

# Brexit and Trump: Populism or Manipulation?

The Brexit vote, like Donald Trump's campaign, is less a populist uprising against the elites than a contest of one elite over another in manipulating popular sentiments, argues ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Some explanations for the outcome of the British vote to leave the European Union are specific to Britain. This includes the divisions within the governing Conservative Party over E.U. membership (divisions that led Prime Minister David Cameron to conceive of the referendum in the first place) and the lackluster defense of membership by the leader of the opposition.

Other reasons, on which much of the immediate post-referendum commentary has focused, go far beyond Britain. The Brexit vote was partly an expression of nationalism that has become so strong a tendency in the politics of so many nations that it can be considered the prime defining characteristic of the current era.

It also was an expression of xenophobia that is shaping much of the politics of the very European continent from which the Brexiteers want to separate themselves and has become a major part of the U.S. presidential campaign in the form of Donald Trump's candidacy.

The vote exhibits something else that transcends Britain: most of those who voted for Brexit were voting against their own interests, certainly as defined by whatever affects their economic well-being. The economic case for remaining in the E.U. was strong to overwhelming. The issue was not one on which honest and competent economists split evenly, or anything close to evenly.

The reaction of financial markets, including in Britain, to the vote was a resounding affirmation of which side had the stronger economic case. Assertions by Brexiteers that most of the benefits of accessing the European market could be secured without the costs and burdens of membership are belied by the experience of non-members such as Norway and by analysis of what will be the E.U.'s interests and motives in negotiating economic agreements with a non-member Britain.

And the portions of the British electorate that voted most heavily in favor of leaving, including many of the less well educated and less well off, will feel some of the worst effects of non-membership. One of the first attention-getting voting results Thursday night came from Sunderland in what turned out to be a

heavily pro-Brexit English northeast, notwithstanding that one of its biggest employers is a Nissan automobile factory that was built there because of its access to the EU market.

Going against one's own interests in this way can be explained, and has been explained, as a protest vote: an expression of anger and a use of the heart more than the head. It can be anger about one's own economic situation, or about faceless bureaucrats in Brussels, or about strange-looking immigrants, or something else, and the anger can be translated directly into a vote without an intermediary step of applying reason regarding what electoral outcome would best serve one's own interest. Certainly many of the votes cast in Britain on Thursday can be described as this kind of emotional, unthinking act.

### **A Misfired Protest Vote**

Another kind of protest vote involves somewhat more calculation, but a calculation about the outcome of the vote. The prevailing expectation on the eve of the vote, as reflected in the odds set by British bookies, was that Remain would prevail over Leave, and some voters thought they could make a protest gesture by voting to leave without their vote making any difference in the outcome.

The actual outcome is a severe lesson in the danger of using one's vote this way. Supporters of Bernie Sanders who are contemplating sending some sort of message by voting for Donald Trump should take careful notice.

But beyond these categories of voters is another reason many people vote against their own interests; they are simply mistaken about which outcomes would help and which would hurt those interests. Many British voters genuinely believed that erecting higher barriers to the cross-border movement of people, goods, and capital would make them better off than the alternative.

The situations of some of those people made them correct, but most such people were mistaken. We see the same phenomenon all the time in the United States, in the form of working-class people voting for politicians who enact policies that favor the one percent and disfavor the working class.

Simply put, people are ignorant. The ignorance is underscored in Britain by lots of people scrambling after the vote to learn what this European Union business is all about. It is underscored in the United States by Trump declaring after one of his primary election victories, "I love the poorly educated."

Venturing into this subject risks getting one branded as elitist. Much interpretation of the vote in Britain has been phrased in populism-vs.-elites terms. But at the level of the individual voter and his or her interests, this

is a mistaken conception.

The ignorance that causes many people to vote contrary to their interests is not all spontaneously generated. Much of it is nurtured by elites for their own purposes. The contest is more one of elites versus other elites.

In Britain, Boris Johnson, by championing the Brexit cause, now is in good position to replace his fellow Etonian Cameron as prime minister. In the United States, politicians stoke economic discontent, security fears, and urges over social issues to win votes from the hoi polloi while enacting economic policies that are more in the interests of elites who finance their campaigns. And currently it is the maybe-billionaire Trump who is riding a similar formula to a presidential nomination.

There is no ready way to overcome self-damaging ignorance within the electorate. Many problems are involved besides the impossibility of making masses of ignorant people smart quickly. In the United States, the mess that constitutes campaign finance law in the post-*Citizens United* era is one of the bigger problems.

Vigorous efforts to make politicians accountable to the truth certainly help but can only go so far. Trump, for example, has overloaded the circuits of fact-checkers by unashamedly telling one whopper after another. And the cultivation of damaging ignorance is not simply a matter of factual truth and individual falsehoods.

It is at least as much a matter of insufficient respect for knowledge and for expertise based on knowledge. Knowledge and expertise in this context are not to be confused with Straussian claims by an elite to having special insight into what is good for a nation or for mankind.

Rather, it is knowledge comparable to what is contained in the strong judgment of economists about the consequences of Brexit, or what the overwhelming majority of climate scientists say about human-induced global warming – and to which the only dissenters are elites who have a narrow interest in arguing otherwise, or masses whose ignorance has been encouraged by those elites.

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# The Brexit Rejection of Neoliberal Tyranny

With the Brexit repudiation of the E.U. – in defiance of Establishment scare tactics – British voters stood up for common people who face marginalization in the neoliberal scheme of global economics, explains John Pilger.

By John Pilger

The majority vote by Britons to leave the European Union was an act of raw democracy. Millions of ordinary people refused to be bullied, intimidated and dismissed with open contempt by their presumed betters in the major parties, the leaders of the business and banking oligarchy and the media.

This was, in great part, a vote by those angered and demoralized by the sheer arrogance of the apologists for the “remain” campaign and the dismemberment of a socially just civil life in Britain. The last bastion of the historic reforms of 1945, the National Health Service, has been so subverted by Tory and Labour-supported privateers it is fighting for its life.

A forewarning came when the Treasurer, George Osborne, the embodiment of both Britain’s *ancient regime* and the banking mafia in Europe, threatened to cut £30 billion from public services if people voted the wrong way; it was blackmail on a shocking scale.

Immigration was exploited in the campaign with consummate cynicism, not only by populist politicians from the lunar right, but by Labour politicians drawing on their own venerable tradition of promoting and nurturing racism, a symptom of corruption not at the bottom but at the top.

The reason millions of refugees have fled the Middle East – first Iraq, now Syria – are the invasions and imperial mayhem of Britain, the United States, France, the European Union and NATO. Before that, there was the willful destruction of Yugoslavia. Before that, there was the theft of Palestine and the imposition of Israel.

The pith helmets may have long gone, but the blood has never dried. A Nineteenth Century contempt for countries and peoples, depending on their degree of colonial usefulness, remains a centerpiece of modern “globalization,” with its perverse socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor: its freedom for capital and denial of freedom to labor; its perfidious politicians and politicized civil servants.

## **Saying 'No More'**

All this has now come home to Europe, enriching the likes of Tony Blair and impoverishing and disempowering millions. On June 23, the British said "no more."

