

# How US Hardliners Help Iran's Hardliners

U.S. neocons keep pounding the propaganda drum about Iran in line with Israel's regional desires but not helpful to American interests or even to the cause of moderating Iran's behavior, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The unrelenting urge among American politicians to keep punishing Iran – or more precisely, to be seen supporting steps with that objective – continues to work against sensible statecraft and U.S. interests in multiple respects. One of those respects concerns how measures taken by the United States affect political competition within Iran.

Here's the current background to questions of U.S. policy toward Iran. The most important development in recent years regarding such policy – the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the formal name for the agreement that limits Iran's nuclear activity – has been in effect for over a year. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, which does the detailed monitoring of the Iranian program, Iran is fully in compliance with its obligations under the agreement.

Those in the United States who have opposed any agreement with Iran all along continue to seek any possible basis for accusing Iran of violations. One of the most recent such accusations concerned some issues of implementation that opponents described as “secret exceptions” granted to Iran. They were in fact not that but rather were typical of the detailed questions that inevitably arise in implementation of any agreement this extensive.

A Joint Commission was created under the agreement precisely to resolve such questions, and it has successfully been doing exactly that. The principal real questions of adherence to the agreement involve whether the United States and the West have been fully living up to their obligations regarding sanctions relief and refraining from further steps to damage the Iranian economy.

Despite the record of Iranian compliance, the months since conclusion of the JCPOA have seen a stream of anti-Iran bills introduced in Congress. Examination of most of these bills yields little idea of how if they were to come into effect they would advance any U.S. interests pertinent to Iran, and little evidence of any thought that in this respect went into the writing of the bills. The bills instead seem to be vehicles for members to demonstrate, through their sponsorship or support of such legislation, their anti-Iran credentials.

Typical of these proposals is a recent amendment introduced by Rep. Ron

DeSantis, R-Florida, that would require any issuer of securities, as it registers with the Securities and Exchange Commission, to declare in its registration statement whether it does business in Iran or with any entity organized under the laws of Iran. Although this may sound like an innocent requirement for information, existing law already requires such a disclosure by issuers of securities with regard to any business done with the government of Iran, the Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Iranian central bank, the entire Iranian petroleum industry, and certain other Iranian individuals and entities subject to sanctions.

So the DeSantis amendment would only serve to impose the reporting requirement on those dealing with portions of the Iranian private sector that not only have no connection with the Iranian regime but also have given no reason to be sanctioned in the long history of U.S. sanctions legislation directed against Iran. This would discourage commerce with the very sectors in Iran that are most in favor of peaceful engagement with the rest of the world.

The legislation would be counterproductive with regard to any political and economic evolution in Iran in a direction favorable to U.S. interests. (The legislation also probably would violate the U.S. obligation under the JCPOA not to take any new steps to prevent Iran from realizing the economic benefits of sanctions relief.)

Another recent example of a backward approach to affecting political competition within Iran is an interview with Dennis Ross of the Washington Institute for New East Policy. Ross, operating squarely within the school of thought that sees nothing good coming out of any business with Tehran and who sees Iran only as an object for confrontation and punishment, focuses on Iran's conduct within the Middle East.

As usual with that topic and that school of thought, there are many general references to Iranian "aggression" without considering exactly what Iran is or is not doing in the region and why, say, Iranian assistance to an incumbent regime in Syria is any more "aggressive" than what other powers have been doing to stoke a rebellion and to try to overthrow the regime.

And Ross's attempt to square his position that Iran "cannot be a partner in the struggle against ISIS" with the fact that in Iraq, Iran is, just like the United States, not only supporting the incumbent regime but also actively opposing ISIS, seems to come down to an assertion that the Iranians are following narrow (undescribed) policies in Iraq that will leave a lot of angry Sunnis on their Western doorstep but evidently are too stupid to realize that is what they are doing.

For the present purpose note what Ross says about the connection between U.S. actions and political contests within the Iranian regime. He says we should try to decrease the influence of General Soleimani and the Revolutionary Guard, who favor a more “confrontational approach,” relative to the influence of president Rouhani, who favors more of a “normalizing approach.” So far so good.

But how is the United States supposed to affect that Iranian political balance? Ross says we should do it by being confrontational ourselves – by “applying pressure” that would “demonstrate the costs to Iran of Soleimani’s actions.” When asked what this means in practical terms, Ross mentions military contingency planning with Israel and the Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

### **Stop Making No Sense!**

Let’s see if we have this straight. We supposedly are all agreed that we would like to see less influence in Tehran for hardliners such as those centered in the Revolutionary Guard. Those hardliners are the ones who, in debate within Iran, argue that doing peaceful business with the United States (as with the JCPOA) does not bring any benefits to Iran, that the United States is determined to use its military might and other power to harm Iran, that Washington will always be acting in cahoots with Iran’s regional rivals in Israel and the Gulf Arab states, and that Iran thus has to stand firm and tough against such predatory U.S. behavior in order to protect Iranian interests.

So acting in a way that *confirms* the hardliners’ narrative is supposed to *reduce* their influence in Tehran? The groundlessness of such an argument can be seen with some role reversal. Such confrontation from a foreign adversary tends to strengthen, rather than to weaken, hawkish and hardline sentiment in U.S. politics. It works pretty much the same way in Iranian politics.

The sort of illogicality voiced by Ross has some general roots in American exceptionalism and the notion that the United States should be able to push other states around but that other states don’t push the United States around. There is more to it than that, however, where Iran is involved, as suggested by comparing the Iranian case with other cases that offer some parallels. One worth looking at is Burma (a.k.a. Myanmar). President Obama announced this week that the United States is ready to lift economic sanctions on Burma, in light of political reforms there.

This decision is not an obvious call. The Burmese military, which maintained a harsh and closed dictatorship for many years, retains much political power. The former opposition leader and now de facto head of the civilian government, Aung San Suu Kyi, has made many concessions to the military and has become in

important respects a partner of the generals rather than a replacement of them. The treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, most conspicuously the Muslim Rohingya community, is still bad. Human rights organizations believe the sanctions are being lifted too soon.

The U.S. administration decided, however, that enough change has taken place in Burma to warrant change in U.S. policy toward Burma. At least as important, the administration determined that further economic and political change in a favorable direction in Burma would be more likely by opening up the country to normal commerce and relations than it would by keeping it isolated.

President Obama's Republican opponents in Congress have, on this issue, taken a constructive and balanced approach. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who has had a strong interest in Burma, made remarks on the Senate floor that appropriately noted both the progress to date and the significant problems and challenges that remain.

That's a much different approach than McConnell and his colleagues take on Iran, and it is a difference in the approach itself and not just in the two countries involved. If they applied to Burma the same perspective they apply to Iran, what we would be hearing is that moderates in Burma don't matter, that it is nefarious hardliners who still run the show, that gross human rights violations continue, that any relief from sanctions would mean the military-dominated regime would have more resources to do bad things, and that Obama is making a big mistake by lifting sanctions.

Two explanations chiefly account for the difference. One is the objective of denying Mr. Obama any significant foreign policy achievement, consistent with Sen. McConnell's earlier declaration that the number one objective of his caucus was to deny the president a second term. The opening to Iran and the JCPOA constitute such a significant achievement; nothing the administration is doing on Burma is of comparable importance.

