The Risks of Clinton’s Syrian ‘No-Fly Zone’

Hillary Clinton’s scheme for a “no-fly zone” – if implemented without the Syrian government’s approval – would be an act of war and a risk of a nuclear showdown with Russia, says ex-Congressman Dennis Kucinich.

By Dennis Kucinich

The most consequential statement by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Wednesday night’s debate was her pronouncement that a no-fly zone over Syria could “save lives and hasten the end of the conflict,” that a no-fly zone would provide “safe zones on the ground” was in “the best interests of the people on the ground in Syria” and would “help us with our fight against ISIS.”

It would do none of the above. A U.S. attempt to impose a no-fly zone in Syria would, as Secretary Clinton once cautioned a Goldman Sachs audience, “kill a lot of Syrians,” and, according to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Dunford, lead to a war with Russia. If the U.S. has not been invited into a country to establish a “no-fly zone” such an action is, in fact, an invasion, an act of war.

It is abundantly clear from our dark alliance with Saudi Arabia and our conduct in support of jihadists in Syria that our current leaders have learned nothing from Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya as we prepare to plunge head-long into the abyss of a world war.

Our international relations are built upon lies to promote regime changes, the fantasy of a unipolar world ruled by America, and a blank check for the national security state.

As others prepare for war, we must prepare for peace. We must answer the mindless call to arms with a thoughtful, soulful call to resist the coming build-up for war. A new, resolute peace movement must arise, become visible and challenge those who would make war inevitable.

We must not wait until the Inauguration to begin to build a new peace movement in America.

Dennis Kucinich is a former congressman from Ohio and a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004 and 2008. [This commentary originally appeared at http://worldbeyondwar.org/dennis-kucinich-war-peace/]
Clinton Repackages Her Syrian ‘No-Fly’ Plan

Exclusive: In a surprise twist, Hillary Clinton dramatically revised her scheme for a “no-fly zone” over Syria, presenting it as a subject for negotiation with Syria and Russia, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

While the major news media focused on Donald Trump’s agnostic response about whether he would respect the results of the Nov. 8 election, Hillary Clinton slipped in a little-noticed but important revision to her call for a “no-fly zone” in Syria, suggesting that it would be negotiated with Russia and Syria.

“This would not be done just on the first day,” Clinton replied to a question about the military cost and human toll that imposing a no-fly zone would require. “This would take a lot of negotiation. And it would also take making it clear to the Russians and the Syrians that our purpose here was to provide safe zones on the ground.”

Before Wednesday night, Clinton had left the impression that the U.S. military would unilaterally impose a “no-fly zone” on Syria, a military action that not only would violate international law but would require a major commitment of U.S. forces to destroy Syrian air defenses and to shoot down planes from the Syrian and possibly the Russian air forces.

President Obama and the U.S. military high command have resisted pressure to implement Clinton’s suggestion because of the potential for killing large numbers of civilians and dragging the United States into a wider war, potentially a clash with nuclear-armed Russia.

Debate moderator Chris Wallace noted, “General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, says you impose a no-fly zone, chances are you’re going to get into a war – his words – with Syria and Russia. So the question I have is, if you impose a no-fly zone – first of all, how do you respond to their concerns? Secondly, if you impose a no-fly zone and a Russian plane violates that, does President Clinton shoot that plane down?”

Breaking from her usual belligerent tone, Clinton repackaged her idea as something quite different, a diplomatic initiative to persuade the Syrian and Russian governments that they should allow the creation of a “safe zone” so Syrians fleeing the fighting could have a place to live inside Syria.
Clinton said: “We’ve had millions of people leave Syria and those millions of people inside Syria who have been dislocated. So I think we could strike a deal and make it very clear to the Russians and the Syrians that this was something that we believe was in the best interests of the people on the ground in Syria, it would help us with our fight against ISIS.”

Whether the Syrian leadership and the Russian government would accept such a plan is doubtful, since it would amount to inviting the U.S. or NATO military to establish a beachhead inside Syria from which rebels, terrorists and other insurgents could operate beyond the reach of military retaliation.

Distrusting Clinton

The Syrians and the Russians are also well aware of the duplicity of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011 when she led the effort to persuade the United Nations Security Council to authorize an emergency program to protect Libyan civilians around Benghazi from an offensive by the Libyan army seeking to root out Al Qaeda-connected terror groups.

Once the Security Council agreed (with Russia abstaining rather than vetoing the plan), U.S.-coordinated airstrikes decimated the Libyan government’s forces. Next, NATO military advisers began assisting the rebels on the ground, with the “humanitarian” mission quickly morphing into a “regime change” operation, with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi driven from power, captured, tortured and murdered.

After Gaddafi’s death on Oct. 20, 2011, Clinton exulted in a TV interview, “We came; we saw; he died.”

So, a President Clinton isn’t likely to get the benefit of the doubt again, especially since she has made clear that her desire is to see Syrian President Bashar al-Assad suffer a fate similar to Gaddafi’s. Clinton’s open hostility toward Russian President Vladimir Putin, whom she’s compared to Hitler, also is not likely to make Russia eager for concessions.

But Clinton’s repackaged “no-fly zone” – as a negotiated undertaking, rather than a unilateral act of war – suggests that the Democratic presidential nominee is at least trying to present a less warmongering face to the American voters, especially to peace-oriented Democrats. Whether the American people have any more faith in Clinton’s words than the Syrians and Russians do is another question.

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
The Democrats’ Joe McCarthy Moment

Exclusive: To shield Hillary Clinton from criticism of her Wall Street speeches, the Democrats are engaging in a new McCarthyism for the New Cold War, suggesting that Donald Trump is in league with the Russians, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

My first book, Fooling America, examined Washington’s excited “conventional wisdom” around the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91 when nearly the entire political-punditry elite was thrilled about bombing the heck out of Iraq, inflicting heavy civilian casualties in Baghdad and slaughtering tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers as they fled from Kuwait.

Ironically, one of the few dissenters from this war lust was right-wing commentator Robert Novak, who actually did some quality reporting on how President George H.W. Bush rejected repeated peace overtures because he wanted a successful ground war as a way to instill a new joy of war among the American people.

Bush recognized that a brief, victorious ground war would – in his words – “kick the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all,” i.e. get Americans to forget their revulsion about foreign wars, a hangover from the bloody defeat in Vietnam.

So Novak, the anti-communist hardliner who often had baited other pundits for their “softness” toward “commies,” became on this occasion a naysayer who wanted to give peace a chance. But that meant Novak was baited on “The Capital Gang” chat show for his war doubts.

To my surprise, one of the most aggressive enforcers of the pro-war “group think” was Wall Street Journal Washington bureau chief Al Hunt, who had often been one of the more thoughtful, less warmongering voices on the program. Hunt dubbed Novak “Neville Novak,” suggesting that Novak’s interest in avoiding war in the Middle East was on par with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement of Adolf Hitler before World War II.

Months later when I interviewed Hunt about his mocking of Novak’s anti-war softness, Hunt justified his “Neville Novak” line as a fitting rejoinder for all the times Novak had baited opponents for their softness against communism. “After years of battling Novak from the left, to have gotten to his right, I
enjoyed that," Hunt said.

At the time, I found this tit-for-tat, hah-hah gotcha behavior among Washington’s armchair warriors troubling because it ignored the terrible suffering of people in various countries at the receiving end of American military might, such as the Iraqi civilians including women and children who were burned alive when a U.S. bomb penetrated a Baghdad bomb shelter, as well as the young Iraqi soldiers incinerated in their vehicles as they fled the battlefield.

In the 100-hour ground war, U.S. casualties were relatively light, 147 killed in combat and another 236 killed in accidents or from other causes. “Small losses as military statistics go,” Gen. Colin Powell wrote later, “but a tragedy for each family.” In Official Washington, however, the dead were a small price to pay for a “feel-good” war that let President Bush vanquish the psychological ghosts of the Vietnam War.

I also had the sickening sense that this “popular” war – celebrated with victory parades and lavish firework displays – was setting the stage for more horrors in the future. Already, neoconservative pundits, such as The Washington Post’s Charles Krauthammer, were demanding that U.S. forces must go all the way to Baghdad and “finish the job” by getting rid of Saddam Hussein. A dangerous hubris was taking hold in Washington.

As we have seen in the decades since, the euphoria over the Persian Gulf victory did feed into the imperial arrogance that contributed to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. At that moment, when the neocons in George W. Bush’s administration were concocting excuses for finally marching to Baghdad, there were almost no voices among the big-shot commentators who dared repeat Robert Novak’s “mistake” of 1991.

**Playing Joe McCarthy**

I mention all this now because we are seeing something similar with the Democrats as they lead the charge into a dangerous New Cold War with Russia. The Democrats, who bore the brunt of the Red-baiting during the earlier Cold War, are now playing the roles of Senators Joe McCarthy and Richard Nixon in smearing anyone who won’t join in the Russia-bashing as “stooges,” “traitors” and “useful idiots.”

When Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has one of his few lucid moments and suggests that the U.S. should cooperate with Russia rather than provoke more confrontations, he is denounced from many political quarters. But these attacks against Trump are most feverish from Democrats looking to give
Hillary Clinton a boost politically and a diversionary excuse for her Wall Street speeches that she tried so hard to keep hidden until they were released by WikiLeaks from hacked emails of her longtime adviser John Podesta.

The Obama administration’s intelligence community has claimed, without presenting evidence, that Russian intelligence was behind the Democratic Party hacks as a way to influence the U.S. election, a somewhat ironic charge given the long history of the U.S. government (and its intelligence community) engaging in much more aggressive actions to block the election of disfavored politicians abroad and even to overthrow democratically elected leaders who got in Washington’s way.

Rather than seeking to explain Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street bigwigs and other special interests, Podesta and other Democrats have simply piled on the Russia-bashing with suggestions that Trump is consorting with America’s enemies. In Wednesday night’s debate, Clinton referred to Trump as Vladimir Putin’s “puppet.”

While the Democrats may consider this strategy very clever – a kind of karmic payback for the Republican red-baiting of Democrats during the Cold War – it carries even greater dangers than Al Hunt’s putting down Robert Novak for trying to save lives in the Persian Gulf War.

By whipping up a new set of whipping boys – the “evil” Russians and their “ultra-evil” leader Vladimir Putin – the Democrats are setting in motion passions that could spin out of control and cause a President Hillary Clinton to push the two nuclear powers into a crisis that – with a simple misjudgment on the part of either nation – could end life on the planet.

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

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How to Win Friends in Latin America

The U.S. government has won more friends in Latin America by opening diplomatic ties to Cuba than by demonstrating endless belligerence, a lesson little understood in Washington, observes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar
Much gets said and written, mostly as rhetoric intended to criticize the Obama administration, about the standing of the United States in the world supposedly having declined. To the extent such rhetoric gets linked to specific policy prescription, it most often amounts to an assertion that respect for the United States derives from throwing its weight around and particularly doing so with military power. But one doesn’t have to look hard for reminders that this is not really the way the world works.

A word is in order about some of the sentiments involved and how they relate to each other. Respect is not identical with liking, but even in everyday life positive sentiments toward someone else tend to go together, and so do negative ones. It is hard to have respect for an authority figure such as a teacher or parent if one dislikes the person.

Dale Carnegie wrote a bestseller called *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and gave courses that encompassed both. The clustering of sentiment is at least as true in international relations, where the goal is to influence the behavior of both people and governments.

Riding roughshod over the sensitivities and concerns of other peoples may engender fear, but does not yield either liking or respect. Moreover, the opportunities for opposing the interests of even a superpower are sufficiently numerous that the weight-throwing approach is not a good strategy for winning influence.

Positive approaches that exhibit respect for the concerns of even those with whom one has significant disagreements are more likely to buy the sort of influence one wants. Respect engenders respect.

A reminder of such reality comes from *The Economist’s* Latin America columnist Bello, who observes a trend in attitudes in the region toward the United States during the years of the Obama administration. Far from relying on the sort of force-reliant bullying that characterized much U.S. policy toward the region over the past two centuries, Mr. Obama’s policies have involved trying to work through partners in the area.

By far the most conspicuous and significant of the administration’s policy moves in the region has been the opening to Cuba, which as the columnist notes “was applauded by both left and right across Latin America.” The impact on regional attitudes toward the colossus to the north also has been significant. In region-wide polling by Latinobarometro, the number of respondents saying they have a positive view of the United States has risen from 58 percent in 2008, the year Mr. Obama was elected, to 74 percent this year.
Bello notes that there has been a corresponding trend in governments’ attitudes and behavior. Brazil’s new government, for example, “does not place the hopes that its predecessor did in ‘south-south’ ties. Through the region, “many governments are now seeking to draw closer to the United States.”

The knock-on effects go well beyond the diplomatic orientation of incumbent governments. Bello comments that if the opening to Cuba were to be reversed – as Donald Trump has threatened to do – this “could remove any hope that the transition to a post-Castro leadership, which is due to start in 2018, will involve a loosening of political control.”

That’s the way respect and influence work in Latin America, although one would never guess that by listening to those who want to sustain the failed half-century attempt to isolate Cuba. It’s also the way they work elsewhere in the world, although one would never guess that from listening to much other foreign policy debate in the United States.

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

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**Congress Sinks to New Depths**

The sad state of American democracy – from the presidential race to Congress – is easy to lament as something beyond correction, but change is possible if the electorate starts taking citizenship seriously, says Mike Lofgren.

By Mike Lofgren

We might have thought the Congress of the United States hit rock bottom in 2011, when it nearly drove the country into a sovereign debt default. It was averted in time, but Standard and Poor’s still downgraded America’s debt rating. Or was rock bottom the government shutdown of 2013? Or was the low point reached in the summer of 2016, when the Senate refused to perform its constitutional duty to consider a Supreme Court nominee, and left a court vacancy in the midst of several important judicial decisions?

No, Congress achieved its nadir of dysfunction at the end of September, with how it handled its first veto override of Barack Obama’s presidency. The bill in question is the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA), which narrows the scope of foreign sovereign immunity from the jurisdiction of U.S. courts: a
state involved in the death of U.S persons becomes liable for court claims. The bill was intended as relief for the next of kin of those killed in the September 11, 2001 terror attacks.

Because the likeliest target of a lawsuit over the 9/11 attacks was the government of Saudi Arabia, the administration had already *issued a veto threat back in April*: rescinding sovereign immunity would immensely complicate foreign relations, could subject the United States to similar suits, and might result in the Saudis pulling *their estimated $750 billion of investments* out of American financial markets.

Congress was not about to take this affront to its institutional majesty lying down, and accordingly overrode Obama’s veto by the overwhelming votes of 348 to 77 in the House and 97 to 1 in the Senate.

Instantly, buyer’s remorse set in, accompanied by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s and House Speaker Paul Ryan’s plaintive wails that *it was all Obama’s fault* for not telling them the implications of JASTA forcefully enough – despite the fact that the administration had already threatened a veto for precisely the reasons that now weighed so heavily upon the members, and despite the fact that the whole thing was Congress’s bright idea, not Obama’s.

And, incidentally, when have the Republicans, who control both chambers, ever refrained from doing something because Obama thought it was a bad idea? Typically, he is a reverse barometer for their course of action. One suspects Obama’s actions or lack of them were irrelevant to Congress’s instant regret.

After the override vote, did the House and Senate leadership offices receive calls from some well-placed entities on Wall Street reminding them that the Saudis’ pulling their investments out of New York might kill the golden goose, as well as dampen the financial services industry’s appetite to attend fundraisers? I’ll leave further speculation to the reader.

This is not the place to analyze the merits or demerits of JASTA. Perhaps the moral and jurisprudential arguments override the principle of sovereign immunity – but Congress obviously never weighed the balance of those interests in a deliberative fashion, as it was constitutionally intended to do. Instead, members wanted cheap credit for associating themselves with 9/11 victims, and all other considerations be damned.

**Selling the Saudis Weapons**

The cherry on the cake of this tragicomedy is the fact that only a few days before approving JASTA, *the Senate agreed to a $1.15 billion sale of weapons* to the very same government of Saudi Arabia that it now wants to subject to
lawsuits on the grounds that it is presumptively involved in terrorism!

JASTA is only the tip of the legislative iceberg. Congress simply hasn’t done its job: it has not agreed to a budget resolution – the most basic blueprint for spending – since 2009, and the last time all appropriations bills were enacted by Oct. 1 (the beginning of the new fiscal year) was in 1996. Partly this is just laziness, and the growing preference of members to pontificate via press release and sound byte rather than doing the public business.

But it is hard to interpret some of it as anything other than malign intent. Congress, like any halfway awake newspaper reader, has known for the last six months that the Zika virus was an immanent menace. Yet funding for public health measures were held hostage until late September by the insistence that the measure could only pass when paired with cuts to Planned Parenthood: in other words, poorer women would not be allowed to obtain fetal screening for potential health problems, including Zika.

The Zika funding only passed when it became clear even to the most addled member of Congress that the majority of the public preferred action on public health to ideological grandstanding.

It is all too easy for the American people to throw up their hands and sigh, “Congress! There go the two parties again! Like kids in a schoolyard!” Notice how the criticism, like rain, falls on the just and the unjust alike, implying that the sad state of Congress is inevitable. There are three answers to this criticism.

First, the American people need to take greater responsibility for the people they elect. When they send a representative to Congress, it is a serious business bound up with maintenance of constitutional government. The notion of “sending a message” or “shaking things up” by inflicting a Louis Gohmert, or a Steve King, or an Alan Grayson on the country, is immature and unworthy of a serious body politic. Congress is a legislative body, not WrestleMania.

