

Russia-Baiting and Risks of Nuclear War

Exclusive: The propaganda war on Russia is spinning out of control with a biased investigation blaming Moscow for the MH-17 tragedy and angry exchanges over Syria, raising the risks of nuclear war, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

As U.S. and Russian officials trade barbed threats and as diplomacy on Syria is “on the verge” of extinction, it is tempting to view the ongoing propaganda exchange over who shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in July 2014 as a side-show. That would be a huge mistake – easily made by President Obama’s wet-behind-the-ears sophomoric advisers who seem to know very little of the history of U.S.-Russia relations and appear smug in their ignorance.

Adult input is sorely needed. There are advantages to having some hands-on experience, and having watched how propaganda wars can easily escalate to military confrontation. In [a Sept. 28 interview](#) with *Sputnik Radio*, I addressed some serious implications of the decision by the U.S. and two of its European vassal states (the Netherlands and Ukraine) to stoke tensions with Russia still higher by blaming it for the downing of MH-17.

In short, there is considerable risk that the Russians may see this particular propaganda offensive (which “justified” the European Union’s economic sanctions in 2014), together with NATO’s saber rattling in central Europe, as steps toward war. In fact, there is troubling precedent for precisely that.

A very similar set of circumstances existed 33 years ago after the Soviets did shoot down Korean Airlines Flight 007 on Sept. 1, 1983, when it strayed over sensitive military targets inside the Soviet Union and the KAL-007 pilots failed to respond to repeated warnings. After the tragic reality became obvious, the Soviets acknowledged that they had downed the plane but said they did not know it was a passenger plane.

However, 1983 was another time of high tensions between the two superpowers and President Ronald Reagan wanted to paint the Soviets in the darkest of hues. So, his administration set out to sell the storyline that the Soviets had willfully murdered the 269 passengers and crew.

U.S. government propagandists and their media stenographers laid on all the *Sturm und Drang* they could summon to promote the lie that the Soviets knew KAL-007 was a civilian passenger plane before they shot it down. As Newsweek’s headline declared, “Murder in the Sky.”

Exploitation of the tragedy yielded a steep rise in tensions, and almost led to a nuclear exchange just two months later. There is an important lesson, now three decades later, as Western governments and the mainstream media manufacture more endless fear and hatred of Russia.

The Dutch/Ukrainian Follies

On Wednesday, new “evidence” blaming Russia for the downing of MH-17 over eastern Ukraine was made public – brought out of the oven, as it were, at a Dutch Maid bakery employing Ukrainian confectioners. A bite into the evidence and it immediately dissolves like refined sugar – and leaves an unpleasant artificial taste in the mouth.

The Dutch-Ukrainian charade played by the “Joint Investigation Team,” on which Belgium, Australia and Malaysia also have members, is an insult to the relatives and friends of the 298 human beings killed in the shoot-down. Understandably, those relatives and friends long for truth and accountability, and they deserve it.

Yet, as happened in 1983 with the credulous acceptance of the Reagan administration’s version of the KAL-007 case, the mainstream Western media has embraced the JIT’s findings as “conclusive” and the evidence as “overwhelming.” But it is in reality extraordinarily thin, essentially a case of deciding immediately after the event that the Russians were to be blamed and spending more than two years assembling snippets of intercepted conversations (from 150,000 provided by the Ukrainian intelligence service) that could be stitched together to create an impression of guilt.

In the slick video, which serves as the JIT’s investigative “report,” the intercepted voices don’t say anything about Russian Buk missiles actually being deployed inside Ukraine or shooting down a plane or the need to get the Buk missiles out of Ukraine afterwards. One voice early on says he’d like to have some Buks but – after that – Buks aren’t mentioned and everything in the video is supposition. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Troubling Gaps in MH-17 Report.”](#)]

There’s also no explanation as to why the Russians would have taken a bizarrely circuitous route when a much more direct and discreet course was available. The JIT’s embrace of that strange itinerary was made necessary by the fact that the only “social media” images of a Buk system traveling on July 17, 2014, before the MH-17 shoot-down, show the Buks heading east toward Russia, not west from Russia. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Official and Implausible MH-17 Scenario.”](#)]

In other words, to make the storyline fit with the available images, the JIT had

to take the alleged Russian-Buk convoy on a ridiculous trip far out of the way so it could be photographed in Donetsk before doubling back toward the alleged firing site near Snizhne, which could have been reached easily from the Russian border without the extensive detour through heavily populated areas.

Ignoring Inconvenient Evidence

The JIT also had to ignore its own evidence that on the night of July 16-17, 2014, Ukrainian military convoys were pressing deep inside what has been called “rebel-controlled territory.” The obvious implication is that if a Ukrainian convoy could move to within a few miles of Luhansk, as one of the intercepts described, a Ukrainian Buk convoy could have traveled to the east as well.

And, the JIT’s presumed motive for the Russians taking the extraordinary decision of supplying a Buk battery to the rebels – that it was needed to shoot down Ukrainian warplanes attacking rebels on the front lines – doesn’t fit with the placement of a Buk system on farmland south of Snizhne, far from the frontlines. Indeed, very little about the JIT’s case makes sense.

It also appears that the JIT devoted no effort to examining other plausible scenarios regarding who might have shot down MH-17. The JIT video report makes no reference to the several Ukrainian Buk systems that were operating in eastern Ukraine on the day that MH-17 was shot down.

The Dutch intelligence service MIVD, relying on NATO’s intelligence capabilities, reported earlier that the only anti-aircraft-missile systems in the area on July 17, 2014, capable of shooting down MH-17 were under the control of the Ukrainian military.

But the JIT’s report offered no explanation of where those Ukrainian Buk systems were located or whether Ukraine had accounted for all the Buk missiles in those batteries. The JIT’s blinders can be explained by the fact that it was coordinating with (and relying on) Ukraine’s SBU intelligence agency, which has among its responsibilities the protection of Ukrainian government secrets.

The shocking reality about the JIT is that one of the major suspects for having shot down MH-17, Ukraine, was pretty much running the inquiry.

Yet, since the JIT’s accusations on Wednesday, the West’s mainstream media has put on its own blinders so as not to notice the gaps and inconsistencies in the case. But what should be apparent to anyone without blinders is that the JIT set its sights on blaming the Russians for the MH-17 shoot-down in 2014 and nothing was going to get in the way of that conclusion.

That predetermined conclusion began with Secretary of State John Kerry’s rush to

judgment, just three days after the shoot-down, putting the blame on the Russians. It then took the JIT more than two years to scrape together enough "evidence" to "confirm" Kerry's findings.

The Near-Nuclear Clash

As a longtime CIA analyst covering the Soviet Union, the MH-17 case immediately brought to my mind the exploitation of the KAL-007 tragedy for propaganda purposes in 1983. After KAL-007 went down, the U.S. propaganda machinery, led by the U.S. Information Agency, went into high gear, even doctoring evidence for a U.N. Security Council meeting to "prove" the Soviets *knew* KAL-007 was a civilian aircraft and still shot it down deliberately.

"Barbaric" was the word used then – and in recent days U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power has applied that epithet again to the leaders in the Kremlin.

The same sort of anti-Russian hysteria is in play today as it was in 1983. And we now know based on declassified records that the extreme vilification of Moscow back then led Soviet leaders to believe that President Reagan was preparing for a nuclear war, a conflict that almost got started because of the harsh propaganda, combined with unprecedented military exercises and other provocations.

Last year, a former CIA colleague and senior manager of Soviet analysis, Mel Goodman, wrote about the "war scare" in the Kremlin in the fall of 1983, and asked if history may be repeating itself. Goodman personally helped persuade Reagan to ratchet down the tension, but it's less clear if any adult remains who could tell President Obama to do the same now.

Goodman wrote: "1983 was the most dangerous year in the Soviet-American Cold War confrontation since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. President Reagan declared a political and military campaign against the 'evil empire' ... Soviet leaders believed that the 'correlation of world forces,' Soviet terminology for the international balance, was unfavorable to Moscow and that the U.S. government was in the hands of a dangerous anti-Soviet crowd.

"In response to Reagan's references to the Soviet Union as the 'focus of evil in the world' ... the new Soviet general secretary, Yuri Andropov, a former KGB chief, suggested that Reagan was insane and a liar ... Andropov would take no chances. Soviet leaders believed the Reagan administration was using a mobilization exercise called 'Able Archer' in November 1983 to prepare a nuclear surprise attack. The KGB instituted a sensitive collection effort to determine if the United States was planning such an attack. ...

"In addition to the Able Archer mobilization exercise that alarmed the Kremlin, the Reagan administration authorized unusually aggressive military exercises near the Soviet border that, in some cases, violated Soviet territorial sovereignty. The Pentagon's risky measures included ... naval exercises in wartime approaches to the USSR where U.S. warships had previously not entered. Additional secret operations simulated surprise naval attacks on Soviet targets."

Reining in Reagan

Goodman continued: "One of the great similarities between Russia and the United States was that both sides feared surprise attack. The United States suffered psychologically from the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor; it has still not recovered from 9/11. Yet, the United States has never appreciated that Moscow has similar fears due to Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion in the same year as Pearl Harbor, a far greater nightmare.

"Russia's fear of surprise attack was accentuated in 1983, when the United States deployed the Army's Pershing-II missile and land-based cruise missiles in West Europe as a counter to the Soviet Union's SS-20 missiles. The SS-20 was not a 'strategic' weapon because of a limited range (3,000 miles) well short of the United States. The P-II, however, could not only reach the Soviet Union, but it could destroy Moscow's command and control systems with incredible accuracy. Since the Soviets would have limited warning time – less than five minutes – the P-II was viewed as a first-strike weapon that could destroy the Soviet early warning system.

"In addition to the huge strategic advantage from the deployment of P-II and numerous cruise missiles, the U.S. deployment of the MX missile and the D-5 Trident submarine placed the Soviets in an inferior position with regard to strategic modernization. Overall, the United States held a huge strategic advantage in political, economic, and military policy.

"The Pentagon's psychological warfare program to intimidate the Kremlin, including dangerous probes of Soviet borders by the Navy and Air Force, was unknown to CIA analysts. Thus, the CIA was at a disadvantage in trying to analyze the war scare because the Pentagon refused to share information on military maneuvers and weapons deployments.

