

Trump's Quiet Outreach to Russia

Facing fierce resistance from Official Washington to a détente with Russia, President Trump has retreated publicly but continues to push ahead with more military-to-military cooperation, reports Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Many backers of Donald Trump's planned foreign policy, which sought détente with Russia, are wringing their hands and shaking their heads over what looks like the policy's defeat in the face of media and Democratic Party attacks, abetted by maverick Republican senators, in which "Russian contacts" and "Russian meddling" are the code words.

But there may be another way to see the situation. There are indications that Trump may be continuing to advance a more collaborative approach toward Russia through the quiet expansion of military-to-military cooperation, such as the recent meeting in Turkey to coordinate strikes against the Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria.

Still, the signs of a broader Trump retreat, even a rout, are undeniable. Several weeks ago we heard the first of several speeches from the new U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley repeating the same tired anti-Russian rhetoric of her predecessor, Samantha Power. Then we heard Defense Secretary James Mattis in Bonn, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in Brussels and Vice President Mike Pence in Munich speaking of unwavering support for U.S. allies and for NATO, the Cold War military alliance that Donald Trump had questioned during the campaign as "obsolete."

And most recently there was the fact that Russia was not invited to the conference of the U.S.-led coalition of 68 countries against ISIS being held in Washington, D.C. on March 22-23. Russia's exclusion would appear to contradict Trump's campaign promise to forge an alliance with Russia to combat and vanquish ISIS.

Against this backdrop, one might expect the Russians to be in despair. After all, assuming they really had "meddled" in the U.S. presidential election, their risky efforts would have resulted in lots of pain and little gain. That was always one of the chief arguments against assuming that the Russians did undertake to undercut Hillary Clinton's campaign, because the Russians would have assumed that their efforts would be detected by U.S. intelligence and surely would have infuriated the likely President Hillary Clinton. But even if Trump somehow had won against all odds, the Russians still would have faced the

Russia-did-it controversy that now is consuming Washington and Brussels.

That's assuming that the Russians did "meddle." Assuming the opposite, that they were innocent of any "meddling," then their hopes for a stroke of good luck with the arrival of a new President committed to détente would appear to have been dashed anyway. To paraphrase Viktor Chernomyrdin, a kind of Russian Yogi Berra in the local book of famous quotations, the Russians may have hoped for the best but it turned out as usual.

From the Sunday CNN interview of Dmitry Peskov, President Vladimir Putin's press secretary, we got a sense of how the Kremlin views the anti-Trump feeding frenzy now going on in the U.S. media and especially the attempt to portray Russian "meddling" as the reason that Trump won. Peskov called these assertions the "demonizing of Russia," a situation to which Russians cannot be indifferent.

But the sentiment was much less negative on some of the leading news programs in Moscow, including channel Rossiya 1's weekly news wrap-up delivered by Dmitry Kiselyov, who heads the news services on all Russian state radio and television channels, and Vladimir Solovyev's political talk show, which brought together some of the country's top legislators and leaders of key policy think tanks.

General to General

Both the Kiselyov news program and the Solovyov talk show drew attention to a development that was covered in the U.S. and Western press but with little or no interpretation so that it was easily missed: the meeting in the southern Turkish resort of Antalya of senior military officers of Turkey, the United States and Russia to discuss coordination of their military actions in northern Syria, where they are operating in close proximity and often at cross purposes. The meeting involved the Turkish Chief of Staff Hulusi Akar, U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joseph Dunford and Russian Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov.

From the Russian standpoint as revealed by Solovyov's guests, the meeting went very well and the only glum participant leaving the meeting was the Turkish general. The Americans and Russians seem to have been in agreement over how to keep the U.S.-sponsored Kurdish fighters – so resented by the Turks – in the forefront of the assault on the ISIS "capital" at Raqqa, and, as a corollary, how to sideline Turkish ambitions of capturing a sphere of influence in northern Syria using Turkish troops and local Turkmen proxies.

Elsewhere in the Solovyov program, panelists hinted that there also are ongoing talks between Trump's people and various Russian institutions. But the Antalya military contact – involving top generals for the first time since the deep

slide in U.S.-Russian relations in 2014 over the Ukraine crisis – bears more attention.

