

Sanders's Screwy Mideast Strategy

Out of fear of offending the power centers of Official Washington, Democrats won't or can't formulate a coherent foreign policy. Even Sen. Bernie Sanders says the solution to Mideast chaos is more Saudi intervention when Saudi intervention in support of Sunni extremists is the heart of the problem, writes Sam Hussein.

By Sam Hussein

There's an old joke about two elderly men at a Catskill resort. One complains: "The food here is horrible." The other vigorously agrees: "Yeah, I know – and the portions are so damn small!" Along those lines, several writers have noted that Sen. Bernie Sanders has been scant in terms of his foreign policy – small portions. But there's also the question of quality.

A problem with Sanders's limited articulation of a foreign policy is that his most passionately stated position is extremely regressive and incredibly dangerous. Sanders has actually pushed for the repressive Saudi Arabian regime to engage in more intervention in the Mideast.

In discussing the Islamic State (or ISIS), Sanders has talked about Saudi Arabia being the solution. His comments are couched in language that seems somewhat critical, but the upshot is we need more Saudi influence and intervention in the region. In effect, more and bigger proxy wars, which have already taken the lives of hundreds of thousands in Syria and could further rip apart Iraq, Libya and Yemen.

As a Democratic presidential candidate, Sanders has made this point repeatedly – and prominently. In February with Wolf Blitzer on CNN, Sanders said: "This war is a battle for the soul of Islam and it's going to have to be the Muslim countries who are stepping up. These are billionaire families all over that region. They've got to get their hands dirty. They've got to get their troops on the ground. They've got to win that war with our support. We cannot be leading the effort."

What? Why should a U.S. progressive be calling for more intervention by the Saudi monarchy? Do we really want Saudi troops in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen and who knows where else (and that's assuming you don't count some of the Saudi-financed militants and extremist proxies operating in those countries as Saudi irregular troops)?

You'd think that perhaps someone like Sanders would say that we have to break our decades-long backing of the corrupt Saudi regime – but no, he wants to

dramatically expand it.

Even worse, after the Saudis started bombing Yemen with U.S. government backing earlier this year, killing thousands and leading to what the UN is now calling a "humanitarian catastrophe," and suffering that is "almost incomprehensible," Sanders continued to promote this scheme of getting the Saudis to do more.

In another interview again with Wolf Blitzer in May, Sanders did correctly note that as a result of the Iraq invasion, "we've destabilized the region, we've given rise to Al Qaeda, ISIS." But then he called for more outside intervention from Saudi Arabia: "What we need now, and this is not easy stuff, I think the President is trying, you need to bring together an international coalition, Wolf, led by the Muslim countries themselves!

"Saudi Arabia is the third largest military budget in the world. They're going to have to get their hands dirty in this fight. We should be supporting, but at the end of the day this is fight over what Islam is about, the soul of Islam, we should support those countries taking on ISIS."

So, progressives in the U.S. are supposed to look toward the Saudi monarchy to save the soul of Islam? The Saudis have pushed the teachings of the fundamentalist Wahabbism sect that's been deforming Islam for decades. This extremism helped give rise to Al Qaeda and now ISIS. In other words, the Saudi royals have already been "getting their hands dirty." It's a bit like someone saying the Koch Brothers need to get more involved in U.S. politics by "getting their hands dirty."

But if your point is to build up the next stage of the U.S. government's horrific role in the Mideast, it kind of makes sense. The U.S. government helped ensure the Saudis would dominate the Arabian Peninsula from the formation of the nation state of Saudi Arabia – a nation named after a family. In return, the Saudis let the U.S. take the lead in extracting oil there.

The Saudis also favored investing funds from their oil wealth largely in the West over building up the region, what the activist scholar Eqbal Ahmed called separating the material wealth of the Mideast from the mass of the people of the region. Saudi Arabia buys U.S. weapons to further solidify the "relationship" and to ensure its military dominance.

During the Arab Spring of 2011, the Saudis and other Gulf monarchies deformed the Arab uprisings, which transformed oppressive but basically secular and minimally populist regimes into failed states and gave rise to groups like ISIS. What has happened in the Mideast since the ouster of Egypt's dictator Hosni Mubarak and the other Arab uprisings is that the Saudis have been

strengthened. Saudi Arabia has largely called the shots in the region.

Both the Tunisian and Yemeni dictators fled to Saudi Arabia. Mubarak himself was urged not to resign by the Saudis, and the Saudis are now the main backers of the military regime in Cairo, which ousted the popularly elected Muslim Brotherhood government.

One has to wonder why Sanders is taking this position. Is there a domestic constituency called "Americans for Saudi Domination of the Arab World"? The opposite would seem to be the case. There would surely be more popular support if someone would say: "We've got to stop backing dictatorships like the Saudis. They behead people. They are tyrannical. They have a system of male guardianship. Why the hell are they an ally?"

But Sanders is unwilling to break with the U.S.-Saudi alliance that has done so much damage to both the Arab people and the American people. Now, we have what amounts to an Israeli-Saudi alliance (with both countries viewing Iran as their principal enemy) and it must be music to the ears of pro-Israeli journalists like Wolf Blitzer for Sanders to be calling for more U.S. backing of Saudi power.

Some progressives have argued that Sanders's candidacy is valuable in that whether he wins or loses he is putting the issue of income inequality front and center. But if his candidacy is to be lauded for raising issues of economic inequality and educating and galvanizing the public around that, it's fair to ask why he is deforming public discussion on another crucial issue, U.S. policy in the Middle East.

If the position of the most prominent "progressive" on the national stage is for more Saudi military intervention in the affairs of its neighbors, what does that do to public understanding of the Mideast and the dialogue between the people of the United States and Muslim countries?

If the U.S. further subcontracts control of the Mideast to the Saudi regime, the setbacks and disappointments for peace and justice in the region during the Obama years will be small potatoes by comparison. If Sanders's plan is implemented making the Saudi royals and other oil-rich monarchs the enforcers of order in the Mideast the likelihood is for open-ended warfare.

And that would likely mean that all the other things that Sanders is talking about regarding economic inequality would be out the window. He himself has noted that "wars drain investment at home." Or does Sanders think it's all good if he can set up a scheme whereby the Saudis pay the bills and use their own troops for Mideast wars that the U.S. government supports?

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in his “Beyond Vietnam” speech called that war a “demonic destructive suction tube” taking funds from the war on poverty. But he also referred to deeper reasons based on moral grounds for opposing war. But Sanders rarely touches on those other reasons. It’s as though we’ve learned nothing about blowback since 9/11.

Contrast Sanders’s call for an escalation of Saudi Arabia’s proxy wars with how insurgent Labour Party MP Jeremy Corbyn – whose campaign to lead Labour in the UK has caught fire addresses the issue, challenging the British establishment about arming the Saudis:

“Will the Minister assure me that the anti-corruption laws will apply to arms deals and to British arms exports? Will they involve forensic examination of any supposed corruption that has gone on between arms sales and regimes in other parts of the world rather than suspending Serious Fraud Office inquiries, as in the case of an investigation into the Al-Yamamah arms contract with Saudi Arabia?”

A section of Corbyn’s website highlights video of his remarks at the House of Parliament last month as he relentlessly criticized human rights violations by the Saudi regime.

Instead of adopting Corbyn’s human rights and rule-of-law perspective, Sanders has used Saudi Arabia’s massive military spending to argue that it should further dominate the region. Unexamined is the \$60 billion arms deal between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia that Obama signed off on in 2010 and Saudi plans to enhance the monarchy’s military capabilities. The BBC reported that Saudi “Prince Turki al-Faisal called for ‘a unified military force, a clear chain of command’ at a high level regional security conference in Riyadh, the Saudi capital.”

So Sanders and Saudi planners seem to be on the same page. But does Sanders really believe that expanded war by an autocratic state in a critical region will breed good outcomes? Sanders doesn’t seem to take money from Lockheed Martin – though he’s backed their F-35 slated to be based in Vermont – but his stance on Saudi Arabia must bring a smile to the faces of Military-Industrial Complex bigwigs.

The Black Lives Matter movement has moved Sanders to “say the names” of Sandra Bland and others who are victims of police abuse and violence. Those striving for peace and justice around the world need to do the same regarding Sanders and U.S. foreign policy.

