

# The NYT's Neocon 'Downward Spiral'

**Exclusive:** Every day, The New York Times – America's "paper of record" – sinks deeper into the swamp of propaganda, now reliably touting predictable neocon notions about the Middle East and Russia, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The New York Times' downward spiral into a neoconservative propaganda sheet continues with another biased lead article, this one on how the Syrian war has heightened U.S.-Russia tensions. The article, bristling with blame for the Russians, leaves out one of the key reasons why the partial ceasefire failed – the U.S. inability to separate its "moderate" rebels from Al Qaeda's jihadists.

The article, written by Michael R. Gordon and Andrew E. Kramer (two of the paper's top national security propagandists), lays the fault for the U.S. withdrawal from Syrian peace talks on Russian leaders because of their "mistrust and hostility toward the United States," citing a comment by former White House official Andrew S. Weiss.

Gordon and Kramer then write that the cessation of hostilities agreement came undone because of the "accidental bombing of Syrian troops by the American-led coalition and then because of what the United States claimed was a deliberate bombing by Russian aircraft and Syrian helicopters of a humanitarian convoy headed to Aleppo." (The Times doesn't bother to note that the Russians have questioned how "accidental" the slaughter of 62 or so Syrian troops was and have denied that they or the Syrian government attacked the aid convoy.)

The article continues citing U.S. intelligence officials accusing Russia and Syria of using indiscriminate ordnance in more recent attacks on rebel-held sections of Aleppo. "Unfortunately, Russia failed to live up to its own commitments," said a State Department statement, according to Gordon and Kramer.

However, left out of the article was the fact that the U.S. government failed to live up to its commitment to separate U.S.-backed supposedly "moderate" rebels from Al Qaeda's Nusra Front, which has recently changed its name to the Levant (or Syria) Conquest Front. By contrast, this key point was cited by Rupert Murdoch's Wall Street Journal, which noted:

"Russia has complained that Washington wasn't upholding its end of the bargain by failing to separate U.S.-backed Syrian rebels from more extremist groups tied to al Qaeda."

**Doubling Down with Al Qaeda**

Indeed, The Wall Street Journal has actually done some serious reporting on this crucial topic, publishing an article from Turkey on Sept. 29, saying: "Some of Syria's largest rebel factions are doubling down on their alliance with an al Qaeda-linked group, despite a U.S. warning to split from the extremists or risk being targeted in airstrikes.

"The rebel gambit is complicating American counterterrorism efforts in the country at a time the U.S. is contemplating cooperation with Russia to fight extremist groups. It comes after a U.S.-Russia-brokered cease-fire collapsed last week and the Syrian regime and its Russian allies immediately unleashed a devastating offensive against rebel-held parts of Aleppo city that brought harsh international condemnation. ...

"The two powers have been considering jointly targeting Islamic State and the Syria Conquest Front – formerly known as the al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front – a group that is deeply intermingled with armed opposition groups of all stripes across Syria's battlefields. The U.S. has also threatened to attack any rebels providing front-line support to the group. ...

"Some rebel groups already aligned with Syria Conquest Front responded by renewing their alliance. But others, such as Nour al-Din al-Zinki, a former Central Intelligence Agency-backed group and one of the largest factions in Aleppo, said in recent days that they were joining a broader alliance that is dominated by the Front. A second, smaller rebel group also joined that alliance, which is known as Jaish al-Fateh and includes another major Islamist rebel force, Ahrar al-Sham. ...

"In a call with Mr. Kerry on Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Syrian rebels 'refused to follow the U.S.-Russian agreement...but instead merged with [Nusra Front].'"

So, it should be clear that a major obstacle to the agreement was the failure of the U.S. government to persuade its clients to break off alliances with Al Qaeda's operatives, a connection that many Americans would find deeply troubling. That public awareness, in turn, would undermine the current neocon P.R. campaign to get the Obama administration to supply these rebels with anti-aircraft missiles and other sophisticated weapons, or to have U.S. warplanes destroy the Syrian air force in order to impose a "no-fly zone."

Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the powerful role of Al Qaeda and its spinoff, the Islamic State, has been a hidden or downplayed element of the narrative that has been sold to the American people. That storyline holds that the war began when "peaceful" protesters were brutally repressed by Syria's police and military, but that version deletes the fact that extremists, some

linked to Al Qaeda, began killing police and soldiers almost from the outset.

### **Hiding Realities**

However, since The New York Times is now a full-time neocon propaganda sheet, it does all it can to hide such troublesome realities from its readers, all the better to jazz up the hatred of Syria and Russia.

As the Times and the Journal both made clear in their articles on Tuesday, the neocon agenda now involves providing more American armaments to the rebels either directly through the CIA or indirectly through U.S. regional "allies," such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

Though pitched to the American people as "humanitarian" assistance needed to shoot down Syrian and Russian planes, the arming-up of the rebels will likely extend the war and the bloodletting even longer while strengthening Al Qaeda and the Islamic State,.

If the new U.S. weapons prove especially effective, they could even lead to the collapse of the Syrian government and bring about the neocons' long-desired "regime change" in Damascus. But the ultimate winners would likely be Al Qaeda and/or the Islamic State, which could be expected to follow up with the mass slaughter of Christians, Alawites, Shiites, secular Sunnis and other "heretics."

More likely, however, the U.S.-supplied weapons would just cause the war to drag on indefinitely with an ever-rising death toll. But don't worry, the dead will be blamed on Vladimir Putin and Bashar al-Assad.

Although never mentioned in the mainstream U.S. media, the delivery of weapons to these Syrian rebels/terrorists are a clear violation of international law, an act of aggression and arguably a crime of aiding and abetting terrorists.

International law is something that the Times considers sacrosanct when the newspaper is condemning a U.S. adversary for some violation, but that reverence disappears when the U.S. government or a U.S. "ally" is engaged in the same act or worse.

So, it is understandable why Gordon and Kramer would leave out facts from their story that might give Americans pause. After all, if the "moderate" rebels are in cahoots with Al Qaeda, essentially serving as a cut-out for the U.S. and its "allies" to funnel dangerous weapons to the terror organization that carried out the 9/11 attacks, Americans might object.

Similarly, if they were told that the U.S. actions violate international law, they might find that upsetting, too, since many Americans aren't as coolly

hypocritical as Official Washington's neocons and liberal war hawks.

Beyond the devolution of The New York Times into a neocon propaganda organ, Gordon and Kramer have their own histories as propagandists. Gordon co-wrote the infamous "aluminum tube" story in September 2002, launching President George W. Bush's ad campaign for selling the Iraq War to the American people. Gordon also has gotten his hands into disinformation campaigns regarding Syria and Ukraine.

For instance, Gordon and Kramer teamed up on a bogus lead story that the State Department fed to them in 2014 about photographs supposedly taken of soldiers in Russia who then turned up in other photos in Ukraine – except that it turned out all the photos were taken in Ukraine, destroying the premise of the story and forcing [an embarrassing retraction](#). [For more on that screw-up, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Another NYT-Michael Gordon Special?](#)"]

For his part, Kramer has been a central figure in the Times' anti-Russian propaganda regarding Ukraine. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[NYT Is Lost in Its Ukraine Propaganda.](#)"]

So, between the Times' neocon institutional bias – and the apparent personal agendas of key correspondents – one can expect very little in the way of balanced journalism when the topics relate to the Middle East or Russia.

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

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## Double Standards for Israel and Syria

When Israel bombards Gaza after some ineffectual rocket attacks, the U.S. sees a right of self-defense, but different standards apply to Syria when foreign-backed terrorists fire deadly rockets and mortars, notes Rick Sterling.

By Rick Sterling

There is a hypocritical disconnect in Western and especially U.S. foreign policy. When it comes to Israel, the U.S. is quick to claim "Israel has a right to defend itself." For Syria, that same right does not seem to exist.

When Israel executed intense bombing campaigns against Gaza in 2008, 2012 and 2014 the U.S. justified the attacks. At the United Nations on July 18, 2014,

U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power said, “President Obama spoke with Prime Minister Netanyahu this morning to reaffirm the United States’ strong support for Israel’s right to defend itself... Hamas’ attacks are unacceptable and would be unacceptable to any member state of the United Nations. Israel has the right to defend its citizens and prevent these attacks.”