Trump appears to have concluded that the way forward in relations between the U.S. and Russia is to make progress out of sight of the media. Whereas bringing Russia into the U.S.-run anti-Islamic State coalition meeting in Washington would have invited the U.S. media's brickbats, a summit of generals in a provincial coastal town of Turkey could be far more productive and produce much less controversy. It is not for nothing that the press is now complaining that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is inaccessible. That follows the desires of the Oval Office, which prefers a "just get it done" approach.

Trump can also expect the greatest loyalty in the U.S. government's hierarchy from the military as well as fewer leaks from holdovers hostile to any rapprochement with Russia. Indeed, many senior U.S. officers had constructive relations with their Russian counterparts for years on crucial issues such as supplying U.S. troops in Afghanistan and in sharing intelligence on terrorism. That was disrupted by the coalition of neoconservatives and liberal interventionists dominating the State Department and holding top political jobs at the Pentagon. So Trump has removed many of President Obama's political appointees and has turned more to the military high command.

If Trump as Commander in Chief can keep the military in line, that would be an enormous step forward compared to the closing months of the Obama administration when Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, who is regarded as a neocon ideologue, got away with stunning insubordination, including what appears to have been an intentional attack on Syrian military positions at Deir Ezzor.

That attack, killing dozens of Syrian soldiers, sabotaged the cease-fire agreement arranged in September 2016 by Secretary of State Kerry with the approval of President Obama. A military under tight control from the Oval Office is the best protection against similar provocations or just bad luck accidents in the field, incidents that could escalate quickly under conditions of a lack of trust and hair-trigger arsenals.

Despite the summit of the generals, panelists on the Solovyov show acknowledged that full cooperation with the United States in Syria or elsewhere is a long way off. Secretary of Defense Mattis's report to Trump on how to conduct the war on ISIS does not provide for close cooperation with Russia, only for greater exchange of information. What the panelists clearly expect, though, is a more civilized relationship with the U.S. than under President Obama, even as the Americans still try to counter Russian influence in the region

A Confident Mood

The overall mood of the panelists was very confident, not because “their man” is in the White House, as U.S. media would have us believe, but as a result of what they construe as Russia’s winning hand in the Middle East, demonstrated by the visits to Moscow in the past week by two of the key players in the region’s geopolitics – President Erdogan of Turkey and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel.

To be sure, the visit by Erdogan had been planned long in advance around an agenda heavy with economic issues. It was to mark the culmination of the normalization process that began late last year when the Turks officially apologized for shooting down a Russian jet over Syria, which led to the killing of the pilot, followed by Russia applying very tough economic sanctions as retaliation for what President Putin called “a stab in the back.”

Now, however, with Erdogan’s visit on Friday, progress is being made on the two biggest projects around which Russian-Turkish economic relations are built: the Turk Stream gas pipelines and a major nuclear generating plant. Still, from the Russian perspective, as the panelists made clear, the Russians have the whip hand on the economic relationship with Turkey.

Turk Stream has importance for Moscow not so much for itself but because of the leverage it gives the Russians with Europe in forcing approval of Nord Stream II because Europe will not want to deal with Turkey as a major supplier of Russian gas. Moreover, the Russians are in no rush to lift the agricultural embargo they imposed on Turkey during the worst moments in their relations, nor are they re-instituting the non-visa travel, which existed before the shoot-down and which was very important for Turkey’s tourist industry.

But Erdogan’s real hopes for the visit lay elsewhere. Due to quick progress of Kurdish and Syrian state forces on the ground against ISIS, the Turkish president had pressing questions to discuss with Putin and wanted them resolved before the next meeting of the warring parties in Kazakhstan this week.

The Israeli visit was on very short notice, at the insistence of Netanyahu, and was also motivated by concern over how the end game in Syria is shaping up, with Iranian forces allied with Russia among the apparent victors. There was unanimity among the Russian panelists on this one point: The visits prove that Moscow is now the inescapable center to be courted by all those seeking solutions not only in Syria but in the broader Middle East. The Russians’ winning hand in Syria has come while it has cooperated with many competing sides in the conflict, including such adversaries as the Turks, Iranians and Kurds.