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The Trump/Sanders Phenomena

Exclusive: The prospect of another competition between the Clinton and Bush dynasties has sent activists from across the political spectrum searching for someone new and leading to the unlikely emergence of unorthodox candidates, billionaire Donald Trump and socialist Bernie Sanders, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As outlandish as Donald Trump is as a presidential candidate, it's pretty obvious why he's topping the polls of Republican voters: he's tipping over the carts of "politics as usual" that Americans understandably hate. In a much more responsible way, Bernie Sanders is doing the same with Democratic voters though he's still trailing Hillary Clinton in most polls.

One of the strongest arguments for Trump and Sanders is that they have refused to prostitute themselves in the scramble for million-dollar donations, a core corruption of the U.S. political process. Trump, a real estate mogul and reality-TV star, boasts about how he rejects big-money donors because he can finance his own campaign.

Sanders relies heavily on small donations and turned down an offer to create a "super PAC" that could have raised millions of dollars from wealthy supporters. Sanders's campaign says its average donation is \$31.30 as Sanders has tapped broad support among progressives in raising \$15.2 million as of July, an impressive sum but still "far behind Mrs. Clinton's fund-raising juggernaut," the New York Times [reported](#).

Neither Trump nor Sanders has competed in what many political analysts consider the key initial test for any "serious" candidate the "silent primary" of lining up super-rich Americans who pour millions of dollars into campaign war chests so candidates can hire high-priced consultants and finance negative TV ads to tear down opponents. That process has made candidates from both parties dependent on special interests.

Ironically, for a nation that denounces Iran, Cuba and other countries for having special panels of religious elders or party leaders who approve rosters of acceptable candidates, the United States now has a political system that requires most candidates to parade themselves before billionaires who then select the finalists much like the judges do at one of Trump's beauty pageants.

Trump is not wrong when he bluntly describes how this process works, noting that the wealthy donors are sure to show up after the election with their hands out for favors if their hand-picked candidate wins. The presidency and pretty much every elected office in the United States are up for sale.

Americans across the political spectrum are rightly disgusted by this corrupt system and thus Trump stands out as someone whose personal wealth and almost comedic self-confidence make him harder to buy than, say, Jeb Bush, Scott Walker or almost any of the other Republican candidates. For different reasons, democratic socialist Bernie Sanders does too.

Clinton's Style

Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton is part of a political dynasty that has made an art form out of vacuuming up money from Wall Street, Hollywood and everywhere in between as well as faraway lands. Bill and Hillary Clinton have sucked up million-dollar bundles of campaign cash, six-figure speaking fees from mega-corporations, and massive donations from foreign potentates to the Clinton Foundation.

With the Clintons, it seems like everything is for sale, leaving much of the public dubious about where their true allegiances lie. They appear to move through the political landscape triangulating as they go, calculating what is most advantageous to say at each moment and then immediately recalculating for the next moment.

As a U.S. Senator and as Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton either showed extraordinarily bad judgment or simply substituted this family process of endless triangulation for what passes as judgment. For instance, she voted for the Iraq War in 2002 not apparently out of any firm conviction that it was the right thing to do for U.S. national security but rather what looked best then for her political career.

At nearly every juncture, Hillary Clinton has opted for what seemed like the safe play at the time. Indeed, it is hard to think of any case in which she showed anything approaching genuine political courage or statesmanlike wisdom. Here is just a short list of her misjudgments *after* the Iraq War:

—In summer 2006, as a New York senator, Clinton supported Israel's air war against southern Lebanon which killed more than 1,000 Lebanese. At a pro-Israel rally in New York on July 17, 2006, Clinton shared a stage with Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations Dan Gillerman, a renowned Muslim basher who proudly defended Israel's massive violence against targets in Lebanon.

"Let us finish the job," Gillerman told the crowd. "We will excise the cancer in

Lebanon” and “cut off the fingers” of Hezbollah. Responding to international concerns that Israel was using “disproportionate” force in bombing Lebanon and killing hundreds of civilians, Gillerman said, “You’re damn right we are.” [NYT, July 18, 2006] Clinton did not protest Gillerman’s remarks.

–In late 2006, Clinton fell for the false conventional wisdom that President George W. Bush’s nomination of Robert Gates to be Secretary of Defense was an indication that Bush was preparing to wind down the Iraq War when it actually signaled the opposite, the so-called “surge.” Later, to avoid further offending the Democratic base as she ran for president, she opposed the “surge,” though she later acknowledged that she did so for political reasons, according to Gates’s memoir *Duty*.

In the early months of the Obama administration, with Gates still Defense Secretary and Clinton the new Secretary of State, Gates reported what he regarded as a stunning admission by Clinton, writing: “Hillary told the president that her opposition to the surge in Iraq had been political because she was facing him in the Iowa primary [in 2008]. She went on to say, ‘The Iraq surge worked.’”

–In 2009, Clinton joined with Gates and General David Petraeus to pressure President Barack Obama into a similar “surge” in Afghanistan which like the earlier “surge” in Iraq did little more than get another 1,000 U.S. soldiers killed along with many more Iraqis and Afghans while extending the bloody chaos in both countries.

–Also, in 2009, Clinton supported a right-wing coup in Honduras, overthrowing left-of-center President Manuel Zelaya.

–In 2011, Clinton helped spearhead the U.S.-backed “regime change” in Libya, which led to the torture/murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi as Clinton chuckled, “we came, we saw, he died.” Like the “regime change” in Iraq, the Libyan “regime change” left the once-prosperous nation in bloody anarchy with major gains by Islamic extremists, including the Islamic State.

–Also, in 2011, Clinton pressed for a similar “regime change” in Syria adopting the popular though false notion that a “moderate opposition” would neatly fill the void after the ouster of President Bashar al-Assad. The reality was that Al Qaeda and its spin-off, the Islamic State, stood to be the real beneficiaries of the U.S.-supported destabilization of Syria. These Islamic terrorist groups now have major footholds in all three Arab countries where Clinton supported “regime change” Iraq, Syria and Libya.

Neocon Fellow-Traveler

Throughout her time as Senator and Secretary of State, Clinton supported the aggressive foreign policy prescriptions of the neoconservatives and their liberal-interventionist allies. In each of these cases, the neocons and liberal hawks were dominating Official Washington's debate and it would have taken some political courage to stand in their way. Hillary Clinton never did.

The enduring mystery with Hillary Clinton is whether she is a true neocon or whether she simply judges that embracing neocon positions is the "safest" course for her career that by parroting the neocon "group think" she can win praise from the national-security elite and that big donors who favor a hard-line strategy for the Middle East will reward her with campaign contributions.

Whatever the case, Clinton has carefully curried favor with key neocons, including consulting with Robert Kagan, a co-founder of the neocon Project for the New American Century, and promoting his wife, Victoria Nuland, making her the State Department spokesperson and putting her on track to become Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs. In that post, Nuland orchestrated "regime change" in Ukraine, which like other neocon targets has descended into bloody chaos, but this adventure also has precipitated a dangerous showdown with nuclear-armed Russia.

Kagan has become a big Clinton booster. According to a New York Times [article](#) on June 16, 2014, Kagan said his neocon views which he has redubbed "liberal interventionist" will have a strong standing in a possible Hillary Clinton administration. The Times reported that Clinton "remains the vessel into which many interventionists are pouring their hopes."

Kagan was quoted as saying: "I feel comfortable with her on foreign policy. If she pursues a policy which we think she will pursue it's something that might have been called neocon, but clearly her supporters are not going to call it that; they are going to call it something else." [For more, see Consortiumnews.com's ["Is Hillary Clinton a Neocon-Lite?"](#)]

Clinton has won praise from another leading neocon, Max Boot, who wrote in a [review](#) of Gates's book that "it is clear that in [Obama] administration councils she was a principled voice for a strong stand on controversial issues, whether supporting the Afghan surge or the intervention in Libya."

In other words, Democrats will have to decide if they wish to nominate a "closet neocon" to be the next president, someone who will triangulate her way into appointing the likes of Kagan and/or Nuland as key advisers or possibly to senior State Department posts. So far the Democratic campaign has focused overwhelmingly on domestic issues, giving Clinton and even Sanders a pass on their foreign policy positions.

Meanwhile, on the Republican side, the more traditional candidates all have embraced hawkish positions on international issues with the limited exception of Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, who has shown less enthusiasm for foreign interventions while still trying to avoid the “isolationist” label that was stuck on his father, Rep. Ron Paul of Texas.