Israel claimed it was simply responding defensively. The human rights group BtSelem reports that over the decade between June 2004 and July 2015, Palestinians launched over 8,700 rockets and 5,000 mortars from Gaza into Israel. But the total number of civilians killed over 10 years was 28 for an average of fewer than three persons per year. Using this as a justification, Israel has attacked by air and invaded every few years inflicting far heavier casualty rates on the Palestinians in Gaza. For example, Israeli attacks on Gaza in Summer 2014 killed more than 2,000 Gazans, the vast majority of them civilians and many of them children.

With so few deaths and little damage caused by the rockets from Gaza, it seems Palestinians have launched these as almost symbolic protest against Israeli repression. The Gazan economy is hugely restricted, the borders are closed and even the sky and ocean are off limits. Many people would say that Israel is keeping the entire population of Gaza in prison-like circumstances. In addition, many residents of Gaza are descendants of refugees from nearby Israeli towns and cities. Under the Geneva Conventions and U.N. Resolution 194, they have the right to return but have been deprived of this in addition to most other rights.

In summary, Palestinians have launched rockets and mortars to protest Israeli occupation and apartheid policies. The Palestinians are not seeking the overthrow of the Israeli state so much as recognition of their rights and an end to the Occupation. Casualties from the rockets have been few. In response, the West has given Israel a virtual free pass to attack Palestinians in Gaza and unleash horrific bombing in densely populated urban areas where there are huge civilian casualties.

The disproportionate nature of these Israeli attacks suggests that the Israeli government is not defending itself; it is imposing punishment on a captive and defenseless population.

### **Syrian State Under Real Attack**

The situation in Syria is dramatically different. The armed opposition in Syria has inflicted a huge number of deaths and damage in its five-year campaign to overthrow the government. Data from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is sympathetic to the opposition, show the following number of casualties since March 2011: Pro Government forces (army and militias) – 105,000; Anti

Government forces – 101,000; Civilians – 86,000.

These numbers reveal the intensity of the violence and how wrong it is for critics to blame President Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian government for all the deaths. As shown, soldiers and militias defending the state make up the largest number of casualties.

The conflict in Aleppo is currently in the news. Aleppo was the largest city in Syria and the industrial and financial engine. The largest and most effective opposition force in Aleppo is Al Qaeda's affiliate Nusra Front, which is recognized to be "terrorist" even by the U.S. and was never part of the "cessation of hostilities." There are other factions and fighting groups in Aleppo also seeking to destroy the Syrian state. Most of the groups are explicitly Wahhabi sectarian and hostile to secularism, Christianity and moderate Islamic faiths.

The opposition in Syria is heavily armed with weapons, ammunition and explosives. Daily they launch hell cannon missiles into western Aleppo, killing randomly in this government-controlled part of the city. Car bombs have killed thousands of civilians and soldiers. Tunnel bombs have killed thousands more.

Aleppo was relatively quiet until summer of 2012 when thousands of armed fighters invaded and occupied neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city. The "rebels" were disliked by the majority of the population from the start. This was documented even by Western journalists such as James Foley and Stephen Sotloff, who went there inclined to be sympathetic to the opposition. (Foley and Sotloff were later captured and beheaded by Islamic State jihadists.)

Martin Chulov of the Guardian described East Aleppo in 2015 and estimated its population at just 40,000. In sharp contrast, there is a large population of about 1.5 million Syrians living in the rest of the city. This is reflective of the reality: the vast majority of Syrians support the government and hate the terrorists. This includes many who are critical of the Baath Party and who want reforms but not violence and destruction. This important fact is generally ignored by Western media. (The current situation in western Aleppo is described here by journalist Eva Bartlett.)

In contrast with Israeli's periodic wars on Gaza, the Syrian government is truly fighting to defend itself – and its civilian population – against an armed opposition that is violent, sectarian and unpopular with the large majority of Syrians.

Adding to the legitimacy of the Syrian government's right to defend itself, the armed opposition in Syria has been heavily supported by foreign governments.

