

# As Costs of Climate Crisis Grow, Protest Movement Escalates

Long term campaigns to decarbonize the economy and demand emergency climate policies are getting stronger, write Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers.

By **Kevin Zeese** and **Margaret Flowers**

[PopularResistance.org](http://PopularResistance.org)



The warnings of climate chaos are coming so fast they are difficult to keep up with. Storms, heatwaves and climate-related weather disasters are increasing at a rapid pace. The leadership of the two corporate-dominated political parties are trying to keep the climate issue out of the 2020 campaign, but the movement is becoming too big to ignore.

Climate justice protests against fossil fuel infrastructure, politicians and the media are also growing. An industry publication describes how [activists are “driving pipeline rejections”](#) reporting, “From large, interstate pipelines to small lines connecting towns and neighborhoods, anti-fossil fuel activists have proven highly successful at blocking, through regulations or lawsuits, new natural gas infrastructure in the Northeastern United States.”

## Reports of Climate Chaos

Several reports in recent weeks are expressing new concerns about the climate crisis.

[An MIT study published last week](#) found that we may be “at the precipice of an excitation” of the carbon cycle. Authors reported that when the rate at which carbon dioxide enters the oceans pushes past a certain critical threshold, it can trigger a reflex of severe ocean acidification that lasts for 10,000 years. The history of the earth shows that over the last 540 million years, this has coincided with four of the five great mass extinctions. Today’s oceans are absorbing carbon at an order of magnitude faster than the worst case in the geologic record, even though humans have only been extracting carbon for the last 100 years. This is likely to be similar to past global catastrophes potentially culminating in the Earth’s sixth mass extinction.

A [June 20](#) report by the [Center for Climate Integrity](#) found that U.S. coastal communities face more than \$400 billion in costs over the next 20 years, much of it sooner, to defend themselves from inevitable sea-level rise.

Related to this, a [study published May 20](#) in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* concluded that coasts should plan for 6.5 feet of sea level rise by 2100. Ice loss from Antarctica and Greenland could cause far more sea-level rise than previously thought.

These reports are forcing the power structure to face the reality of the climate crisis. Last month, Moody’s Analytics examined the economic impact of the failure to curb planet-warming emissions in [“The Economic Implications of Climate Change.”](#) Moody’s warns there will be a \$69 trillion price tag by 2100 due to the far-reaching economic damage of the climate crisis. They warned: “There is no denying it: The longer we wait to take bold action to curb

emissions, the higher the costs will be for all of us.”

These reports come at a time of increased climate-caused disasters.

- This year, wildfires have scorched more than 1.2 million acres in Alaska, making it one of the state’s three biggest fire years on record. Fires are spreading farther north into the Arctic, burning more intensely and starting earlier in the year as climate models have suggested. On July 4, Anchorage hit 90°F, breaking the city’s all-time record by 5 degrees. Alaska’s statewide average temperature was 7.9°F above average, according to NOAA’s latest National State of the Climate report. For the first time in the 95-year record, the year-long July-to-June average temperature for Alaska as a whole was above freezing.
- Around the world, global warming has clearly contributed to an increase in extreme fires from tropical rainforests to boreal evergreen forests, and they are often linked with heatwaves. Fires pose new threats to places that aren’t used to experiencing them, including temperate mid-latitude forests near regions with dense populations, as shown by unusual wildfires in places like Germany during last summer’s European heatwave and drought. There is rapid growth of unusually extreme fires burning across South America, Australia, and western North America like the extreme fires in California and Canada last year.
- Tropical Storm Barry, fueled by warm offshore waters, recently caused downpours in Louisiana. The situation showed the compounding of risks that

scientists have been warning about due to climate change. Like [Hurricane Florence](#) in North Carolina last year and [Hurricane Harvey](#), which sat over Houston for days in 2017, Barry brought heavy rainfall and flooding on the coast and lower Mississippi Valley, [according to the National Hurricane Center](#).