But the rest of the traditional field has criticized President Obama for alleged weakness and some have attacked Trump for supposedly lacking foreign policy expertise. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, who has been one of the most consistent neocons, lectured Trump about his supposed ignorance of the Middle East, a region that Graham and his fellow travelers have thoroughly messed up.

Given all that, is it so surprising that many conservative Republicans as disgusted with Official Washington as many progressives are would prefer a renegade like Trump to the bland cast of grubbing politicians who are regarded by the mainstream press as the “serious candidates”? The bigger question is whether progressive Democrats are ready to make a similar break from the pack and make Sanders that sort of alternative, too.

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](#)). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

American Jews Split from Netanyahu

Major Jewish organizations and donors are pressing the U.S. Congress to get in lockstep behind Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu’s opposition to the Iran nuclear deal, but they are out of step with most American Jews who support the accord, reports Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

On Aug. 13, The New York Times carried a front-page article entitled “Donors Descend on Schumer and Others in Debate on Iran.” The article opened a window on the activities of big money donors in the Congress of the United States.

According to the Times story, Sen. Charles Schumer, D-New York, had been consulting with John Shapiro, a wealthy financier and “longtime benefactor” of

the senator and other Democratic politicians. Shapiro is also the head of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), an organization that claims 100,000 members and that, since 2009, has described itself as “a center for Jewish and Israel global advocacy,” thereby misleadingly tying these two interests – Jewish advocacy and Israeli advocacy – together.

Shapiro’s position with AJC also means that, when it comes to Middle East foreign policy, there is no real difference between his position and that of the Israeli government. This identification is reflected in the AJC’s “unity pledge” concerning the Zionist state.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that Shapiro told Schumer what Israeli-inspired analyses to read before he made his decision on the nuclear deal. According to the Times, Shapiro also informed the senator that the Egyptian “president” Abdel Fattah el-Sisi felt sure that the deal would “increase regional terrorism.” It can be assumed that Shapiro failed to mention that this was an opinion that differed from the public position taken by the Egyptian foreign minister.

Soon thereafter Schumer announced that he would oppose President Barack Obama’s negotiated nuclear agreement with Iran. One can find multiple critiques on the web of Schumer’s reasons for taking this position, so we won’t go into it here. For our purpose the important point is that Shapiro wasn’t the only Jewish donor trying to pressure legislators and, in fact, many were urging not rejection but acceptance of the Iran deal.

American Jewish Support for Iran Deal

The Times article identifies several wealthy Jewish donors who were lobbying in support of the Iran agreement but doesn’t tell us if they have been as successful as Shapiro. These include the billionaire entrepreneur S. Daniel Abraham, TV producer Norman Lear (founder of People for the American Way), and the famous billionaire George Soros.

There are several additional points that can be added to this aspect of the Times story:

–There are a good number of Israeli intelligence professionals (to say nothing of their American counterparts) who “have very positive views of the nuclear agreement.” Despite efforts by the Netanyahu government to silence them, their positions are now coming out in the media.

–Hundreds of prominent American Jews have publicly supported the agreement in a Times ad and open letter to Congress.

–Recent polls show that most American Jews support the deal with Iran. According

to a poll conducted by the LA Jewish Journal Survey, “by a wide margin, American Jews support the recently concluded agreement with Iran.” Indeed, according to this poll, even a majority (51 percent) of those who described themselves as “very attached emotionally to Israel want Congress to approve the deal.”

All this information undermines the myth that Israel (or worse yet, Benjamin Netanyahu) speaks for the Jews. This has always been untrue, yet Israel’s persistent insistence that it is true constitutes a typical “big lie” which, repeated over and over again, takes hold in the popular mind and comes to appear as a reflection of reality.

It is the resulting pseudo-truth that helps men like John Shapiro be so persuasive. Along with all the money he can bring to the table, he can claim that he speaks simultaneously for Israel and American Jewry. His political benefactors will believe this because it is consistent with an established myth.

That is why it is important to point out, at every opportunity, instances that undermine the myth. The case of the Iran nuclear agreement is just such an instance.

An Organizational Approach

There is one other lesson to be learned from the Times story. Lobbyists like Shapiro have an advantage because unlike most of the Jewish donors who support the nuclear agreement, they can approach Congress as the leaders of focused organizations that have a relatively large membership with deep pockets.

The Jewish donors out there who may want to defy Israel and its claim to speak for the Jews must also approach the U.S. government in a focused organizational fashion if they are to compete with Mr. Shapiro and other groups such as AIPAC. There are, of course, smaller Jewish groups that are defiant of Israel and its practices, groups such as Jewish Voices for Peace. But such organizations, while giving the lie to the Israeli claim to represent all Jews, haven’t the numbers or the money to successfully compete for influence in Congress.

One might also mention JStreet, which really doesn’t qualify here, because nine times out of ten it offers a resolutely Zionist analysis.

When all is said and done, the opposition forces in Congress probably will be unable to destroy the nuclear agreement with Iran. Will this achievement encourage the Jewish donors who favored the deal to come together and form a single Jewish organization outspokenly independent of Israel and its camp followers in the U.S.? One would hope so, because this is really what is needed if we are to liberate the U.S. Congress and political parties from the myth of a unified Jewry in support of Israel.

In the meantime there is an even bigger job to make the same case to rest of the world. Be it in Europe or the Arab world, the myth is growing and shaping people's thinking. As a consequence, to the extent that a person is hostile to Israel's policies and practices they run the risk of becoming hostile to "Jews," which opens the way to stark anti-Semitism.

This process can only aid and abet the ambitions of the Zionists. So let us strive for clear thinking on this matter and popularize the fact that Jews are quite diverse in their views and a growing number of them are not supporters of Israel or its practices. In this way we can undercut the myth that falsely connects them to Israel.

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Explaining the Trump Phenomenon

Since the days of Richard Nixon's "Southern Strategy," the Republican Party has played to the grievances of angry white men (and some women), in effect creating a ready audience for a hot-headed and quick-witted showman like Donald Trump, a classic case of reaping what is sown, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

It is really not too hard to figure out Donald Trump. The man is having fun.

What we have witnessed so far is a demonstration of how a billionaire megalomaniac and narcissist has fun: having secured a national stage, he runs around and says whatever he pleases, even if it is blatantly obnoxious. If he gets positive feedback, he does it all the louder. If he gets negative feedback, he turns into a bully, which he also sees as fun.

If his alliance with Fox "News" doesn't work out, maybe he will buy his own network. If the Republican Party spurns him, he will no doubt start his own political party. He can afford it and, again, it's a lot of fun. By the way, while Trump is having fun many of the rest of us don't find him funny at all. Indeed, it's a serious question whether Mr. Trump's good time will, in the end, encourage him to become a dangerous demagogue.

If explaining Donald Trump isn't all that difficult, explaining why millions of people applaud him is more of a challenge. And it is, after all, millions. There are roughly 219 million Americans who are qualified to vote, but only approximately 146 million are registered to do so. Of those registered, 29 percent are signed up as Republicans, or about 42 million people. According to a [Aug. 4 CBS poll](#), Trump has a favorable rating among 24 percent of that number, or about 10 million people. We can assume that this is a low number, given it only counts presently registered Republicans and not independents.

There is a lot of speculation over why these people like Trump. Here are the typical reasons given:

,["Trump has found support](#) from Republican voters looking for a successful businessman to jumpstart an economic renaissance." This sort of sentiment is seconded by the opinion that, because he is a rich businessman, he must know how to "generate jobs." Of course, this is an illusion. Most businesspeople operate within economic pockets and know little about "the economy" as a whole. Many of them get rich not by creating jobs but by eliminating them through mergers and downsizing operations.

,[He is not a Washington insider](#), he has never worked in Washington or been "stained by political life." This is a very questionable asset. Government is a bureaucratic system with well-established rules. The notion that Mr. Trump can come into such a system and "revolutionize" it without causing chaos is fantasy.

,[Trump "is a fighter"](#) and "people want a fighter." He tells it like it is and has no time for "political correctness," of which most people are allegedly "deathly tired." In other words, there is a subset of the population who don't like minority groups or their demand for respect. They don't like feminists and their concerns about women's rights. They don't like immigrants and the notion that the government should treat them like human beings. Trump has become their champion because he says what they believe, which, of course, passes for an assumed truth: all of this "political correctness" is an anti-American attack on traditional values.