Second, there is plenty of blame to go around on a bipartisan basis – note that the veto override votes in both Houses were overwhelming. And, yes, politicians of both parties are beholden to corporate special interests. Nevertheless, the source of Congress’s extreme dysfunction lies predominantly in one party.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

For decades, the Republican Party has been damning government – established by the very Constitution that the party claims to revere. They promise to clean up the mess in Washington, and then proceed to throw sand in the gears of any possibility of orderly governance.
The resulting increased disarray then becomes their rationale to be reelected: a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is apparently a convincing argument for millions of low-information voters who want to shrink government to a size that it can be drowned in a bathtub, but also want their Social Security checks delivered on time, and with the customary cost-of-living increase.

Finally, democracies, like civilization itself, are inherently fragile. The self-brainwashing of millions of Americans by habitual exposure to the right-wing media-entertainment complex has replaced social trust with resentment, vitriol, and the perpetual hunt for scapegoats. This process has been faithfully reproduced in the actions of Congress.

At one time the inequitable political treatment of different parts of the country suffering from natural disasters would not have occurred to anyone. But with the seating of the Tea Party faction in Congress in 2011, that changed. Tornadoes in Joplin, Missouri, and Tuscaloosa, Alabama, were promptly addressed, but Red State Republicans dragged their feet in addressing 2012’s Superstorm Sandy. Why? It affected predominantly Democratic constituencies.

The same syndrome repeated itself this year: September’s inundations in Louisiana were speedily tackled, but Republicans only grudgingly included funding to solve the Flint, Michigan water crisis to avoid being blamed for another government shutdown, even though the contamination had been a nationally known issue for a year.

This kind of endemic bad faith within our national legislature provides abundant evidence that the problem in our governing institutions is not confined to nominating the occasional lunatic to be a presidential candidate. The rot extends to Congress, the focus of the very first article of the Constitution and, as James Madison believed, the premier instrument of popular self-government.

It is well past time to clean up Congress. The first step is for the electorate to understand that choices have consequences, and that voting is a serious responsibility – not just for president, but down the ballot as well.

The Right’s Made-up ‘Constitution’

From the Archive: America’s right-wingers talk fervently about protecting the Constitution but seem to have little understanding of what the Federalist framers were doing in creating a powerful central government, as Jada Thacker noted in 2013.

By Jada Thacker (Originally published on July 6, 2013)

The Cato Institute’s Handbook for Policy Makers says, “The American system was established to provide limited government.” The American Enterprise Institute states its purpose to “defend the principles” of “limited government.” The Heritage Foundation claims its mission is to promote “principles of limited government.” A multitude of Tea Party associations follow suit.

At first glance the concept of “limited government” seems like a no-brainer. Everybody believes the power of government should be limited somehow. All those who think totalitarianism is a good idea raise your hand. But there is one problem with the ultra-conservatives’ “limited government” program: it is wrong. It is not just a little bit wrong, but demonstrably false.

The Constitution was never intended to “provide limited government,” and furthermore it did not do so. The U.S. government possessed the same constitutional power at the moment of its inception as it did yesterday afternoon. This is not a matter of opinion, but of literacy. If we want to discover the truth about the scope of power granted to federal government by the Constitution, all we have to do is read what it says.

The Constitution’s grant of essentially unlimited power springs forth in its opening phrases: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

As might be expected in a preamble to a founding document, especially one written under supervision of arch-aristocrat Gouverneur Morris, the terms are sweeping and rather grandiose. But the point is crystal clear: “to form a more perfect Union.” If the object of the Constitution were to establish “limited government,” its own Preamble must be considered a misstatement.

Enumerated Powers

Article I establishes Congress, and Section 8 enumerates its powers. The first
clause of Article I, Section 8 repeats the sweeping rhetoric of the Preamble verbatim. While it provides for a measure of uniformity, it does not so much as hint at a limit on the federal government’s power to legislate as it sees fit:

“The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the United States; but all Duties, Imposts and Excises shall be uniform throughout the United States”

No attempt is made here, or at any other place in the Constitution, to define “general Welfare.” This oversight (if that is what it was) is crucial. The ambiguous nature of the phrase “provide for the general Welfare” leaves it open to widely divergent interpretations.

Making matters worse for federal government power-deniers is the wording of the last clause of Article I, the so-called “Elastic Clause”: Congress shall have power “To make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any Department or Officer thereof.”

Thus the type, breadth and scope of federal legislation became unchained. When viewed in light of the ambiguous authorization of the Article’s first clause, the importance of the “necessary and proper” clause truly is astonishing. Taken together, these clauses restated in the vernacular flatly announce that “Congress can make any law it feels is necessary to provide for whatever it considers the general welfare of the country.”

Lately there has been an embarrassingly naive call from the Tea Party to require Congress to specify in each of its bills the Constitutional authority upon which the bill is grounded. Nothing could be easier: the first and last clauses of Article I, Section 8 gives Congress black-and-white authority to make any law it so desires. Nor was this authority lost on the Founders.

“Limited government” advocates are fond of cherry-picking quotes from The Federalist Papers to lend their argument credibility, but an adverse collection of essays called the Anti-federalist Papers unsurprisingly never gets a glance. Here is a sample from New Yorker Robert Yates, a would-be founder who walked out of the Philadelphia convention in protest, written a month after the Constitution had been completed:

“This government is to possess absolute and uncontrollable power, legislative, executive and judicial, with respect to every object to which it extends. The government then, so far as it extends, is a complete one. It has the authority
to make laws which will affect the lives, the liberty, and the property of every man in the United States; nor can the constitution or the laws of any state, in any way prevent or impede the full and complete execution of every power given.”

Yates, it must be emphasized, took pains to identify the “necessary and proper” clause as the root of the “absolute power” inherent in the Constitution well over a year before ratification.

**The Tenth Amendment**

A particular darling of secession-prone, far-Right Texas Gov. Rick Perry, the Tenth Amendment is often claimed as the silver-bullet antidote for the powers unleashed by the “general welfare” and “elastic clauses.” Here is the text of the Amendment in its entirety: “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

Superficially, the Tenth seems to mean “since certain powers are not delegated to the federal government, then those powers are reserved to the states or the people.” This would seem to be good news for champions of limited government. But this is not the case.

The Tenth does not say that important powers remain to be delegated to the United States. It merely says that powers “not [yet] delegated” are “reserved” to the states or the people. This sounds like a terrific idea until we realize, of course, that all the important powers had already been delegated in 1787, four years before the Tenth Amendment was ratified.

As we have seen, the first and last clauses of Article I, Section 8 made the Tenth Amendment a lame-duck measure even as James Madison composed its words in 1791 and so it remains today. The sweeping powers “to make all laws necessary and proper” in order to “provide for the general welfare,” had already been bestowed upon Congress. The Johnny-come-lately Tenth Amendment closed the constitutional pasture gate after the horses had been let out.

This apparently has never occurred to the likes of Gov. Rick Perry and his far-Right cohorts who believe a state may reclaim power by withdrawing its consent, in effect repossessing their previously delegated power through state legislation. Superficially, the logic of this position seems sound: if the states had the legal authority to delegate power, then they may use the same authority to “un-delegate” it by law.

But a close re-reading of the Tenth’s wording nixes such reasoning. Oddly, the Tenth Amendment does not say the states delegated their powers to the federal government although it may be argued that it probably ought to have said so. It
The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution are reserved to the States."

Thus, according to the Tenth Amendment, the Constitution itself delegated the power to the federal government. States, in other words, now have no standing to “reserve-back” what they had never “delegated-away” in the first place.

Had it been possible to “un-delegate” the powers of the United States by invoking the Tenth, the Old South would have simply done so and spared itself the bother of secession not to mention the bother of being annihilated by a series of subsequent Northern invasions. The fact that the South did not even attempt such a strategy attests to the toothlessness of the Tenth Amendment.

No other instance in law would be a better example that we should choose our votes carefully. For in ratifying the Bill of Rights, which included the Tenth Amendment, the American people endorsed the legal fiction that the Constitution not the original 13 states, or “We the People” authorized the power of the United States because the Constitution itself said so. If the Constitution has an Orwellian twist, this is it no matter which side of the aisle you’re on.

The states and the people may amend the Constitution. But they may not do so by nullification (according to the logic inherent in the wording of the Tenth Amendment), or by the judgment of state courts (according to the “supremacy clause” of Article VI), nor may any Amendment be made without the participation of the federal government, itself (according to Article V.) If the Founders had meant to ensure “limited government,” there is no trace of such intent here.

Paucity of Rights

If the Constitution were intended to provide “limited government,” we might expect it to be chock full of guarantees of individual rights. This is what Tea Partiers may fantasize but this is not really true. In fact, the Constitution is amazingly stingy in reference to “rights.”

The word “right” is mentioned only once in the Constitution as ratified. (Art. I, Sec. 8 allows Congress to award copyrights/patents to ensure their holders “Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.”)