"In 1983, the CIA had no idea that the annual Able Archer exercise would be conducted in a provocative fashion with high-level participation. The exercise was a test of U.S. command and communications procedures, including procedures for the release and use of nuclear weapons in case of war."

Goodman continued: "I believed that Soviet fears were genuine and Reagan's national security advisor, Robert McFarlane, was even known to remark, 'We got their attention' but 'maybe we overdid it.' ... [CIA Director William] Casey took our analysis to the White House, and Reagan made sure that the exercises were toned down.

"For the first time, the Able Archer exercise was going to include President Reagan, Vice President Bush, and Secretary of Defense Weinberger, but when the White House understood the extent of Soviet anxiety regarding U.S. intentions, the major principals bowed out. ... Soviet military doctrine had long held that a possible U.S. *modus operandi* for launching an attack on the USSR would be to convert an exercise into the real thing.

"Three decades later, history seems to be repeating itself. Washington and Moscow are once again exchanging ugly broadsides over the confrontations in Ukraine and Syria. The Russian-American arms control and disarmament dialogue has been pushed to the background, and the possibilities of superpower conflict into the foreground. Pentagon briefers are using the language of the Cold War in their congressional briefings, referring to Putin's Russia as an 'existential threat.'"

(END of excerpts from Mel Goodman's account of "Able Archer.")

The KAL-007 Prequel

As I wrote after the MH-17 shoot-down in 2014:

The death of all 298 people onboard the Malaysia Airline flight, going from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, will surely provide plenty of fuel for the already roaring anti-Russian propaganda machine. Still, the U.S. press might pause to recall how it's been manipulated by the U.S. government in the past, including three decades ago by the Reagan administration twisting the facts of the KAL-007 tragedy.

In that case, a Soviet fighter jet shot down a Korean Air Line plane on Sept. 1, 1983, after it strayed hundreds of miles off course and penetrated some of the Soviet Union's most sensitive airspace over military facilities in Kamchatka and Sakhalin Island.

Over Sakhalin, KAL-007 was finally intercepted by a Soviet Sukhoi-15 fighter. The Soviet pilot tried to signal the plane to land, but the KAL pilots did not respond to the repeated warnings. Amid confusion about the plane's identity – a U.S. spy plane had been in the vicinity hours earlier – Soviet ground control ordered the pilot to fire. He did, blasting the plane out of the sky and killing all 269 people on board.

The Soviets soon realized they had made a horrendous mistake. U.S. intelligence also knew from sensitive intercepts that the tragedy had resulted from a blunder, not from a willful act of murder (much as on July 3, 1988, the USS Vincennes fired a missile that brought down an Iranian civilian airliner in the Persian Gulf, killing 290 people, an act which President Ronald Reagan explained as an “understandable accident”).

But a Soviet admission of a tragic blunder regarding KAL-007 wasn't good enough for the Reagan administration, which saw the incident as a propaganda windfall. At the time, the felt imperative in Washington was to blacken the Soviet Union in the cause of Cold War propaganda and to escalate tensions with Moscow.

To make the blackest case against Moscow, the Reagan administration suppressed exculpatory evidence from the U.S. electronic intercepts. The U.S. mantra became “the deliberate downing of a civilian passenger plane.” Newsweek ran a cover emblazoned with the headline “Murder in the Sky.”

“The Reagan administration's spin machine began cranking up,” wrote Alvin A. Snyder, then-director of the U.S. Information Agency's television and film division, in his 1995 book, *Warriors of Disinformation*.

USIA Director Charles Z. Wick “ordered his top agency aides to form a special task force to devise ways of playing the story overseas. The objective, quite simply, was to heap as much abuse on the Soviet Union as possible,” Snyder recalled.

Snyder noted that “the American media swallowed the U.S. government line without reservation.” Said the venerable Ted Koppel on the ABC News ‘Nightline’ program: ‘This has been one of those occasions when there is very little difference between what is churned out by the U.S. government propaganda organs and by the commercial broadcasting networks.’”

On Sept. 6, 1983, the Reagan administration went so far as to present a doctored transcript of the intercepts to the United Nations Security Council. ...

“The tape was supposed to run 50 minutes,” Snyder said about the recorded Soviet intercepts. “But the tape segment we [at USIA] had ran only eight minutes and 32 seconds. ... ‘Do I detect the fine hand of [Richard Nixon's secretary] Rosemary Woods here?’ I [Snyder] asked sarcastically.’”

But Snyder had a job to do: producing the video that his superiors wanted. “The perception we wanted to convey was that the Soviet Union had cold-bloodedly carried out a *barbaric* act,” Snyder wrote.

Seeing the Whole Story

Only a decade later, when Snyder saw the complete transcripts – including the portions that the Reagan administration had hidden – would he fully realize how many of the central elements of the U.S. presentation were false.

The Soviet fighter pilot apparently did believe he was pursuing a U.S. spy plane, according to the intercepts, and he was having trouble in the dark identifying the plane. At the instructions of Soviet ground controllers, the pilot had circled the KAL airliner and tilted his wings to force the aircraft down. The pilot said he fired warning shots, too. “This comment was also not on the tape we were provided,” Snyder wrote.

It was clear to Snyder that in the pursuit of its Cold War aims, the Reagan administration had presented false accusations to the United Nations, as well as to the people of the United States and the world. To Reagan’s people, the ends of smearing the Soviets had justified the means of falsifying the historical record.

In his book, Snyder acknowledged his role in the deception and drew an ironic lesson from the incident. The senior USIA official wrote, “The moral of the story is that all governments, including our own, lie when it suits their purposes. The key is to lie first.”

[End of my excerpt]

In 2016, as we deal with the West’s new hysteria regarding Russia – complete with rehashes of prior propaganda themes and military escalations – the pressing question is whether there are any adults left at senior levels of Official Washington who can rein in the madness before things spin entirely out of control.

Santayana famously noted, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” But the real danger now is that history won’t stop at repeating itself but will continue beyond, plunging over the nuclear precipice.

Ray McGovern 27-year career as a CIA analyst included leading CIA’s Soviet Foreign Policy Branch. He later conducted morning briefings of President Reagan’s most senior national security advisers with the *President’s Daily Brief*. He now works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington.

A Victory in Mosul Could Help Clinton

If a U.S.-backed coalition drives the Islamic State from Mosul, Iraq, before the U.S. elections, the victory could boost Hillary Clinton's campaign and undercut Donald Trump's criticisms, writes Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

The liberation of Mosul ahead of the Nov. 8 U.S. election would boost Hillary Clinton's chances and enhance the legacy of her chief proponent, Barack Obama. As preparations continue to intensify for a major military operation to free Iraq's second largest city from ISIS's grip, talk here 55 miles away in Erbil is that the operation could be launched on Oct. 15.

A source who speaks regularly to residents of Mosul told me that ISIS militants have virtually disappeared from the streets of the city. Where before they were out in numbers enforcing their extreme version of Sharia law (you could be executed for smoking a cigarette), they are now hardly to be seen. The residents aren't sure what's going on. But it could mean ISIS fighters have begun evacuating ahead of the attack.

This is what happened in June when, after initial fighting, ISIS deserted Fallujah allowing the Iraqi army and Shia militias to take the city. Then last month, ISIS extremists abandoned the oil town of Qayyara, just 48 miles south of Mosul, ahead of advancing Iraqi army units. The militants released petroleum into the streets and set it on fire as they retreated.

Preparations are being made outside Erbil for an influx of refugees from Mosul that could number as many as 500,000, according to Stephen O'Brien, the U.N.'s under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs. Another million people could flee elsewhere to the Kurdish region.

If the reports of vanished ISIS militants from the streets of Mosul are correct, occupying the city may come without the immense civilian casualties that would almost certainly result from U.S. aerial bombardments and house-to-house fighting.

Meetings among Iraqi Kurdish authorities, Baghdad officials and Americans have intensified here in the Kurdish capital and in Baghdad. The aim is to avoid a clash over who gets to control Mosul once it is taken. The city is a mix of Sunni Arabs and Kurds, as well as several other minority groups.

Relations between Baghdad and Erbil have been severely strained for several years over the control of oil and territory. The Kurds have been selling

petroleum on their own through Turkey, cutting off revenue to the central government. In response Baghdad has cut off all government revenues to the region. The Kurds have long sought independence from Baghdad but have been prevented by the U.S. from going ahead with a referendum.

Kurdish peshmerga forces have been accused of seizing control of Arab majority towns that they have liberated from ISIS. Amnesty International reported that the Kurds have raised houses to prevent Arab Iraqis from returning.

Divided Allies

The fear is that the real battle will be between Kurdish and Iraqi Army units after ISIS leaves Mosul, the biggest prize in the war to rid Iraq of the Islamic State. Such a bloody fight, especially if Mosul is taken relatively peacefully, would undermine the narrative of the Obama administration's triumph.

So the U.S. is sending 600 more troops to help coordinate logistics for the attack, U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said on Wednesday. There are already 4,400 U.S. troops throughout Iraq.

ISIS has controlled Mosul since July 2014. Where they would flee to, if they are indeed leaving the city ahead of the operation, is another issue. It could further complicate the war in neighboring Syria, whose border is less than 180 miles from Mosul, if they retreat there. Raqqah, the so-called Syrian capital of the Islamic State, is only 290 miles away.

The U.S. effort against ISIS has been focused more on Iraq than Syria. Obama announced his air war against the group when it came within a few miles of capturing Erbil in the summer of 2014. U.S. air power and the peshmerga pushed them back towards Mosul.

U.S. operations in Syria, on the other hand, have been questionable. It has appeared that the U.S. has largely left ISIS alone as it advances there. For instance, Washington did nothing to stop ISIS's capture of Palmyra, which was liberated by the Syrian government with Russian help earlier this year.

If in fact ISIS has been allowed to play a role in Washington's goal of "regime change" in Damascus, the influx of ISIS fighters from Iraq would put additional pressure on the Syrian government. It could also help create the conditions for the quagmire that the U.S. seems so intent on getting the Russians into.

The liberation of Mosul, especially without a fight, would be trumpeted as a major victory for the legacy of Obama's beleaguered foreign policy and indirectly a boost for Hillary Clinton. Though she hasn't been Secretary of State for four years, Clinton is still closely associated with Obama White

House.

The expulsion of ISIS from Mosul could undermine Donald Trump's insistent criticism of the Obama administration's failure to deliver a knockout punch to the extremists.

