

# An Apology and Explanation

**From Editor Robert Parry:** For readers who have come to see Consortiumnews as a daily news source, I would like to extend my personal apology for our spotty production in recent days. On Christmas Eve, I suffered a stroke that has affected my eyesight (especially my reading and thus my writing) although apparently not much else. The doctors have also been working to figure out exactly what happened since I have never had high blood pressure, I never smoked, and my recent physical found nothing out of the ordinary. Perhaps my personal slogan that “every day’s a work day” had something to do with this.

Perhaps, too, the unrelenting ugliness that has become Official Washington and national journalism was a factor. It seems that since I arrived in Washington in 1977 as a correspondent for The Associated Press, the nastiness of American democracy and journalism has gone from bad to worse. In some ways, the Republicans escalated the vicious propaganda warfare following Watergate, refusing to accept that Richard Nixon was guilty of some extraordinary malfeasance (including the 1968 sabotage of President Johnson’s Vietnam peace talks to gain an edge in the election and then the later political dirty tricks and cover-ups that came to include Watergate). Rather than accept the reality of Nixon’s guilt, many Republicans simply built up their capability to wage information warfare, including the creation of ideological news organizations to protect the party and its leaders from “another Watergate.”

So, when Democrat Bill Clinton defeated President George H.W. Bush in the 1992 election, the Republicans used their news media and their control of the special prosecutor apparatus (through Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Appeals Court Judge David Sentelle) to unleash a wave of investigations to challenge Clinton’s legitimacy, eventually uncovering his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

The idea had developed that the way to defeat your political opponent was not just to make a better argument or rouse popular support but to dredge up some “crime” that could be pinned on him or her. The GOP success in damaging Bill Clinton made possible George W. Bush’s disputed “victory” in 2000 in which Bush took the presidency despite losing the popular vote and almost certainly losing the key state of Florida if all ballots legal under state law were counted. Increasingly, America – even at the apex of its uni-power status – was taking on the look of a banana republic except with much higher stakes for the world.

Though I don’t like the word “weaponized,” it began to apply to how

“information” was used in America. The point of Consortiumnews, which I founded in 1995, was to use the new medium of the modern Internet to allow the old principles of journalism to have a new home, i.e., a place to pursue important facts and giving everyone a fair shake. But we were just a tiny pebble in the ocean. The trend of using journalism as just another front in no-holds-barred political warfare continued – with Democrats and liberals adapting to the successful techniques pioneered mostly by Republicans and by well-heeled conservatives.

Barack Obama’s election in 2008 was another turning point as Republicans again challenged his legitimacy with bogus claims about his “Kenyan birth,” a racist slur popularized by “reality” TV star Donald Trump. Facts and logic no longer mattered. It was a case of using whatever you had to diminish and destroy your opponent.

We saw similar patterns with the U.S. government’s propaganda agencies developing themes to demonize foreign adversaries and then to smear Americans who questioned the facts or challenged the exaggerations as “apologists.” This approach was embraced not only by Republicans (think of President George W. Bush distorting the reality in Iraq in 2003 to justify the invasion of that country under false pretenses) but also by Democrats who pushed dubious or downright false depictions of the conflict in Syria (including blaming the Syrian government for chemical weapons attacks despite strong evidence that the events were staged by Al Qaeda and other militants who had become the tip of the spear in the neocon/liberal interventionist goal of removing the Assad dynasty and installing a new regime more acceptable to the West and to Israel).

More and more I would encounter policymakers, activists and, yes, journalists who cared less about a careful evaluation of the facts and logic and more about achieving a pre-ordained geopolitical result – and this loss of objective standards reached deeply into the most prestigious halls of American media. This perversion of principles – twisting information to fit a desired conclusion – became the *modus vivendi* of American politics and journalism. And those of us who insisted on defending the journalistic principles of skepticism and evenhandedness were increasingly shunned by our colleagues, a hostility that first emerged on the Right and among neoconservatives but eventually sucked in the progressive world as well. Everything became “information warfare.”

### **The New Outcasts**

That is why many of us who exposed major government wrongdoing in the past have ended up late in our careers as outcasts and pariahs. Legendary investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, who helped expose major crimes of state from the My Lai massacre to the CIA’s abuses against American citizens, including illegal spying

and LSD testing on unsuspecting subjects, has literally had to take his investigative journalism abroad because he uncovered inconvenient evidence that implicated Western-backed jihadists in staging chemical weapons attacks in Syria so the atrocities would be blamed on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The anti-Assad group think is so intense in the West that even strong evidence of staged events, such as the first patients arriving at hospitals before government planes could have delivered the sarin, was brushed aside or ignored. The Western media and the bulk of international agencies and NGOs were committed to gin up another case for “regime change” and any skeptics were decried as “Assad apologists” or “conspiracy theorists,” the actual facts be damned.

So Hersh and weapons experts such as MIT’s Theodore Postol were shoved into the gutter in favor of hip new NATO-friendly groups like Bellingcat, whose conclusions always fit neatly with the propaganda needs of the Western powers.

The demonization of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russia is just the most dangerous feature of this propaganda process – and this is where the neocons and the liberal interventionists most significantly come together. The U.S. media’s approach to Russia is now virtually 100 percent propaganda. Does any sentient human being read the New York Times’ or the Washington Post’s coverage of Russia and think that he or she is getting a neutral or unbiased treatment of the facts? For instance, the full story of the infamous Magnitsky case cannot be told in the West, nor can the objective reality of the Ukraine coup in 2014. The American people and the West in general are carefully shielded from hearing the “other side of the story.” Indeed to even suggest that there is another side to the story makes you a “Putin apologist” or “Kremlin stooge.”

Western journalists now apparently see it as their patriotic duty to hide key facts that otherwise would undermine the demonizing of Putin and Russia. Ironically, many “liberals” who cut their teeth on skepticism about the Cold War and the bogus justifications for the Vietnam War now insist that we must all accept whatever the U.S. intelligence community feeds us, even if we’re told to accept the assertions on faith.

### **The Trump Crisis**

Which brings us to the crisis that is Donald Trump. Trump’s victory over Democrat Hillary Clinton has solidified the new paradigm of “liberals” embracing every negative claim about Russia just because elements of the CIA, FBI and the National Security Agency produced a report last Jan 6 that blamed Russia for “hacking” Democratic emails and releasing them via WikiLeaks. It didn’t seem to matter that these “hand-picked” analysts (as Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called them) evinced no evidence and even admitted that they weren’t asserting any of this as fact.

The hatred of Trump and Putin was so intense that old-fashioned rules of journalism and fairness were brushed aside. On a personal note, I faced harsh criticism even from friends of many years for refusing to enlist in the anti-Trump “Resistance.” The argument was that Trump was such a unique threat to America and the world that I should join in finding any justification for his ouster. Some people saw my insistence on the same journalistic standards that I had always employed somehow a betrayal.

Other people, including senior editors across the mainstream media, began to treat the unproven Russia-gate allegations as flat fact. No skepticism was tolerated and mentioning the obvious bias among the never-Trumpers inside the FBI, Justice Department and intelligence community was decried as an attack on the integrity of the U.S. government’s institutions. Anti-Trump “progressives” were posturing as the true patriots because of their now unquestioning acceptance of the evidence-free proclamations of the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Hatred of Trump had become like some invasion of the body snatchers – or perhaps many of my journalistic colleagues had never believed in the principles of journalism that I had embraced throughout my adult life. To me, journalism wasn’t just a cover for political activism; it was a commitment to the American people and the world to tell important news stories as fully and fairly as I could; not to slant the “facts” to “get” some “bad” political leader or “guide” the public in some desired direction.

I actually believed that the point of journalism in a democracy was to give the voters unbiased information and the necessary context so the voters could make up their own minds and use their ballot – as imperfect as that is – to direct the politicians to take actions on behalf of the nation. The unpleasant reality that the past year has brought home to me is that a shockingly small number of people in Official Washington and the mainstream news media actually believe in real democracy or the goal of an informed electorate.

Whether they would admit it or not, they believe in a “guided democracy” in which “approved” opinions are elevated – regardless of their absence of factual basis – and “unapproved” evidence is brushed aside or disparaged regardless of its quality. Everything becomes “information warfare” – whether on Fox News, the Wall Street Journal editorial page, MSNBC, the New York Times or the Washington Post. Instead of information provided evenhandedly to the public, it is rationed out in morsels designed to elicit the desired emotional reactions and achieve a political outcome.

As I said earlier, much of this approach was pioneered by Republicans in their misguided desire to protect Richard Nixon, but it has now become all pervasive

and has deeply corrupted Democrats, progressives and mainstream journalism. Ironically, the ugly personal characteristics of Donald Trump – his own contempt for facts and his crass personal behavior – have stripped the mask off the broader face of Official America.

What is perhaps most alarming about the past year of Donald Trump is that the mask is now gone and, in many ways, all sides of Official Washington are revealed collectively as reflections of Donald Trump, disinterested in reality, exploiting “information” for tactical purposes, eager to manipulate or con the public. While I’m sure many anti-Trumpers will be deeply offended by my comparison of esteemed Establishment figures with the grotesque Trump, there is a deeply troubling commonality between Trump’s convenient use of “facts” and what has pervaded the Russia-gate investigation.

My Christmas Eve stroke now makes it a struggle for me to read and to write. Everything takes much longer than it once did – and I don’t think that I can continue with the hectic pace that I have pursued for many years. But – as the New Year dawns – if I could change one thing about America and Western journalism, it would be that we all repudiate “information warfare” in favor of an old-fashioned respect for facts and fairness – and do whatever we can to achieve a truly informed electorate.

**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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## Reverberations from Trump’s Jerusalem Move

One ironic benefit from Donald Trump’s presidency is that the world is showing more independence against U.S. edicts, such as the recent rebuff of Trump’s decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, as Dennis J Bernstein reports.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The U.N. General Assembly's rebuff of overt threats of economic retaliation from President Trump – in the overwhelming repudiation of his decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem – marked a rare show of independence from Washington. Despite President Trump's threats, the vote against the U.S. position was 128 to 9, with 35 abstentions.

I spoke about the significance of the vote with Professor Francis Boyle, a scholar and long-time pro-Palestinian activist, who has been deeply engaged in the Mideast peace process and various negotiations over the last 30 years. Boyle is a professor of international law at the University of Illinois' College of Law. He served as a legal advisor to the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

Dennis Bernstein: Before we jump into this, I would like people to know a little bit more about your background, because you're the perfect person to hit this subject at this time. Just say a little bit more about your work with the Palestinians.

Francis Boyle: Right. Well, starting in 1987, at [the Palestinians] request, I made a speech at the United Nations on the 20th anniversary of the Six-Day War. And, in this speech, I outlined to them an agenda for establishing their statehood, including, at some point, invoking the Uniting for Peace Resolution.

So, they liked what I had to say and asked me to write it up in a memo, which I did. You can read it in my book "Palestine, Palestinians and International Law." And they then carried out my recommendation in their Declaration of Independence of 15 November, 1988. And I was their legal advisor on all of that. My memorandum became their position paper. And I've worked with them since then.

Today, the State of Palestine is recognized du jour by 136 states, the last time I looked. And it also has U.N. observer state status now at the United Nations along the lines that Switzerland had before it became a full-fledged U.N. member state.

[...] And certainly the Palestinians have publicly stated that they can, at some point in the future, invoke the Uniting for Peace Resolution to obtain their admission to the United Nations as a full-fledged U.N. member state. They said that's next on the agenda. I guess we have to see what happens here. I really can't say, but they said they're renewing that struggle in January [2018], after the dust settles here.

