

Can Trump Find the 'Great' Path?

Exclusive: After a half year in office, President Trump is stumbling toward a “reality TV” irrelevance or worse, but a narrow path remains to make a historically important contribution to the nation, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

On June 29, when CNN’s Wolf Blitzer asked John Podesta, the chairman of Hillary Clinton’s failed presidential campaign, how they had lost to Donald Trump, I expected the usual excuse – “Russia! Russia! Russia!” – but was surprised when Podesta spoke truthfully:

“Even though 20 percent of his voters believed he was unfit to be president, they wanted radical change, they wanted to blow the system up. And that’s what he’s given them, I guess.”

For those millions of Americans who had watched their jobs vanish and their communities decay, it was a bit like prisoners being loaded onto a truck for transport to a killing field. As dangerous and deadly as a desperate uprising might be, what did they have to lose?

In 2008, some of those same Americans had voted for an unlikely candidate, first-term Sen. Barack Obama, hoping for his promised “change you can believe in,” but then saw Obama sucked into Official Washington’s Establishment with its benign – if not malign – neglect for the average Joe and Jane.

In 2016, the Democratic Party brushed aside the left-wing populist Sen. Bernie Sanders, who might have retained the support of many blue-collar Americans. The party instead delivered the Democratic nomination to the quintessential insider candidate – former First Lady, former Senator and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Though coming from a modest background, Clinton had grabbed onto the privileges of power with both hands. She haughtily set up a private email server for her official State Department business; she joined with neocons and liberal interventionists in pushing for “regime change” wars fought primarily by young working-class men and women; and after leaving government, she greedily took millions of dollars in speaking fees from Wall Street and other special interests.

Clinton’s contempt for many American commoners spilled out when she labeled half of Trump’s supporters “deplorables,” though she later lowered her percentage estimate.

So, enough blue-collar voters in Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania rebelled against the prospect of more of the same and took a risk on the disruptive real-estate mogul and reality-TV star Donald Trump, a guy who knew little about government and boasted of his crude sexual practices.

Hobbling Trump

However, after Trump's shocking victory last November, two new problems emerged. First, Hillary Clinton and the national Democrats – unwilling to recognize their own culpability for Trump's victory – blamed their fiasco on Russia, touching off a New Cold War hysteria and using that frenzy to hobble, if not destroy, Trump's presidency.

Second, Trump lacked any coherent governing philosophy or a clear-eyed understanding of global conflicts. On foreign policy, most prospective Republican advisers came from a poisoned well contaminated by neocon groupthinks about war and “regime change.”

Looking for alternatives, Trump turned to some fellow neophytes, such as his son-in-law Jared Kushner and alt-right guru Steve Bannon, as well as to a few Washington outsiders, such as former Defense Intelligence Agency director Michael Flynn and Exxon-Mobil chief executive officer Rex Tillerson. But all had serious limitations.

For instance, Kushner fancied himself the genius who could achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace by applying the so-called “outside/in strategy,” i.e., getting the Saudis and Gulf States to put their boots on the necks of the Palestinians until they agreed to whatever land-grabbing terms Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dictated.

Flynn, who served briefly as Trump's National Security Adviser, had led the DIA when it correctly warned President Obama about the jihadist risks posed by supporting the “regime change” project in Syria, even predicting the rise of the Islamic State.

But Flynn, like many on the Right, bought into Official Washington's false groupthink that Iran was the principal sponsor of terrorism and needed to be bomb-bomb-bombed, not dealt with diplomatically as Obama did in negotiating tight constraints on Iran's nuclear program. The bomb-bomb-bomb approach fit with the desires of the Israeli and Saudi governments, which viewed Iran as a rival and wanted the American military to do the dirty work in shattering the so-called “Shiite crescent.”

So, because of Kushner's views on Israel-Palestine and because of the Flynn/Right-Wing hostility toward Iran, Trump fell in line with much of the

neocon consensus on the Middle East, demonstrated by Trump's choice of Saudi Arabia and Israel for his first high-profile foreign trip.

But obeisance to Israel and Saudi Arabia – and inside Washington to the neocons – is what created the catastrophe that has devastated U.S. foreign policy and has wasted trillions of dollars that otherwise could have been invested in the decaying American infrastructure and in making the U.S. economy more competitive.

In other words, if Trump had any hope of “making America great again,” he needed to break with the Israeli/Saudi/neocon/liberal-hawk groupthinks, rather than bow to them. Yet, Trump now finds himself hemmed in by Official Washington's Russia-gate obsession, including near-unanimous congressional demands for more sanctions against Moscow over the still-unproven charges that Russia interfered with the U.S. election to help Trump and hurt Clinton. (The White House has indicated that Trump will consent to his own handcuffing on Russia.)

A Daunting Task

Even if Trump had the knowledge and experience to understand what it would take to resist the powerful foreign-policy establishment, he would face a hard battle that could only be fought and won with savvy and skill.

A narrow path toward a transformational presidency still remains for Trump, but he would have to travel in some very different directions than he has chosen during his first six months.

For one, Trump would have to go against type and become an unlikely champion for truth by correcting much of the recent historical record about current global hot spots.

On Syria, for instance, Trump could open up the CIA's books on key events, including the truth about Obama's “regime change” scheme and the alleged sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013. Though the Obama administration blamed the Assad government, other evidence pointed to a provocation by radical jihadists trying to trick the U.S. military into intervening on their side.

Similarly, on the Ukraine crisis, Trump could order the CIA to reveal the truth about the U.S. role in fomenting the violent coup that ousted elected President Viktor Yanukovich and touched off a bloody civil war, which saw the U.S.-backed regime in Kiev dispatch neo-Nazi militias to kill ethnic Russians in the east.

In other words, facts could be deployed to counter the propaganda theme of a “Russian invasion” of Ukraine, another one of Official Washington's beloved groupthinks that has become the foundation for a dangerous New Cold War.

As part of the truth-telling, Trump could disclose the CIA's full knowledge about who shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, an atrocity killing 298 people that was pinned on the Russians although other evidence points to a rogue element of the Ukrainian military. [See [here](#) and [here](#).]

Further going against type, Trump also might admit that he [rushed to judgment](#) following the April 4, 2017, chemical-weapons incident in Khan Sheikhoun, Syria, by ordering a retaliatory missile strike against the Syrian military on April 6 when the whodunit evidence was unclear.

By sharing knowledge with the American people – rather than keeping them in the dark and feeding them a steady diet of propaganda – Trump could enlist popular support for pragmatic shifts in U.S. foreign policy.

Those changes could include a historic break from the Israeli-Saudi stranglehold on U.S. policy in the Middle East – and could make way for cooperation with Russia and Iran in stabilizing and rebuilding Syria so millions of displaced Syrians could return to their homes and reduce social pressures that the refugees have created in Europe.

A Populist Party

On the domestic front, if Trump really wants to replace Obama's Affordable Care Act with something better, he could propose the one logical alternative that would both help his blue-collar supporters and make American companies more competitive – a single-payer system that uses higher taxes on the rich and some more broad-based taxes to finance health-care for all.

That way U.S. corporations would no longer be burdened with high costs for health insurance and could raise wages for workers and/or lower prices for American products on the global market. Trump could do something similar regarding universal college education, which would further boost American productivity.

By taking this unorthodox approach, Trump could reorient American politics for a generation, with Republicans emerging as a populist party focused on the needs of the country's forgotten citizens, on rebuilding the nation's physical and economic infrastructure, and on genuine U.S. security requirements abroad, not the desires of "allies" with powerful lobbies in Washington.

To follow such a course would, of course, put Trump at odds with much of the Republican Party's establishment and its longstanding priorities of "tax cuts for the rich" and more militarism abroad.

A populist strategy also would leave the national Democrats with a stark choice, either continue sidling up to Official Washington's neoconservatives on foreign policy and to Wall Street's wheelers and dealers on the economy – or return to the party's roots as the political voice for the common man and woman.

But do I think any of this will happen? Not really. Far more likely, the Trump presidency will remain mired in its “reality-TV” squabbles with the sort of coarse language that would normally be bleeped out of network TV; the Democrats will continue substituting the Russia-gate blame-game for any serious soul-searching; the Republicans will press on with more tax cuts for the rich; and the Great American Experiment with Democracy will continue to flounder into chaos.

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](#)).

House GOP Seeks to Curb Yemen War

As national Democrats claim the mantle as the more hawkish party – and President Trump panders to the Saudi-Israeli tandem – House Republicans moved to curb U.S. support for the Saudi-led war on Yemen, Dennis J Bernstein notes.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Republicans are taking the lead in blocking U.S. participation in the Saudi slaughter in Yemen, which has plunged that country to the brink of starvation and sparked a cholera epidemic. Surprising to many, there was a vote by the Republican-led House of Representatives to block U.S. participation in the Saudi-led war.

The key amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act – prohibiting U.S. military support for the Saudi-led coalition's bombing of Yemen – was sponsored by Rep. Warren Davidson, R-Ohio. Though the amendment gained bipartisan support – and another restrictive amendment was sponsored by Rep. Dick Nolan, D-Minnesota – the Republican leadership on this issue reflects the changing places in which Democrats have become the more hawkish party in Congress.



I spoke to Kate Gould, Legislative Representative for Middle East Policy for the Friends Committee on National Legislation about this pressing issue of life and death in Yemen. We spoke on July 17.

Dennis Bernstein: Well, this is a terrible situation and getting worse by the day. Could you please remind everyone what it looks like in Yemen on the ground?