Many of these Trump supporters are oblivious to the fact that they themselves are descended from both legal and illegal immigrants who had to fight the prejudiced sentiments of people just like them to become accepted citizens. That presents an almost laughable picture, except their sentiments are also very scary.

The Permanently Disaffected

These sentiments are really the surface emanations of a crowd phenomenon that has deeper meaning and persistent historical roots. In all societies, one finds the chronically disaffected, frustrated and resentful. Their numbers may go up or down according to economic and social circumstances, but they never go to zero.

In the U.S., this statistically permanent set of disaffected citizens seems to find itself most comfortable amidst the ultra-conservative right, with its hatred of “big” government and its resentment of just about any taxation. All of this is melded to national chauvinism and exceptionalism. Of late this minority has become quasi-organized in what is known as the Tea Party movement.

A Gallup poll conducted in October 2014 suggested that 11 percent of voting-age Americans are “strong supporters” of the Tea Party movement. If we use the 219 million figure given above, that comes to 24 million Americans. There is certainly an overlap here with the 10 million avid followers of Donald Trump.

What this means is that Trump, in his narcissistic pursuit of recognition, has tapped into a subgroup of the population that includes the permanently dissatisfied. He can rally them and perhaps bring them together into a bigger movement of, say, 20 to 25 percent of the population. But he can never satisfy that element’s essentially nihilistic grumbling.

In other words, Trump is playing with fire and at some point he will have to wake up to just what sort of monster he has by the tail. Then he will have to decide: is he just out for fun or does he want to go the route of the demagogue?

The American people are not immune to demagoguery. In fact Fox “News,” on the air 24/7, has made a lot of money showcasing demagogues of one sort or another. Bill O’Reilly might be the most well known of the lot.

These people have had their predecessors, particularly during the Great Depression, such as Father Charles Coughlin, a Detroit-based Catholic priest who ended up supporting fascist principles. His radio broadcasts had tens of millions of listeners. And then there is Joe McCarthy, etc.

Donald Trump certainly has the qualifications to join the long list of history’s demagogues: good speech-making abilities, no problem with playing fast and loose with the facts, and an affinity for the crowd, which energizes him. For him it also seems to be a lot of fun. For the rest of us it is just another aspect of living under the old curse of interesting times.

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Congress' Test of Allegiance: US or Israel?

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has instructed the U.S. Congress to reject an international agreement constraining Iran's nuclear program and to humiliate the sitting U.S. president, thus testing where the primary allegiance of most members of Congress lies, with the U.S. or Israel, writes John V. Whitbeck.

By John V. Whitbeck

The choice facing members of the U.S. Congress in September's "disapproval" votes could scarcely be clearer and has little to do with the merits of the international agreement reached on July 14 with respect to Iran's nuclear program.

Whether one believes that there was a genuine risk of Iran attacking Israel with a nuclear weapon or, more sensibly, that there was a genuine risk of Israel attacking Iran with conventional or nuclear weapons (the real and only rational reason for the mobilization of the European Union, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany on this issue), the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action" reached in Vienna should vastly reduce the risk of a catastrophic war involving Iran and Israel.

Since this diplomatic agreement is obviously good news for the world, the UN Security Council has unanimously approved it and only one of the UN's 193 member states, Israel, is currently opposed to it.

The choice before members of Congress is thus a clear and simple one: Do they owe their primary allegiance and loyalty to the United States of America or to Israel?

The great majority of members of Congress have traditionally seen less personal career risk in favoring Israeli desires over American interests than in favoring American interests over Israeli desires. There has been good empirical evidence to support this self-serving calculation. Several prominent and patriotic American politicians have lost their reelection bids as a result of the perception that they put American interests ahead of Israeli desires, and it has become a truism in American politics that "no one has ever lost an election for being too pro-Israel."

However, the choice facing members of Congress has never been so clear-cut and consequential as in the imminent “disapproval” votes on the Iran nuclear agreement.

At first glance, it appeared that President Obama had outsmarted the Republican Congressional leadership by getting them to agree that approval of American participation in any Iran nuclear agreement would not require an inconceivable two-thirds majority of the Senate but, rather, only a post-veto one-third minority approval in one of the two houses of Congress.

However, particularly since the influential Democratic Senator from New York Chuck Schumer, poised to become the next Democratic leader in the Senate, has confirmed his personal allegiance to Israel and consequent intention to vote for “disapproval,” it is by no means certain that even one third of one house of Congress will choose the United States over Israel.

What if Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu does defeat President Barack Obama in the American Congress? How might Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry react to a defeat more crushing and humiliating than any defeat ever suffered by any American president and secretary of state?

In Obama’s case, one can envision three alternatives, one cowardly and two courageous:

1. He could accept his and his country’s humiliation and retreat into irrelevance for the remaining 16 months of his term in office; or
2. He could go before the American people, announce that he has no desire to continue to represent a country in which more than two-thirds of the members of the legislative branch owe their allegiance to a foreign country and resign as president; or
3. He could seek patriotically to restore the independence and dignity of his country (or simply to take personal revenge against Netanyahu) by supporting or not vetoing a new application by the State of Palestine for full member state status at the United Nations and by supporting or not vetoing a UN Security Council resolution imposing meaningful sanctions on Israel until it withdraws fully from the occupied State of Palestine and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

In Kerry’s case, one may hope that he would resign as secretary of state and run again for the Democratic nomination for president, this time with an America-First focus on restoring the independence and dignity of the United States.

Palestinians and those who seek some measure of justice for Palestine and the

Palestinian people must view this remarkable spectacle with mixed emotions.

All the signs suggest that, if Obama “wins,” even by a hair’s breadth, he will immediately seek to “compensate” Israel for his unprecedented act of disobedience through a significant increase in the amount of America’s annual tribute payment to Israel, through even deeper military largesse and cooperation and through continuing American diplomatic and political support at the United Nations and elsewhere.

However, if Netanyahu “wins,” Obama just might finally do the right and decent thing for Palestine, the Palestinian people and the United States. To cite the ancient Chinese curse, we are living in interesting times.

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Gauging the Violent ‘Fox Effect’

The mainstream U.S. media has two standards for describing the motives for mass killings depending on whether the killer is a Muslim or a white man, with “terrorism” usually ascribed to the former and some personality disorder explaining the latter – rather than noting, say, an affinity for watching Fox News, says Mike Lofgren.

By Mike Lofgren

When John Russell “Rusty” Houser killed two people and wounded nine at a movie theater in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on July 23, the response was predictable. Governor Piyush “Bobby” Jindal rushed to the scene and pronounced his sorrowful and complete bafflement and a rote “in our thoughts and prayers” homily in lieu of any concrete policy proposal.

“Now is not the time” for such a policy discussion, said Jindal, as if there were ever a good time for craven politicians actually to do their job. Louisiana’s two senators, David Vitter and Bill Cassidy, released statements announcing that they were praying for the victims. Media editorials offered their standard quota of “something must be done” arm waving, knowing full well that if a couple of dozen massacred elementary school kids at Sandy Hook can’t distract Washington’s political class from its 24/7 fundraising and assiduous non-coordinating with super PACs, nothing will.

Within hours of the shooting a meme flew around, probably started by the police investigating the crime. Houser was a “deranged drifter,” and the media dutifully parroted the phrase. “Drifter” is a fairly rare term these days; we last recall it in common discourse during the 1970s, approximately the same time hitchhiking transformed from penniless young people seeing the country to something dangerous and creepy.

The term was resurrected for the Houser case. A deranged person who commits murder may have a motive, but it is likely to be a senseless one about which no larger social lessons can be drawn; a drifter is by definition adrift from society and its norms. We can only give a collective shrug.

Contrast that with any such incident involving Muslims as perpetrators and concrete ideological motives are instantly ascribed, usually accompanied by calls for increased vigilance, stepped up internal surveillance, and, from some quarters, demands that a foreign country be bombed. Such crimes are invariably described as terrorism. Terrorism, which has an official government definition, was not the word authorities used in describing the Houser case.