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Obama's Gift to Israel – and Lockheed

President Obama approved \$38 billion in military aid to Israel, but that cash is then recycled to subsidize the U.S. Military-Industrial Complex like some giant money-laundering machine of the taxpayers' money, explains JP Sottile.

By JP Sottile

The Israeli lobby wins again! That's the obvious takeaway from President Barack Obama's historically large, but not quite unprecedented \$38 billion "aid package" to Bibi Netanyahu's supposedly intransigent government.

In Israel, the ten-year deal is seen as a solid, but not complete victory for Bibi. In the U.S., the deal looks like it's the cost of doing business with Iran. Sadly, the deal also looks like a bad sign of things to come for the Palestinian people.

Shortly after the deal was sealed, President Obama's farewell tour took him to the United Nations where he stated without irony, "Israel must recognize that it cannot permanently occupy and settle Palestinian land." The utter toothlessness of his admonition was preemptively underlined by a fascinating online video posted by Netanyahu in which he claimed the Palestinians – not the rapidly encroaching Israelis – were the real outlaws. Apparently, they are advocating "ethnic cleansing" by hoping to reclaim pilfered land from illegal Israel settlements peppered throughout the absconded territory of the West Bank.

It's an amazing bit of pretzel logic gleefully served up to a dwindling, demoralized crowd of two-state enthusiasts. The mustard came when Obama made his final, flaccid appeal to a now-buoyant Bibi regarding his not-so-subtle expansion of Israel's ethnically-pure settlements.

Of course, this predictable turn of events confirmed what critics of Israel's outsized influence have always believed – that when it comes to the State of Israel, the fix is always in no matter how badly the “special relationship” appears to be broken.

In 2006, John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt of Harvard University made a strong case that, as they wrote in the London Review of Books, the “Israel Lobby” surpasses all “other special-interest groups” in its ability to not just “skew foreign policy” away from America’s “national interest,” but it has also simultaneously convinced “Americans that US interests and those of the other country – in this case, Israel – are essentially identical.”

Although there's little doubt that much of America's foreign policy establishment seems inexorably convinced that the two nations share “identical” interests, there are indications that Israel is not quite the arm-twister it used to be.

That's because the Iran Nuke Deal was a distinct departure from the usually suspect arrangement between Washington and Tel Aviv. It does appear that Obama broke 40 years of Israeli exceptionalism to defeat the vaunted Israeli Lobby. In exchange, Obama had to paper-over that unprecedented break with 38 billion greenbacks. In effect, he purchased Israel's acceptance of the Iran Nuclear Deal.

Transactional Politics

It's transactional politics and it makes a lot of sense. To keep war with Iran off the table, Obama simply had to reinforce Israel's nuclear-tipped military edge over Iran, over other regional powers and over the people living in the bombing range also known as Gaza. But there is another thrust to the bulging aid package.

It also reinforced the United States' notable edge as the world's leading salesman of military hardware. And that's the interesting upshot of the big deal with little Israel. It's all laid out in a synopsis of the “Memorandum of Understanding” published by the White House:

–This amount represents a significant increase over the current MOU by every measure, and will enable Israel to ***acquire additional advanced military capabilities from the United States.***

–It includes \$33 billion in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) funds and an ***unprecedented \$5 billion commitment in missile defense assistance.*** This funding will be disbursed in equal increments of \$3.3 billion in FMF and \$500

million in missile defense funding each year for the duration of the understanding.

–In practical terms, ***the level of funding*** specified in the MOU will ***permit Israel to update the lion's share of its fighter aircraft fleet – including through the acquisition of additional F-35s*** – increase its missile defense, and acquire other defense capabilities needed to meet its threat environment.

–***The \$500 million in annual missile defense funding*** under the MOU ***exceeds*** the average level of ***non-emergency support the United States has provided to Israel for missile defense over the last five years.***

Most importantly, President Peace Prize secured a key provision that terminates Israel's ability to spend 26.3 percent of Uncle Sam's annual gift "within Israel on non-U.S. products." In other words, all of the tax dollars Uncle Sam sends over there now have to come back here and be spent in Uncle Sam's Club – a.k.a. America's Supermarket of Military Hardware.

The Needy Military Industrial Complex

In fact, the White House stated with detectable pride that "Israel will spend more funding, as much as \$1.2 billion per year, on the advanced military capabilities that only the United States can provide." So, Israel's big win also cornered a part of their market for those American corporations that lead the world in developing new and exciting ways of killing people.

And it comes none too soon for America's defense industry. As a "longtime consultant for American military contractors" recently told Foreign Policy, the already wildly profitable defense industry is looking for some assistance because "domestic defense spending is flat as a pancake and Israel is a consumer of high-end military technology."

And nothing is more "high-end" (and more in need of aid) than Lockheed Martin's bloated boondoggle – the F-35. As it turns out, the biggest win of all might be for Lockheed's embattled, trillion-plus dollar weapon system.

So far, the "next generation" fighter injures its pilots, just suffered "another engine fire" from tailwinds, probably cannot beat the F-16 or European Typhoon in a dogfight and is still hampered by a panoply of "serious problems," according to the "Pentagon's top weapons tester." But fear not, Lockheed shareholders ... here comes military aid to the rescue!

As Eric Pianin detailed in The Fiscal Times, Israel was an early-adopter of the "ill-fated, long overdue and far over budget" fighter jet. In 2006, they slated an "augmented version" of the jet as a replacement for yet another profitable

weapon system purchased from Uncle Sam's Club – their fleet of 300 F-16s.

The problem is that they'd budgeted \$5 billion to buy 100 F-35s. That works out to a bargain price of \$50 per plane. But now "the price tag has ballooned to \$15 billion – or about \$200 million per plane," writes Pianin.

So, it's quadrupled in price over the last decade ... and it hasn't even been delivered yet! But the first souped-up Israeli model is supposed to arrive on Dec. 12, 2016. And that's where the \$38 billion deal comes in. The "aid" is going to help the Israelis make up the difference.

So, thanks to the American taxpayer, they'll be able to afford to receive the plane from Lockheed, which has only been able to build the plane because of an ongoing subsidy also provided by the U.S. taxpayer in the form of the Pentagon's own haphazard effort to get the "most expensive weapons system in history" off the ground here in the United States.

Can't you just hear the money flushing down the drain ... and into the already-flush bank accounts of the executives and shareholders who are perennially enriched by the world's biggest weapons-maker and the U.S. government's biggest contractor?

Investment in Lobbying

Not coincidentally, Lockheed has spent over \$7 million on lobbying thus far this year. And that's why it's worth considering that the Israel Lobby is not, as Mearsheimer and Walt claimed in 2006 and many believe today, the apex predator among the herd of special interest groups feasting on U.S. foreign policy.

The vaunted American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has spent \$1.8 million on lobbying so far this year. Its high-water mark was during last year's scrum around the Iran nuclear deal when it spent \$3.88 million, according to OpenSecrets.org.

And Lockheed's high water mark? They hit \$16.1 million in 2008, when the profitable, but ever-more catastrophic Global War on Terror came under a great deal of election year scrutiny. That year was a high-water mark for the industry as a whole with a whopping \$153.3 million spread around the political process by Profiteers of Doom.

Lockheed also leads the defense industry pack in giving to Congressional candidates of both stripes. So far this year they've doled-out \$3.1 million while the entire industry has dropped a cool \$22 million around Capitol Hill, according to OpenSecrets.org's latest numbers. It's enough to (almost) make Sheldon Adelson blush.

So, here's the question: Is Israel's \$38 billion windfall really yet another example of how Washington, DC is "Israeli Occupied Territory"? Or it is just a continuation of a decades-long defense industry money-laundering scheme dating back to the start of the Cold War with the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949?

That's when the so-called Iron Curtain officially became a cash cow for the Military-Industrial Complex and President Harry Truman created one of the industry's most reliable slush funds – foreign military assistance. Some of that aid was used to send U.S. weapons directly to allies. Some of it was direct aid (a.k.a. money) used to buy U.S. weapons. Some of it financed the purchase of U.S. weapons. And some of it was used to buy from other dealers – particularly as Europe built-up its own, NATO-stoked defense industry.

But mostly it's been a tidy little loop that cycles U.S. tax-dollars back to the corporate arms-dealers back in the United States. And it still is. That's why contractors are touting Cold War 2.0 to investors and why the State Department deploys *de facto* salespeople to push arms around the Middle East and why the Israelis always get their way in spite of what would seem to be America's larger national interests.

Frankly, the \$38 billion "aid" package is as much of – if not more of – a gift to the Military-Industrial millionaires who've made a killing off of the Middle East's woes. And now that Obama nixed Israel's use of aid on its own industry, it is really just the middleman through which the money passes on its way back to America's defense industry.

A Money-Laundering Scheme

The stark truth is that America's so-called "national interests" reflect the wishes of the Military-Industrial Complex far more than they do Israel or any foreign power. That's why military aid so often laundered tax dollars through a rogue's gallery of strongmen, counterproductive military juntas, brutal anti-Communist regimes and, since the advent of the Global War on Terror, through those snazzy little coalitions cobbled together out of nations willing to aid in overthrowing governments, to abet in torture and, thereby, to create an endless supply of enemies around the world.

Really, once you view U.S. foreign policy as a vast money-laundering scheme, America's frustrating (perhaps even immoral) policies toward Israel and Saudi Arabia and Eastern Europe and practically everywhere else suddenly look a lot more rational.

So, it isn't ideology or stupidity or some Svengali-induced trance that has

America looking the other way in the Occupied Territories or supporting the carnage in Yemen or fueling the largest military build-up in Europe ... since the last largest military build-up in Europe.

Rather, there is a simple profit motive at the heart of U.S. foreign policy. Always has been. Maybe there always will be. To wit, America isn't just the world's biggest spender on its own military, but it also accounts for one-third of all foreign military sales worldwide.

Uncle Sam's Club services "at least" 96 countries. That's nearly half of the world's nations. And 40 percent of those weapons end up in the Middle East. Like Israel, Saudi Arabia is among its most reliable customers and Uncle Sam is keeping them supplied with everything they need to turn Yemen into a humanitarian catastrophe.

Just like Israel, many point to the pernicious power of Saudi influence in shaping U.S. policy. And like Israeli policy, Saudi policy seems counterproductive to U.S. interests. Perhaps even more so since Saudi-exported jihadism helped set the conditions for the Global War on Terror. But that means the Saudi Government is not just a great customer, but they even open up new markets!