Kate Gould: It is a catastrophic situation. According to the United Nations, it is the largest humanitarian crisis in the world right now. And despite the fact that this humanitarian crisis has been a direct result of the Saudi/United Arab Emirate-led war in Yemen, backed by the United States, most Americans have no idea that we are so deeply involved in this war.

A conservative estimate is that seven million people are on the verge of starvation, half a million being children. The people in Yemen are experiencing the world's largest cholera outbreak. A child under the age of five is dying every ten minutes of preventable causes. Every 35 seconds a child is infected.

This is all preventable with access to clean water and basic sanitation. This war has destroyed the civilian infrastructure in Yemen. We're talking about air strikes that have targeted warehouses of food, sanitation systems, water infiltration systems. The World Health Organization points out that cholera is not difficult to prevent. The problem is that so many Yemenis lack access to clean water as a result of the infrastructure being in ruins.

DB: What about the medical infrastructure, what about the ability to deal with this kind of epidemic, or is it just going to get worse?

KG: Well, unless we do something to change the situation, it is definitely going to get worse. In Yemen, 90% of food is imported and the Saudis have made this much more difficult. They imposed more restraints on one of the major ports and

have refused to allow Yemen to repair the damage caused by air strikes. Often it is difficult for ships to get permission to berth. All these complications have driven up the price of food so that even when food manages to be imported it is too expensive, even for those earning decent incomes. So what we are seeing is a de facto blockade as well as a war.

DB: Could you say a few words about the campaign of the Saudi military and what kind of weaponry they are using? Later I would like to discuss US support for all of this.

KG: The Saudi-led war began about two and a half years ago in March, 2015. At that time they asked for US support and got it from the Obama administration. The air campaign has resulted in the carpet bombing of Yemen. It is the Saudis and the United Arab Emirates who have been driving this massive bombardment. There has been an all-out assault on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

And, of course, as Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) has pointed out, the Saudis would not have been able to carry out this bombing without full US support. Their planes cannot fly without US refueling capacity. In fact, since October the US has actually doubled the amount of fuel it provides to Saudi and Emirati bombers. Last October is significant because at that time there was a major bombing of mourners coming out of a funeral hall which killed about 140 civilians and wounded another six hundred. Since that atrocity, the US has doubled its refueling support.

DB: How does the US justify its support for the Saudis, from a human rights perspective?

KG: We've heard very little discussion of the human rights angle from the Trump administration. The Obama administration claimed to be pressuring the Saudis to take precautions to prevent civilian casualties, that this is why the US has provided precision-guided smart bombs, to limit civilian casualties. There has never been an official US response to the fact that the Saudis and Emiratis are deliberately pushing millions to the verge of starvation. They are using hunger as a political tool to get better leverage on the battlefield and at the negotiating table. This is really what is driving the humanitarian nightmare.

DB: We know that Trump was just in Saudi Arabia and signed a massive weapons contract. Will this weaponry contribute to the coming famine and cholera epidemic?

KG: Certainly. It is providing the Saudis a blank check for this devastating war in which direct casualties from airstrikes are conservatively estimated at around 10,000 and millions of people have been displaced. It sends the message

that the United States is willing to support the Saudis despite massive human rights violations.

DB: There is no way the US or the Saudis can deny the tragedy. This has been thoroughly documented by US and international rights groups.

KG: But what they will often say is that a lot of the fault lies with the Houthi rebel groups. And it is certainly true that the Houthi rebels have committed massive human rights violations. But as far as the mass devastation of public infrastructure is concerned, which is leading to the humanitarian crisis, the majority of the blame can be assigned to the Saudi-led war and the US backing.

Repeatedly, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, responding to the scene of unlawful airstrikes against civilian targets, have found either unexploded US-made bombs or identifiable fragments of US bombs. This was the case with the bombing of the funeral procession last October. Still, the US government claims that it is trying to limit civilian casualties.

DB: It is interesting that the Republican-led House has voted to block US participation in the war in Yemen. It seems somewhat counter-intuitive.

KG: It is definitely surprising. Although I've been working around the clock on this recently, even I was surprised. What happened is that last week [week of July 9] the House of Representatives voted on the major military policy bill for fiscal year 2018. This is a major piece of national security legislation which authorizes funding for the Pentagon. It has to get passed every year and it provides an opportunity for members to vote on amendments that have to do with national security.

Two of these amendments were particularly consequential for Yemen. One was introduced by a Republican, Warren Davidson of Ohio, and the other by Rick Nolan, a Democrat from Minnesota. They added language that would require the Trump administration to stop providing refueling for Saudi and Emirati bombers, as well as to stop intelligence sharing and other forms of military support. It wouldn't stop the weapons sales, which is another process, but it would stop military support for this indiscriminate war.

The Davidson amendment would prohibit US military action in Yemen that is not authorized by the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force. Given that US participation in the Saudi-led war in Yemen is not targeting Al-Qaeda, it is not authorized by the 2001 AUMF and is prohibited by this amendment. The Nolan amendment prohibits the deployment of US troops for any participation in Yemen's civil war.

This means that the House just voted to end US funding of our military for the

Saudi-led war in Yemen. This is really unprecedented and it builds on the wave of congressional momentum that we saw last month when 47 senators voted against sending more of what we call “weapons of mass starvation” to Yemen. So we have clear signals from both the House and the Senate that there is no support for Trump’s blank check to Saudi Arabia for this devastating war.

DB: So now this goes to the Senate?

KG: Yes, and there we are going to face a more difficult fight. We’re preparing for that now. We definitely will see some important Yemen votes in the Senate. It could come up right after a health care vote in early August or it might not be voted on until the fall. But we will see votes on Yemen. It is unclear whether a Senate member will offer amendments similar to the Davidson or Nolan amendments.

After the Senate votes on the various amendments, they will both have versions of this and they will have to come back and conference a final version to send to the president. This is definitely a time to push our senators to follow suit with the House and oppose US involvement in this devastating war in Yemen.

DB: Finally, who are some of these Republican Congressional members who stood up in this effort to restrain this oncoming famine? Who were some of the surprise votes?

KG: Actually, this was added in a whole block of legislation so we can’t point to exactly who supported and who opposed it. It was good to see Warren Davidson taking a leadership role on this issue. He is relatively new in the Senate, having taken [Former House Speaker John] Boehner’s seat. It is noteworthy also that the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Mac Thornberry from Texas, allowed this amendment to go forward. Just that the House Republican leadership allowed this to move forward is really interesting in itself.

DB: Yes, it is. It seems to me that the Democrats have really become out-of-control Cold Warriors, either lost in Russia-gate or dropping the ball on this very important foreign policy issue. We thank you, Kate Gould, Legislative Representative for Middle East Policy with the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

KG: And I just want to say that we can win on this one and we need everybody to get involved. You can go to our website, fcnl.org, to get more information. Again, 47 Senators voted last month to block these bomb sales and we only need 51 votes. And with Trump’s massive arms deal with Saudi Arabia, I’m sure we will have more votes on this. But it is really important to stay engaged and we need everybody to get involved and contact your members of Congress.

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Pitching the ‘Forever War’ in Afghanistan

Exclusive: Rather than rethink U.S. policy in the Mideast, particularly the entangling alliances with Israel and Saudi Arabia, Official Washington pushes schemes to perpetuate the “forever war” in Afghanistan, writes James W Carden.

By James W Carden

In May, the founder of the mercenary-for-hire group Blackwater (now since remained Academi), Erik Prince took to the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* to propose that the Pentagon employ “private military units” and appoint a “viceroy” to oversee the war in Afghanistan.

According to Prince, who has been actively lobbying for what he calls an “East India Company approach” as the solution to America’s longest war (16 years, \$117 billion and counting), “In Afghanistan, the viceroy approach would reduce rampant fraud by focusing spending on initiatives that further the central strategy, rather than handing cash to every outstretched hand from a U.S. system bereft of institutional memory.” (Prince naturally failed to say if his were among those “outstretched hands”)

On July 10, *The New York Times* reported that Prince and the owner of the military contractor Dyn Corporation, Stephen Feinberg, have, at the request of Stephen K. Bannon and Jared Kushner, been pushing a plan to, in effect, privatize the war effort in Afghanistan. (In recent weeks both The Nation and The American Conservative have published deep-dive investigative pieces into the behind the scenes machinations of would-be Viceroys Prince and Feinberg).

According to the *Times* report “The strategy has been called ‘the Laos option,’ after America’s shadowy involvement in Laos during the war in neighboring Vietnam.”

If so, then “the Laos option” is an unfortunate moniker for their strategy given the fact that the during America’s war over Laos (1964-73) the U.S. dropped 2.5 million tons of munitions on that country as part of the failed effort in Vietnam, which finally ended when the U.S. embassy in Saigon was evacuated in

1975.

It is worth mentioning, since we so often overlook the “collateral damage” caused by our overseas adventures, that in the 40-plus years since the cessation of operations in Laos that 20,000 Laotians have been killed by unexploded ordinance dropped that had been dropped during that illegal nine-year campaign.

And while Prince and Feinberg have (so far anyway) gotten the cold shoulder from National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and Pentagon Chief James Mattis, momentum is picking up for once again ramping up American involvement in Afghanistan among some of the (allegedly) more sophisticated members of the foreign policy establishment.