The other explanation is that continued isolation and punishment of Iran is part of a larger objective of the administration's opponents of taking sides in the Middle East, and in particular to take whatever side the Israeli government is on. Ross's mention of military contingency planning with Israel directed against Iran represents not so much a way to scare Iran about costs of General Soleimani's activities but instead the side-taking that underlies the impulse to keep Iran perpetually isolated and punished in the first place.

And the counterproductive effect of confirming the Iranian hardliners' narrative is not really counterproductive if the objective is to maintain Iran as a *bête noire* forever; if you want a *bête noire*, a regime in which hardliners dominate

is the best kind of bête noire to have.

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## Simple Ignorance vs. Politically Slanted Ignorance

Libertarian presidential nominee Gary Johnson flubbed a question about the war-torn Syrian city of Aleppo but a more pervasive form of ignorance comes in the form of politically slanted "knowledge," writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

The vast majority of people "live locally." Wherever they are residing, that is the arena of their life, and it is that environment that they know best. Even up-and-coming American political leaders are subject to this rule. This became embarrassingly obvious when, on Sept. 8, Gary Johnson made his now famous faux pas.

Gary Johnson, who once was governor of New Mexico and therefore knows a lot about that state and its strengths and weaknesses, appeared on MSNBC's weirdly named, but widely watched, a.m. program "*Morning Joe*" (the "*Joe*" referring, I assume, to both host Joe Scarborough and the local U.S. term for coffee).

The principal reason Mr. Johnson was on the show was that he is running for president of the United States on the Libertarian Party ticket. And, of course, the president of the U.S. is the world's most powerful leader and his or her awareness level is expected to reflect that.

Therefore, those running for president are assumed to know everything about what is going on in the world as well as in their own country. This is of course impossible, though there is always a short list of issues that are center-stage.

So, what happens is that leaders have "briefing books" prepared on these priority issues. But again, the priorities are judgment calls and can be different for different leaders. Unfortunately for Johnson, foreign policy issues were low on the priority list for the Libertarians – who are more or less isolationist.

That is why, when Gary Johnson was asked by another guest on that *"Morning Joe"* show, what he would do, if he were president, about the crisis in Aleppo, he answered "And what is Aleppo?" It was a real gaffe, and Johnson was almost immediately taken to task by the "pundits" of social media for being a dummy.

One might ask why would anyone expect an ex-governor of New Mexico to know anything about a Syrian city mostly wrecked by civil war? Well, again, because he is running for president. And Aleppo should, many assume, be on his short list. Be that as it may, it was not on Johnson's, whose ideological outlook puts Syria in someone else's local venue. His is New Mexico and maybe, eventually, the rest of the U.S.

### **Power of the Briefing Book**

Do you think that this is unusual? Unfortunately it is not. What is unusual is that Johnson got caught in his ignorance. Fear of just such exposure is one of the reasons leaders now give so few press conferences. Yet history has also shown us that recent presidents have been unafraid to make foreign policy decisions which impact millions, often fatally, without adequate knowledge.

As we will see, these decisions almost always reflect their own conditioned ignorance but are made in a way that allows them to be obscured and rationalized after the fact. It just so happens that such decisions helped lead to the Syrian civil war and the destruction of Aleppo.

In the time since his gaffe on *"Morning Joe,"* Johnson has had created the appropriate briefing book and is now speaking in a seemingly authoritative way about Aleppo and the Syrian civil war. For him, the transformation has worked like magic. The gaffe itself increased the level of attention he has received from the official mass media, and given his new level of superficial knowledge, there are even calls for him to be included in the upcoming presidential debates. Go figure!

Johnson's situation points to the power of the briefing book, so it is important to ask where these analyses come from.

They are put together by the leader's staff as well as alleged "experts." For instance, in the case of the president, that would be department heads. When it comes to foreign policy, that would include the Secretary of State, the National Security Adviser, the Director of National Intelligence, the heads of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency and other "intelligence agencies."

Of course these folks are also political appointees who may know next to nothing about particular topics. So they have their own versions of briefing books

prepared by people down the line who may actually know something about what is going on.

In fact, as this process goes on, you do usually reach a level of staff who are real experts in, say, both the history of and the state of the crisis in Syria. They speak and read the local language, have in-country intelligence sources and so can produce a fairly accurate, unbiased assessment of the situation. They make their analysis and pass it up the ladder.

Here comes the problem. At some level of this process the relatively accurate analysis comes to people, usually those department chiefs or their immediate assistants, who are working in and responding to a preexisting political and ideological environment. Consciously or unconsciously, they begin to censor the analysis of the experts so as to reconcile it with the prevailing groupthink of the leadership.

The ignorance of the leadership, superficially hidden by what turns out to be censored analyses, is by no means unique to U.S. politicians. Vladimir Putin of Russia, Ali Khamenei of Iran, Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, King Salman of Saudi Arabia, Xi Jinping of China – and the list can go on and on – all see the world as through glasses darkened by cultural, ideological, political and historical preconceptions.

And they all have their experts who do their best to give the boss a more or less accurate picture of the world. And, also, they all have their own versions of department heads who censor the picture to support the present preconceived worldview.

I offer this account of policy-making to the reader not as an excuse for the near-sightedness of almost all of the world's politicians, but as an explanation, the back story so to speak, out of which so many bad policies come.

The Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw once commented that “false knowledge is more dangerous than ignorance.” Actually, the two are so tied to each other that most of us can't recognize false knowledge when we are confronted with it. There are too many panes of dark glass in the way.

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# “We Are Adopting Principles of Fascism”

Retired Army JAG Major Todd Pierce explains how his perspective on U.S. foreign policy and politics has changed as he watched the nation’s slide into “perpetual war,” in Part Two of an [interview](#) with Philip Weiss of Mondoweiss.

[\(Click here for Part One\)](#)

Philip Weiss: However humble your ambition, you’ve traveled widely, been a friend of a lot of interesting people and at 65 you’re going to the New School, and you visit your son in Paris, where he’s studying philosophy after he left the priesthood. A very full life. But you’re full of dark warning. So why can’t I say there are areas of great freedom in your life, to be celebrated. And darkness will always be there?

Todd Pierce: I’m trying to preserve the freedom I’ve had. I see a genuine threat to it. And I see it from people whom I know. The people in this Veteran intelligence group I’m in [[Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity](#)] includes the four NSA whistleblowers, Kirk Wiebe, Bill Binney, Ed Loomis, and Thomas Drake. Binney has got to be one of the smartest people in the world, I don’t think that’s an exaggeration. He was one of the smartest people at the NSA.

PW: You’ve met him?

TP: Yes. And he agrees with me fully. Because he’s seen the NSA. We’re a more sophisticated form of what I think has to be called fascism. The term fascism was applied to the way the communists and Stalin got on as well. You bring the term fascist to what it really means, and that ultimately is, ultra-militarism and authoritarianism combined with an expansionist foreign policy. And that’s us—what you can see us becoming.

PW: What do you mean?

TP: We’re selective. Bill Binney and these guys were all arrested at gunpoint by the FBI. They were able for a number of ways—including Bill Binney being quite smart and turning the tables and showing that the government was making things up— they were able to get out of it. The other person is Diane Roark, who was in charge of oversight of the NSA for the congressional intelligence staff. They’ve got the capabilities to spy on everybody and collect every bit of data that we share, and they’re doing it, and yeah they haven’t had to— again going back to [Posner and Vermeule](#)— they don’t need to do those things yet.

PW: Like what?