And that's the real reason Saudi Arabia, just like Israel, always seems to get away with (literally) murder. It's not because they "control" the United States. It's because U.S. taxpayer-funded defense spending in a "dangerous world" is the most reliable source of income in human history.

Like Listerine needs "chronic halitosis" to sell mouthwash, the post-Cold War defense industry needs lotsa "bad breath" in Russia, in the South China Sea, in Africa and, of course, in the Middle East. And who leaves a more bitter taste in the mouths of their neighbors than Israel and Saudi Arabia?

Even better, here in the U.S. they've become big glaring targets of disdain and suspicion despite the fact that the biggest beneficiaries of U.S. policy toward both are the U.S. corporations that sell them big bangs for big bucks ... and profit even more off the collateral chaos they spawn.

So, it's not influence. It's really about customer service. And the customer is always right.

JP Sottile is a freelance journalist, radio co-host, documentary filmmaker and former broadcast news producer in Washington, D.C. He blogs at Newsvandal.com or you can follow him on Twitter, <http://twitter/newsvandal>.

Parry Laments Loss of Journalistic Skepticism

From Editor Robert Parry: Skepticism once was considered a universal virtue in American journalism, but – as we’ve seen in too many recent cases – it is now applied selectively. When some demonized American “adversary” is accused of something, skepticism disappears and the charges, no matter how thinly supported by evidence, are accepted as flat fact. Entirely different rules apply for an American “ally.”

However, at Consortiumnews.com, we still believe in the old values that call for skepticism in all cases. So, whether we’re talking about Saddam Hussein or Muammar Gaddafi or Vladimir Putin, we insist on checking out the accusations against them and trying to apply fair standards.

That’s not always popular. Many people want us to join the pack and denounce the “evil ones.” But skepticism is what I think you, the reader, deserve. In my view, it’s also what’s best for American democracy, the concept that an informed electorate – not a population numbed by propaganda and disinformation – is central to making the process work.

Honest reporting also is necessary for the world to avoid unnecessary wars. We’ve seen how unprofessional journalism at America’s premier newspapers has contributed to conflicts with Iraq, Libya, Syria and now nuclear-armed Russia. Things are getting more and more dangerous.

But for Consortiumnews to continue to serve this role of applying skepticism when others won’t, we need at least a modest budget, which is why we make fundraising appeals three times a year. We are currently trying to wrap up our late-summer/early fall fund drive, but we’re still less than halfway to our \$30,000 target.

So, please contribute what you can with a donation by [credit card online](#) (we accept Visa, Mastercard, American Express and Discover), by PayPal (our PayPal account is named after our original email address, “consortnew@aol.com”), or by [mailing a check](#) to Consortium for Independent Journalism (CIJ); 2200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 102-231; Arlington VA 22201.

We also are registered with PayPal’s Giving Fund under the name Consortium for Independent Journalism. And, since we are a 501-c-3 non-profit, donations by American taxpayers may be tax-deductible.

And, we are offering a special thank-you gift for those who can give \$125 or

more – or if you set up a recurring monthly donation by credit card or PayPal.

You can receive a signed copy of the new edition of my second book, *Trick or Treason*, which was originally published in 1993 and has been long out of print. It tells the inside story of my PBS-Frontline investigation of the 1980 October Surprise mystery (whether Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush sabotaged President Carter's Iran-hostage negotiations to ensure their electoral victory). There is also a new "Afterword" that brings the story up to the present day.

As part of the gift package, we are including a DVD of the Frontline documentary, "Election Held Hostage," the 1991 program that resulted from the investigation.

If you wish to get this book-and-DVD thank-you gift, just follow up your donation with an e-mail to us at info@consortiumnews.com with instructions on where to mail it. We'll pay the shipping charges.

Another way to help is to buy a five-book set of my other books – *Fooling America*, *Lost History*, *Secrecy & Privilege*, *Neck Deep* and *America's Stolen Narrative* – [through the Web site](#) at a deep discount price, with part of each purchase going to the fund drive.

Thanks for your support and for making our two decades-plus of honest journalism possible. Our work could not happen without your help.

Robert Parry is a longtime investigative reporter who broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for the Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 to create an outlet for well-reported journalism that was being squeezed out of an increasingly trivialized U.S. news media.

US Foreign Policy Elite vs. the Evil One

The crème de la U.S. foreign policy establishment gathered in Texas last week, reaffirming at a friendly conclave the need for their skillful stewardship of the national security state, as Michael Brenner witnessed.

By Michael Brenner

The combined security/intelligence communities held a high-powered public conference at the University of Texas in Austin last week, a now regular event blessed by Chancellor (Admiral) William McRaven who previously had led OPERATIONS COMMAND (SOCOM).

The line-up of heavy hitters was impressive: Clapper, McLaughlin, Hadley, Breedlove, Zelikow, Negroponte, Eliot Cohen, General Norton Schwartz (former Chief of staff, Air Force), Joshua Bolten (Bush Chief of Staff), John Helgerson (CIA Inspector General), Kurt Campbell. Its purpose, though, remains obscure.

Outreach to the American public is one standard explanation for this type of shindig. Communication in this instance, though, was one-way. The panels included only true believers in a hard-line, aggressive approach to a very long security agenda. The speakers' roster was similarly stacked. Token participants from outside the "community" who had figured in previous meetings were nowhere in sight. So what the public gets is instruction rather than exchange or communication.

The choice of Texas is particularly odd since there are few locals who need conversion. At last year's event, CIA Director John Brennan's litany of grievances against all those who, like the Senate Intelligence Committee, were trying to rein in the CIA, NSA, et al elicited a standing ovation from the entire audience (minus one).

The level of enthusiasm was what one might expect had he announced the decimation of the last Comanche band or a State Supreme Court's decision to void all land grants to Mexicans from the King of Spain. In 2015, Russia, Iran, Syria, the Islamic State and – not least- domestic enemies provided the amphetamine-like rush. Same this year. So what we had was the College of Cardinals trekking 1,200 miles to preach to the choir of a provincial town.

This effusive welcome is not surprising. After all, Texas is where the Governor (Greg Abbott) called out the State Guard to defend the citizenry from the threat of abuse by U.S. Army units engaged in a training exercise in one county north of Austin. He voiced sympathy for their claimed fears about possible rapine, robbery, wreckage, and – above all – confiscation of their firearms. So did almost all other elected officials.

In other words, the event had elements of an Evangelical rally – the crowd leaned toward the elderly, albeit with a considerable sprinkling of the college-aged and Generation "Xs." Still, it was illuminating to hear the Word straight from the apostles. Understandably, in those congenial conditions restraint or ellipse are dispensed with in outbursts of self-satisfied candor.

Perhaps a better metaphor is a gathering of senior prelates at Rome's Society of Jesus sometime in the early Seventeenth Century. For America's foreign policy Establishment has a "near enemy" and a "far enemy." The former includes those forces who would curb the robust exertion of power at home and abroad – either through misguided legal constraints or a scaling back of its audacious goals.

The aroused opposition to draconian surveillance and associated illegalities had been a threat to the Establishment's authority and legitimacy. Now, that abortive Reformation has been quelled and the *status quo ante* restored with trivial concessions to the heretics. The outgoing Pope had seen the necessity and virtue of aligning with the Society and the Pope-designate is a proven sister-in-Christ.

Prioritizing Enemies

The "near enemy" is the priority, of course. For it poses a manifest or latent threat to the essence of the Establishment: its bureaucratic control, its lavish financing, its political clout and – above all – its position as cynosure of the creed, defender of the Faith from heresy, and spiritual guide to the nation in pursuing its external relations.

The "far enemy" is the world "out there." That space can be divided into four categories: those places where conversion is complete and governments can be expected to bow to American suzerainty: Western Europe, Japan, etc.; other places where active proselytization is well underway: Eastern Europe, South Asia; places occupied by hostile forces which threaten directly or otherwise endanger the Establishment's supremacy or general well-being; and, finally, those ambiguous zones where threats potentially could spawn.

Category III is where the "Evil One" resides – in his many manifestations: e.g. Russia, Iran, North Korea, Islamic terrorists. The "Evil One" is omnipresent – even when not visible as was the case in Austin.

Category IV embraces two concerns: a) nests where minor vipers may lurk – Latin American "reformers," African gangster cabals, Mexican drug cartels – but not Afghan ones; and b) China. This last bulks large and ominously in the anxious imagination of the Establishment. It is the equivalent of nascent Islam to Christian Europe of the Dark Ages or – perhaps more closely – the Ottomans to Renaissance Europe.

What to do – confront, co-opt, co-exist, engage tactically? The Establishment's movers-and-shakers instinctively lean toward confrontation. Their practical sense leans them toward vigilant accommodation. They fret but they don't think creatively.

The blunt truth is that China scares the American foreign policy elite. It is too big, too successful, too self-confident, too ready to make claims of exceptionalism that supposedly are an American exclusive. That is why these Establishment apostles compulsively deploy the classic avoidance devices of disparaging it, of magnifying its problems, of persuading themselves that the

United States' position as king of the hill is impregnable. In other words, adolescent wishful thinking.

The "near enemy" front and the "far enemy" front intersect. They are mutually dependent. High-threat assessments on the latter are assets in campaigning for maximum support on the former. Expanded assets, material and political, in turn permit for more extensive engagement abroad. A veritable perpetual motion machine.

There does indeed exist a terrorism industry whose behavior largely conforms to that of other industries. It admittedly has a number of distinctive features. It is a public/private partnership; therefore it deals in two currencies – political rewards and money. Its activities have deep and pervasive support among the populace at large and elites. It is impervious to criticism since its functions are deemed critical to the nation's basic security. Critics are either shrugged off or accused of not taking seriously grave threats.

The terrorism industry's value to the country is impossible to measure since its success is defined in terms of negatives (things that haven't happened) rather than positives (things that did happen). While tangible benefits are immeasurable, there are millions of people whose livelihood, status, self-esteem and political future depend on perpetuation of the terrorism industry as it currently is structured and operates.

In addition, the terrorism industry is both seller and buyer of its products – all of which are in the form of services. Its for-profit and non-profit components both depend on a high level of demand. Fear of terrorism generates the demand. Stoking fear generates higher returns for all those who work in the industry.