DB: Okay, now let's talk about the significance of the vote today [Dec. 21], which has a lot to do with Jerusalem. And, talk about it, if you will, in the context of the Uniting for Peace procedure because this gives it more power or more of a focus.

FB: Well, that is correct. When Uniting for Peace started out, back during the days of the Korean War, the Soviet Union proceeded to exercise a veto. And the United States under Secretary of State Dean Acheson – back in those days we controlled the General Assembly – put forward the Uniting for Peace Resolution in the General Assembly to circumvent the Soviet veto. And then [the US] used it to impose fairly terrible economic sanctions against North Korea that continue until today.

And, over the years, the Uniting for Peace procedure was approved by the International Court of Justice in the [Unclear 05:48] advisory opinion in 1962. And I did, I was the one who informed the Palestinians about the Uniting for Peace procedure and that we need to go forward and use it. And they have used it.

And [the vote on Dec. 21] was yet another example. The mainstream news media is dismissing this as nothing more than symbolic. You know, Dennis, if it were nothing more than symbolic then why did Nikki Haley get up there and threaten to break the legs of everyone in the world, if they voted for it, and likewise, Trump make his thuggish threat, as well, at his last cabinet meetings? So it's far more than symbolic.

Under Uniting for Peace the General Assembly cannot require states to do anything. But they can certainly authorize them. And what happens here with this resolution under Uniting for Peace is that it really solidified the international consensus on Jerusalem. As you note, we discussed this before, when Trump announced his new policy, and invited other states to follow moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem and recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, which it definitely is not, whether west Jerusalem or east Jerusalem.

And, this vote today really solidifies that international consensus. So that is a positive thing, but, obviously it's going to have to be followed up by more steps by the Palestinians. Again, my advice is the next stage here is to use United for Peace to have Palestine admitted to the U.N. itself. But, that's under consideration. We'll have to see what they do.

DB: And what, exactly, did that resolution say? It was reinforcing earlier Security Council resolutions. What exactly are we talking about here?

FB: Well, the way the United States government set it up under Secretary of State Dean Acheson, was that in the event there is a matter affecting international peace and security, and at least one of the permanent members at the Security Council exercises a veto power over a resolution on that matter, when the resolution is introduced in the Security Council, the matter is then turned over to the United Nations General Assembly for action, for the General

Assembly to decide what to do about it, in accordance with a two-thirds vote. So, the United States government originally introduced this. We conceived it and we applied it, regretfully, to North Korea.

And those economic sanctions are still strangling North Korea today, as we talk. And Trump is trying to escalate them. But in any event, sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. I think it's only history, sort of cosmic blowback here, that a generation later the Palestinians and most of the rest of the world are using Uniting for Peace against the United States. This is our baby, as it were, and they are sticking it back to us.

DB: Alright, now let's just talk a little bit about Jerusalem and what's at stake here. Last we spoke, one of the things you said, and it's very concerning and absolutely true, is that you were now fearing the deaths again of more Palestinians in this fight for liberation.

FB: And, it's true, Dennis, [...] in fairness, that Jews might die too.

DB: Yes. And things have been happening, clearly Palestinians have been dying. There have been attacks in the Gaza Strip. There have been some incidents from Palestinians coming at Jews, that's a fact as well. But, always, it's the Palestinians that lead the dying. And what I want you to talk about here is, because people still do not get it: What is at stake in Jerusalem here? What exactly is this about? And why will this be the line of resistance?

FB: Because, as you know, Jerusalem is the headquarters for the three great monotheistic faiths: Islam, Judaism, Christianity. And, especially, for the Muslims the Haram al-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, it's the plateau over there. And that plateau is considered to be sacred. They have on there the Al-Aqsa Mosque, where Muslims used to direct their prayers before Mecca Medina. There is the Dome of the Rock where it is said Mohammed ascended into Heaven. And then you have the El Burka, which is the sort of "stand on the side" where Mohammed is said to have tied up his horse, when he miraculously flew from Arabia to Jerusalem, to make his ascent into Heaven.

So, on the Jewish side, you have the Wailing Wall. And, despite when everything is said, this is still Palestinian. It is protected under the Geneva Conventions, and also there's a 1953 convention to which Israel is a party, protecting cultural religious sites in times of war. Although, I believe, that could easily be negotiated by simply setting up an easement so that Jews could go worship at the Wailing Wall. I don't think Palestinians have any great desire to stop that, one way or the other. And then Christianity, of course, you have all the holy sites there, the Nativity, the Church of the Nativity, the Holy Sepulchre, etc.

So, it's really the flashpoint for these three religions. Although, again, I did devise a proposal for the Palestinians that was approved by the PLO, on sharing Jerusalem as a capital between both Israel and Palestine, the two states. That would have to be subject to approval by the Security Council because Jerusalem still has a separate status under international laws of *corpus separatum*. But that would probably be approved.

And you can read that proposal that did have the approval of the PLO in my book "Palestine, Palestinians and International Law" along with the original memorandum I did for them going back to 1987. And then the Chair of the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East peace negotiations, my client and friend, the late, great Dr. Haidar Abdel-Shafi, instructed me to draw up the counter offer to Israel's Oslo Bantustan [the Oslo Accords of 1993], which I did do. And that is published in there with Dr. Abdel-Shafi's permission.

It was clear at the beginning that Oslo was pretty much a Bantustan, and so I advised all the Palestinians to that effect. And Abdel-Shafi then instructed me to come up with their counter offer which I did do. But that position did not prevail. Dr. Abdel-Shafi and I fought against Oslo to the bitter end. Then we lost, so there you go.

DB: Now, staying with Jerusalem, I think the statement made by Trump, even though it's obviously a continuum of U.S. policy – Obama's ambassador [Dan Shapiro] was no better, if not worse—but what's going on on the ground in Jerusalem in the context of this statement, in other words, the continuing expansion of house demolitions, the attempt to put security devices, and set up a place to block Muslims from going to pray before making them go through a metal detector..that was going on in the recent past. The heat on this situation in Jerusalem has been high before this announcement. So, this is just sort of pushing it right at the edge, isn't it?

FB: Right. Dennis, it's really emboldening Netanyahu and his religious fanatics over there, who, by the way were complicit in the assassination of Prime Minister [Yitzhak] Rabin. Who was first and, so far, the only Prime Minister they've had over there who was interested in negotiating peace with the Palestinians and Syria, which is why they murdered him.

So, yeah, this simply emboldens these people. And the real flashpoint is... Netanyahu permitting these fanatical, racist settlers to go onto Haram Al-Sharif [Temple Mount] itself, and storm Al-Aqsa Mosque. And, that is happening repeatedly. And it's extremely dangerous and highly provocative. Because, at the end of the day, these people want to destroy Al-Aqsa and build their so-called third temple. And it would be a total catastrophe if this happens, because you'd have 1.5 billion Muslims in the world rising up in unison over this.

But that's the real danger right now, I think, is the emboldenment of Netanyahu and these fanatical religious extremists, settlers that now believe they have a blank check to do whatever they want to do. And especially in Jerusalem and particularly the Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, yeah.

DB: And, I guess it should be of concern that Jared Kushner has a foundation that funds the building of settlements in the West Bank. I would think that that would be of concern to anybody thinking about any kind of negotiation, whatsoever. Not to mention the fact that Netanyahu would stay with the family at the Kushner house when he was in the U.S.

FB: Well, that's correct. Kushner is aiding and abetting, by means of his foundation, he is aiding and abetting more crimes under the Hague Regulations of 1907, to which the United States government is a party, a violation of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the four Geneva Conventions to which the United States is a party. And crimes against humanity as defined by the statute of the International Criminal Court. And the prosecutor, the International Criminal Court, is currently investigating war crimes, and crimes against humanity because of these settlements.

So, it's impossible to think that a guy like Kushner could possibly serve as some type of mediator here, and it does look now, the Palestinians have decided to turn to Russia and China, and the United Nations to serve as mediators. Although I have to point out, Dennis, that I was involved as legal advisor to the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East Peace Negotiations right from the very beginning there in Washington, D.C. in the fall of 1991, convened by President Bush, Sr., and the United States government has never served as an honest broker. They've always supported the Israeli position.

And, indeed, I think as I mentioned it before, Bush, Sr. put three American Jews in charge of the process, [Dennis] Ross, [Aaron David] Miller and [Daniel] Kurtzer. And they basically functioned as Israel's lawyer. And, I believe, two of them were, still are, orthodox. I don't think Ross is. And here we are, all these years later, now 2017 – that was 1991 – and nothing has changed because Trump has put Kushner, [David] Friedman and [Jason] Greenblatt as the so-called negotiators.

And here all three of them are orthodox. So, this situation is completely preposterous. How do you expect any negotiations to go on here – reasonable, fair negotiations? It's not going to happen.

DB: And, I guess, that takes us back to Nikki Haley's threatening statements today sounding like a bit of a mafioso captain warning any nation that would vote – I guess they didn't have much of an impact on the vote – but clearly it's

got to be frightening if you're a little nation that lives or dies based on U.S. aid and they're saying you vote for this resolution in support of the Palestinians then we're going to kill you. This is also not a good sign.

FB: Right, well without the Haley/Trump threats, I suspect the Palestinians would have also picked up the 35 abstentions, and maybe the no-shows. It appears several states just didn't show up, because of these threats. So, basically it probably would have been – what, there's 193 U.N. member states – so it probably would have been 185 to 9. But under United for Peace all they needed was two-thirds of those voting and abstentions didn't count. So, there you are.

They have the votes, and indeed, they do have the votes to be admitted as a full-fledged U.N. member state based on this vote here. And the Trump/Haley threats, it does appear to me, they've got the votes to get admitted to the U.N., hopefully starting in January [2018]. There's been a statement made that they will be submitting another resolution on their admission to the Security Council sometime in January. And, assuming the U.S. vetoes it, which it probably will under Trump, they can again invoke Uniting for Peace, and put it before the General Assembly.

Because, at the end of the day, in accordance with the terms of the United Nations charter, the Security Council only makes a recommendation on admission, not any decision. There's a big difference between recommendations and decisions. And, also, under the terms of the United Nations charter, at the end of the day, it is the General Assembly that admits a member state, not the Security Council.

I had advised the Palestinians years ago, they can do this, that they did try in 2012. And, at that point they decided just to go for observer state status. They're going one step at a time, and we'll have to see what their next step is.

I also noticed that, although I don't have a list, but [Palestinian] President Abbas just exceeded to about 22 different treaties. I still haven't gotten the names of those treaties. But that also goes back to our previous conversation on Jerusalem here on a legal intifada.

They will use their memberships in all these international organizations to further solidify and promote their statehood. And, the bottom line is, I think that's positive, one, because even [Noam] Chomsky has pointed out, if the Palestinians keep going this way, at the end of the day you'll have two states over there.

Otherwise, I'm afraid we're just going to have total chaos, and the Palestinians will be getting nothing more than a collection of little Bantustans. You

remember, back in the days, Dennis, when we used to fight apartheid in South Africa. We had Transkei, Ciskei, and Bophuthatswana that weren't even connected with each other. They were little bitty plots of land. And that's pretty much what Israel has in mind here.

DB: And it is important to note those who fought that war against apartheid in South Africa are among the strongest supporters of the Palestinians. And they now say, and I pushed them on this, because I want to know if we're talking hyperbole here, and they now say that the Palestinian situation is way worse, particularly in Gaza. Way worse than they ever had it in terms of the Bantustans that you were just referring to.

FB: That's correct. And indeed, my friend, Professor John Dugard, who had been Special Rapporteur on Palestine is from South Africa. And he was one of a handful of white, international law professors over there with the courage, integrity and principles to oppose apartheid in South Africa, at risk to his life. And Dugard has said the same thing. If you want to look at... do a google on his name DUGARD.