TP: Well, let's say we do ramp up a war with Russia and we do get a more active antiwar movement. Say a Donald Trump who's already let everybody know what he thinks of the constitution, or Hillary Clinton.... And Obama has said he can kill American citizens. The military goes to them and says, "Hey, these dissenters are going to cause us to lose a war, like the Vietnam War. Let's put them in military detention, let's impose censorship." Everything's in place right now.

PW: How many Americans would accept that?

TP: A poll Chas Freeman showed me says that 55 percent of Republicans already say they could accept a military junta running things today in the United States. Almost that they desire one. There's a breakdown. Do you think we need one now or do you think we should have one if there's a constitutional violation? I think it's about 29 percent of Democrats said, "Yeah, time for a military junta now," 43 percent said, "Yeah, if there's a constitutional violation," and Republicans even higher. In any case, a high number of Americans believe we should have a military junta, which means martial law.

PW: Idiots express these views all the time.

TP: Yes, but during World War II, what did it lead to? It led to the removal of 120,000 Japanese Americans from the west coast into what was called at the time, concentration camps. It wasn't a benign thing. Our myth is, well these people gathered willingly and it was... No, they were told, get here for transportation to the- concentration camp was the word the government was using at the time, till it was put in disrepute. And they were put under armed guard, and there were cases of people who, just by being near the boundary and the fence, got shot by trigger happy guards. Even though most people acceded to it, the Japanese Americans, so there wasn't heavy force, military force was always there.

PW: Binney has a reason to say fascist, being at the point of the lance. He was atypical. Lefties pointed at certain events in the '80s and said fascism. You remember them saying that?

TP: Yes, absolutely. You could point to those things, and you could say it was proto-fascism. There's authoritarianism; what Nixon was doing and later Reagan were all elements of it. But I think it took an event like 9/11 to bring it to greater fruition. So the seed of it was there then and it could easily have evolved into things we have now, because we know of things that Nixon was saying. But it didn't get to the point we're at today. Reagan never said- his Department of Justice didn't go into court and say, "Yeah I can kill an American

citizen," in the case of the Sandinistas. But they did do so in the Obama administration, and I was in the court when they did. Because I was there the day Anwar al-Awlaki's father brought a case to get injunctive relief to not kill his son.

I was just an observer, we heard the case was going to be heard. And there the DOJ was saying, the president as commander in chief has to have the power to take any means necessary. And if that means killing an American citizen, he has that within his power. What was it a couple of months later [September 2011] al-Awlaki's son was killed. And for good measure they killed his grandson a few days later.

His grandson was not collateral damage; he was killed separately, a few days or a week later. They said later that Awlaki was an operational leader, which again means nothing. But then what was his son? He wasn't collateral damage, there was no reason to believe he was an operational leader, still they kill him. Was that because they saw him as a symbol? Just like you have preventive detention, you have preventive assassination?

PW: At Nuremberg they hanged propagandists.

TP: [Julius] Streicher, yes. But he went beyond propaganda, too. I forget the details, but I have read his case. But you can make the argument that he went beyond propaganda. I think it included incitement to aggressive war and a few other things like that. Of course we wage aggressive war, but we present it as we have good intentions, unlike the Germans. Raymond Aron talks about that: How good intentions are used to justify all sorts of war crimes.

PW: There was someone in the Obama administration who wrote, it's perpetual war, get used to it.

TP: Rosa Brooks. She wrote that after she had actually left the Pentagon. Rosa Brooks was good on human rights.

PW: Could that article be read as a rationalization of endless war?

TP: It was saying, "OK, let's get down to work now to put in place some of the human rights protections that we need." But, again, the nature of the article, reading it, was justifying perpetual war. At least my cynical reading of it was. And again let's put in statute some things to protect the human rights. Number one, that doesn't work when you get into a mindset that we're at war. You saw that with the Japanese American removal. You always get around the law because there's always a claim of military necessity. So again to accept the idea that we're in perpetual war, is to help continue the perpetual war.

There's a wonderful quote by [E. Barrett] Prettyman, a federal court judge, in fact the building is named after him. He said it in regard to a fourth amendment case, actually a case of the JDL [Jewish Defense League]- I don't remember the facts, they were doing something with Russians and they got charged. "We are dealing with doctrines and not with the presumable taste and sense of individual officials. Maybe none of these examples would ever occur. But the question before us is not whether they would happen but whether they legally could."

PW: So that's the Section 1021 issue [of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)]?

TP: Exactly. I've said this a number of times to colleagues. I am not saying that these things will all happen. I don't know what external circumstances will drive people. But they legally could happen. And as the DOJ said, legal detention could happen to a guy just because of expressive activities. So that's the quote I like to use in justifying my very dark view.

PW: So you agree, yours is a dark view?

TP: I think it's a dark view because of what legally could happen. But I'm not saying it's going to, I'm saying it could happen. I like to point out, this right might be casually given away as necessity for a war, then you might get a Donald Trump who's president, and he has already made clear his intention to violate the Constitution, and gets cheered for it. A year ago there was a guy who was in the process of getting hired by West Point, as a constitutional law teacher-and he had written an article, though... [that] argued that we are going to have to start putting law professors into military detention, and take other legal measures because they are subverting our will to fight. That struck home. These fascistic strains exist. The fact that guys like Posner and Vermeule teaching at Harvard and University of Chicago openly say, "We have to go back and study Carl Schmitt." That doesn't make us a fascist society, but-

PW: Could studying Schmitt be innocent?

TP: Carl Schmitt was actively engaged in justifying the Nazis. He wasn't a Nazi to begin with, he would be considered a Conservative revolutionary, but like so much of that wing of radical rightwing German politics, went into the Nazis. But Schmitt was writing actively, he was assisting the Nazis in getting into power, he spoke of the need for a dictatorship in 1922. His theory of the friend/enemy distinction is the fundamental principle of fascism- that a nation must have an enemy. That's essentially the fascist view.

PW: Tell me about the Vietnam precedent.

TP: Well, Sam Adams was a CIA analyst in Vietnam who was disagreeing with

Westmoreland's numbers on how many Vietcong there were in 1967. He argued that you had to count more of them than Westmoreland was counting. Westmoreland was trying to make it seem as if we were winning. And Adams was trying to be objective and present the facts as they were to the decision makers. Sam Adams took it up the chain of command in the CIA, and eventually the CIA met with the Department of Defense to try and come up with a consensus on the numbers. But the military, the Department of Defense had more influence and basically won the argument. So the numbers were lower than they presented to the public and the president. The Tet offensive came about a couple months later in 1968. That false number cost the United States a lot of lives, cost the Vietnamese a lot of lives. That could have been prevented if they had been using intelligence.

PW: There was a lawsuit over this.

TP: Right. CBS had Sam Adams on *60 Minutes* where he made these allegations. Westmoreland sued. And Westmoreland agreed to settle it without a finding, conceding that CBS had its facts right. But it's put a chill into the media ever since. That's what the people who write about it say. Ever since then, *60 Minutes* has not been quite as willing to go out on that limb. [Former CIA analyst] Ray McGovern, he and a few other people he knew put these organizations together [including Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity] back when the Iraq War was starting to try and present information to the public that was actually accurate. I met Ray McGovern and Phil Giraldi and Colleen Rowley when I was getting *amicus* support for one of the cases that I was working on. They signed on. That's when I got involved in their organizations. I'm not an intelligence officer, but my work in psyops and military commissions qualifies me.

And what if Donald Trump gets elected, what's going to restrain him? This article in [the Washington Post](#) pointed out, really nothing. That's not because of him, but because of the way the office of the presidency has accumulated power in the last 50 years.