Western states and their Gulf allies have supplied weapons, training, logistical support and salaries for many thousands of fighters. Qatar's Al Jazeera has broadcast misinformation, fabricated stories and heavily biased reporting from the start.

The same governments have been complicit in the recruitment and travel to Syria by thousands of foreigners from all parts of the globe. European, North American and Australian governments "looked the other way" as their citizens were recruited and then traveled to Syria via Turkey to join ISIS or Nusra. According to one study, over 12,000 foreigners including 3,000 from Europe and North America traveled to Syria in the first three years of the conflict. That was before ISIS peaked. Only in the last year, following terrorist actions in the West, have Western governments started arresting or detaining recruits and recruiters.

### **Violating International Law**

The situation in Syria is more extreme but has similarities to the situation in Nicaragua in the 1980s when the Reagan administration was covertly arming and financing the Contras, a rebel army that inflicted death and destruction across parts of Nicaragua. On June 27, 1986, the International Court of Justice ruled:

"the United States of America, by training, arming, equipping, financing and supplying the **contra** forces or otherwise encouraging, supporting and aiding military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua, has acted, against the Republic of Nicaragua, in breach of its obligation under customary international law not to intervene in the affairs of another State".

The court also decided that the U.S. should make reparations to Nicaragua for injury caused by the violations. The U.S. ignored the ruling and later withdrew from the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

The former Nicaragua Foreign Minister and former President of the United Nations General Assembly, Father Miguel D'Escoto, has written "What the U.S. government is doing in Syria is tantamount to a war of aggression, which, according to the Nuremberg Tribunal, is the worst possible crime a State can commit against another State." (Personal correspondence quoted with permission)

Some foreign governments seeking "regime change" in Damascus have poured huge amounts of money into what is called "smart" or "soft power" via the funding of an array of organizations with nice sounding names to control the narrative and influence public opinion.

There is the Syrian Justice and Accountability Centre, initiated by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, to prepare for victor's justice. There is the Syrian

Network for Human Rights which largely ignores the deaths of Syrian soldiers and seeks U.S./NATO intervention. There is the Syrian Civil Defense also known as the White Helmets, a support group for Al Qaeda/Nusra but most importantly a political lobbying tool actively campaigning for U.S./NATO intervention.

All of these organizations, and many more, are said to be “Syrian” and “independent.” But they were all created after the conflict began and they are all funded by the foreign governments that seek to overthrow the Syrian government.

These and other organizations support the opposition in various ways, demonize the Syrian government and romanticize the opposition. They are part of the reason why many people around the world believe that the anti-government protests in 2011 only became violent after peaceful protests were brutally crushed, which is untrue. There were seven police killed in the first protests in Deraa. That was soon followed by dozens of soldiers being massacred in Deraa and Banyas at the end of March and in April 2011.

By justifying the continued “rebel” violence, this “soft power” acts in concert with “hard” or military power. For example the White Helmets was originally called the Syrian Civil Defense and began with a military contractor training some Syrians in Turkey. This group was then rebranded as the “White Helmets” by a New York marketing company called “The Syria Campaign.” Since then, the “feel good” White Helmets brand has been heavily promoted.

As a measure of the marketing success, the White Helmets recently won the Right Livelihood Award for 2016 and are even nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. Ironically, there is a REAL Syrian Civil Defense working since 1953 and a REAL White Helmets/CascosBlancos from Argentina which have received little recognition alongside the slick new “White Helmets” created and promoted by the shadowy PR firm.

Soft power distorts the reality in the conflict. Thus we are not told that the Syrian government is defending against terrorists but that the “Assad regime” is “targeting hospitals and civilian markets.” Are the claims true? My investigation of the claims regarding the Doctors Without Borders/MSF supported “Al Quds Hospital” in April 2016 revealed that the accusations were full of contradictions, inconsistencies and unverified accusations.

The “hospital” was an unmarked building; the damage was unclear; the number of deaths varied wildly and could not be verified. The photographic evidence, supplied by the ubiquitous White Helmets, was dubious. The investigation

resulted in a open letter to MSF. So far they have failed to corroborate or document their accusations and claims.