And Dugard has said, and as you point out, other ANC leaders have said, that what the Palestinians are up against is far worse than what we were up against in the struggle against apartheid. You were involved, I was involved, many of us fought apartheid in South Africa. And we're fighting apartheid over there [Palestine] today as well. The legal principles are pretty much the same.

DB: The legal principles are the same, but the uh... sort of the history and the details, or the situation, are quite a bit different. Israel and its lobby controls U.S. policy so they're... all those anti-apartheiders have been fairly silent, wouldn't you say?

FB: Well, we have the BDS campaign...

DB: Well, yes... no, no, this is the silver lining but I mean all those politicians, and all those civil rights activists, and all those folks... and you know I can go down the list, do not see... if you even bring that up, either the subject disappears or you're considered an idiot, or a conspiracy theorist, over the top, whatever. When you make that parallel structure. I haven't heard it on NPR, have you?

FB: You mean National Propaganda Radio, Dennis? But, look, I set up the Israeli divestment/disinvestment campaign, in November of 2000, because of my involvement in the divestment/disinvestment campaign here against apartheid South Africa, that was called for by a black lawyer who was ahead of me at Harvard Law School, Randal Robinson.

And looking into the situation, I concluded that the legal principles are the same. And, when I did this, I remember the president of Harvard, Larry Summers, condemned me, because I was involved in the Harvard divestment/disinvestment campaign, and accused me of being anti-semitic.

And WBUR, which is the NPR affiliate out there in Boston asked me to debate Summers and I said I would. And Summers did not have the courage, integrity or principles to debate me. As you know, eventually Harvard fired him because he publicly stated women are dumber than men when it comes to math and science. So, fine.

So I debated Alan Dershowitz on this, as far back as 2002. And, we had a debate and I won that debate. I clobbered Dershowitz. And in 2005 then-Palestinian civil society leaders contacted me and said "We really want to set up a BDS campaign, modeled on what the world did against apartheid South Africa. Boycott, divestment and sanctions, would you go in with us?" I said, "Sure." So, I sort of surrendered the initiative to them.

But we've made an enormous amount of progress in these years. And, yes, the forces against us are substantial, and I guess more substantial than in apartheid South Africa.

Although thereto, as you note, the United States government fully supported apartheid South Africa, except during President Jimmy Carter. But all the rest of them supported it, up through and including Reagan, and the collapse of apartheid. So, when I set this thing up in 2000 I knew the forces against us would be formidable.

But the only progressive ... change we've ever seen in this country, Dennis, in my lifetime, going back to the struggle for civil rights for black people, which I also supported, has come from the people, and grassroots movement. It has never come from Washington, D.C. And it certainly hasn't come from the judiciary. It hasn't come from Congress. It hasn't come from the executive branch.

So, I think we've done a pretty good job in the BDS campaign, not just in this country, but worldwide. And it's going to take more time. Israel is fighting it tooth and nail, as you know. They even set up a separate ministry over there, to counteract BDS. [Sheldon] Adelson is putting millions of dollars into the campaign.

But I think everyone who looks at it realizes they are losing, because we have truth and justice on our side. So we're just going to have to keep plucking away, Dennis. People want to have peace with justice there for both Palestinians and Jews. It can be done. But we have a lot more work to do.

DB: Beautiful. Alright, well, Professor Boyle, as always we appreciate the good information, and the discussion about an issue that is really at the core, whether there's going to be peace in this world.

FB: I do want to make one more point here which I think is very important. Back in 1991, I was advising both the Palestinian delegation and the Syrian delegation. And the Jordanians were prepared for peace but they couldn't go first. And at that time Lebanon was occupied by Syria, so they basically did whatever the Syrians told them. So I was advising, at the same time, the two key actors here.

And I can assure you that if Israel had wanted peace back in 1991, with the Palestinians and with the Syrians, we could have had it. Because I knew the Palestinian bottom line, and I knew the Syrian bottom line, and I was drafting their documents. And, regretfully, they started under [former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak] Shamir, whose strategy was stall and delay. Then came Rabin, and he negotiated a comprehensive peace plan, agreement with Syria, full peace for full withdrawal. And he also did the Oslo Accord with the Palestinians. And then he was murdered.

DB: He was murdered by settlers. Let's remind people. He was murdered by crazy....

FB: Extremist settlers. And Netanyahu came to power and there's been no peace, peace process to speak of, since then. Now that's 1995. And here we are today. But I can say, based on my inside personal knowledge that peace was at hand, back at that point, at this early point. And, regretfully, we're pretty far from it today.

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

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## Trump's Continuation of US Interventionism

Criticizing his predecessors for misguided foreign wars, President Trump promised a break in that approach, but his National Security Strategy report indicates a shift more in rhetoric than substance, reports Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

President Trump's recent report on National Security Strategy supposedly reflected his America First "realism" but his approach seems more like old wine in a new bottle, particularly his continued strong support for Saudi Arabia and Israel in the Middle East combined with an even more aggressive U.S. policy in Asia aimed at containing China as well as confronting North Korea.

For more background on Trump's foreign policy, I spoke to Matthew Hoh. In 2009, Hoh resigned his position with the State Department in Afghanistan in protest of the escalation of the Afghan War by the Obama administration. He previously had been in Iraq with a State Department team and with the U.S. Marines. He is a senior fellow with the Center of International Policy. Hoh is also a member of the advisory boards of Expose Facts, Veterans For Peace and World Beyond War.

Dennis Bernstein: Before we get into Trump's recent major speech on foreign policy, let's take a look at Afghanistan, where you were posted by the State Department until you resigned in protest. Your thoughts after over 16 years of a US-waged war there?

Matthew Hoh: For the people of Afghanistan, this war has been going on since the 1970's, much of it propelled by and supported by outside involvement. It has been eight years now since I resigned. If you had told me back then that this level of tragedy would still be continuing eight years on, there is no way I would have believed you.

It was just revealed by the Pentagon that in the last six months, American and Afghan commandos have conducted more than 2,000 raids in Afghanistan. Americans are still there kicking in doors, raiding people's homes in the middle of the night, killing them, taking prisoners. This has happened over 2,000 times in Afghanistan in the last six months! In addition to that, we have seen an escalation in air strikes, both from drones and from manned aircraft, in Afghanistan and throughout the Muslim world.

These poor suffering people are no closer to seeing an end to this horrific violence. Money continues to pour in to support the war, people continue to get rich off the war, the opium trade continues to expand.

Bernstein: It's interesting, there are two major things that Trump has done when it comes to Afghanistan. One was to test out "the mother of all bombs" there and the other was to state that we are not going to make any commitment to withdraw by a certain date.

Hoh: Dropping the mother of all bombs was really the first indication of what war policy was going to look like under Trump. Under Obama and under Bush,

there was a political victory sought. As immoral and misguided as the military aims were, there was a political end stated. They encouraged elections, they assisted in development, they were involved in a process of reconciliation.

Under the Trump administration, there is no political end state. People who were concerned about there being so many generals in the White House were concerned for a reason. We have General Kelly as Chief of Staff, Mattis as Secretary of Defense and General McMaster as National Security Advisor. You have military operations now conducted simply for military purposes. This new bomb is a great example of that.

They lied that it was used to go after a tunnel complex. It was above ground and turns the entire area into one huge flash. It is useless against tunnels. The dropping of this bomb was meant to punish the people there because, a week prior, an American service member had been killed in that area.

This policy of terror and punishment is in common with other wars which America is leading in the region. In Iraq, the US-led forces have demolished Sunni cities in the Euphrates and Tigris River Valleys. Look at what the Saudis and the United Arab Emirates have been doing in Yemen, what the Kurdish forces along with the American Air Force have done to Raqqa as well as other cities in eastern Syria. And in Afghanistan we are seeing an increase in air strikes, in artillery operations and in these night raids into people's homes.

Our policy has become to terrorize people into subjugation. And this ties into what Trump said on the campaign trail. Trump said a number of times that he was going to "take the gloves off," that our wars were too politically correct, that we should be killing the families of terrorists and destroying their homes, etc.

Bernstein: President Trump gave his big speech yesterday [Monday, Dec. 18] on US foreign policy. What is your take on what was said?

Hoh: As has been pointed out by a number of commentators, Trump's speech yesterday was really a public relations speech, affirming his status as the leader of the Make America Great Again campaign. The first thing he talked about, as he was addressing the national security interests of the United States, was how thirteen months prior the American people elected him to be a "glorious new hope." The target of the speech was not China or Russia or the Islamic State. Its purpose was to reaffirm to his domestic political base that he is the man to lead a policy of American exceptionalism. This is the belief that American moral superiority is needed to keep the world in order.

If you wanted details, you weren't going to get them in this speech. I always tell people, if you want the details, go to the budget. Just as in previous

administrations, there is a preoccupation with China. We are building ten new aircraft carriers that will cost \$13 billion apiece. That is meant for an adversary like China. The Air Force refuses to even reveal the price tag of its new nuclear bomber. Our nuclear weapons program will get a trillion dollar shot in the arm to modernize over the next thirty years. These types of weapons are meant to intimidate our "competitors," as Trump likes to call them, who might rival our power.

Bernstein: The Obama administration had a very aggressive policy in the so-called Pacific Pivot, drawing a ring around China to undermine it while at the same time asking for China's support in dealing with North Korea. Is it more dangerous now because Trump is a little more volatile and dangerous and might want to create a distraction from his troubles at home?

Hoh: For those of us on the left, we should not lose sight of what took place during Obama's eight years which allowed this to happen. The previous administration did nothing to hold the torturers accountable. This makes it easier for a Donald Trump to proclaim that torture is back.

In the case of the Pacific Pivot, we are ringing China with military bases, strike aircraft and naval ships that would demolish anything that China has, despite the fact that they have expanded their military forces over the last couple decades. A modern conventional war with China would last a week at the outside. Obama did a lot to heighten those tensions.

For centuries, the Chinese have had to deal with colonization and the imperialist ambitions of various powers. A hundred years ago, the American Navy was present on Chinese rivers! What we are seeing now is really an extension of gunboat diplomacy. So when, today, the Chinese hear of American plans to build new aircraft carriers and bombers and nuclear cruise missiles, and know that this is geared toward them, it is not difficult to predict how they are going to react.

I think Trump truly believes that, through our weapon superiority and our violence, we can be a great nation again. And also, as you mentioned, there's the "wag the dog" phenomenon. What if his son does get indicted (which is probably what he deserves)? Will he do something to distract from that?

Clinton did something similar to distract attention from the Monica Lewinsky affair. It is not uncommon for politicians to get the media and the public to focus elsewhere.

But the fact that Trump has these generals on his cabinet who are driven by their military mindset and tend not to have the political concerns that civilians have, makes this administration more dangerous than the previous two.

Bernstein: I'd like to hear your thoughts on Russiagate.

Hoh: First of all, if the Russian intelligence services were not trying to hack into the DNC and RNC computers in order to understand our election system, as well as everything else about us, then the head of Russian intelligence should be fired. This is what intelligence services do. We've known about hacking for decades now. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that they did hack into these systems. However, evidence of this has not been presented to the American public, other than assertions from the intelligence community, whose chief function is to lie.

Normally, what is called a "national intelligence estimate" is done, which follows specific guidelines and is reviewed by all the different agencies. This is what was doctored under the Bush administration to allow for the war in Iraq. But we also saw it with the 2007 national intelligence estimate, which said that the Iranians had not been doing anything with their nuclear weapons program since 2003.

So, within the intelligence community, they do have a process that would substantiate these claims of Russian interference in our elections but that process has not been utilized. This hand-picked group of a dozen or so men and women from a few different agencies produced a report that says, in effect, "trust us." I am very skeptical, because no real evidence has yet to be produced.

**Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.**

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## UN Members Show Spine in Rebuffing Trump

President Trump and Ambassador Nikki Haley tried to bully the U.N. into accepting Trump's decision on Jerusalem as Israel's capital but – in a rare show of independence – most U.N. members pushed back, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

When North Korea began the Korean War with an invasion of South Korea in June 1950, the armed response was waged under the flag of the United Nations thanks to the Soviet Union having absented itself from the Security Council. The

Soviets were boycotting the council to protest the fact that China's seat had not been given to Mao Zedong's communists, who had won the Chinese civil war the previous October. With no Soviet veto in the way, the Security Council quickly passed the resolutions necessary to bestow U.N. sanction on the U.S.-led military resistance to the North's aggression.

The Soviets came to realize that they were not going to get support for their contention that the absence of any of the council's permanent members should prevent the council from conducting business. The Soviets resumed their seat and began vetoing further resolutions on Korea. To get around this obstruction, U.S. diplomats led by Secretary of State Dean Acheson persuaded enough other delegations at the U.N. to have the General Assembly, where there are no vetoes, assert the power to take action on matters on which the Security Council was unable to act. That assertion, known as the "Uniting for Peace" resolution, passed the General Assembly in November 1950.

The General Assembly has used this power sparingly, in recognition of how it twists somewhat the division of responsibilities envisioned in the U.N. Charter. The power is appropriately looked at as a last resort in the face of obstructionism by any of the veto-wielding permanent members of the Security Council.

The most recent use of the power came this week, with the General Assembly passing a resolution essentially identical to one that the United States had vetoed three days earlier and had been supported by all 14 other members of the Security Council. The resolution was the international community's response to the Trump administration's declaration that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and stated intention to move the U.S. embassy there.

The vote in the General Assembly was 128 countries in favor, nine against, and 35 abstentions. Besides the United States and Israel, the only "no" votes came from some of the Pacific microstates among whom the United States usually gets support when the support is meager (Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, and Palau) as well as Guatemala, Honduras, and Togo. Among those casting "yes" votes were major U.S. allies such as Britain, France, and Germany.

It is appropriate and unsurprising that the resolution gained such strong support even in the face of the U.S. administration's threats and bullying. The resolution does not criticize the United States by name. It instead calls on all members to comply with Security Council resolutions regarding Jerusalem and reaffirms that the status and governance of the city constitute "a final status issue to be resolved through negotiations in line with relevant U.N. resolutions." Far from being a usurpation of the Security Council's role, the General Assembly's action is a declaration of respect for the Security Council's

own prior resolutions, in the face of U.S. flouting of those resolutions.

### **More Spine Than Usual**

Among the principal takeaways from the General Assembly's action is that an international sense of justice and fairness matters. Many states reject the notion that might makes right, which is how the Israeli government has treated its relations with the Palestinians, and how the Trump administration approached its lobbying on this resolution.

Another conclusion is that, notwithstanding how much the Israeli government and its supporters in Washington would like to think that Arabs don't care about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict anymore and that the only thing that matters to them these days is to confront Iran, that is not how Arab governments (and certainly their constituents in the street) think. Every Arab state supported the resolution. Non-Arab Muslims also care about Jerusalem. Every Muslim majority state except Turkmenistan (which was absent) voted for the resolution.

The administration's threats and bullying did not work. The crude tactics included U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley's rhetoric about "taking names" and Donald Trump's bombast about cutting off U.S. aid. Among the Arab states that supported the resolution were the two states – Egypt and Jordan – that receive more U.S. aid than anyone other than Israel. The very crudeness of the tactics, and the offense taken to bullying, probably made the tactics counterproductive.

More generally, the result of the vote is one more illustration of how much less is the capacity of the United States to push the rest of the world around than those Americans of an assertive nationalist stripe seem to think. This discrepancy between reality and uber-nationalist belief predates Trump and has existed at least since the post-Cold War "unipolar moment" that was barely a moment, if that. Trump's policies and rhetoric have caused international confidence in the United States to plummet to even lower depths. The United States' pushing ability has dropped along with the confidence.

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is author most recently of *Why America Misunderstands the World*. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)**

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## The Israel-gate Side of Russia-gate

While unproven claims of Russian meddling in U.S. politics have whipped Official

Washington into a frenzy, much less attention has been paid to real evidence of Israeli interference in U.S. politics, as Dennis J Bernstein describes.

By Dennis J Bernstein

In investigating Russia's alleged meddling in U.S. politics, special prosecutor Robert Mueller uncovered evidence that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pressured the Trump transition team to undermine President Obama's plans to permit the United Nations to censure Israel over its illegal settlement building on the Palestinian West Bank, a discovery referenced in the plea deal with President Trump's first National Security Adviser Michael Flynn.

At Netanyahu's behest, Flynn and President Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner reportedly took the lead in the lobbying to derail the U.N. resolution, which Flynn discussed in a phone call with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak (in which the Russian diplomat rebuffed Flynn's appeal to block the resolution).

I spoke on Dec, 18 with independent journalist and blogger Richard Silverstein, who writes on national security and other issues for a number of blogs at [Tikun Olam](#).

Dennis Bernstein: A part of Michael Flynn's plea had to do with some actions he took before coming to power regarding Israel and the United Nations. Please explain.

Richard Silverstein: The Obama administration was negotiating in the [UN] Security Council just before he left office about a resolution that would condemn Israeli settlements. Obviously, the Israeli government did not want this resolution to be passed. Instead of going directly to the Obama administration, with which they had terrible relations, they went to Trump instead. They approached Michael Flynn and Jared Kushner became involved in this. While they were in the transition and before having any official capacity, they negotiated with various members of the Security Council to try to quash the settlement resolution.

One of the issues here which is little known is the Logan Act, which was passed at the foundation of our republic and was designed to prevent private citizens from usurping the foreign policy prerogatives of the executive. It criminalized any private citizen who attempted to negotiate with an enemy country over any foreign policy issue.

In this case, what Flynn and Kushner were doing was going directly against US

foreign policy, because Obama wanted the resolution to pass; He just didn't want to vote for it because that would cross the Israel lobby in the United States.

The US finally ended up abstaining on the resolution and it passed 14-0.

But before that happened, Flynn went to the Russians and to Egypt, both members of the Security Council, and tried to get the resolution delayed. But all of Israel's machinations to derail this resolution failed and that is what Mueller was investigating, the intervention and disruption of American foreign policy by private citizens who had no official role.

This speaks to the power of the Israel lobby and of Israel itself to disrupt our foreign policy. Very few people have ever been charged with committing an illegal act by advocating on behalf of Israel. That is one of the reasons why this is such an important development. Until now, the lobby has really ruled supreme on the issue of Israel and Palestine in US foreign policy. Now it is possible that a private citizen will actually be made to pay a price for that.

This is an important development because the lobby till now has run roughshod over our foreign policy in this area and this may act as a restraining order against blatant disruption of US foreign policy by people like this.

Bernstein: So this information is a part of Michael Flynn's plea. Anyone studying this would learn something about Michael Flynn and it would be part of the prosecution's investigation.

Silverstein: That's absolutely right. One thing to note here is that it is reporters who have raised the issue of the Logan Act, not Mueller or Flynn's people or anyone in the Trump administration. But I do think that Logan is a very important part of this plea deal, even if it is not mentioned explicitly.

Bernstein: If the special prosecutor had smoking-gun information that the Trump administration colluded with Russia, in the way they colluded with Israel before coming to power, this would be a huge revelation. But it is definitely collusion when it comes to Israel.

Silverstein: Absolutely. If this were Russia, it would be on the front page of every major newspaper in the United States and the leading story on the TV news. Because this is Israel and because we have a conflicted relationship with the Israel lobby and they have so much influence on US policy concerning Israel, it has managed to stay on the back burner. Only two or three media outlets besides mine have raised this issue of Logan and collusion. Kushner and Flynn may be the first American citizens charged under the Logan Act for interfering on behalf of Israel in our foreign policy. This is a huge issue and it has hardly been raised at all.

Bernstein: As you know, Rachel Maddow of MSNBC has made a career out of investigating the Russia-gate charges. She says that she has read all this material carefully, so she must have read about Flynn and Israel, but I haven't heard her on this issue at all.

Silverstein: Even progressive journalists, who you'd think would be going after this with a vengeance, are frightened off by the fact the lobby really bites back. So, aside from outlets like the Intercept and the Electronic Intifada, there is a lot of hesitation about going after the Israel lobby. People are afraid because they know that there is a high price to be paid. It goes from being purely journalism to being a personal and political vendetta when they get you in their sights. In fact, one of the reasons I feel my blog is so important is that what I do is challenge Israeli policy and Israeli intervention in places where it doesn't belong.

Bernstein: Jared Kushner is the point man for the Trump administration on Israel. He has talked about having a "vision for peace." Do you think it is a problem that this is someone with a long, close relationship with the prime minister of Israel and, in fact, runs a foundation that invests in the building of illegal Israeli settlements? Might this be problematic?

Silverstein: It is quite nefarious, actually. When Jared Kushner was a teenager, Netanyahu used to stay at the Kushner family home when he visited the United States. This relationship with one of the most extreme right political figures in Israel goes back decades. And it is not just Kushner himself, but all the administration personnel dealing with these so-called peace negotiations, including Jason Greenblatt and David Friedman, the ambassador. These are all orthodox Jews who tend to have very nationalist views when it comes to Israel. They all support settlements financially through foundations. These are not honest brokers.

We could talk at length about the history of US personnel who have been negotiators for Middle East peace. All of them have been favorable to Israel and answerable to the Israel lobby, including Dennis Ross and Makovsky, who served in the last administration. These people are dyed-in-the-wool ultra-nationalist supporters of [Israeli] settlements. They have no business playing any role in negotiating a peace deal.

My prediction all along has been that these peace negotiations will come to naught, even though they seem to have bought the cooperation of Saudi Arabia, which is something new in the process. The Palestinians can never accept a deal that has been negotiated by Kushner and company because it will be far too favorable to Israel and it will totally neglect the interests of the Palestinians.

Bernstein: It has been revealed that Kushner supports the building of settlements in the West Bank. Most people don't understand the politics of what is going on there, but it appears to be part of an ethnic cleansing.

Silverstein: The settlements have always been a violation of international law, ever since Israel conquered the West Bank in 1967. The Geneva Conventions direct an occupying power to withdraw from territory that was not its own. In 1967 Israel invaded Arab states and conquered the West Bank and Gaza but this has never been recognized or accepted by any nation until now.

The fact that Kushner and his family are intimately involved in supporting settlements—as are David Friedman and Jason Greenblatt—is completely outrageous. No member of any previous US administration would have been allowed to participate with these kinds of financial investments in support of settlements. Of course, Trump doesn't understand the concept of conflict of interest because he is heavily involved in such conflicts himself. But no party in the Middle East except Israel is going to consider the US an honest broker and acceptable as a mediator.

When they announce this deal next January, no one in the Arab World is going to accept it, with the possible exception of Saudi Arabia because they have other fish to fry in terms of Iran. The next three years are going to be interesting, supposing Trump lasts out his term. My prediction is that the peace plan will fail and that it will lead to greater violence in the Middle East. It will not simply lead to a vacuum, it will lead to a deterioration in conditions there.

Bernstein: The Trump transition team was actually approached directly by the Israeli government to try to intercede at the United Nations.