The media did not give us the full story. The *Washington Post* did a piece on Houser which certainly pegged him as a highly unpleasant nut case, but aside from a couple of brief references to his extreme political views, the reader would likely come away with a sense of wonderment that an unstable and vitriolic kook with a felony record managed to pass a firearms background check. The full story is more alarming and more instructive.

The Southern Poverty Law Center researched Houser’s online activity and other details of his life and concluded that he was quite active in expressing extreme right-wing views. His online fingerprints revealed a political profile firmly anchored in every imagined grievance Fox News and right-wing talk radios have tried to cultivate for decades: dislike of foreigners, blacks, Obama, liberals, abortion, the government, government spending, the welfare state, and so on. As is common among right-wingers, he expressed a liking for That Old Time Religion as practiced by America’s most obnoxious religious nuts.

A Tweet of his said the following: “The Westboro Baptist Church may be the last real church in America [members not brainwashed].” Houser reportedly may have attacked the theater because the movie presented feminist themes and its writer, who was also its lead actress, was Jewish.

Further, Houser posted on the comments page of the website of Golden Dawn, the Greek neo-Nazi political party. He also espoused an admiration for Hitler: “Hitler accomplished far more than any other,” he commented on usmessageboard.com.

And he was not just a drifter all his adult life who was merely given to angry rants on message boards. He once attended law school (although he did not graduate), and even was a substitute host on a Columbus, Georgia television talk show, where he advocated violence against abortion providers.

Houser had definitely washed up on the farthest shore of politics. But surely none of this has anything to do with “responsible” conservatism, or even self-described “hard-core conservatives,” right? Just read the message boards at some of the “hard-core conservative” web sites, though, and you will see similar stuff. Get a few beers into a hard-core conservative, and once in a while what he says about Hitler will surprise you.

Fundamentalist Christian web sites are full of commenters advocating violence against doctors who provide abortions. Donald Trump, presently leading the Republican presidential candidate polls, does not say anything about immigration that Houser could not have said. Houser also favorably mentioned “The Bell Curve,” a book on race and IQ by the conservative author Charles Murray, an American Enterprise Institute “scholar” and sometime contributor to foxnews.com.

Moving from crazy political views to violence is, of course, a huge step. But the Fox News Effect has already been shown to have done its job in converting the nonpolitical to rabid, obsessed partisans.

I have talked with documentary filmmaker Jen Senko, the subject of a 2013 article, “Fox News and Talk Radio Brainwashed My Dad.” She told me that she had interviewed numerous people lamenting that once their father (it’s frequently elderly or near-elderly fathers) started watching Fox News or listening to talk radio, they became seething cauldrons of grievances who in some cases ended up hating their own children and grandchildren. These were previously normal, well-adjusted adults who might have been apolitical or held politically moderate views.

What about society’s misfits, people who *already* started out perpetually belligerent, resentful, and borderline mentally ill? Fifty years ago, they might have gotten into loud and pointless arguments in bars over whether the Packers or the Cowboys were the better team. In the larger society, they were isolated and written off as kooks.

But now, with 30 years of operant conditioning by the right-wing media-entertainment complex, their inchoate anger has been focused, honed, and brought to a fever pitch. Those voices in their heads aren’t paranoid delusions because, after all, Glenn Beck and Michael Savage and everybody else they listen to on radio and TV say the same thing!

And since the propagandists of the media-entertainment complex tell them not to trust any other sources of news, the constant reinforcement and self-isolation push them to further and further extremes. If the Stanford Prison Experiment can turn ostensibly ordinary people into torturers, it is hardly implausible that a 24/7 propaganda barrage by professional fear-mongers could drive psychically fragile cranks over the edge.

As everyone knows, the Fox News demographic skews old, and it is the same with audiences of right-wing radio bloviators. Is it significant that while the great majority of mass killers are young males, some barely out of their teens, Houser was 59?

Walter Eugene Litteral, the accused ringleader of a bizarre plot to mass murder American soldiers, is 50 (Litteral and his accomplices were believers in "black helicopter" conspiracies, a lunacy that is assiduously fostered by right-wing media personalities like Alex Jones and reported by Fox News in a faux even-handed manner as something that might possibly true).

James von Brunn, the white supremacist who perpetrated a politically motivated killing in Washington, D.C., in 2009, was 88! We have uncovered only episodic examples here, but there would seem to be an opportunity for further research into whether violent right-wing offenders in this country skew older than perpetrators of similar, nonpolitical crimes, and how much the culprits were influenced by the Fox News Effect.

In 1944, Vice President Henry A. Wallace was quoted in the New York Times as saying: "The American fascist would prefer not to use violence. His method is to poison the channels of public information."

So is Roger Ailes, Fox News' longtime president, an accessory to Houser's murders? No. But given that Ailes and his right-wing media allies have hijacked the ideology of one of our two major parties, and that Fox News is attempting to pre-select the field of Republican candidates in a format reminiscent of Jerry Springer, Ailes's malign influence should not be underestimated.

As someone who has been poisoning the well of public discourse going back more than 45 years to his early days as Richard Nixon's media dirty trickster, Ailes cannot stand around acting like an innocent when some of those who have drunk the water he has tainted go crazy.

Mike Lofgren is a former congressional staff member who served on both the House and Senate budget committees. His book about Congress, The Party is Over: How Republicans Went Crazy, Democrats Became Useless, and the Middle Class Got Shafted, appeared in paperback on August 27, 2013. His new book, The Deep State:

The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government, will be published in January 2016.

America's Mindless Clamor

America has become a land of institutionalized noise whether the clamor of a crowded restaurant or the more dangerous shout fests of TV "news" both intruding on the ability to think and communicate coherently, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Many of you must have experienced something like this: you and a companion go into a restaurant and, over a good meal, would like to carry on a fruitful conversation – perhaps on the virtues of the agreement that President Barack Obama and his international partners have finally reached with Iran. However, you quickly realize that such a conversation is impossible.

The conversation is not impossible because your companion is a member of the Republican-controlled Congress, nor is it impossible because, like so many people, he or she doesn't know one factual thing about Iran. No. It is impossible because neither you nor your companion can hear each other.

The restaurant's decibel level is in the 90s, which replicates the noise intensity of an active construction site. Indeed, the environment is so noisy that even shouting is futile. It would seem that more and more of our "stylish" eating establishments have melded cacophony with cuisine.

Noise is an old problem. It started to seriously invade Western culture with the Industrial Revolution of the Eighteenth Century. The women and children who worked in the early textile factories had to develop a form of sign language to communicate over the racket made by the machines. It wasn't until 1972 that the U.S. government began to regulate workplace din as a health hazard. Before that, one can assume that millions of citizens went through their adult life made partially deaf by the modernity's accelerating hum.

Despite the realization that high levels of noise can hurt you, restaurants somehow escaped regulation, and some of them now present a hazard to customers and staff alike. However, this fact fails to move many owners and managers of otherwise presentable eating establishments. They insist that deafening noise is stylish – even fun – maybe like a rock concert.

Noise in the "News"

It is not only high levels of restaurant chatter that can be harmful. In other public spaces as diverse as airports, doctors' offices and gyms the environment is dominated by television screens broadcasting, among other things, "news" programs, which manage to interfere with the average citizen's ability to think clearly.

This brings us back to that hypothetical conversation mentioned above – the one on the nuclear deal with Iran. Those TV "news" programs filling the public airwaves are now regurgitating a version of deafening nonsense about this important subject – which only goes to show that noise comes in many forms.

Take for instance "news" noise coming from Republican Party leaders. Here are a few examples:

, Sen. Mark Kirk, a Republican from Illinois who has declared that the nuclear accord "condemns the next generation to cleaning up a nuclear war in the Persian Gulf." He explains that "tens of thousands of people in the Middle East are gonna lose their lives because of this decision by Barack Hussein Obama."

, Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, a Republican presidential candidate, declares, "This is not diplomacy, this is appeasement."

, Sen. Lindsey Graham, another presidential candidate, insists that "it's akin to declaring war on Sunni Arabs and Israel by the P5+1 because it ensures their primary antagonist Iran will become a nuclear power and allows them to rearm conventionally."

, Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, a Christian Fundamentalist and another Republican presidential candidate, says, "Shame on the Obama administration for agreeing to a deal that empowers an evil Iranian regime to carry out its threat to 'wipe Israel off the map' and bring death to America."