- A [report released July 10 by the NOAA](#) finds that sunny-day flooding has doubled since 2000 in the United States. Floods interfered with traffic in northeast states, swamped septic systems in Florida and choked Delaware and Maryland coastal farms with saltwater over the past year. In 2018, the [U.S. tied the record for high-tide flood days](#). The report predicted that annual flood records will be broken again next year and for years and decades to come due to sea-level rise.
- In Indian Country, according to the 2018 [National Climate Assessment](#), weather on the Northern Great Plains has been getting more variable, erratic and destructive. In 2011, the Northern Plains faced a rash of wildfires and drought, followed in 2012, by severe flooding. Occasionally, these take the form of high-powered storms, like tornadoes that ravaged South Dakota reservations in 2016, or the ice storm of 2018, or the bomb cyclone of 2019. A bomb cyclone, last March occurred when an unseasonably hot column of air shot suddenly upward and collided with the frigid high atmosphere sending barometric pressure plummeting. In seconds, the sky erupted bringing devastating wind, storm, and [flooding](#). Homes and ranches of South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation were hit like a missile, more than 500 homes were left uninhabitable. [Click here](#)

for information on how you can help.

- Washington, D.C., just experienced nearly a month's worth of rain in an hour. According to a paper published in the journal Nature, these intense rains are a byproduct of man-made climate change.
- Last month was the hottest June on record globally. In Europe, there were record heat waves that sent Europe's temperatures soaring to 114 degrees Fahrenheit.

Despite these realities, there is inadequate action by most nations of the world especially the United States. President Donald Trump dismissed the need for climate action during the G-20 summit in Japan, saying he doesn't want to take action to confront the emergency because such a move would threaten corporate profits. As experts have warned, if we do not confront the climate emergency now, we will pay much more later.

### **DNC Resisting Climate Debate**

In the 2020 election cycle, the Democratic Party is resisting climate change as an issue even though 15 of its presidential candidates, more than 50 of its member organizations in the states, and a slew of progressive organizations that make up its voting base, some armed with petitions bearing over 200,000 signatures, are calling for the Democratic National Committee to hold a separate climate-focused debate. On June 10, the executive committee of the Democratic Party in Miami-Dade County – the U.S. metropolitan area considered most vulnerable to sea-level rise – voted unanimously to urge Democrats to devote one of the 12 Democratic presidential debates to the climate crisis.

DNC Chairman Tom Perez, who rejected a climate-focused debate, tried to explain the party's opposition in [a post on Medium](#), saying it would be impractical to hold a single-issue forum. His refusal [led to hundreds of activists sitting in at the DNC headquarters](#), including sleeping overnight, before the first debate, demanding a debate on climate change.

Sen. [Bernie Sanders](#) and Rep. [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) introduced a [resolution](#) asking Congress to declare that global warming is an emergency and demanding a massive mobilization of resources to protect the U.S. economy, society and national security. They called for “a national, social, industrial, and economic mobilization of the resources and labor of the United States at a massive-scale to halt, reverse, mitigate, and prepare for the consequences of the climate emergency and to restore the climate for future generations.”

Billionaire [Tom Steyer](#) has entered the 2020 race pledging to spend \$100 million and focus his campaign on climate change. In his [first television advertisement](#), he focused on the corruption of government and the economy and on climate. He said: “You look at climate change, that is people who are saying we’d rather make money than save the world.”

Green Party candidate Howie Hawkins has put forward an [ecosocialist Green New Deal](#) that not only transitions to a clean energy economy but remakes the economy and creates an economic bill of rights while cutting the military budget by 75 percent.

**The Climate Justice Movement's Growing Power**

The movement is building power and impacting the direction of the U.S. and the world, but the response by those supporting the status quo was shown in France recently when on the hottest day in French history climate protesters were brutally tear-gassed for demanding climate action.

PARIS – Intervention des CRS qui utilisent des gazeuses pour tenter de déloger les militants.

Plusieurs journalistes ont été empêcher de filmer. [pic.twitter.com/XzwTCTYyJE](https://pic.twitter.com/XzwTCTYyJE)

– Clément Lanot (@ClementLanot) [June 28, 2019](#)

This action, occurring in Paris where the Paris Climate Accord was reached, adds to the heightening of the conflict. The inadequate Paris agreement showed the movement must do more than rely on international agreements.

### **Third Phase**

A longtime labor and climate activist, Jeremy Brecher, describes the climate movement entering a third phase. In the first phase, the man-made climate crisis was confirmed and the movement focused on international agreements and lobbying governments. The second phase arose when the Copenhagen agreement failed, leading to a protest movement against fossil fuel infrastructure, protests of fossil fuel corporations and against investors funding climate-destroying infrastructure.