More Armchair Warmongering

On July 11, former Deputy Defense Secretary Michele Flournoy and think tank functionary Richard Fontaine published a piece for the purportedly realist *National Interest* magazine that attempted to assure readers that “The Afghan War Is Not Lost.” Why not? Because even though there are roughly 8,400 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, “*More troops* can help achieve American objectives in Afghanistan, but only if they are part of a larger and more effective strategy.” [Emphasis mine].

The stress on more troops (if not to say, thousands upon thousands of unaccountable mercenaries in the pay of Feinberg and Prince) is deeply concerning because if anyone can be said to be a reliable barometer of prevailing opinion inside the Beltway it is Flournoy.

Readers may recall that Flournoy co-chaired the Obama administration’s Afghanistan policy review, which led to the President’s ill-fated December 2009 decision to send 33,000 American troops (plus a contingent of 7,000 from NATO) to prop up the Karzai regime in Afghanistan. The following year, 2010, would end up as the bloodiest one yet for coalition forces in Afghanistan. Indeed, nearly three-fourth of all American casualties in that war took place in the years following Obama’s decision to “surge” in Afghanistan.

But give Flournoy (who was at the top of Hillary Clinton’s short list to be Defense Secretary) credit: she persists. Today Flournoy and her frequent co-author Fontaine (both are executives of the hawkish think tank Center for a New American Security) say that American should commit to Afghanistan “indefinitely”:

“The centerpiece of the administration’s Afghanistan strategy must therefore be a clear and sustained American commitment to Afghanistan. By forswearing deadlines and making clear that the United States will support the Afghan

government and security forces indefinitely and until they are able to hold their own, Washington can telegraph to the Taliban that it will not succeed in retaking the country.”

Worryingly, some members of Congress seem to be on board. In early July, a bipartisan delegation including Senators John McCain, Lindsey Graham and Elizabeth Warren toured Pakistan and Afghanistan and called for greater military involvement in the region. Speaking on behalf of the delegation, McCain noted, “none of us would say that we’re on course to a success here in Afghanistan.”

The Forever War

Driving the push to send more troops is the fact that, as Flournoy and Fontaine point out, the “Taliban today controls more territory than at any time since 9/11. Faced with corruption and exclusionary politics, popular opposition to the government in Kabul is rising, while the Taliban makes inroads in rural areas and, increasingly, near the cities.” This is no doubt the case.

And proponents of the forever war in Afghanistan are correct when they say, as they inevitably do, that the Taliban provided sanctuary to Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda in the lead up to 9/11. But these same proponents usually neglect to note that bin Laden and Al Qaeda were motivated by the U.S.-Israeli special relationship and, according to the 9/11 Report, “grievances against the United States” that were “widely shared in the Muslim world.” Bin Laden “inveighed against the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia ... and against other U.S. policies in the Middle East.”

But, in the intervening years between 2001 and now, Al Qaeda’s leadership has been decimated, and according to a Brown University study, “the United States has spent or taken on obligations to spend more than \$3.6 trillion in current dollars on the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria and on the Department of Homeland Security” in the years following 9/11.

Meanwhile other alternative strategies (such as the “offshore balancing strategy” advocated by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt) have never been tried. As I wrote at Consortiumnews in June, “there *are* alternatives (there always are). It’s just that these tend not to have the institutional backing of Washington’s policy/think tank community which, because it is deeply compromised by its defense industry funders, rarely given them voice or consideration.”

If the U.S. is to successfully combat terrorism emanating out of the Middle East a wholesale re-evaluation of U.S. policy is in order, particularly with regard to Israel and Saudi Arabia. To gloss over this is to miss the point.

And proponents of expanding and privatizing the war in Afghanistan miss it entirely.

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The Unending Failure of the Afghan War

Afghanistan has been a disaster for U.S. policymakers since Presidents Carter and Reagan started funding Islamists almost four decades ago and then the U.S. began fighting them post-9/11, a failure that needs ending, says Alon Ben-Meir.

By Alon Ben-Meir

Sixteen years have passed and we are still fighting a war in Afghanistan which is not only the longest in American history (at a cost approaching \$1 trillion and the blood of thousands of brave soldiers), but one which is morally corrupting from which there seems to be no exit with any gratification but shame.

It was necessary to invade Afghanistan to destroy Al Qaeda following 9/11, but once it was defeated we should have departed, leaving behind some residual forces to clean up the mess. Instead, we decided to introduce democracy, a totally alien concept to a land historically governed by tribes, and which no foreign power has ever been able to govern or fully conquer for long.

Today, we are still discussing the best course of action to bring this war to some form of a satisfactory conclusion. Before we discuss prospective solutions, however, we should take a hard look at the real cost of the war and its implications that will startle many to their core.

Nearly 2,400 American soldiers have been killed and 20,000 wounded; over 33,000 Afghani civilians have lost their lives. A record number of civilians—1,662—were killed in the first six months of 2017 alone, and over 3,581 civilians were wounded. Overall, Afghani casualties are estimated at 225,000, with 2.6 million Afghani refugees and more than one million internally displaced.

Thus far, the cost of the war to date is approximately \$783 billion; the cost for each soldier is \$3.9 million per year. If we were to divide the war's cost

among Afghanistan's 30 million citizens, it would amount to \$33,000 per head, from which the ordinary Afghan has derived zero benefit in a country where the average annual per capita income was only \$670 in 2014.

While we are spending these sums of money on an unwinnable war, 15 million U.S. children (21 percent) live in households below the federal poverty threshold. Hundreds of thousands go to sleep hungry, and many are living in squalid conditions, with infrastructure and homes on the verge of collapsing.

To understand the travesty of these expenditures on the war, just think of the cost to America, not only in human lives and money, but our moral standing in the world and the pervasive, corrosive thinking that the war can still be won with military muscle.

It is naïve to think that after 16 years of fighting, dispatching an additional military force of 4,000 soldiers (as recommended by Secretary of Defense James Mattis) will change anything, when at its peak over 140,000 soldiers were unable to win and create a sustainable political and security structure that would allow us to leave with dignity.

No Win in Sight

No one in the Trump administration, including the Pentagon, is suggesting that additional forces would win the war. At best, they can arrest the continuing advances of the Taliban, which is now in control of more than one third of the country – and then what?

After a visit to Afghanistan, Sen. John McCain was asked to define winning: "Winning is getting major areas of the country under control and working toward some kind of ceasefire with the Taliban."

But as Robert L. Borosage of The Nation points out, "we've had major areas under control before, and the Taliban continued to resist, while corruption and division continued to cripple the Afghan government." Beyond this resurgent Taliban threat, Al Qaeda is back in full force and is successfully spreading its wings far beyond the Afghani borders.

If anything, the situation today is even worse both in the political and security spheres, and the prospects of developing sustainable conditions on the ground and a functioning government in Kabul are next to zero. Sadly, Defense Secretary Mattis resembles a gambling addict pouring money into a slot machine, but ends up leaving depressed and frustrated for having lost every dollar, hoping against hope to win a jackpot that never pays out.

One might ask Secretary Mattis, what is our goal now in Afghanistan, and what is

our exit strategy? For the past 16 years, no Defense Secretary provided a clear answer, and now we are asked to gamble again with the lives of our soldiers, with no hope of ever winning this debilitating war, which has now become a war of choice.

To be sure, there will not be a military solution to the Afghan war. The sooner we accept this reality, however bitter it may be, the better so we can focus on a practical outcome that can emerge only through negotiations with moderate elements of the Taliban.

The second option of conducting the war, which is championed by Trump's chief strategist Steve Bannon, is to hire private contractors in lieu of American troops to fight a proxy war on our behalf. There is nothing more disdainful than such a proposal. If we were to choose this route – sending mercenaries to foreign lands to do our killing – will there be anything more morally decadent than this breach of our humanity?

The fact that we used mercenaries in the past to act as security guards or manage detention centers was bad enough, in that they abused their mandate and committed egregious crimes while making billions of dollars.

We should never repeat such a practice which is morally reprehensible. This scheme, not surprisingly, comes from the self-serving master manipulator Bannon, whose advice to Trump so far has got the President in more trouble than he cares to handle. A war for which we are not prepared to sacrifice the life of a soldier for a worthy cause must never be fought.

A Way Out

In a series of conversations I had with Ajmal Khan Zazai, tribal leader and Paramount Chief of Paktia province in Afghanistan, he spoke with deep frustration about the American military approach that has never had a chance of succeeding.

He said, "Afghanistan is a tribal country, the tribes are the past, present, and the future. To win this hard fight against the Taliban and their associates [including Al Qaeda and ISIS] without the support and backing of the tribes would be a miracle and I doubt a miracle is happening these days."

He was emphatic about the naivete of successive American administrations, saying that government officials in the Departments of State and Defense going back to the Bush era appeared to be "either obsessed with their version of 'democracy' and 'human rights' or believe only in a U.S. military solution. They don't believe in homegrown or Afghan local solutions led by the tribes, or even winning hearts and minds."

It is time for the U.S. to realize that the long-term solution lies, as Zazai said, with the full backing and support of the tribes. He told me that he is prepared to gather the chiefs of all the tribes to seek commitment from top U.S. officials to empower them by providing \$400 million to \$500 million dollars, over a few years (which is a fraction of what we spend today). The purpose would be to recruit and train their own militia to fight their own battles – not mercenaries for hire, who want to prolong the war only to enrich themselves.

The solution to the Afghanistan debacle lies with the Afghani tribes, who must take the lead in fighting the insurgency. The tribes will be fighting for their country because they want an end to outrageous foreign interventions that did nothing but cause havoc in the name of pursuing an illusionary democracy.