Silverstein: I'm assuming it was Netanyahu who went directly to Kushner and Trump. Now, we haven't yet found out that Trump directly *knew* about this but it is very hard to believe that Trump didn't endorse this. Now that we know that Mueller has access to all of the emails of the transition team, there is little doubt that they have been able to find their smoking gun. Flynn's plea meant that they basically had him dead to rights. It remains to be seen what will happen with Kushner but I would think that this would play some role in either the prosecution of Kushner or some plea deal.

Bernstein: The other big story, of course, is the decision by the Trump administration to move the US embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem. Was there any pre-election collusion in that regard and what are the implications?

Silverstein: Well, it's a terrible decision which goes against forty to fifty years of US foreign policy. It also breaches all international understanding.

All of our allies in the European Union and elsewhere are aghast at this development. There is now a campaign in the United Nations Security Council to pass a resolution condemning the announcement, which we will veto, but the next step will be to go to the General Assembly, where such a resolution will pass easily.

The question is how much anger, violence and disruption this is going to cause around the world, especially in the Arab and Muslim world. This is a slow-burning fuse. It is not going to explode right now. The issue of Jerusalem is so vital that this is not something that is simply going to go away. This is going to be a festering sore in the Muslim world and among Palestinians. We have already seen attacks on Israeli soldiers and citizens and there will be many more.

As to collusion in all of this, since Trump always said during the campaign that this was what he was going to do, it might be difficult to treat this in the same way as the UN resolution. The UN resolution was never on anybody's radar and nobody knew the role that Trump was playing behind the scenes with that—as opposed to Trump saying right from the get-go that Jerusalem was going to be recognized as the capital of Jerusalem.

By doing that, they have completely abrogated any Palestinian interest in Jerusalem. This is a catastrophic decision that really excludes the United States from being an honest broker here and shows our true colors in terms of how pro-Israel we are.

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

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## The Strangelovian Russia-gate Myth

The Strangelovian palaver of Russia-gate is embraced by many liberals as some totem to ward off the vile Donald Trump, but this dishonest process only furthers the cause of American Empire and risks global destruction, says poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

The effects of humankind created climate chaos are proving to be more devastating than even the grimmest predictions. Today's wealth inequity is worse

than in the Gilded Age. Around the world, the U.S. empire wages perpetual war, hot and cold, overt and covert, including military brinksmanship with the nuclear power, the Russian Federation.

Speaking of the latter, the U.S. media retails a storyline that would be considered risible if it was not so dangerously inflammatory i.e., L'affaire du Russia-gate, wherein, according to the lurid tale, the sinister Vladimir Putin, applying techniques from the Russian handbook for international intrigue, *Rasputin Mind Control For Dummies*, has wrested control of the U.S. Executive Branch of government and bends its policies to his diabolical will.

Ridiculous, huh? Yet the mainstream press promulgates and a large section of the general public believes what is clearly a reality-bereft tale, as all the while, ignoring circumstances crucial for their own economic well-being; their safety, insofar as a catastrophic nuclear exchange; and the steps required to maintain the ecological criteria crucial for allowing the continued viability of human beings on planet earth.

A socio-cultural-political structure is in place wherein the individual is bombarded, to the point of psychical saturation, with self-serving, elitist manufactured media content. Decades back, news and entertainment merged thus freedom of choice amounts to psychical wanderings in a wilderness of empty, consumer cravings and unquenchable longings. Moreover, personas are forged upon the simulacrum smithy of pop/consumer culture, in which, image is reality, salesmanship trumps (yes, Trumps) substance. Among the repercussions: A reality television con man gains the cultural capital to mount a successful bid for the U.S. presidency.

Trump's ascendancy should not come as a shock. Nor should desperate Democrats' embrace of Russia-gate/The Russians Are Coming mythos. In essence, U.S. citizens/consumers are the most successfully psychologically colonized people on planet earth. In the realm of the political, Democratic and Republican partisans alike, on cue, are prone to parrot the self-serving lies of their party's cynical elite, who, it is evident, by the utter disregard they hold towards the prerogatives of their constituency, view the influence-bereft hoi polloi with abiding disdain ... that is, in the rare event they regard them at all.

The crucial question is: Whose and what agenda does the Russia-gate yarn serve? The answer is hidden in plain sight: the profiteers of U.S. economic and militarist hegemony. The demonization and diminution of Russian power and influence is essential in order to maintain and expand U.S. dominance and the attendant maintenance and expansion of the already obscene wealth of capitalism's ruling elite.

While It might seem we are mired in an (un-drainable) swamp of complexity, in reality, the political landscape is a bone-dry wasteland, wrought by a single factor – the addictive nature of greed.

Moreover, the reality of Beginning Stage Human Extinction crouches just beyond the line of the horizon. All signs auger, we lost souls of the Anthropocene must alter our course. Yet, we, stranded in the mind-parching wasteland of late-stage capitalism, collectively, continue to stagger, mesmerized, towards mass media mirages leading us further and further into the hostile-to-life terrain.

Yet the wasteland's Establishment media outlets are doing a dead-on, although straight faced, impression, right out of Stanley Kubrick's satirical film of Cold War era madness, "Dr. Strangelove, "of Brigadier General Jack D. Ripper's roiling with paranoia ranting about a Russian "conspiracy to sap and impurify all of our precious bodily fluids."

Hyperbolic? Take at perusal at [the cover story](#) of the Washington Establishment mouthpiece Newsweek, headlined: "PUTIN IS PREPARING FOR WORLD WAR III – IS TRUMP?"

A sphincter-clinching tale of woe and warning promulgated by the same governmental entities and their corporate media stenographers who waxed apocalyptic about Iraq possessing weapon's of mass destruction; that an immediate NATO bombing campaign must be launched against the government of Muammar Gaddafi or else a mass slaughter of the innocent would be imminent; and regime change in Syria must proceed because Assad is gassing his own people.

Just what sort of an embittered cynic would call into question the credibility of and mistrust the motives of such paragons of probity? Yet, somehow, in regard to Russia-gate, liberals display scant-to-zip skepticism towards the stories peddled by this unelected, unaccountable clutch of hyper-authoritarian prevaricators. In fact, they are, in a cringe-worthy spectacle, allowing themselves to be played like Dollar Store kazoos.

### **Terror of Tweet-Town**

Although, I get it. The tangerine-tinged Terror Of Tweet-town represents a hideous affront to common sense and common decency. But the same applies to his antagonists in the anti-democratic institutions of the U.S. National Security State and Intelligence Community. While the mission statements of the bureaucracies in question declare they exists to protect the nation from all manner of threats to the safety of the citizenry, a study of their history and present-day operations reveals, their modus operandi serves to ensure obscene amounts of wealth continue sluicing into the already bloated coffers of the

profiteers of global-wide operations of capitalist plunder.

I understand the desperate need for hope. To crave the quality is inherently human. Even to the point of being whipped into a tizzy by the Russia-gate imbroglio. Yet: All and all, an obsessive focus on Trump, the Orange Scylla, buffets one into the maw of the Washington Establishment's Charybdis.

Again, I understand the sense of desperation: Trump's smug, bloated face, the grandiose squawk of his voice, and his crass, mean-spirited, petty-minded pronouncements and middle-school bully taunts deserve to be resoundingly rebuked. His hubristic posturing simply begs for comeuppance. One is prone to grow plangent with magical thinking. One longs to witness the bully smirk smacked from his face as he is dispatched in disgrace, Richard Nixon-style, to his parvenu palace at Mar a Lago.

But the effect of banishing Nixon was cosmetic. The accepted Watergate storyline, of probing, political inquest and Constitutional redemption, served as a palliative administered to the U.S. public in the rare case the slumbering masses might have desired to delve deeper into the heart of darkness of U.S. empire thus might begin to question the mythos of American Exceptionalism and doubt the uplifting denouement cobbled onto the scandal by the political and media elite, e.g., the system of checks and balances functioned as the nation's Founders intended. Granted, the system did work as designed, only not in the cliched manner portrayed by its apologists; it worked in the manner in which it was rigged, to wit, to preserve the secrets of state. The long national nightmare was far from over. In fact, it has been normalized.

When the unthinkable becomes quotidian, by means of the normalization and systemic codification of crimes against the greater good of humanity, there is a good chance the dynamics of empire-building are in play. Empires are not only inherently entropic but they are anathema to the democratic processes crucial to maintaining a republic.

The vast amounts of wealth acquired by means of plunder render a nation's elite not only craven with cupidity but prone to become so dismally shortsighted, even, judging by the evidence of their reckless actions and crackbrain casuistry, bughouse mad. The present U.S. nuclear saber-rattling at North Korea and the economic aggression and militarist posturing deployed against the Russian Federation are proof of the declaration. A military empire's unchecked, monomaniacal, more often than not self-destructive, impulse for domination are monstrous traits. The death and carnage strewn in the wake of the imperial monster's presence in Libya and Syria illustrate a grim testament to the fact.

History reveals, overreach and the passage of time renders the aspirations of

imperium a nimbus of dust; its grandiose pronouncements a cacophony of strutting clowns; its belief in its inviolable nature and its trumpeted tales of vaunted exceptionalism the stuff of asylum-dweller gibbering. On the contrary, a sense of perspective imparts the knowledge, late empire is a fool's inferno played out on a landscape ridden with exponentially increasing decay.

The storylines of the beneficiaries and operatives of vast systems of runaway power concoct are, more often than not, self-justifying fictions. Cover stories and flat-out prevarications, rolled out for the purpose of hiding the prevailing order's actions and motives, come to dominate the socio-cultural-political sphere. Views running counter to reigning narratives are apt to be marginalized and/or met with scorn, rage and revulsion. A dangerous one-sidedness prevails.

Analogous to the laws governing thermodynamic equilibrium, when a governor (or speed limiter or controller) switch has been rendered inoperative, a state of thermic runaway comes into play. We are talking the stuff of runaway trains, flaming out super novae, nervous breakdowns, and overreaching empires. By suppressing countervailing views, empires create chaos and carnage and will, in the end, meet their demise by self-annihilation. The rage for total dominance and attendant overreach of capitalist/U.S. militarist hegemony has wrought the phenomenon on a global-wide basis.

The governor switch within the greed and power crazed minds of the corporate, military, and governing elite, by all indications, is inoperable. Impervious to the consequences of their recklessness, ranting about Russians, they careen through the Anthropocene. At present, the whole of humankind is held in the thrall of a trajectory of doom. Yet their power is hinged on the ability to dominate the storyline. Withal, complicity translates to destiny usurped. Conversely, the first measure towards a restoration of equilibrium is to call out a lie.

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## Why Loss of Net Neutrality Hurts Democracy

The principle of every person having equal access to the Internet represented a strong pillar of modern democracy – and its removal represents another victory for profit-dominated plutocracy, as Dennis J Bernstein explains.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Despite its importance to a functioning democracy in the Twenty-first Century, many people's eyes still glaze over at the uttering of the term Net Neutrality. However, whenever there is a clear explanation available, people – Republicans and Democrats alike – overwhelmingly support the concept and understand that, once again, it will be big business and corporations that will benefit greatly from the purging of the concept of Net Neutrality, and poor and working-class people and their families who will suffer from the recent decision to end it.

For an in-depth primer on the subject, I spoke with Professor Victor Pickard about the implications of the recent actions taken by the Republican-led Federal Communication Commission. Pickard is associate professor at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and author of the book *America's Battle for Media Democracy*.

Dennis Bernstein: We turn now to the issue of net neutrality and its very serious implications for Internet users everywhere. Welcome Professor Pickard. Could you start by giving us an extended definition of net neutrality? People's eyes still tend to glaze over when you raise the topic of net neutrality.