The third phase centers around a global Green New Deal. It involves protests, electoral demands, and challenging inaction of fossil fuel-funded politicians. He points to groups like Sunrise, Extinction Rebellion and the Student

Strike for Climate as examples of this phase. It is a meta-movement that integrates, environmentalism, ecological restoration, social justice, racial equality, workers' rights, restorative agriculture, and many other challenges to our unjust and unsustainable world order into a practical program.

Climate protests, which have been ongoing for a decade, are having victories. Recently, two major oil pipelines for carrying crude oil from Canada's tar sands region were called into question as judges in Minnesota overturned a key approval for a proposed pipeline and Michigan's attorney general threatened to shut down an aging pipeline under the Great Lakes. These were the latest setbacks for a series of five pipelines designed to transport tar sands that have either been canceled or delayed. The other projects include Energy East and Northern Gateway, both of which were canceled, and Trans Mountain expansion and Keystone XL pipelines, both of which are on hold.

On July 13, climate activists from Beyond Extreme Energy held a protest outside Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) commissioner Cheryl LaFleur's home in Massachusetts. They demanded that LaFleur vote "no" on all new fossil fuel infrastructure. Jordan Engel listed the 100 people responsible for killing the planet. Holding people accountable is becoming a reality in this new phase of climate activism.

People are connecting the issue of militarism with climate. In Maine, 22 people were arrested protesting spending on Navy ships urging "Fund Climate Solutions, Not Endless War." The facts are in, the Pentagon is a top global climate

polluter. Popular Resistance and other organizations are organizing the People's Mobilization to Stop the U.S. War Machine and Save the Planet on Sept. 22 and 23, while the UN High Commission meets, and encouraging people to participate in other actions that weekend, the Climate Strike and Puerto Rican Independence Day March. In our most recent interview on Clearing the FOG, we spoke with David Schwartzman, author of "The Earth is Not For Sale," about ending Fossil Fuel Militarized Capitalism.

Extinction  
Rebellion  
brought the  
protest  
movement to  
*The New York  
Times*. On  
June 24, 70  
were arrested  
demanding the  
*Times* cover  
the climate  
crisis as a  
global  
emergency.  
During a sit-  
in on 8th  
Avenue they  
chanted "Report  
the urgency,  
this is a  
climate



emergency!” On Monday, Extinction Rebellion D.C. demonstrated at the Capitol.

The movement continues to grow. More than 7,000 colleges and universities across the globe declared a climate emergency on July 10 committing to mobilize on the crisis. This month, more than 70 health organizations called for urgent action on “one of the greatest threats to health America has ever faced,” calling it the “cancer of climate change.” They cite storm and flood emergencies, chronic air pollution, the spread of diseases carried by insects, and heat-related illnesses. Extreme heat has been the leading cause of weather-related deaths.

The movement is having an impact and industry and politicians know it. Long term campaigns to stop climate infrastructure, force banks and investors to divest from the fossil fuel industry and demand emergency climate policies are getting stronger.

At the beginning of July, after a meeting of OPEC in Vienna, their Secretary-General Mohammed Barkindo said, “there is a growing mass mobilization of world opinion... against oil,” children “are asking us about their future because... they see their peers on the streets campaigning against this industry.” Barkindo added the “mobilization” was “beginning to... dictate policies and corporate decisions, including investment in the industry.”

In testimony to British lawmakers this month, famed scientist and environmental advocate David Attenborough said, “We cannot be radical enough in dealing with the issues that face us at the moment. The question is: what is

practically possible? How can we take the electorate with us in dealing with these things?" It is the job of the climate movement to push political systems to respond.

**Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers co-direct [Popular Resistance](#).**

*A version of this article first appeared on [PopularResistance.org](#).*

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## WATCH THE REPLAY: Nils Melzer, Aaron Maté', Mike Gravel on CN Live! Premiere

The UN special rapporteur on torture, Nils Melzer; journalist Aaron Maté and former U.S. Senator and presidential candidate Mike Gravel were among the guests for the premier edition of **CN Live!** **Watch the replay at this updated and now permanent link.**

**O**n the premiere episode of **CN Live!**, Nils Melzer, the United Nations special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, joined us from Geneva to discuss his work on the condition of imprisoned *WikiLeaks* publisher Julian Assange. Journalist **Aaron Maté** spoke to us from New York about his latest article, "[CrowdStrikeOut: Mueller's Own Report Undercuts Its Core Russia-Meddling Claims](#)". Former U.S. Senator and Democratic primary contender **Mike Gravel**, and **Marjorie Cohn**, professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law and former president of the National Lawyers Guild, joined the program from California to discuss the race to the White

House.

