Lurching Toward World War III

Anti-Russian hysteria has reached extraordinary levels in Official Washington with heated allegations about Russia hacking Democratic Party emails, but this over-the-top “group think” threatens the world’s future, explains John Chuckman.

By John Chuckman

When did America’s establishment ever discuss, in elections or at other times, issues of war and peace for the people’s understanding and consent? Virtually never. There was no mandate for Vietnam, Cambodia, Iraq, Libya, Syria, or a dozen other conflicts.

Of course, once a war gets going, there is a tendency for Americans to close ranks with flags and ribbons and slogans such as “Support our troops” and “Love it or leave it.” The senior leaders know this psychological pattern, and they count on it, every time.

The fundamental problem in America’s government is an elaborate political structure much resembling democracy but with actual rule by a powerful establishment and a set of special interests – all supported by a monstrous security apparatus and a huge, lumbering military, which wouldn’t even know what to do with itself in peace. Unfortunately, I don’t think there is any apparent solution to this horrible political reality, and, while once it affected primarily Americans themselves, today it affects the planet.

There is an intense new element that has been added to America’s governing establishment: the drive of the neocons for American supremacy everywhere, for complete global dominance, and it is something which is frighteningly similar to past drives by fascist governments which brought only human misery on a vast scale.

The neocons’ underlying motive, I believe, is absolute security for America’s colony in the Middle East, Israel – put another way, their concern is for Israel’s hegemony over its entire region with no room for anyone else to act in their own interests. It is only if the United States is deeply engaged all over the planet that Israel can constantly benefit from its strange relationship with America.

It did not require the neocons to interest America’s establishment with interfering in other people’s affairs. America has a long history of doing so, stretching back to the Mexican War, the Spanish-American War, the Philippine-American War, the brazen seizure of Hawaii from its people and going right up to
the pointless War in Vietnam and Cambodia in the hope of keeping the Pacific Ocean effectively an American lake. But the neocons have added a new force, a new impulse to something which would be better left alone, and they are very influential in American affairs.

Ordinary Americans are not interested in world affairs, and there is a great deal of evidence to support that statement. American Imperialists of earlier times disparaged this tendency to just want peace at home with the pejorative name, isolationism, and avoiding isolationism became an excuse for a whole series of wars and interventions.

So, Americans today cannot be allowed to fall back into their natural tendency of not caring. Thus we have the drive of the neocons and, tragically, thus we have America being driven into direct confrontation with Russia. And with China, too, of course, but Russia is my focus since Russia is the only country in the world literally capable of obliterating the United States. There is unquestionably a sense here of Rome wanting to go after Carthage, although cavalry, swords, spears and catapults no longer can settle such conflicts.

The situation is compounded by the American establishment’s dawning realization that its days of largely unquestioned supremacy in the world are fading into memory, as other countries grow and develop and have important interests in world affairs.

In many respects, it has been a long downhill slide for the average American since the economic heyday of the 1950s. Decline in real incomes, decline in good job opportunities at home, the export of American industries abroad to areas of less costly labor, and the virtual collapse of American towns and cities in many places, Detroit being perhaps the most sorrowful case of many – all these are evident year-in and year-out.

**Lost Perspective**

I do think the American establishment simply does not know how to handle its role in a brave new world, but do something it clearly thinks it must, and that is an extremely dangerous state of mind. It is armed with vast armies and terrible weapons so that it retains a sense of being able to act in some way to permanently reclaim its place, an illusion if ever there was one.

We know from scholars of the past the role that the mere existence of terrible military power can play in disaster. Huge standing armies were one of the major underlying causes of the First World War, a conflict in which 20 million people perished. Germany repeated the effort with Hitler’s government working tirelessly to create what was to become the finest and most advanced army the
world had ever seen until that time, but it, too, ended in disaster, and of even greater proportions.

America has not discovered the secret to making itself invulnerable, although I fear that its establishment believes that it can do so, and that represents the most dangerous possible thinking.

Contrary to political speeches, America’s establishment has never shown great concern over the welfare of ordinary Americans, and today its lack of concern is almost palpable. Washington’s white-maned, over-fed, crinkly-faced senators spend virtually every ounce of effort in two activities: raising funds from special interests for re-election (estimated at two-thirds of an average Senator’s time) and conspiring on how to keep America dominant in the world. Anything else is just piffle.

America’s unique place in the world of 1950 took care of ordinary Americans, not any effort by government. Again, the utter contempt for ordinary Americans perhaps offers a dark element in the thinking of America’s establishment when it comes to possible nuclear war.

Russia is not, of course, a direct threat to neocon interests, except when it comes to matters like Syria, a deliberately-engineered horror to bring down the last independent-minded leader in the Middle East and to smash and Balkanize his country, parts of which, Israel has always lusted after in its vision of Greater Israel.

The coup in Ukraine, which borders along a great stretch of Russia, represented a direct challenge to Russia’s security, offering a place ultimately to be filled with hostile forces and missiles and American advisors – all of which was expected to silence Russia’s independent voice in the world and its ability to in any way thwart neocon adventures, if not, in the longer-range, savage dreams of some, to provide a platform for the ultimate destruction or overthrow of Russia herself.

Russia’s effective countering with skillful moves in its own interests both in Syria and Ukraine has driven some of America’s establishment to the edge of madness, and that madness is what we see and hear in Europe, which is once again being turned into a vast armed camp. Europe is now seething with anti-Russian rhetoric, threats and activities such as huge war games, the largest of which occurred around the anniversary of Hitler’s invasion of Russia, the single most destructive event in all of human history.

America has created deliberately a situation almost as dangerous as the days of the Cuban missile crisis, which itself arose from the American establishment’s
belief that it had every right to interfere in Cuba’s affairs.

**Nuclear Threats**

We have another element, now compounding the danger, in a far greater variety and level of sophistication of weapons, including some nuclear weapons whose controlled yields are regarded by America’s military as being perhaps “usable” in a theater like Europe.

The installation of anti-missile systems near Russia is very much part of this threat since these systems not only are intended to neutralize Russia’s capacity for response to a sudden, massive attack but to provide a cover for future covert, easily-done substitution of other kinds of missiles into the launchers, faster-arriving, nuclear-armed missiles which would indeed be an element in such an attack.

Russia, a country twice invaded with all the might of Germany and before that by Napoleon’s Grande Armée, cannot be expected just to sit and do nothing. It won’t. It cannot.

The world must not forget that America’s military, a number of times in the past, created complete plans for a massive, surprise nuclear attack on what was then the Soviet Union, the last of which I am aware was in the early 1960s, and it was presented as being feasible to President Kennedy, who is said to have left the Pentagon briefing sick to his stomach.

Nuclear war, just as with any other kind of war, can happen almost by accident through blunders and careless acts and overly-aggressive postures. Just let the blood of two sides get up enough, and an utter disaster could quickly overtake us.

Constantly decreasing the possibilities for accidents and misunderstandings is a prime responsibility of every major world leader, and right now the United States is pretty close to having completely abdicated its responsibility.

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**The Fallacy of ‘Regime Change’ Strategies**

“Regime change” or destabilizing sanctions are Official Washington’s policy options of choice in dealing with disfavored nations, but these aggressive
strategies have proved harmful and counterproductive, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Many variables are involved in the messy predicaments in the Middle East, but one way of framing the history and issues of U.S. policy toward the region is in terms of the approaches that have been taken toward so-called rogue regimes. That term, one should hasten to add, obscures more than it enlightens. But it has been in general use for a long time. Take it as shorthand to refer to regimes that have come to be considered especially troublesome and are subjected to some degree of ostracism and punishment.

Three basic approaches are available in formulating policy toward such a regime: (1) keep ostracizing and punishing it in perpetuity; (2) try to change the regime; or (3) negotiate and do business with it, to constrain it and to influence its actions. There are some contradictions between the approaches. Any regime that is led to believe that it is going to be overturned anyway, or that it will be perpetually punished anyway, lacks incentive to make concessions in a negotiation.

The approaches that outside powers, especially Western powers and above all the United States, have taken toward Middle Eastern regimes that have come to be considered rogue have varied—not only from one state to another but also over time in the policy toward any one state.

Iraq was subject to punishment for a long time, with the prevailing outlook not involving urgency to try different things. The perspective, as voiced by Secretary of State Colin Powell, was that Saddam Hussein was “in his box.”

Then suddenly the policy became one of forceful regime change, stimulated by nothing other than such a project has been on the neoconservative agenda and that the surge in militancy in the American public mood after the 9/11 terrorist attack, even though Iraq had nothing to do with that event, finally made realization of that agenda item politically possible.

Libya under Muammar Gaddafi was subject to years of punishment and ostracism. As far as international sanctions were concerned, this did have a specific declared objective: involving the turning over of named suspects in the bombing of Pan Am 103 in 1988. Once Qaddafi surrendered the suspects, real negotiation ensued. It resulted in an agreement that ended (while opening up to international inspection) Libya’s unconventional weapons programs and confirmed the Libyan regime’s exit from international terrorism.

Then, after an internal insurrection broke out in Libya, the idea took root—
first in Western European capitals, although Washington would go along— that the situation should be exploited to intervene on behalf of the rebels and to help overthrow the regime. Regime change supplanted negotiation.

Policy toward Syria has been a mixed bag all along. There has been lots of punishment, but without some of the isolation to which other regimes have been subjected; the United States kept diplomatic relations with Syria even after placing it on the list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Once an internal revolt broke out in Syria, a situation similar to Libya arose, in that some outsiders (principally Gulf Arab states and Turkey) wanted to take advantage of the situation to topple the Assad regime. With Russian and Iranian help, and also for internal reasons, the regime has managed to hang on.

But “Assad must go” became a slogan elsewhere, and many in the West took regime change to be an objective. There was negotiation leading to the surrender and disposal of Syrian chemical weapons, but some, including in the United States, did not like that approach.

While there has been some backing away from the idea that Assad must go, others outside Syria say that still should be an objective. In short, there has been conflict and controversy, even within the United States let alone in any larger coalition, over just what the objective should be.

Iran has been subject to much punishment in the form of sanctions. Then after Hassan Rouhani’s election in 2013 there was real negotiation on an important issue. This led to the conclusion and implementation of a multilateral agreement that places limits on, and subjects to international scrutiny, Iran’s nuclear program.

A Balance Sheet

Before turning to a balance sheet regarding the results of these different approaches, some observations are in order about what has too often been overlooked with two of the approaches. The sustained use of punishment in the form of sanctions often has been accompanied by confusion about exactly what the objectives are—if that objective is to be anything besides punishment for punishment’s sake, which does not advance anyone’s interests.

An objective might be to make it directly harder for the targeted regime to do certain things, such as to procure advanced military technology. Or it might be to try to provoke an internal revolt, although this rarely works, for several reasons including where the blame for the pain usually falls.

Often the rationale for the sanctions is that it is an inducement to get the
targeted regime to change its policies. But this does not work unless there is a positive alternative to the negative one of punishment and sanctions, and unless there is a firm expectation that the sanctions will end if the regime chooses a different, specific, identifiable course. And that is what has often been overlooked and missing.

This explains the years of failure of imposing sanctions on Iran without providing any positive alternative. If such an alternative had been offered, a nuclear agreement could have been reached years earlier, when Iran’s nuclear program was much smaller.

As for regime change, one needs to reflect first of all on just how irregular and extreme is the notion that if we don’t like someone else’s government, forcefully overthrowing it is to be considered as just another policy option. Such a notion is contrary to tenets of international law and international order than have been in effect since the Peace of Westphalia in the Seventeenth Century.

Also overlooked when regime change is turned to is how other people may have different ideas from our own about what rulers are legitimate and who should get their support – a factor in considering the status of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Overlooked all too often as well is what comes after the ruler we don’t like is gone. A simple faith that something better is bound to fall into place has led to the problems we have seen in spades in Iraq and Libya.