PW: That goes for Hillary Clinton, too?

TP: Absolutely. Hillary Clinton was part of the administration that argued that they could kill American citizens purely on the president's say so. Then made the specious claim that Harold Koh was responsible for as legal adviser to the State Department that we're not at war because we don't have boots on the ground in Libya. We're just firing missiles from a few miles out. As if the people dying in Libya from those missiles didn't think they were being attacked and at war by a foreign power.

PW: Do you have compassion for those folks?

TP: I've got compassion for those people who were unjustly attacked in different ways. My father was a Bataan death march survivor. He came back and I didn't want to say that— at least one death march survivor that I'm acquainted with had said that what kept them going was the hatred they developed in the prisoner of war camp. But yet, it's a natural emotion, as anybody knows, I believe, if you look within yourself, when something really bad happens to you or when someone brutalizes you. Whatever country it is. People victimized by the National Socialists of Germany or the Soviet Union military rule of Eastern Europe, or any other despotic regime. You come to hate your oppressor.

In my father's case, and in other prisoners of war I met, they didn't carry that hatred beyond the prison of war camp. We never grew up with an anti-Japanese idea.

But a lot of Americans just accepted that the Japanese American removal was necessary or fell under military necessity. And when you learn a little about it, you find, that not only was it unjust to those 120,000 people whose loyalties were to the United States but it was all driven by lies, and not hysteria, because it was planned years before by the military command on the west coast and in Hawaii.

What it was driven by was racism, as we now know too, but also I would say the bias of the military—of dealing with any threat. Like Cheney using the 1 percent doctrine. If there is so much as a 1 percent risk, you must take extraordinary means to defend yourself from this very faint risk. That was the same principle that the military was following on the west coast, that there might be a Japanese American out there whose loyalty might be more to Japan than the United States and if so, he might be tempted to engage in sabotage.

The ironic thing is that the person who is really given much of the blame for driving this, in addition to General [John] DeWitt, but working with the provost marshal under DeWitt was a Jewish

American, [Major Karl] Bendetson. He was really the driving force. So the irony is that at the same time people were being put in concentration camps in Europe—and realize this was before Germany had gone all the way to the final solution. At this point in 1942, the extermination camps weren't well known, and the Germans said, we're just putting internal enemies into these camps.

But we were doing the same thing on the west coast, and it was being driven in large part by this Jewish American. Then you realize that the Zionists are doing the same thing in Israel or Palestine. I'm saying, "There's no ethnic group that is above committing these type of oppressive acts."

And I should say, you asked about my acquaintanceship with Jewish Americans, what formed my attitudes. Well— Leon Uris. When I was growing up, I read the book *Exodus* and I saw the movie. It did influence my understanding of the Middle East as it did probably almost all Americans.

PW: What was the influence?

TP: The idea that the Jews in Israel were the victims and were gallantly trying to get their independence. Very much analogically to the US. It was intended as propaganda and it was very successful propaganda. Look at my own case. But it goes to the point. We have been engaged not only in Israel, but in our own wars that we now claim to be in— they're entirely based on propaganda and false propaganda. I don't think the American people realize that so much. It goes to Vietnam too. Sam Adams tried to reveal that they were lying. That entire war was fought on false claims by the United States.

I mentioned to you that Benjamin Netanyahu, working with his admitted fascist father, and Menachem Begin, who was deemed a fascist, as well by Hannah Arendt and Einstein, set up what you could say was a disinformation or influence operation called the Jonathan Institute. Netanyahu has been engaged, following in his father's footsteps, promoting what should be called fascist propaganda ever since, continuing now as Prime Minister. And as you know, it's more sophisticated than ever.

PW: On what basis do you say Netanyahu is fascistic?

TP: There's a couple good books, I don't have the titles offhand, explaining how Likud grew out of the Herut party. And Herut grew out of the maximalist wing of Revisionist Zionism. Even within Revisionist Zionism, they were the fascists. Jabotinsky was radical right, but not necessarily fascist in how I am looking at it. But Begin and some others including Netanyahu's father came out of that faction that was influenced by General Pilsudski of Poland, who was a fascist. And this was interwar Europe, when there were a lot of fascist movements, with slight variations based on their own nationalistic orientation.

And so this group of European Jews were, as well, influenced by those fascist ideas and they had their own movement. They even had reached out to Hitler— early. Today a lot of people say, "Why didn't we do something about Hitler early?" Well, a whole lot of people didn't realize where Hitler was going, including these Jewish fascists. So they reached out to Hitler but were rebuffed. They definitely were in contact with Mussolini. And Mussolini's own fascist movement, according to various sources on fascism, had Italian Jews that were part of it. Fascism wasn't something that was anathema to Jews, though of course Nazism became that. So that's a movement that Netanyahu's father Ben Zion

and Menachem Begin came out of.

I haven't looked at this stuff for so long. But Jacob Talmon was an Israeli political scientist, who wrote a book on the origins of totalitarian democracy in 1952. He was addressing the Eastern European countries under the influence of the Soviet Union, which were democratic in name only. And if you tie that in to Edward Bernays's argument— you have to have propaganda to direct the people in the right direction. Fascism's founding principle is how to manipulate the masses. So propaganda was always central to fascism.

Totalitarian democracy allows for the form of democracy, but it requires the fascist principle that all the people must be driven to the same ideas. And of course militaristic and authoritarian because you can't have dissenters in a fascist state, or not too strong of a dissident movement.

That's the point I'm making: Israel and the United States since 9/11, you have to consider us to be a form of totalitarian democracy. We're not the worst of it. I'm not saying that for a second. But we have a couple of billionaires who can really buy up the election, Sheldon Adelson on the Republican side, and Haim Saban on the Democratic side. What politician can be successful if they don't fall into one of those camps?

If you look at the platforms, both parties have given their undying loyalty to Israel, and it's clear that Israel's policies are our policies. As you know, there are a number of Israelis now who are saying that Netanyahu and Lieberman represent a fascist form of governance.

PW: But what is America? I'm a free man in New York, you're a free man in Minnesota. I've been fired from jobs for my views, but— what is America?

TP: As I discussed the other day, No we're not a fascist state in what anyone thinks of as a fascist state. But we are adopting principles of fascism. You as a free man in New York, and me as a free man in Minnesota, we are pretty well protected by our civil liberties. But what about someone in the Mid-East? There's a discussion going on, that we can kill anyone who we deem to be the enemy.

We are operating a fascist system in our foreign policy. That's where the fascism is plain to see. That's what both parties are fully in agreement with. Not as we are at home—we are still relatively secure in our liberties. It's hard to see that we would become, the ordinary term is fascist— if there's a better term tell me— but the foreign policy— as others have frequently said, including Hannah Arendt, when you wage a totalitarian foreign policy like that, it eventually spills over more and more into your domestic system, and we're seeing

this in Section 1021, and Israel passed its anti-terrorism law this summer. They've always had provisions previously not to entirely suppress dissent but to make it uncomfortable, and they are constantly through propaganda changing people's opinions, so they become more and more militaristic and they support the radical right wing. Like Likud and Lieberman.

PW: Where do you see that propaganda in our country?

TP: Just in the general news. The New York Times, as your site has pointed out, has very imperfect coverage of what happens in the Middle East and Palestine. It's like a self-censorship.