**Francis Boyle**, international law professor at the University of Illinois, picked apart the intelligence and political machinations behind the arrest of financier Jeffery Epstein on sex trafficking charges; and author and scholar **George Szamuely** joined hosts **Joe Lauria** and **Elizabeth Vos** from Budapest to dissect the latest news on Assange and *WikiLeaks*.

Watch the replay of **CN Live!** on our [Facebook page](#), on Periscope and right here on *Consortium News* at this permanent link:

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## Announcing CN Live! A Weekly Current Events Webcast Beginning Friday on Consortium News

*Consortium News* announces the launch on Friday of a weekly webcast news show as a successor to the Vigils for Assange that will also delve into other pressing issues of the day.

**CN Live!** will air every Friday from 2 pm to 4 pm U.S. Eastern time and can be seen here streaming live on *Consortium News* as well as on our [YouTube Channel](#), our [Facebook page](#) and on Periscope. It will also be archived on those platforms.

Besides the latest news on *WikiLeaks* and Julian Assange, our panel will discuss the coming U.S. presidential election, the Middle East, East-West relations, U.S. foreign policy,

climate change, media, domestic and international politics and more.

On our premiere edition, Francis Boyle, international law professor, will pick apart the intelligence and political machinations behind the arrest of financier Jeffery Epstein on sex trafficking charges; Marjorie Cohn, professor emeritus of law, and former U.S. Senator Mike Gravel, a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, will discuss the Democratic Party primary battle; As'ad AbuKhalil, political science professor, will analyze the latest developments in Syria, Iran and other parts of the Middle East region; and George Szamuely will join hosts Joe Lauria and Elizabeth Vos to dissect the latest news on Assange and *WikiLeaks*.

Join us Friday at 2 pm EDT for **CN Live!**

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## Kamala Harris's Distinguished Career of Serving Injustice

The presidential hopeful's record in California undermines her claim to progressive credentials, says Marjorie Cohn.

By **Marjorie Cohn**

*Truthout*



Sen. Kamala Harris is rising in the polls after dramatically confronting former Vice President Joe Biden during the Democratic primary debate about his opposition to federally mandated busing for desegregation. The following week, however, Harris backed away from saying that busing should always be federally mandated, calling it just one “tool that is in the toolbox” for school districts to use. When asked to clarify whether she would support federal mandates for busing, she said: “I believe that any tool that is in the toolbox should be considered by a school district.” But Biden’s poll numbers are falling as a result of Harris’s theatrical attack.

Harris, who served as San Francisco district attorney from 2004 to 2011 and California attorney general from 2011 to 2017, describes herself as a “progressive prosecutor.” Harris’s prosecutorial record, however, is far from progressive. Through her apologia for egregious prosecutorial misconduct, her refusal to allow DNA testing for a probably innocent death row inmate, her opposition to legislation requiring the attorney general’s office to independently investigate police shootings and more, she has made a significant contribution to the sordid history of injustice she decries.

### **Jail Informant Scandal**

For years, perhaps decades, the Orange County Sheriff’s Department, in cooperation with the Orange County District Attorney, or OCDA, planted teams of informants in the jail to illegally elicit confessions.

Deputy sheriffs placed informants near defendants who were represented by counsel to obtain statements from them. Prosecutors were aware of this program and explicitly or implicitly promised benefits to informants. This violated the defendants' Sixth Amendment right to counsel.

In *People v. Dekraai*, an informant in this program illegally obtained statements from the defendant. After the prosecutor agreed not to use the statements, Dekraai pled guilty to murder and was preparing his defense for a trial on whether he would get the death penalty. He asked the judge to find that the OCDA had a conflict of interest because of its involvement in the jail informant program.

Over a six-month period, the judge held two hearings and heard from 39 witnesses.

The judge found that many witnesses, including prosecutors and law enforcement officers, were "credibility challenged" about the nature of the informant program and their role in it. Some couldn't remember, the judge determined, but "others undoubtedly lied."

Thus, the judge concluded that the OCDA had a conflict of interest and recused the entire OCDA office, removing it from any further involvement in Dekraai's case.