Russia is a co-guarantor of the partial ceasefire, which seeks to limit military actions to attacks on designated terrorist groups. Russia is also a leading

actor in the talks between the Syrian government and the armed opposition being held in the Kazakhstan capital of Astana. Meanwhile, the panelists expressed deep satisfaction over the encouraging warming of relations with Egypt and over Russia having chosen the side in the Libyan civil war that looks to be coming out on top.

Genuine Experts

Unlike many American news shows where the “talking heads” are often journalists imparting second-hand information, the key panelists on these Russian programs tend to be well-connected legislators or other government insiders. For instance, last Sunday’s shows included Aleksey Pushkov, chairman of the Federation Council’s Information Committee and, until the last Duma election in September 2016, chairman of the Duma’s Foreign Relations Committee.

The second major contributor on the Solovyov show was Vyacheslav Nikonov, chairman of the Duma Committee on Education but best known as the chairman of Russian World, the NGO which promotes the cultural interests of the Russian diaspora abroad. In that capacity, Nikonov, who is Kremlin aristocracy as the grandson of Molotov, also has a wide information base within and outside Russia. He is a Putin stalwart while also believing in Trump and in an eventual accommodation with the U.S.

The third legislator was the irrepressible Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Though known as something of a clown in the West for outrageous statements, he is in fact a very shrewd observer of the international scene and – as a Turkish-speaker and close follower of Middle East developments – his contributions were highly relevant to the discussion on how to get greatest advantage for Russia in the present Middle Eastern situation.

A fourth panelist was think tank director Yevgeny Satanovskiy, director of the Near Eastern Institute. A fifth was Israeli Yakov Kedmi, who left the Soviet Union as one of the first Jewish activists who wanted out. Settled in Israel, he eventually became the director of one of their intelligence agencies. Persona non grata in Russia until several years ago, Kedmi has been invited back to Moscow recently to participate in Solovyov’s and other leading talk shows.

Serious Debate

Unlike RT, formerly Russia Today, which is the voice of Russia to global audiences, the shows on Rossiya 1 are directed at the domestic audience. On the Solovyov show, we have Russians debating with Russians about key issues facing the country, its capabilities and options.

Besides the broader geopolitical discussions, a top question of the day was how

to turn Russian victories into something more tangible, meaning hard cash. The challenge was set out in the opening moments by the show's provocateur, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who insisted that Russia must practice a policy of deception: tell everyone what they want to hear, be friends to all, but serve only Russian national interests, starting with economic interests.

Here is the point about American policy on which all the key panelists concurred: the tight relationship between geopolitical and commercial success by America is something Russia must emulate. Wars should always end in great financial benefits for the victors, we were told, and Russia should not hesitate to exploit its position as favored military partner in the Middle East at present to promote the interests not only of its oil and gas companies, but also its industrial companies for infrastructure projects in the region.

That being said, panelists questioned whether their country can overcome endemic corruption so that projects abroad genuinely benefit the Russian nation and not only selected state-owned companies. Moreover, the reserved Near East expert Yevgeny Satanovskiy asked whether it is appropriate to engage in infrastructure projects abroad when there are great needs for the same in Mother Russia itself.

One point made by panelists which seemed to go unchallenged is that Russia should provide a defense umbrella with its S-300 and S-400 ground-to-air systems that locks in its strategic relationships from the Syrian conflict: for Turkey, Iran and Israel.

Whereas there are those in the Trump administration, possibly including the President himself, who reckon on wooing Russia away from Iran, it was clear from the well-networked panelists that Russian elites are dead set against any possibility of disowning their recent comrades in arms in Syria, notably Iran. Also, Iran occupies a key position in the Chinese led "One Belt One Road," which Russia strongly supports. It is a key part of the North-South energy route that Russia also supports.

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy has talked for many years about how and why Russia should stop looking West, should stop looking East, and should look to the South. But in the past, this recommendation had little content other than the offhand remark harking back to the Nineteenth Century when Russia and Britain were fierce rivals. Zhirinovskiy said Russian soldiers deserved to take R&R on the shores of the Indian Ocean.

However, in light of Sunday's discussion of commercial and diplomatic opportunities for Russia as a big player in the Greater Middle East, Zhirinovskiy's "look south" point of view is getting a new respectability in Moscow. The pressing question now is what the Trump Administration will make of

all this once it can get past the rearguard skirmishes with domestic opposition and focus on how to interact with Russia.