Now for the balance sheet. The results of regime change in Iraq have been too glaringly bad to need a full recounting. They include a civil war that has never ended and has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands, has disrupted the Iraqi economy, and has created enormous flows of refugees and displaced persons. These include the birth of a major terrorist group that we now know as ISIS. And for those who don’t like to see Iranian influence anywhere, the war that toppled Saddam resulted in the single biggest increase in Iranian influence in the region in at least the last couple of decades.

Libya has seen prolonged chaos since the removal of Gaddafi. Contending governments based in different parts of the country have competed for power, with only tentative and fragile progress made recently toward a reconciliation. The economy, despite the oil resources, is in shambles. Instability has been exported from Libya in the form of both men and materiel, and ISIS established in Libya its biggest presence outside of Iraq and Syria.

In Syria, the closest thing to successes have come from the bits of negotiation and diplomacy that have come into play: those involving the Assad regime’s surrender of chemical weapons and some partial and temporary cease-fires. The
war in Syria — the war itself, not any particular political outcome in Damascus — has been a major breeder of extremism and the threat of instability spilling over borders.

Actions against the regime have brought counteractions not only from external supporters of the regime but also internal players who see the alternatives as worse for them. Moreover, it would be difficult to escape a similar conclusion from the point of view of our own interests — that is, that the most feasible alternatives to the current Syrian regime would not be those hoped-for moderate forces the building up of which always seems to fill short, but instead radical extremists.

The brightest spot in this regional picture is found in the one place where the policy move by the United States, in cooperation with international partners, has been in the direction of negotiation. That involves Iran, and the big result so far has been the agreement to restrict Iran’s nuclear program, which certainly is one of the most significant steps in recent years on behalf of nuclear nonproliferation.

It is just one issue, but an important one. And lest we forget, it was the issue about which anti-Iran activists had for so long been crying most loudly. What comes later in dealings with the Iranian regime will depend in large part on the continued attempts of hardliners in more than one capital, but especially in Washington, to sabotage the nuclear agreement.

But at least there has been an unshackling of diplomacy in the Middle East in the sense of establishing, even in the absence of full diplomatic relations, something closer than before to a businesslike dialogue with one of the most significant states about issues of mutual concern (including countering ISIS, an issue on which U.S. and Iranian interests run parallel).

It should have been apparent, on an a priori basis alone, that overthrowing foreign government we don’t happen to like is not to be considered as just another foreign policy option, even for a superpower. And it should have been apparent that punishment for the sake of punishment doesn’t do anyone any good, beyond registering our dislikes.

When we take into account the actual record of results from the different approaches that have been taken toward regimes we choose to call rogue, these conclusions should be all the more obvious.

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Sheriff Arpaio Paved the Way for Trump

Before there was Donald Trump and his promise of a “beautiful wall” across the U.S.-Mexican border there was Sheriff Joe Arpaio from Arizona who pushed cruel treatment of illegal immigrants and other Latinos, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump’s embrace of Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who has built a national reputation for his harsh treatment of undocumented migrants and U.S. citizens of Mexican descent, is a clear signal of how Trump plans to treat Latinos if he becomes president.

While the federal courts have taken legal steps to restrain Arpaio’s most flagrant actions, the elected sheriff has set the tone for the right-wing debate on immigration and has paved the way for Trump’s promise to deport all 12 million undocumented people from the United State and build “the most beautiful wall you’ve ever seen.”

For more than seven years, Salvador Reza, a Phoenix-based indigenous rights leader and long-time human rights activist with Tonatierra, has gone head to head with Arpaio and was appalled to see the sheriff on stage at the Republican National Convention. Dennis Bernstein spoke with Salvador Reza.

Dennis Bernstein: Could [you] begin by just giving us a bit of background in terms of the kind of work you’ve been involved in, what your struggle has been over the last 10 and 20 years?

Salvador Reza: Well, Tonatierra is an indigenous rights organization, and we see immigration tolerance through that lens. We see that we have been here for thousands of years, and these are the lands where the Aztecs migrated from. So when we defend anybody that’s being persecuted by Joe Arpaio or by this racist law, we do it from that context.

We’ve been fighting Arpaio since 2007, when he started deporting day laborers massively from a furniture store. We were able to get him out of there, basically by almost breaking the store financially. We’ve been instrumental in putting pressure on Joe Arpaio everywhere he turns. He arrested me twice, once voluntarily and the second one because he wanted to teach me a lesson. And the
litigation is still going on.

But then [State Rep] Russell Pierce arrested me too, for opposing his racist policies in the state legislature. So, I hate to say it, but with Trump, you know, getting up there and possibly becoming the next president, the same policies that started here in Arizona are going to be implemented nationwide. With the exception that, now with Donald Trump, you don’t have a sheriff that’s relying on taxpayers’ money. He’ll be relying on corporate money plus taxpayers’ money. So that makes him more dangerous. […] So he doesn’t care whether the justice department, the judge, whatever puts pressure on Arpaio or what he stands for, because Donald Trump basically stands for Arpaio.

DB: That was a good way to set the scene for your multiple confrontations with Arpaio and the policy that he, and now Trump, represent. But let me, for a moment, ask you to give us your reaction when you heard both that […] Arpaio would be a major supporter [of Trump], and then that [Arpaio] was given a platform [at the Republican National Convention] leading up on the day that Trump would speak. What did that mean to you? What went through your mind? How did that reverberate in your community?

SR: Well, what it means to us, and what it means to our community, is that the racist policy in Arizona, at the national level, are going to be massively pushed by the Trump administration if he gets elected. The thing is that Trump is only like a mini-me of Arpaio, with the exception that this mini-me is actually more powerful than Arpaio. Cause Arpaio is local at a county, and Donald Trump will be at the international level and the national level.

So what it means to us, the way we saw it, is very dangerous. What we predicted would happen is happening now. We didn’t stop it in Arizona, we were able to squash it a little bit, but we were not able to stop it. And SB 1070 is the law of the land right now. Any police force, any police officer, can stop you for what they consider reasonable stop, and basically ask you for your documentation. And that’s what is about to happen, nationwide. And to ask what it meant to us, it’s a very dangerous precedent. People better hold on, because I don’t think they’re ready for what’s coming.

DB: Can you talk … [about] the level of violence that Joe Arpaio perpetrated on the people of Arizona, and brown people across the state […] and very specifically, because a lot of people don’t understand. I know that you were put in jail a couple of times. But just remind people some of the brutalities. Some of them led to fatalities that Arpaio propagated, forced, pushed as sort of a vigilante operation. Just so we have a taste of what he’s doing on the ground, why you were able to be a little bit successful, in the courts.
SR: Arpaio, the type of damage that he inflicts upon our community, is first of all psychological— the climate of fear. That is daily for a child. For example, when a parent leaves, [the child] doesn’t know if he’s going to have the parent back home that afternoon. The parent goes to work, he doesn’t know whether he’ll come back from work place, right? And, more than that, the tent city is an area where at a temperature of 115 – 120 degrees on the outside, getting to be 140 – 150 [degrees] under the tents. And that type of scenario…

DB: So, he created a tent city to house, and essentially subtly torture, the community that he was arresting en mass.

SR: Exactly. And then he marched them for all the media to see, and humiliate them, and basically say, “Look, I am tough on illegal immigration. This is the way it is supposed to be.” And even in [Trump’s] speech [at the RNC] he said that in this nation people care more about illegal aliens, for the lives of “illegal aliens,” than U.S. citizens. And there was Arpaio saying it, exactly when the judge saying he could not be arresting people on the grounds of their status.

The thing is, the torture for the community here, and the violence against the community, is very bad. Like Arpaio, he has two, three people getting killed in his jails, that we know of. And then there’s people that die, and we don’t know of[…]. Every year there’s 2 – 3 people that get killed in jail.

DB: What’s an example? How do they die in the jails? Explain to us why it’s suspicious.

SR: Well, sometimes it’s not even suspicious, they basically beat them to death. Like this veteran that [...] had PTSD. He goes in there, he’s complying. And they surround him, about ten deputies, and beat him into unconscious. And they basically left him there at the powder room […]. And then another deputy actually steps on somebody, on their neck. He puts him on a table, gets on top of the table, and steps on his neck.

And those are the ones that we know of. The ones we don’t know of, I don’t know what it is. But the thing is, Arpaio is bad on his jails, Arpaio is bad on enforcement, Arpaio is bad on the psychological warfare against the community. Yet that’s what Donald Trump stands for. That’s a problem. Donald Trump is just like Joe Arpaio, except magnified by a lot more power.

DB: We’re talking about the kinds of policies that are now being threatened by Donald Trump, by his close relationship with Joe Arpaio. He is now an advisor to Trump, an informal advisor, a supporter. [He] was featured at the convention the day leading up to Trump’s statement and acceptance of the Republican nomination
for the presidential convening.

Now we know, Salvador, that under the Obama government, [Obama has] been referred to as the deporter-in-chief. Essentially, Arpaio has a friend, in that the prison industrial complex, the private prison industry has blossomed. And it exists now to torture the kinds of people that Joe Arpaio arrests, and sort of torture at the local level. That’s part of the whole national security program that is inspired by this kind of policy. How do you respond to that?

SR: Well, I’ll just tell you that Arpaio, for 18 years, was on the 18th floor of the Wells Fargo building here in Phoenix, Arizona, living in corporate offices, because Wells Fargo is one of the biggest investors in the prison industrial complex. So, he basically sent people to the jails, and they get something like $200/day for everybody they send there. So, that tells you a little bit about that.

And the difference between the two parties, to me, the Democratic party and the Republican party, it doesn’t matter who gets up there, the[y] will be still under the influence of the prison industrial complex. And they will continue this type of immigration policies, including [how] Obama deported 2.5 million people, that I know of, during his tenure. That’s more than anybody else [...] and we’re talking about the massive deportations in the 30’s and massive deportations in the 40’s, the massive deportations anytime. I mean he has deported more people than anybody else. Yet, he’s supposed to be our friend.

So, to me, the Democrats and the Republicans or any party, in reality, they will all have to basically kowtow to the prison industrial complex. So, we have to organize on our own, and put pressure [on] whatever party is up there, because maybe one will deport more than the other. But, [...] to me, 2.5 million people deported in eight years is a lot of people.

DB: And are you getting some of the same reports that we’re getting, that the treatment of folks who are being arrested by the government, taken into custody by ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement], being swept up, are being brutalized at various levels and in many ways?

SR: Oh, yeah. I mean people die all the time under custody. They are punished severely if they protest. If they try to organize in any way, shape, or form they basically put them in the hole. People whose only crime was to work, all of a sudden they have to deal with being thrown in the hole, in solitary. So, it’s not nicey-nice, like they say.

It’s not even supposed to be imprisonment. It’s supposed to be detention. But in
reality it’s a long term detention, for a lot of people stay there for 1.5 – 2 years waiting to resolve their case. And they don’t let them out into the streets, even though they’re no danger to anybody, because they’re collecting money on it.

DB: We talked a little bit about this before, but I want to come back to the atmospheric pressure. Could you talk a little bit more about how people have really changed their lives, how they live more cautiously, how they live more in fear, how they perhaps act in ways that try and anticipate and take precautions against being arrested, being abused by these laws?

SR: Well, the people that get close to organizations where they know their rights, more than likely they’ll not get deported. More than likely they’ll just end up, one day, in a local detention center and let go. But the people that don’t know that, they end up being deported, because they’ll sign. Once they sign, they lose all their rights. In reality, the way people behave [...] right now, they try to drive less. If they don’t have to, they won’t drive. They basically, something as simple as giving them a drivers license is something that is beyond the state of Arizona, or many other states.