The word “right” somewhat counter-intuitively appears only six times in the ten Amendments called the “Bill of Rights.”

Almost a century later, the first of seven other rights were added under pressure from Progressive activists almost all of which were intended to create and extend democratic participation in self-government.
Amendment XIV (sanctions against states denying suffrage); XV (universal male suffrage); XIX (women’s suffrage); XXIV (denial of poll tax); and XXVI (18 year-old suffrage); and twice in Amendment XX, which gives Congress the “right of choice” in presidential succession.

In grand total, the word “right” appears only 14 times in the entire Constitution, as it exists today (including the two rights conferred to government).

Did we all notice that the “Constitution of the Founders” did not include the “right” for anybody at all to vote? Notable, too, is the absence of language implying that any “rights” are “unalienable” or “natural” or “endowed by their Creator.” All such phraseology belongs to the Declaration of Independence, which apparently unbeknownst to Tea Partiers everywhere bears no force of law.

The word “power,” by the way, occurs 43 times in the Constitution, each time referring exclusively to the prerogative of government, not right-wingers. Since “individual” rights are mentioned only 12 times, this yields a ratio of about 4:1 in favor of government power over individual rights. Without the efforts of those pesky, democracy-mongering Progressives, who fought for universal voting rights, the ratio would be more than 6:1 today or 50 percent higher.

This statistical factoid is not as trivial as it may appear. Expressed in practical terms, Michele Bachmann, Sarah Palin or Clarence Thomas would almost certainly never have achieved public office had they lived under the “limited government” designed by the Founders they so revere.

The Bill of Rights

So what exactly are our non-patent/copyright “rights,” under so-called “limited government?”

Amendment I the right of people “peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for redress of grievances”

Amendment II the right “to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed”

Amendment IV the right “to be secure against unreasonable searches or seizures”

Amendment VI the right “to a speedy and public trial”

Amendment VII the right “of a trial by jury”

Amendment IX enumeration “of certain rights” shall not deny “others retained by the people”
That’s it. What happened to the famous rights of free speech, religion or press? The way the First Amendment is worded does not enumerate these as positive rights that people possess, but rather as activities the government may not infringe upon. If Bill of Rights author James Madison had meant to stipulate them as positive “rights” all he had to do was write it that way, but he did not.

Bear in mind Madison (then a federalist) wrote the Bill of Rights under political duress. Since anti-federalists (recall the skepticism of Robert Yates) flatly refused to ratify the Constitution unless it guaranteed something, Madison had to write something. In effect, the amendments were the pig the anti-federalists had bought in the poke, three years after ratification had paid for it.

Madison, at the time of writing, had little incentive to take pains with what he wrote because federalists did not believe a Bill of Rights was necessary, or even good idea (with Alexander Hamilton arguing a Bill of Rights would be “dangerous.”) This may account for the fact that some of what Madison wrote seems vague, or even ambiguous, as in the case of Amendment II.

Amendment IX, for example, actually makes little sense, which may account for the fact nobody ever seems to mention it: “The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.”

This sounds “righteous” enough, until we recall the Constitution to which this Amendment pertains had “enumerated” only a single right in the first place! Even if Amendment IX applies to the Bill of Rights (to include itself), then all it says is “the people may have more rights than the half dozen mentioned so far, but we’re not going to tell you what they are.” (So if Amendment X is Orwellian, Amendment IX verges on Catch-22.)

Of course the idea was to calm suspicions that people would possess only the half-dozen rights enumerated in the Bill of Rights (plus patents!) and no others. Even so, Amendment IX did not guarantee any un Enumerated rights; it just did not peremptorily “deny or disparage” any.

And what sense should we make of the crucial Amendment V one of the four Bills of Rights not actually containing the word “right” at all?

“No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to
be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.” [Emphasis supplied]

Thus, life, liberty and property are not expressly granted status as fundamental “rights,” but only as personal possessions that may be deprived or taken according to “due process.” The crucial implication is that Amendment V exists in order to stipulate how the government may deny an individual claim to life, liberty or property. With due process, you life, liberty and property may be toast. That is what it plainly says.

It is interesting, too, that the Bill of Rights does not speak to the origin of rights, but only to their existence. Moreover, the Constitution never speaks of granting rights, but only protecting them. There is a good reason for this: excepting the Progressive suffrage Amendments, none of the guaranteed rights were American inventions, but had for centuries been considered the rights of the English nobility.

For those who want to believe in “American Exceptionalism” as the basis of “limited government,” this is not encouraging news. Moreover, the Constitution, including the Bill of Rights, hardly includes any “right” that had not already been recognized at one time or another by medieval English monarchs or in ancient Rome and Greece.

**Property Rights and ‘Republic’**

The strict libertarians among us claim the sole legitimate power of government is that which is necessary to protect private property rights. On this score, however, the “limited government” of the Founders is practically mute. Except for the aforementioned Article I, Section 8 provision for patents and copyrights, private “property” is only mentioned twice in the Constitution, both times in a single sentence of the “right”-less Amendment V quoted above:

“No person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.” [Emphasis supplied]

Once again, Amendment V fails to guarantee personal immunity from the power of the state, but rather details the way state power may be used to dispossess individuals of their property. And we must bear in mind these words were not penned by Marxists, socialists, or Progressives.

Whether by design or happenstance, the original “Constitution of the Founders,” or the Bill of Rights, or even the Constitution with all its Amendments does not
grant any irrevocable “right of possession” to property. Even the Second Amendment’s “right to keep” arms, is subject to the terms by which property may be taken under terms of Amendment V, and it always has been.

Tellingly, the word “democracy” does not appear in the Constitution. This intentional oversight is often smugly celebrated by anti-democrats among us, who insist that the United States of America was founded as a “republic.” No doubt this is true, given that the Constitution was written by an exclusive, hand-picked cadre of oligarchs, whose number did not include a single woman, person of color, or wage-earner.

Unfortunately for the pro-republic “limited government” crowd, the Constitution does not contain the word “republic” either. The word does appear as an adjective, but only once, (Article IV, Section 4): “The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government, and shall protect each of them from Invasion.”

Typically for the Constitution, which defines few of its terms, the word “Republican” also remains unexplained. The ambiguity of the term turned out to be handy, however, as Radical Republicans continuously and egregiously violated Article IV, Sec. 4 from 1865-1877 as they enforced blatantly unconstitutional military occupation of former Confederate states during the gross misnomer of “Reconstruction.”

It should be obvious that the “Constitution of our Founders,” including the Bill of Rights, may not protect as many rights as many wish to believe. Moreover, we have already noted the Constitution dropped all revolutionary talk of “unalienable” rights and “Creator endowed” liberty. This was not an oversight. The revolutionary bit about “consent of the governed” posed an especially delicate problem for the Founders. Almost all owned slaves or were masters of property-less tenants or domestic servants, including their wives none of whom could offer their legal consent even if they wished to do so. Thus the Founders shrewdly considered it unnecessary to include any voting rights in the new republic they planned to rule, uncontested by the disenfranchised lower castes.

Did this result in the land of the free, with liberty and justice for all? Let’s see.

Under the U.S. Constitution, Americans were sentenced to death for protesting unfair taxes; journalists and citizens imprisoned for criticizing government officials; citizens’ property seized illegally; workers murdered by government agents; thousands jailed without the “privilege” of habeas corpus; entire states deprived of civilian courts; untold numbers of American Indians defrauded of
liberty and property; debt-peonage and debtors’ prisons flourished, as did slavery and child labor; and the majority of the public was denied the vote.

All this was considered constitutional by the Founders. None of these outrages, please note, was the result of “progressivism,” which had yet to be articulated, and all were common prior to the New Deal and the advent of so-called Big Government. Was this the face of “limited government?”

No, it was not. The concept of a democratically “limited government” was not for a moment entertained by our Founders, nor is it by those who idolize them today. With few exceptions, the Founders were Eighteenth Century patricians who took a revolutionary gamble meant chiefly to perpetuate their privileges, free from English colonial overlord-ship. It should come as no surprise these elitists drafted a Constitution that posed no threat to aristocracy.

‘Limited Government’ as Act of Faith

The original Constitution of the United States of America was just so much ink on paper. The Constitution, as it stands today, is just a lot more ink on paper.

But the Constitution’s ink is important and deserves respect because it represents nothing less than the collective civic conscience of the American people. A great many Americans have dedicated their lives in trust to that conscience on battlefields, in classrooms, in everyday civic life, and even a few in the halls of power.

It is evident that most of the Amendments to the original Constitution as well as the Supreme Court’s decisions interpreting its scope and purpose were made because the document had over the course of time been found wanting by the American people, whose common interests it was not originally intended to serve. As the collective civic conscience of the people changed, so too did their interpretation of self-government.