Highlighting those continuing U.S. obstacles to a détente with Russia, the Kiselyov news wrap-up devoted one segment to the current American hysteria over Russia, labeling it “McCarthyism” as a number of Americans now do. The segment showed the Russian audience just who Sen. Joe McCarthy was and how he and other fierce anti-communists in the 1950s engaged in the sort of personal denunciations, destruction of careers and imprisonment of dissidents that older Russians vividly remember from the Stalin era.

The segment concluded with a reminder of why comic genius Charlie Chaplin, whom Russians know and love from childhood, spent the last 25 years of his life in Switzerland – after being hounded out of the United States in the zealotry of McCarthyism. This Russian TV segment was not “holier than thou” with respect to the United States, but rather self-confident as if saying: Russia has been through its own version of this intolerance and regrets that another wave is now sweeping the U.S.

Gilbert Doctorow is a Brussels-based political analyst. His latest book, *Does Russia Have a Future?* was published in August 2015.

Testing the Principle of Free Speech

A surge in hateful speech toward minorities in the Age of Trump has been met by a pushback from angry activists, sometimes trampling the vital principle of free and open debate, writes Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

At the risk of sounding like a geezer complaining about “these kids today,” back in my college days, when it came to points of view we were unhesitatingly exposed to literature, teachers and on-campus speakers covering the ideological waterfront.

In one instance, the student body was addressed by civil rights activist and comedian Dick Gregory, radical Irish activist Bernadette Devlin and the conservative writer and critic Russell Kirk – all in the course of a week or so.

Such variety was a common occurrence, and freewheeling, open discussion was encouraged. We didn’t always like or agree with a lot of what we heard or read –

from time to time there were vehement protests – but all of it was invaluable. None of us were harmed in the making of our education.

So I was appalled other day when I read about the attempt by Republican Arkansas legislator Kim Hendren to ban from that state’s public schools all books written by the great radical historian Howard Zinn, including his seminal *A People’s History of the United States*, a truthful, lacerating look at the heroes and villains of America – especially the oligarchs and kleptocrats who once again have their heels on the necks of the poor and middle class.

But I also was deeply troubled by the incident at Vermont’s Middlebury College on March 2, when controversial social scientist Charles Murray was invited by a conservative student group and attempted to speak on campus. Here’s what happened, according to the Associated Press:

“Hundreds of students chanted as Murray began to speak Thursday, forcing the college to move the lecture to an undisclosed location. Murray’s talk was live-streamed to the original venue, but protesters drowned it out. The topic, he said, was the divergence of the country’s culture into a new upper class separated from mainstream America.

“Afterward, a group of protesters surrounded Murray, professor Allison Stanger and college administrator Bill Burger as they were leaving, he said. The protesters became violent, with one pulling Stanger’s hair, twisting her neck, the college said.

“After Murray and the two Middlebury staff members got into a car to leave, protesters banged on the windows, climbed onto the hood and rocked the vehicle, the college and Murray said.”

Professor Stanger, by the way, went to the ER and was subsequently diagnosed with concussion. She’s a respected political scientist at Middlebury and a fellow at the progressive New America, and was there the other night because the conservative student group had asked her to provide a counterpoint to Murray’s speech, to interview him from the stage after his prepared remarks. She had prepared some tough, challenging questions.

Odious Opinions

Many of Charles Murray’s opinions are indeed odious and his research highly questionable, He was co-author of *The Bell Curve*, a notorious book that seemed to link race and IQ. He describes himself as a libertarian, but the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) calls him a white nationalist and reports:

“According to Murray, the relative differences between the white and black

populations of the United States, as well as those between men and women, have nothing to do with discrimination or historical and structural disadvantages, but rather stem from genetic differences between the groups... Murray's attempts to link social inequality to genes are based on the work of explicitly racist scientists."

At the beginning of Murray's attempt to speak at Middlebury, students turned their backs to him and chanted in protest. I probably would have done the same. But to not let him speak and to allow the protests to lead to violence is inexcusable.

I realize that this raises all sorts of questions about freedom of speech and academic liberty, the nature of dissent and when and if political violence is ever justified, but looking at what happened coolly – and admittedly, from a distance – it seems clear that this went far beyond the boundaries of civil discourse that especially today must be defended against the barbarians who already have run roughshod, pushing through the gates and seizing the reins of power and governance.