All of this is coming to the public repetitively through varied media. And all of it is noisy nonsense. How do these Republican notables know their assertions are true? After all, they contradict the positions of most of the world's professional intelligence experts, including those working for the U.S. government and, it turns out, many of their Israeli counterparts.

The Republicans who shout that the Obama administration was "fleeced" and "bamboozled" by the Iranians are reading from a script which looks like a Machiavellian set-piece designed to attack the President no matter what he does. The authors just plug in the issue (be it health care, immigration or Iran's nuclear energy program) and start shouting.

The U.S. Zionists, of course, use a script written in Israel. Acting just like agents of that country, they are bound to shout what Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu shouts. For instance, “the concessions agreement Iran is about to receive paves the way for it to arm itself with nukes.”

Either way, the resulting noise leads away from – and not toward – reality. Thus, the complaints that Obama has simply surrendered to the Iranians is the exact opposite of the truth. Iran has agreed to significant reductions in its nuclear program as well as the most intrusive inspections regime ever imposed on any nation’s nuclear energy program.

Noise in its many manifestations deafens more than one’s ears. It deafens one’s mind. And that is its purpose, as used by both restaurant managers and politicians.

On the one hand, restaurateurs believe they know what it takes to have fun at the dinner table – it takes the merging of all diners into a cloud of near-mindless chatter. Thus, it doesn’t matter if the chatter has any recognizable content, for it merely serves as a vehicle for entering a crowd-focused experience.

The chatter makes you one with everyone else in the restaurant. And, I guess, that is why many people come back for more. The food, no doubt, is secondary.

On the other hand, the politicians also invite you into a crowd experience, but one of a more dangerous kind. The noise in the “news” is not diffused chatter but a loud and sustained message. It is, more often than not, a form of propaganda – the same storyline repeated over and over again until it fills the public airwaves and from there comes to dominate the thought waves of the ignorant.

No doubt about it, the world is getting noisier every day – a fact which might encourage the independent minded to eat more meals at home and turn off the television. That way you get fewer calories and more clarity of mind in one quiet package.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America’s National Interest*; *“America’s Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.

A Clash Over Whose Lives Matter

A Twitter clash has broken out between people favoring #BlackLivesMatter or #AllLivesMatter, both protesting U.S. police violence against Americans but failing to take into account the hundreds of thousands of lives lost to the U.S. military as self-appointed global policeman, says Sam Hussein.

By Sam Hussein

The last several months have seen a debate, at times heated, between the #BlackLivesMatter movement and those who respond with #AllLivesMatter. I think a lot of people – perhaps not all – who are using both tags are missing a larger point and opening themselves up to ultimately devaluing a lot of lives.

People use #BlackLivesMatter to denote that given our criminal “justice” system, African-Americans are frequently targeted, endangered and at times killed largely *because* they are black. And that’s totally true and needed saying a long time ago.

People saying #AllLivesMatter presume to appeal to universal values, perhaps also noting that poor whites and others have particular vulnerabilities to police abuse as well. And the last part is certainly true. But it is odd to see an appeal to universal values that seems to broaden the point to include a relatively privileged group.

They crit each other: “The Defacement of Sandra Bland Mural Proves #AllLivesMatter Is Destructive” (“#AllLivesMatter is a mantra of white supremacy that ignores history...” and “#BlackLivesMatter Should Move Towards #AllLivesMatter” (“Twice as many Whites are killed than Blacks by cops, which means they are killed at about a third of the rate as Blacks.”)

But both sides limit who they mean by “lives.” They effectively exclude the victims of the U.S.’s highest officials. When most people use #BlackLivesMatter, they seem to be saying that all black U.S. lives matter when taken unlawfully by the government. And when most people who use #AllLivesMatter use it, they seem to be saying all U.S. lives matter when taken at the hands of police authorities – not just black U.S. lives. But the formulation effectively excludes the lives of millions of people who U.S. officials have deemed expendable for reasons of state.

Charles Blow of the *New York Times*, for example, at one level makes a legitimate point: “#AllLivesMatter may be your personal position, but until that is this COUNTRY’S position it is right to specify the lives it values less...” But aren’t some of the lives that this country values less the lives our government and

military has taken in Iraq and Afghanistan the last 15 years?

Blow also tweeted: "I will not be an accessory to my own oppression. #BlackLivesMatter" But nor should one be an accessory to the oppression of others.

What should be a glaring blind spot has at time reached absurd proportions. Hillary Clinton saying "all lives matter" at a predominantly black church was deemed a "misstep" by NPR, but why not examine if it makes any sense coming from her?

While a U.S. senator, Clinton voted for authorizing President George W. Bush to invade Iraq, resulting in hundreds of thousands killed and millions displaced. While Secretary of State, Clinton helped preside over the U.S. massive nuclear weapons arsenal, which threatens the entire planet, the drone assassination program which has killed thousands, and the NATO bombing of Libya, boasting afterward of Muammar Gaddafi's brutal murder: "We came, we saw, he died." That doesn't exactly square with a position of "all lives matter."

As it is, #BlackLivesMatter fails to genuinely uplift the lives of the most discarded by remaining within a national confine. And #AllLivesMatter isn't being universal at all – in its current form, it's being outright nationalistic and parochial.

Many now know the names of Sandra Bland and of Samuel DuBose and other African-Americans whose lives were devalued by law enforcement officials, we know their *names* and we know some of their *stories*. But the U.S. government has been bombing and attacking several countries in the Mideast and parts of Africa for years now, including. Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya. How many names do you know of the victims of U.S. foreign policy?

We know the names of the victims of the so-called Islamic State, people like Steven Sotloff. We know the names of victims of the Taliban, like Malala Yousafzai, who recovered from their attack on her. But the U.S. government has killed thousands of people in Iraq and Afghanistan, but we don't know the names, we don't listen to their stories.

Virtually the only time we meaningfully perceive the violence of U.S. foreign policy – in media or anywhere really – is when U.S. soldiers are hurt or killed. Otherwise, the violence is accepted as normal, as Cincinnati prosecutor Joe Deters said in relation to the police slaying of Samuel DuBose: "This doesn't happen in the United States – okay. This might happen in Afghanistan or somewhere. This just does not happen in the United States."

Have you thought of a civilian victim of U.S. policy who you could name? You

probably came up with Anwar al-Awlaki. But the reason you know his name is he was a U.S. citizen, proving the point that often that is what bestows value upon a human life. A study by Physicians for Social Responsibility earlier this year found: “The number of Iraqis killed during and since the 2003 U.S. invasion have been assessed at one million, which represents 5 percent of the total population of Iraq. This does not include deaths among the three million refugees subjected to privations.”

But that’s a non-story. We’ve ended up in a sense embracing Stalin’s aphorism: “The death of one man is a tragedy, the death of millions is a statistic.” A year ago, the U.S. government backed the latest of Israel’s regular brutal bombing of Gaza, in which Israel killed over 1,000 Palestinians, hundreds of them children. For several months now, U.S. ally Saudi Arabia has been bombing Yemen to minimal attention and virtually no protest. President Barack Obama just visited Ethiopia and Kenya – with barely any criticism of how those nations have carved up Somalia, perpetuating killing there.

It may be possible to honor the noblest possible intent in #BlackLivesMatter: That we should rush to aid those lives that are disregarded by many. Likewise for #AllLivesMatter: We should be universal and apply the principle of veneration of the value of life truly to *all*. Both impulses in their best form would argue to seriously scrutinize the U.S. government’s role as global rogue cop – a “cop” more dangerous than the most violent, racist police operating in the U.S. today.

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Hillary Clinton’s Leftward Flip-Flops

Faced with a populist surge in favor of Sen. Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton has tacked strongly to the left and in so doing is leaving in her wake many long-held positions on crime, trade, same-sex marriage, etc., to such a degree that it’s hard to know what she’d do as president, says Evan Popp.

By Evan Popp

As a strong challenge from the Left emerges in the form of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, who was once thought to be headed for a coronation in the Democratic presidential primary, has tried to recast herself as a progressive champion. However, in her mad dash to the left, Clinton cannot

escape her history of supporting, as the First Lady and then as a senator, the decidedly centrist and corporate-friendly policies of her husband, President Bill Clinton.