The most effective propagandists of the "European ideal" have not been the far Right, but an insufferably patrician class for whom metropolitan London is the United Kingdom. Its leading members see themselves as liberal, enlightened, cultivated tribunes of the Twenty-first Century zeitgeist, even "cool." What they really are is a bourgeoisie with insatiable consumerist tastes and ancient instincts of their own superiority.

In their house paper, the *Guardian*, they have gloated, day after day, at those who would even consider the European Union profoundly undemocratic, a source of social injustice and a virulent extremism known as "neoliberalism."

The aim of this extremism is to install a permanent, capitalist theocracy that ensures a two-thirds society, with the majority divided and indebted, managed by a corporate class, and a permanent working poor.

In Britain today, 63 per cent of poor children grow up in families where one member is working. For them, the trap has closed. More than 600,000 residents of Britain's second city, Greater Manchester, are, reports a study, "experiencing the effects of extreme poverty" and 1.6 million are slipping into penury.

Little of this social catastrophe is acknowledged in the bourgeois-controlled media, notably the Oxbridge-dominated BBC. During the referendum campaign, almost no insightful analysis was allowed to intrude upon the clichéd hysteria about "leaving Europe," as if Britain was about to be towed in hostile currents somewhere north of Iceland.

## **Dismissing 'These People'**

On the morning after the vote, a BBC radio reporter welcomed politicians to his studio as old chums. "Well," he said to "Lord" Peter Mandelson, the disgraced architect of Blairism, "why do these people want it so badly?" The "these people" are the majority of Britons.

The wealthy war criminal Tony Blair remains a hero of the Mandelson "European" class, though few will say so these days. The *Guardian* once described Blair as "mystical" and has been true to his "project" of rapacious war. The day after the vote, the columnist Martin Kettle offered a Brechtian solution to the misuse of democracy by the masses.

“Now surely we can agree referendums are bad for Britain,” said the headline over his full-page piece. The “we” was unexplained but understood – just as “these people” is understood. “The referendum has conferred less legitimacy on politics, not more,” wrote Kettle, adding: “the verdict on referendums should be a ruthless one. Never again.”

The kind of ruthlessness for which Kettle longs is found in Greece, a country now airbrushed. There, they had a referendum against more austerity and the result was ignored. Like the Labour Party in Britain, the leaders of the Syriza government in Athens are the products of an affluent, highly privileged, educated middle class, groomed in the fakery and political treachery of post-modernism.

The Greek people courageously used the referendum to demand their government seek “better terms” with a venal status quo in Brussels that was crushing the life out of their country. They were betrayed, as the British would have been betrayed.

On Friday, the Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, was asked by the BBC if he would pay tribute to the soon-to-be-departed Cameron, his comrade in the “remain” campaign. Corbyn fulsomely praised Cameron’s “dignity” and noted his backing for gay marriage and his apology to the Irish families of the dead of Bloody Sunday.

Corbyn said nothing about Cameron’s divisiveness, his brutal austerity policies, his lies about “protecting” the Health Service. Neither did he remind people of the warmongering of the Cameron government: the dispatch of British special forces to Libya and British bomb aimers to Saudi Arabia and, above all, the beckoning of World War Three.

### **Ignoring Russia’s Memories**

In the week of the referendum vote, no British politician and, to my knowledge, no journalist referred to Vladimir Putin’s speech in St. Petersburg commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of Nazi Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. The Soviet victory – at a cost of 27 million Soviet lives and the majority of all German forces – won the Second World War.

Putin likened the current frenzied build up of NATO troops and war materiel on Russia’s western borders to the Third Reich’s Operation Barbarossa. NATO’s exercises in Poland were the biggest since the Nazi invasion; Operation Anaconda had simulated an attack on Russia, presumably with nuclear weapons.

On the eve of the referendum, the quisling secretary-general of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, warned Britons they would be endangering “peace and security” if

they voted to leave the E.U. The millions who ignored him and Cameron, Osborne, Corbyn, Obama and the man who runs the Bank of England may, just may, have struck a blow for real peace and democracy in Europe.

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## The Feel-Good but Misguided Brexit

The Brexit vote delivered a sharp rebuke to the cumbersome E.U. bureaucracy and the Establishment in general, but it won't solve the problems facing the U.K., Europe and the planet, writes ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

What an irony that Great Britain should be the one country in the world to deliver what could be the coup de grâce to the modern European order and to a meaningful Atlantic relationship. It is incredible that the population of the U.K. should have so thoughtlessly lurched into such a breathtakingly regressive, ignorant, narrow-minded and destructive act in our contemporary world.

However good the 52 percent who voted in favor may feel about torpedoing this major experiment in the making of a new European world order, their heads are firmly implanted in the sand (if that is what it is) as to what the realities of contemporary global currents are. These realities come with our modern world. Disliking them will not make them go away.

First, widespread large-scale immigration, both legal and illegal, is going to characterize *all the rest of this century* at a minimum. Destructive wars (including those launched by the U.S.), civil conflicts, environmental degradation (with some degree of Western responsibility involved), disease, health crises, lack of education, corruption, instability, bad governance, and the magnet pull of countries in the world that do work somewhat successfully – all of this will drive the refugee flow predictably year after year. It cannot realistically be physically stopped.

This is, in fact, the number one global security issue: only by taking bloated Western military budgets and applying large hunks of that money to some alleviation of conditions in the developing world can anybody begin to treat the problem at its source. Forget the beautiful walls, border guards, ramped-up sea patrols, or buying off Turkey to be a holding pen. Leaving the E.U. will not, in the end, make a whit of difference in shielding the U.K. from these realities as

long as the U.K. is going to be part of this world and compelled to partake in much of our common human agony.

Second, “taking our country back” is an unthinking, lame and simple-minded cliché. Anyone can, and will, utter it. Scotland will likely now “take its country back,” and so will Chechnya and Quebec, maybe Texas and California. Or Quebec and eastern Ukraine, or the Uighurs of China in Xinjiang. Or all the Kurds of the Middle East. The list is literally endless. What is a “country” and who is taking it back? And from whom, and in whose name, and over whose objections? And by what means? Five hundred new nations, anyone?

Third, globalization is a reality. It can’t be stopped. It consists of airlines, and internets, and global banking systems and communications. It is a very mixed bag; it is by no means an absolute good. Apart from its demonstrable benefits for many, globalization also has real downsides; it hurts many, including in the industrial world. And it threatens local cultures and autonomies. But no country can stop the process.

When foreign labor is ever cheaper than Western labor, when Asian and other societies are proving just as technically adept as Western ones (if not more so), and when robotics are replacing much unskilled and even skilled labor, what will the Western workforce do? There are some partial answers to this – increased social services and niche industries among other things. But Brexit will not solve this global problem of globalization. It represents the highest and ultimate form of capitalism if you will.

Fourth, broad voluntary regional political associations are the wave of the future if we are serious about the need to diminish the likelihood of (nuclear) war. The E.U. demands that its members accept the principle that war among themselves in pursuit of national interests is “*unthinkable*.” That is a strong but vital word. Europeans well understand the reason why after having run what may be the bloodiest continent in human history in terms of numbers killed in wars.