In the end, the solution lies in peace negotiations with moderates in the Taliban, who are Afghani nationals and will not be dislodged from their own land, and no one is better equipped to achieve that than the tribal chiefs. They want to take matters into their hands and end the decades-long suffering, death, and destruction they have and continue to endure.

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NYC: Front Line of Income Inequality

New York City faced a crisis four decades ago with a massive electrical failure and fear of crime. Now, it confronts another challenge, a vast gap between the super-rich and the rest, writes Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

Forty years ago this summer, the lights went out. It was July 13, 1977, a hot, muggy night here in Manhattan. Lightning strikes set off a cascade of mechanical failures at Con Edison that plunged virtually the entire city into darkness.

Nine million people were without power. Thousands had to be rescued from the subway tunnels. And there was looting – lots of looting. A thousand fires were set, 1,600 stores were ransacked and 3,400 were arrested. The total economic damage was estimated at more than \$300 million – well over a billion in 2017

dollars.

I was having dinner at my then-girlfriend's apartment when the lights went out. We tuned in a small, battery-powered radio and listened as news began spreading of trouble and violence around the city. The two of us stayed where we were and the next morning I walked back to my place a few blocks away. West 57th Street was almost empty; small groups of people gathered in front of their buildings talking about what had happened.

The power remained out and I climbed the 11 stories to my darkened studio apartment but the water was still pumping and I could shower and change. I worked at our public television station, WNET/Channel Thirteen, and the offices were closed. But their electricity already was back, so I went up to the local news department to see whether anyone was around. I was put to work writing news copy about the events of the night and advisories about closings that would be read on the air when the transmitter was up and running again.

That was one bizarre, long hot summer, 1977, and not simply because of the massive blackout. The city still was trying to pull itself from near-bankruptcy, just two years after the New York *Daily News* had reported the federal government's refusal to help with the front page headline, "FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD." (Not long after, Congress begrudgingly enacted and President Ford signed legislation that loaned the city \$2.3 billion with interest.)

New York's budget was taken over by an Emergency Financial Control Board, administered by the state. Police layoffs contributed to a rise in crime. The ruins of buildings in the South Bronx became a symbol of urban decay and new structures abandoned in mid-construction littered the skyline like so many rotten teeth. The subway system was falling apart, the cars smeared with graffiti; in just a year, ridership had dropped by 25 million passengers.

A Political Challenge

So roiled was the political scene in 1977 that incumbent Democratic Mayor Abe Beame, accused of gross incompetence, was challenged in his party's primary by five other candidates, including Ed Koch, Mario Cuomo and Bella Abzug. Eventually, Koch won the mayoralty and served for three terms.

And throughout that summer there was a serial killer whose brutality seemed a metaphor for what was happening to New York. The self-named Son of Sam killed six and wounded eight, targeting young women in particular. The murders had begun the summer before and for months the '70s version of trolls and creeps searched the phone directory for the names of single women and called in the middle of the night, "I'm the Son of Sam. You're next."

In August, less than a month after the big blackout, and following a massive manhunt, police arrested David Berkowitz, a mail sorter for the postal service. To this day, he is serving six consecutive life sentences, one for each of those he murdered.

As hard as many of us would like to try, 1977 was a summer that's not so easy to forget, a fraught time here in the city that in some similar ways seems to afflict the entire nation today. Yet New York City, a haven for finance and banking's cynical buccaneers and mountebanks, rebounded from its '70s fiscal crisis. Of all the cities in the world, it is second only to Tokyo in gross domestic product (GDP). We're in the midst of a \$43 billion construction boom that just keeps growing.

But the transit system is falling apart again. The state of its infrastructure is dire. Subway service is starting to seem as bad as it was 40 years ago – without the graffiti. Local and state government say that overcrowding on the trains is wearing down the tracks and rolling stock. Major, commuter-disrupting repairs are taking place on rotting railroad lines leading in and out of Penn Station – the head of Amtrak euphemistically calls it "the summer of renewal."

Homelessness and Mansions

Homelessness in the city is higher than it has been since the Great Depression. Rents have risen 22 percent since 1990 and 20.6 percent of New Yorkers live in poverty. Income inequality in the city continues to be an outrage. According to the last census, it's the worst in the United States.

Debipriya Chatterjee, an economist with the city's Independent Budget Office reports that, "At the very top, it's the top 0.1 percent who own 24 percent of the city's income," She told the website Gothamist, "We all know that the city is very unequal. What I did not anticipate seeing in the data is that the share of the bottom 50 percent has actually fallen."

In other words, in this city of millions, 3,700 people raked in about 23 percent of the city's income – \$63.7 billion. As blogger Ofo Ezeugwu wrote, "Basically, while most of us find ourselves embroiled in this rat race, a small chunk of folks finds themselves watching us run it."

Case in point: the gentrification of my West Village neighborhood, once a center of bohemia, radical thought and modest rents, continues to run amok. Three years ago, a couple of blocks away, a four-story building was sold for \$45 million and is being turned into a single-family mansion.

As per the website 6sqft, which got a look at the architect's plans, "[T]he mansion will have six bedrooms, two kitchens, its own elevator, a dressing room

and walk-in closet larger than most apartments, a 50-foot lap pool, and more than 4,000 square feet of outdoor space that will include a rooftop terrace.”

Ironically, the building had been a headquarters for the foster and child-care agency The New York Foundling, which since 1869 has fought the devastating effect of poverty and lack of opportunity for destitute children and families. And the buyer? He and his brother run a health care hedge fund. Of course they do.

In fairness, the millions made from the sale of the former orphanage will go to new programs for those families, so you might be thinking it’s a decent exchange. But the constant conversion of properties into luxury vanity homes, especially buildings once used for the public good, seems wrong at a time and in a place where affordable housing for those in desperate need is increasingly nonexistent.

We are New Yorkers and we will carry on; it’s what we do. But like that hot muggy July night 40 years ago, we feel increasingly powerless.

Michael Winship is the Emmy Award-winning senior writer of *Moyers & Company* and *BillMoyers.com*. Follow him on Twitter: [@MichaelWinship](https://twitter.com/MichaelWinship). [This article originally appeared at <http://billmoyers.com/story/turning-off-lights-taking-away-power/>]

Rising Budget Stakes for Space Warfare

Exclusive: As a backdrop to the Russia-gate hysteria and the heightened fear of China is a budget war over how much U.S. taxpayer money to pour into space warfare, explains Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

There’s a civil war being fought on our nation’s soil, right in our capital. It pits the Secretary of Defense and senior generals against a bipartisan band of militant legislators who accuse the Pentagon of standing pat while Russian and China work to achieve military superiority over the United States in space.

No doubt these bureaucratic warriors will eventually call a truce. But in the meantime, the American people will almost certainly become less secure and more indebted (in budget terms) as a result of both sides’ macho posturing for new warfighting capabilities in space (differing mostly on how far and how fast to go).

Eager congressional advocates of space warfare have attached an amendment to the House defense authorization bill requiring the Pentagon to create a new U.S. Space Corps to join the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard by 2019. Currently, the Air Force oversees most space warfare projects.

The amendment has sent senior Pentagon leadership into a tizzy. Secretary of Defense James Mattis “strongly” urged Congress to rescind the requirement, stating in a letter that “it is premature to add additional organization and administrative tail to the department at a time I am trying to reduce overhead.”

Similarly, Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson protested that the proposal will simply “add more boxes to the organization chart.” Meanwhile, Gen. John W. Raymond, commander of Air Force Space Command, insisted that his service has space matters well in hand. (He should be happy – the Pentagon recently raised his position to a 4-star rank.)

Upping the Ante

In response, Rep. Mike Rogers, an Alabama Republican and chairman of the Strategic Forces subcommittee, announced that he was “pissed” and “outraged” at the Air Force for fighting the new Space Command, saying its obstructionism would “set back efforts to respond to adversaries and space threats” and allow Russia and China “to surpass us soon.”

“The Air Force leadership would have us trust them: I don’t think so,” Rogers sneered, as if speaking about the Russians. “They just need a few more years to rearrange the deck chairs: I don’t think so. This is the same Air Force that got us into the situation where the Russians and the Chinese are near-peers to us in space.” He vowed, “We will not allow the status quo to continue.”

Behind all the fiery argumentation lies a bipartisan consensus that the United States must sharply increase its spending on the militarization of space to maintain global supremacy. Gen. Raymond applauded Congress for recognizing the “national imperative” of his mission to “normalize, elevate, and integrate space as a war-fighting domain.”

Secretary Wilson published an op-ed column last month on her new initiatives to “develop space airmen who have the tools, training, and resources to fight when – not if – war extends into space.” She fully expects Congress to follow through on her request for a 20 percent increase in Air Force space funding. (Total military spending on space, including non-Air Force programs like the National Reconnaissance Office, came to about \$22 billion last year.)

What’s driving all this activity – aside from baser motives of bureaucratic advantage and financial gain – are “intelligence assessments” that “China

and Russia have aggressive programs to both demonstrate and produce eventual operational capability to . . . attack our space assets across the spectrum,” in the words of David Hardy, acting deputy undersecretary of the Air Force for Space.

“While we’re not at war in space, I don’t think we can say we’re exactly at peace, either,” said Navy Vice Adm. Charles A. Richard, deputy commander of U.S. Strategic Command, in March. Gen. John Hyten, head of the Pentagon’s Strategic Command, recently declared that the United States needs not only a good defense, but “an offensive capability to challenge” space threats from Russia and China.