The contrast in views espoused by First Lady/ Sen. Clinton, versus 2008, and to a greater extent, 2016 presidential candidate Clinton, could emerge as a major problem for her campaign. Although Clinton has been extremely close-lipped to the media thus far in her latest bid for the Democratic nomination, by attempting to portray herself in speeches as a progressive during a time in which the political winds of the millennial generation are blowing left, Clinton has unwittingly shown herself to be a consummate flip-flopper who takes the positions that are most likely to return her to the White House.

A run-through on a litany of issues important to progressives reveals a candidate in Clinton who once held decidedly anti-progressive views on many of the important questions of the day.

Same-Sex Marriage

Few issues in recent memory have prompted as great a reversal of public opinion in as short a time as same-sex marriage. Between 2003 and 2013, the proportion of Americans supporting marriage equality rose 21 points nationwide, from 32 percent to 53 percent. As recently as May 2015, before the historic Supreme Court ruling that made same-sex marriage legal across the country, 57 percent of Americans were supportive of marriage equality.

Clinton came out in favor of marriage equality in 2013, after a majority of Americans had already indicated their support. To be fair, she was not the only prominent politician to withhold their approval until it was clear public opinion had shifted. President Barack Obama waited until 2012 to come out in favor of marriage equality, following Vice President Joe Biden's comments supporting same-sex marriage.

But it is telling what Clinton's views on the issue were back in 2000 when the electorate was still squarely against marriage equality. Clinton stated gay couples had no place in the institution of marriage, and said she would have voted for the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, which defined marriage as between a man and a woman.

"Marriage has got historic, religious and moral content that goes back to the beginning of time and I think a marriage is as a marriage has always been, between a man and a woman," Clinton said in 2000.

Even as recently as 2014, despite having come out in favor of same-sex marriage the year before, Clinton was hesitant to endorse efforts for nationwide marriage

equality, hiding behind the favorite Republican Party talking point of states' rights.

"Marriage had always been a matter left to the states. And in many of the conversations that I and my colleagues and supporters had, I fully endorse the efforts by activists who work state-by-state," she said.

But just a year later, with an ever increasing number of people supportive of establishing nationwide equality for same-sex couples, Clinton changed her tune. She advocated that the Supreme Court rule in favor of same-sex couples, in a clear contrast with her states-based approach from the previous year.

Clinton will say she, like many politicians, has evolved on the issue of marriage equality. But the evolution of her views very conveniently follows the change in public opinion on the issue and falls in line with her overall move to the left to combat the appeal of Sanders, who was one of a minority of members of Congress to vote against the Defense of Marriage Act, to progressive Democrats. And it's not the only issue she has surreptitiously "evolved" on.

Trade

One of Clinton's most conspicuous and recent flip-flops is on the issue of "free trade." As President Obama sought fast track authority from Congress to pursue the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, TPP, Clinton was pressured by Sanders to take a stance on the deal, one that Sanders and many progressive activists and labor groups are vehemently opposed to.

In a move consistent with her attempt to portray herself as progressive, Clinton said she had doubts about the trade deal and stated if she were voting, she would most likely not have supported the trade package moving through Congress at the time, which gave Obama fast track trade authority to negotiate the deal.

"At this point, probably not," she said when asked if she would have voted to give Obama fast track authority. However, in 2012, while serving as Secretary of State, Clinton spoke about the TPP in much more glowing terms.

"We need to keep upping our game both bilaterally and with partners across the region through agreements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership or TPP," Clinton said "This TPP sets the gold standard in trade agreements to open free, transparent, fair trade, the kind of environment that has the rule of law and a level playing field. And when negotiated, this agreement will cover 40 percent of the world's total trade and build in strong protections for workers and the environment."

With the TPP coming under intense scrutiny from progressives and potentially representing a dividing issue between her and Sanders, Clinton flipped her script on the trade deal by stating she probably wouldn't vote for it, just three years after expressing strong support for the TPP.

And it's not the first time Clinton has flip-flopped on the issue of free trade agreements. While First Lady, she was a supporter of the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, which was championed by President Bill Clinton. Speaking about NAFTA in 1996, Hillary Clinton said, "I think everybody is in favor of free and fair trade. I think NAFTA is proving its worth."

Later she discussed NAFTA in a 2003 memoir, writing "Creating a free trade zone in North America, the largest free trade zone in the world, would expand U.S. exports, create jobs and ensure that our economy was reaping the benefits, not the burdens, of globalization. Although unpopular with labor unions, expanding trade opportunities was an important administration goal."

By 2007, however, Clinton's views on NAFTA had changed. In a 2007 debate during the race for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, Clinton contrasted her previous statements, saying in the debate NAFTA was the wrong course of action.

"NAFTA was a mistake to the extent that it did not deliver on what we had hoped it would, and that's why I call for a trade timeout," she said.

On trade, as with many other issues, Clinton has demonstrated a startling propensity to change her mind, most recently flip-flopping in the direction of progressive advocates on an issue she has spoken quite clearly in favor of in the past.

Iraq War

Clinton, and to be fair many Democrats, flip-flopped on the Iraq War, but her change of view is indicative of her tendency to take the politically popular view of the time. In 2002, when Clinton voted to give President George W. Bush the authorization to use military force in Iraq, public opinion was still squarely in support of the war.

In a 2002 speech on the floor of the Senate, Clinton said she supported the measure to authorize force because of Iraq's dictatorial ruler Saddam Hussein.

"Intelligence reports show that Saddam Hussein has worked to rebuild his chemical and biological weapons stock, his missile delivery capability, and his nuclear program. He has also given aid, comfort, and sanctuary to terrorists, including al-Qaeda members," Clinton said.

Clinton went on to say in her Senate floor speech that if left unchecked Hussein would “continue to increase his capacity to wage biological and chemical warfare, and will keep trying to develop nuclear weapons.”

In a meeting with CODEPINK in 2003, Clinton also furthered the since debunked storyline that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

“There is a very easy way to prevent anyone from being put into harm’s way and that is for Saddam Hussein to disarm and I have absolutely no belief that he will,” Clinton said. “The very difficult question for all of us is how does one bring about the disarmament of someone with such a proven track record of a commitment, if not an obsession, with weapons of mass destruction?”

However, by 2007, as public sentiment cooled on the Iraq War, Clinton’s view of her vote to authorize the use of force had shifted. In September 2007, in the midst of her campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination, Clinton said of her war vote, “Obviously, if I had known then what I know now about what the President would do with the authority that was given him, I would not have voted the way that I did.”

Then in her 2014 memoir *Hard Choices* with the war in Iraq increasingly remembered as a colossal foreign policy blunder, Clinton went even further in her opposition to the war. “I thought I had acted in good faith and made the best decision I could with the information I had,” Clinton said of her Iraq vote. “And I wasn’t alone in getting it wrong. But I still got it wrong. Plain and simple.”

Clinton is right to say she got it wrong, as the war in Iraq represented a dark chapter in American foreign policy. But the trouble arises with the fact that she supported the war when it was popular with the American people and only expressed her opposition to it once public opinion turned against the conflict. On this, and these other issues highlighted, it appears that Clinton is much more concerned with pandering to the widest swath of voters than to upholding any personal beliefs.

Crime

Crime is another policy area in which Clinton’s rhetoric has changed dramatically from her days in Bill Clinton’s White House. In fact, Clinton has made a new approach to dealing with those who commit crimes a central part of her campaign, calling for an “end to the era of mass incarceration.”

During her latest campaign, Clinton has been an outspoken critic of the current

criminal justice system. “We have allowed our criminal justice system to get out of balance, and these recent tragedies should galvanize us to come together as a nation to find our balance again,” Clinton said.

Clinton is right, the current criminal justice system and approach to dealing with crime is inherently counterproductive. But she hasn’t always felt that way. Back when the more popular political school of thought was to be “tough on crime,” Clinton displayed a much more aggressive approach to punishing those who commit crimes.

During Bill Clinton’s presidency, Hillary Clinton supported his tough on crime policies and a 1994 law “that among other things, has increased untold numbers of prison sentences by encouraging states to drastically reduce or eliminate parole and early release.”

In 1994, Hillary Clinton’s quotes about crime sound very different from her 2016 campaign when she talks about the problem of mass incarceration. “We need more and tougher prison sentences for repeat offenders,” she said in 1994. “We need more prisons to keep violent offenders for as long as it takes to keep them off the streets.”