Professor Stanger said it best herself. She wrote:

"To people who wish to spin this story as one about what's wrong with elite colleges and universities, you are mistaken. Please instead consider this as a metaphor for what is wrong with our country, and on that, Charles Murray and I would agree. This was the saddest day of my life. We have got to do better by those who feel and are marginalized. Our 230-year constitutional democracy depends on it, especially when our current President is blind to the evils he has unleashed. We must all realize the precious inheritance we have as fellow Americans and defend the Constitution against all its enemies, both foreign and domestic. That is why I do not regret my involvement in the event with Dr. Murray."

And then she quoted James Baldwin: "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

I can be as guilty as the next person about tuning out and trying to ignore the voice of someone with whom I vehemently disagree. I know, too, that this indeed is a time to speak out against the ignorance and despotism sweeping our nation. Further, I realize that the religious, racial and homophobic hate crimes that have been on the upswing since Donald Trump's candidacy and election – and increased in 2016 for the second year in a row according to the Southern Poverty Law Center – far exceed in numbers and intensity any violence or brutishness that has occurred on college campuses. No question that they're more frightening and dangerous.

But, in the words of Andrew Sullivan, “Universities are the sanctuary cities of reason. If reason must be subordinate to ideology even there, our experiment in self-government is over.”

Two sides of the same coin: whether the Trump White House or those who would physically attack a college professor. Their unthinking, unyielding enslavement to a single viewpoint is fatal.

Ignorance begets ignorance and hate begets hate. And like a virus, each can infect without regard to race, gender, creed or political perspective. At a time when those in charge are fueling a pandemic of intolerance we must make sure not to succumb ourselves.

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America First or Saudi Arabia First?

Saudi Arabia is testing President Trump’s “America First” promise by demanding U.S. alignment with Saudi interests in the Mideast, a betrayal that Trump should reject, says 9/11 widow Kristen Breitweiser in a letter to the President.

By Kristen Breitweiser

Dear President Trump,

This week you are scheduled to meet with Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. As a 9/11 widow who has fought for more than 15 years for truth, justice, accountability and transparency with regard to the murder of my husband, Ron, I have a considerable interest in your upcoming meeting with the Deputy Crown Prince.

First, foremost and for good reason, I fear that the Deputy Crown Prince will not be forthright with you about his Kingdom’s role in the 9/11 attacks and global terrorism.

Indeed, many in the Kingdom refuse to tell the truth about their continued, long-standing, and well-documented clandestine, logistical and financial support of radical Islamist terrorist groups that target and kill innocent Americans.

For example, last summer when the infamous 2002 Joint Inquiry of Congress' "28 pages" were finally released, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al Jubeir claimed that the Saudis were exonerated and that the matter surrounding the Saudi role in the 9/11 attacks was "now finished."

In reality, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its role in facilitating the 9/11 attacks is far from over. And, in truth, the "28 pages" – actually 29 pages of the 832-page report – prove to be quite illuminating, devastating and damning towards that end:

On page 415: "While in the United States, some of the September 11 hijackers were in contact with, and received support and assistance from, individuals who may be connected to the Saudi Government... [A]t least two of those individuals were alleged by some to be Saudi intelligence officers."

On page 417: One of the individuals identified in the pages as a financial supporter of two of the 9/11 hijackers, Osama Bassnan, later received a "significant amount of cash" from "a member of the Saudi Royal Family" during a 2002 trip to Houston.

On page 418: "Another Saudi national with close ties to the Saudi Royal Family, [deleted], is the subject of FBI counterterrorism investigations."

On pages 418 and 419: Detained al Qaeda leader Abu Zubaida had in his phone book the unlisted number for the security company that managed the Colorado residence of the then-Saudi ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan.

On page 421: "a [deleted], dated July 2, 2002, [indicates] 'incontrovertible evidence that there is support for these terrorists inside the Saudi Government.'"

On page 426: Bassnan's wife was receiving money "from Princess Haifa Bint Sultan," the wife of the Saudi ambassador. (Her correct name is actually Princess Haifa bin Faisal.)