But the entire concept of social evolution (much less biological evolution) is something the ultra-Conservative rank-and-file likely does not comprehend and it is not something their leaders encourage them to consider. The reason for this may have less to do with politics than with fundamentalist faith.

An anecdote in point: the editor-in-chief at Random House once asked the extremist libertarian Ayn Rand if she would consider revising a passage in one of her manuscripts. She reportedly replied, “Would you consider revising the Bible?”

Ergo, that which is sacrosanct neither requires nor will tolerate change to include the fantasized “limited government” of the immortalized “Founding
Fathers.” The fact that Rand was a noted atheist only underscores the point that fundamentalist faith is not restricted to any particular brand of fanaticism.

Yet the Constitution’s conception was anything but immaculate. It was not carted down from the Mount in tablets of stone, nor is it the product of some mysterious Natural Law interpretable only by libertarian gurus. And whether its meaning is best exemplified by the Tea Party flag depicting a talking snake (“Don’t Tread on Me”), perhaps only Eve could judge with authority.

The Constitution is not a holy book, and there is no good reason for anybody to treat it like one. The men who wrote it were not prophets, nor were they particularly virtuous, though some could turn a pretty phrase. In fact, the Constitution’s most unholy-book characteristic is its most welcomed attribute: its readers are not required to believe in its infallibility in order for it to make sense to them.

But we are required to read the Constitution if we want to know what it says. The ultra-conservatives’ obsession with a constitutionally “limited government,” which has never actually existed, suggests they do not understand the Constitution as much as they merely idolize it.

These constitutional “fundamentalists” along with the American public in general would do better to pick the document up and read it sometime, not fall on bended knee before it and expect the rest of us to follow their example.

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**Good Deaths in Mosul, Bad Deaths in Aleppo**

**Exclusive:** As the U.S.-backed offensive in Mosul, Iraq, begins, the mainstream U.S. media readies the American people to blame the terrorists for civilian casualties but the opposite rules apply to Syria’s Aleppo, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Note how differently The New York Times prepares the American public for civilian casualties from the new U.S.-backed Iraqi government assault on the city of Mosul to free it from the Islamic State, compared to the unrelenting condemnation of the Russian-backed Syrian government assault on neighborhoods of
east Aleppo held by Al Qaeda.

In the case of Mosul, the million-plus residents are not portrayed as likely victims of American airstrikes and Iraqi government ground assaults, though surely many will die during the offensive. Instead, the civilians are said to be eagerly awaiting liberation from the Islamic State terrorists and their head-chopping brutality.

“Mosul’s residents are hoarding food and furtively scrawling resistance slogans on walls,” writes Times’ veteran war correspondent Rod Nordland about this week’s launch of the U.S.-backed government offensive. “Those forces will fight to enter a city where for weeks the harsh authoritarian rule of the Islamic State … has sought to crack down on a population eager to either escape or rebel, according to interviews with roughly three dozen people from Mosul. …

“Just getting out of Mosul had become difficult and dangerous: Those who were caught faced million-dinar fines, unless they were former members of the Iraqi Army or police, in which case the punishment was beheading. … Graffiti and other displays of dissidence against the Islamic State were more common in recent weeks, as were executions when the vandals were caught.”

The Times article continues: “Mosul residents chafed under social codes banning smoking and calling for splashing acid on body tattoos, summary executions of perceived opponents, whippings of those who missed prayers or trimmed their beards, and destroying ‘un-Islamic’ historical monuments.”

So, the message is clear: if the inevitable happens and the U.S.-backed offensive kills a number of Mosul’s civilians, including children, The New York Times’ readers have been hardened to accept this “collateral damage” as necessary to free the city from blood-thirsty extremists. The fight to crush these crazies is worth it, even if there are significant numbers of civilians killed in the “cross-fire.”

And we’ve seen similar mainstream media treatment of other U.S.-organized assaults on urban areas, such as the devastation of the Iraqi city, Fallujah, in 2004 when U.S. Marines routed Iraqi insurgents from the city while leveling or severely damaging most of the city’s buildings and killing hundreds of civilians. But those victims were portrayed in the Western press as “human shields,” shifting the blame for their deaths onto the Iraqi insurgents.

Despite the fact that U.S. forces invaded Iraq in defiance of international law – and thus all the thousands of civilian deaths across Iraq from the “shock and awe” U.S. firepower should be considered war crimes – there was virtually no such analysis allowed into the pages of The New York Times or the other
mainstream U.S. media. Such talk was forced to the political fringes, as it continues to be today. War-crimes tribunals are only for the other guys.

**Lust to Kill Children**

By contrast, the Times routinely portrays the battle for east Aleppo as simply a case of barbaric Russian and Syrian leaders bombing innocent neighborhoods with no regard for the human cost, operating out of an apparent lust to kill children.

Rather than focusing on Al Qaeda’s harsh rule of east Aleppo, the Times told its readers in late September how to perceive the Russian-Syrian offensive to drive out Al Qaeda and its allies. A Sept. 25 article by Anne Barnard and Somini Sengupta, entitled “Syria and Russia Appear Ready to Scorch Aleppo,” began:

“Make life intolerable and death likely. Open an escape route, or offer a deal to those who leave or surrender. Let people trickle out. Kill whoever stays. Repeat until a deserted cityscape is yours. It is a strategy that both the Syrian government and its Russian allies have long embraced to subdue Syrian rebels, largely by crushing the civilian populations that support them.

“But in the past few days, as hopes for a revived cease-fire have disintegrated at the United Nations, the Syrians and Russians seem to be mobilizing to apply this kill-all-who-resist strategy to the most ambitious target yet: the rebel-held sections of the divided metropolis of Aleppo.”

Again, note how the “rebels” are portrayed as local heroes, rather than a collection of jihadists from both inside and outside Syria fighting under the operational command of Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front, which recently underwent a name change to the Syria Conquest Front. But the name change and the pretense about “moderate” rebels are just more deceptions.

As journalist/historian Gareth Porter has written: “Information from a wide range of sources, including some of those the United States has been explicitly supporting, makes it clear that every armed anti-Assad organization unit in those provinces [of Idlib and Aleppo] is engaged in a military structure controlled by Nusra militants. All of these rebel groups fight alongside the Nusra Front and coordinate their military activities with it. ...

“At least since 2014 the Obama administration has armed a number of Syrian rebel groups even though it knew the groups were coordinating closely with the Nusra Front, which was simultaneously getting arms from Turkey and Qatar. The strategy called for supplying TOW anti-tank missiles to the ‘Syrian Revolutionaries Front’ (SRF) as the core of a client Syrian army that would be independent of the Nusra Front.
“However, when a combined force of Nusra and non-jihadist brigades including the SRF captured the Syrian army base at Wadi al-Deif in December 2014, the truth began to emerge. The SRF and other groups to which the United States had supplied TOW missiles had fought under Nusra’s command to capture the base.”

**Arming Al Qaeda**

This reality – the fact that the U.S. government is indirectly supplying sophisticated weaponry to Al Qaeda – is rarely mentioned in the mainstream U.S. news media, though one might think it would make for a newsworthy story. But it would undercut the desired propaganda narrative of “good guy” rebels fighting “bad guy” government backed by “ultra-bad guy” Russians.

What if Americans understood that their tax money and U.S. weaponry were going to aid the terrorist group that perpetrated the 9/11 attacks? What if they understood the larger historical context that Washington helped midwife the modern jihadist movement – and Al Qaeda – through the U.S./Saudi support for the Afghan mujahedeen in the 1980s?

And what if Americans understood that Washington’s supposed regional “allies,” including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Israel, have sided with Al Qaeda in Syria because of their intense hatred of Shiite-ruled Iran, an ally of Syria’s secular government?

These Al Qaeda sympathies have been known for several years but never get reported in the mainstream U.S. press. In September 2013, Israel’s Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren, then a close adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, told the Jerusalem Post that Israel favored Syria’s Sunni extremists over President Bashar al-Assad.

“The greatest danger to Israel is by the strategic arc that extends from Tehran, to Damascus to Beirut. And we saw the Assad regime as the keystone in that arc,” Oren told the Jerusalem Post in an interview. “We always wanted Bashar Assad to go, we always preferred the bad guys who weren’t backed by Iran to the bad guys who were backed by Iran.” He said this was the case even if the “bad guys” were affiliated with Al Qaeda.

And, in June 2014, speaking as a former ambassador at an Aspen Institute conference, Oren expanded on his position, saying Israel would even prefer a victory by the brutal Islamic State over continuation of the Iranian-backed Assad in Syria. “From Israel’s perspective, if there’s got to be an evil that’s got to prevail, let the Sunni evil prevail,” Oren said.

But such cynical – and dangerous – realpolitik is kept from the American people. Instead, the Syrian conflict is presented as all about the children.
There is also little said about how Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front and its allied jihadists keep the civilian population in east Aleppo essentially as “human shields.” When “humanitarian corridors” have been opened to allow civilians to escape, they had been fired on by the jihadists determined to keep as many people under their control as possible.