### **A Flawed Best Hope**

The E.U. represents the best hope humans have put together so far – in just a limited but important region admittedly – to abolish war. Yes, the United Nations remains a noble aspiration and a work in progress, but cannot yet boast of consistent accomplishment. To abandon the E.U. association that has delivered seven decades of peace is retrogressive – maybe even immoral.

Fifth, the E.U. is not a finished turn-key project, but a work in progress. British are churlish to scuttle this unique human experiment in its relatively



early history of developing its political and economic vision. Of course there are things wrong with the E.U. Where aren't there things wrong with large political orders? Is the U.S. a model? Russia? China?

The E.U.'s unelected bureaucracy certainly deserves trimming, rethinking, and reining in some of its excesses. But you don't kill it to solve shortcomings. Political orders are delicate constructs, hard to build, easy to bludgeon. Is the E.U. incapable of further change and reform that it should be abandoned?

Six, increasing regulation is the order of the future. While legitimately irksome to libertarians and individualists, modern societies are aware that nearly all fields of human endeavor require increasing and detailed regulation: health, hospitals, medicines, food, construction safety, highways, guns, vehicle safety, child care – the list goes on. The list will *never* get smaller. Most people are demanding *more* regulation in these fields and not less.

All modern societies will increase regulation of everything as the world grows more crowded and social orders more complex and vulnerable. Eat your heart out, international cowboys, but we don't live on the frontier anymore. You may love to hate Brussels, but fix it, don't kill it.

These, then, are some of the most obvious features and growing realities of our modern world. We don't have to like them, but there we have them. They are in the nature of the beast of the modern international order; they are not going away. Growing populations will increase all of them. And British Brexiteers are not going to change any of that one iota. Nor can they truly shield themselves.

The U.K. will, however, become increasingly irrelevant in sharing in the common human undertaking of trying to build better and more rational structures to live together on this fragile planet.

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## Intel Vets Call 'Dissent Memo' on Syria 'Reckless'

A group of U.S. intelligence veterans urges President Obama to resist the "reckless" call for a wider Syrian war from 51 State Department officials in a recent "dissent memo."

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

Subject: Beware Foggy Bottom Dissent

Dissent and disagreement within the foreign policy and national security bureaucracy only comes to the public's attention when there are deep and fundamental differences of opinion about the execution and objectives of a U.S. policy. Instances of dissent emerged during the war in Vietnam and have reappeared periodically, e.g., during the Contra War in Central America in the 1980s and the Cold War with the Soviets. We can now add Syria to this list.

The latest media buzz came with the leak that 51 "State Department Diplomats" [signed a dissent letter](#) advocating direct U.S. bombing as a tool to force Syria into submission to our government's dictates. U.S. Foreign Service Officers are a unique collection of highly educated people, who take great pride in having passed the Foreign Service Exam. Yet even among such "bright people," some succumb to the forces of careerism and the pressures to politicize intelligence.

Unfortunately the dissent signers are calling for America to threaten, and if our bluff is called, commit acts of overt, aggressive war against the forces of a sovereign nation on its own territory. One whose supporters include Russia, the world's other big nuclear power.

The line of thought – that it is America's right and duty to employ large-scale death to enforce its leaders' will on other peoples – adheres to the noxious notion that the U.S.A. enjoys uniquely privileged standing as the "sole indispensable country in the world." If this was ever an arguably legitimate position, that time is long gone – and today demonstrably blinds its adherents to common sense.

Such thinking is not new. Theodore Roosevelt popularized it as we went to war to annex Spanish territories in the Philippines and Caribbean – at the cost of over half a million indigenous lives – more than a century ago. We saw it, in spades, with the "Best and the Brightest" – those responsible for destroying Vietnam. Three million Vietnamese people died in that war (according to former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara), and another two million or so in its Indochina spin-offs. After this slaughter and the deaths of scores of thousands of its own troops, the U.S. endured a complete and humiliating defeat, one affecting its foreign policy and domestic politics to this day. Their bright successors supported the attack on Iraq in 2003, the catalyst for an outbreak of violence that has brought death reaching into the millions – again – in Iraq, Syria,

Libya, Yemen, Somalia and other neighboring locales we'll eventually read about. This aggression has created millions more traumatized refugees.

The memo, a draft of which was provided to *The New York Times* (and *Wall Street Journal*), presumably by one of the State Department employees who authored it, claims American policy has been "overwhelmed" by the unrelenting violence in Syria and calls for "a judicious use of stand-off and air weapons, which would undergird and drive a more focused and hard-nosed U.S.-led diplomatic process." Furthermore, per the *NYT*:

"In the memo, the State Department officials wrote that the Assad government's continuing violations of the partial cease-fire, officially known as a cessation of hostilities, will doom efforts to broker a political settlement because Mr. Assad will feel no pressure to negotiate with the moderate opposition or other factions fighting him. The government's barrel bombing of civilians, it said, is the 'root cause of the instability that continues to grip Syria and the broader region.'

"The memo acknowledged that military action would have risks, not the least of which would be increased tension with Russia, which intervened in the war on Mr. Assad's behalf last fall. Russia subsequently helped negotiate the cease-fire. Those tensions increased on Thursday when, according to a senior Pentagon official, Russia conducted airstrikes in southern Syria against American-backed forces fighting the Islamic State."

The dissenters were smart enough to insist they were not "advocating for a slippery slope that ends in a military confrontation with Russia," but rather a credible threat of military action "to keep Mr. Assad in line." Easier said than done! The 51 are silent on this point of major importance.

The foundational premise of their dissent is that Assad's "barrel bombing" (followed by chemical attacks) on civilians provoked civil war in Syria. It's true that the initial phase of the Syrian Spring seems to have been largely spontaneous. Facts show, however, that [outside interveners](#) – primarily the United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Israel and Saudi Arabia – cooperated in lighting the match that brought the inferno of civil war. Covert funding and provision of weapons and other material support to opposition groups for strikes against the Syrian Government provoked a military reaction by Assad – which created a pretext for our enlarged support to the rebel groups.

A large body of evidence also [suggests](#) that it was the U.S.-backed rebel forces that employed chemical weapons on civilians, and then blamed Assad, in a propaganda effort to advance international public support for overt American intervention.

U.S. actions against Syria have been widely perceived to be part of a broader proxy battle with Iran, being pursued to push back against its expanded influence in the Middle East. But Iran's emergence as a regional power was not the result of a magical event. It was a direct consequence of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and our subsequent decision to eradicate every vestige of the Baathist party and to install Iraqi Shia leaders with close ties to Iran in the positions of leadership.

We have thus helped start a war and then have the audacity to pretend to be shocked at the consequences of our own action.

The State Department dissenters were not the first to land a blow in this new PR battle over the course of U.S. policy in Syria. The Department of Defense and CIA appear to have entered the fray two weeks ago. According to [a report](#) in *The Daily Beast*, DOD and CIA are in a "cat fight."

Two Department of Defense officials told that media outlet that they are not eager to support rebels fighting in the city of Aleppo because they are believed to be affiliated with al Qaeda in Syria, or Jabhat al Nusra. The CIA, which supports those rebel groups, rejects that claim, saying alliances of convenience in the face of a mounting Russian-led offensive have created marriages of battlefield necessity, not ideology.