Doctors Without Borders/MSF continues to issue politically biased messages. Their Oct 2 tweet about a “bloodbath in East Aleppo” led to false accusations that two teenagers were killed by Syrian government bombing when they were actually killed by terrorist bombing.

Currently the Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM), funded by France and other countries, has been at the forefront accusing Syria and Russia of intentionally bombing an underground hospital. Is the story real or fabricated propaganda? The Russians and Syrians are trying to fight the terrorists; why would they waste resources and generate negative publicity by attacking a hospital? The reports seem to be based on phone or skype conversations with sources of unknown reliability.

The narrative promoted by “soft power” is that the Syrian government is an unpopular dictatorship dominated by the Alawi religious group. Is that true? On the contrary, key ministries including Defense and Foreign Affairs are held by Sunni leaders. The majority of the Syrian Arab Army are Sunni. Visitors to Syria readily meet mothers who are proud of their sons who died defending their country against foreign-backed terrorism.

The narrative promoted by “soft power” is that the Syrian uprising was largely progressive, secular, and seeking democracy. This myth makes for a good rationalization for effectively supporting the “regime change” war against Syria, but it is contradicted by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency. In a classified report from August 2012, the DIA analyzed the conflict as follows: “THE SALAFIST [sic], THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, AND AQI [“Al Qaeda in Iraq,” now known as ISIS or the Islamic State] ARE THE MAJOR FORCES DRIVING THE INSURGENCY IN SYRIA.”

“Soft power” in Syria has involved the creation and funding of Syrian groups who convey a message supportive of the “regime change” goals. For example there is a group in the town of Kafranbel which produces an English language banner each week. The group is provided with the message by a foreign source and the group holds the banner to be photographed and displayed on social media in the West. Most of the locals probably have no clue what it says.

Then there is the Aleppo Media Center which creates videos for influencing Western audiences, and the White Helmets previously discussed. These Western-created groups are the examples of the “Syrian Revolution” by those who promote this narrative. What kind of “revolution” is on contract with the U.S. State Department?

## Current Situation and Coming Crisis

The Syrian government, with the support of the majority of Syrian people, is doing its best to defend itself against an onslaught financed by some of the wealthiest and most powerful countries on earth. The Syrian Army and popular militias have suffered huge losses but are advancing. In the last year, Russia has provided crucial air support. Unlike the invasion of Syrian land and air space by the U.S., the Russian intervention is in compliance with international law because it followed a request for assistance from Syria's internationally recognized government, whereas the U.S. government and its allies have no such permission.

Currently the Syrian government and allies are seeking to drive Nusra and other terrorist groups from eastern Aleppo. If that is successful, they could then focus on ISIS in Raqqa and the remaining terrorists in other parts of the country. Unlike densely populated Gaza, the opposition-held areas of Aleppo have very few civilians left. Although civilian casualties happen in all wars, it makes no sense that the Syrian military would target civilians. On the contrary, the government has opened corridors to facilitate civilians and fighters to leave Aleppo.

Largely unreported in the West, the Syrian government has an active reconciliation program which allows former gunmen to move to a different area or return to society. This has been successfully used to clear the last remnant of terrorists from Al Waer near Homs and Darraya near Damascus. Many thousands of Syrian fighters who were coerced or bribed into joining the opposition have laid down their arms, signed an agreement and rejoined society.

In contrast with the frenzy and alarm in Western media and political circles, there is a growing optimism and hope among the vast majority of people in Aleppo. Syrian journalist Edward Dark recently tweeted "Aleppo soon will be freed from the jihadis that invaded & destroyed it. After 4 years of hell its people will finally know peace." They are looking forward to the final defeat or expulsion of the terrorists who invaded the city in 2012.

What will the foreign enemies of Syria do to prevent this? Will they continue or escalate their campaign to destroy Syria as they destroyed Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya? Are they prepared to risk potential World War III with Russia? In the last month Turkey sent troops into northern Syria and the U.S. attacked the Syrian Army in Deir Ezzor, killing at least 62 soldiers. The U.S. claims this was an accident, but many believe it was intentional.