And we saw it with the coverage of the Iraq War. Again, I go back as I mentioned the other day to the post-Vietnam War era. When these generals came out with this false claim, "We would have won but for the media." The Department of Defense has deliberately— you can find articles and papers on how do you control the media— they've developed policies on how you control it. Shape it, direct it. That's what we're living under, the embedded journalist program. That was strictly as a result of that. Because they knew that people being put in close proximity with soldiers would develop a natural sympathy with them. Not in the sense of feeling sorry for them, but, "We're together in this."

PW: The war on terror has gotten skewed coverage?

TP: Absolutely, in part because most people don't understand it. Again, going back to the media, Antiwar.com found out they were being surveilled by the FBI because they opposed the war. They are immediately suspect because of that, and everything we thought we had resolved by stopping COINTELPRO back in the 70's has been taken to a higher level, where the NSA surveils everyone.

We have total surveillance of the US population through the NSA. That's what these huge data storage facilities are about, to store all the data that they've gathered. They've gone to the public and say, "We're not listening to your phone calls." But what they are doing is storing it. It's all there, just like a huge data file. Like the Stasi— they would go look at their file on someone, and go use that against them. Well, we have all that data collected, including people's attitudes. So if the day comes, which, if people like Vermeule and Posner have said, we may have to impose censorship and have military detention, they might have been more careful in what they said about detention.

The book is Terror in the Balance. The idea is that we always have to balance civil liberties against national security. But it's a false argument. Because our greatest national security is having a full and open discussion on our policy. We didn't want to allow that with Johnson and Nixon but it happened and,

like I say, these generals said we should put these dissenters in detention.

The antiwar movement proved to be more wise than our generals were. Our generals would have driven us into national bankruptcy for the lost cause of Vietnam.

PW: What is wrong with the media coverage of the war on terror?

TP: Just the presumptions of all of it. Number one, the beginning presumption is that 9/11 happened out of the blue. The U.S. was sitting there, everyone was peacefully going about their business. And nobody writes about the hundreds, well over a thousand, military bases throughout the world. No one is talking about the relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Syria in the past, Jordan. The United States has been propping up these police states all these years, which led to the 9/11 attack. Because al Qaeda said, "We may be oppressed by the Saudis, but it's the United States that's propping it up."

[Prussian general and military theorist, Carl von] Clausewitz writes, "war never comes about without history." There's always history to it. We treat 9/11 as if we were all innocents. Then it unleashes the most ferocious opinions toward Muslims and then there's this constant incitement of Islamophobia. Not necessarily from the main media, but Fox certainly does.

PW: So in 9/11, we're the innocents. That persists to this day?

TP: Even more so with the debate over, "Is it radical Islamic terrorism?" Again, you look at who used those words first, it was Netanyahu. It's a consistent propaganda theme that he's used, as in that book over there [pointing at *Fighting Terrorism* by Benjamin Netanyahu]. That this isn't about legitimate political grievances or even any political grievances, this is all about this radical Islam. And it's not just a few Muslims. When you read into it, it's really Islam itself, it's a radical and murderous religion. And that's become the predominant theme in the U.S., I would say, whether it's by the hard right or the people who try to present themselves as more moderate.

But look at what we've been doing. Look at what you'd see if you're a Muslim country. Then you can figure that you're probably in line for some kind of military attack.

PW: What do you think of Islam?

TP: Well I'm not going to express a particular opinion on it except to say I believe it's mischaracterized in a variety of ways. The caliphate was not the threat that the Islamophobes make it out to be. There was a caliphate in Turkey, the Ottoman Empire, till 1922, and it was never a threat to the west. They do have their way of governing, as we do. We always profess, especially

conservatives, a commitment to Judeo-Christian values. Well, you know what that led to with the Native Americans.

The fact that it is a predominant religion in the Middle East means that to appeal to people, you refer to Islam, to unite people. Just as we do in various ways, and they do in Israel. So I don't think it's inherently a murderous religion, as the Islamophobes make it out to be, and Netanyahu constantly makes it out to be. What we're dealing with is a group of people from the Islamic territories and lands who sit on oil and are in the way of Israel's expansion. And so they have legitimate political grievances because of what we've been doing to them. Which is not to say they're all innocents or they govern their countries well.

But again, going on to classic military strategists, like Clausewitz, we can't be in a constant state of war, both morally and militarily. And the fact is that we are the aggressors, really. None of these Islamic countries threatened the United States until a group of anti-Saudi terrorists, guerrillas, insurgents did, only because we were propping up the Saudi regime. It's all based upon politics. As Clausewitz says, war is a continuation of politics, or policy by other means. And we do the same thing. We're hypocritical in all this.

PW: You say that We have to know ourselves.

TP: That goes to Sun Tzu and Clausewitz. They said in various ways, To understand the nature of the conflict, you have to know yourself, you have to know the enemy. If you don't know yourself, you don't know what is motivating the enemy. If we can't recognize that, maybe what we did in support of what was done in Beirut in 1982 had an effect upon the people we now deem to be our enemy, we can't understand what motivates them. And not knowing what motivates them has us doing the resisting them in maybe ways that make things worse rather than better.

A few officials come to recognize this at a micro level, in terms of counterinsurgency, that maybe it's not so good to wipe out a family with a drone in Pakistan. But the same thing applies at a macro level in our foreign policy. If we don't accept that the U.S. has created some of these grievances, then we can't bring about a reconciliation, a resolution that is satisfactory to everybody and strategically necessary to the U.S..

The idea that we can fight a perpetual war, as some people now talk about, is exactly against everything that classical strategists understood. It should be self-evident to anybody. We've seen what happens if you try. Look at the Soviet Union in the 1980s, when they collapsed as a result of their perpetual war.

PW: Is that why they collapsed?

TP: It certainly was a big part of it— all the expense in Afghanistan and the dissent. These things are all interrelated. We try and make it out that the war is over there and has no effect here. But we're constantly taking more and more money out of our own domestic budget to keep the military going.

Or the police issue: We're training them to become militarist. Not to come down on the police, but we're seeing cases that to anyone smacks of an execution. The person in Chicago who was shot fifteen times—the person running away and was shot in the back by a police officer. We send our police officials over to Israel to be trained in what is military occupation tactics. But our own military members come back and they have adopted this viewpoint from their own experience in Afghanistan and Iraq. That's been imported.

Again, it's spilling over into our own domestic system. That's the ultimate cost, as Hannah Arendt said. French officials recognized this after a while, when they were fighting in Algeria. Eventually, the ultimate risk is that you lose your democracy as a result, and I would say that we're already far along in that process.

PW: You're an autodidact.

TP: I know what that means but refresh my memory.

PW: You're a self-taught intellectual.

TP: I would definitely agree with that. Self-taught by pursuing knowledgeable works.

PW: It's a term of praise to me, but it has a certain liability. You were, in my view, deeply influenced by your father's experience of the horrors of war and you wanted to be a political scientist but you were raised in circumstances where that was not available, and you worked construction and read books. But now at age 65, you're going to be a political scientist.

TP: That was the one area I was really interested in as a kid.

PW: But in the meantime, you have gotten a rich experience of the world that most academics don't have.

TP: I would add, looking back, I did have this interest in the military, coming out of my dad's experience. So it wasn't just the academic interest in politics, but rather the convergence of circumstances, the Vietnam War going on and the issue of insurgency.

PW: OK. But the risk with an autodidact is, he has independent ideas. But all ideas have a social component. They come out of a community. Have you ever had the charge thrown at you, that there is no establishment rigor in your thoughts, they're not shaped by a community, they're entirely independent?