"It is a strange thing that DOD hall chatter mimics Russian propaganda," one U.S. official, who supports the intelligence community position, wryly noted about Pentagon claims that the opposition and Nusra are one in the same.

The intelligence community, which backed opposition forces in Aleppo, believes ISIS cannot be defeated as long as Assad is in power. The terror group, they say, thrives in unstable territories. And only local forces – like the ones backed by the CIA – can mitigate that threat.

"The status of the opposition is resilient in the face of horrendous attacks by the Syrian and Russian forces," a U.S. intelligence official explained to *The Daily Beast*. "The defeat of Assad is a necessary precondition to ultimately defeat [ISIS]. As long as there is a failed leader in Damascus and a failed state in Syria, [ISIS] will have a place to operate from. You can't deal with ISIS if you have a failed state," the U.S. official observed.

This unnamed official conveniently ignores the fact that the U.S. is working aggressively to facilitate Syria's failure. We are astonished. After 15 years of strident rhetoric about waging a war on Al Qaeda, we have now come full circle to witness the CIA and a vocal bloc within the State Department advocate to arm and train an Al Qaeda affiliated group.

It's impossible to know whether or not the eruption of this dispute is a slap to the face of President Obama simply because the President appeared to support the overthrow of Assad but then backed away from the precipice of militarily taking him out.

The [influence of Saudi Arabia](#) in helping push and promote "regime change" in Syria cannot be underestimated. The Saudis also have reportedly funneled significant money into key sectors of the U.S. foreign policy establishment and, it would appear, have obtained considerable influence over our national security policy. More evidence is coming to light that the Saudis have given significant amounts to the Clinton Foundation.

A recent [report](#) on the *Petra News Agency* site (which was subsequently taken down and claimed to have been a "hack") raises some important concerns. On Sunday a report appeared on that website that included what were described as exclusive comments from Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The comments included a claim that Riyadh has provided 20 percent of the total funding to the prospective Democratic candidate's campaign. Although the report did not remain on the website for long, the Washington-based Institute for Gulf Affairs later [re-published](#) an Arabic version of it, which quoted Prince Mohammed as having said Saudi Arabia had provided with "full enthusiasm" an undisclosed amount of money to Clinton.

In light of Hillary Clinton's strong advocacy for imposing a No Fly Zone in Syria, which would put us on track for stepped up intervention in Syria and a military confrontation with the Russians, it is natural to wonder if Saudi donations had any influence over the direction of U.S. policy in Syria and support for rebel groups?

In sum, the latest memo from the 51 State Department officers is just one more alarming indication of disarray and failure within the U.S. foreign policy establishment. Notably, most of *their* children and grandchildren will not be in the military ranks of those called on to fight this war. They are too smart and too "valuable" to engage in such ridiculous endeavors. So something called a "Volunteer Army" was assembled, populated by "volunteers" – mostly from the inner-cities and the small towns of our country, where jobs and education are elusive.

This almost unprecedented dissent letter from 51 emboldened State Department hawks is an alarming new sign of the reckless direction that well-organized elements of the U.S. foreign policy establishment seek to take us. Thus, we appeal to you, as Assistant to the President for National Security, to help President Barack Obama stand firm against such institutional destructiveness and

to sort out the disarray and bureaucratic contention among his “Team of Rivals.” If the 51 are sincere in their advocacy of a let’s-try-some-more-of-the-same-but-tougher policy, we would expect them to welcome the personal risks involved in being sent off to bash Bashar with “standoff” – or – “closer-quarter” weapons. This could provide them initially with a sense of affirmation – then later, an education.

(Also see earlier remarks by individual VIPs members: by Ann Wright, [here](#), by Elizabeth Murray and Ray McGovern [here](#); by Philip Giraldi, [here](#).)

### **For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPs)**

William Binney, former Technical Director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Mike Gravel, former Adjutant, top secret control officer, Communications Intelligence Service; special agent of the Counter Intelligence Corps and former United States Senator

Matthew Hoh, former Capt., USMC, Iraq & Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan (associate VIPs)

Larry Johnson, CIA & State Department (ret.)

Michael S. Kearns, Intelligence Officer, USAF (ret.); former Master SERE Instructor.

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former Senior Investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Karen Kwiatkowski, former Lt. Col., US Air Force (ret.), at Office of Secretary of Defense watching the manufacture of lies on Iraq, 2001-2003

Edward Loomis, NSA, Cryptologic Computer Scientist (ret.)

David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Near East, CIA and National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Todd E. Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (Ret.)

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel

(ret.)

Peter Van Buren, U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (ret.)  
(associate VIPS)

J. Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA

Ann Wright, Col., US Army (ret.); Foreign Service Officer (resigned in  
opposition to launching of Iraq War)

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## European Union's Imperial Overreach

**Exclusive:** The European Union's haughty and hasty expansion into low-wage Eastern Europe may be its undoing, as the Brexit vote shows popular resistance to the westward migration of workers that followed, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

While few analysts are putting it this way, the European Union suffers from a self-inflicted crisis of overexpansion – a form of “imperial overstretch,” if you will. The Brexit vote was just the latest symptom of this policy disaster, which also includes escalating confrontations with Russia and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

Public opinion polls in the United Kingdom established that widespread concern over immigration was the single most important factor driving voters to support an E.U. exit. Pro-Brexit campaigners made much of the statistics released just last month that net annual migration into the U.K. reached a third of a million people in 2015, double the rate just three years earlier.

Such numbers fed public concerns over the impact of immigrants on the country's National Health System and other social services, as well as jobs. They also fed deep suspicions about government credibility.

As the *Guardian* reported after the stunning election victory for the Brexit camp, “David Cameron's failure to give a convincing response to the publication of near-record net migration figures in the first week of the EU referendum campaign has proved to be its decisive moment.

“The figure of 333,000 not only underlined beyond any doubt that Britain had become a country of mass migration but also meant politicians who claimed they could make deep cuts in the numbers while Britain remained in the European Union were simply not believed.”

The influx of these newcomers had a deeper psychological effect on the public. “The British government’s inability to control (intra-European) migration is seen as emblematic of a wider loss of control,” wrote Oxford political theorist David Miller just before the election. “Many Britons feel that they are no longer in charge of their own destiny: ‘Take back our country’ is a slogan that resonates along the campaign trail.”

### **E.U. Expansion and Immigration**

Roughly half of immigrants to the U.K. in recent years have come from other E.U. countries, taking advantage of the association’s fundamental commitment to the free movement of people. Their large numbers reflected the enormous expansion of the E.U. since 2004 – and the lure of Britain’s relatively affluent economy to poor workers from newer members like Poland and Romania.

The E.U. – which actually has a commissioner for “enlargement” – has expanded relentlessly without heeding concerns from grassroots constituents of its traditional core members. In 2004, the E.U. absorbed Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia – all low-wage countries with much lower standards of living than the likes of Germany, France or the U.K. In 2007, it also took in Romania and Bulgaria.

Official statistics show that citizens of these newer and poorer E.U. members account for nearly a third of net migration into the U.K. in recent years.