And what happens is that [this law enforcement creates]...they say, “Okay, I’m going to make you a criminal.” And then when [immigrants] do their everyday stuff, and then they get criminalized, then they say, “Well, they got arrested because they violated the law,” when they created the law so that they could arrest people. It’s no different than apartheid in the Bantustan, and apartheid laws that basically were made so to keep a certain sector of cities. They wanted the labor of the African communities, the South African communities, but they didn’t want them there.

And, to me, the same thing [is happening] but at a global level, at the continental level. They want our labor but they don’t want us. So that type of situation, to me, is inhumane, immoral and basically goes to the very heart of our humanity. And, unfortunately, Trump seems to have at least close to 50% of the population of the United States wanting him to be president.

DB: Well, he’s up by a couple of points in the latest polls, that’s for sure. And I guess this thing about repression also goes to the fact that people will be more hesitant to seek medical help when they need it. Or for a woman to deal with an abusive husband, or a man in the house, if they need the help. So this becomes a grave danger, given this kind of law and repression. This is what people who you work with feel like every day in Arizona, huh?
SR: Yes. And you know what’s really funny? Some of the local [police] chiefs in this area, don’t think that their job is to do immigration work. And they basically don’t like for the police officers to do immigration work. Yet, the law permits them to do it. And the thing is, you have very strong police officers’ associations that basically lobbied for the law, and they will fight, tooth and nail, for the officers to be able to deport people.

DB: Under ICE now, deportations are considered a national security action. And folks, everyday folks, people who do the hardest work in this country, who get abused every day for it, are all of a sudden become turned into national security risks, and thus it justifies the brutality of law enforcement. How do you respond to that?

SR: Well, it’s like one, they criminalize you, then they dehumanize you. When they dehumanize you, they can do anything they want to against you, and the population will applaud it, or a certain percentage of the population will applaud it. It’s no different than what Hitler did, you know? He demonized the Jewish communities, and then pretty soon people that had Jewish workers, or were working with Jewish people, then they started denouncing them, and then trying to save themselves from not being associated with them. And that’s what the laws do here. [...] If you give somebody a ride that’s an “illegal alien” then you are aiding and abetting. Then the law says you become the criminal, even though you were giving a ride to a friend. That’s the type of situation that’s being created, unfortunately, nationwide, now.

DB: And, just finally, just so we’re fair and balanced here, we’re sort of dealing with the major candidates. I imagine that you have some real concern with Hillary Clinton besides her connection to Obama. The fact that she, as Secretary of State, supported the coup in Honduras, and policies, free trade policies, that have forced migration out of countries in Central America, and so on and so forth. I guess that’s a concern as well, on the other side.

SR: Well, like I said, both parties to me are the same. They’re just appendages of a capitalist system that only see profit. They don’t care about human beings. To me they’re the same. Now, what we have to decide is […] which one of the three is the worse evil. Because […] under this false democracy, that’s all that’s left. They leave us to…just to deal with who can we influence more, Hillary or Donald. And I really don’t know, in reality, which one is the best, because both of them are pretty bad.

The thing is, we have to make the decision whether we want […] somebody that’s going to be crazy enough to unleash the police forces throughout the United
States, and then create a vigilante type of a movement, like we have here in Arizona. Or, do we want somebody that’s going to be more middle of the road, trying to look liberal? Where they’ll let you at least say a word or two, whether they listen to you or not, at least they give you an opening. So, that’s what we’re going to make a decision on. But to me, both parties are just the same face…two faces of the same coin.

Hillary Clinton and Her Hawks

Exclusively: Focusing on domestic issues, Hillary Clinton’s acceptance speech sidestepped the deep concerns anti-war Democrats have about her hawkish foreign policy, which is already taking shape in the shadows, reports Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

As Hillary Clinton begins her final charge for the White House, her advisers are already recommending air strikes and other new military measures against the Assad regime in Syria.

The clear signals of Clinton’s readiness to go to war appears to be aimed at influencing the course of the war in Syria as well as U.S. policy over the remaining six months of the Obama administration. (She also may be hoping to corral the votes of Republican neoconservatives concerned about Donald Trump’s “America First” foreign policy.)

Last month, the think tank run by Michele Flournoy, the former Defense Department official considered to be most likely to be Clinton’s choice to be Secretary of Defense, explicitly called for “limited military strikes” against the Assad regime.

And earlier this month Leon Panetta, former Defense Secretary and CIA Director, who has been advising candidate Clinton, declared in an interview that the next president would have to increase the number of Special Forces and carry out air strikes to help “moderate” groups against President Bashal al-Assad. (When Panetta gave a belligerent speech at the Democratic National Convention on Wednesday night, he was interrupted by chants from the delegates on the floor of “no more war!”

Flournoy co-founded the Center for New American Security (CNAS) in 2007 to promote support for U.S. war policies in Iraq and Afghanistan, and then became Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in the Obama administration in 2009.
Flournoy left her Pentagon position in 2012 and returned to CNAS as Chief Executive Officer. She has been described by ultimate insider journalist David Ignatius of the Washington Post, as being on a “short, short list” for the job Secretary of Defense in a Clinton administration.

Last month, CNAS published a report of a “Study Group” on military policy in Syria on the eve of the organization’s annual conference. Ostensibly focused on how to defeat the Islamic State, the report recommends new U.S. military actions against the Assad regime.

Flournoy chaired the task force, along with CNAS president Richard Fontaine, and publicly embraced its main policy recommendation in remarks at the conference.

She called for “using limited military coercion” to help support the forces seeking to force President Assad from power, in part by creating a “no bombing” zone over those areas in which the opposition groups backed by the United States could operate safely.

In an interview with Defense One, Flournoy described the no-bomb zone as saying to the Russian and Syrian governments, “If you bomb the folks we support, we will retaliate using standoff means to destroy [Russian] proxy forces, or, in this case, Syrian assets.” That would “stop the bombing of certain civilian populations,” Flournoy said.

In a letter to the editor of Defense One, Flournoy denied having advocated “putting U.S. combat troops on the ground to take territory from Assad’s forces or remove Assad from power,” which she said the title and content of the article had suggested.

But she confirmed that she had argued that “the U.S. should under some circumstances consider using limited military coercion – primarily trikes using standoff weapons – to retaliate against Syrian military targets” for attacks on civilian or opposition groups “and to set more favorable conditions on the ground for a negotiated political settlement.”

Renaming a ‘No-Fly’ Zone

The proposal for a “no bombing zone” has clearly replaced the “no fly zone,” which Clinton has repeatedly supported in the past as the slogan to cover a much broader U.S. military role in Syria.

Panetta served as Defense Secretary and CIA Director in the Obama administration when Clinton was Secretary of State, and was Clinton’s ally on Syria policy. On July 17, he gave an interview to CBS News in which he called for steps that partly complemented and partly paralleled the recommendations in the CNAS paper.
“I think the likelihood is that the next president is gonna have to consider adding additional special forces on the ground,” Panetta said, “to try to assist those moderate forces that are taking on ISIS and that are taking on Assad’s forces.”

Panetta was deliberately conflating two different issues in supporting more U.S. Special Forces in Syria. The existing military mission for those forces is to support the anti-ISIS forces made up overwhelmingly of the Kurdish YPG and a few opposition groups.

Neither the Kurds nor the opposition groups the Special Forces are supporting are fighting against the Assad regime. What Panetta presented as a need only for additional personnel is in fact a completely new U.S. mission for Special Forces of putting military pressure on the Assad regime.

He also called for increasing “strikes” in order to “put increasing pressure on ISIS but also on Assad.” That wording, which jibes with the Flournoy-CNAS recommendation, again conflates two entirely different strategic programs as a single program.

The Panetta ploys in confusing two separate policy issues reflects the reality that the majority of the American public strongly supports doing more militarily to defeat ISIS but has been opposed to U.S. war against the government in Syria.

A poll taken last spring showed 57 percent in favor of a more aggressive U.S. military force against ISIS. The last time public opinion was surveyed on the issue of war against the Assad regime, however, was in September 2013, just as Congress was about to vote on authorizing such a strike.

At that time, 55 percent to 77 percent of those surveyed opposed the use of military force against the Syrian regime, depending on whether Congress voted to authorize such a strike or to oppose it.

**Shaping the Debate**

It is highly unusual, if not unprecedented, for figures known to be close to a presidential candidate to make public recommendations for new and broader war abroad. The fact that such explicit plans for military strikes against the Assad regime were aired so openly soon after Clinton had clinched the Democratic nomination suggests that Clinton had encouraged Flournoy and Panetta to do so.

The rationale for doing so is evidently not to strengthen her public support at home but to shape the policy decisions made by the Obama administration and the coalition of external supporters of the armed opposition to Assad.
Obama’s refusal to threaten to use military force on behalf of the anti-Assad forces or to step up military assistance to them has provoked a series of leaks to the news media by unnamed officials – primarily from the Defense Department – criticizing Obama’s willingness to cooperate with Russia in seeking a Syrian ceasefire and political settlement as “naïve.”

The news of Clinton’s advisers calling openly for military measures signals to those critics in the administration to continue to push for a more aggressive policy on the premise that she will do just that as president.

Even more important to Clinton and close associates, however, is the hope of encouraging Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which have been supporting the armed opposition to Assad, to persist in and even intensify their efforts in the face of the prospect of U.S.-Russian cooperation in Syria.

Even before the recommendations were revealed, specialists on Syria in Washington think tanks were already observing signs that Saudi and Qatari policymakers were waiting for the Obama administration to end in the hope that Clinton would be elected and take a more activist role in the war against Assad.

The new Prime Minister of Turkey, Binali Yildirim, however, made a statement on July 13 suggesting that Turkish President Recep Yayyip Erdogan may be considering a deal with Russia and the Assad regime at the expense of both Syrian Kurds and the anti-Assad opposition.

That certainly would have alarmed Clinton’s advisers, and four days later, Panetta made his comments on network television about what “the next president” would have to do in Syria.

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The Content of Donald Trump’s Character

Exclusive: Though some anti-war Americans see hope that Donald Trump would pull back from foreign wars, they also must face his undeniable record of racial and sexist bigotry, writes Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn

In his acceptance speech for the Republican presidential nomination, Donald
Trump declared, “My Dad, Fred Trump, was the smartest and hardest working man I ever knew. . . . It’s because of him that I learned, from my youngest age, to respect the dignity of work and the dignity of working people.”


Moreover, Fred Trump, “the smartest” man his son ever knew, did not respect the dignity of black people. The legendary folk singer Woody Guthrie rented an apartment in the elder Trump’s Brooklyn complex in 1950. It turned out blacks were not welcome there.

University of Central Lancashire professor Will Kaufman, a student of Guthrie’s life and songs, noted that Guthrie thought “Fred Trump was one who stirs up racial hate, and implicitly profits from it,” lamenting “the bigotry that pervaded his new, lily-white neighborhood.”

Guthrie responded to Fred Trump’s bigotry with this song:

I suppose
Old Man Trump knows
Just how much
Racial Hate
He stirred up
In the bloodpot of human hearts
When he drewed
That color line
Here at his Eighteen hundred family project

The acorn did not fall far from the tree of racial prejudice. In 1973, the Nixon Justice Department sued Fred and Donald Trump for systematic discrimination against African-Americans in housing rentals.

The New York Times’ Nicholas Kristof cited the Trumps’ former building
superintendent who said he was told to code rental applications with a “C” for colored, which would flag the office to reject the application. The Trumps only rented to “Jews and executives,” not blacks, according to a rental agent.

Kip Brown, a former Trump casino owner, told the New Yorker, “When Donald and [former wife] Ivana came to the casino, the bosses would order all the black people off the floor. . . . They put us all in the back.”