Victor Pickard: In a way, it is an unfortunate term. We can thank Timothy Woo for coining it, but I think we're stuck with it at this point. Essentially, it means an open Internet. Net neutrality is the safeguard that prevents Internet service providers such as Verizon and Comcast from interfering with your online content. It prevents them from slowing down or blocking content or offering what is known as "paid prioritization." This is where they set up slow and fast lanes and a kind of payola system where they try to shake down content creators and force them to "pay to play" in order to load and stream more quickly. This changes the underlying logic of the Internet, which was meant to be an open medium with all voices created equal.

Bernstein: And it was hoped that net neutrality would be an equalizer, making it possible for people to have a voice who hadn't had one before and be able to access content that would not have been available before. Isn't this essentially a question of democracy?

Pickard: Yes, the Internet has always had significant democratic potential. At least in theory, it can level power hierarchies. It can be used to give the voiceless more access to the public sphere. Of course, it never quite panned out this way. There have always been barriers to entry and there is still a major digital divide in this country. Nonetheless, the channels through which

we access the Internet were meant to be kept equal and open, and without net neutrality that is no longer going to be the case.

As soon as you remove the basic safeguards, Internet service providers not only have the ability, they have a perverse incentive to make more money by charging us more for access to various types of content or charging content creators more to access the Internet. Of course, large corporations like Amazon and Netflix can afford to pay up. Those who will be hurt will be the activists and journalists, the people without the resources to pay to play.

That is what is so deeply troubling about this: It is going to hurt us as consumers—it is going to hurt us economically—but more importantly, it is going to hurt us democratically.

Bernstein: It is interesting, one of the consequences of the disappearance of newspapers, particularly investigative reporting, was the emergence of various independent investigative organizations online who have been doing an incredibly good job. They will suffer from this, won't they?

Pickard: Yes, they will suffer disproportionately from this. Traditional newspapers and smaller independent news outlets depend on the Internet to reach broader audiences. They couldn't afford to do this otherwise. Without having the resources to pay up, it is going to create a stranglehold on those kinds of investigative outlets. This is especially troubling now, at this perilous political moment.

Bernstein: What is problematic about the claim of [FCC] Chairman Ajit Pai that he "would hate to side with the Democrats, but this was Bill Clinton's vision for the Internet"?

Pickard: Such a claim is disingenuous and ahistorical. While it is possible to argue that the Internet has traditionally been lightly regulated, in many cases this has simply not been true. In fact, we wouldn't even have the Internet if not for massive public subsidies and regulations.

You have to go back to 2002, when then FCC chairman Michael Powell re-categorized Internet services. Instead of considering it a telecommunications service—which had always been heavily regulated—the category description became one of an "information service," which is only lightly regulated. That is what really started this whole ongoing debate and policy battle. So you can't say that this was a democratic position. That's simply not true.

Bernstein: What did the inventors of the Internet envision as its function and how could it potentially be an important democratizer?

Pickard: Again, the Internet was created through massive public subsidies. The Pentagon's Advanced Research Project Agency designed what was then called the Arpanet and which was based on the net neutrality principle that all online content should be treated equally. The pipes through which the Internet would flow were meant to be "dumb" in the sense that they were not discriminating against particular types of content.

Into the Seventies and Eighties, this system was developed often through research institutes, so again, public subsidies helped expand the Internet. You had various public interest regulations that maintained a common carrier status. To give one example, you might remember the bad old days of dial-up Internet. One of the reasons we had such an explosion of dial-up Internet services was that the telephone companies who owned the wires had to share those wires with competitors.

These various public service protections helped expand the Internet, which really cuts against the FCC Chairman's narrative that the Internet is simply a creation of the free market. First of all, we haven't really had a free market when it comes to the Internet. But to try to argue that the government is not involved in the Internet is a libertarian mythology. The government is always involved and the question should be how the government should be involved.

Bernstein: Let's talk a little more about the politics behind the Internet. We saw the Internet play a key role in liberation movements like the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement. Is this shutting down of net neutrality an attempt to undermine such movements?

Pickard: Corporate libertarians like Chairman Pai who are opposed to even the lightest public service regulation are driven by a kind of market libertarian ideology that is really meant to accumulate more wealth within a corporation. In other words, I think this is more an economic agenda as opposed to a political agenda—not that the two can always be separated.

Nevertheless, I think that it creates the potential for political misuse. To give an example, if you had an activist group that was launching a campaign against internet service monopolies, you can imagine that Comcast would want to shut down that website. Without net neutrality protections, they would have the power to block or "throttle" online content. We have seen cases like this before and they could very well happen again.

Bernstein: We're seeing now that you can pay extra and get in the fast lanes of various freeways (not to push the highway analogy too far). Can that be a way for people to think about it? You pay a little more and get there faster but what's the rush, you're going to get there anyway?

Pickard: That sounds fairly innocuous. There are a couple other analogies we could use. For example, setting up tollbooths all along the highway. I read an even better analogy in *The Washington Post* which likened it to the hellscape of airport security lines where, if you pay up and go through some kind of process, you might get TSA clearance, but otherwise you are stuck in line and may get hassled because of how you look or the language you speak. I think the dystopian outlook is probably more apt than this idea that we are all going to get to our final destination anyway so it's not a big deal if we have to pay a little more for faster service.

Bernstein: Will this have an impact on the way people view television and access Hollywood productions and other entertainment? Will people be paying a lot more for these services?

Pickard: Mostly likely, yes. I think it is fair to say that what will happen to the Internet without net neutrality protections is that it will become more like cable television, where consumers pay for premium content. Overall, consumers will have to pay more. When a company like Netflix has to pay more to its Internet service provider, they will then offset their increased costs to consumers.

Bernstein: People have been paying a lot of attention to this and these decisions being made now are not very popular, are they?

Pickard: Not at all. In fact, polling data is showing that even the vast majority of Republicans want to keep net neutrality protections. This has been a deeply unpopular and undemocratic position. People are engaged and they realize that without net neutrality their daily lives will be impacted.

Bernstein: Has there been a lot of money thrown around on Capitol Hill by those who stand to gain from the elimination of net neutrality? Do you think we should worry about that?

Pickard: I think we should. I mean, it is rarely very overt. People are not walking into congressional offices with hundred dollar bills in their hands. But you do see tremendous amounts being spent on lobbying, you do see campaign contributions.

The FCC is a little more subtle because they are not elected in the same way, but you do see what is referred to as "regulatory capture," where, over time, a regulatory agency begins to harmonize its actions with the industry it purportedly regulates. Ajit Pai's FCC is a textbook case. Basically, he has been granting the long-standing wish lists of the industries he is supposed to be overseeing.

Bernstein: Could you talk about the potential benefits of a more neutral Internet available to everybody? How can it contribute to a better society?

Pickard: Especially in the activist realm, you see various groups who have organized and leveraged the democratic potential of the Internet to really amplify their voices. We have seen this play out with many older forms of media, such as radio. When radio first started, it was similarly used by various activist groups and was hailed as a new democratizing force that was going to revolutionize the way that we communicate with each other, the way we govern ourselves. But it quickly became captured by a handful of corporations and I am worried that this is what we are seeing with the Internet today.

Bernstein: That brings me to my last question. What are the chances of this decision being flipped, if there is support for that among the various communities across the country? Do you have any hope that this can be turned around?

Pickard: Actually, I am cautiously optimistic that in the long run net neutrality will be upheld. In the short term, there will be challenges in the courts, where there is at least a fifty-fifty chance that net neutrality will prevail. The other crucial front is going to be in Congress, where there will be pressure to pass what is known as a Congressional Review Act, enabling Congress to put forward a resolution of disapproval. It is very important for all of us to be pressuring Congress to overturn the FCC decision.

But I also think that all of this public engagement is showing that there will be continued activism around this issue. Even if we win in the courts, there is going to be an ongoing battle. But as long as the public remains engaged, I really believe that in the long term we will have net neutrality.

Bernstein: Has legal action been taken already?

Pickard: Absolutely. We have already seen a number of state attorneys general challenging this decision in court. Various activist groups like Battle for the Net.com, Fight for the Future, Free Press, and Free Disclosure will continue to focus on this issue for months and years to come.

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

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# Intel Vets Tell Trump Iran Is Not Top Terror Sponsor

A group of U.S. intelligence veterans urges President Trump to stop his administration's false claims about Iran being the leading state sponsor of terrorism when U.S. allies, such as Saudi Arabia, are clearly much guiltier.

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** The President

**FROM:** Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

**SUBJECT:** Is Iran the "World's Leading Sponsor of Terrorism?"

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/BACKGROUND**

We are concerned by recent strident and stark public statements from key members of your Administration that paint Iran in very alarmist terms. The average American, without the benefit of history, could easily be persuaded that Iran poses an imminent threat and that there is no alternative for us but military conflict.

We find this uncomfortably familiar territory. Ten years ago former President George W. Bush was contemplating a war with Iran when, in November of 2007, intelligence analysts issued a formal National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) debunking the prevailing conventional wisdom; namely, that Iran was on the verge of getting a nuclear weapon. The NIE concluded that Iran had stopped working on a nuclear weapon in 2003.

Recalling this moment in his memoir, *Decision Points*, President Bush noted that the NIE's "eye-popping" intelligence findings stayed his hand. He added this rhetorical question: "How could I possibly explain using the military to destroy the nuclear facilities of a country the intelligence community said had no active nuclear weapons program?"

We believe that you are facing a similar situation today. But instead of an inaccurate claim that Iran has nuclear weapons, the new canard to justify war with Iran is the claim that Iran remains the "world's leading state sponsor of terrorism." This is incorrect, as we explain below.

\* \* \*

One of the recurring big bipartisan lies being pushed on the public with the enthusiastic help of a largely pliant media is that Iran is the prime sponsor of terrorism in the world today.

In the recent presentation of your administration's National Security Strategy for 2018, the point is made that:

"Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, has taken advantage of instability to expand its influence through partners and proxies, weapon proliferation, and funding. . . . Iran continues to perpetuate the cycle of violence in the region, causing grievous harm to civilian populations."

Those sentiments are echoed by several other countries of the Middle East. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister, Adel al-Jubeir, for example, declared in October 2015 that: Iran "is the biggest sponsor of terrorism in the world, and it is working on destabilizing the region."

The Saudi foreign minister conveniently declined to mention that 15 of the 19 terrorists who hijacked planes and attacked America on 11 September 2001 were Saudis, not Iranians. And, while Iran was an active promoter of terrorism two decades ago, it is no longer in the forefront of global terrorism. Ironically, that dubious distinction now goes to Iran's accusers – first and foremost, Saudi Arabia.

The depiction of Iran as "the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism" is not supported by the facts. While Iran is guilty of having used terrorism as a national policy tool, the Iran of 2017 is not the Iran of 1981. In the early days of the Islamic Republic, Iranian operatives routinely carried out car bombings, kidnappings and assassinations of dissidents and of American citizens. That has not been the case for many years. Despite frequent claims by U.S. officials that Iran is engaged in terrorism, we simply note that the incidents recorded annually in the U.S. Department of State's Patterns of Global Terrorism rarely identifies a terrorist incident as an act by or on behalf of Iran.

Iran's relationship with Hezbollah also has evolved radically. In the early years of the Islamic Republic, Hezbollah was often a proxy and sub-contractor for Iran. But during the last 20 years Hezbollah has become an entity and political force in its own right. It fought Israel to a standstill in 2006 in southern Lebanon, which was a watershed moment in establishing Hezbollah's transformation into a conventional army. In the intervening years, Hezbollah, which is now part of the Lebanese government, also has turned away from the radical, religious driven violence that is the hallmark of the Sunni extremists, like ISIS.