Although many economists defend free labor movement as good for the economy overall, the result – like that of free trade with low-wage countries – can harm less-skilled workers.

In 2011, two unpublished reports commissioned by the Department of Communities and Local Government made that point.

One warned senior government officials that sharply rising immigration could “increase tensions between migrant workers and other sections of the community” during the country’s recession. Another noted a huge rise in immigrants settling unexpectedly in rural areas, and concluded they were having “a negative impact on the wages of UK workers at the bottom of the occupational distribution.”

“We under-estimated significantly the number of people who were going to come in from Eastern Europe,” conceded Ed Milliband, leader of the Labour Party. “Economic migration and greater labour market flexibility have increased the pressure faced by those in lower skilled work.”

Ironically, many of the localities that voted most decisively for Brexit had relatively low migrant populations. But many of them are still suffering from



economic austerity and sharp reductions in the social safety net imposed by the Conservative government since 2010.

“Switching the scapegoat from the government to the faceless migrant . . . is easier when people are scared for their livelihood, and more convenient for the politicians campaigning on both sides,” remarked the London-based writer Dawn Foster.

Voters were easily persuaded that “distant” and “faceless” E.U. bureaucrats just didn’t grasp their concerns. Indeed, the E.U. remains bent on continued expansion. It is currently in membership discussions with Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey, and recognizes Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo as potential members.

### **Russia and Ukraine**

The E.U.’s expansionist drive has had other costly repercussions for Britain and the rest of Europe. One notable disaster was its drive for an “association agreement” with Ukraine, a wide-ranging treaty that included not only provisions for tight economic integration, but also a commitment over time to abide by the E.U.’s Common Security and Defense Policy and European Defense Agency policies. On both fronts, the agreement was designed to pull Ukraine out of its traditional Russian orbit.

The E.U.’s expansion into Ukraine, like its expansion into the rest of Eastern Europe, was paralleled by the expansion of the NATO military alliance into the same countries, contrary to promises by Western leaders to their Russian counterparts in 1990. In 2008, NATO’s secretary general – backed by President George W. Bush and presidential candidate Barack Obama – pledged that Ukraine would be granted NATO membership.

Needless to say, Russia reacted badly, as it did to the E.U.’s later power play. It pressured the government of President Viktor Yanukovich to resist entreaties by NATO and the E.U. His refusal to break with Russia in turn triggered the so-called “Euromaidan” protests and the Western-backed putsch that ousted his government in February 2014.

Within a month, the new pro-European and pro-U.S. prime minister, Arseniy Yatseniuk, had signed the political provisions of the E.U. agreement. Just months later, he declared that he would seek NATO membership as well.

The result has been a bloody civil war in Eastern Ukraine; dangerous and costly military confrontations between Russia and NATO; and mutual economic sanctions that impoverish both Russia and the E.U.

Future historians will help us understand the underlying sources of the E.U.'s self-destructive expansion. No doubt they include some combination of ideological faith in the universality of European values, bureaucratic aggrandizement, and pandering to neo-liberal elites. Whatever the causes, the results now threaten the entire European project.

The E.U.'s future will require serious self-examination on many fronts, but especially about its grandiose ambitions for expansion.

**Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international affairs, including *The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War and the International Drug Traffic* (Stanford University Press, 2012). Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were "Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions"; "The US Hand in the Syrian Mess"; "Hidden Origins of Syria's Civil War"; and "Israel Covets Golan's Water and Now Oil."**]

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## Meyer Lansky's Heirs Want Money from Cuba

A curious twist in the renewed U.S.-Cuban relations is the claim by Mafia financier Meyer Lansky's heirs for damages from the loss of Lansky's Havana casinos, which Fidel Castro nationalized after the revolution in 1959, writes Jack Colhoun.

By Jack Colhoun

The heirs of Meyer Lansky, the impresario of the North American Mafia gambling colony in Cuba, a reign that lasted from 1933 to 1958, are betting on a big payback from the negotiations between the United States and Cuba to normalize relations between the two countries.

Compensation claims by U.S. citizens or businesses for properties nationalized by the Cuban revolution are among the issues under discussion. Lansky's daughter Sandi, her son Gary Rapoport, and her brother Paul have filed a compensation claim against Cuba for the Riviera Hotel and Casino with the U.S. Foreign Claims Settlement Commission.

The Cuban revolution confiscated the Riviera and other Mafia-owned properties after it toppled the gangster-linked regime of General Fulgencio Batista in 1959.

"It was through my grandfather's hard work that the hotel was built," Rapoport

told the U. K. *Daily Mail Online* on Dec. 23, 2015. "We are his natural relations . . . . By right, it should be our property." He said the Riviera is valued at \$70 million. The *Tampa Bay Tribune*, *Reuters*, and *Haaretz* have also covered the story. (Lansky died in 1983 at the age of 80 from lung cancer, living his final years quietly in Miami Beach.)

The Riviera, which overlooks the Straits of Florida, was the crown jewel of Lansky's casinos, hotels and nightclubs in Havana. When the Riviera opened in December 1957, it was the largest Mafia-owned hotel-casino outside Las Vegas. The hotel's 440 double rooms were booked solid for the winter season of 1957-1958.

However, the narrative that the success of the Riviera was the product of Meyer Lansky's "hard work" is undercut by Lansky's own assessment of his arrangement with Batista. Lansky talked candidly about his years in Cuba with Israeli national security writers Dennis Eisenberg, Uri Dan, and Eli Landau for their admiring biography *Meyer Lansky: Mogul of the Mob* (Paddington Press, 1979). (Lansky lived in Israel in 1970-1971 to avoid tax evasion charges in the United States.)

Lansky pitched his plan to Batista to open Mafia owned casinos and nightclubs in Cuba in 1933. Lansky promised to make Batista, who had just come to power in a *coup d'etat*, a partner. Batista and his inner circle would get regular payments from the Mafia gamblers. In return, the gangsters would be allowed to operate without interference from Cuban authorities. With a handshake and an *abrazo*, Lansky and Batista laid the foundations of the Cuban gangster state.

"Working on the well-known principle that it's better to use other people's money than your own, Lansky persuaded Batista to have the Cuban government help finance the venture," Eisenberg, Dan, and Landau wrote. "The [Cuban] government agreed to back every dollar invested on the island by foreigners with a dollar of its own and to give every hotel that cost more than one million dollars the precious prize of a gambling license . . . and the casino hotels would not have to pay Cuban taxes."

### **Lansky's Crown Jewel**

The Riviera was one of four new hotels with casinos, which opened in Havana between 1955 and 1958. Cuban development banks subsidized 50 percent of Lansky's \$14 million Riviera project; Lansky-linked investors provided the rest. Senator Eduardo Suarez Rivas, brother of Batista's Minister of Labor Jose Suarez Rivas, was secretary of the *Compania de Hotels La Riviera de Cuba*, which operated the Riviera.

The Mafia gambling colony was the cornerstone of the Cuban gangster state. The gangsters' graft bound Batista, his inner circle, senior security officers, and the Mafia together in the defense of one of the most repressive regimes in Latin America. As a CIA report put it, "In return for the loyalty they gave him, Batista always backed his security services. In times of crisis, he often suspended civil guarantees . . . and gave the services a free hand."