Kamala Harris, who at that time was serving as state attorney general, would then take over the prosecution of the death penalty phase of Dekraai's trial. But Harris appealed the judge's ruling and opposed the recusal of the OCDA.

In 2016, the Court of Appeal rejected Harris's argument and

upheld the trial judge's recusal of the OCDA. The appellate court wrote in its opinion:

"On the last page of the Attorney General's reply brief it states, "The trial court's order recusing the OCDA from prosecuting Dekraai's penalty phase trial was a remedy in search of a conflict." Nonsense. The court recused the OCDA only after lengthy evidentiary hearings where it heard a steady stream of evidence regarding improper conduct by the prosecution team. To suggest the trial judge prejudged the case is reckless and grossly unfair. These proceedings were a search for the truth. The order is affirmed."

Attorney Jerome Wallingford represented a man who, like Dekraai, was a victim of the illegal Orange County jail informant program. "Harris should've done her job and investigated the informant program based on the findings of the Court of Appeal in the Dekraai case," Wallingford told *Truthout*. "But instead, she tried to whitewash the scandal by protecting the DA and blaming the sheriff."

The job of the attorney general is not to protect the DA. As chief law enforcement officer of the state, the attorney general's duty is "to see that the laws of the State are uniformly and adequately enforced," as mandated by Article V of the California Constitution. Harris violated her legal duty in this case.

### **Minimized 'Outrageous Misconduct'**

Harris minimized "outrageous government misconduct" in *People v. Velasco-Palacios*. The trial court found the

prosecutor “deliberately altered an interrogation transcript to include a confession that could be used to justify charges carrying a life sentence, and he distributed it to defense counsel during a period of time when [the prosecutor] knew defense counsel was trying to persuade defendant to settle the case.” After the prosecutor snuck the fabricated confession into the record, it caused the defense counsel to urge the defendant to plead guilty, which undermined the trust the client had in his lawyer.

The trial judge determined that the prosecutor’s action was “egregious, outrageous, and shocked the conscience,” and dismissed the case. Harris’s office appealed. The Court of Appeal affirmed the dismissal, noting that “dismissal is an appropriate sanction for government misconduct that is egregious enough to prejudice a defendant’s constitutional rights.” Significantly, the appellate court stated that “egregious violations of a defendant’s constitutional rights are sufficient to establish outrageous government misconduct.”

But the Court of Appeal rejected Harris’s argument that if the conduct wasn’t *physically brutal*, it would not satisfy the “shock the conscience” standard required for dismissal.

Once again, Harris was covering up prosecutorial misconduct and ignoring the Supreme Court’s admonition in *Berger v. U.S.* that the duty of a prosecutor “is not that it shall win a case, but that justice shall be done.”

### **Opposed Investigations of Police Shootings**

These cases are not isolated examples of Harris’s less-than-progressive record as a prosecutor.

“Time after time, when progressives urged her to embrace criminal justice reforms as a district attorney and then the state’s attorney general, Ms. Harris opposed them or stayed silent,” University of San Francisco School of Law Professor Lara Bazelon wrote in a *New York Times* article titled, “Kamala Harris Was Not a ‘Progressive Prosecutor.’” Bazelon added, “Most troubling, Ms. Harris fought tooth and nail to uphold wrongful convictions that had been secured through official misconduct that included evidence tampering, false testimony and the suppression of crucial information by prosecutors.”

After a federal judge ruled in 2014 that California’s death penalty system had become so dysfunctional it “violate[d] the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment,” Harris appealed the decision. As a result, California’s death penalty was upheld and remains in place today.

Harris refused DNA testing that could exonerate Kevin Cooper, a likely innocent man on death row, and she opposed statewide body-worn police cameras. Harris favored criminalizing truancy, raising cash bail fees and keeping prisoners locked up for cheap labor. She also supported reporting arrested undocumented juveniles to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, covering for corrupt police lab technicians and blocking gender confirmation surgery for a transgender prisoner. A U.S. District Court judge concluded that withholding the surgery constituted cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eighth Amendment.

Many of Harris’s prosecutorial actions

disproportionately hurt people of color.

Harris opposed legislation requiring the attorney general's office to independently investigate police shootings resulting in death. In 2016, members of the California Legislative Black Caucus called on Harris to do more to strengthen accountability for police misconduct. Assemblyman Kevin McCarthy (D-Sacramento), a member of the Black Caucus, told the *Los Angeles Times*, "The African American and civil rights community have been disappointed that [Harris] hasn't come out stronger on this."