The High Stakes in Space

The stakes are potentially huge because the United States uses space for all manner of command, control, and intelligence missions, not to mention civilian applications. Orbiting satellites provide near-real-time images of conflict zones, sense missile launches and nuclear tests, provide precise positioning coordinates to guide weapons systems, and route secure communications to remote regions of the globe.

Of some 1,400 operational satellites currently in orbit, 40 percent belong to the United States, nearly twice as many as Russia and China combined. About 150 U.S. satellites serve military applications.

Any threat to satellites would thus pose a serious, even disproportionate military risk to the United States. But instead of supporting international initiatives to put space off limits to warfare, Washington has led the way in developing anti-satellite missile technology, encouraging a space arms race that puts our assets in peril.

The United States and Russia experimented with primitive anti-satellite technology as far back as the 1960s, but the United States first used a missile fired from a fighter jet to destroy an aging satellite in 1985. Not until 2007 did China conduct a similar test, blowing up an old weather satellite, while emphasizing its interest in multilateral talks to prevent the weaponization of space. The following year, the United States used a Navy interceptor missile to shoot down a dying military satellite. Russia followed suit with an anti-satellite test in 2015, proving that no military advance goes unanswered.

Some Key Facts

Alarmists who selectively cite Russian and Chinese activities to warn of an impending military space “gap” ignore a few key facts:

1. The United States holds a clear technology lead and spends at least 10

times more on military space operations than *every other country* on earth combined.

2. Although U.S. satellites are vulnerable to attack, most have maneuvering capabilities, shielding against various forms of radiation, and jam-resistant communications.
3. For years, Russia, China and other nations have sought to control the spread of weapons into space – only to face consistent opposition from Washington.

An Outer Space Treaty signed in 1967 limited only the deployment of nuclear weapons in space. In 2002, the George W. Bush administration withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty with Russia, opening the door to widespread deployment of weapons that put U.S. satellites at risk. A year later, the Air Force declared in its Strategic Master Plan that “the ability to exploit space while selectively disallowing it to adversaries is critically important and . . . an essential prerequisite to modern warfare.”

Candidate Barack Obama proposed an international “code of conduct” in space, but as president he met resistance from the State Department and Pentagon, and dropped the idea as U.S.-Russia relations soured. In 2011, Congress passed an amendment banning cooperation with China in space, thus encouraging a military space race between our countries.

In 2014, the United Nations General Assembly voted 126 to 4 to pass a Russian resolution banning an arms race in space. The four dissenting countries were Georgia, Israel, Ukraine – and the United States.

Because the United States depends on space more than any other nation, both for military security and commerce, it has the most to lose if wars spread into space. Instead of relying only on military superiority to keep us safe, the time is long overdue to pursue diplomatic options for arms control – which potentially could help us achieve greater security for far less money.

“Unfortunately, the structural inertia that supports and, indeed, advocates, aggressive space postures requiring expensive weapon systems is strong,” notes Joan Johnson-Freese, a professor of national security affairs at the Naval War College and expert on space warfare. “Congressional support for their efforts is easily garnered, as building hardware creates lucrative jobs and corporate profits, whereas diplomacy does not.

“But if the goal of U.S. space security efforts is to maintain stability in space so it can fully utilize its space assets, then the time seems ripe for proactive diplomatic leadership and, at the same time, sustained strategic restraint. Otherwise, the U.S. will be seen (not for the first time) as

advocating a policy of do-as-we-say-and-not-as-we-do regarding pursuit of offensive space capabilities.”

Johnson-Freese is not alone in her call for fresh new thinking about space warfare. A [2016 policy paper](#) that she co-authored was published of all places by the Atlantic Council – a pro-NATO, Pentagon-funded think tank.

Its introduction declared, “The days of ‘space dominance’ are over and we need to move from thinking of space as a military domain of offense and defense to a more complex environment that needs to be managed by a wide range of international players. Doing so would calm growing tensions in space and, with deft management, lead to a more stable, peaceful space domain.”

The author of those words was retired Marine Gen. James Cartwright, former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They are words that sensible Americans – who want a safer world and a sane limit on military spending – should rally round. We will stand a greater chance of preserving our civilization if we reserve space wars for movies and novels.

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Another Attack on Honduran Rights Activist

Defending indigenous and environmental rights in Central America can be a very dangerous undertaking, with an account of a new attack on the daughter of slain Honduran activist Berta Cáceres, as Dennis J Bernstein reports.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Bertha Zuñiga, daughter of slain indigenous and environmental rights campaigner Berta Cáceres, has survived an attack by three men armed with machetes who then tried to force Zuñiga and two co-workers off the road twice before the activists escaped serious harm.

Zuñiga had only recently been named leader of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras, or COPINH, the indigenous rights organization co-founded and led by her mother. The elder Cáceres was murdered in her home a little over a year ago, only a week after she was threatened for opposing a major hydroelectric project in Honduras. The elder Cáceres was the recipient of the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize for her grassroots environmental work in Honduras.

I spoke on July 5 with Silvio Carrillo, nephew of Berta Cáceres, about the recent attack on his first cousin, Bertha Zuñiga. Carrillo runs the website BertaCaceres.org.

Dennis Bernstein: This is not a happy occasion. I know you've been on the phone, you've been e-mailing around. Maybe you can tell us, as best as you can, what you know about what happened in terms of the assassination attempt on Bertha Zuñiga.

Silvio Carrillo: It was three women from the organization COPINH, that my aunt founded, Bertha's mother. And they were leaving and they were confronted by these men wielding machetes. And they quickly got into the car, and they took off. They had a driver. The driver was savvy enough to get away from them quickly, and then they tried again to run them down, and run them off the road.

[...] I saw it on Twitter, that's where I heard about it. And it was hours [after the attempt] that I heard about it. And I immediately alerted the NGOs that work with us here in the U.S. that my aunt used to work with. And we started getting in touch with the embassy to find out what they were doing about it. And, to my surprise, when I reached the embassy the next day, they told me they knew nothing about it.

DB: They hadn't heard about this at all? Very high profile.

SC: Right. I mean it was already on Twitter. So, if I'm catching it, you know, 3,000 – 4,000 miles away, one night when I'm in bed, and it was hours after it had happened, they had no clue. Now, they told me, what they said was, "We apologize for the late response, that it's a holiday weekend." It was July 4th weekend.

So, anyway, I heard back from him just now, actually, to check in to see if they had—this is the embassy that I reached out to, again—to see if they had an update. And they said, "Well, it looks like the police spoke to the man that was driving the car. But, it's turned into a he-said, she-said. Where he says that that's not actually what happened. It was a misunderstanding." And so, the police are just like ... shrugging their shoulders. I mean, this isn't a surprise, right?

DB: A "misunderstanding."

SC: Right.

DB: But the embassy is engaged now?

SC: That's the extent of... all they can do is ask, and say "Hey, attorney general

... can you find out about this? Tell us what the police are saying.” And so, that’s how it goes. And this is how I find out any information about what’s happening in Honduras, like believable information, is I have to go to the U.S. embassy and say, “Hey, look, you know the government is not providing us with information, they are not doing this, they are not doing that.” And the embassy sends them an e-mail or gives them a call to the attorney general, and says “Why aren’t you doing this?”

DB: This he-said, she-said, in the context of who it is that we’re talking about here, makes it really unbelievable. Now [Zuñiga] has only been head of the organization about three weeks?

SC: A few weeks, yeah. She was just elected, named by the organization, they had elections, internal elections.

DB: And what was she doing, before she was attacked?

SC: They were in a community meeting. They were talking to organizers in this small town that are having an issue with their water. They’re not getting the water that they used to get because a dam has been built that has rerouted the water for the dam. And so this village isn’t getting water, and they want help from COPINH to help them fight against the government, so that they can get some water back in their town.

DB: And, of course, fighting against the dam and the dams, those were the things that got your aunt killed. Because she was very effective.

SC: Yeah. Now ... she had managed to get ... what happened in the dam, Agua Zarca, that my aunt was fighting against, the builders pulled out. This was the largest dam builder in the world, a company called Sinohydro, a Chinese company. They pulled out... but they only pulled out after the military, the Honduran military, shot point blank at one of the protestors. So this is the price we’ve been paying, Hondurans have been paying. They’re paying with their lives. Clearly, it’s continuing, nothing’s changed even though Berta was killed 16, 17 months ago.

DB: That’s amazing. And we are talking about an attack on Berta’s... we believe that there was an attack on Bertha, she’s 26 years old. She is the daughter of Berta Cáceres. And apparently these folks are unrelenting. What will be the strategy? Obviously, just like your aunt kept going, I imagine your cousin is going to keep going because this is what you all are doing.

SC: That’s right. We’re not going to let this happen again. We are doing everything we can from here. And we’re gaining more and more tools, more and more allies because we’ve been working... doing a lot of work on the ground, on

social media, making sure people know what's happening. We've got the Berta Cáceres Act which was introduced on March 2nd by Representative Hank Johnson from Georgia. And we've got about 60 co-signers.

DB: Remind people what that is.

SC: So, the Berta Cáceres Act is HR1299. And this act will prohibit security funding to the Honduran government which is using \$18 million, it's only \$18 million, but it's a message. And they're using this money to militarize their police force. And so they're arming them to the teeth. But they don't have the training, they don't have the wherewithal, they don't have the decency to not be corrupt. And every one of these government agencies is extremely corrupt. And so they shouldn't be arming them to the teeth.