In 1958, Fidel Castro's July 26th Movement denounced the Mafia in radio broadcasts from the guerrilla group's redoubt in the Sierra Maestra, accusing the Mafia of turning Havana into a center of commercialized vice – gambling, prostitution, and drugs. The days of the North American gangsters in Cuba were numbered when Batista fled into exile on Jan. 1, 1959. When Castro arrived in Havana on Jan. 8, he vowed to "clean out all the gamblers."

The Riviera and other gangster-owned properties were nationalized, and the Mafia gamblers returned to the United States. To regain control of its casinos, hotels and nightclubs in post-Castro Cuba, the Mafia waged a covert war on the Cuban revolution. The gangsters regrouped with their Cuban political allies, now in exile in the United States. The Mafia subsidized Cuban exile leaders and supplied arms to Cuban exile commando groups for attacks on Cuban targets from speedy boats and small aircraft.

The gangsters also plotted with the CIA to assassinate Fidel Castro. In 1959, Lansky volunteered to arrange the assassination of Castro in a meeting with the CIA, according to Doc Stacher, a life-long Lansky associate.

"He [Lansky] indicated to the CIA that some of his people who were still on the island, or those who were just going back, might assassinate Castro," Stacher told his Israeli biographers. "Meyer Lansky thought that if Castro would be eliminated there was a good chance for Batista to make a comeback. . . . He told them [CIA officers] he was quite prepared to finance the operation himself."

From 1960 to 1963, the CIA and the Mafia plotted covertly to assassinate Castro. So, to portray Lansky as an aggrieved victim of Cuba is to stand history on its head. There should be no compensation for the heirs of the former Mafia gamblers in Cuba.

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## A 'Brexit' Blow to the Establishment

**Exclusive:** British voters turned a deaf ear to scary warnings about leaving the E.U. and struck a blow against an out-of-touch, self-interested and incompetent Western Establishment, a message to the U.S., too, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The United Kingdom's "Brexit" vote may cause short-term economic pain and present long-term geopolitical risks, but it is a splash of ice water in the face of the West's Establishment, which has grown more and more insular, elitist and unaccountable over recent decades.

The West's powers-that-be, in both the United States and the European Union, too often display contempt for real democracy, maintaining only the façade of respecting the popular will, manipulating voters at election time with red-meat politics and empty promises – before getting back to the business of comforting the comfortable and letting the comfortable afflict the afflicted.

That has been the grim and tiresome reality with America's two parties and with the E.U.'s bureaucrats. The average American and the average European have every reason to see themselves as a lesser concern to the politicians and the pundits than the special interests which pay the money and call the tune.

In the stunning "Brexit" vote – with 52 percent wanting to abandon the 28-nation European Union – U.K. voters rejected the West's politics-as-usual despite dire warnings about the downsides of leaving. They voted, in effect, to assert their own nationalistic needs and aspirations over a commitment to continental unity and its more universal goals.

But, in the vote, there was also a recognition that the West's Establishment has grown corrupt and arrogant, routinely imposing on the people "experts" who claim to be neutral technocrats or objective scholars but whose pockets are lined with fat pay checks from "prestigious" think tanks funded by the Military-Industrial Complex or by lucrative revolving-door trips to investment banks on Wall Street or The City.

Despite the Establishment's self-image as a "meritocracy," its corrupted experts and haughty bureaucrats don't even demonstrate basic competence anymore. They have led Europe and the United States into catastrophe after catastrophe, both

economically and geopolitically. And, there is another troubling feature of this Establishment: its lack of accountability.

In the United States, the rewards and punishments have been turned upside-down, with the benighted politicians and pundits who pushed for the Iraq War in 2003 still dominating the government and the media, from Hillary Clinton's impending Democratic presidential nomination to the editorial pages of The New York Times and The Washington Post.

And, the Iraq War disaster was not a one-off affair. The neocons and their liberal interventionist sidekicks have their fingerprints on other "regime change" messes, from Libya to Ukraine to Syria (still in the works), with their predictable recommendations for more violence and more belligerence. Yet, they have impunity for their crimes and incompetence. They fail up.

### **Establishment Doesn't Know Best**

So, the West's Establishment can't even argue that it knows best anymore, which always had been its ace in the hole. The various insurgents could be painted as the dangerous option – and that is sometimes true as we've seen with Donald Trump – but it is arguably a toss-up as to whether Clinton or Trump would be the bigger risk to the world's future.

Trump may be a blustering buffoon but he challenges the neocon "group thinks" about the wisdom of expanding the West's war in Syria and launching a costly and existentially risky New Cold War against nuclear-armed Russia and China. Clinton surrounds herself with neocons and liberal hawks and shares their obsession with overthrowing the government of Syria and provoking Russia and China with military operations near their borders.

Trump and "Brexit" advocates also reject the Establishment's neoliberal consensus on "free trade," which has depressed (or eliminated) the wages of American and European workers while the benefits accrue mostly to financial and political elites. The Establishment's embrace of the "winners" and its disdain for the "losers" have further enflamed today's populism.

Yet, there are undeniably ugly features in the populist sentiment sweeping the U.S. and Europe. Some of it is driven by bigotry toward non-whites, especially immigrants. Some is inspired by wild conspiracy theories from a population that has understandably lost all faith in what it hears from Washington, Brussels and other capitals. Trump has espoused the scary know-nothing notion that the scientific evidence of global warming is "a hoax."

There is always something unsettling when an incipient revolution takes shape and starts tearing down the old order. What follows is not always better.

In the end, the American election – like the “Brexit” referendum – may come down to whether voters feel more comfortable sticking with the status quo at least for a while longer or whether they want to blow up the Establishment and gamble on the consequences.

Right now, Clinton and the Democrats are carrying the banner of the Establishment, while Trump and his Republican insurgents fly the Jolly Roger. In a political year when the anti-establishment wave seems to be cresting, the Democrats may regret their choice of a legacy, status-quo candidate.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Two Corrupt Establishments”](#); [“Democrats – Too Clever by Half on Clinton”](#); [“The Coming Democratic Crack-up”](#); [“Neocons and Neolibs: How Dead Ideas Kill”](#); and [“The State Department’s Collective Madness.”](#)]

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](#)).

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## The ‘Safe’ Risk of Hillary Clinton

**Exclusive:** The U.K.’s “Brexit” vote underscores the power of this year’s anti-establishment politics, a warning to Democrats as they nominate status-quo candidate Hillary Clinton, a “safe” choice who may prove very risky, says Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

With Hillary Clinton the all-but-official Democratic nominee, growing numbers of liberals are trying to talk themselves into backing someone they dislike (Hillary Clinton) versus someone they downright loathe (Donald Trump).

Noam Chomsky paved the way last January by announcing that he would [“absolutely”](#) vote for Clinton if he lived in Ohio or some other swing state instead of Massachusetts, where he teaches at MIT.

More recently, *Nation* columnist Gary Younge [advocated](#) voting for Clinton regardless of which state you live in because while she’s “merely bad,” Trump “represent[s] an existential threat to basic democratic rights.”