The same people in the non-profit sector who benefit also make the judgments, launch the policies and control the discourse as to how great the need is. A critique of assertions about the magnitude, nature and change in the level of threat we face must be understood against this backdrop. So, too, must any assessment of how well present policies and practices are working.

Remarkable Conclave

The Austin conclave was remarkable in two respects: its calm self-confidence; and its unquestioning belief that the American Establishment has a Providential mission to oversee the affairs of the globe. Truth is immanent (or inherent) in U.S. foreign policy. America's motives pure. Its means measured.

The paramount responsibility of those who lead is to scour the world to find and identify threats – and then to devise strategies for eliminating them.

Periodically, they must also ensure that the American people fully understand why and what is being done on their behalf.

When it comes to policy advocacy, the two recurrent words are “should” and “must” – as in *New York Times* editorials. “We should strengthen our military presence in Syria to counter Russian influence.” “Putin must stop his aggression in the Baltics and Balkans” – Stephen Hadley, national security adviser to President George W. Bush. (Geography evidently is not this crowd’s strong suit).

Embedded in this rhetoric is a pair of core propositions. Like pillars of the Faith, they do not require explicit restatement. The overriding purpose of American foreign policy is to achieve absolute security for the United States. In the long run, that means Americanizing the world. In the shorter term, that means strenuous, unrelenting efforts to smite our enemies and to preempt potential threats.

There are four guiding principles:

- It is legitimate, even imperative, for the threatened democratic world, led by Washington, to use its power to forestall assaults on them.
- Traditional concepts of state sovereignty do not constitute an acceptable legal or political barrier to efforts at imposing that solution.
- The United States, therefore, is not a “global Leviathan” that advances its selfish interests at the expense of others. It is, rather, the benign producer of public goods.
- The privilege of partial exception from the international norms, including the right to act unilaterally, is earned by an historical record of selfless performance.

Don’t Look Back

The worthies on the Austin panel spent no time on a retrospective critique of the policies and action that have flowed from this world-view. The objective record may show that the country has invested enormously in serial failure relieved only by the modest success of dispersing Classic Al Qaeda and dislodging the Taliban – temporarily.

The global struggle goes on against enemies real and imagined without any appreciable change in strategic thinking. Its sole convincing victory has been mastery of the American public mind. Yet, there is no reappraisal of core premises. The tragic Iraq fiasco got one mention: “we need to better identify what factors in the equation we have inadequate Intelligence about, like WMDs”

–Director of National Intelligence James Clapper.

The resilience of Faith in strategic doctrine as some sort of Holy Writ is evident in the Establishment’s approach to Syria. Speakers evinced an undifferentiated and unqualified consensus on America purposes there. American priorities emerged clearly. In this mess, we still can discern what they are – and that there exists a consensus on their importance and ordering. As noted in an earlier post:

1. The paramount objective is to thwart Russia’s efforts to exercise influence and to establish its position in Syria.
2. Get rid of Assad. We have committed ourselves to the Israelis, the Turks, and the Saudis on this. Their wish is our command.
3. Marginalize and weaken Iran by breaking the Shi’ite Crescent
4. Wear down and slowly fragment ISIS. Success on this score can cover failure on all others in domestic opinion.
5. Ensure a permanent American physical presence in Iraq, i.e. achieve what we failed to achieve in 2008.
6. Facilitate a de facto partition of Iraq with bits of Syria attached to the Iraqi bits. Hold this out as the lure for the Kurds to act as our infantry.
7. Facilitate some kind of Sunni entity in Anbar and eastern Syria. How can we prevent it being destabilized by attacks from ISIS remnants? How can we prevent it falling under the sway of Al Qaeda? Good subjects for the Obama Foundation’s first major study project.
8. Al-Nusra in Syria proper? Hope that the Turks can “domestic” al-Nusra. Incentive? Obscure. No one made mention of Washington’s tacit alliance with Al Qaeda in Syria. No one made mention of pressuring Turkey and the KSA to cease and desist supporting jihadi elements, no mention was made of Israel, no mention was made of post-Assad Syria.

The words “should” or “must” in regard to other parties were absent from all discussion of Syria. Indeed, Hadley and others urged that we redouble efforts to repair credibility in the eyes of Riyadh and Ankara. These Establishment figures have spent so much time in blind alleys that they seem unable to tell night from day.

Every Soul is captive

Of its own Deeds – Qur’an 74:38

The U.S. foreign policy Establishment is not big on introspection or self-reflection – it sparks fear of an acute agoraphobia attack.

Michael Brenner is a professor of international affairs at the University of

How the US Armed-up Syrian Jihadists

The West blames Russia for the bloody mess in Syria, but U.S. Special Forces saw close up how the chaotic U.S. policy of aiding Syrian jihadists enabled Al Qaeda and ISIS to rip Syria apart, explains ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

“No one on the ground believes in this mission or this effort”, a former Green Beret writes of America’s covert and clandestine programs to train and arm Syrian insurgents, “they know we are just training the next generation of jihadis, so they are sabotaging it by saying, ‘Fuck it, who cares?’”. “I don’t want to be responsible for Nusra guys saying they were trained by Americans,” the Green Beret added.

In a detailed report, *US Special Forces Sabotage White House Policy gone Disastrously Wrong with Covert Ops in Syria*, Jack Murphy, himself a former Green Beret (U.S. Special Forces), recounts a former CIA officer having told him how the “the Syria covert action program is [CIA Director John] Brennan’s baby ... Brennan was the one who breathed life into the Syrian Task Force ... John Brennan loved that regime-change bullshit.”

In gist, Murphy tells the story of U.S. Special Forces under one Presidential authority, arming Syrian *anti-ISIS* forces, whilst the CIA, obsessed with overthrowing President Bashar al-Assad, and operating under a separate Presidential authority, conducts a separate and parallel program to arm anti-Assad insurgents.

Murphy’s report makes clear the CIA disdain for combatting ISIS (though this altered somewhat with the beheading of American journalist James Foley in August 2014): “With the CIA wanting little to do with anti-ISIS operations as they are focused on bringing down the Assad regime, the agency kicked the can over to 5th Special Forces Group. Basing themselves out of Jordan and Turkey” – operating under “military activities” authority, rather than under the CIA’s coveted Title 50 covert action authority.

The “untold story,” Murphy writes, is one of abuse, as well as bureaucratic infighting, which has only contributed to perpetuating the Syrian conflict.

But it is not the “turf wars,” nor the “abuse and waste,” which occupies the

central part of Murphy's long report, that truly matters; nor even the contradictory and self-defeating nature of U.S. objectives pursued. Rather, the report tells us quite plainly why the attempted ceasefires have failed (although this is not explicitly treated in the analysis), and it helps explain why parts of the U.S. Administration (Defense Secretary Ashton Carter and CIA Director Brennan) have declined to comply with President Obama's will – as expressed in the diplomatic accord (the recent ceasefire) reached with the Russian Federation.

The story is much worse than that hinted in Murphy's title: it underlies the present mess which constitutes relations between the U.S. and Russia, and the collapse of the ceasefire.

"The FSA [the alleged "moderates" of the Free Syria Army] made for a viable partner force for the CIA *on the surface*, as they were anti-regime, ostensibly having the same goal as the seventh floor at Langley" [the floor of the CIA headquarters occupied by the Director and his staff] – i.e. the ousting of President Assad.

But in practice, as Murphy states bluntly: "distinguishing between the FSA and al-Nusra is impossible, because they are virtually the same organization. As early as 2013, FSA commanders were defecting with their entire units to join al-Nusra. There, they still retain the FSA monicker, but it is merely for show, to give the appearance of secularism so they can maintain access to weaponry provided by the CIA and Saudi intelligence services. The reality is that the FSA is little more than a cover for the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra. ...

"The fact that the FSA simply passed American-made weaponry off to al-Nusra is also unsurprising considering that the CIA's vetting process of militias in Syria is lacklustre, consisting of little more than running traces in old databases. These traces rely on knowing the individuals' real names in the first place, and assume that they were even fighting-age males when the data was collected by CTC [Counterterrorism Centre] years prior."

Sympathy for Al Qaeda

Nor, confirms Murphy, was vetting any better with the 5th Special Forces operating out of Turkey: "[It consisted of] a database check and an interview. The rebels know how to sell themselves to the Americans during such interviews, but they still let things slip occasionally. 'I don't understand why people don't like al-Nusra,' one rebel told the American soldiers. Many had sympathies with the terrorist groups such as Nusra and ISIS."

Others simply were not fit to be soldiers. "They don't want to be warriors. They

are all cowards. That is the moderate rebel,” a Green Beret told Murphy, who adds:

“Pallets of weapons and rows of trucks delivered to Turkey for American-sponsored rebel groups simply sit and collect dust because of disputes over title authorities [i.e. Presidential authorities] and funding sources, while authorization to conduct training for the militias is turned on and off at a whim. One day they will be told to train, the next day not to, and the day after only to train senior leaders. Some Green Berets believe that this *hesitation comes from the White House getting wind that most of the militia members are affiliated with Nusra and other extremist groups.*” [emphasis added.]

Murphy writes: “While the games continue on, morale sinks for the Special Forces men in Turkey. Often disguised in Turkish military uniform, one of the Green Berets described his job as, ‘Sitting in the back room, drinking chai while watching the Turks train future terrorists’ ...

“Among the rebels that U.S. Special Forces and Turkish Special Forces were training, ‘A good 95 percent of them were either working in terrorist organizations or were sympathetic to them,’ a Green Beret associated with the program said, adding, ‘A good majority of them admitted that they had no issues with ISIS and that their issue was with the Kurds and the Syrian regime.’”

Buried in the text is this stunning one-line conclusion: “after ISIS is defeated, *the real war begins.* CIA-backed FSA elements will openly become al-Nusra; while Special Forces-backed FSA elements like the New Syrian Army will fight alongside the Assad regime. *Then the CIA’s militia and the Special Forces’ militia will kill each other.*”

Well, that says it all: the U.S. has created a ‘monster’ which it cannot control if it wanted to (and Ashton Carter and John Brennan have no interest to “control it” – they still seek to use it).

U.S. Objectives in Syria

Professor Michael Brenner, having attended a high-level combined U.S. security and intelligence conference in Texas last week, summed up their apparent objectives in Syria, *inter alia*, as:

–Thwarting Russia in Syria.

–Ousting Assad.

–Marginalizing and weakening Iran by breaking the Shi’ite Crescent.