On page 436: The general counsel of the U.S. Treasury Department, David Aufhauser, testified that "offices [of the Saudi charity al-Haramain] have significant contacts with extremists, Islamic extremists." CIA officials also testified "that they were making progress on their investigations of al-Haramain... [T]he head of the central office is complicit in supporting terrorism, and it also raised questions about [then-Saudi Interior Minister] Prince Nayef."

Holding the Saudis Accountable

Fortunately, as you know President Trump, JASTA (Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act) was enacted into law – overriding President Obama’s veto – on Sept. 28, 2016 and the 9/11 Families were given the right to hold the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia accountable in a court of law for its alleged role in the 9/11 attacks.

Thanks to discovery and subpoena power, the 9/11 families hope to unearth and reveal a panoply of compelling information surrounding the Saudi role in the 9/11 attacks. Suffice it to say, we do not believe the Saudis should be considered an ally of America.

Unsurprisingly, the Saudis continue to wage war against the 9/11 Families and JASTA by paying millions to their 14 powerful, insider Washington DC lobbying firms, like the Podesta Group, to repeal JASTA and rob us of our day in court.

In addition, some of the Saudis’ key legislative supporters who threaten to repeal JASTA are Senators Lindsey Graham and John McCain. Sadly, McCain and Graham choose to protect the Saudis rather than American victims of terrorism.

Quite horrifically, one of the Saudi lobbyists – Qorvis – was recently caught trying to dupe, manipulate, and pit U.S. veterans against the 9/11 families. According to media reports, Qorvis offered vets an all-expense-paid trip to Washington (staying at the Trump Hotel) to lobby against JASTA without telling the vets that it was Saudi money funding their trip. Given that many of these vets had joined the military in the wake of 9/11, the discovery that they were now being duped into “working” for the enemy they enlisted and risked their lives to fight against, was extremely upsetting. Pitting American veterans against American victims is the lowest of the low – yet, there seems to be no lengths that the Saudis will not go.

Which brings me to my last point – the Saudi Aramco IPO on Wall Street. Mr. President, my husband was burnt to death on September 11th. The remains I received included his two arms, a few fingers, and his wedding band.

Thousands of innocent people were brutally slaughtered and turned to ash in broad daylight on that horrific day, now more than 15 years ago. The notion that the Saudis – whom the 9/11 Families are currently trying to hold accountable in a court of law for their role in the murder of our loved ones – want to return to the scene of their own alleged crime to make billions of dollars is immoral and simply untenable.

As my fellow 9/11 widows and I have repeatedly said—not over our husbands’ dead bodies.

President Trump, you have structured your campaign and current policies around

being for America First. The 9/11 Families certainly hope that you remain steadfast in your belief that Americans must be protected, supported, and heard, first and foremost above all others—particularly those like the Saudis who fund radical Islamic terrorists that target and kill Americans.

Kristen Breitweiser is a 9/11 widow and activist who – working with other 9/11 widows known collectively as the “Jersey Girls” – pressured the U.S. government to conduct a formal investigation into the terror attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. Follow Kristen Breitweiser on Twitter: www.twitter.com/kdbreitweiser. [This article originally appeared as a blog post at HuffingtonPost.]

Celebrating the Balfour Disaster

A century ago, the U.K.’s Balfour Declaration set in motion the human rights disaster of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but – for opportunistic reasons – British politicians plan to hail it as a brilliant success, says Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

British Prime Minister Theresa May has announced that Britain will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration later this year. The Conservative Party leader addressed her party’s “Friends of Israel” faction and declared that the Balfour Declaration was “one of the most important letters in history” while pledging that her government would celebrate it “with pride.”

Her determination to do so is a clear indication that those who control national politics also control official interpretations of history. In the case of the Balfour Declaration’s centenary, it is the ongoing alliance of Zionist special interests and British political power that is about to turn what has been a disaster for Britons, Jews and Palestinians alike, into a source of national pride.

I have told the story of the Balfour Declaration in documented detail in my book *America’s Palestine*. Here is a brief synopsis: The November 1917 declaration was a World War I expedient undertaken by the then British government to enlist the aid of worldwide Jewry (mistakenly believed to be led by the fledgling World Zionist Organization) to the British side. In exchange the British government promised to create a “Jewish National Home” in Arab Palestine after the war. In so doing it sought to buy Jewish assistance with someone else’s currency – that is, with territory then belonging to the Ottoman Empire.