Since the collapse of the cessation of hostilities, “soft power” propaganda has escalated. Accusations that the Syrians and Russians are targeting hospitals are linked to new social media campaigns to “Save Aleppo.” Two things are clear:

–The public should be wary of media stories based on the claims of biased actors and not supported by solid evidence

–The Syrian government has the right to defend itself against foreign-funded violent extremists seeking to destroy it.

**Rick Sterling is an investigative journalist and member of Syrian Solidarity Movement.**

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## Making Cold War to the End of the World

The Western media’s orgy of anti-Russia propaganda includes the curious claim that it is Moscow that is undermining faith in the U.S. presidential election, not the widely despised major party candidates, notes William Blum.

By William Blum

“Russia suspected of election scheme. U.S. probes plan to sow voter distrust.” That’s the *Washington Post* page-one lead headline of Sept. 6. Think about it. The election that Americans are suffering through, cringing in embarrassment, making them think of moving abroad, renouncing their citizenship; an election causing the Founding Fathers to throw up as they turn in their graves ... this is because the Russian Devils are sowing voter distrust! Who knew?

But of course, that’s the way Commies are – Oh wait, I forgot, they’re no longer Commies. So what are they? Ah yes, they still have that awful old hang-up so worthy of condemnation by decent people everywhere – They want to stand in the way of American world domination. The nerve!

The first Cold War performed a lobotomy on Americans, replacing brain matter with anti-communist viral matter, producing more than 70 years of functional national stupidity. For all of you who missed this fun event there’s good news: Cold War Two is here, as big and as stupid as ever.

Russia and Vladimir Putin are repeatedly, and automatically, blamed for all manner of bad things. The story which follows the above *Washington Post* headline does not even bother to make up something that could pass for evidence of the claim. The newspaper just makes the claim, at the same time pointing out that

“the intelligence community is not saying it has ‘definitive proof’ of such tampering, or any Russian plans to do so.” But the page-one headline has already served its purpose.

Hillary Clinton in her debate with Donald Trump likewise accused Russia of all kinds of computer hacking. Even Trump, not usually a stickler for accuracy, challenged her to offer something along the lines of evidence. She had nothing to offer.

In any event, this is all a diversion. It’s not hacking per se that bothers the Establishment; it’s the revelations of their lies that drives them up the wall. The hack of the Democratic National Committee on the eve of the party’s convention disclosed a number of embarrassing internal emails, forcing the resignation of DNC Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

On Sept. 12 we could read in the *Post* that a well-known physician had called for Hillary Clinton to be checked for possible poisons after her collapse in New York. Said the good doctor: “I do not trust Mr. Putin and Mr. Trump. With those two all things are possible.”

### **The Crimea ‘Invasion’**

Numerous other examples could be given here of the *Post*’s near-juvenile anti-Russian bias. One of the most common subjects has been Crimea. Moscow’s “invasion” of the Crimean peninsula in Ukraine in February 2014 is repeatedly cited as proof of Moscow’s belligerent and expansionist foreign policy and the need for Washington to once again feed the defense-budget monster.

But we’re never reminded that Russia was reacting to a U.S.-supported coup that overthrew the democratically-elected government of Ukraine on Russia’s border and replaced it with a regime in which neo-Nazis, complete with swastikas, feel very much at home. Russia “invaded” to assist Eastern Ukrainians in their resistance to this government, and did not even cross the border inasmuch as Russia already had a military base in Ukraine.

NATO (= USA) has been surrounding Russia for decades. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov captured the exquisite shamelessness of this with his remark of Sept. 27, 2014: “Excuse us for our existence in the middle of your bases.”

By contrast here is U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry: “NATO is not a threat to anyone. It is a defensive alliance. It is simply meant to provide security. It is not focused on Russia or anyone else.”

NATO war games in these areas are frequent, almost constant. The encirclement of Russia is about complete except for Georgia and Ukraine. In June, Germany’s

foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, shockingly accused NATO of “war-mongering” against Russia. How would the United States react to a Russian coup in Mexico or Canada followed by Russian military exercises in the same area?