### **Helped 'Foreclosure King'**

Although many of Harris's prosecutorial actions harmed people of color, a notable one helped the white "foreclosure king" – Steve Mnuchin, now Trump's Treasury secretary.

Mnuchin was CEO of OneWest Bank from 2009-2015. A 2013 memo obtained by *The Intercept* alleges that "OneWest rushed delinquent homeowners out of their homes by violating notice and waiting period statutes, illegally backdated key documents, and effectively gamed foreclosure auctions."

After a yearlong investigation, the California attorney general's Consumer Law Section "uncovered evidence suggestive of widespread misconduct." In 2013, they recommended that Harris prosecute a civil enforcement lawsuit against the bank.

"Without any explanation," Harris's office declined to initiate litigation in the case.

Mnuchin donated \$2,000 to Harris's Senate campaign in February 2016. It was his only donation to a Democratic

candidate.

In January 2017, the Campaign for Accountability claimed that Mnuchin and OneWest Bank used “potentially illegal tactics to foreclose on as many as 80,000 California homes,” and called for a federal investigation.

Harris wrote in her memoir, “The Truths We Hold,” “America has a deep and dark history of people using the power of the prosecutor as an instrument of injustice.” She added, “I know this history well – of innocent men framed, of charges brought against people without sufficient evidence, of prosecutors hiding information that would exonerate defendants, of the disproportionate application of the law.”

Indeed, the public record indicates that as district attorney and later as attorney general of California, Harris has contributed to the injustice she claims to abhor.

**Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers and a member of the advisory board of Veterans for Peace. Her most recent book is “Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues.”**

*This article is from Truthout and reprinted with permission.*

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A Howl for Blood in Iran as Americans Cheer US Bombers on July 4

The aerial parade of military aircraft was a chilling display of rampant killing machinery, write Medea Benjamin and Ann Wright.

By [Medea Benjamin](#) and [Ann Wright](#)

[Common Dreams](#)



**P**resident Donald Trump's order to the Pentagon to have an aerial parade of military aircraft over Washington, D.C., on July 4 provided a history lesson of America's war mongering in the past two decades, and a terrifying view of what might appear in the skies of Iran if National Security Advisor John Bolton gets his way.

The combat aircraft that were cheered by Trump's supporters as they flew low over the monuments in the nation's capital have not been cheered by people in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Palestine as the same type of planes fly over their homes – terrifying and killing their children and wreaking havoc on their lives.

Over those countries, Air Force [B-2 Spirit](#), Air Force [F-22 Raptor](#), Navy [F-35C Joint Strike Fighter](#) and [F/A-18 Hornet](#) stealth fighters and bombers fly so high they are not seen or heard – until the massive explosions from their 500- to 2,000-pound bombs hit and obliterate everything and everyone in their radius. The [blast radius](#) of a 2,000-pound bomb is 82 feet, but the lethal fragmentation reaches 1,200 feet. In 2017, the Trump administration dropped the most massive non-nuclear bomb in its inventory, the 21,000 pound [“mother of](#)

all bombs,” on a cave tunnel complex in Afghanistan.

## **More Bombs Allowed**

While most Americans have probably forgotten we are still at war in Afghanistan, the Trump administration “eased” the rules of engagement, allowing the military to drop more bombs in 2018 than in any other year since the war began in 2001. The 7,632 bombs dropped by American aircraft in 2018 made U.S. weapons makers rich, but hit 1,015 Afghan civilians.

The Boeing-made combat attack Apache helicopters, a crowd pleaser on July 4, have been used by the US Army to blow up homes and cars filled with civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Israeli military uses them to kill Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the Saudi military has killed children in Yemen with these death machines.

Billions of dollars worth of U.S. planes and bombs sold to Saudi Arabia raked in record profits for weapons manufacturers such as Raytheon and Lockheed Martin. But they pummeled Yemeni civilians since the air war started in 2015, killing people in marketplaces, weddings, funerals, and 40 children on a summer outing in a school bus. Radhya al-Mutawakel, chairwoman of the Yemeni human rights organization Mwatana, says the U.S. has legal and moral responsibility for selling weapons to the Saudi-led coalition. “Yemeni civilians are dying every day because of this war and you (America) are fueling this war. It is a shame that financial interests are worth more than the blood of innocent people.”