Key members of the war cabinet in London, such as the Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, were believers in the myth of worldwide Jewish power, and on that basis were convinced that Jewish influence in Washington could help bring the United States into the war as a British ally, and at the same time keep their eastern front ally, the Russians, from leaving the war. Though the U.S. did soon enter the war, it had nothing to do with Jewish influence, and the Russians, now led by the Bolsheviks, proceeded to make a separate peace with the Germans.

At the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire collapsed and Britain found itself in military control of Palestine. The government in London then proceeded to follow up on its promise to the Zionists. It did so by allowing the massive immigration of European Jews into Palestine. At this point the policy was driven by a blend of religious and racist beliefs, along with imperial ambitions.

First there was the fact that the Jews were seen as European allies who would allegedly help secure a strategic part of the Middle East for the British Empire, and second there was a mesmerizing mythic belief that a Jewish National Home was somehow in line with the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. In the end none of this played out well for the British. In 1948, they were driven out of Palestine by both violently hostile Zionists and Arab nationalists. They left with their tails between their legs.

It appears that Prime Minister May and her party's "Friends of Israel" reject this history. Or, perhaps they don't care about documented facts because all that now matters is keeping for the Conservative Party the financial backing of the Zionist lobby. Such is democratic politics in the West.

A Disaster All Around

It is worth repeating that the consequences of the Balfour Declaration have proven to be disastrous. British hegemony lasted but 30 years and, as just mentioned, ended in an ignominious withdrawal. The Palestinians have suffered decades of dispossession and ethnic cleansing.

And the Jews, religious and secular, of the resulting state of Israel, now officially tied to the Zionist ethos, have been politically seduced and culturally converted to a racist ideology. Today, for many Jews, Zionism and Judaism are two sides of the same coin. One way you can demonstrate this latter point is by calling the ideology of Zionism into question. In doing so you will be labeled an anti-Semite.

Why has this situation come to pass? Certainly the history of European anti-Semitism, culminating in the Holocaust, has a lot to do with it. Anti-Semitism always constituted a threat for the Jews of the West. However, traditionally,

that threat was mostly local. That is, even as the Jews of a particular shtetl in, say, southern Russia were being slaughtered, those elsewhere might be prospering. So, the danger was always there but only sporadically realized.

But then came the Nazis and the dimensions of the threat changed radically. As a result, there was a total breakdown of European Jewish life. And, for a significant number, the old Torah-based insights and philosophies that explained the world no longer sufficed.

So what did those Western Jews who managed to survive do in such circumstances? Their customary social order was gone. They were adrift in a world that did not make sense except in terms of its mortal danger. Under such conditions an applicable single idea that appeared to be historically logical could serve as a life preserver – and that idea was Zionism.

Zionism seemed historically logical because it melded the historical success of the nation-state, which was after all the dominant political system of the age, with a biblical myth that rationalized a “Jewish state” in the Arab land of Palestine. To both the survivors of the Holocaust and to those Jews who had watched the destruction of European Jewry from afar (i.e., from such places as the U.S.), the whole package must have had an internal logic that was irresistibly comforting – promising permanent security in a Jewish national home.

While one can understand the seductive power of Zionism, it, like other exclusively racial or ethnic political ideologies, only led to predictable disaster. The truth is that it is impossible to create a state exclusively for one people (call them people A) in a territory already populated by another people (call them people B) without the adoption of racist policies by A and serious resistance on the part of B. Under such circumstances, for A, there can be no real security nor can there be anything like a healthy national culture.

The whole process has proved remarkably self-corrupting for Zionist Jews. It is ironic that now most Zionists are themselves anti-Semites. In this case the Semite targets are the Palestinians and the growing number of western Jews who have come to support their cause.

Thus, the plans to celebrate the centenary of the Balfour Declaration is based on an illusion that something awful is really something prideful. The only way you can pull this off is if you have the power to twist the entire historical episode into something it is not – and that is what Theresa May is planning to do.

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The Misguided 'Vault 7' Whodunit

Typically, the mainstream U.S. media responds to a major leak of U.S. intelligence secrets as a whodunit search for the leaker rather than focus on the troubling disclosures, as Jesselyn Radack notes after the "Vault 7" release.