Since the end of Cold War One, NATO has been feverishly searching for a reason to justify its existence. Their problem can be summed up with this question: If NATO had never existed what argument could be given now to create it?

The unmitigated arrogance of U.S. policy in Ukraine was best epitomized by the now-famous remark of Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary at the State Department, reacting to possible European Union objection to Washington’s role in Ukraine: “Fuck the E.U.”, she charmingly declared.

Unlike the United States, Russia does not seek world domination, nor even domination of Ukraine, which Moscow could easily accomplish if it wished. Neither did the Soviet Union set out to dominate Eastern Europe post-World War II. It must be remembered that Eastern Europe became communist because Hitler, with the approval of the West, used it as a highway to reach the Soviet Union to wipe out Bolshevism forever; and that the Russians in World Wars I and II lost about 40 million people because the West had twice used this highway to invade Russia. It should not be surprising that after World War II the Soviets were determined to close down the highway.

The *Washington Post*’s campaign to depict Russia as the enemy is unrelenting. Again, on the 19th, we could read in the paper the following: “U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies are investigating what they see as a broad covert Russian operation in the United States to sow public distrust in the upcoming presidential election and in U.S. political institutions, intelligence and congressional officials said.”

Nothing, however, compares with President Obama’s speech to the U.N. General Assembly (Sept. 24, 2014) where he classified Russia to be one of the three threats to the world along with the Islamic State and *ebola*.

A war between nuclear-powered United States and nuclear- powered Russia is “unthinkable.” Except that American military men think about it, like Cold-War U.S. General Thomas Power, speaking about nuclear war or a first strike by the U.S.: “The whole idea is to *kill* the bastards! At the end of the war, if there are two Americans and one Russian, we win!” The response from one of those present was: “Well, you’d better make sure that they’re a man and a woman.”

**William Blum is an author, historian, and renowned critic of U.S. foreign policy. He is the author of *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* and *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*,**

among others. [This article originally appeared at the Anti-Empire Report, <http://williamblum.org/> .]

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## Contrasting Mayor LaGuardia and Donald Trump

New York's New Deal-era Mayor Fiorella La Guardia and GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump both belonged to the Republican Party, lived in New York and showed self-confidence but their similarities stop there, writes Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

One of the most awkward interviews I ever conducted in my life was with Marie La Guardia, widow of the late three-term mayor of New York City, the legendary Fiorello H. La Guardia. She was 86 at the time. I was researching a project about her husband and arrived at her home in Bronxville, New York, with several pages of questions about Fiorello and their life together.

Despite all those pages, our conversation was over in about 15 minutes because to each one of my many queries her answer was "Yes," "No," or "I don't remember," even when I tried to follow up.

One exception: I asked her if she remembered when she and her husband entertained Britain's King George VI and his wife in 1939. "Yes," she replied. "Can you tell me more?" I asked. "It was nice," she said. And that was that. I left the house, dripping in flop sweat as I walked back to the car.

*The New York Times* spoke with her a year or so after my failed chat and seemed to have had much the same experience. But the reporter did elicit this comparatively voluble response from her about Fiorello: "I was always kind of crazy about him," she said. "Oh, I don't have to tell you what kind of guy he was. Everyone knows what kind of guy he was."

The kind of guy he was and how she felt about him comes through loud and clear in a current revival of the Pulitzer Prize-winning musical *Fiorello!* Produced by the Berkshire Theatre Group from Massachusetts, it's being staged here in Manhattan at the Classic Stage Company, but only through Oct. 7.

The cast is young and energetic and the songs, by the gifted Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick of *Fiddler on the Roof* fame (among other great shows) are tuneful and nostalgic for a time when a *Republican* – for that's what La Guardia was – could be a progressive, powerful street-fighter for the people. He's on

the side of the angels, as one of the songs goes, and a supporting character says in exasperation, "He'll help anybody!"

La Guardia's father was a bandmaster in the U.S. Army who died from eating tainted meat sold to the military by crooked suppliers during the Spanish-American War, a tragedy that taught his son early on how business can corrupt government, getting officials to look the other way in exchange for bribes or favors.