**Propaganda Fodder**

By forcing the civilians to stay, Al Qaeda and its allies can exploit the injuries and deaths of civilians, especially the children, for propaganda advantages.

Going along with Al Qaeda’s propaganda strategy, the Times and other mainstream U.S. news outlets have kept the focus on the children. A Times dispatch on Sept. 27 begins: “They cannot play, sleep or attend school. Increasingly, they cannot eat. Injury or illness could be fatal. Many just huddle with their parents in windowless underground shelters — which offer no protection from the powerful bombs that have turned east Aleppo into a kill zone.

“Among the roughly 250,000 people trapped in the insurgent redoubt of the divided northern Syrian city are 100,000 children, the most vulnerable victims of intensified bombings by Syrian forces and their Russian allies. Though the world is jolted periodically by the suffering of children in the Syria conflict — the photographs of Alan Kurdi’s drowned body and Omran Daqneesh’s bloodied face are prime examples — dead and traumatized children are increasingly common.”

This propagandistic narrative has bled into the U.S. presidential campaign with Martha Raddatz, a moderator of the second presidential debate, incorporating much of the evil-Russians theme into a question that went so far as to liken the human suffering in Aleppo to the Holocaust, the Nazi extermination campaign against Jews and other minorities.

That prompted former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to repeat her call for an expanded U.S. military intervention in Syria, including a “no-fly zone,” which U.S. military commanders say would require a massive operation that would kill many Syrians, both soldiers and civilians, to eliminate Syria’s sophisticated air-defense systems and its air force.

Based on the recent Wikileaks publication of Clinton’s speeches to investment bankers and other special interests, we also know that she recognizes the high human cost from this strategy. In one June 2013 speech, she said, “To have a no-fly zone you have to take out all of the air defense, many of which are located in populated areas. So our missiles, even if they are standoff missiles so we’re
not putting our pilots at risk — you’re going to kill a lot of Syrians. So all of a sudden this intervention that people talk about so glibly becomes an American and NATO involvement where you take a lot of civilians.”

Yet, during the campaign, Clinton has spoken glibly about her own proposal to impose a “no-fly zone” over Syria, which has become even more dangerous since 2015 when the Russians agreed to directly assist the Syrian government in fighting Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Also, left unsaid about such a U.S. intervention is that it could open the way for Al Qaeda and/or its spinoff Islamic State to defeat the Syrian army and gain control of Damascus, creating the potential for even a worse bloodbath against Christians, Shiites, Alawites, secular Sunnis and other “heretics.” Not to mention the fact that a U.S.-imposed “no-fly zone” would be a clear violation of international law.

Over the next few weeks, we are sure hear much about the Islamic State using the people of Mosul as “human shields” and thus excusing U.S. bombs when they strike civilians targets and kill children. It will all be the terrorists’ fault, except that an opposite set of “journalistic” rules will apply to Aleppo.

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

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NYT’s Absurd New Anti-Russian Propaganda

**Exclusive:** The New York Times is so determined to generate hate against Russia that it has lost all journalistic perspective, even portraying Russia’s military decoys – like those used in World War II – as uniquely evil, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

If the dangers weren’t so great – a possible nuclear war that could exterminate life on the planet – The New York Times over-the-top denunciation of all things Russian would be almost funny, like the recent front-page story finding something uniquely sinister about Russia using inflatable decoys of military
weapons to confuse adversaries.

The Oct. 13 article, entitled “Decoys in Service of an Inflated Russian Might,” was described as part of a series called “DARK ARTS ... How Russia projects power covertly,” suggesting that the nefarious Russians aren’t to be trusted in anything even in the case of “one of Russia’s lesser-known military threats: a growing arsenal of inflatable tanks, jets and missile launchers.”

The bizarre article by Andrew E. Kramer, one of the most prolific producers of this anti-Russian propaganda, then states: “As Russia under President Vladimir V. Putin has muscled its way back onto the geopolitical stage, the Kremlin has employed a range of stealthy tactics. ... One of the newer entries to that list is an updating of the Russian military’s longtime interest in operations of deceit and disguise, a repertoire of lethal tricks known as maskirovka, or masking. It is a psychological warfare doctrine that is becoming an increasingly critical element in the country’s geopolitical ambitions.”

What is particularly curious about Kramer’s article is that it takes actions that are typical of all militaries, going back centuries, and presents them as some special kind of evil attributable to the Russians, such as Special Forces units not dressing in official uniforms and instead blending in with the surroundings while creating deniability for political leaders.

American and European Special Forces, for instance, have been deployed on the ground in Libya and Syria without official confirmation, at least initially. Sometimes, their presence is acknowledged only after exposure because of casualties, such as the death of three French soldiers near Benghazi, Libya, in July.

Indeed, one could argue that the United States has excelled at this practice of stealthily entering other countries, usually in violation of international law, to carry out lethal operations, such as drone assassinations and Special Forces’ strikes. However, rather than condemning U.S. officials for their sneakiness, the Times and other mainstream Western publications often extol the secrecy of these acts and sometimes even agree to delay publication of information about the covert attacks so as not to jeopardize the lives of American soldiers.

U.S. Propaganda Network

The U.S. government also has built extensive propaganda operations around the world that pump out all sorts of half-truths and disinformation to put U.S. adversaries on the defensive, with the American financial hand kept hidden so the public is more likely to trust the claims of supposedly independent voices.

Much of that disinformation is then promoted by the Times, which famously
assisted in one major set of lies by publishing a false 2002 front-page story about Iraq reconstituting its nuclear weapons program as a key justification for the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. Yet, the Russians are called out for activities far less egregious than what the U.S. government – aided and abetted by the Times – has done.

You could even view the Times’ article citing inflatable weapons as proof of Moscow’s perfidy as itself an example of another U.S. psychological operation along the lines of the Times’ article accusing Iraq of obtaining aluminum tubes for nuclear centrifuges, when the tubes were actually unsuited for that purpose. In this new case, however, the Times is heating up a war fever against Russia rather than Iraq.

Yet, as in 2002, this current psy-op is not primarily aimed at a foreign adversary as much as it is targeting the American people. The primary difference is that in 2002, the Times was helping instigate war against a relatively small and defenseless nation in Iraq. Now, the Times is whipping up an hysteria against nuclear-armed Russia with the prospect that this manufactured outrage could induce politicians into further steps that could lead to nuclear conflagration.

As German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier wrote in a recent opinion piece, the current tensions between Washington and Moscow are “more dangerous” than during the Cold War.

“It’s a fallacy to think that this is like the Cold War,” Steinmeier wrote. “The current times are different and more dangerous” because there were clear “red lines” during the Cold War where the rival nuclear powers knew not to tread.

Though Steinmeier, as a part of the NATO alliance, puts most of the blame on Moscow, the reality is that Washington has been the prime instigator of the recent tensions, including pressing NATO up to Russia’s borders, supporting an anti-Russian putsch in neighboring Ukraine, and helping to arm rebel groups fighting in Syria alongside Al Qaeda’s affiliate and threatening Russia’s allied Syrian government.

‘Regime Change’ in Moscow?

Further feeding Russia’s fears, prominent Americans, including at least one financed by the U.S. government, have called for a “regime change” project in Moscow. Yet all Americans hear about is the unproven allegation that Russia was responsible for hacking into Democratic Party emails and exposing information that former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has tried to keep secret, such as the content of her speeches to Wall Street investment banks and other special
interests.

Vice President Joe Biden has announced Washington will retaliate with some information-warfare strike against Moscow. But the reality is that the U.S. government, working hand-in-glove with the Times and other mainstream American publications, has been waging such an information war against Russia for at least the past several years, including promotion of dubious charges such as the so-called Magnitsky case which was largely debunked by a courageous documentary that has been virtually blacklisted in the supposedly “free” West.

The Times also has embraced the U.S. government’s version of pretty much every dubious claim lodged against Moscow, systematically excluding evidence that points in a different direction. For instance, regarding the shootdown of the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, the Times ignored a published Dutch (i.e. NATO) intelligence report stating that the only powerful anti-aircraft missiles in the area capable of hitting MH-17 were under the control of the Ukrainian military.

While it may be understandable that the Times opts to embrace claims by a Ukrainian-dominated investigation that the Russians were responsible – despite that inquiry’s evidentiary and logical shortcomings – it is not journalistically proper to ignore official evidence, such as the Dutch intelligence report, because it doesn’t go in the preferred direction. If the Times were not acting as a propaganda vehicle, it would at least have cited the Dutch intelligence report as one piece of the puzzle.

The Times’ relentless service as the chief conveyor belt for anti-Russian propaganda has drawn at least some objections from readers, although they are rarely acknowledged by the Times.

For instance, Theodore A. Postol, professor emeritus of science, technology, and national security policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, tried to lodge a protest with the Times’ editors about the “inflatable weapons” story.