Candidates are allowed to change their minds and it is possible that Clinton’s perspective on crime and these other issues has indeed shifted. However, the sheer volume of issues that Clinton has flip-flopped on, and the progressive territory she is trying to stake out with these switches as a mechanism for stemming Sanders’ momentum, tells a story of a candidate willing to say whatever it takes to win the presidency.

Driver’s Licenses for Undocumented Immigrants

A clear and recent example of a Clinton flip-flop is her stance on providing driver’s licenses to undocumented immigrants. During her quest for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, Clinton generated headlines when she said she would not support a proposal put forward by then-New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer to provide driver’s licenses to undocumented immigrants that pass a driving test. This came after criticism that her position on the issue was not clear.

When Spitzer eventually abandoned the driver’s license proposal, Clinton praised the decision. “I support Governor Spitzer’s decision today to withdraw his proposal,” she said in a statement. “As President, I will not support driver’s licenses for undocumented people and will press for comprehensive immigration reform that deals with all of the issues around illegal immigration, including border security and fixing our broken system.”

This put her in clear contrast with then Sen. Barack Obama, who was supportive of the idea of providing driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants who passed a driver's test. However, in her second bid for the Democratic nomination, Clinton has done a 180 on the issue. Clinton indicated the change in her position through a campaign spokesperson who said "Hillary supports state policies to provide driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants. This is consistent with her support for the president's executive action."

Clinton didn't say what prompted her to switch her position on the issue, but in a primary where she is running in a full sprint to the left, it isn't surprising that she has changed her tune in a way that appeals to progressives.

Ethanol

Perhaps the most egregious Clinton flip-flop came on an issue that's not on most of the country's radar screen: ethanol. However, this issue tends to come up time and time again in presidential primaries/caucuses because of its importance in Iowa and the sway that state holds in the presidential primary process.

An examination of Clinton's rhetoric on ethanol indicates her support for the controversial fuel source has changed at politically convenient times. An article by *The Daily Beast* explored Clinton's position on ethanol and examined how, and likely why, she flipped so dramatically on the issue.

"In 2002, Clinton opposed the mandated use of just two billion gallons of ethanol per year," the article stated. "But a mere five years later, after seeing that she had to go through Iowa, which produces more ethanol than any other state, to return to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, she was advocating the use of 18 times that quantity of biofuel."

Additional proof of her anti-ethanol history is Clinton's participation in writing a 2002 letter about mandates in ethanol use. The letter stated that an ethanol mandate would add "an astonishing new anti-consumer government mandate, that every US refiner must use an ever-increasing volume of ethanol." *The Daily Beast* also reported that while serving in the Senate, Clinton voted against measures supportive of ethanol 17 times.

Fast forward to 2007, when Clinton was seeking the Democratic nomination for President, and as her first step in that journey, a win in the Iowa caucuses. While on a campaign stop in Iowa, Clinton stressed the importance of the corn-based energy product, saying the U.S. needed to work on "limiting our dependence on foreign oil. And we have a perfect example right here in Iowa about how it can work with all of the ethanol that's being produced here."

The fact that Clinton flip-flopped on ethanol while campaigning for President in

Iowa after she had consistently voted against ethanol related measures as a senator is telling of her tendency to take the politically convenient stance, rather than uphold any convictions. It shows that her predominate interest is getting elected, rather than adhering to principle.

Conclusions

So what do all these flip-flops say about Hillary Clinton? The takeaway message is that while she is angling to appeal to the more liberal wing of the Democratic party, progressives should not trust Clinton to follow through if she is elected President, as she has a history of changing her mind on issues at politically convenient times.

I'm not saying that politicians should never be allowed to change their mind, of course political figures' views are allowed to evolve and shift. But the problem comes when a politician changes their mind so frequently that it becomes difficult to trust them to follow through on what they're campaigning on.

Such is the case with Hillary Clinton. She may cast herself as a progressive, but her prior history and propensity to flip-flop say otherwise.

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Trump, McCain and 'Chicken-hawk-ism'

The fury over Donald Trump's slur against Sen. McCain's time as a Vietnam War POW has obscured a larger point about "chicken-hawk-ism," how U.S. political/media insiders hail the soldiers for "heroism" but send them into harm's way with little appreciation of their sacrifice, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The sheer outrageousness of some of Donald Trump's public utterances invites condemnation that is so justifiably quick and unqualified that it leads us to overlook respects in which what Trump says or stands for reflects larger patterns that many Americans do not condemn and may even support.

There is a reason that Trump moved to the top of the polls of Republican primary voters, and the reason isn't his hair. Dana Milbank of the *Washington Post* addressed this phenomenon the other day in a column in which he noted how, when

Trump briefly ran for the presidential nomination of the Reform Party in 2000, he distinguished himself from Pat Buchanan by taking relatively progressive positions on immigration and social issues.

That's quite a contrast with how Trump, now running for the Republican nomination, has called Mexicans a bunch of rapists. Milbank's persuasive explanation is that what we have heard each time is much less any sincere convictions of Trump but instead the kind of red meat that he has calculated will most excite the constituency to which he happens to be appealing.

Trump's most recent outrageous comment, his disparaging of John McCain's military service, leads naturally and appropriately to comparing what those two individuals were doing as young men during the years in question.

Michael Miller and Fred Barbash do a good job in the *Post* of relating how, while McCain was stoically enduring suffering in captivity in North Vietnam and heroically resisting his captors' demands for a "confession" in return for his release, Trump was enjoying a life of privilege, partying, and pecuniary pursuits. Student deferments and the luck of a high draft lottery number kept Trump out of the military.

Trump's story regarding military service was little different, however, from that of many other prominent American men from the same generation who have enjoyed political success. Some of those men did much more gaming of the system than Trump did.

That was true of Bill Clinton, who cleverly worked the creaky draft board system. It was true as well of Dick ("I had other priorities in the '60s than military service") Cheney, who may have gone so far as to manipulate his marriage and child-siring schedule to stay out of uniform.

As for the Republican presidential nominee in 2012, he had, with the addition of a couple of years of deferment while a Mormon missionary, the same things going for him as Trump did, student deferments and a high lottery number, and thus was able, like Trump, to embark directly on a career that enriched himself through financial wheeling and dealing.

Amid a culture of American exceptionalism that is one of the most conspicuous examples in the current world of fervent nationalism, many Americans have yet to reconcile in any convincing way this overtly patriotic culture with the pattern just described regarding national service and the leaders they admire and support.

We live in an age of chicken hawks, in which those who have never served in the military tend to be, not coincidentally, some of those most supportive of, and

most confident in the success of, the application of military force by the United States.

We also live in a time when collective responsibility and collective pursuits on behalf of the general welfare usually take a back seat to private pursuits. We are at least as likely to treat as heroes people who have conspicuously succeeded in private sector pursuits and sold us a better cell phone, as we would so treat anyone who has endured things while in any form of public service.

As far as the contemporary military's place is concerned, we deal with the patriotism-vs.-private indulgence disjuncture mainly by ritualistically voicing tribute to those who wear the uniform while keeping their world separate from our world. We salute them at sporting events, we give them priority boarding at airports, and we thank them for their service in other venues. By so doing, we check a box on the patriotism list.

The lack of conscription is, of course, critical for maintaining the separation and keeping the military world from intruding messily on our own. Probably that is one reason those who served in the Vietnam War did not, at the time, get the salutations at ball parks or other shows of appreciation.

The Vietnam War also had come to be perceived, by its last couple of years and by all except a few diehard believers in the wisdom of the expedition, as a losing endeavor. And so it clashed with the American tendency to associate heroism with winning.

That, too, is a chord that Trump struck, in his outrageous way, in his insult against McCain. "He's a war hero because he was captured," sneered Trump. "I like people that weren't captured."

That brings to mind the aphorism, associated with George S. Patton, that "You don't win wars by dying for your country. You win wars by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his country." Although the statement may be apocryphal, George C. Scott said it in a movie, so Americans take it as genuine wisdom.

Trump's comment about McCain was so despicable that all, Republicans and Democrats alike, can comfortably condemn it. Another box checked. And then Americans can continue with their chicken hawkism, their focus on private pecuniary pursuits, their general disdain for public service and the public sector, their neglect of collective endeavors necessary for the general welfare, and their belief that patriotism and the military aspects of it are all about wins that we assume someone in uniform will get for us without having to discomfort ourselves with thoughts of costs and losses.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)