In his 1991 book, John O’Donnell, former president of the Trump Plaza Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City, quoted Donald Trump as saying “laziness is a trait in blacks. It really is, I believe that. It’s not anything they can control.”

The ‘Mexican’ Judge

Trump’s racial animus is not confined to African-Americans. He has vowed to deport 11 million undocumented immigrants, calling Mexican immigrants “in many cases, criminals, drug dealers, rapists”; build a wall on the southern U.S. border to keep people out; and temporarily forbid Muslims from entering the United States.

At one of his rallies, Trump condescendingly pointed to a black man in the crowd, saying, “Oh, look at my African-American over here – look at him.”

And Trump denounced Gonzalo Curiel, a well-respected federal judge of Mexican heritage who is presiding over a lawsuit in San Diego filed by people claiming they were scammed by Trump University. After Curiel unsealed documents, Trump declared that Curiel had “an absolute conflict” that should disqualify him from the case. Trump’s reason: “He is a Mexican,” adding, “I’m building a wall. It’s an inherent conflict of interest.”

Trump’s overriding theme, “Make America Great Again,” is a euphemism for “Make America White Again.” Indeed, Trump was a founder of the birther movement, whose aim was to discredit Barack Obama by claiming he was born in Kenya, thus stoking racist attacks throughout his presidency. That movement evolved into the Trump for president campaign, which is steeped in racial hatred.

As Sen. Elizabeth Warren said in her speech at the Democratic National Convention, Trump pits blacks against whites, reminiscent of what occurred during the era of Jim Crow. She quoted Dr. Martin Luther King’s remarks about how poor white workers in the South were told, “No matter how bad off he was, at least he was a white man, better than the black man,” noting, “Racial hatred was part of keeping the powerful on top.”

Trump is sexist as well as racist. His comments about women reveal his misogyny. He has referred to women as “dog,” “fat pig,” “slob,” “degenerate” and
“disgusting animal.” And Trump disgustingly said of Megan Kelly, “You could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever.”

The GOP nominee has no more respect for the disabled than he does for women, workers and people of color, publicly mocking a reporter with a disability.

And although he declared in his acceptance speech that he would “protect our LGBTQ citizens from the violence and oppression of a hateful foreign ideology,” Trump said nothing about protecting them from the hateful ideology within the United States.

The next president may fill three or four seats on the Supreme Court. Trump has vowed to nominate justices like Antonin Scalia, who said during oral argument in the affirmative action case, Fisher v. University of Texas, that he was not “impressed by the fact that the University of Texas may have fewer” black students.

Scalia added, “Maybe it ought to have fewer. I don’t think it stands to reason that it’s a good thing for the University of Texas to admit as many blacks as possible.”

Scalia opposed reproductive rights, universal health care, same-sex marriage, affirmative action, voting rights, immigrants’ rights, labor rights, LGBT rights and environmental protection. Trump, who has said he will pick his judicial nominations from lists drawn up by the Heritage Foundation and the Federalist Society, could move the high court radically to the right for decades to come.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously said he hoped his children would not be judged by the color of their skin, but rather “by the content of their character.” Donald Trump’s character is racist, sexist, and just downright mean. A Trump presidency would pose an unimaginable danger to the people of this country.

Democrats Adopt a More Progressive Tone

At the Democratic National Convention, some tough-guy/gal militaristic talk has prompted floor shouts of “no more war,” while most domestic policy rhetoric has been markedly progressive, say Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

Shoot if you must these old grey heads, but these two semi-qualified observers of the passing political scene watched Monday night’s proceedings at the Democratic National Convention and saw past the heckles and opprobrium of the leather-lunged few.

Instead, we witnessed an evening of progressive rhetoric and thoughtfulness unseen on a big political stage since the days of William Jennings Bryan, Wisconsin’s Fighting Bob La Follette, the Happy Warrior Al Smith and the crusaders of FDR’s New Deal. Not to mention Hubert Humphrey, Jesse Jackson, Shirley Chisholm, and a host of others who though history kept beating the drums for ordinary people against the organized might of Big Money.

Progressive big hitters were out on the field Monday and they successfully swung for the fences. Michelle Obama, Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders were batting like the Yankees’ legendary Murderers Row, aided and abetted by such powerful players as Representatives Keith Ellison and Raúl Grijalva, Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney and U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley.

Michelle Obama was elegant and forceful as she looked back at her family’s years in the White House and endorsed Hillary Clinton.

“I want someone with the proven strength to persevere,” she said. “Someone who knows this job and takes it seriously. Someone who understands that the issues a president faces are not black and white and cannot be boiled down to 140 characters. Because when you have the nuclear codes at your fingertips and the military in your command, you can’t make snap decisions. You can’t have a thin skin or a tendency to lash out. You need to be steady, and measured, and well-informed.”

Could anyone watching not feel a tingle down the spine as this remarkable woman traced the great arc of American history? We only prayed grandchildren were listening as she said that the story of America is “the story of generations of people who felt the lash of bondage, the shame of servitude, the sting of segregation, but who kept on striving and hoping and doing what needed to be done so that today, I wake up every morning in a house that was built by slaves?—? and I watch my daughters?—?two beautiful, intelligent, black young women?—?
playing with their dogs on the White House lawn. And because of Hillary Clinton, my daughters — and all our sons and daughters? — now take for granted that a woman can be president of the United States.”

Elizabeth Warren did what only she can do, deconstructing the charade that is Donald Trump.

“Trump thinks he can win votes by fanning the flames of fear and hatred,” she said. “By turning neighbor against neighbor. By persuading you that the real problem in America is your fellow Americans — people who don’t look like you, or don’t talk like you, or don’t worship like you… That’s Donald Trump’s America. An America of fear and hate. An America where we all break apart…

“When we turn on each other, bankers can run our economy for Wall Street, oil companies can fight off clean energy, and giant corporations can ship the last good jobs overseas. When we turn on each other, we can’t unite to fight back against a rigged system. Well, I’ve got news for Donald Trump. The American people are not falling for it.”

And then the hour belonged to Bernie Sanders. As he endorsed Clinton, he was gracious in defeat: “I understand that many people here in this convention hall and around the country are disappointed about the final results of the nominating process. I think it’s fair to say that no one is more disappointed than I am. But to all of our supporters — here and around the country — I hope you take enormous pride in the historical accomplishments we have achieved.

“Together, my friends, we have begun a political revolution to transform America and that revolution — Our Revolution — continues. Election days come and go. But the struggle of the people to create a government which represents all of us and not just the 1 percent — a government based on the principles of economic, social, racial and environmental justice — that struggle continues. And I look forward to being part of that struggle with you.”

Then and there, the old socialist from Vermont liberated Democrats to be the champions of everyday people again.

Choking on Big Money

If only — and it’s a big if — if only the party can liberate itself from the stranglehold of Big Money. For off camera, out of sight and (for the moment) out of mind, one could sense the corrupting presence of the lobbyists of corporate America, the bag men of special interests, and the mercenaries there in Philadelphia with hefty infusions of campaign cash eager to bring the Democrats down from the ramparts of Les Mis and back to cold, cynical earth.
Monday, we saw spirit and passion, ideas and aspirations, inspiring language, diversity (1,182 black delegates — as opposed to the GOP’s 18 — and 2,887 women), values, even the tears of Bernie’s supporters and yes, the willingness to join forces to defeat Trump.

But those progressive voices ringing out so beautifully that night are the very ones fighting to free their party from the grip of millionaires and billionaires while at the same time the Clinton forces embrace the one-tenth of one percent represented by the multi-billionaire and former Republican Mayor of New York Mike Bloomberg. He spoke at the convention on Wednesday night, part of the Clinton effort to give moderate members of the GOP another reason to dump Trump. Nonetheless, the optics are less than great.

We took time from the grace notes of unity and collaboration sounded at the convention to look over those Democratic National Committee emails dumped on the eve of the convention by WikiLeaks, communications that reveal just how low party fundraisers will stoop for cash, promising contributors access to the White House and other higher-ups in exchange for their donations.

In The Washington Post this week, Matea Gold wrote, “The leaked emails reveal the relentless art of donor maintenance that undergirds the system: the flattery, cajoling and favor-bestowing that goes into winning rich supporters. It’s a practice that the party fundraisers themselves often find dispiriting.”

To which Nicholas Confessore and Steve Eder at The New York Times added, “As is common in national politics, Democratic staff members kept detailed track of every dollar contributed by targeted donors, aiming to get each of the wealthiest givers to ‘max out,’ or contribute the maximum legal amount to each party account. The biggest national donors were the subject of entire dossiers, as fund-raisers tried to gauge their interests, annoyances and passions.”

Avarice is bipartisan, as has been seen at both this year’s Republican and Democratic conventions. For the first time, both parties received no public money for their conventions so they were completely beholden to private funding. What’s more, Democrats reversed previous policy and lifted a ban on corporate and lobbying dollars to pay for their big soiree.

“After those limits were lifted,” Matea Gold noted, soon-to-be-former DNC Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz “and other top party officials showered corporate lobbyists with calls, emails and personal meetings seeking convention support and PAC contributions to the party, according to a spreadsheet logging the contacts.” This year’s sponsors include Lockheed Martin, Home Depot, AT&T, Xerox, Twitter, Microsoft and Facebook.
While in Philadelphia, according to Confessore and Eder, “Donors who raise $1.25 million for the party – or who give $467,000 – are entitled to priority booking in a top hotel, nightly access to V.I.P. lounges and an ‘exclusive roundtable and campaign briefing with high-level Democratic officials,’ according to a promotional brochure obtained by The Times.”

And then there’s this report by Megan R. Wilson at the Washington paper, The Hill: “Presumptive Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton has accepted more than $9 million in bundled donations from registered lobbyists, while the DNC has rolled back the lobbyist bans that Obama put into place.

“In 2008 and 2012, there was no integration with the [Obama] campaign,’ said Al Mottur, a senior Democratic lobbyist at Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, adding that he would have liked to have helped. ‘Now, the campaign is welcoming – they’re open to us. That’s why I’ve done as much work for her as I’ve done on her behalf.’”

It’s an old story. Candidates seek the votes of citizens only to turn around and promise the only real access to donors. And once again representative government is disrupted because the winners so rarely govern as they campaigned. They can’t, because they are tethered to the demands, claims and tendered IOUs of the rich and privileged.

That the system is so rigged has been a major theme of the Sanders campaign, and on Monday, it was reiterated by both Sanders and Warren as each called for the overturning of Citizens United and other court decisions that have flooded politics with money at a level beyond imagination.

In her acceptance speech Thursday night, Hillary Clinton doubtless will say similar things and praise the progressive gospel of campaign finance reform, professing to shun the appeasement of Wall Street – the big banks, hedge fund managers, and private equity oligarchs.

All well and good, but if her actions and her party’s continue to prove otherwise, the rousing rhetoric of this week – and the historic nomination of the first woman as a presidential nominee –may fade to insignificance as an angry, disillusioned, and despairing public opens the door wide for the phony “I’m so rich I can’t be bought off” gospel of Donald J. Trump. Caveat emptor.

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Coups Inside NATO: A Disturbing History

Exclusive: Turkey’s embattled President Erdogan suspects U.S. sympathy for the failed coup if not outright assistance to the coup plotters, a belief that has some basis in history, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

The Turkish government’s strong suspicion that Washington sympathized with or covertly backed the recent failed military coup – even if completely unfounded – may seriously damage the Western alliance.

After all, the preamble to the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty emphasizes the determination of the signing countries “to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.”

Emphasizing the high political stakes for the alliance, India’s former Ambassador to Turkey M. K. Bhadrakumar recently declared that the “Turkish allegation has no precedent in NATO’s 67-year old history – of one member plotting regime change in another member country through violent means.”