One notorious vehicle of death that was not flown above

Washington was America's assassin drone. Perhaps it was too dangerous for an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) to be flown close to the president of the United States and a crowd of American citizens with its history of numerous inexplicable crashes and intelligence failures that have caused the deaths of hundreds of innocent civilians in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Iraq.

John Bolton, who has the ear of the president every day, [wrote in an op-ed](#) in 2015 that in order to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, the U.S. should bomb Iran. Now that he has goaded Iran into stepping up its enrichment of uranium as a result of the U.S. reneging on the nuclear deal and European signatories bailing out on their responsibilities in the agreement, Bolton is itching to start the bombing. So are Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Mohammad Bin Salman, crown prince of Saudi Arabia. Both Israel and Saudi Arabia have been trying for years to drag the U.S. into a war with Iran. Colleagues in the humanitarian and refugee arenas in the Middle East tell us a war is coming and are preparing for its nightmarish consequences throughout the region.

With the U.S. political and media dogs of war howling again for blood in Iran, Trump's decision to showcase America's aerial firepower must have been cheered by the war hawks in the administration and Congress, and their friends in the weapons industry. But to those of us who want peaceful resolutions to international disputes, the Fourth of July display was a chilling reminder of the horrific deaths caused by successive Administrations' propensity for war and the terror that might soon be raining down on the people of

Iran if John Bolton gets his way.

**Medea Benjamin is the co-founder of CODEPINK: Women for Peace and the author of numerous books including “Inside Iran,” “Kingdom of the Unjust: Saudia Arabia” and “Killing by Remote Control-Drones.”**

**Ann Wright is a retired U.S. Army Colonel and a former U.S. diplomat who resigned in 2003 in opposition to Bush’s war on Iraq. She is the co-author of “Dissent: Voices of Conscience.”**

*This article is from [Common Dreams](#).*

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## What to Expect in the Democratic Debates

Sam Hussein takes a look at some some of the candidates who will be getting national TV attention.

**By [Sam Hussein](#)**

*Special to Consortium News*



**F**ollowing the rigging of the 2016 Democratic presidential primary process in favor of Hillary Clinton and various reforms that have been implemented since, the current mix of candidates heading into the back-to-back TV debates, Wednesday and Thursday nights, is perhaps the best the DNC establishment could realistically have hoped for.

Sen. Bernie Sanders has been diluted by a massive field and former Sen. Mike Gravel, who has been articulating the broadest and most radical critique of U.S. foreign policy of

any candidate, is off the stage, at least for now.

Gravel's exclusion is especially important because of his temperament and age: he is not bound to respect the traditional pieties, particularly toward the allegedly gravitas-laden, former vice president, Joe Biden. Gravel is presumably not among the older senators the young Biden cozied up to upon entering the revered body in 1973.

It's unclear how the large stage will play out, but it might mitigate the clear head-to-head contrast on Thursday between Biden and Sanders. It might be seen as a relative diversion. It's also possible some other candidates might take on the role of undercutting Sanders on behalf of the DNC establishment. Alternatively, the critiques of Biden might be rather watered down and therefore possible for Biden and his proxies to rebut. The wide field also provides a good number of establishment candidates as "backups" in the event that Biden does collapse.

An added layer to this are the "refs": Russiagate conspiracy peddler Rachel Maddow and friends from the Comcast/NBC corporate family. The debate has of course been deemed "legitimate" by the DNC, which has said it will penalize candidates who participate in debates it doesn't sanction.

### **Gabbard: Lone Voice on WikiLeaks**



The establishment media have a history of taking gratuitous shots at Sanders and so any stumble from him will be magnified. The same is likely true of Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, who has articulated some legitimate points on foreign policy. She continues to

be idiosyncratic by defending Biden on his gaffe about having worked with pro-segregation senators, but she's been virtually the lone loud voice on issues like the Trump administration targeting *WikiLeaks* with the Espionage Act – a first against a publisher for unauthorized possession and dissemination of classified information in U.S. history.

### **Biden's Vulnerabilities**

Biden's recent remarks on working with segregationists have drawn attention, but not the underlying fact that he was the leading northern Democratic opponent of desegregation, as the noted author and education specialist Jonathan Kozol has noted. Biden is vulnerable on that, though he'll viciously attack any candidate that would raise that history.