In the email, a copy of which he forwarded to me, Postol wrote: “This article is a very good example of the misleading foreign policy reporting that has unfortunately become a hallmark of the New York Times.

“The complete lack of sophistication of this article, coupled with the implication that the use of such decoys is somehow an indication of a Russian cultural bias towards deception is exactly the kind of misleading reporting that cannot possibly be explained as a competent attempt to inform Times readers about real and serious national security issues that we are today facing with Russia.”
Postol attached to his email a series of photographs showing decoys that were used by the Allies during the Battle of Britain and the D-Day invasion. He noted, “There is a vast popular literature about this kind of deception in warfare that is available to even the most unsophisticated nonexperts. It is simply unimaginable to me that such an article could be published in the Times, yet alone on the front page, if the oversight mechanisms at the Times were properly functioning.”

Postol, however, assumes that the editorial system of the Times wishes to provide genuine balance and context to such stories, when the pattern has clearly shown that – as with Iraq in 2002-2003 – the Times’ editors see their role as preparing the American people for war.

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

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**Donald Trump’s False Martyrdom**

**Exclusive:** Donald Trump is presenting himself as a martyr absorbing the “slings and arrows” of false charges that he groped and abused women, even though he boasted about doing exactly that, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Yes, The New York Times is the newspaper of the Establishment and reflexively accepts almost anything that the powers-that-be say is true, but Donald Trump undercut that valid critique when he spins a conspiracy theory about the Times plotting with women who simply confirm what Trump has said about his own sexual predations.

It wasn’t a couple of women who announced Trump’s compulsion to kiss and grope women and rely on his wealth and star power to keep them silent. It was Trump in his “locker room talk” with Access Hollywood host Billy Bush in 2005:

“You know, I’m automatically attracted to beautiful – I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait. And when you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. ... Grab ‘em by the pussy. You can do anything.”

And, it wasn’t Miss Arizona and a few other beauty pageant contestants who
described Trump’s creepy interest in ogling naked teen-age girls in backstage dressing rooms. It was Trump in a radio show with shock jock Howard Stern.

“I’ll tell you the funniest is that I’ll go backstage before a show and everyone’s getting dressed,” Trump told Stern in recordings of Stern’s show. “No men are anywhere, and I’m allowed to go in, because I’m the owner of the pageant and therefore I’m inspecting it. ... ‘Is everyone OK’? You know, they’re standing there with no clothes. ‘Is everybody OK?’ And you see these incredible looking women, and so I sort of get away with things like that."

In other words, Trump does a disservice to anyone who seeks to analyze the actual interplay between the mainstream U.S. media and the politically powerful when he exploits that serious concern by using it to cover up his own unconscionable behavior.

“I take all of these slings and arrows gladly, for you,” Trump told a cheering crowd in West Palm Beach, Florida, on Thursday. “I take them for our movement, so that we can have our country back. Our great civilization here in America and across the civilized world has come upon a moment of reckoning.”

Yet, Trump is not some innocent martyr for the cause. The simple and obvious truth is that he did what he bluntly described himself doing, forcing himself on unsuspecting women and satisfying his prurient interest in seeing naked women, even girls as young as 15.

That he is now attacking the honesty of women who simply confirm what he himself has said about his own behavior is truly bizarre. His recent assertion that his self-admissions were not to be taken seriously – and that thus the confirmations of his own words by a variety of women coming forward – must be false stands as one of the most audacious lies ever told in U.S. politics, which is saying something.

This is not a “he said/she said” situation. It is a moment in which “he” confessed to the actions that “she” – or in this case, multiple she’s – is confirming, except now the “he” says he was lying when he made his un-coerced confessions and thus the confirmations must also be a lie.

**Spinning a Conspiracy Theory**

As bad as that is, Trump has made matters worse by wrapping his self-contradictions about his own actions in the web of a global conspiracy. That means his cover-up also discredits the valid concerns about the real coordination of policies by the wealthy and the political/media elites. Trump’s conspiracy theory is like many other conspiracy theories that divert attention from some genuine wrongdoing by postulating an absurd alternative reality that
is easily disproved. 

In this case, Trump enables the Times, which does deserve criticism for a long pattern of falling in line behind the falsehoods of the Establishment, to now wrap itself in the cloak of courageous journalism reporting facts that Americans need to know to function as informed citizens in a democracy. With his preposterous threat to sue the Times, Trump gives the Times unearned credibility as the protector of the public interest.

Trump further undermines his generally accurate contention that the powers-that-be are enriching themselves at the expense of regular people when he surrounds that important point with various right-wing nostrums about slashing taxes on the rich and wiping away regulations that somewhat constrain the actions of big banks and big corporations.

How it follows that the way to rein in the abuses of the powerful is to give them more money and freedom to do whatever they want is never explained in Trump’s “populist” appeals.

To say that Trump is a flawed messenger for a reasonably valid message about the elites having little concern about the suffering of the commoners is a gross understatement. He is the personification of a rich and powerful individual exercising dominion over vulnerable people who can’t fight back. He is, in a word, a phony. And, if you wanted to add another word, he is a demagogic phony.

It is a sad predicament that people who want desperately to challenge the unbridled, corrupt and dangerous power of the global elites find themselves stuck with Donald Trump as their avatar, a person who was happy to hobnob with those elites and share their grotesque control over “lesser” people until he suddenly found “populism” as the way to accumulate even more power.

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).

‘End of Growth’ Sparks Wide Discontent

The global elites’ false promise that neoliberal economics would cure all ills through the elixir of endless growth helps explain the angry nationalist movements ripping apart the West’s politics, observes ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.
By Alastair Crooke

Raul Ilargi Meijer, the long-standing economics commentator, has written both succinctly – and provocatively: “It’s over! The entire model our societies have been based on for at least as long as we ourselves have lived, is over! That’s why there’s Trump.

“There is no growth. There hasn’t been any real growth for years. All there is left are empty hollow sunshiny S&P stock market numbers propped up with ultra-cheap debt and buybacks, and employment figures that hide untold millions hiding from the labor force. And most of all there’s debt, public as well as private, that has served to keep an illusion of growth alive and now increasingly no longer can.

“These false growth numbers have one purpose only: for the public to keep the incumbent powers that be in their plush seats. But they could always ever only pull the curtain of Oz [Wizard of Oz] over people’s eyes for so long, and it’s no longer so long.

“That’s what the ascent of Trump means, and Brexit, Le Pen, and all the others. It’s over. What has driven us for all our lives has lost both its direction and its energy.”

Meijer continues: “We are smack in the middle of the most important global development in decades, in some respects arguably even in centuries, a veritable revolution, which will continue to be the most important factor to shape the world for years to come, and I don’t see anybody talking about it. That has me puzzled.

“The development in question is the end of global economic growth, which will lead inexorably to the end of centralization (including globalization). It will also mean the end of the existence of most, and especially the most powerful, international institutions.

“In the same way it will be the end of -almost- all traditional political parties, which have ruled their countries for decades and are already today at or near record low support levels (if you’re not clear on what’s going on, look there, look at Europe!)

“This is not a matter of what anyone, or any group of people, might want or prefer, it’s a matter of ‘forces’ that are beyond our control, that are bigger and more far-reaching than our mere opinions, even though they may be man-made.

“Tons of smart and less smart folks are breaking their heads over where Trump and Brexit and Le Pen and all these ‘new’ and scary things and people and
parties originate, and they come up with little but shaky theories about how it’s all about older people, and poorer and racist and bigoted people, stupid people, people who never voted, you name it.

“But nobody seems to really know or understand. Which is odd, because it’s not that hard. That is, this all happens because growth is over. And if growth is over, so are expansion and centralization in all the myriad of shapes and forms they come in.”

Further, Meijer writes: “Global is gone as a main driving force, pan-European is gone, and whether the United States will stay united is far from a done deal. We are moving towards a mass movement of dozens of separate countries and states and societies looking inward. All of which are in some form of -impending-trouble or another.

“What makes the entire situation so hard to grasp for everyone is that nobody wants to acknowledge any of this. Even though tales of often bitter poverty emanate from all the exact same places that Trump and Brexit and Le Pen come from too.

“That the politico-econo-media machine churns out positive growth messages 24/7 goes some way towards explaining the lack of acknowledgement and self-reflection, but only some way. The rest is due to who we ourselves are. We think we deserve eternal growth.”

The End of ‘Growth’

Well, is global “growth over”? Of course Raul Ilargi is talking “aggregate” (and there will be instances of growth within any contraction). But what is clear is that debt-driven investment and low-interest-rate policies are having less and less effect — or no effect at all — in producing growth — either in terms of domestic or trade growth, as Tyler Durden at ZeroHedge writes:

“After almost two years of the quantitative easing program in the Euro Area, economic figures have remained very weak. As GEFIRA details, inflation is still fluctuating near zero, while GDP growth in the region has started to slow down instead of accelerating. According to the ECB data, to generate €1.0 of GDP growth, €18.5 had to be printed in the QE, ... This year, the ECB printed nearly €600 billion within the frame of asset purchase programme (QE).”