### **Iran's Asymmetrical Response**

After Iran fell under the rule of the Ayatollah in 1979 terrorism, its role in high profile terrorist attacks, such as the taking of U.S. hostages and the

bombings of the U.S. Embassy and the Marine barracks in Lebanon, fed understandable U.S. animosity towards Iran. But Iran's actions were not driven primarily by blind hatred or radical religious views. For Iran terrorism was a way to punch back against more powerful foes, principally the United States, which was providing military and intelligence support to Iran's neighbor and enemy, Iraq.

The Iranians were also pragmatic and had direct dealings with Israel. During the early days of the Iranian revolution the Mullahs, despite publicly denouncing Israel, happily accepted secret military support from the Israelis. Israel was equally pragmatic. The Israeli leaders ignored the Mullahs and gave the support as a means of helping counter the threat posed by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. A classic case of the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

The public image of Iran as a hotbed of fanatical terrorists has been usurped since the August 1998 bombings of the U.S. Embassies in east Africa by Al Qaeda and other radical Sunni entities. The U.S. Government's own list of terrorist attacks since 2001 shows a dramatic drop in the violence carried out by Iran and an accompanying surge in horrific acts by radical Sunni Muslims who are not aligned with Iran. The latest edition of the Global Terrorism Index, a project of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, shows that four groups accounted for 74 percent of all fatalities from terrorism in 2015 – Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and ISIS.

Thirteen of the 14 Muslim Groups identified by the U.S. intelligence community as actively hostile to the US are Sunni, not Shia, and are not supported by Iran:

- ISIS (Sunni)
- The Al-Nusra Front (Sunni)
- Al-Qa'ida Central (Sunni)
- Al-Qa'ida in Magheb (Sunni)
- Al-Qa'ida in Arabian Peninsula (Sunni)
- Boku Haram (Sunni)
- Al-Shabbab (Sunni)
- Khorassan Group (Sunni)
- Society of the Muslim Brothers (Sunni)

- Sayyaf Group in the Philippines (Sunni)
- Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Sunni)
- Lashgar i Taiba (Sunni)
- Jemaa Islamiya (Sunni)
- Houthis (Shia)

The last major terrorist attack causing casualties that is linked to Iran was the July 2012 bombing of a bus with Israeli tourists in Bulgaria. That departure from Iran's more recent policy on terrorism was retaliation for what Iran perceived to be Israel's role in assassinating five Iranian scientists involved with Iran's Nuclear program, between January 2010 and January 2012 (the dates and names of those attacked are appended).

One can easily imagine the outrage and lust for revenge that would sweep the U.S., if Americans believed a foreign country sent operatives into the United States who in turn murdered engineers and scientists working on sensitive U.S. defense projects.

### **Special Operations**

There have been other terrorist attacks inside Iran bearing the handprint of support from the United States. Author Sean Naylor, *Relentless Strike*, which details the history of operations carried out by U.S. Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) over the past 30 years, sheds light on this uncomfortable truth:

"JSOC personnel also worked with the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), a militant Iranian exile group that had based itself in Iraq after falling afoul of the ayatollahs' regime in Tehran. The State Department had placed the MEK on its list of designated terrorist organizations, but that didn't stop JSOC from taking an attitude of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" toward the group. "They were a group of folks that could transit the border, and they were willing to help us out on what we wanted to do with Iran," said a special operations officer."

The MEK were classified as a terrorist group, until the United States decided that as long as the MEK would help kill Iranians rather than Americans, that they were no longer terrorists. The MEK's history of terrorism is quite clear. Among more than a dozen examples over the last four decades these four are illustrative:

- During the 1970s, the MEK killed U.S. military personnel and U.S. civilians working on defense projects in Tehran and supported the takeover in 1979 of

the U.S. Embassy in Tehran.

- In 1981, the MEK detonated bombs in the head office of the Islamic Republic Party and the Premier's office, killing some 70 high-ranking Iranian officials, including Iran's President, Premier, and Chief Justice.
- In April 1992, the MEK conducted near-simultaneous attacks on Iranian embassies and installations in 13 countries, demonstrating the group's ability to mount large-scale operations overseas.
- In April 1999, the MEK targeted key military officers and assassinated the deputy chief of the Iranian Armed Forces General Staff.

Despite this history, a bipartisan parade of prominent U.S. political and military leaders has lobbied on behalf of MEK and has been well compensated in return.

### **Benighted Policy So Far**

In the ultimate ironic turn, the U.S.-led 2003 war in Iraq played a critical role in Iran's resurgence as a regional power. Saddam Hussein was replaced by Shia Muslims who had received sanctuary in Iran for many years and Baathist institutions, including the Army, were taken over by Iraqis sympathetic to Tehran.

Iran has come out ahead in Iraq and, with the 2015 nuclear agreement in place, Iran's commercial and other ties have improved with key NATO allies and the other major world players—Russia and China in particular.

Official pronouncements on critical national security matters need to be based on facts. Hyperbole in describing Iran's terrorist activities can be counterproductive. For this reason, we call attention to Ambassador Nikki Haley's recent statement that it is hard to find a "terrorist group in the Middle East that does not have Iran's fingerprints all over it." The truth is quite different. The majority of terrorist groups in the region are neither creatures nor puppets of Iran. ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Al-Nusra are three of the more prominent that come to mind.

You have presented yourself as someone willing to speak hard truths in the face of establishment pressure and not to accept the status quo. You spoke out during the campaign against the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq as a historic mistake of epic proportions. You also correctly captured the mood of many Americans fatigued from constant war in far away lands. Yet the torrent of warnings from Washington about the dangers supposedly posed by Iran and the need to confront them are being widely perceived as steps toward reversing your pledge not to get embroiled in new wars.

We encourage you to reflect on the warning we raised with President George W. Bush almost 15 years ago, at a similar historic juncture:

“after watching Secretary Powell today, we are convinced that you would be well served if you widened the discussion ... beyond the circle of those advisers clearly bent on a war for which we see no compelling reason and from which we believe the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic.”

## APPENDIX

### LIST OF IRANIAN SCIENTISTS ASSASSINATED IN IRAN

#### **January 12, 2010: Masoud Alimohammadi, Iranian Physicist:**

Killed by a car bomb. The perpetrator reportedly confessed to having been recruited by Israeli intelligence to carry out the assassination.

#### **November 29, 2010: Majid Shahriari, Iranian nuclear scientist:**

Killed by a car bomb. According to German media, Israel was the sponsor.

#### **November 29, 2010: Assassination attempt on Fereydoon Abbasi Iranian nuclear scientist:**

Wounded by a car bomb.

#### **July 23, 2011: Darioush Rezaeinejad, Iranian electrical engineer, unclear scientist**

Killed by unknown gunmen on motorcycle. Specialist on high-voltage switches – a key component of nuclear warheads. Assassinated by Israeli intelligence, according to the German press.

#### **January 11, 2012: Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan, Iranian nuclear scientist**

Killed at Natanz uranium enrichment facility by a magnetic bomb of the same kind used in earlier assassinations of Iranian scientists.

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Signed:

Richard Beske, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

William Binney, former NSA Technical Director for World Geopolitical & Military Analysis; Co-founder of NSA's Signals Intelligence Automation Research Center

Marshall Carter-Tripp, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) and Division Director,

State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research

Bogdan Dzakovic, Former Team Leader of Federal Air Marshals and Red Team, FAA Security, (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Larry C. Johnson, former CIA and State Department Counter Terrorism officer

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF (Ret.); ex-Master SERE Instructor for Strategic Reconnaissance Operations (NSA/DIA) and Special Mission Units (JSOC)

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Karen Kwiatkowski, former Lt. Col., US Air Force (ret.), at Office of Secretary of Defense watching the manufacture of lies on Iraq, 2001-2003

Edward Loomis, NSA, Cryptologic Computer Scientist (ret.)

David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Near East, CIA and National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Torin Nelson, former Intelligence Officer/Interrogator (GG-12) HQ, Department of the Army

Todd E. Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (ret.)

Greg Thielmann – Former director of the Strategic, Proliferation, and Military Affairs Office of the State Department's intelligence bureau (INR) and former senior staffer on the Senate Intelligence Committee

Kirk Wiebe – former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA

Lawrence Wilkerson, Colonel (USA, ret.), Distinguished Visiting Professor, College of William and Mary (associate VIPS)

Sarah G. Wilton, CDR, USNR, (Retired)/DIA, (Retired)

Robert Wing – former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)

Ann Wright, Col., US Army (ret.); Foreign Service Officer (who resigned in opposition to the war on Iraq)

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## Did Obama Arm Islamic State Killers?

**Exclusive:** A new study shows that U.S. government weapons ended up in the hands of Islamic State jihadists, but no one in Washington seems interested in how they got there or what President Obama knew, writes Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

Did Barack Obama arm ISIS? The question strikes many people as absurd, if not offensive. How can anyone suggest something so awful about a nice guy like the former president? But a stunning report by an investigative group known as Conflict Armament Research (CAR) leaves us little choice but to conclude that he did.

CAR, based in London and funded by Switzerland and the European Union, spent three years tracing the origin of some 40,000 pieces of captured ISIS arms and ammunition. Its findings, made public last week, are that much of it originated in former Warsaw Pact nations in Eastern Europe, where it was purchased by United States and Saudi Arabia and then diverted, in violation of various rules and treaties, to Islamist rebels seeking to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The rebels, in turn, somehow caused or allowed the equipment to be passed on to Islamic State, which is also known by the acronyms ISIS or ISIL, or just the abbreviation IS.

This is damning stuff since it makes it clear that rather than fighting ISIS, the U.S. government was feeding it.

But CAR turns vague when it comes to the all-important question of precisely how the second leg of the transfer worked. Did the rebels turn the weapons over voluntarily, involuntarily, or did they somehow drop them when ISIS was in close proximity and forget to pick them up? All CAR will say is that “background information ... indicates that IS [Islamic State] forces acquired the materiel through varied means, including battlefield capture and the amalgamation of disparate Syrian opposition groups.” It adds that it “cannot rule out direct supply to IS forces from the territories of Jordan and Turkey, especially given the presence of various opposition groups, with shifting allegiances, in cross-border supply locations.” But that’s it.

If so, this suggests an astonishing level of incompetence on the part of Washington. The Syrian rebel forces are an amazingly fractious lot as they merge, split, attack one another and then team up all over again. So how could the White House have imagined that it could keep weapons tossed into this mix from falling into the wrong hands? Considering how each new gun adds to the chaos, how could it possibly keep track? The answer is that it couldn't, which is why ISIS wound up reaping the benefits.

But here's the rub. The report implies a level of incompetence that is not just staggering, but *too* staggering. How could such a massive transfer occur without field operatives not having a clue as to what was going on? Was every last one of them deaf, dumb, and blind?

Not likely. What seems much more plausible is that once the CIA established "plausible deniability" for itself, all it cared about was that the arms made their way to the most effective fighting force, which in Syria happened to be Islamic State.

This is what had happened in Afghanistan three decades earlier when the lion's share of anti-Soviet aid, some \$600 million in all, went to a brutal warlord named Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Hekmatyar was a raging bigot, a sectarian, and an anti-western xenophobe, qualities that presumably did not endear him to his CIA handlers. But as Steve Coll notes in *Ghost Wars*, his bestselling 2004 account of the CIA's love affair with Islamic holy war, he "was the most efficient at killing Soviets" and that was the only thing that mattered. As one CIA officer put it, "analytically, the best fighters – the best-organized fighters – were the fundamentalists" that Hekmatyar led. Consequently, he ended up with the most money.

After all, if you're funding a neo-medieval uprising, it makes sense to steer the money to the darkest reactionaries of them all. Something similar occurred in March 2015 when Syrian rebels launched an assault on government positions in the northern province of Idlib. The rebel coalition was under the control of Jabhat al-Nusra, as the local branch of Al Qaeda was known at the time, and what Al-Nusra needed most of all were high-tech TOW missiles with which to counter government tanks and trucks.