TP: Maybe in law school in my first year. I went in there thinking pretty independently. And I did well. Not to flatter myself, but I was right on the approach that I was taking. Which was acknowledged. But I'm never out there in the sense that I'm outside of everyone. I'm arguing from within but using the principles that are given but seeing them slightly different.

I mentioned the cases with the judge in St. Cloud, I was clearly outside the norm there, and another law clerk pointed that out to me. There was a guy whose offense would have gotten him put into prison for 10 years. My friend who was a clerk said he and I were the only two clerks out of 10 or 11 who would have thought independently where we would have looked at the facts rather than accept what the county attorney said. And furthermore, I had the only judge who would have listened. His own judge would have said, "No, we can't do that."

PW: What does that tell you about human society? We run with the pack?

TP: I absolutely agree with that. I hate to use the word, but there is something about group mentality, and it's not just where people consciously say, "I'm going along with the group." It's almost unconscious in thinking that way, which is always at work when you go to war.

PW: So if human beings behave in this fashion, what is the hopeful scenario of how we demolish this propaganda? You and I love this country. What's the hopeful way this war ends? You say in Vietnam the antiwar movement had the wisdom, and notwithstanding two million deaths or whatever, the country righted itself in the end.

TP: Today I'm not as hopeful as people might have been in '67, '68. Because then it was more apparent and there was more self-interest at stake; people were being drafted. Today we have so successfully shielded people from direct consequences of the war that they don't connect the two, but it's in effect every single moment. Education, policing, etc— all are being sacrificed for the war. If you look at the budget, the first bite of the apple is the defense industry and the Defense Department. We have to take care of defense. And we get the crumbs which are left, and we try and work it out so we get enough for education and roads. So we are already paying a huge economic price domestically to maintain the wars and the military. But people don't make that connection very well.

So I'm not as hopeful today because the government has shielded the people more from the effects of the government's bad policies. The other side of it is the terrorism acts that I think are directly attributable to the war. In San Bernardino, Chattanooga, Orlando— all are direct consequences of the war. It's like 9/11 two. This was a direct effect of our foreign policy, but we see ourselves as innocents.

Every terrorist incident that takes place, officials say, "We don't know what the motive is, we're searching, blah blah." But there are always sufficient clues that it is driven by belief, by injustice, or as David Hume said, sympathy that people feel when they see such a great injustice being done, and some way or another it hits a tipping point and they engage in some act of violence. The person in Orlando said, "I'm doing this because of your bombing Afghanistan, my country." Even though he never lived there.

That's not to say that we should be suspicious of all these people, because it can happen to people who are not even Muslim. In the Vietnam era we saw people becoming sympathetic to the Vietcong because they could see that they were being victimized by the US military. It took a while for people to realize how victimized they were. So there are these human emotions that are triggered by the type of war we're fighting right now.

We are paying the cost, but they're indirect, so we're not seeing it, and that's what's being covered up. So that's why there's a necessity for a counter narrative to be presented. There are two motivations. It's not about Islam, it's about violent political acts being committed in propping up a very despotic Middle East. It's about the US role in maintaining a very repressive system of governance in the Middle East.

PW: Including in Israel?

TP: Including in Israel.

PW: Would you have had this understanding a year ago, or five years?

TP: It began to be formed when I was in the Gulf War. That began shifting my way of thinking. I admit I was very much a neocon and going along with the neocons' thinking on national security. And the Gulf War opened my eyes a bit. I talked to a number of Saudis, I took advantage of being there to meet people individually. I began to see how they saw things a bit more. And it took time; but then when 9/11 happened and then seeing what we had become, that opened my eyes a little further. Then just continuing to search for and find an explanation for what's all going on.

PW: Did you ever say, "I love the military"?

TP: No never.

PW: Why are you laughing?

TP: Well, I didn't like the regimentation.... I'm pretty normal; most people don't like that regimentation.

PW: What do you think of military culture's influence? Is that the problem?

TP: We survived as a democracy for years, even in Vietnam. We had challenges to democracy then, COINTELPRO, military surveillance; but we weren't militaristic then. That's why we got so much opposition. It wasn't long before that that Eisenhower said, watch out for the military industrial complex.

The military set out deliberately following the Vietnam War to change people's attitudes. The movie Top Gun was one of the first examples where they began working with Hollywood. Changing the narrative, changing the perception. They had a deliberate strategy to elevate the military in the eyes of the people. That in itself isn't necessarily that bad either, but a number of circumstances came together, including the neocon constant incitement toward war, and then 9/11, of course, that was the final trigger that was necessary to bring us into this. And we're moving deeper into this militaristic world, as both presidential candidates show.

PW: How much time have you spent in Guantanamo?

TP: I went down there probably 35, 40 times. Once a month we would go down and see our client. We'd fly down there on Monday morning, check in, do all the things we had to do. Then see our client for the next couple of days, and come back on a Thursday or Friday.

PW: What does Guantanamo look and feel like?

TP: Well, again, even defense attorneys don't get to go into the actual prison camps. And there's a number of different ones, three or four different camps, and one that was closed. We don't get to see that ordinarily. What you get into, you have the regular military base. It's a navy base. That's like middle-America, they've even got a high school. They're going to spend an exorbitant amount of money to build a new high school. Again, talk about misplaced priorities. But you have families down there... You have that side of the camp running normally, like any military base.

Then you have a detention facility, and that comes under a different military command. And you drive out to it, and when you get close, it becomes like something you would think of in any militaristic society. The checkpoint, you go

in and constant security. The guards [are] very paranoid, seeing everybody, including their fellow soldiers, as I was, as a potential terrorist. Former guards have talked about this... How the guard force is constantly incited to be hostile. When they were getting deployed for the first time to Guantanamo, they first took them to the World Trade Center site, and said, "You're going to be guarding the people that are responsible for this." Which is not the case, other than maybe 5 people, if that. So it's constant conditioning for everyone there, that we've got the worst of the worst. And that did not change under Obama.

I started under the Bush regime, and there were no changes. The people who were running things were the same people, or anyway had the same attitude. We had to go through a process under Obama, to have each detainee have his record reviewed, and he could present facts to the review board. But I don't think they changed a bit from what had been done under Bush. Bush had already begun releasing people. The whole story that these were the worst of the worst was unraveling. So Bush released a lot. That continued under Obama, but no greater and no less, really, if you look at the statistics. So there was no change that you could see other than during that brief period of [Obama promising], we're going to close Guantanamo.

PW: Where are your clients?

TP: One of them is in Sudan, where he is from, and the other one is still in Guantanamo, the appellate case. He was one that the government would say is too dangerous to release.

PW: The one who wouldn't meet with you?

TP: Yes. His crime is as a propagandist, is how the government describes it. We're waiting for a decision right now. All the offenses that [Salim] Hamdan and our client were convicted of were originally

held not to be war crimes on review. This goes to the fraudulence of the whole military commission system. I don't have time to say that here, but they made up offenses and said they were war crimes.

Virtually everything coming out of the Bush administration originally was made up. They fabricated legal precedents and misstated them. Under our system, you can only have military commissions in three different circumstances: one would be under military occupation, one would be under martial law, and the third would be for war crimes. Well, we were officially not under martial law and the United States and Guantanamo are not under occupation. The only thing left is war crimes. So they made up these offenses that they claim are war crimes.