–Facilitating some kind of Sunni entity in Anbar and eastern Syria. How can we

prevent it falling under the sway of al-Qaeda? Answer: Hope that the Turks can “domesticate” al-Nusra.

–Wear down and slowly fragment ISIS. Success on this score can cover failure on all others in domestic opinion.

Jack Murphy explains succinctly why this “monster” cannot be controlled: “In December of 2014, al-Nusra used the American-made TOW missiles to rout another anti-regime CIA proxy force called the Syrian Revolutionary Front from several bases in Idlib province. *The province is now the de facto caliphate of al-Nusra.*

That Nusra captured TOW missiles from the now-defunct Syrian Revolutionary Front is unsurprising, but that the same anti-tank weapons supplied to the FSA ended up in Nusra hands is even less surprising when one understands the internal dynamics of the Syrian conflict, i.e. the factional warfare between the disparate American forces, with the result that “Many [U.S. military trainers] are actively sabotaging the programs by stalling and doing nothing, knowing that the supposedly secular rebels they are expected to train are actually al-Nusra terrorists.”

How then could there ever be the separation of “moderates” from Al-Nusra – as required by the two cessations of hostilities accords (February and September 2016)? The entire Murphy narrative shows that the “moderates” and al-Nusra *cannot meaningfully be distinguished from each other*, let alone separated from each other, because “they are virtually the same organization.”

The Russians are right: the CIA and the Defense Department never had the intention to comply with the accord – because they could not. The Russians are also right that the U.S. has had no intention to defeat al-Nusra – as required by U.N. Security Council Resolution 2268 (2016).

So how did the U.S. get into this “Left Hand/Right Hand” mess – with the U.S. President authorizing an accord with the Russian Federation, while in parallel, his Defense Secretary was refusing to comply with it? Well, one interesting snippet in Murphy’s piece refers to “hesitations” in the militia training program thought to stem from the White House getting wind that most of the militia members were “affiliated with Nusra and other extremist groups.”

Obama’s Inklings

It sounds from this as if the White House somehow only had “inklings” of “the jihadi monster” emerging in Syria – despite that understanding being common knowledge to most on-the-ground trainers in Syria. Was this so? Did Obama truly believe that there were “moderates” who could be separated? Or, was he persuaded by someone to go along with it, in order to give a “time out” in order for the

CIA to re-supply its insurgent forces (the CIA inserted 3,000 tons of weapons and munitions to the insurgents during the February 2016 ceasefire, according to IHS Janes').

Support for the hypothesis that Obama may not have been fully aware of this reality comes from Yochi Dreazen and Séan Naylor (*Foreign Policy's* senior staff writer on counter-terrorism and intelligence), who noted (in May 2015) that Obama himself seemed to take a shot at the CIA and other intelligence agencies in an interview in late 2014, when he said the community had collectively “underestimated” how much Syria’s chaos would spur the emergence of the Islamic State.

In the same article, Naylor charts the power of the CIA as rooted in its East Coast Ivy League power network, its primacy within the intelligence machinery, its direct access to the Oval Office and its nearly unqualified support in Congress. Naylor illustrates the CIA’s privileged position within the Establishment by quoting Hank Crumpton, who had a long CIA career before becoming the State Department’s coordinator for counterterrorism.

Crumpton told Foreign Policy that when “then-Director Tenet, declared ‘war’ on Al-Qaeda as far back as 1998, “you didn’t have the Secretary of Defense [declaring war]; you didn’t have the FBI director or anyone else in the intelligence community taking that kind of leadership role.”

Perhaps it is simply – in Obama’s prescient words – the case that “the CIA usually gets what it wants.”

Perhaps it did: Putin demonized, (and Trump tarred by association); the Sunni Al Qaeda “monster” – now too powerful to be easily defeated, but too weak to completely succeed – intended as the “albatross” hung around Russia and Iran’s neck, and damn the Europeans whose back will be broken by waves of ensuing refugees. Pity Syria.

Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum, which advocates for engagement between political Islam and the West.

The Official and Implausible MH-17 Scenario

Exclusive: Another problem with the new report blaming Russia for the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 shoot-down is the bizarre route that the investigators say the Buk missile battery took, a wild ride that made no sense, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Without any skepticism, the West's mainstream media is embracing the new allegations implicating Russia in the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, but there are key evidentiary and logical gaps including the presumed route followed by the supposed Buk missile convoy.

According to the Joint Investigation Team (JIT), which while "led" by the Dutch was guided by the Ukrainian SBU intelligence service, the Russians delivered the Buk anti-missile battery at a border crossing about 30 miles southeast of Luhansk on the night of July 16-17, 2014. From that point, there would have been an easy and logical route to the JIT's claimed firing site.

The convoy would have followed one of two roads west to H21 and then taken H21 southwest to the area around Snizhne before getting onto a back road to Pervomaiskyi where the JIT says the launch occurred.

Instead, according to the JIT account, the convoy took a strange and circuitous route, skirting south of Luhansk to Yenakiieve, a town that sits along highway E50, which incidentally offered another easy route south to Snizhne. Instead of going that way, according to the JIT, the convoy proceeded southwest to the city of Donetsk, stopping there before turning east on H21 passing through a number of towns on the way to Snizhne.

Not only does this route make no sense, especially given the extreme sensitivity of the Russians providing a powerful anti-aircraft missile battery to the rebels, an operation that would call for the utmost secrecy and care, but the eventual positioning of the Buk system in the remote town of Pervomaiskyi makes little military sense.

According to the JIT's video narrative, the presumed purpose of the Russians taking such a huge risk of supplying a Buk system was to protect rebel troops from Ukrainian military aircraft firing from heights beyond the range of shoulder-fired MANPADs.

So why would the Russians position the Buk battery in the south far from the frontlines of the heaviest fighting which was occurring in the north and then have the crew shoot down a commercial airliner when, according to the JIT, there were no military aircraft in the area?

To accept the JIT's narrative, you have to swallow a large dose of credulity, plus assume that the Russians are extremely incompetent, so incompetent that they would send a highly secret operation on a wild ride across the eastern Ukrainian countryside, ignoring easy routes to the target location (only about 70 miles from the Russian border) in favor of a route more than twice as long (about 150 miles) while passing through heavily populated areas where the convoy could be easily photographed.

Then, the Russians (or their rebel allies) would have placed the Buk system in a spot with marginal if any military value, misidentify a commercial airliner as some kind of military aircraft, and – with a sudden burst of efficiency and competence – shoot it down.

The JIT's claim about the exfiltration of the remaining Buks has similar problems of logic. The JIT asserts that rather than take the most direct (and most discreet) route back to Russia by heading east, the missile battery supposedly traveled north to Luhansk before crossing back into Russia, a longer trip through more populous areas, another head-shaker.

Russian Fears

After the MH-17 shoot-down, which killed 298 people, I'm told the Russian government did fear that somehow one of its field operatives might have been responsible and conducted an intensive investigation, including an inventory of its equipment, concluding that all its Buk missiles were accounted for.

I was also told that at least some CIA analysts shared the doubts about Russia's guilt and came to believe that the MH-17 shoot-down was the work of a rogue and out-of-control Ukrainian team with the possible hope that the airliner was a Russian government plane returning President Vladimir Putin from South America.

Another fallacy of the JIT's report is to assume that in July 2014 there were fixed lines of control between the Ukrainian government and the eastern Ukrainian rebels, something like the trenches of World War I. Indeed, the fluidity of the battle lines – and Ukraine's ability to penetrate deep into rebel "territory" – was underscored by one of the SBU's telephone intercepts published by the JIT on Wednesday.

According to the JIT, the conversation revealed a Ukrainian military convoy passing through the town of Sabivka, which is about five miles west of Luhansk, and moving toward an airport, possibly Luhansk's airport south of the city. If that JIT account is correct, it shows that armed Ukrainian convoys could move almost at will across much of rebel "territory."

And that would suggest that the assumption that the Buk missile must have been

fired by Russians or Russian rebels because the firing location was inside rebel “territory” is suspect. According to [Dutch intelligence](#) (which really means NATO intelligence), the Ukrainians had several high-powered anti-aircraft missile systems in eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, the day MH-17 was shot down.

The JIT report makes no effort to explain where those Ukrainian Buks were positioned, presumably because Ukraine was part of the JIT investigation and thus had the right to veto the release of any information. While steering the Dutch, Australians and others toward blaming the Russians, Ukraine’s SBU was never going to allow evidence that would put the spotlight on Ukraine.

In addition, by issuing the report in video form, the JIT made it difficult for the public to focus on the logical inconsistencies in the findings, such as the alleged convoy route. Further, complicating the process of evaluation, JIT enhanced its presentation by mixing in real-looking computer graphics with images found on social media.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Troubling Gaps in New MH-17 Report.”](#)]

Troubling Gaps in the New MH-17 Report

Exclusive: The new accusation of Russian complicity in 2014 Malaysia Airlines shutdown was based on Ukrainian intelligence intercepts that were selectively interpreted while contrary information was ignored, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The key [conclusion](#) of the Dutch-led criminal inquiry implicating Russia in the 2014 shutdown of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 relied heavily on cryptic telephone intercepts that were supplied by the Ukrainian intelligence service and were given incriminating meaning not clearly supported by the words.

The investigators also seemed to ignore [other intercepts](#) that conflicted with their conclusions, including one conversation that appeared to be referring to a Ukrainian convoy, not one commanded by ethnic Russian rebels, that was closing in on the Luhansk airport, placing Ukrainian troops deep inside rebel territory.

That conversation was among five that the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) released in seeking the public’s help in identifying persons of interest in the MH-17 shutdown. The callers seemed to be discussing information from Moscow

regarding the movement of a convoy, but they describe it as a “Ukrops” or Ukrainian troop convoy.

“B: I am saying about the confirmation of the convoy that is going in the direction of the airport... Moscow/Moskva has confirmed... they see it. Is it err... whatsit... Ukrops convoy?”

“A: The convoy that is going in the direction of the airport? Yes.

“B: And how did it go through?”

“A: Most likely through Sabovka,” which the JIT interprets to be the town of Sabivka, about five miles west of Luhansk and about 92 miles northeast of Donetsk, the two rebel capitals. The Luhansk airport is about 20 miles south of the city center.

In other words, if this intercept from JIT is correct, the Ukrainian military was operating near the highway routes that the alleged Russian Buk missile battery would have been using. The conversation then picks up, referring to a possible battle for the airport:

“B: So, the convoy was confirmed. Where the convoy can be from?”