### **Arming Al Qaeda**

So the Obama administration arranged for Nusra to get them. To be sure, it didn't provide them directly. To ensure deniability, rather, it allowed Raytheon to sell some 15,000 TOWs to Saudi Arabia in late 2013 and then looked the other way when the Saudis transferred large numbers of them to pro-Nusra forces in Idlib. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Climbing into bed with Al-Qaeda.](#)"] Al-Nusra

had the toughest fighters in the area, and the offensive was sure to send the Assad regime reeling. So even though its people were compatriots with those who destroyed the World Trade Center, Obama's White House couldn't say no.

"Nusra have always demonstrated superior planning and battle management," Yezid Sayigh, a senior associate at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, said a few weeks later. If the rebel coalition was successful as a whole, it "was entirely due to their willingness to work with Nusra, who have been the backbone in all of this."

Scruples, assuming they existed in the first place, fell by the wayside. A senior White House official told The Washington Post that the Obama administration was "not blind to the fact that it is to some extent inevitable" that U.S. weapons would wind up in terrorist hands, but what could you do? It was all part of the game of *realpolitik*. A senior Washington official crowed that "the trend lines for Assad are bad and getting worse" while The New York Times happily noted that "[t]he Syrian Army has suffered a string of defeats from re-energized insurgents." So, for the master planners in Washington, it was worth it.

Then there is ISIS, which is even more beyond the pale as most Americans are concerned thanks to its extravagant displays of barbarism and cruelty – its killing of Yazidis and enslavement of Yazidi women and girls, its mass beheadings, its fiery execution of Jordanian fighter pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh, and so on.

Yet U.S. government attitudes were more ambivalent than most Americans realized. Indeed, the U.S. government was strictly neutral as long as ISIS confined itself to attacking Assad. As a senior defense official told the Wall Street Journal in early 2015: "Certainly, ISIS has been able to expand in Syria, but that's not our main objective. I wouldn't call Syria a safe haven for ISIL, but it is a place where it's easier for them to organize, plan, and seek shelter than it is in Iraq."

In other words, Syria was a safe haven because, the Journal explained, the U.S. was reluctant to interfere in any way that might "tip the balance of power toward Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who is fighting Islamic State and other rebels." So the idea was to allow ISIS to have its fun as long as it didn't bother anyone else. For the same reason, the U.S. refrained from bombing the group when, shortly after the Idlib offensive, its fighters closed in on the central Syrian city of Palmyra, 80 miles or so to the east. This was despite the fact that the fighters would have made perfect targets while "traversing miles of open desert roads."

As The New York Times explained: “Any airstrikes against Islamic State militants in and around Palmyra would probably benefit the force of President Bashar al-Assad. So far, United States-led airstrikes in Syria have largely focussed on areas far outside government control, to avoid the perception of aiding a leader whose ouster President Obama has called for.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s “How US-Backed War on Syria Helped ISIS.”]

### **Looting Palmyra**

The United States thus allowed ISIS to capture one of the most archeologically important cities in the world, killing dozens of government soldiers and decapitating 83-year-old Khalid al-Asaad, the city’s retired chief of antiquities. (After looting and destroying many of the ancient treasures, ISIS militants were later driven from Palmyra by a Russian-backed offensive by troops loyal to President Assad.)

Obama’s bottom line was: ISIS is very, very bad when it attacks the U.S.-backed regime in Iraq, but less so when it wreaks havoc just over the border in Syria. In September 2016, John Kerry clarified what the administration was up to in a tape-recorded conversation at the U.N. that was later made public. Referring to Russia’s decision to intervene in Syria against ISIS, also known by the Arabic acronym Daesh, the then-Secretary of State told a small knot of pro-rebel sympathizers:

“The reason Russia came in is because ISIL was getting stronger. Daesh was threatening the possibility of going to Damascus and so forth, and that’s why Russia came in, because they didn’t want a Daesh government and they supported Assad. And we know this was growing. We were watching. We saw that Daesh was growing in strength, and we thought Assad was threatened. We thought, however, we could probably manage, that Assad might then negotiate. Instead of negotiating, he got ... Putin in to support him. So it’s truly complicated.”  
(Quote starts at 26:10.)

“We were watching.” Kerry said. So, by giving ISIS free rein, the administration hoped to use it as a lever with which to dislodge Assad. As in Afghanistan, the United States thought it could use jihad to advance its own imperial interests. Yet the little people – Syrian soldiers, three thousand office workers in lower Manhattan, Yazidis, the Islamic State’s beheading of Western hostages, etc. – made things “truly complicated.”

Putting this all together, a few things seem clear. One is that the Obama administration was happy to see its Saudi allies use U.S.-made weapons to arm Al Qaeda. Another is that it was not displeased to see ISIS battle Assad's government as well. If so, how unhappy could it have been if its allies then passed along weapons to the Islamic State so it could battle Assad all the more? The administration was desperate to knock out Assad, and it needed someone to do the job before Vladimir Putin stepped in and bombed ISIS instead.

It was a modern version of Henry II's lament, "Who will rid me of this meddlesome priest?" The imperative was to get rid of Assad; Obama and his team had no interest in the messy details.

None of which proves that Obama armed ISIS. But unless one believes that the CIA is so monumentally inept that it could screw up a two-car funeral, it's the only explanation that makes sense. Obama is still a congenial fellow. But he's a classic liberal who had no desire to interfere with the imperatives of empire and whose idea of realism was therefore to leave foreign policy in the hands of neocons or liberal interventionists like Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and John Kerry.

If America were any kind of healthy democracy, Congress would not rest until it got to the bottom of what should be the scandal of the decade: Did the U.S. government wittingly or unwittingly arm the brutal killers of ISIS and Al Qaeda? However, since that storyline doesn't fit with the prevailing mainstream narrative of Washington standing up for international human rights and opposing global terrorism, the troublesome question will likely neither be asked nor answered.

**Daniel Lazare is the author of several books including *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace).**

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## Trump's Gross Hypocrisy on Yemen War

**Exclusive:** The Trump administration's hypocrisy was on clear display when it denounced Iran over an ineffectual Yemeni missile that landed in Saudi Arabia while the U.S. aids the Saudi slaughter of Yemeni civilians, says Jonathan

Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Political charlatans like Donald Trump often employ an essential trick from stage magic: misdirecting the audience. By taking the public's eye off the real issues and channeling discussion toward made-up controversies, they can keep working their agenda in the shadows.



U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley has been quick to learn that technique from her mentor in the Oval Office. Last week, in a performance reminiscent of Secretary of State Colin Powell's UN speech before the Iraq War, she staged a highly publicized demonstration of alleged Iranian perfidy: bits and pieces of a missile fired on Nov. 4 by Houthi rebels in Yemen toward Saudi Arabia's King Khalid International Airport outside of Riyadh.

"When you look at this missile, this is terrifying, this is absolutely terrifying," Haley asserted. She said the scraps included "parts made by Iran, some by Iran's government-run defense industry. All are proof that Iran is defying the international community." In particular, she claimed that Iran is violating a United Nations Security Council resolution banning it from engaging in transfers of ballistic missiles – an annex to the Security Council's endorsement of the Iran nuclear deal.

Critics quickly shot holes in her case. For one thing, the Security Council's resolution actually says "Iran is *called upon* not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles *designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons . . .*" "Called upon" is not the same as a ban. Nor would any serious expert confuse Houthi rockets with nuclear-capable ballistic missiles.

In addition, the *New York Times* noted, "Defense officials said they could not say exactly when the weapons . . . were given to the Houthis, which means that

they could have been transferred before the Security Council resolution was enacted.”

Nor could a U.N. panel of experts even confirm that Iran had supplied the missiles; analysts at IHS Jane’s raised the possibility that Houthi rebels modified foreign missiles purchased by Yemen’s military before the outbreak of war. Although Haley put on display an Iranian-made component that was allegedly part of the missile, one reporter noted that the debris also contained an American-made part used to circulate liquid fuel propellant.

“Unless someone can provide a direct smoking gun, such as a shipping manifest or other documents which clearly identify the weapons and how they were sourced, this is simply speculation to further support the administration, Saudi, and Israeli case to militarily confront Iran,” said Rob Richer, former associate deputy director for operations at the CIA.

### **Diversion from Saudi War Crimes**

Haley’s show was pure misdirection. No serious analyst of the region doubts that Iran has given at least some limited material support to the Houthi rebels who control a sizeable portion of Yemen, including its capital, Sanaa.

The question of whether Iran also smuggled a small number of relatively crude missiles to the Houthis should hardly weigh too heavily on anyone’s moral scales when Saudi Arabia and its allies have been pounding Yemen since March 2015 with high-explosive bombs, mostly supplied by the United States and Great Britain.

As former CIA analyst and presidential adviser Bruce Riedel said of Riyadh’s vocal outrage over the ineffectual Houthi missile attack, “They desperately want to change the conversation away from starving children to Iranian bad guys.”

Or as Iran’s foreign minister put it in a tweet, Saudi Arabia “bombs Yemen to smithereens, killing 1000s of innocents including babies, spreads cholera and famine, but of course blames Iran.”

The Houthis fired off their missile – which killed no one – just days after a Saudi-led airstrike at a market in northern Yemen killed at least 25 civilians.

Immediately after the Houthi retaliation, the Saudi coalition bombed Yemen’s international airport and closed all the country’s other air, land, and seaports, putting in dire peril some 7 million people deemed by humanitarian agencies to be immediately at risk of famine.

The Saudi blockade also made it almost impossible for medical workers to contain the spread of cholera, which has sickened nearly a million people. The

international aid group Save the Children estimated that 50,000 Yemeni children under the age of 5 could die by year's end.

"It is very clear that if you are using starvation as a weapon you are in breach of international humanitarian law," said Penny Mordaunt, the British government's international development secretary.

The U.N.'s human rights office recently accused the Saudi coalition of further killing at least 136 non-combatants from Dec. 6 to 16. Targets of its bombs included a TV station, a hospital, and a wedding party. The hospital was in the Red Sea port of Hodeida, the country's main point of entry for food. Some close observers predict an imminent attack by the Saudi coalition to oust Houthi rebels from the city – a move that one of Oxfam's senior executives said would "breach international humanitarian law" and result in "near certain famine."

President Trump earlier this month called on the Saudi government to permit "food, fuel, water, and medicine to reach the Yemeni people who desperately need it." It's hard to take his words seriously, however, after Reuters' report that "Saudi Arabia has agreed to buy about \$7 billion worth of precision guided munitions from U.S. defense contractors . . . in a deal that was part of a \$110 billion weapons agreement that coincided with President Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May."

Nonetheless, there are serious rumblings of concern in Congress, even among Republicans, over the humanitarian disaster in Yemen. Senator Todd Young of Indiana, a Republican member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, recently pressed Trump's nominee to the State Department's top legal office about the implications of Saudi Arabia's blockade on international aid to Yemen.

And just last month, the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to condemn the killing of civilians in Yemen and to demand that the warring parties "increase efforts to adopt all necessary and appropriate measures to prevent civilian casualties and increase humanitarian access."

By itself, to be sure, that was a toothless measure, but it's a sign that anti-Iran sentiment on Capitol Hill has not blinded legislators to the crimes being committed by the Saudi coalition in Yemen. So far, at least, Nikki Haley's tricks have failed to divert the world's attention.

**Jonathan Marshall's articles on Yemen include "How US Policy Helps Al Qaeda in Yemen," "The West's Moral Hypocrisy on Yemen," "Belated Pushback on Saudis' War on Yemen," and "How Washington Adds to Yemen's Nightmare."**

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