But the assumption that NATO has always before respected peaceful political change within its ranks is false. The historical record – which may fuel Turkish paranoia – suggests that anti-communist solidarity within the alliance has too often taken precedence over the fine democratic sentiments endorsed in NATO’s founding document.

Before this summer’s botched attempt, for example, Turkey previously experienced military coups in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997. Comforted by the staunch anti-communism of its military, U.S. officials rarely batted an eye when Turkish officers took charge. In some cases, Washington may have had foreknowledge of the plots.

The 1960 coup was engineered by Colonel Alparslan Türkes, reportedly a liaison officer to the CIA and founder of a NATO-backed “counter-guerrilla” paramilitary organization.

After that coup, which led to mass purges of judges, prosecutors and
universities, the New York Times called it “gratifyingly reassuring” that “the new rulers declare that they remain completely loyal to the United Nations and to both NATO and CENTO.”

Following the bloody 1980 coup, a story in the New York Times noted, “Officials in Turkish military circles privately suggested recently that the armed forces would not intervene unless they received prior approval from Washington.”

US-Driven Regime Change

In this article, I examine two other military interventions within the democratic heart of NATO: the Greek military coup of 1967 and the attempted overthrow of the Italian government in 1970. Both cases offer disturbing evidence of U.S. support.

While official U.S. complicity in the two events remains unproven, even skeptical historians concede the possibility that “unofficial” agents of the U.S. government convinced coup leaders that Washington would welcome the downfall of left-leaning parliamentary parties. Both violent episodes illustrate the dangerous impact of America’s zealous pursuit of narrow ideological ends at the expense of democracy.

Greece, 1967

On April 21, 1967, in the birthplace of Western democracy, right-wing army officers seized the Greek parliament, royal palace, key communications centers and all major political leaders — a total of more than 10,000 people. Apparently following a NATO-designed plan for military control of Greece in the event of an internal security threat, they suspended the constitution, dissolved political parties, established military courts, and set up torture centers that inflicted terrible cruelty on thousands of detainees.

Despite condemnation by other European powers, the ruthless Greek junta held onto power until 1974. It fell only after sponsoring a reckless coup against the government of Cyprus, which prompted Turkey to invade and occupy much of the island.

Many if not most Greeks, particularly those on the left, blamed Washington for the 1967 coup. And no wonder: the United States had been intervening in Greek affairs since the late 1940s, starting with the campaign to suppress communist insurgents after World War II. The United States built military bases, brought Greece into NATO, and trained Greece’s military and intelligence forces.

By 1953, U.S. ambassador to Athens John Peurifoy could boast that “U.S. leadership [in Greece] has been respected more highly and followed more
unquestioningly than elsewhere in Europe or in most parts of the world. If we are able and willing to continue some support for these purposes, through a combination of all the various means and techniques available to us, we shall have no difficulty in maintaining our preeminent position and influence in Greece."

(A year later, Peurifoy would coordinate a CIA-backed coup against the democratically elected government of Guatemala.)

U.S. influence was clearly waning by 1964, however, when the left-leaning Center Union Party and its prime minister, George Papandreou, scored an electoral victory. Papandreou resigned a year later after a dispute with the country’s conservative king, but he and his fiery son Andreas were poised to win a substantial victory in the May 1967 elections.

**Fearing the Left**

As one senior American intelligence officer told reporter Laurence Stern, “There was growing concern in our embassy that in an election Papandreou would win and Andreas would become the dominant figure. He had become increasingly anti-American. He was charging openly that Greece had lost her sovereignty to NATO which was an instrument of United States policy. He attacked the United States, KYP [the Greek Central Intelligence Agency], and CIA. We were concerned that if Papandreou won, Andreas would be in the driver’s seat for all practical purposes. He would withdraw Greece from NATO and evacuate the United States bases . . .”

The CIA proposed spending a few hundred thousand dollars on a covert program to help swing the Greek election to more conservative candidates. Although the Agency was at that very time doing much the same thing in countries ranging from Chile to Japan, senior officials in the Johnson administration worried about security risks and rejected the plan.

Meanwhile, the CIA began hearing reports of coup plots by the king and senior military officials to block a left-wing electoral victory. The CIA certainly had the best of sources: the leader of the April coup, Lt. Col. Georgios Papadopoulos, served as liaison officer between the Greek KYP and the CIA, and reportedly had been on the CIA’s payroll since 1952.

Along with senior officials in Washington, the U.S. ambassador opposed a coup, writing, “What we don’t need in NATO now is a Greek military dictatorship.” But not everyone on the “country team” was a team player.

As former embassy political officer Robert Keeley observed, “There is a possibility that one or more lower level people, particularly some Greek-
Americans who worked in the intelligence services, both military and civilian, knew about [the coup] in advance, because they were very sympathetic to the Colonels and their approach. These staffers were very conservative, very anti-communist, fearful of the Papandreous regaining power; one might say even anti-democratic in some respects. It is possible that they knew about the Colonels’ plot and . . . colluded with the Colonels by not passing on information which would have enabled us to predict the coup.”

**A Hard-Line CIA Officer**

Keeley was almost certainly referring to the Greek-American CIA officer Gust Avrakotos, who “had made it his business to get to know the colonels,” according to George Crile, author of *Charlie Wilson’s War*. “He drank and whored with them, and they knew from the heart that he shared their ferocious anticommunism.”

After the colonels arrested Andreas Papandreou by threatening to put a bullet in the head of his 14-year-old son, the U.S. embassy instructed Avrakotos to tell the military to let Papandreou leave the country. Avrakotos conveyed the message, but added: “Unofficially, as your friend, my advice is to shoot the motherfucker because he’s going to come back to haunt you.”

Crile continued, “For the next seven years, the colonels insisted on dealing with Avrakotos as their principal American contact. Ostensibly he worked for the Department of the Army as a civilian liaison to the Greek military. He moved freely in and out of their offices. He took them out on his boat at night and for picnics and outings on weekends. He was, for all practical purposes, an invisible member of the ruling junta.”

One leading historian of the coup, while denying any official U.S. role, conceded, “Given the lack of evidence on covert activities in Greece, facilitated in part by the CIA’s decision to not unseal its records on this incident, it remains possible that covert operatives, especially rogue agents affiliated with the United States, played some kind of role in the colonels’ coup.”

Moreover, despite its official disapproval, Washington learned to live with military rule. By 1968, the United States resumed military aid to the dictatorship, rationalizing – in the words of Defense Secretary Clark Clifford – that “the obligations imposed on us by the NATO alliance are far more important than the kind of government they have in Greece or what we think of it.” He evidently forgot to read the bit about NATO’s obligation to safeguard freedom and democracy.

And after the election of President Nixon, the Pentagon stepped up secret arms
Shipments to Greece as relations between the White House and Athens became almost chummy. In the fall of 1968, Nixon’s vice presidential running mate, Greek-American Spiro Agnew, gave a speech lauding the junta and branding its opponents as communist tools.

A crusading Greek journalist later revealed that the KYP had secretly funneled more than half a million dollars in illegal cash to the Nixon-Agnew campaign through Thomas Pappas, a conservative Greek-American businessman and admitted CIA agent. Another sign of the times: as the CIA station chief prepared to leave Athens in 1972, he invited nearly every member of the junta to his farewell party.

Years later, President Bill Clinton did his best to repair the damage to America’s reputation among the millions of Greeks who suffered under the dictatorship. Addressing business and community leaders in Athens in November 1999, Clinton conceded that after the military seized power in 1967, “the United States allowed its interests in prosecuting the Cold War to prevail over its interest – I should say its obligation – to support democracy, which was, after all, the cause for which we fought the Cold War. It is important that we acknowledge that.”

Italy, 1970

Leaders of the Greek coup had strong fascist leanings, and zealously exported their ideology. Among their first international guests were dozens of Italian neo-fascist students and activists. Their liaison officer was Kostas Plevris, a KYP officer and Greek neo-fascist leader.

Some of the returning Italians are suspected of joining ardent terrorists who engaged in a wave of bombings that rocked Italy throughout 1969 and into 1970, killing and wounding dozens of people. Many of those attacks were falsely attributed to anarchists and leftists, as part of a “strategy of tension” to build political support for an authoritarian crackdown on the Left by Italy’s security services.

The strategy culminated on the night of Dec. 7, 1970 with a Greek-inspired coup plot led by Prince Junio Valerio Borghese, a neo-fascist leader. During World War II, Borghese had led an elite commando squad that murdered anti-fascist partisans for Mussolini and the Nazis. He was rescued after the war by a senior American intelligence officer who maintained close relations over the years with Borghese – even after he became honorary president of Italy’s official fascist party.

In 1964 Borghese plotted with senior members of Italian military intelligence to
stage a failed coup. In 1969, he took the lead in planning another coup with extreme rightists and several powerful Mafia bosses. He also cultivated sympathizers in the military, including a number of key commanders of the armed forces and intelligence services. Most prominent among them was the head of Italy’s military intelligence agency, General Vito Miceli.

Finally, on “Tora Tora” night, named after the Japanese attack code for Pearl Harbor, Borghese and his confederates assembled hundreds of militants with plans to seize weapons from the Interior Ministry’s armory and descend on Rome.

Aborted Coup

At the last minute, for reasons never explained, the plot was aborted. Borghese fled to Fascist Spain to escape justice. Italian intelligence officials dismissed the affair as a trivial incident, until prosecutors took a closer look and finally arrested General Miceli and an army general, among other participants, in 1974. (Eventually released, Miceli became a member of parliament representing Italy’s fascist party.)

A confession by one of Borghese’s top aides implicated an American engineer and CIA agent named Hugh Fenwich. According to the aide, Fenwich had close ties to the Republican Party and called President Nixon on the evening of the coup.

He also revealed that an Italian-American businessman, Pier Francesco Talenti, had made his fleet of buses available to the coup participants. Borghese’s aide claimed that Talenti was the chief intermediary between the Nixon White House and the Borghese plotters.

Significantly, just two weeks after the coup attempt, Talenti met with Deputy National Security Adviser Alexander Haig to offer a dire assessment of Italian politics. He stirred up the White House with his warning that the situation in Italy could soon resemble that of Chile – where a Socialist had just been elected president – and that the United States must prevent the Communists from gaining power.

Talenti is something of a mystery man. He was naturalized as a U.S. citizen in 1961. He appears to have been a representative in Italy of a major American manufacturing company, Fairbanks-Morse. He developed relations with the CIA (and the American mafia) in the early 1960s.

In the mid-1980s, he popped up in the United States, named in a major scandal implicating members of the Reagan administration, where he worked with “ethnic and minority groups.” In 1996, after losing a long series of legal battles, Talenti sued the Italian government for $5.4 billion to compensate for the loss of his properties stemming from the “trumped up charges” of his involvement in
the Borghese coup plot.

Journalist Tim Weiner calls him “an Italian American industrialist with fascist tendencies and a vast family estate in Rome” who raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for Nixon’s campaigns from wealthy supporters in Italy. There is no question that Talenti knew President Nixon personally and worked “extensively” on his 1968 presidential campaign. He was a guest at a White House dinner in 1971. For the 1972 election, he was a regional chairman — and colleague of co-chairman Thomas Pappas — of the Finance Committee to Re-Elect the President.

Weiner also reports that Talenti engineered the appointment of Graham Martin, a hard-line conservative and former Army colonel, as Nixon’s ambassador to Italy: “Talenti went to see Colonel Alexander M. Haig, Jr., Kissinger’s military aide, to deliver a warning that the socialists were on the verge of taking power in Italy and a proposal that a new American ambassador was needed to counter the left. He named Martin, and his message went right to the top.”

**Seeking CIA Support**

Kissinger took Talenti’s warnings seriously enough in the fall of 1969 to appoint a special group within the National Security Council to “study the implications for US policy of possible Communist entry of the Italian Government.”