“C: I don’t know where it is going from. It’s from west, isn’t it?”

“B: It’s somehow going from west. From west. Fucking one and a half kilometres from the airdrome.

“C: From the airdrome?”

“B: Yes.

“C: It can’t be one and a half kilometres from the airdrome because there is a populated locality there, there are positions there. Probably... I don’t know. Will now try to do something. ... I think we will be receiving information soon... our groups have left.

“B: Uh-huh.

“C: Ok. Well, if they come in the airport, will fight at the airport. What else can we do?”

“B: Ok. I got you.”

Although it’s difficult to know precisely what these callers are discussing, the conversation seems to refer to a potential battle for an airport, not the deployment of a Buk missile system.

Also, if Ukrainian forces had penetrated that deep into rebel territory, it is difficult to exclude that a Ukrainian Buk battery might have traveled along the southerly route H-21, which skirts Donetsk and then heads east toward the JIT's claimed firing site in a field near the town of Pervomaiskyi. H-21 then bends north toward Luhansk airport and the city of Luhansk.

The Ukrainian Buks

The JIT video report on the MH-17 case, which was released on Wednesday, also didn't address questions about the location of several Ukrainian Buk missile batteries that Dutch (i.e. NATO) intelligence placed in eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, the day that MH-17 was shot down. A finding from the Dutch intelligence service, MIVD, released last October, said the only high-powered anti-aircraft missile systems in eastern Ukraine at that time, capable of bringing down MH-17 at 33,000 feet and killing all 298 people onboard, belonged to the Ukrainian military, not the rebels.

Although the location of the Ukrainian Buk systems would seem to be crucial to the investigation – at least in eliminating other suspects – JIT operates under an agreement with the Ukrainian government that lets it veto the release of information. Ukraine's SBU intelligence service, which represented the Kiev government in the JIT, also has among its official responsibilities the protection of secret information that could be damaging to Ukraine.

Regarding JIT's claim that the Buk missile system crossed over from Russian territory, the video report states: "All telecom data and intercepted telephone calls that have been examined by the investigation team demonstrates that the Buk/TELAR (the self-contained operating system) was brought into Ukraine from the Russian Federation."

But as evidence the JIT cites one phone intercept, which – according to the JIT's translation – does not use the word Buk though referencing a piece of equipment that can move on its own or be transported by truck. That could be a Buk system but could apply to many other weapons systems as well.

In the intercepted call, one speaker said, "it crossed, crossed the line." The narrator of the JIT video report then adds, "The Buk/TELAR crossed the line, in other words, it passed the border." But there are two assumptions here: that the unidentified weapon is a Buk and that the "line" means border. That could be the case but other interpretations are possible.

Another key point, the disputed location of the so-called "getaway" video of a Buk missile system missing one missile, is simply asserted as fact without an explanation as to how the JIT reached its conclusion placing the location

near Luhansk.

While the Western mainstream media has given the JIT great credibility, the JIT itself has acknowledged a dependency on Ukraine's SBU, which shaped the inquiry by supplying its selection of phone intercepts.

Yet, the SBU is far from a neutral party in the investigation, nor does it have clean hands regarding the Ukrainian civil war that followed a U.S.-backed putsch ousting elected President Viktor Yanukovich on Feb. 22, 2014, and sparking an uprising among ethnic Russian Ukrainians who represented Yanukovich's political base in the east and south.

Since then, the SBU has been on the front lines of crushing the rebellion by using controversial tactics. In late June 2016, the United Nation's Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Simonovic accused the SBU of frustrating U.N. investigations into its alleged role in torture and other war crimes.

Simonovic criticized the SBU for "not always providing access to all places where detainees may be kept. ... OHCHR (the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner on Human Rights) also continues to receive accounts about torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary and incommunicado detention by the SBU, especially in the conflict zone.

"Torture and threats to members of the families, including sexual threats, are never justifiable, and perpetrators will be held to account sooner or later. ... War crimes, crimes against humanity and grave breaches of human rights cannot be the subject of an amnesty."

Yet, the SBU strongly influenced the direction of the JIT, which included Ukraine along with the Netherlands, Belgium, Australia and Malaysia. The JIT agreement gave Ukraine veto power over what would be released – even though Ukrainian military units were among the logical suspects in the MH-17 case,

Relying on Ukrainian Intelligence

Earlier this year, an internal report describing the JIT operation revealed how dependent the investigators had become on information provided by the SBU. According to the report, the SBU helped shape the MH-17 investigation by supplying a selection of phone intercepts and other material that would presumably not include sensitive secrets that would implicate the SBU's political overseers in Ukraine. But the JIT seemed oblivious to this conflict of interest, saying:

"Since the first week of September 2014, investigating officers from The Netherlands and Australia have worked here [in Kiev]. They work in close

cooperation here with the Security and Investigation Service of the Ukraine (SBU). Immediately after the crash, the SBU provided access to large numbers of tapped telephone conversations and other data. ...

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

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

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

Another concern about how the SBU could manipulate the JIT investigation is that the long assignments of investigators in Kiev over a period of more than two years could create compromising situations. Kiev has a reputation as a European hotbed for prostitution and sex tourism, and there’s the possibility of other human relationships developing between Australian and Dutch investigators and Ukrainian intelligence officers.

According to the JIT report, four investigating officers from Australia are stationed in Kiev on three-month rotations while Dutch police rotate in two teams of about five people each for a period of a “fortnight,” or two weeks.

The relative isolation of the Australian investigators further adds to their dependence on their Ukrainian hosts. According to the report, “The Australian investigators find themselves a 26 hour flight away from their home country and have to deal with a large time difference. ‘For us Australians, it is more difficult to get into contact with our home base, which is why our operation is quite isolated in Kiev’, says [Andrew] Donoghoe,” a senior investigating officer from the Australian Federal Police.

The SBU’s assistance, however, did not lead to a rapid resolution of the MH-17 mystery, now more than two years old. The Dutch Safety Board report last October placed the spot of the suspected missile launch within a 320-square-kilometer area, including both government and rebel positions.

According to the Dutch intelligence service finding also released last October,

the only anti-aircraft missiles in eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, capable of hitting a plane flying at 33,000 feet belonged to the Ukrainian military.

There's also the dog-not-barking mystery of the curious silence from the U.S. intelligence community. Although Secretary of State John Kerry claimed to know the firing location immediately after the shootdown, the U.S. government went silent after CIA analysts had time to evaluate U.S. satellite, electronic and other intelligence data.

A source who was briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts told me that they saw the attack as a rogue Ukrainian operation involving a hard-line oligarch with the possible motive of shooting down Russian President Vladimir Putin's official plane returning from South America that day, with similar markings as MH-17. But I have been unable to determine if that assessment represented a dissident or consensus view inside the U.S. intelligence community.

For its part, the Russian government has denied supplying the eastern Ukrainian rebels with a Buk system although the rebels did possess shorter-range, shoulder-fired MANPADs.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

Donald Trump's Roger Rabbit Moment

Donald Trump's recent attempts to show more restraint and look presidential unraveled in his debate with Hillary Clinton like Roger Rabbit unable to resist a goofy sight gag, says Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

And so, after all the anticipation, the rampant sports metaphors and the breathless, sensationalized buildup (MSNBC's headline in the minutes before the event was "Clinton/Trump Showdown"), the first debate is over.

Scorecards may be odious, but overall, it has to be said that Hillary Clinton had a very good night. In the first half hour, Donald Trump seemed to be doing his best to appear presidential and keep his Trumpiness under control but soon it came bursting out of him like Roger Rabbit, unable to resist a goofy sight gag, no matter the consequences.

In those beginning minutes, Trump got in his licks, especially when he went after Clinton on trade policy, criticizing her husband's support of NAFTA and her initial support of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a position she has since publicly reversed.

But he kept spouting like rote the same boilerplate he has been shouting since his campaign began – Mexico stealing our jobs, China outstripping us in production and economic progress, his insistence that slashing corporate taxes will be “a job creator like we haven't seen since Ronald Reagan. It's going to be a beautiful thing to watch.” But he offered little else in the way of solutions. Asked how he would get jobs back and create new ones, too, all he could come up with was trying to keep the ones we still have.

While Clinton may also have been guilty of rehashing much her standard campaign rhetoric, she seemed to be able to change it up and not repeat the same talking points over and over, at least creating the impression of some fresh ideas and a surer grasp of policy. She spoke well about criminal justice reform and community policing, for example. And she remained calm and unflustered even as her opponent melted down just a few feet away, constantly interrupting her, denying the facts placed before him and charging that not only does Clinton not have “the look” to be presidential, she also lacks the stamina.

To the latter she replied, “Well, as soon as he travels to 112 countries and negotiates a peace deal, a cease-fire release of dissidents and opening of new opportunities and nations around the world or even spends 11 hours testifying in front of a congressional committee, he can talk to me about stamina.”

Further, when Trump accused her of staying off the campaign trail (an unsubtle reference to her recent bout with pneumonia and the aforementioned stamina) she responded, effectively: “I think Donald just criticized me for preparing for this debate. And yes I did. And you know what else I prepared for? I prepared to be president, and I think that's a good thing.”

Performing in the big, one-on-one debate tent for the first time (for that's what it was, a performance), and with the eyes of perhaps as many as 100 million upon him, Trump's misogyny and condescension did not play well Monday night, nor did plugging his new hotel in Washington, bragging about his wealth and property holdings or his rambling, often evasive answers on birtherism, race, law and order, the invasion of Iraq, ISIS and the release of his income tax returns (Clinton said he was hiding something and Trump all but admitted that he pays no federal taxes).

Almost all of his words, his bellicose tone, even his body language, belied Trump's chest-thumping assertion that, “I think my strongest asset, maybe by

far, is my temperament. I have a winning temperament.” His petulant insistence on this reminded me of W.C. Fields in *The Bank Dick*, raising his hand to a child and declaring, “She’s not gonna tell ME I don’t love her.”

As usual, what may have been most important is what went unsaid. The phrase “income inequality” came up only once, and that was from moderator Lester Holt. There was little mention of education or health care; some talk of energy policy but almost nothing on global warming other than Clinton’s reference to Trump claim that climate change is a hoax perpetrated by the Chinese (last night he denied ever saying it, but he has).