He became a crusading lawyer, defending immigrants, striking garment workers and tenants fighting greedy landlords. Marie was his devoted secretary and assistant, becoming La Guardia's second wife in 1929. In *Fiorello!*, his character shouts that "it's time to get the garbage off the doorstep," and rails against "heartless, misbegotten misters" and "the termites eating up our city."

He was elected to Congress and in 1934 was sworn in as the 99th mayor of New York City. Despite his Republican Party affiliation, La Guardia was an ardent New Dealer who during years of desperate poverty and unemployment helped make possible public works projects across the city, generating jobs that (in most cases) genuinely improved the urban landscape with housing and highways, parks and playgrounds.

"You cannot preach self-government and liberty to people in a starving land," he said. "Only a well-fed, well-housed, well-schooled people can enjoy the blessings of liberty." He was pro-labor and urged crackdowns on Wall Street plutocrats and their abuses of power.

### **Supreme Self-Confidence**

Like our present Republican presidential candidate, La Guardia was supremely self-confident and brash, a real publicity hound who chased fire engines and conducted city orchestras. He loved strutting his stuff on the airwaves. But the similarities end there.

Unlike our current tangerine nightmare, La Guardia backed up his big talk with action and genuine concern for his constituents. And La Guardia admitted when he was wrong. He didn't try to put the blame on anyone or anything else (as in faulty microphones, biased moderators, rigged search engine algorithms, etc.). Fiorello readily confessed, "When I make a mistake, it's a beaut!" and the voters loved him for the candid *mea culpa*.

Thinking of this lack of deceit or pretense, I particularly was amused last week when a member of Donald Trump's team tried to explain away the possibly illegal purchase of a large portrait of the businessman by the Trump Foundation, a painting that hangs in a bar at the Trump National Doral resort near Miami. The

team member said that in reality, Donald was doing the foundation a favor by storing it for them. Yeah, that's the ticket, a favor.

David A. Farenthold's account of this in *The Washington Post* bears repeating. He begins with a quote: "There are IRS rules which specifically state that when a foundation has an item, an individual can store those items – on behalf of the foundation – in order to help it with storage costs,' Trump adviser Boris Epshteyn said on MSNBC. 'And that's absolutely proper.'

"MSNBC's Hallie Jackson pressed Epshteyn. Was he really talking about the \$10,000 portrait that was recently discovered – by an Univision journalist – at the Champions Bar and Grill? 'You're telling me that that is storage, for Mr. Trump?' Jackson [asked].

"Right, of course, he's doing a good thing for his foundation,' Epshteyn said." Farenthold adds: "Tax experts were not impressed by this reasoning. "It's hard to make an IRS auditor laugh,' Brett Kappel, a lawyer who advises nonprofit groups at the Akerman firm, said in an email. 'But this would do it.'"

Wow. Epshteyn's rationale actually reminded me of a song from *Fiorello!* It's called "Little Tin Box," and musically recreates testimony before the Seabury hearings investigating municipal corruption and Tammany Hall, a probe that ultimately overthrew La Guardia's predecessor as mayor, Gentleman Jimmy Walker.

When bought-and-paid-for city officials are grilled as to how, on their meager salaries, they've been able to afford lives of luxury, they have a raft of explanations. Here's an example of one of the questions, asked and answered:

*"Mr. Z, you're a junior official And your income's rather low, Yet you've kept a dozen women in the very best hotels, Would you kindly explain how so?"*

*"I can see your Honor doesn't pull his punches, And it looks a trifle fishy, I'll admit. But for one whole week I went without my lunches, And it mounted up, your Honor, bit by bit."*

Similarly, with each preposterous lie and excuse, the falsehoods mount up and Trump and his people dig a bigger, deeper hole. And while his supporters may buy anything they're told, we all have to hope that a sufficient number of them, on top of the percentage of the country who already know better, will get a grip and realize they're being sold a bill of goods as ludicrous as those proverbial suckers buying the Brooklyn Bridge.

La Guardia had a simple answer to such nonsense: "Let's drive the bums out of town," he'd shout. And he knew that the ballot box is a good way to show them the highway.

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