In late 1970, Talenti weighed in again with Haig, proposing that the United States spend $8 million on a covert campaign to undercut the Left. “The U.S. government should not hesitate to resort to corruption in its own interest,” he declared.

The administration’s response, orchestrated by Ambassador Martin and the CIA station chief in Rome, was to spend millions of dollars to back leaders of the conservative Christian Democratic party, and millions more to support far-right politicians and neo-fascist activists. Martin’s covert spending totaled about $10 million.

After the Borghese coup failed, Martin dismissed it as a “childish operation.” However, in a “sealed eyes only” message to Kissinger he acknowledged that “two of the five individuals taken into custody had been in touch with some senior military officers” who worried that their own coup plots, “peripherally connected with Borghese, may now come to light.” He reported that the unnamed officers were considering “accelerating their planning for a military take-over of the government.”

Martin also asked about rumors he was hearing of secret contacts between certain Italian military leaders and the White House. Kissinger responded that his
office was getting reports from “high-level” military contacts in Italy and that Talenti had informed the NSC of the military’s “restiveness,” but he added that “no one in the White House has, to my knowledge, done more than listen to these reports.”

Rather than discourage such plotting, Martin actually financed it. In 1972, with apparent approval from both Nixon and Kissinger, he secretly paid $800,000 to General Miceli, the fascist head of Italian military intelligence and admitted colleague of the “Black Prince” Borghese.

According to a fascist member of parliament, Talenti arranged for the money to be passed in turn to the head of Italy’s neo-fascist party, to pressure the Christian Democrats not to move left.

Talenti and Miceli weren’t the only Italian neo-fascists with close connections to the Nixon administration. Seven months after the Borghese coup attempt, the New York Times observed that its most “disquieting facet” was “the implied military participation.” It quoted Luigi Turchi, a fascist deputy and member of the parliamentary defense committee, as saying his party had many supporters “in the army, in the carabinieri, in the police.”

U.S. Links

The story then reported Turchi’s remarkable connections to the United States: “He is one of the few neo-Fascist leaders who has been to the United States. ‘I campaigned for Richard Nixon all over the country,’ he says, ‘and I think helped swing many of the Italo-American votes which were decisive in electing him.’ . . .

“Some of his gestures seem to be copied from Nixon, whose photo, signed with a dedication, is on his wall, next to those of Franco and Perón. Turchi likes Nixon because Turchi is convinced that the Republican party is inclined to do more for Italy than the Democrats – i.e. to block any opening by the Italian Government toward the Communists. Turchi . . . blames Kennedy and the Democrats for permitting the establishment of Center-Left governments in Italy in the early sixties.

“Turchi took an active part in a recent neo-Fascist-sponsored demonstration for solidarity with the armed forces that was called a danger signal by Il Giorno of Milan. ‘One cannot remain different,’ wrote the paper, ‘when one sees two former chiefs of staff of the Democratic Republic side by side with the friends of Borghese in the middle of a crowd which is shouting, ‘We want the colonels.’”

Multiple other strands of evidence suggest that various U.S. representatives winked at anti-communist plotters in Italy during the politically volatile years
of the early 1970s.

One such plotter, Count Edgardo Sogno, told in his memoirs of visiting the CIA station chief in Rome in 1974 to give advance notice of an impending coup and gauge Washington’s reaction.

“He answered what I already knew: the United States would have supported any initiative tending to keep the communists out of government,” Sogno wrote.

During a trial of right-wing extremists accused of a terrorist bombing in Milan in 1969, a former head of military counter-intelligence, General Gianadelio Maletti, suggested that U.S. intelligence agents might have provided the explosives, in order to support the “strategy of tension” in Italy.

“The CIA, following the directives of its government, wanted to create an Italian nationalism capable of halting what it saw as a slide to the left and, for this purpose, it may have made use of rightwing terrorism,” Maletti testified.

Telling Tales

President Jimmy Carter’s popular ambassador to Italy, Richard Gardner, also lent official credence to these stories in his memoir, Mission Italy:

“President Nixon’s resignation in the Watergate scandal . . . severely tarnished the image and prestige of the United States. Revelations that the Lockheed Corporation had bribed Italian government officials to help sell aircraft to the Italian armed forces made matters worse.

“But most serious of all was the widespread perception in Italy that the U.S. Embassy in Rome from 1969 to 1976 during the Nixon and Ford administrations had tried to fight Italian Communism by working with some of the most reactionary elements in Italian political life, sometimes helping them with covert financing.”

Gardner related that his predecessor, Graham Martin, “seemed to believe a Communist takeover of Italy was imminent” and relied for advice on a vehemently anti-communist Mafia financier who was later convicted of bank fraud: “He was also profoundly influenced by an extreme right-wing Republican Party representative in Italy, Pier Talenti. Martin . . . devised a secret program to finance centrist and ultra-right-wing politicians . . . This program was revealed by congressional investigations and further damaged America’s reputation in Italy.”

In an oral history, Gardner similarly noted that Ambassador Martin “poured vast
amounts of money into the pockets of right-wing politicians, including the head of the secret services of Italy, a well-known neo-fascist, who was later implicated in a plot to take over the country by force, by somebody named Prince Borghese, a real right-wing nut.

“The other major influence on Graham Martin was a man named Pier Talenti, a great friend of Nixon’s, a Nixon fundraiser, who was an Italian-American who lived in Italy. He was brought to trial by the Italian government for implication in this subversive plot.”

The stories behind U.S. involvement with right-wing military coups and plots in the heart of Western Europe should warn us that a foreign policy based on secret, anti-democratic interventions can corrupt and undermine the very allies we have pledged to defend in the name of democracy.

This history has also left a long-lasting stain on America’s credibility as a champion of freedom. The United States may well pay a heavy political price if our dark history fuels Turkish claims of Washington’s complicity in this summer’s failed military coup.

Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international affairs, including The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War and the International Drug Traffic (Stanford University Press, 2012). Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were “Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions”; “Neocons Want Regime Change in Iran”; “Saudi Cash Wins France’s Favor”; “The Saudis’ Hurt Feelings”; “Saudi Arabia’s Nuclear Bluster”; “The US Hand in the Syrian Mess”; and “Hidden Origins of Syria’s Civil War.”

The Fear of Hillary’s Foreign Policy

Hillary Clinton’s nominating convention has focused on domestic issues, but her foreign policy has many anti-war Democrats worried, as she surrounds herself with neocons and liberal hawks, writes James W Carden from Philadelphia.

By James W Carden

The Democratic convention leaves one with an uneasy sense of déjà vu about the potential foreign policy direction of a second Clinton presidency. We’ve seen this movie before and we know how it turns out: badly.

The mood among some of the Democratic Party’s foreign policy cognoscenti here is one of an unadulterated smugness bred of certainty mixed with a sense of global
entitlement. One Democratic U.S. senator lamented to a roomful of well-heeled donors and foreign policy experts on Monday that the U.S. had “lost” Ukraine. Lost? Was it ever America’s to begin with?

Yet the Democratic Party’s foreign policy elites are certain that that is so. They are also certain Donald Trump is dead wrong about everything; they are certain NATO is the “cornerstone” of American national security and therefore any criticism of the alliance is “dangerous”; and many are certain that the Republican nominee is the Kremlin’s very own Manchurian candidate.

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton may well be the most qualified candidate for the nation’s highest office since George H.W. Bush, but there the comparisons end. Clinton is not running to extend the Obama legacy (whatever that may be) but to extend the Clinton legacy, and this should worry us deeply.

The foreign policy legacy of the first Clinton administration is this: foreign interventions on the flimsiest of “humanitarian” pretexts. Clinton redux looks to be a continuation of the 1990s, a period that the mainstream media portrays through rose-colored lenses as a time of peace and prosperity for all. But what was it, really?

In foreign policy, it was a period in which liberal hawks like Madeleine Albright, Richard Holbrooke, Strobe Talbott and Samuel Berger took the reins of the foreign policy apparatus and abandoned the mostly nuanced realism of the George H.W. Bush administration. It launched a crusade to spread “democracy” and “open markets” abroad which, in practice, amounted to isolating Russia, relegating America’s European allies into vassals and immiserating the developing world.


Yet, rather than undertake serious steps to find and capture Al Qaeda’s Osama bin Laden after the bombing of the Khobar Towers (1996) and the USS Cole (2000), President Bill Clinton did little more than fire a tomahawk missile into a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. He repeatedly allowed the Saudis to block FBI Director Louis Freeh’s investigation into the Khobar Towers bombing which killed 19 servicemen and wounded 350.

Contributing to Disaster

Under neoconservative pressure – including from Robert Kagan’s and William Kristol’s Project for the New American Century – Clinton signed the Iraq
Liberation Act (1998) which helped set the stage for the Bush administration’s disastrous decision to invade Iraq in 2003.

Meanwhile, Clinton embarked on a series of policies in the former Soviet Union which have had dire consequences. The decision to expand NATO by the alliance at its 1994 summit in Brussels came only 12 months into the Clinton presidency and only 24 months after the Soviet Union dissolved itself and peacefully disbanded its own military alliance, the Warsaw Pact.

What Russia did in those 24 months to merit the alliance’s expansion to include its own former allies and protectorates remains a mystery. Indeed, by expanding NATO, Clinton and his team not only went against the advice offered by scores of distinguished Russian experts, savvy politicians and foreign policy thinkers, Clinton also sought to tie the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus to the United States.

All this took place while Clinton studiously ignored the grotesque abuses of power by Russian President Boris Yeltsin. “Good ol’ Boris,” as Clinton liked to call him, bombed the democratically elected Russian parliament in 1993, stole the 1996 election with the help of American political advisers and pseudo-academics, and launched a barbaric war in Chechnya, while simultaneously raiding the state treasury and enriching the circle of thieves around him.

It was Yeltsin who subverted Russia’s burgeoning democracy, not his successor, Vladimir Putin. And he did it all with Clinton’s help.

A Hillary Clinton presidency will more likely than not be a faithful replication of her husband’s tenure. Her record as Secretary of State speaks to the kind of foreign policy she will pursue. She continually sought to embroil the U.S. in the Syrian civil war (2011-present), and pushed President Obama to unleash NATO forces in helping to overturn the Libyan government (2011) which cleared the path for ISIS to build dangerous footholds in both countries.

Whenever the option was between military action and serious diplomacy, the nation’s chief diplomat would invariably opt for the former, as when she forcefully lobbied the President to send more troops to Afghanistan (2009).

**Surrounded by Hawks**

As a candidate she has surrounded herself with liberal hawks, like former State Department Policy Planning chief Jake Sullivan and former the Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul. She has also smothered the neoconservative establishment in a warm embrace. Leading members of the neocon tribe like Eliot A. Cohen and Max Boot have signaled that “they’re with Her” and on July 21 in Washington, D.C.’s tony Logan Circle neighborhood, leading neocon Robert Kagan and former
Biden adviser Julianne Smith spoke on Clinton’s behalf at a fundraiser.

A source who attended the Logan Circle soiree told me that Smith cited an outgoing memo to President Obama from Secretary Clinton which warned him of the danger of unchecked “Russian aggression.” Smith claimed that as someone who saw “Hillary in action,” that “it was the Secretary who pushed President Obama the hardest on checking Russian aggression.” Smith, according to my source, credited Clinton with pushing Obama “to turn up the heat on Putin.”

This effort by then-Secretary of State Clinton to “turn up the heat” on Putin, it should be noted predates the 2014 crisis in Ukraine by well over a year and predates Russia’s annexation of Crimea (which occurred after a referendum in which Crimea’s voters, by a 96 percent margin, called for leaving Ukraine and rejoining Russia). In other words, if what Smith says is true, Clinton was actively working to subvert the “re-set policy” of which she was ostensibly in charge!

Hillary 2016: change you can’t (and shouldn’t) believe in.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s “Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a Neocon.”]