War crimes are clearly delineated in Nuremberg and now the international court—

but [they are] none of these offenses they used to charge these people with, because 90 percent of these people had not done anything other than possibly fight as guerrillas, and that's not a war crime. They might have been sympathetic to al Qaeda, or might have been foot soldiers or a go-fer, like my client, but no one charged with the usual offenses had planned the 9/11 attack. Nobody planned on killing civilians.

So they tried to wrap it up into one giant conspiracy, the same as the German Nuremberg defendants had been charged with conspiracy. But that conspiracy was to wage aggressive war or commit genocide. There's no conspiracy by the people in Guantanamo to wage aggressive war or commit genocide. They're not even charged with that. Only the few that were alleged to be responsible for 9/11 have been charged with actual war crimes.

So they made up the material support for terrorism charge which was intended to get anybody they wanted even if it was only for something they said. Or for the video that one client made about why people in the Middle East feel they have a legitimate grievance against the United States. Material support for terrorism was deemed to be a war crime. Solicitation was deemed to be a war crime. Finally, conspiracy was charged, and they said that was a war crime, even though it wasn't a conspiracy to commit aggressive war or genocide.

In fact, that conspiracy to commit aggressive war would more fit Cheney and the whole bunch of neoconservatives that were involved in pushing us into Iraq.

In the DC Court of Appeals, what we argued was, these are not violations of the international law of war, they are not international war crimes. The government said they were. The court of military review agreed with the government. Then we got to the DC circuit, and we said the same thing, and the government turned around and said the defense is absolutely right.

But then they invented something that they call the domestic common law of war. And what they say are the legal precedents are the Civil War— that was one period of time where they held a lot of military commissions. But that was under martial law. They weren't war crimes, they were martial law violations. The other time was the Quirin case, where eight German soldiers entered our lines, and they took their uniforms off and plotted or some of them did to commit sabotage. They were enemy soldiers concealing their identity in our territory. It breaches the law of non-intercourse as a form of perfidy. That was 1942.

So, anyway, they used that as a precedent. But none of the people that we have captured and have been charging with conspiracy committed that offense; none of them came through our lines. They were all in Afghanistan. Or some other place. Maybe being an insurgent— but it's no war crime to be an insurgent. Otherwise

all generals would be in war crimes tribunals, because the US army sponsors insurgents in places like Libya and Syria.

So we're saying that it's a war crime to be an insurgent if you're not on our side. But if you are, it goes to, one person's freedom fighter is another person's terrorist. The whole system was fabricated from falsehoods, and that's what we're operating under now.

One of the people [unnamed colleague] I disagree with most is very supportive of what we have been doing. But he sort of slipped one time and said, this military commissions act, it's almost like we are exercising martial law over the whole world. We are. We are taking those precedents from our own martial law period over our own territory and applying it to the world. Someone who may be anti-drone warfare in Afghanistan or Pakistan is guilty of a war crime, and gets targeted with a drone attack.

So we are doing to the Mideast and other parts what the Germans did to Europe in World War II. They held that any anti-German opinion was basically a war crime. And putting aside the Jewish issue—but non-Jewish people who might be opposed to the Nazis invasion, before the Germans invaded, they would be put into military detention.

That's the problem with the idea that you're at war, because you adopt the most extreme understanding of who the enemy is and then justify killing them or putting them in military detention because they're the enemy.

PW: This case will go through the federal appeals system?

TP: We're waiting for the decision. We've already won once in the DC Court of Appeals. They vacated the conviction of Salim Hamdan, and his case was in parallel with ours. So they were ready to drop the conviction, but the government asked for an *en banc* decision in our case. It's already been held that material support for terrorism and solicitation are not war crimes. So that conviction of our client has been vacated. Conspiracy is the one issue remaining...

I also worked on one of the five cases that are charged with 9/11, for about a year. That's where I ended up doing a lot of research that I'm now talking about, on the origins of the conflict, which can really be dated to the end of World War 1, and the colonialization and division by the French and British of Iraq and Syria and Lebanon, and the brutal measures that France and Britain used to suppress any dissent to their colonialism. So that's where I became acquainted with some experts in the field.

PW: Why is that the background?

TP: In all these cases, it goes to, "Is a rebellion legitimate or is it a war crime?" Well the government says, "It's a war crime. Unless it's our own." When you understand what is really being done depending on the individual client, what we're calling terrorists are what would more properly be known as guerrillas. It's a form of guerrilla warfare. Putting aside the places that they have been charged with killing civilians. I'm not justifying that in any way; but we've also done it ourselves.

In World War II we really adopted the idea of terror bombing. That's no secret. So it's really been us as much as anyone else who have driven the standards of international law downward. And the Nazis had done it before they attacked Warsaw, and the fascists attacked Guernica. The British and French adopted it as early as 1920, what they called colonial policing.

You could say that the West, whatever the Ottomans had done to the Arabs beforehand, when France and Britain took over after World War I—in one article I came across, the British said, "What do you do to a troublesome village? You drop a couple of 500 pound bombs and some more 250 pound bombs on them, and the problem goes away." This was a general who would have been in the Royal Air Force, as it was being formed, describing the use of air power in counter guerrilla operations. About 1920.

We like to believe that it was only Arabs that began killing civilians. We brought that in to the Mideast with western colonial policing. Whatever the Ottomans were doing before the end of World War I, we legitimated it or took it to a higher level with the west's colonial policing policies of killing civilians to terrorize them.

PW: You're not hopeful this is going to end?

TP: I think human nature— people don't change until they have to. The Germans were happy going on for the most part most of them, until they hit Stalingrad. Then they began reconsidering things. I think that's the nature of human beings; until they hit bankruptcy or some other calamitous event they don't see that maybe this is the wrong course, they don't want to change course. What is going to be the turning event, it's hard to say, because these terrorist attacks are pinpricks, we're not going to hit Stalingrad like the Germans did. We'll just slowly erode our economy and— again, we're doing it already, but we can conceal it.

So what do you do? There was the White Rose group in Germany, at the University of Munich— Sophie Scholl, her brother and some friends. Her brother and the friends had been to Stalingrad or the eastern front and came back because they were medical students. They came to realize what the Germans were doing to the

people in the east, and they formed the White Rose group. I think '43, '44.

So they tried to inform the German people of what was really being done in their name by the government. And they were somewhat successful. They got messages out. Unfortunately they got caught and were executed. But even then, some of their messages they had sent out got taken out to the West and were then used as leaflets to drop to the people. So they really contributed far more after their death to the defeat of Germany and the Nazis.

It's those people who see what's wrong that have to try and change the dominant narrative to one of truth, to what is truthfully taking place.

PW: What did the US hit in Vietnam, calamity wise?

TP: The Tet Offensive. Building up to it was the constant propaganda. There's a book written about Westmoreland by a former Army Officer, Lewis Sorley. The title is, *Westmoreland, the General Who Lost Vietnam*. Sorley wasn't anti-Vietnam. He was a lieutenant colonel who just believed that Westmoreland's tactics were wrong, and believed that [Gen. Creighton] Abrams was doing something different, when he wasn't. He wrote this book about how LBJ was trying to use propaganda to sell to the American people that he could have both Vietnam and the war of poverty and have no consequences and that we were winning there. But Westmoreland was an eager participant in what was called the progress offensive, and beyond what even LBJ wanted of him. Part of that was concealing the numbers of how many people were actually opposed.