Frances Fox Piven [said roughly the same thing](#) at last weekend’s “People’s

Summit” in Chicago: “I’m going to vote for Hillary, but I’m not going to work for her. ... Lesser-evilism may be a curse word, but I think it’s reasonable. Another four years of a deceptive neo-liberal government, I’m going to swallow it.”

All of which begs not just one question but two. The first, obviously, is whether Clinton really is the lesser evil. The answer: domestically, there’s no argument. Say what you will about Clinton, at least she’s not a raging bigot the way Trump is.

But things are not so clear once you leave the U.S. and venture out into the great wide world beyond. Trump’s foreign-policy ideas are all over the map. He has vowed to tear up the nuclear accord with Iran and blasted Obama for “abandon[ing] our missile defense plans with Poland and the Czech Republic.” In practically the same breath, he then calls for better relations with Russia even though Russia sees any such forward-based anti-missile system as a direct threat.

Trump wants closer relations with Israel if such a thing is possible given Washington’s long record of obsequiousness to Tel Aviv, and he wants to expand the military. But he’s also an opponent of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, even if it took him until 2004 to wake up to what was going on, and says that U.S. “actions in Iraq, Libya and Syria have helped unleash ISIS,” which is of course correct. Last but not least, he opposes military action aimed at ousting Syria’s Bashar al-Assad.

### **Weighing Foreign Policy**

So Trump’s foreign-policy stances are contradictory and ill thought out, yet at times almost reasonable and sane, especially by Washington standards. This is not the case with Clinton. To the contrary, she is a hawk through and through. Her rhetoric was every bit as ferocious as George W. Bush’s in the days after 9/11, if not more so.

She voted for the Authorization to Use Military Force, which gave the go-ahead for the invasion of Afghanistan, and also for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. She persuaded President Obama to pursue “regime change” in Libya and spent much of March 2011 recruiting ultra-rich Qatar to join in the effort. But she said nothing when Qatar then poured \$400 million into the hands of Islamist rebels who proceeded to spread chaos throughout the country. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Hillary Clinton’s ‘Entangled’ Foreign Policy.”]

Clinton has been no less reckless with regard to Syria. She beat Obama to the punch in calling for Bashar al-Assad’s overthrow, she’s consistently pushed for



stepped-up support for the rebels, and, as recently as April, she reiterated her call for a “no-fly zone” even though it would require massive military intervention and would almost certainly mean a confrontation with Russia.

So if Clinton is ahead on domestic policy, Trump is better abroad. It’s a choice between racism and war, which itself is an indictment of America’s increasingly rightwing political system. But since U.S. foreign policy directly affects 20 times more people than domestic – i.e. seven billion versus 322 million – then there’s no doubt as to whom the “lesser-evilism” award goes to. It goes to Trump.

But the other question that the pro-Clinton argument begs is one of political viability. People such as Chomsky, Younge, and Piven wouldn’t urge a vote for Clinton if they didn’t think she could win. Instead, they’d vote Green, Socialist Equality, or for some other leftist party. So they argue in favor of pulling the lever with one hand and holding one’s nose with the other because they think she can pull it off.

But can she really? Again, the picture is less clear than is generally assumed. To be sure, Trump is currently going through a rough patch. He’s having trouble transitioning from the primaries to the general election, and his campaign is such a shambles that *The New Republic* recently predicted that he’ll lose as big in November as Barry Goldwater did in 1964.

But forecasts like this are not terribly meaningful this early in the game, especially in an election year as topsy-turvy as this one. Rather than polls, what matters at this point are politics, i.e. a sense of the candidates’ relative ideological strengths and weaknesses. And it’s in this regard that Clinton is more vulnerable than her backers apparently realize.

### **Clueless Candidate**

Her speech in Cleveland following the June 12 Orlando massacre is a good example why. She began – inappropriately in view of the tragic circumstances – with the usual glib shout-outs to local pols:

“I want to thank your extraordinary senator, Sherrod Brown, for his leadership. ... I want to thank your congresswoman, Marcia Fudge, who is both indomitable and indefatigable... I want to acknowledge the mayor, Mayor Jackson, who was here, County Executive Budish...”

It’s the kind of thing that Clinton can do in her sleep, and it sounds like it too, i.e. robotic and impersonal. When she got to the serious stuff, the clichés only multiplied:

“This is a moment when all Americans need to stand together ... we must attack it [i.e. terrorism] with clear eyes, steady hands, unwavering determination, and pride in our country and our values ... the barbarity that we face from radical jihadists is profound...”

Once again, the effect was thoughtless and frozen. But then came something truly bizarre:

“Now, the third area that demands attention is preventing radicalization and countering efforts by ISIS and other international terrorist networks to recruit in the United States and Europe. For starters, it is long past time for the Saudis, the Qataris and the Kuwaitis and others to stop their citizens from funding extremist organizations. And they should stop supporting radical schools and mosques around the world that have set too many young people on a path towards extremism.”

Why bizarre? Simply because Clinton has been a national figure for two decades as First Lady, U.S. Senator, and Secretary of State, yet this was a rare recognition that there was something wrong with the U.S.-Saudi relationship. Otherwise, there has been almost nothing but praise. When the State Department negotiated a record \$60-billion arms deal with Riyadh in 2010, for instance, her officials stated (somewhat redundantly) that the sale would benefit the Middle East “by deepening our security relationship with a key partner with whom we’ve enjoyed a solid security relationship for nearly seventy years.”

How do you have a solid security relationship with a country that funds extremist mosques that function as a terrorist breeding ground?

When King Abdullah died in January 2015, she and her husband put out a statement praising the Saudi monarch “for his support of efforts for peace in the Middle East” and “the kingdom’s humanitarian efforts around the world.” Since when do you advance the cause of peace by funding Al Qaeda?

To be fair, Clinton was surprisingly frank – once. In December 2009, she wrote in a State Department memo:

“While the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) takes seriously the threat of terrorism within Saudi Arabia, it has been an ongoing challenge to persuade Saudi officials to treat terrorist financing emanating from Saudi Arabia as a strategic priority. Due in part to intense focus by the USG over the last several years, Saudi Arabia has begun to make important progress on this front and has responded to terrorist financing concerns raised by the United States through proactively investigating and detaining financial facilitators of

concern. Still, donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide.”

### **Double-Talk about Saudis**

The language was tough and unsparing. But the memo is the exception that proves the rule since it was a secret in-house communication that only saw the light of day when Wikileaks put it on the Internet – a disclosure, by the way, that Clinton assailed as “an attack on the international community, the alliances and partnerships, the conversations and negotiations that safeguard global security and advance economic prosperity.” (Full quote [here](#) starting at 1:34.)

If it’s long past time now for the Saudis to cease funding extremist organizations, why wasn’t it long past time then? Why has Clinton repeatedly assured the American people that everything is fine when, as she now concedes, America’s “friends” are funding extremist forces that are trying to kill Americans in the streets?

Trump can be counted on to hammer at such themes, and the more he does, the more voters will want to know. Indeed, Trump followed up her remarks in Cleveland by [posting](#) a few hours later on Facebook: “Crooked Hillary says we must call on Saudi Arabia and other countries to stop funding hate. I am calling on her to immediately return the \$25 million plus she got from them for the Clinton Foundation!”