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Poverty Protests at RNC/DNC Conventions

For decades, Democrats like Republicans have shied away from talking much about poverty, but America’s severe income inequality has made the plight of the poor a national crisis, notes Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

True concern about the plight of America’s poor and disenfranchised has been low on the priority lists of both the Republican and Democratic parties for many years, a challenge that Cheri Honkala, a long-time warrior for the poor and disenfranchised, has taken to the two conventions in Cleveland and Philadelphia.

As National Coordinator of the Poor Peoples’ Economic Human Rights Campaign and the founder of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, Honkala participated a Poor
People’s March through the streets of Cleveland at the Republican National Convention and, from her home base in Philadelphia, sought to bring the same issues to the Democratic National Convention.

I caught up with her in Cleveland on July 22 as she was poised to march through heavily guarded streets at the Republican convention “to send a strong message that we are against the racists and inhumane policies of the Republican National Committee, and are outraged at the idea of having Trump or Hillary for president in this country.”

Dennis Bernstein: What kind of a president do you think Trump would make? How do you think he would impact on the poor?

Cheri Honkala: Well, [...] in all seriousness, if Trump becomes our president, we have to begin to get serious about organizing soldiers across this country to organize the New American Spring. Because we are currently not surviving in this country. And if either Trump or Hillary are elected, we’re in big trouble.

And, so, we are out here on the streets. We are not going to be afraid of the police. We’re not going to be afraid of, you know, people telling us that we have to choose one person of the lesser evil. We’re going to go forward and lift our voices, and envision a different kind of world. We’re going to make that new world.

DB: You’re about to lead this march...in Cleveland. Could you talk about what are some of the multiple struggles that poor people face, that you represent? What are the kinds of everyday struggles we’re talking about now?

CH: Well, a big thing that we’re dealing with now is the nonprofit industrial complex, where many mega-organizations are getting multi-million dollar budgets and still can’t find ways to house poor people in this country. And it’s a question of greed.

And we need so many things. Healthcare– we need single payer healthcare in this country. Most everybody I know, they are missing all of their back teeth because they had them pulled because they can’t afford the dentist. Our children can’t afford glasses. Adults are also going without glasses. I know somebody who had potential bladder cancer and the public health clinic didn’t pay for that.

Most everybody I know in Kensington [neighborhood in Philadelphia], especially single males, are living on less than two dollars a day, but sometimes go weeks without a dollar. So, there’s just no way to give justice, to describe what people are having to live with.

Not to mention that both of these major parties have allocated millions of
dollars to add to the police state. And we continue to see young black lives shot down around this country, and we cannot sit by just as spectators and watch these things.

I’m very hopeful because I know that, as a mom, mothers out there, they love their kids. And they’re not going to settle for a lower standard of living. It’s inhumane and non-Christian. We’re going to rise from the ashes and we’re going to change this thing around.

DB: Could you talk a little bit about the way in which things seem to be progressing against the poor? Many people who have been dealing with the authorities, in recent years, around poor and homelessness find there’s a move to really criminalize the poor, in a formal way. Could you tell us about that?

CH: In the 80’s, you know, there was actually like a little bit of consciousness, [it was] kinda trendy. But now, if you’re a poor person and you’re homeless and you’re on the corner and you put up a sign, you’re pretty much going to get a brick thrown at your head. They institutionalized the institution under the other Clinton, Bill Clinton, they ended welfare as you know it. And like in my neighborhood, the number one source of income used to be welfare, and now the number one source of income is drugs. And so if peoples’ lives are not exploitable, they’re expendable.

And this is not the kind of world that I want for my children. And I say world, because I also care what’s happening to the poor around the entire world. It’s not okay for us to just focus and think about and focus on the poor here in this country. Whoever becomes president in our country is going to have impact on poor folks throughout the world. And, I’m tired, I’m tired of having a Democrat or a Republican continue to bomb and kill people around the world. I think it’s time that we nurture and we give birth to an independent political party in this country.

It’s no secret that I was Jill Stein’s running mate in 2012. She’s being totally blacked out by the media. But I’m happy to see all the Bernie supporters that are flocking to Dr. Jill Stein, because people understand that we’re never going to change the position of the poor in this country if we continue to support Pepsi or Coke. And so we need to give our children more than corporate controlled political parties.

DB: Do you see the situation for the poor getting noticeably worse? Are there more families on the street? Are there more children who are hungry? Do you see this getting worse?

CH: Yeah, just the other day in Philadelphia there was a ten year old little
boy that died from a bowel obstruction. And he died because the Department of Human Services Child Protection had its certificate taken away, because of the horrible conditions that foster kids are living in, in Philadelphia. And so there’s people taking kids away from moms and then not monitoring the conditions that they’re living in. And it was a ten year old little boy’s life. He didn’t have to die.

And that’s pretty much the story for low-income families across this entire country. It’s our families that are feeling the bruises, it’s our families that are suffering from malnutrition. It’s our families that don’t have the health care. And I’ve been in this anti-poverty movement for over 30 years now. And whenever I think it can’t get any worse, it takes another dive.

And so, in my community, you’re seeing whole segments of people that are permanently unemployed. And, I guess, it’s really true what’s happening with electronics and technology, that people, labor is totally being replaced. You know, I respect the fight for 15 across the entire country, but the corporations have been busy having different automations so that they can replace even fast food workers. So we’ve got our work cut out for us. Either we take charge of our country or the corporations are going to take charge. And that’s as simple as it gets.

DB: And, you’re about the lead this march in Cleveland…

CH: In about 5 minutes; People are signaling for me to get off the phone.

DB: We appreciate your time. Before we say goodbye, tell us about your response to the massive show of force by law enforcement. Do you feel intimidated by the level of police, and various military forces that are there? Will you go ahead in spite of all kinds of threats that we hear about now?

CH: Yes, we should not be ruled by fear. It’s time to determine what we do in our lives and, as they say, we have to rage against the machine and go forward and take our country back. And that’s what people in front-line communities are planning to do.

DB: And you’re serious, you find no difference between a Hillary Clinton and a Donald Trump when it comes right down to the issues that affect the poor and disinherited in this country and around the world?

CH: Yeah. It’s going to be a painful process, but it’s time. All what we have to do is think about the poor that are dying in other parts of the world, and it’s very clear to us that our solidarity goes beyond the borders of this country. But that we actually care about what happens to families across the entire world. And so that means to not have somebody that supports war as our next
president. And so I’m not with her.

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

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**Trump as the Reagan Reboot**

**Exclusive:** Donald Trump’s pro-police-state acceptance speech must have appealed to many Americans, boosting him in the polls, but another secret to his success may be that he is a 2.0 reboot of Ronald Reagan, says JP Sottile.

By JP Sottile

The conventional wisdom says Donald Trump has turned presidential politics into a reality show. It’s an understandable diagnosis, particularly given his intentionally brassy persona and the professional wrestling-style antics he used to dispatch a motley crew of also-rans on this way to victory. Both were on display in Cleveland where — with the name “Trump” towering over him — the sole survivor triumphantly claimed the ultimate prize at the end of a year-long series.

If nothing else, this “reality show as politics” narrative helps pundits make sense of a candidacy they couldn’t predict and the establishment couldn’t control. It affords them the cold comfort of categorizing Trump as something totally new and completely foreign to American politics. But in America’s celebrity-obsessed matrix of infotainment, clickbait-n-switch “news” and the instant iBranding of everything, the more apt description of Trump’s presidential potboiler is not the reality show ... it’s the Hollywood reboot.

The “reboot” is the movie industry’s unimaginative answer to an increasingly cutthroat competition for both market share and brand relevance in an ever-more cynical marketplace (which sure sounds like the current political landscape). These 2.0 versions of anything and everything come at a time when the public’s sensibilities are dulled, their views are deeply jaded and their attention is divided by a dizzying array of on-demand options. In response, Hollywood seeks out proven hooks in the hope that garishly repackaged nostalgia will net a bountiful return on their mega-budget investments.

So, instead of banking on a new script or original idea, Hollywood takes a well-worn story and “sexes it up” with more of everything — more explosions, more sex, more twists, more turns, more shock and more schlock. Sometimes this
steroidal formula works. Many times it doesn’t. But it worked like a charm in the race for the Republican nomination. Much to the chagrin of “rock-ribbed” Conservatives, Donald Trump captured the GOP’s top spot by rebooting its most successful franchise — the Reagan Revolution.

The “HUUUGE” Reboot

The reboot was as simple as it was effective. Trump took a proven hook — the Reagan Revolution — and “pumped it up” with a relentless tweetstorm of tendentious tropes and a bomb-throwing rhetorical style that would make action-movie filmmaker Michael Bay blush. Like a seasoned — or cynical — Hollywood producer, Trump used political investments in himself, his own companies and those ubiquitous red hats to turn an old franchise into a new smash hit. Like so many of the films that have been rebooted in the whiz-bang era of computer animation, The Donald fills the screen like an action-packed, CGI-enhanced version of The Gipper.

Along the way he’s sexed-up Reagan’s Revolution with a barrage of attacks on the corrupt political system, on the media and on the turncoats in his own party. He’s wowed disillusioned Republicans and entreated embattled Reagan Democrats with explosive charges against China’s economic rapists, with dire warnings about cunning Mexican negotiators and with blanket condemnations of incompetent, perhaps even nefarious politicians.

As in all things, Trump has gone big. He cranked-up the volume on Reagan’s infamous 1980 “State’s Rights” dog whistle delivered by the Gipper at the Neshoba County Fair just outside Philadelphia, Mississippi, where three civil rights workers were murdered in 1964. But Reagan’s racially-tinged signal to economically struggling working-class whites, which some apologists ahistorically write-off as merely a theoretical flourish premised on libertarian principles, was too subtle for Trump.

Instead of blowing a dog-whistle — a nearly silent coded message only those attuned can actually hear — Trump took out a bullhorn to blare an unmistakable message about “rapists” and “bad Mexicans” whose criminal presence was an affront to both America’s traditions and very safety of natural-born Americans in their own homes and communities.

He’s also taken Reagan’s famous refrain that “Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem” and updated it for an America corroded not just by special interests and crony capitalism, but also by the idea that government itself is the enemy. Now it’s the politicians populating that government who are the villains. Only an Action Hero-in-Chief can save the voiceless people from treacherous lawmakers. Just so there would be no doubt, he
even landed in Cleveland to the theme music from the action-packed Harrison Ford hit “Air Force One.”

More Military Money

And it doesn’t stop there. Trump rebooted Reagan’s “Peace through Strength” mantra with expensive promises to “rebuild” a muscular military that is already far and away the world’s largest, most ubiquitous force. At least Reagan justified his build-up on a three decade-long Cold War against a nuclear-armed adversary. And it followed a post-Vietnam budgetary retreat in military spending. But Trump’s urge to overkill comes when the United States dwarfs the rest of the world in military reach and expenditures. He also plans to “bomb the shit” out of the Islamic State.

But wait, there’s more. Despite his mostly secular life and limited bona fides as a Christian, Trump sold himself to Evangelicals without a hint of Protestant humility. He purposefully sought out Jerry Falwell, Jr. to be the thin edge of his wedge into the Religious Right. It was Falwell the Elder who first marshaled his “Moral Majority” to act as foot-soldiers in Reagan’s Revolution. It was a brilliant end-run around then-President Jimmy Carter’s demonstrable Born Again credentials with Southern voters.

Since then, however, Republican Christians have grown disillusioned with the GOP’s failure to deliver on its promises. So, Trump rebooted the relationship with “the Evangelicals” by simply declaring his “love” for them … and bragging about their support for him. And in true reboot style, he pumped-up the Bible as the only book better than his own.