The South Vietnamese government was a despotic government, they had the population under a harsh martial law. South Vietnam was not a democracy where the people were in any way happy. It was a harsh military regime. Which turned a lot of the Vietnamese away from supporting the government. And the government in Hanoi may have been as bad or worse, but it was driven by nationalistic feeling more than the South was. And there was a lot of support in South Vietnam for unification with the north and against the South Vietnamese government. Westmoreland was covering up and concealing that. And that failure of intelligence allowed the Tet Offensive to take place.

The revisionists like to say the Tet Offensive was our greatest victory, we killed so many Vietcong. But ultimately war is about perceptions. It wasn't about the media turning against us and making a victory look like a defeat. But the critical audience was the Vietnamese people and they could see that, yes, the Vietcong actually does have quite a bit of power.

The American generals said, "The critical audience that we had to maintain this concept of the will for war was the American people." No, it was the Vietnamese

people. If we didn't have their support, the war could never have been won, no matter how much the American people supported it.

That's the same as what's going on in the Mid-East today. It's the people of the Mid-East who have to make decisions, but we have shown by everything we've done, including causing the vast migration out of Mid-East into Europe— all these things have turned any common sense view of what's going on against what the United States is doing. We have done everything wrong from a strategic point of view from the very beginning of 9/11, is the point I've tried to make.

PW: What should we do?

TP: I say, get out of Afghanistan. We've been there 15, 16 years now and failed every day. Our staying there is what stokes the Taliban insurgency. Not to say they're all going to give up when we leave, but we can't win as long as we're there. Because that is the cause of the Taliban fighting against us.

We have no choice but to get out of there, unless we want to continue as the Soviets had done squandering our treasure. It goes to the theme of groups like ISIS and al Qaeda, that the United States is generally an imperialist power taking over the lands of Islam. And as long as we're in Afghanistan, we just maintain the apparent truth of that claim. We need to stop acting as imperialist powers to get this anti-imperialist guerrilla war to a lower level. At least in the foreseeable future, there's going to be continuous opposition to a U.S. imperialist policy.

A fascist foreign policy is going to inherently generate opposition. Hannah Arendt called it: A totalitarian foreign policy, by its very nature, triggers opposition. That goes to understanding ourselves and understanding our enemy. If we can't understand that about ourselves, then how can we ever reduce the violence coming from the opposition? Again, you can find this all in Clausewitz, written 200 years ago.

PW: Where are you on the election?

TP: I'm for anybody but Trump or Clinton. I see in both of them the emphasis on militaristic values. They each have a slightly different tack, depending upon the constituency. Trump has actually talked a little bit more prudently about a war. He's not actually trying to gin up a war with Russia, but then he gets as advisers people like Michael Ledeen and General [Michael] Flynn.

I have read Flynn's book and it's just more of the same: radical Islamic terrorism is the enemy along with Russia and Iran. You can't have an adviser like Flynn and think this guy is going to have a different policy. Plus, Trump has made it clear that even if he doesn't plan to go to war against Russia, it's

not out of prudence, but his own talk has always been about promoting fascist values— putting journalists in prison, detention, whatever.

Hillary Clinton has a track record of that under Obama, basically attacking journalists, like James Risen and others. So I see no difference between the two.

PW: And her foreign policy?

TP: I have great trust in her that she is going to get us into wars. No matter what she says, she has done it already, she has a track record. She is the one who was promoting the Libyan war over Obama's hesitancy, from what I understand. Then Syria, and the Ukraine coup she obviously had to be in on that with her subordinate, [Assistant Secretary of State] Victoria Nuland.

So we know what she'll do. Trump might actually be too lazy or less interested in those things. But again his talk has been just as bad.

PW: Does his Islamophobia bother you?

TP: Absolutely. He's adopting Netanyahu's theme, that this is all radical Islamic terrorism. Again with all of his attacks on Obama for not using that phrase, he has legitimized it even more for Netanyahu. He's tied up with Flynn, and Flynn's made clear that he considers himself a virtual member of the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces]. The US and the IDF are far closer than anyone thinks. If you think about it, we're really operating as a joint command in the Middle East, whether it's us restocking their ammunition, or our special operations groups working hand in glove.

PW: You mentioned Hunter Thompson's 180 rule before I started taping. What's that?

TP: Thompson said his belief was that he tried to follow the 180 degree philosophy, and that was that, anytime government officials tell you one thing, the truth is 180 degrees from that. Or close to 180 degrees. In other words, they're lying; and you have to believe the exact opposite. When you start to think about it, on important issues, that's pretty much true. War issues. "We were winning in Vietnam," the truth was the exact opposite. "The surge succeeded." The truth is the exact opposite. "We're winning here, we're winning there." The truth is the exact opposite.

PW: You're about to go to the New School. What's your role?

TP: I think I'm going to be a very lowly student in a Masters of Arts in Politics program. Obviously this is a culmination of my lifelong interest,

including the tradition the New School has as a university in exile. I have been reading this material all my life. The New School had these anti-totalitarian Jewish Germans come over, Hannah Arendt and Ernst Fraenkel. And they have maintained that same approach to politics. I figure it's a very logical place to go. And I'm still involved in the al-Bahlul case and continuing to study for what may be necessary.

PW: Has meeting the accused been important to your thinking?

TP: I don't think so. My approach in all this has come about from what we're doing to ourselves. Not that I don't have moral qualms about what we're doing to them. But recognizing what we're doing to ourselves. We're not violating the constitution so much as we're supplanting it. We're keeping it in name but it no longer means anything.

To be clear, I do have sympathy for people who are being made the victims, who we are killing in these unjust wars.

PW: What does it mean that you're now friends with lefties?

TP: The lefties you refer to are people that I would have been ideologically opposed to in the '80s— not the '60s and '70s so much. But the '80s. And recognizing my own fallibility, whatever ways we may have disagreed in the past, that's irrelevant. Because today, quite honestly, it's only the left that has taken a critical view of what the U.S. is doing, with the exception of Ron Paul. And, of course, not all of the left, as we saw with Hillary Clinton being nominated. But there's a remnant of the left that does criticize what we're doing and has an understanding of what Israel is doing to the Palestinians and that does make us natural allies.

PW: So I came to the Israel issue for very selfish reasons. Sounds like you are concerned for your community.

TP: I try to make a point of that. My criticism isn't that our militarism is out there winning these wars, though it would be that, as well as our motives are illegitimate. My criticism is that the militarism is out there losing these wars to our detriment, beside the moral cost that we've become complicit in. The point I've tried to make is that people like Petraeus and all these other generals, and the politicians who are supporting them, they're the ones who are leading us over the cliff or into the abyss and they're wrong. Just like Westmoreland. They're the ones who are costing us.

Germany's enemy wasn't the Jews in the '30s and the '40s, as the Nazis claimed. It turned out it was their own Nazi party, and the military leaders who went along with it, they're the ones who destroyed Germany. And it was our generals

in Vietnam that were destroying the United States, and unfortunately their effect is continuing today because we adopted their false stab in the back narrative.

PW: What about the politicians?

TP: Yes. They each feed off each other. Absolutely.

[...]

PW: The name you've mentioned more than any other in our conversation is Hannah Arendt. Why?

TP: She makes a lot of points that are valuable to understand what is going on today. I'm not that acquainted with everything she's written. I'm not even sure that she would agree with me today were she alive. But the points she made are valuable to an analysis of what is happening today. They are points she developed first hand seeing a totalitarian regime coming to power.

**Philip Weiss is the founder and co-editor of Mondoweiss.net, where this interview originally appeared.**

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