They're essentially private police forces. And they were protecting the dam that my aunt was fighting against. I mean, how can that be? They were told by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to protect my aunt. The police were supposed to have been protecting my aunt. Instead they were protecting the dam. What kind of world is this where these things are allowed to happen?

And so the strategy going forth is to put an end to ... our tax dollars being used to pay for the Honduran military to get armed to the teeth, and police to get armed to the teeth. And so, that's where we're headed, and we've been making some great headway. We've got a lot of great response from California Congress people and we still need to get many, many more, especially here in the Bay Area. We don't have every Democrat signed on, but we're fighting to do so.

DB: Now, there's every reason to question the role, or how active the United States embassy and U.S. officials are going to be in this context because they're compromised. Part of the resistance has to do with the amount of military presence that the United States has on the ground in Honduras. Right? [...]

SC: Every time I fly in [to Honduras], I always see Americans that look like they are military personnel going in. I go in at random times, random flights, and every single time, they are there. This country is full of military from the U.S. And there's more and more of that because this is such a strategic place, in Latin America.

It's a good perch to watch the rest of Latin America. And so, ideally, what you would be doing is, if you're going to perch yourself there, you would want to, instead of helping to militarize this country even more, you would probably want to help the country gain some control in their corruption. Because this is a problem.

The reason the U.S. has to be there, or thinks it has to be there, is because of the drug trafficking coming into the U.S. Well, a lot of that is done by the people, the functionaries in the government, and the military, and the police.

DB: That's sort of a narco-dictatorship.

SC: Yeah, it absolutely is.

DB: ...posing as a democracy.

SC: Right. That is right. It's a kleptocracy, a narco-democracy. There's a study that was done by a researcher named Sara Chase for the Council on Foreign Relations. [Chase] did a study on the Honduran government and it's essentially a kleptocracy. And they are heavily involved in drug trafficking here to the U.S.

So, the U.S. is really exacerbating the problem, and not helping the situation, not helping Hondurans ... come to a place where they have at least somewhat of a corruption-free government. And where heroes like Berta Cáceres, and Bertha Cáceres are cultivated. Where people believe and look at heroes, like little girls and little boys can see, look up to people like Berta or Bertha, and say, "Gosh, I want to be like her. I want to make my country great." You know like, apparently that's what Donald Trump is doing here. We should have that same ability to do that in Honduras, and we don't.

DB: How would you describe the role of the government, sort of government police, in the context of it being sort of the death squad capitol of the region? What's the role of the government? How does that work?

SC: Well, it's hard to describe, because the government really does things in very... in unofficial ways. There's laws, there's secrecy laws, there's all kinds of police actions that take place, there's raids, but all under this veil of secrecy. So you never know what's going to happen at any moment.

DB: Would you say that all community activists are in jeopardy in Honduras, now? Those who are being somewhat effective whether they're working within the school system, or wherever they're working?

SC: Absolutely. And there's a lot of homophobia. There's a lot of people that are in jeopardy, because... whether they're organizing, or they're protesting, or they're signing petitions. They're finding out the names of people. And they're coming after them. And the government has also passed laws criminalizing protests.

DB: Really?

SC: I mean, yeah, this is unbelievable. It's a dictatorship essentially,

already.

DB: And the idea, or what it appears to be, the idea of U.S. involvement besides the military, it's sort of their free trade zone. That's the vision of the United States government, is Honduras becomes a free trade zone. So the people who can't even travel the way they used to, on certain roads, in certain ways, because of what's happened.

SC: Right, they're selling off... they're not just selling off the water rights, which they have, the Honduran government. They've sold roads and put in tolls. Tolls! ... In the second poorest country in Latin America. People are incredibly impoverished people, and they are being charged tolls by the government because the government privatized some major arteries.

So they are making money hand over fist. Meanwhile people now, in addition to being poorly educated, having poor government resources, they are now being taxed, and killed indiscriminately. Under 5% of the murder cases in Honduras ever get solved. How can the U.S. government support that, and say everything is okay in Honduras? I mean that's really what you have to ask your congressman.

DB: And what is your cousin doing now? Are they trying to think of ways to be more secure? I imagine there's an international outpouring? We just have a minute.

SC: There's been a lot of support, certainly here from the U.S. and the organizations we work with. She is actually getting ready to come to the U.S., to New York, next week, to make some appearances, and to speak to people and tell them what's been happening in Honduras, like the reality, and not what the government of Honduras is peddling here in the U.S. They've got groups lobbying for them, P.R. firms lobbying for them. We don't have any of that money that they are using, that power.

And so, we have to do this on our dime. Bertha is coming on NGO dime money and doing what she needs to do ... so that her mother's death isn't in vain. We're not going to let up. We're not going to be intimidated by this. Of course, we fear for our Bertha's life, as we did with Berta's life. But what's the alternative? As Berta used to say to me, "What is our alternative? Do we just sit down and take it? Of course not."

DB: You do have a web site. What's the best way for people if they want to follow this, if they want to get more information?

SC: There's a Facebook site called [facebook.com/justiceforBerta](https://www.facebook.com/justiceforBerta). There's also a Twitter [@justiceforBerta](https://twitter.com/justiceforBerta) and there's a website bertacasares.org.

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.

Trump’s Empty Promise on War Savings

Although President Trump promised to avoid unnecessary wars, he still is seeking a major increase in the already gigantic U.S. military budget, a risky contradiction, says Ivan Eland.

By Ivan Eland

President Donald Trump has always had contradictions in his “tough guy” national security policy. For starters, he has proposed a nearly 10 percent increase in defense spending, but also claims that his demands for U.S. allies to spend more on defense are producing results.

And during his campaign, he alluded to the need to stay out of unneeded wars. If allies pay more and the United States stays out of pointless brushfire wars, the U.S. government could seemingly spend less, not more, on defense.

However, allied defense spending is probably not going to increase that much.

Our wealthy allies have long allowed the United States to spend most of the money on security, so that they can use their money to compete with U.S.

commercial interests on the world market without fully opening their markets to American products and services. Trump is right to pressure the allies to do more, but they really won’t unless the United States tells them they are mostly on their own to provide security.

Also, it remains to be seen whether an American president with already the most powerful military in human history, both absolutely and relatively (the United States spends on defense what the next seven highest spending countries do), can avoid the temptation to needlessly meddle in the affairs of other countries.

Recent presidents from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama have been unable to resist the urge.

Trump succumbed to the lure of playing to his political base by demonstrating that he was tougher than his predecessor by launching a mere cosmetic cruise missile strike against Bashar al-Assad’s Syria for allegedly using chemical weapons. Furthermore, his generals are pressuring him to re-escalate the long-lost war in Afghanistan.

Apart from these contradictions in the use of conventional military forces, Trump has promised to overhaul a nuclear arsenal that he has called “obsolete.” Barack Obama left him an expensive program – \$1 trillion over 30 years – to

revamp the nuclear triad of bombers, land based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that the cost of that gargantuan program has already skyrocketed 20 percent to \$1.2 trillion. If past defense programs are any guide, the expenses will continue to escalate over time, because the government procures weapons using a highly regulated and inefficient manner.

And Trump's post-election promise that the United States "must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability" has not even been figured into his already bogus budget of substantial tax cuts paid for by fantasy levels of economic growth (like the "cooked" budgets of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, which racked up huge budget deficits and thus accumulated mounting national debt).

Unnecessary Upgrades

Upgrading the oldest and most vulnerable of the legs of the triad – the land-based ICBMs – would be among most costly parts of the Trump administration's military buildup. The good news is that the United States could get rid of this leg of the triad and not be any less safe. The same could be said of the aging U.S. nuclear-capable bomber force. In short, after the Cold War, the United States no longer needs all the 1,550 nuclear warheads allowed by the 2010 treaty on strategic weapons with Russia.

For decades, the Chinese wisely avoided getting swept up in the farcical nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. They developed only a minimum long-range nuclear deterrent – enough long-range missiles to inflict enough atomic damage on other countries to deter them from attacking China with nuclear weapons. (This policy might change because the Chinese believe expensive and destabilizing U.S. missile defenses could begin to nullify this minimum deterrent.) China used savings from avoiding a nuclear arms race for economic development at home, which helped it to become a global economic powerhouse.

The United States needs to do the same to effect a much-needed economic renewal. U.S. ballistic missile submarines are still the quietest in the world and are invulnerable to attack. After scrapping the unneeded bomber and land-based missile legs of the triad, more resources could be funneled into buying a new generation of such submarines. Also, the destabilizing new U.S. cruise missile could be cancelled.

Fewer nuclear weapons platforms and launch vehicles would require fewer warheads, thereby also allowing a reduction in the expensive nuclear infrastructure, including closing some of the redundant nuclear laboratories. Pricey strategic missile defenses could also be scrapped, because they still don't work very well and may motivate other countries, such as China, to just

build more warheads.

Despite President Trump's rhetoric, over time, he will not be able to afford unneeded defense profligacy, especially in nuclear weapons. The triad should be reduced to a "monad" of submarines and their invulnerable ballistic missiles and maybe even to a level of such platforms and armaments that provide minimum nuclear deterrence.

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Ten Problems with Anti-Russian Obsession

Many anti-Trump Americans see the Russia-gate "scandal" as a way to derail Donald Trump, but this political opportunism has fed a dangerous anti-Russian hysteria and led Democrats to ignore why they really lost, says Rick Sterling.