Actually, the problem is worse since, if one includes other Gulf states such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates as well as high-ranking businessmen, the amount of Persian Gulf money flowing to the Clinton family foundation is not \$25 million, but anywhere from [\\$51 million to \\$75 million](#). That’s a lot of dough. So voters will want to know whether Clinton intentionally held off criticizing the Gulf monarchies because she wanted them to fork over as soon as she stepped down as Secretary of State and that she is only doing so now because the money is in the bag and there is nothing to lose.

Trump plays the politics of fear, as everyone knows. But he also thrives by citing examples of corruption, hypocrisy and incompetence, and Clinton exemplifies all three. Since she entered the Senate, Al Qaeda has grown from a tiny band of conspirators to a major military force wreaking havoc from Indonesia to California. Yet now she expects voters to show their thanks by propelling her into the White House.

Voters just might do it – if, that is, Trump is unable to get his campaign in proper working order, if there are no more terrorist outrages like San Bernardino and Orlando, and if the economy stays afloat. Otherwise, voters may

declare themselves fed up with an establishment candidate who obviously doesn't know what she's doing. In that case, they may vote for a know-nothing bigot who at least stands for change.

That's just what voters have done in Britain by deciding to leave the European Union – and a similar anti-establishment uprising may occur in the United States. If so, liberals may once again find themselves in bed with not just a “lesser evil” but with a loser.

**Daniel Lazare is the author of several books including *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace).**

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## In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in May focused on the new Cold War with Russia, the U.S. presidential election race, and the costs – financial, ethical and human – from endless war.

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["Hillary Clinton's 'House of Cards'"](#) by Greg Maybury, May 21, 2016

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["Intel Vets Urge Fast Report on Clinton's Emails"](#) by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, May 23, 2016

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## The Fraudulent Case for a Syrian Escalation

**Exclusive:** Washington’s armchair warriors are pounding the drums for a major U.S. military escalation in Syria but a new report shows there’s little reason to think that would help, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

The [recent call](#) by 51 dissenting State Department officials for U.S. military

escalation in Syria is merely one of dozens of similar demands by neoconservatives and anguished liberals who accuse President Obama of moral failure for not dictating peace in Syria at the end of a gun.

At almost the same time as the dissent went public, in fact, the hawkish Center for New American Security issued similar recommendations under the auspices of Michele Flournoy, Hillary Clinton's likely pick for Secretary of Defense. Its report called for more "arming and training" of anti-government rebels, launching of "limited military strikes" against the Assad regime, and eliminating "artificial manpower limitations" on military missions in the country.

Critics warn that such policies would violate international law, in the absence of any United Nations authorization for intervention, and risk a dangerous confrontation with Russia. But the slew of reports, speeches and columns calling for "limited" and "judicious" military escalation have an even bigger flaw: they never make even the slightest case for thinking such interventions could work.

Their claims reflect magical thinking. Champions of intervention cling to the wishful belief that if the world's one superpower wants something badly enough, we must be able to attain it. But as our disastrous experiences in Iraq and Libya – not to mention Vietnam – should have made abundantly clear to any sentient being, America simply lacks the capability to find and empower suitable local partners and then dictate political outcomes.

Our experience in Syria itself should have made the same lesson clear. President Obama ordered the Pentagon to spend \$500 million to "train-and-equip" anti-regime "moderates." The program graduated all of 54 recruits, most of whom were promptly kidnapped by the local Al Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra (possibly at the instigation of Turkey). Similarly, U.S. arms for "moderate" rebels have consistently fallen into the hands of al-Nusra.

### **A Contradictory Report**

But don't take my word for it. Consider the spectacularly contradictory new report by the "progressive" Century Foundation, called "The Case for a More Robust U.S. Intervention in Syria." Despite its conventional recommendations, author Thanassis Cambanis offers reason after reason to question how U.S. escalation could possibly make things better.

As Cambanis admits, the Obama administration *has* been "funding, training, and arming parts of the opposition" for several years now. And he acknowledges that "Most of the armed opposition has survived only because of foreign intervention – the exceptions being the most distressing elements: Islamic State and Nusra."

Unfortunately, he adds, Washington's favored allies are "disconnected from the most important groups doing the fighting and delivering services in rebel-controlled territory."

Some Kurdish groups – bitterly opposed by Turkey – have shown great prowess in the field. But America's favored local force, the Free Syrian Army, is a mish-mash of "citizens' militias, local mafia and gangster groupings, and semi-professional forces" whose promise "never materialized," Cambanis writes. "Free Syrian Army brigades remain as bitterly fragmented today as they were in 2011–12 – perhaps even more so. No amount of cajoling by the United States . . . has persuaded even the most minute brigades to submit to an umbrella command."

Worse yet, "Many Free Syrian Army groups have been guilty of corruption, brutality, torture, and other crimes," Cambanis writes.

Moderates, it seems, make bad fighters. In contrast, Cambanis says our allies like Saudi Arabia and Turkey have funded "other more Islamist fighting forces, including the Army of Islam around Damascus and Ahrar al-Sham, a group with both jihadist and nationalist pedigrees that is probably the single most powerful militant rebel force in northern Syria, outside of Al Qaeda's Nusra Front and the Islamic State group. Few of these groups . . . can be described as 'moderate.' . . . The only unitary actors with discernible chains of command are the Islamist-jihadist hardline groups: Islamic State, Nusra, and Ahrar el Sham."

### **Dominant Islamists**

In fact, Islamists are so dominant, Cambanis acknowledges, that "In most of rebel-held northern Syria, the Free Syrian Army groups exist largely at the pleasure of Ahrar or Nusra, and in some areas face the specter of destruction by Islamic State."

Bottom line, he admits, "There is no sizable 'moderate,' nationalist, or secular faction that could lead a military offensive, much less claim to represent the opposition in a negotiating setting. Any anti-Assad intervention will, in the short-term, benefit the most powerful factions on the ground – the extremists and the jihadists."

The typical proponent of more U.S. military intervention is as oblivious to the realities of the regime as to those of its opposition. Unlike them, Cambanis concedes that Assad does not simply rule through terror.

Assad's government "possesses significant wells of legitimacy," Cambanis writes, "his rule has maintained some degree of buy-in from millions of Sunni Arabs, as well as thousands of Kurds. . . ."



“Conversations suggest there are plenty more, perhaps numbering in the millions, who do not like the way Assad runs Syria but prefer his secular, pluralistic dictatorship to the alternative they believe the rebellion offers: violence, anarchy, or a Sunni theocracy. . . . The alternative, in their view, is the kind of unchecked sectarianism they have heard about in areas controlled by Islamic State, Nusra, Ahrar, . . . even supposedly moderate Free Syrian Army-branded groups.”

So here you have it: Millions of Syrian support Assad, or prefer him to the alternative. His armed opponents are mainly radical Islamists, varying only in their willingness to make tactical compromises. All previous U.S. efforts to rally an effective force of “moderates” have failed utterly.

So what exactly makes interventionists think that doubling down on a failed strategy will produce a different and better outcome? In light of these failures, how dare they claim the moral high ground? What gives them the right even to be taken seriously as foreign policy experts? It’s time to call most of these armchair warriors what they are: frauds.

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