By Jesselyn Radack

It is the leakiest of times in the Executive Branch. Last week, [Wikileaks published](#) a massive and, by all accounts genuine, trove of documents revealing that the CIA has been stockpiling, and lost control of, hacking tools it uses against targets.

Particularly noteworthy were the revelations that the CIA developed a tool to hack Samsung TVs and turn them into recording devices and that the CIA worked to infiltrate both Apple and Google smart phone operating systems since it could not break encryption. No one in government has challenged the authenticity of the documents disclosed.

We do not know the identity of the source or sources, nor can we be 100 percent certain of his or her motivations. [Wikileaks writes](#) that the source sent a statement that policy questions "urgently need to be debated in public, including whether the CIA's hacking capabilities exceed its mandated powers and the problem of public oversight of the agency" and that the source "wishes to initiate a public debate about the security, creation, use, proliferation and democratic control of cyber-weapons."

The FBI has already begun [hunting down the source](#) as part of a criminal leak investigation. Historically, the criminal justice system has been a particularly inept judge of who is a whistleblower. Moreover, it has allowed the use of the pernicious Espionage Act – an arcane law meant to go after spies – to go after whistleblowers who reveal information the public interest.

My client, former NSA senior official Thomas Drake, was prosecuted under the Espionage Act, only to later be [widely recognized](#) as a whistleblower. There is no public interest defense to Espionage Act charges, and [courts have ruled](#) that

a whistleblower's motive, however salutary, is irrelevant to determining guilt.

The Intelligence Community is an equally bad judge of who is a whistleblower, and has a vested interest in giving no positive reinforcement to those who air its dirty laundry. The Intelligence Community reflexively claims that anyone who makes public secret information is not a whistleblower. Former NSA and CIA Director General Michael V. Hayden speculated that the recent leaks are to be blamed on young millennials harboring some disrespect for the venerable intelligence agencies responsible for mass surveillance and torture.

Not only is his speculation speculative, but it's proven wrong by the fact that whistleblowers who go to the press span the generational spectrum from Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg to mid-career and senior level public servants like CIA torture whistleblower John Kiriakou and NSA whistleblower Thomas Drake to early-career millennials like Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning and NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden. The lawbreaker does not get to decide who is a whistleblower.

Whistleblowing or Not

Not all leaks of information are whistleblowing, and the word "whistleblower" is a loaded term, so whether or not the Vault 7 source conceives of him or herself as a whistleblower is not a particularly pertinent inquiry. The label "whistleblower" does not convey some mythical power or goodness, or some "moral narcissism," a term used to describe me when I blew the whistle.

Rather, whether an action is whistleblowing depends on whether or not the information disclosed is in the public interest and reveals fraud, waste, abuse, illegality or dangers to public health and safety. Even if some of the information revealed does not qualify, it should be remembered that whistleblowers are often faulted with being over- or under-inclusive with their disclosures. Again, it is the quality of the information, not the quantity, nor the character of the source.

Already, the information in the Vault 7 documents revealed that the Intelligence Community has misled the American people. In the wake of Snowden's revelations, the Intelligence Community committed to avoid the stockpiling of technological vulnerabilities, publicly claiming that its bias was toward "disclosing them" so as to better protect everyone's privacy. However, the Vault 7 documents reveal just the opposite: not only has the CIA been stockpiling exploits, it has been aggressively working to undermine our Internet security.

Even assuming the CIA is using its hacking tools against the right targets, a pause-worthy presumption given the agency's checkered history, the CIA has

empowered the rest of the hacker world and foreign adversaries by hoarding vulnerabilities, and thereby undermined the privacy rights of all Americans and millions of innocent people around the world. Democracy depends on an informed citizenry, and journalistic sources – whether they call themselves whistleblowers or not – are a critical component when the government uses national security as justification to keep so much of its activities hidden from public view.

As we learn more about the Vault 7 source and the disclosures, our focus should be on the substance of the disclosures. Historically, the government's reflexive instinct is to shoot the messenger, pathologize the whistleblower, and drill down on his or her motives, while the transparency community holds its breath that he or she will turn out to be pure as the driven snow.

But that's all deflection from plumbing the much more difficult questions, which are: Should the CIA be allowed to conduct these activities, and should it be doing so in secret without any public oversight? These are questions we would not even be asking without the Vault 7 source.

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