By Rick Sterling

The U.S. mainstream media and Democratic Party politicians have built a major "scandal" out of accusing Russia of "meddling" in the U.S. election to help Donald Trump win the presidency and possibly even colluding with his campaign to do so. The charges began as "allegations" but now are routinely asserted as facts.

The Washington Post recently ran a long article claiming all the above plus saying the operation was directed by Russian President Putin himself and implying not enough has been done to "punish" Russia. The July-August 2017 edition of Mother Jones magazine features an article headlined "We Already Know Trump Betrayed America. Collusion? Maybe. Active Enabling? Definitely."

Is this effort to indict Russia and condemn Trump based on facts or political opportunism? Does it help or hurt the progressive cause of peace with justice? Following are major problems with the "anti-Russia" theme, starting with the lack of clear evidence.

1) Evidence from CrowdStrike is dubious.

Accusations that Russia stole and released the Democratic National Committee (DNC) emails are based on the findings of the private company CrowdStrike. The DNC did not allow the FBI to scan the computers but relied on a hired private company which claims to have found telltale Russian alphabet characters (Cyrillic) in the computer memory. However, CrowdStrike is known to be political

biased, to be connected to the Clintons and to make false accusations such as this one documented by Voice of America. Recently, the Wikileaks "Vault7" disclosures revealed that the CIA has developed software which purposely leaves foreign language characters in memory, casting further doubt on the CrowdStrike evidence.

2) The Steele Dossier looks fictitious.

The accusations of Trump-Russia collusion and Putin's personal involvement are significantly based on the so-called "Steele Dossier," a 35-page compilation of "opposition research" on Trump by a former MI6 officer Christopher Steele. The research and reports by Steele first were contracted by anti-Trump Republicans in the primary race and then by Clinton supporters in the presidential race.

There is no supporting evidence or verification of the dossier's claims; the reports are essentially that a Kremlin source says such-and-such. It has since been revealed that Steele was not in direct contact but collected the information via Russians in the U.K. who in turn received it from supposed Kremlin insiders.

The reports were viewed skeptically by media, politicians and the intelligence community through the summer and fall of 2016. But elements of the dossier became public prior to the election, and it was published in full in the days before Trump's inauguration, including sensational stories of "golden showers" by prostitutes urinating on Trump to "defile" the bed in Moscow's Ritz-Carlton Hotel where the Obamas previously slept.

Is the Steele dossier accurate or was it a P.R. dirty trick designed to damage Trump? The latter seems at least if not more likely. This Newsweek article, "Thirteen things that don't add up in the Russia-Trump intelligence dossier," lists some of the reasons to be skeptical.

3) The "assessment" from several (not 17) Intel Agencies gives no evidence and seems politically biased.

On Jan. 6, the office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) released a 14-page document titled "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections." The report says Russian President Putin ordered a campaign including cyber activity along with "overt efforts" to influence the election through official media (RT) and social media. Half of the report (seven pages) is devoted to describing the effectiveness and growth of the Russian-sponsored news outlet known as "RT," including faulting RT for sponsoring debates among third-party U.S. presidential candidates in 2012 and for covering the Occupy Wall Street protests.

The report gives no solid evidence that the Russians did covertly interfere with the U.S. elections in 2016, acknowledging that the report “does not and cannot include the full supporting information, including specific intelligence and sources and methods.” The report further admits that its “judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

So, should this report be accepted uncritically? Not if you consider past performance. The CIA has a long history of deception and disinformation, including “politicized intelligence” to support the goals of presidents and other senior officials. One clear example was the false claims about Iraq’s WMD that led to the U.S. invasion in 2003.

In addition, the intelligence leadership has been known to lie under oath. For example, President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, who issued the Jan. 6 report, lied in testimony before Congress regarding the extent of the National Security Agency’s monitoring of American citizens’ private communications. The truth was later revealed by whistleblower Edward Snowden, forcing Clapper to retract his statement.

In short, there is no good reason to uncritically accept the statements and assertions of the U.S. intelligence community. Plus, the oft-repeated claim that all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concurred in the Russia assessment was never true. There was no community-wide assessment, which would have required some form of a National Intelligence Estimate or NIE and would have included dissents as well as consensus judgments.

In raising the Russia meddling allegation last October – before the presidential election – Clapper simply claimed to be speaking for the Intelligence Community and that was then falsely interpreted to mean that all 17 intelligence agencies agreed. A formal assessment – though not an NIE – was not undertaken until December leading to the Jan. 6 report, which was the work of what Clapper later described as “hand-picked” analysts from three agencies: CIA, NSA and FBI.

On June 29, The New York Times ran a grudging correction to one of its stories that had repeated the false claim about the “17 intelligence agencies” although that canard continues to resonate on cable news channels as way to shut down any questioning of what has become the new groupthink believing in “Russian meddling.”

Another reason to be skeptical is the fact that Trump and elements of the Intelligence Community have clashed and some senior intelligence officials may be looking to pay back the President. Even Democratic Sen. Chuck Schumer warned

Trump about the dangers of bucking the CIA and other agencies: “They have six ways to Sunday at getting back at you.”

What better way of getting back at Trump than shining a bright light on the Steele dossier by including a summary of its contents as a classified annex to the Jan. 6 report, thus giving credence to the third-hand accusations and giving news organizations a peg for publishing the salacious allegations?

Finally, it is significant that the NSA would only grant “moderate confidence” to the accusation that “Putin and the Russian Government aspired to help President-elect Trump’s election chances.” Page 13 of the Jan. 6 report explains that moderate confidence means the information is “plausible but not of sufficient quality or corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence.”

In an apparent reference to those NSA doubts, The Washington Post reported on June 25 that “Some of the most critical technical intelligence on Russia came from another country, officials said. Because of the source of the material, the NSA was reluctant to view it with high confidence.”

Though the Post did not identify the country, this reference suggests that another key element of the case for Russian culpability was based not on direct investigations by the U.S. intelligence agencies, but on the work of external organizations with checkered histories.

Given the Intelligence Community’s history of deception and politicization – and especially given the false assumption about the 17-agency consensus – there is every reason to be skeptical and to demand credible and verifiable evidence about the core charge that Russia did “meddle” in the U.S. election.

4) The counter-evidence seems stronger and more factual.

Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), including William Binney, a former technical director of the NSA, asserts that the DNC email release was caused by a leak not a “hack.” The distinction is important: a hack is done over the Internet; a leak is done transferring files onto a memory stick with little or no record. VIPS believes the emails were taken by an insider who transferred the files onto a thumb drive. If the files had been transferred over the Internet, the NSA would have a record of that since virtually every packet is stored.

In addition, the publisher of the DNC and Podesta emails, Wikileaks, says it did not receive the emails from Russia. Also, Wikileaks founder Julian Assange has offered a reward for the discovery of the murderer of Seth Rich, the young DNC Director of Voter Expansion who was mysteriously murdered on July 22, 2016. When

asked if Seth Rich was the source of the DNC emails, Assange does not reply directly but it is implied.

Since Trump's November victory, there also have been accusations of "Russian interference" in European elections. But in each case, subsequent investigations showed the opposite. In Germany, France and the U.K., security services found no evidence to support the initial allegations. The French security chief dismissed the claims of the Macron campaign saying the hack "was so generic and simple that it could have been practically anyone."

5) The purported "crimes" have been wildly inflated.

The leaking of DNC and Podesta emails has been inflated into an "attack on US democracy" and an "act of war." Not to be outdone in the hyperbole department, The Washington Post article calls this "the crime of the century." It's quite astounding; even if Russia were guilty of hacking the DNC servers and the emails of Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta, the information was truthful, not "fake news" or disinformation as some mainstream media outlets have suggested. The idea that disclosing truthful and newsworthy information amounts to an "act of war" is preposterous, and indeed dangerous.

Plus, the Wikileaks-related stories were secondary problems for the Clinton campaign, far less important than the FBI closing and then re-opening the criminal investigation of Clinton's use of a private email server for her official business as Secretary of State or her labeling half of Trump's supporters as "deplorables."

And, blaming RT for reporting on shortcomings in the U.S. democratic process and faulting the network for allowing third-party candidates to have a forum – as the Jan. 6 report does – amount to an absurdity. Even former U.S. President Jimmy Carter questions whether the U.S. is a still democracy, saying: "Now it's just an oligarchy, with unlimited political bribery being the essence."

6) The anti-Russia hysteria has reduced resistance to reactionary changes in domestic policy.

For progressives, the anti-Russia hysteria has not only bordered on McCarthyistic challenges to people's patriotism but has diverted time and attention from the need to build opposition to Trump policies including the loss of net neutrality, increased military spending, reductions in environmental protection, plans to slash health-care for the poor to permit more tax cuts for the rich, and reduction in other budgets for education and social programs.

Further, the "blame-Russia" and "hate Trump" campaigns have reduced the credibility of liberals and progressives and make it harder to reach out to

white working-class Americans who voted for Trump, in part, because they felt ignored and disrespected by the national Democratic Party.

7) The DNC and Podesta leaks were not bad; they were good.

If one is to take The Washington Post's new slogan seriously – "Democracy Dies in Darkness" – you'd have to agree that shedding light on the secret machinations of the DNC and the Clinton campaign was a service to democracy, not an attack on democracy.