Central Banks can and do create money, but that is not the same as creating wealth or purchasing power. By channelling their credit creation through the intermediary of banks granting loans to their favored clients, Central Banks grant to one set of entities purchasing power — a purchasing power that must necessarily have been transferred from another set of entities within
Europe (i.e. transferred from ordinary Europeans in the case of the ECB), who, of course will have less purchasing power, less discretionary spending income.

The devaluation of purchasing power is not so obvious (no runaway inflation), because all major currencies are devaluing more or less pari passu – and because the authorities periodically steam hammer down the price of gold, so that there is no evident standard by which people can “see” for themselves the extent of their currencies’ joint downward float.

And world trade is grinding down too, as Lambert Strether of Corrente rather elegantly explains: “Back to shipping: I started following shipping ... partly because it’s fun, but more because shipping is about stuff, and tracking stuff seemed like a far more attractive way of getting a handle on ‘the economy’ than economics statistics, let alone whatever books the Wall Streeters were talking on any given day. And don’t get me started on Larry Summers.

“So what I noticed was decline, and not downward blips followed by rebounds, but decline, for months and then a year. Decline in rail, even when you back out coal and grain, and decline in demand for freight cars. Decline in trucking, and decline in the demand for trucks. Air freight wobbly. No Christmas bounce at the Pacific ports. And now we have the Hanjin debacle — all that capital tied up in stranded ships, though granted only $12 billion or so — and the universal admission that somehow “we” invested w-a-a-a-a-a-y too much money in big ships and boats, implying (I suppose) that we need to ship a lot less stuff than we thought, at least across the oceans.

“Meanwhile, and in seeming contradiction not only to a slow collapse of global trade, but to the opposition to ‘trade deals,’ warehousing is one of the few real estate bright spots, and supply chain management is an exciting field. It’s disproportionately full of sociopaths, and therefore growing and dynamic!

“And the economics statistics seem to say nothing is wrong. Consumers are the engine of the economy and they are confident. But at the end of the day, people need stuff; life is lived in the material world, even if you think you live it on your device. It’s an enigma! So what I’m seeing is a contradiction: Less stuff is moving, but the numbers say ‘this is fine.’ Am I right, here? So in what follows, I’m going to assume that numbers don’t matter, but stuff does.”

Fake Elixir

Or, to be more faux-empirical: as Bloomberg notes in A Weaker Currency is no longer the Elixir, It Once Was: “global central banks have cut policy rates 667 times since 2008, according to Bank of America. During that period, the dollar’s 10 main peers have fallen 14%, yet Group-of-Eight economies have grown an
average of just 1%. Since the late 1990s, a 10% inflation-adjusted depreciation in currencies of 23 advanced economies boosted net exports by just 0.6% of GDP, according to Goldman Sachs. That compares with 1.3% of GDP in the two decades prior. U.S. trade with all nations slipped to $3.7 trillion in 2015, from $3.9 trillion in 2014."

With “growth over,” so too is globalization: Even the Financial Times agrees, as its commentator Martin Wolf writes in his comment, The Tide of Globalisation is Turning: “Globalisation has at best stalled. Could it even go into reverse? Yes. It requires peace among the great powers … Does globalisation’s stalling matter? Yes.”

Globalization is stalling – not because of political tensions (a useful “scapegoat”), but because growth is flaccid as a result of a veritable concatenation of factors causing its arrest – and because we have entered into debt deflation that is squeezing what’s left of discretionary, consumption-available, income. But Wolf is right. Ratcheting tensions with Russia and China will not somehow solve America’s weakening command over the global financial system – even if capital flight to the dollar might give the U.S. financial system a transient “high.”

So what might the “turning tide” of globalization actually mean? Does it mean the end of the neo-liberalist, financialized world? That is hard to say. But expect no rapid “u-turn” – and no apologies. The Great Financial Crisis of 2008 – at the time – was thought by many to mark the end to neo-liberalism. But it never happened – instead, a period of fiscal retrenchment and austerity was imposed that contributed to a deepening distrust of the status quo, and a crisis rooted in a widespread, popular sense that “their societies” were headed in the wrong direction.

Neo-liberalism is deeply entrenched – not least in Europe’s Troika and in the Eurogroup that oversees creditor interests, and which, under European Union rules, has come to dominate E.U. financial and tax policy.

It is too early to say from whence the economic challenge to prevailing orthodoxy will come, but in Russia there is a group of prominent economists gathered together as the Stolypin Club, who are evincing a renewed interest in that old adversary of Adam Smith, Friedrich List (d. 1846), who evolved a “national system of political economy.” List upheld the (differing interests) of the nation to that of the individual. He gave prominence to the national idea, and insisted on the special requirements of each nation according to its circumstances, and especially to the degree of its development. He famously doubted the sincerity of calls to free trade from developed nations, in particular those by Britain. He was, as it were, the arch anti-globalist.
A Post-Globalism

One can see that this might well fit the current post-globalist mood. List’s acceptance of the need for a national industrial strategy and the reassertion of the role of the state as the final guarantor of social cohesion is not some whimsy pursued by a few Russian economists. It is entering the mainstream. The May government in the U.K. precisely is breaking with the neoliberal model that has ruled British politics since the 1980s – and is breaking towards a List-ian approach.

Be that as it may (whether this approach swims more widely back into fashion), the very contemporary British professor and political philosopher, John Gray has suggested the key point is: “The resurgence of the state is one of the ways in which the present time differs from the ‘new times’ diagnosed by Martin Jacques and other commentators in the 1980s. Then, it seemed national boundaries were melting away and a global free market was coming into being. It’s a prospect I never found credible.

“A globalised economy existed before 1914, but it rested on a lack of democracy. Unchecked mobility of capital and labour may raise productivity and create wealth on an unprecedented scale, but it is also highly disruptive in its impact on the lives of working people – particularly when capitalism hits one of its periodic crises. When the global market gets into grave trouble, neoliberalism is junked in order to meet a popular demand for security. That is what is happening today.

“If the tension between global capitalism and the nation state was one of the contradictions of Thatcherism, the conflict between globalization and democracy has undone the left. From Bill Clinton and Tony Blair onwards, the center-left embraced the project of a global free market with an enthusiasm as ardent as any on the right. If globalisation was at odds with social cohesion, society had to be re-engineered to become an adjunct of the market. The result was that large sections of the population were left to moulder in stagnation or poverty, some without any prospect of finding a productive place in society.”

If Gray is correct that when globalized economics strikes trouble, people will demand that the state must pay attention to their own parochial, national economic situation (and not to the utopian concerns of the centralizing élite), it suggests that just as globalization is over – so too is centralization (in all its many manifestations).

The E.U., of course, as an icon of introverted centralization, should sit up, and pay attention. Jason Cowley, the editor of the (Leftist) New Statesman says: “In any event … however you define it, [the onset of ‘New Times’] will not lead
to a social-democratic revival: it looks as if, in many Western countries, we are entering an age in which centre-left parties cannot form ruling majorities, having leaked support to nationalists, populists and more radical alternatives.”

**The Problem of Self-Delusion**

So, to return to Ilargi’s point, that “we are smack in the middle of the most important global development in decades … and I don’t see anybody talking about it. That has me puzzled” and to which he answers that ultimately, the “silence” is due to ourselves: “We think we deserve eternal growth.”

He is surely right that it somehow answers to the Christian meme of linear progress (material here, rather than spiritual); but more pragmatically, doesn’t “growth” underpin the whole Western financialized, global system: “it was about lifting the ‘others’ out of their poverty”?

Recall, Stephen Hadley, the former U.S. National Security Adviser to President George W. Bush, warning plainly that foreign-policy experts rather should pay careful attention to the growing public anger: that “globalization was a mistake” and that “the elites have sleep-walked the [U.S.] into danger.”

“This election isn’t just about Donald Trump,” Hadley argued. “It’s about the discontents of our democracy, and how we are going to address them … whoever is elected, will have to deal with these discontents.”

In short, if globalization is giving way to discontent, the lack of growth can undermine the whole financialized global project. Stiglitz tells us that this has been evident for the past 15 years – last month he noted that he had warned then of: “growing opposition in the developing world to globalizing reforms: It seemed a mystery: people in developing countries had been told that globalization would increase overall wellbeing. So why had so many people become so hostile to it? How can something that our political leaders – and many an economist – said would make everyone better off, be so reviled? One answer occasionally heard from the neoliberal economists who advocated for these policies is that people are better off. They just don’t know it. Their discontent is a matter for psychiatrists, not economists.”

This “new” discontent, Stiglitz now says, is extended into advanced economies. Perhaps this is what Hadley means when he says, “globalization was a mistake.” It is now threatening American financial hegemony, and therefore its political hegemony too.

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the West.