died in prison not from an official assassination but from banal neglect of his medical condition.

The cinematic qualities of the film are evident. Nekrasov is highly experienced as a maker of documentaries enjoying a Europe-wide reputation. What sets this work apart from the "trade" is the honesty and the integrity of the filmmaker as

he discovers midway into his project that key assumptions of his script are faulty and begins an independent investigation to get at the truth.

An Inconvenient Truth

It is an inconvenient truth that he stumbles upon, because it takes him out of his familiar milieu of “creative people” who are instinctively critical of the Putin regime and of its widely assumed violation of human rights and civil liberties.

We see how well-known names in the European Parliament, in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and in NGOs that are reputed to be watchdogs have taken on faith the arguments and documentation (largely in Russian and inaccessible to them) which they received from William Browder and then rubber-stamped his story as validated without making any attempt to weigh the evidence.

Their intellectual laziness and complacency is captured fully on film and requires no commentary by the director. One of those especially skewered by her own words is German Bundestag deputy (Greens) Marieluise Beck. It is understandable to me now that I have viewed the film why she was one of the two individuals whose objections to its showing scuttled the screening in the European Parliament in April.

By the end of the documentary, Nekrasov finds that he has become a dissident in his own subculture within Russia and in European liberal circles.

Another exceptional and striking characteristic of the filmmaker is his energetic pursuit of all imaginable leads in his investigative reporting. Some leads end in “no comment” while others result in exposing whole new areas of lies and deception in the Browder narrative.

Nekrasov’s diligence is exemplary even as he takes us into the more arcane aspects of the case such as the money flow from the alleged tax fraud. These bits and pieces are essential to his methodology and justify the length of the movie, which approaches two hours.

Nekrasov largely allows William Browder to self-destruct under the weight of his own lies and the contradictions in his story-telling at various times. Nekrasov’s camera is always running, even if his subjects are not thinking about the consequences of being taped. The film also shows a videotaped deposition of Browder fumbling during an interrogation in a related civil case that is devastating to those politicians and commentators who fully swallowed Browder’s Magnitsky line.

Browder’s supposed lapses of memory, set in the context of involuntary facial

expressions of stress and nervousness, would be compelling to jurors if this matter ever got into an open court of law in an adversarial proceeding.

At the end of the twists and turns in this expose, the viewer is ready to see Browder sink through the floor on a direct transfer to hell like Don Giovanni in the closing scene of Mozart's opera. Nothing so colorful occurs, but it is hard to see how Browder can survive the onslaught of this film if and when it gets wide public viewing.

But the goal of many powerful people, including members of the U.S. Congress, the European Parliament and the Western news media who gullibly accepted Browder's tale, will be to ensure that the public never gets to see this devastatingly frank deconstruction of a geopolitically useful anti-Russian propaganda theme.

Gilbert Doctorow is the European Coordinator of The American Committee for East West Accord. His most recent book, *Does Russia Have a Future?* was published in August 2015. © Gilbert Doctorow, 2016