The leaks exposed how the DNC was violating its mandate to remain neutral during the primaries. Instead, the DNC leadership conspired to boost Clinton's candidacy and frustrate a successful challenge by Sen. Bernie Sanders. If there was an "attack on democracy," it was by the DNC leadership, not from the public release of authentic emails. And, as for the Podesta emails, they revealed the contents of Clinton's paid speeches to Wall Street, which she had sought to hide from voters, and exposed some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

8) Social media criticizing Clinton was not bad; much of the criticism was accurate.

While short on actual evidence of a Russian hack, the Jan. 6 report blames Russia for undermining "public faith in the US democratic process" by denigrating Clinton and harming "her electability and potential presidency." The report suggests that Russia was responsible for anti-Clinton online messages, tweets, Facebook posts, etc.

Yet, it was predictable that Hillary Clinton would generate a lot of opposition during the presidential campaign since she has long been a magnet for right- and left-wing criticism. She is strongly disliked by many progressives for a number of reasons, including her warmongering foreign policy. So, it should come as no surprise that social media was alive with tweets, pages, posts and campaigns against Clinton – as it was with harsh criticism of Donald Trump.

It is self-deception to think this opposition was initiated or controlled in any substantial way by Moscow. Without doubt, the overwhelming majority of the criticism directed at Hillary Clinton – and at Donald Trump – was sincere and home-grown.

9) The anti-Russia hysteria distracts from an objective evaluation of why the Democratic Party lost.

Instead of doing an honest and objective assessment of the election failure, the Democratic Party has invested enormous time and resources in promoting the narrative of Russian "meddling" and collusion with Trump. If the Democrats want

to regain popularity – and gain congressional seats in 2018 as well as the White House in 2020 – they need to look in the mirror and undertake reforms, including a shake-up of leadership which has changed very little in over 15 years.

The Democrats must confront the reality that many working-class Americans view the party as elitist and lacking a deep concern for the economic suffering of average people.

By concentrating so much energy on blaming “Russia, Russia, Russia,” the DNC also ignores that it tilted the primary race in Clinton’s favor while Sanders might well have been a much stronger candidate against Trump. In that sense, the Democratic Party’s leaders have nobody to blame but themselves for Trump’s victory.

10) The anti-Russia hysteria reduces resistance to neoconservative forces pushing for more war.

By obsessing on Russia-gate, Democrats and liberals are playing into the hands of neoconservatives and the Military Industrial Complex, which are pushing for another war in the Middle East and an expensive New Cold War with Russia. The immediate flashpoint is Syria where the Syrian government and allies are making slow but steady progress defeating tens of thousands of foreign-funded extremists.

In response, the U.S. and its allies have escalated their intervention and aggression trying to prolong the conflict and/or grab territory to block a Syrian government victory. The expanding U.S. military role in Syria also is threatening to bring about a direct clash between United States, which is operating inside Syria in violation of international law, and Russia, which has come to the aid of the internationally recognized government.

The Democratic and liberal hysteria around Russia has confused huge numbers of people who now have been led to believe that Russia is America’s “enemy” and must be confronted militarily around the world. Leading liberals are allying themselves with the CIA and war hawks, while also alienating peace voters, another important voting bloc.

Looking back over the eight months since the election, the obsession with Russia-gate may have started from shock over Trump’s election and then morphed into a resistance to his presidency (including the unlikely hope that the “scandal” would lead to his impeachment), but the hysteria has contributed to significant mistakes by those who have embraced it.

The mainstream news media jettisoned any pretense of objectivity as it joined the “hate-Russia” and “get-Trump” movement. Many Democrats and liberals also

opportunistically and uncritically accepted and promoted the anti-Russia demonization, including McCarthyistic attacks on Americans who balked at the political/media stampede and questioned the accusations as either lacking in evidence or exaggerated.

Meanwhile, Trump finds himself getting pressured by Democrats and liberals to adopt even more warlike stances – to prove that he’s not Putin’s puppet – including a slide toward a new war in the Middle East and a step onto the slippery slope that could lead to nuclear annihilation.

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Trump Takes Aim at Energy R&D Funds

Exclusive: While boasting of his plans for “American energy dominance,” President Trump is slashing key research projects and ceding much of the renewable energy market to China, notes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

In case you didn’t get the memo, the White House dubbed this “[Energy Week](#).” Though devoid of substance, President Trump took the opportunity to tout his administration’s commitment not just to energy security – how passé – but to “a golden age of American energy dominance.”

Apparently the White House budget office didn’t get the memo, either, because it still wants crippling cuts to very Department of Energy programs that help Americans get more bang for their energy bucks and fund breakthrough technology research to sustain U.S. energy leadership for decades to come.

The Trump administration proposes about [\\$3 billion in cuts to basic and applied research on energy](#). It would slash over half the funding for the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) and wipe out altogether the much-acclaimed Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E). Those priorities are [reflected](#) in legislation now being crafted by the House Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee.

EERE works with industry and federal laboratories to promote cutting-edge, marketable technology related to energy efficiency; solar, wind, bioenergy and geothermal energy production; and advanced manufacturing programs.

To date, according to the office's website, now under the supervision of Energy Secretary Rick Perry, "third-party evaluations have assessed one-third of EERE's research and development portfolio and found that an EERE taxpayer investment of \$12 billion has already yielded an estimated net economic benefit to the United States of more than \$230 billion, with an overall annual return on investment of more than 20%."

To promote visionary technologies that EERE and the private sector find too risky to fund, Congress authorized the creation of ARPA-E in 2007. It was modeled after the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), which is widely credited – among other breakthroughs – with funding the creation of the Internet and the Global Positioning System.

A Nimble Agency

ARPA-E's mission is to "enhance the economic and energy security of the United States" by reducing energy imports and pollution, improving the energy efficiency of the U.S. economy, and "ensur(ing) that the United States maintains a technological lead in developing and deploying advanced energy technologies."

Since ARPA-E first received funding in 2009, it has selectively supported some 580 R&D projects, representing a mere five percent of funding requests. Of those, 74 projects have gone on to attract more than \$1.8 billion in private funding to pursue pilot projects, 68 have partnered with the Defense Department or other government agencies to further develop their technology, and 56 have spawned new companies to commercialize their concepts.

It has also earned an enviable reputation for brilliant leadership and for a nimble, efficient operational style usually associated with successful tech companies, not government bureaucracies.

Just in time to inform the debate in Washington, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine two weeks ago issued an authoritative assessment of ARPA-E's track record and mission.

Contrary to the claims of critics, the report concluded, "The agency is not failing and is not in need of reform. In fact, attempts to reform the agency – such as applying pressure for ARPA-E to show short-term success rather than focusing on its long-term mission and goals – would pose a significant risk of harming its efforts and chances."

The report's biggest criticism: ARPA-E fails to tell its powerful story often and clearly enough to the general public.

The Trump administration's sabotage of such R&D programs comes at an especially

critical time, when vital considerations of climate, national security, and economics all cry out for more, not less, attention to clean energy.

On the climate front, time is fast running out for a global response to the threat of disruptive warming. An international group of prominent climate scientists, writing in the journal *Nature*, have just warned that without substantial reductions in carbon emissions starting in 2020, the chances are low of limiting our planet's temperature increase to a high but manageable 2 degrees Celsius.

On the national security front, the increasingly anarchic state of the Middle East, the shakiness of the Saudi monarchy, and saber-rattling by Sunni oil producing powers against Iran and Qatar, provide a convincing rationale for weaning the U.S. economy off fossil fuels as quickly as possible, so our industry and transportation sectors become less vulnerable to price shocks induced by war or political instability.

Bowing to China

And on the economic front, the Trump administration's energy sector cuts would amount to unilateral industrial disarmament against rising foreign competitors like China.

Recalling the waves of technology innovation that propelled the U.S. economy in the Twentieth Century, MIT lecturer William Bonvillian recently argued in *The American Interest* that the next great sources of growth and innovation are renewable energy (wind and solar) and vehicle electrification.

"Although U.S. R&D played a key role in creating these sectors, it has lost implementation leadership," he warned. China "now dominates world production of solar, boasting five of the world's six largest solar companies, has the largest wind turbine company, and is on track to generate a quarter of its electricity from wind by 2030.

"China did not enter wind and solar for the environmental benefits; rather, it saw them as rapidly growing advanced-technology sectors where it could dominate and capture major world export markets. It now has. While the U.S. economy maintains the overall lead in technological advances through its still-strong research in these areas, it is in the process of ceding the financial gains of production."

With 10 electric car companies ramping up production, China also threatens the U.S. lead in such vehicles. But Bonvillian cited ARPA-E's support of radical new battery technology as a potential key to creating a true mass market for clean electric vehicles while keeping the lead in the United States:

“If the next big [energy technology wave] is electric vehicles, ARPA-E is arguably a critical breakthrough innovation institution for achieving the battery advances this requires (as well as to other energy breakthroughs). Other agencies and the private sector aren’t anywhere near as well positioned.”

The good news is that Trump faces fierce opposition to his efforts to disband successful organizations like EERE and ARPA-E. Two years ago, a group of prominent business leaders, including Bill Gates and General Electric CEO Jeffrey Immelt, recommended tripling ARPA-E’s budget. ARPA-E also received strong support in June from the conservative U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Just a couple of months ago, it received the most critical endorsement of all – when Congress upped its budget for the 2017 fiscal year by \$15 million. Let’s hope that legislators continue putting our money where the jobs are and keep supporting America’s urgently needed development of clean energy.

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