And absolutely no mention of the ruinous influence of money in politics, which in retrospect made it a bit jarring that when Bill and Chelsea Clinton entered the debate auditorium they sat next to Vernon Jordan, a close family friend and adviser, certainly, but also senior counsel at Akin Gump, the biggest and most profitable lobbyist in Washington, prime peddlers of influence and privilege on Capitol Hill.

Billionaires Sheldon Adelson (Trump supporter and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani literally kissed the ring of Adelson’s wife), Mark Cuban and a lot of other high rollers were in the room, too. Democrats and Republicans crowded the hall at Hofstra University Monday night: cash and power got the good seats.

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Trump’s Missed Debate Opportunities

Donald Trump missed chances in the first debate, including failure to exploit a U.S. intelligence report that cited U.S. support for an Islamic State forerunner, part of Hillary Clinton’s scheme for Syrian “regime change,” notes Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

Hillary Clinton stood calmly at her podium smirking during most of the first U.S. presidential debate as she provoked emotional reactions from Donald Trump in what appeared to be a strategy to rattle him and keep him on the defensive most of the night.

Clinton needled Trump on his plan to fight the Islamic State, on him not paying his taxes, on his treatment of women, on his denial of climate change, on his denigration of Muslims and his position on nuclear weapons – all legitimate criticisms but delivered with an intent to do personal harm. As Trump grew angrier and angrier, Clinton appeared to be laughing at him. At one point, she told him he was saying “crazy things” and living “in his own reality.”

Clinton got under Trump’s skin by telling him he started life with a big inheritance, while she was the daughter of a humble small businessman; that he had four (or more) times filed for bankruptcy, did not pay his workers, called women “pigs,” and had been sued by the government 40 years ago for racial discrimination in a housing development he owned (and which he settled out of court).

Trump seemed uncharacteristically nervous and restrained as the first debate of three got underway, displaying a grudging respect for Clinton by calling her “Secretary,” while labeling her “Crooked Hillary” on Twitter. But a series of humiliating jabs by Clinton worked to get Trump’s back up leading to several gaffes, including an apparent admission that he has paid no federal taxes.

After noting that a couple of tax returns which had been released in connection with a casino application showed no federal taxes and suggesting that Trump would not release his tax returns because he may be hiding this reality for other years, Trump lost his cool and interjected that it “makes me smart” not to pay.

Ruthless

It was a calculating strategy on her part, cooked up by her team of ruthless campaign operatives and her own experience of 38 debates in her political career. This was Trump’s first one-on-one debate. And it showed.

She took a week off to prepare, while Trump did not hold one mock session. She depended on a team of highly experienced opposition researchers who have dug up every scrap of dirt they could find on Trump.

At one point when Clinton accused him of calling a contestant at one of his beauty pageant “Miss Piggy,” Trump feverishly responded “Where did you find this? Where did you find this?”

“He loves beauty contests, supporting them and hanging around them,” Clinton said, slowly inserting the needle and twisting it slightly. “Then he called her ‘Miss Housekeeping,’ because she was Latina. Donald, she has a name.”

“Where did you find this? Where did you find this?” Trump asked.

"Her name is Alicia Machado," Clinton calmly said.

"Where did you find this?" he repeated.

"And she has become a U.S. citizen, and you can bet..."

"Oh, really?" Trump interrupted.

"... she's going to vote this November," said Clinton.

That he wouldn't know Clinton's "oppo" researchers would come up with something like this, and then would blurt out his astonishment that they did from the podium is itself astonishing.

It showed how little he understood this dirty game of modern politics and how poorly prepared he was. His opposition research seemed to be based solely on the considerable Clinton negatives already in the public domain. He hit her hard on the emails, but she swatted it away, and Trump backed off.

Trump seemed to think he could wing it. But he ran into a political juggernaut, with master dirty tricksters like former rightwing operative David Brock conjuring up ways to rattle Trump, exposing his temper and his weak command of the facts. Meanwhile, a studied and scripted Clinton merely laughed at him, giving him the rope to hang himself.

Russia Did It!

Trump did score some points, though they have been largely ignored in a corporate media analysis that scored a decisive knockout for Clinton. In one exchange, she clearly said that Russia had hacked the Democratic National Committee and Trump called her on it.

CLINTON: "There's no doubt now that Russia has used cyber attacks against all kinds of organizations in our country, and I am deeply concerned about this. I know Donald's very praiseworthy of Vladimir Putin, but Putin is playing a really ... tough, long game here. And one of the things he's done is to let loose cyber attackers to hack into government files, to hack into personal files, hack into the Democratic National Committee."

TRUMP: "I don't think anybody knows it was Russia that broke into the DNC. She's saying Russia, Russia, Russia, but I don't – maybe it was. I mean, it could be Russia, but it could also be China. It could also be lots of other people. It also could be somebody sitting on their bed that weighs 400 pounds, OK?"

TRUMP: "You don't know who broke in to DNC. But what did we learn with the DNC? We learned that Bernie Sanders was taken advantage of by your people, by Debbie

Wasserman Schultz. Look what happened to her. But Bernie Sanders was taken advantage of. That's what we learned."

Trump's rhetoric on Russia (and with no political record, rhetoric is all we have) is clearly saner than Clinton's, who has an alarming record. It is simple to understand why Russia would favor Trump. He is not threatening Russia while she is. And she's left a trail of destruction behind her in Libya, Syria and Honduras making it more than mere words.

No one has come up with any evidence to back up the Clinton campaign's charge of a Trump conflict of interest because he either owes money or has business in Russia. Frankly, I hope he does have businesses there. It would make him even less likely to stir up a crisis with Moscow if he should win.

Nor has anyone come up with any evidence to prove Russia was behind the DNC hack. After the debate CNN either deviously or incompetently did a "fact-check" and said Trump was wrong about "the question that was posed, 'Who is the leading suspect in the DNC hack?'"

But Clinton didn't talk about the "leading suspect." She flat out said Russia did it.

Her continued hammering on these supposed business interests and that Russia did the hacking is suspicious. Linking Trump to Russia has done little to hurt him in the polls. In fact, he rose to a virtual tie in the weeks since the hack. So why does she keep at it? There could be something else at play, an admittedly sinister scenario, but entirely possible in the Clinton camp. (Perhaps, her "oppo" team is planning to drop another shoe regarding Trump's relationship with Russia.)

If she should lose a close election to Trump I would not be surprised if she contested the outcome charging that Russia had hacked the electoral databases and changed the result. If she could challenge enough electors to bring him below 270 Electoral College votes needed to win, the result could be thrown to the House of Representatives (as it has [three](#) times in history) where a Republican majority, many who hate Trump, just may side with her.

With the way the American public has been relentlessly conditioned to fear and despise Russia, evidence of Moscow's alleged tampering may not be needed. With the corporate media playing along, evidence wasn't necessary for the tall tale of Russia's "invasion" of Ukraine, the dubious claim that Russia was responsible for shooting down Malaysia Airline Flight 17 in 2014, or Russia's supposed attack on a humanitarian convoy in Syria last week.

No Mention of Syria

Curiously, there was absolutely no discussion of Syria in the debate, beyond an incidental mention by Clinton. The focus was on the Islamic State's threat inside the U.S. and what to do about it.

Trump accused Clinton, as secretary of state, of creating a vacuum by pulling U.S. troops out of Iraq, allowing ISIS to be established. Here Trump insisted again that he never backed the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which he correctly said caused immense instability creating the conditions for ISIS.

But Trump missed a tremendous opportunity to hit Clinton for being secretary of state when [a precursor of the Islamic State](#) was directly aided by the administration she served in when the U.S. and its Mideast allies were seeking "regime change" in Damascus and tolerating jihadists who were spearheading the effort.

And this is the tragedy of Trump. He's wrong on so many things: torture, climate change, tax breaks for the rich, increased military spending, law and order, stop and frisk, and guns. So, when he's right, such as wanting good relations with Russia to avoid catastrophe, he doesn't adequately explain his position, while being subject to a massive smear campaign.

Only on trade and rebuilding the country's infrastructure has he been right for the good of American workers, and has also amply laid out this position (spending more time on that in the debate than anything else.)

Last month, Trump caused a firestorm when he said that Obama and Clinton had "[created](#)" ISIS. He later said Obama "[founded](#)" ISIS. While that is an exaggeration, there exists a document proving the Obama administration's complicity in the rise of this group, a document Trump must be aware of, but has never made use of. The debate would have been the perfect time.

The declassified Defense Intelligence Agency [document](#) of August 2012 said the U.S., some European countries, Turkey and the Gulf Arab states were facilitating the establishment of a Salafist principality in the east of Syria to put pressure on Damascus. The document warns that likeminded jihadists on the Iraq side of the border could join with them to create an "Islamic State." The document actually uses that name a full two years before the Islamic State was declared.

Trump must know about it because Ret. General Mike Flynn, the DIA director at the time, [told Al Jazeera](#) that the document shows the administration was not turning a blind eye to this but that it was a "willful decision" by Washington. Mike Flynn is a Trump foreign policy adviser, so it's inconceivable that Flynn did not tell Trump about the document.

And yet Trump inexplicably has never mentioned it, even when he was under heavy fire from establishment Washington and the corporate media for his remark.

Instead of bringing it up at the debate, he merely attacked Clinton for revealing her plan to fight ISIS on her website. "I don't think General Douglas MacArthur would like that too much," Trump said, referring to the commanding U.S. general in the Pacific during World War II, a head-scratching reference for the vast majority of Americans born in the post-war era.

"Well, at least I have a plan to fight ISIS," Clinton retorted.

"No, no, you're telling the enemy everything you want to do," Trump shot back.

Instead of mentioning the DIA document he repeated his numbskull idea that ISIS would not exist if his idea of "taking" Iraq's oil had been followed. 'Had we taken the oil – and we should have taken the oil – ISIS would not have been able to form either, because the oil was their primary source of income," he said. "And now they have the oil all over the place, including the oil – a lot of the oil in Libya, which was another one of her disasters."

Clinton cut his knees out from under him again, saying Trump "actually advocated for the actions we took in Libya and urged that Gaddafi be taken out, after actually doing some business with him one time."

It looks like it may be a very long six weeks until Election Day for Donald Trump. And if avoiding a confrontation with Russia is the single most important issue of the day, more urgent even than climate change, the alternative, a Clinton back in the White House, could be a very chilling four years for the rest of us.

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