Of course, Trump’s biggest reboot was lifted directly from Reagan’s winning campaign when he successfully sold the idea of a crusade to make America great again at the 1980 GOP Convention. Trump has not only rebooted the line — which first appeared with Reagan’s face on buttons and posters — but he’s actually trademarked it and made it a popular culture mainstay. Sorry, Matt Taibbi. That isn’t “stupid.” That’s how you own it.

In fact, that’s exactly how you reboot it to match the era of human beings as brands. In today’s self-referential, social media-driven world, “owning it” is literally and figuratively the same thing. And because he is television incarnate … Trump knew in his bones that there is no such thing as bad publicity in the ratings-starved world of 24/7 cable news.

That’s why his reboot echoes the internet age cry for MOAR! — combining more and roar. He’s leveraged more bluster, more shocking headlines and more uncomfortably candid moments into more free media than any candidate has ever
secured in American history. In the business of politics it’s called “earned media” and Trump played the earned media game like a seasoned pro effortlessly hitting his marks.

The Reagan Pro

And that’s something you might’ve heard a commentator say about Reagan during the 1980 election when skeptics ridiculed and derided him as little more than a “Hollywood actor.” As Frank Rich pointed out in an exhaustive comparison, Reagan faced many of the same criticisms levied against Trump – as a lightweight, as ill-informed and even too dangerous to be near “the button.”

Even Republican National Committee Chair Reince Priebus drew that comparison on the eve of the convention in Cleveland, “... it’s the same thing that happened in 1980 when the bottom fell out of Carter, when people said, Ronald Reagan can be president, I can trust him, and I see him in the White House.”

Once there, Trump – like Reagan before him – will find “the best people” to get the job done. Trump’s daughter Ivanka made that case in her widely-hailed introductory speech. She trumpeted his singular ability to find the right people to do any job. This willingness to delegate was further elaborated in a disconcerting New York Times Magazine story about the eventual selection of Indiana Governor Mike Pence as his running mate. Pence was introduced in the same New York hotel where Reagan announced his Presidential run in 1979.

But, according to Robert Draper, Trump’s son Donald Jr. first offered the job to former foe and current Ohio Governor John Kasich. Trump the Younger told Kasich he’d be “the most powerful vice president in history.” That’s quite a statement in light of the infamous influence of Dick Cheney or G.H.W. Bush’s underestimated role in Reagan’s Administration.

Draper, quoting an unnamed source inside Kasich’s camp, writes, “When Kasich’s adviser asked how this would be the case, Donald Jr. explained that his father’s vice president would be in charge of domestic and foreign policy. Then what, the adviser asked, would Trump be in charge of? ‘Making America great again’ was the casual reply.”

Coincidentally, Reagan famously said in 1986, “Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don’t interfere.” That’s because, as Steven Weisman of the New York Times reported in 1981, Reagan governed with “big picture” style that’s been celebrated by his devotees as “visionary” and the true measure of leadership. Meanwhile, critics assailed his notoriously hazy grasp of policy details to no avail. Nothing stuck to the Telfon President. Not even the extra-constitutional mess of Iran-Contra.
Broad Brushstrokes

Now the Teflon Don has rebooted the Telfon President by stripping away the pretense of ideological rigor and campaigning without the restraints of “plans” or “policies.” And like Reagan did when he repeatedly confounded opponents and critics, Trump’s broad brushstrokes somehow defy criticism. His detail-free pronouncements about bringing back jobs that China is already replacing with robots and building a “beautiful” wall that Mexico will gladly fund and administering a religious test at each of America’s international airports are cartoonish. But that’s the point. They illustrate a supersized vision built on the strength of his personal brand.

Trump is not running as a policy wonk. And neither did Reagan. Wonks are weak. Or they are dangerous cogs in the machinery of politics or government. Or they are both, like Barack Obama and Jimmy Carter. On the other hand, big thinkers are strong and their big ideas withstand scrutiny because they are forged in the mint of American Exceptionalism, not foraged out of time-consuming tedium of bookish study.

Ultra-conservative Reaganite Dinesh D’Souza illustrated the “political mystery” of Reagan’s intractable indifference to policy, facts and details by recounting an exchange between then-Secretary of State George Shultz and then-National Security Advisor (and future Iran-Contra conspirator) Robert McFarlane. According to D’Souza’s effusive biography of Reagan, McFarlane remarked to Schultz that the Gipper “knows so little and accomplishes so much.”

That’s exactly the chord Trump and his children strike over and over again like a hit song on Top 40 radio. Forget lyrical details. Think accomplishments. Think of what a big, broad brushstroke painter can do on the canvas of America. He’s already penciling-in a “beautiful” wall around Reagan’s “shining city on hill.” The story of his accomplishments as a builder — dramatically narrated by Academy Award-winner Jon Voight — showed that he’s going to make that city shine like never before.

The Role of a Lifetime

Trump became TV’s biggest reality star by playing the part of America’s ultimate CEO. He’s super-rich, super-entitled and ever-ready to drop a personally branded pink slip on a contestant seeking that ultimate brass ring in post-Crash America — a good job. He became a pop-culture phenom by shouting “You’re fired!” even as CEO incomes swelled and Middle Class Americans wealth evaporated.

Amazingly enough, Reagan also burnished his credentials at the start of his presidency by going on television and saying “You’re Fired!” On Aug. 3, 1981,
Reagan publicly “terminated” striking air traffic controllers. That “strong” executive action was a transformative, tone-setting moment for Reagan’s tenure in office and for the nation generally. Is it just blind coincidence that, prior to his turn to politics, Trump is best known for firing people on his smash hit show? Perhaps.

And perhaps it’s just coincidence that Reagan also had a talent for spinning minor celebrity into gold. He punched his golden ticket in the 1950s after years as a nondescript B-Movie actor. He leveraged a role as a chimp’s sidekick into a remunerative gig as a spokesperson and television host for a Cold War-enriched General Electric. But he ran afoul of GE and the “big government” largesse he enjoyed when he criticized the Tennessee Valley Authority.

By the time he spoke on behalf of Barry Goldwater in 1964, he’d fled the Screen Actors Guild, the Democratic Party and remade himself as a Conservative gadfly. Reagan embodied both the prosperity of the 1950s and the growing reaction to the 1960s. His political evolution into full-fledged Conservative scion played out on the same television screens that made him widely known and wealthy.

When he finally took center stage in the 1980 election, Reagan’s perfectly-coifed, heavily-Brylcreemed pompadour evoked a simpler, more masculine time and a stronger, nostalgic idea of America that stood in stark contrast to Jimmy Carter’s hippy-dippy, professorial weakness. Reagan’s recalcitrant patriotism and his polished delivery of perfectly-crafted one-liners offered a striking image of confidence and success to a nation tired of losing — to Vietnamese Communists, to Soviet hockey teams, to the Japanese auto industry, to Iranian hostage takers, to the new boogeyman of big government and, if you believed defense hawks and military-industrial profiteers, to the erosion of military might that only billions upon billions of dollars could cure.

The Seventies were the age of the working man and the liberated woman — and programs featured a gritty, funny, Norman Lear-driven exploration of working-class America. It was the age of Archie Bunker and Maude, of “Chico and the Man” and “Alice.” By the time the 1970s gave way to Reagan’s America, television, too, wanted winners. The popular culture moved up to penthouses and into mansions, onto yachts and into limos. The daily struggles and social issues of 1970s sitcoms were quickly covered with the gold-plated fantasies of “Dynasty,” “Falcon’s Crest” and, most conspicuously, “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.” In the 1980s, the media turned its attention to the movers and shakers and moneymakers. And the sitcoms fled to the suburbs.

This was the gilded backdrop against which Trump played his golden card of a lucky birth into the brass ring of fame as a real estate mogul. The stage was set with unpaid-for tax cuts, deregulation and money artificially pumped into
the economy through a spike in defense spending. Today, it’s easy to forget the bubble of Reaganomics. The Crash of 2008 wiped away many things, including the memory of bubbles past.

The fact is that “Morning in America” wasn’t a generational economic boom. It was a momentary, debt-fueled bubble that caused a market crash, a banking crisis and, eventually, a sharp recession. The bubble was inflated and exploded by corporate raiders, leveraged buyouts, massive budgets deficits, and the highly speculative, deregulation-fueled real estate boom of the 1980s.

This was the setting for the self-referential building spree that made Trump the self-appointed poster boy of the go-go 1980s. Like the Ponzi-esque Savings and Loan Scandal that paper-thin recovery spawned, some Trump companies too went bankrupt. And yet he eventually returned to profit, just like the financialized speculators who have bet for and against each successive up and down of the “business cycle” since Reaganomics unleashed the roller coaster. Indeed, Trump’s recurring spikes in wealth and four bankruptcies make him the living embodiment of the perpetual boom-and-bust cycle that came with Reagan’s neoliberal revolution.

Mourning In America

According to the conventional wisdom, Trump’s “dark” and dictatorial speech in Cleveland was a Nixonesque pivot away from hopeful Reaganism. If true, his fearful “law and order” candidacy further inoculates the Reagan legacy from being infected by “Trumpism.” But it doesn’t.

First, the current conventional wisdom belies the truth about Reagan’s underlying appeal to “law and order.” He was widely known as an outspoken law and order Governor of California during the upheavals of late 1960s and early 1970s. And it ignores his escalation of the War on Drugs.

Secondly, it fails to properly account for the reality of Reagan’s “sunny optimism,” which was heavily shaded with attacks on bogus welfare queens, draconian policies that stoked homelessness among alleged ne’er-do-wells who supposedly slept on steamy street grates by choice, and by his troubling comfort with extra-constitutional executive power.

And, in many ways, “revolutionary” Reagan was himself an accomplished rebooder. He hit Baby Boomer nostalgia at just the time they were leaving disco dance floors and skipping out on the “key parties” of the 1970s to settle down into a black-and-white rerun of “Father Knows Best.” Their nostalgia was stoked by economic uncertainty, a foreign menace and fear of the social disorder from urban decay.
That’s the same ominous triad Trump deployed in Cleveland. Sadly, the deeply-seated problems — governmental malaise, political corruption, the haunting impact of an unnecessary terrible war and intractable economic stagnation — are fueling Trump now, just like they fueled Reagan then.

Of course, loyal Reagan apostles like Peggy Noonan categorically deny the comparison and steadfastly defend the separation between the Church of Ronnie and Trump’s rebooted Republican Party. During NPR’s convention coverage, former Bush adviser and current ABC political analyst Matthew Dowd lamented that the GOP finally transformed into a cult of personality.

But how can anyone say that with a straight face when so many still effusively praise Reagan in spite of Iran-Contra, the Crash of 1987, the Savings and Loan Scandal, massive deficit spending and the dispatching of the mentally ill to America’s streets?

Even mainline Democrats are loathe to make the obvious comparison, in no small part because they love using Reagan’s geniality and comparative “moderation” as a weapon against today’s GOP. “Reagan wouldn’t make it in today’s Republican Party,” they like to say. Maybe that’s because his legacy has been co-opted by the free-trading, welfare-reforming, crime-fighting, Wall Street-deregulating Clinton revolution inside the Democratic Party. Perhaps the biggest plot twist of all is that President Bill Clinton completed much of Reagan’s stalled revolution.

Most importantly, the conventional wisdom about Trump’s “dark reality show” misses the truth about the source of Trump’s troubling reboot. Like many of the blue-collar whites foundering in a fading Middle Class, Trump is a byproduct of Reagan’s ill-fated Revolution and its worst excesses, of its broken promises and stunted dreams.

But, as one of the few who mastered the art of that raw deal, Trump is also strangely qualified to champion the grievances it created. Like so many bad movie reboots, Ronald Reagan not only made Trump’s rise possible, but his revolution helped make Trump into The Donald in the first place. The symmetry is so complete that one might even say it “seems scripted.”

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