Biden has largely succeeded in spinning his cooperation with segregationists as one of "civility" but his version of bipartisanship obviously doesn't translate into working with anti-war Republicans such as Ron Paul, the late Walter Jones, Rep. Thomas Massie or Sen. Rand Paul.

Biden clearly benefits enormously from having been Obama's vice president, though few seem to recall the dynamics that lead to him having that position. During the 2016 campaign, Biden contrasted Obama with prior African American candidates for president as "the first mainstream African American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy." By picking Biden as vice president, Obama was sending a signal to white Democrats who might be leery of a darker skinned man as president: We're in safe hands.

In the absence of any clear view of the major negatives of

the Obama years, Biden could well be vulnerable by being cast as a substantial part of the reason the Barack Obama presidency didn't live up to expectations. That kind of case could deflate Biden – the idea that his endless establishment and corporate ties (as detailed in [Andrew Cockburn's piece](#) in *Harper's* earlier this year) were a major reason that the Obama administration didn't go after Wall Street crooks or really bring about the change many hoped for in 2008.

For the record, I didn't support Obama, arguing instead for a VotePact.org strategy – with conscientious conservatives joining with principled progressives – but many did. A case could be made that if Obama had picked a different running mate, such as Jim Webb, his presidency could have unfolded differently. [See [accuracy.org](#) news release from 2008: “Anti-War Candidate, Pro-War Cabinet?”]

Not only did Biden vote for the Iraq invasion, he prevented people from testifying to the Senate against it, for example the former weapons inspector, Scott Ritter. Biden would later defend his false claims about Iraqi WMDs by insisting that “everyone in the world thought he had them. The weapons inspectors said he had them.”

Other candidates should press Biden on this history of engaging in and facilitating Bush war lies, as well as his record of subservience to corporate interests, but with such a crowded stage, full of so many candidates and moderators who share many of those underlying prejudices, Biden might come through remarkably under-scrutinized.

## **Sanders Weak on Foreign Policy**



Sanders' stance on economic inequality found great resonance in the public in 2016 and his recent speech on democratic socialism – especially contrasting it with corporate socialism – was quite effective. If he can articulate that clearly, he could stem the name recognition Biden has. Sanders has the greatest potential to generate populist excitement – and in a much more authentic way than how Trump manipulated it in 2016. But last time around, Sanders was vulnerable on his foreign policy positions. He actually called for more Saudi intervention in the Mideast at the time. [see [“Sanders’s Screwed Mideast Strategy.”](#)]

He has since become a vocal critic of the horrific Saudi war on Yemen. While he has improved substantially, a case can be made that Sanders has not taken on the U.S. foreign policy establishment sufficiently to articulate a meaningful path out of the perpetual war orthodoxy. He has attempted to invoke war powers to hinder Trump's backing of the Saudi war, and has raised similar objections with respect to a possible U.S. attack on Iran, but somehow such concerns don't come up when the U.S. outright bombs Syria.

All the contenders will want to contrast themselves to Trump, but in different ways. Some will do so in ways that come close to being xenophobic in terms of “Russian influence.” Some will reach for important but “low hanging fruit” issues such as immigration. It will be interesting to see if any candidates besides Sanders and Sen. Elizabeth Warren highlight Trump's regressive economic policies.

**Warren Strong on Economic Issues**



Warren can benefit by putting forward her strong policy proposals on economic issues, which are often more moderate versions of Sanders' proposals, and cast herself as something of a compromise candidate. Unfortunately, she seems very weak on foreign policy, see my piece of last year: ["The Limits of Elizabeth Warren."](#)

### **Andrew Yang & National Income**



Andrew Yang could make a strong showing. His embrace of a guaranteed national income could have wide resonance. It's a strong policy proposal because it's both universal and has a history of support on both the left and right.

### **Kamala Harris, Law & Order**



Sen. Kamala Harris could try to make her law and order background an asset by targeting Trump and other elites in terms of their lack of adherence to legal fidelity. Unfortunately, her record suggests she is quite likely to use legal processes to "punch down."

### **Trump's Anti-Interventionist Façade**

By stepping back from bombing Iran last week, Trump is likely skillfully attempting to regain his non-interventionist facade that helped him win in 2016. His administration, however, is packed with hawks and is escalating the continuing but virtually invisible wars in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia and elsewhere. His

policies in those countries – as well as on Israel, Venezuela and elsewhere – should be attacked, but might get far less scrutiny than they should. That would be in part, again, to Gravel not being on the stage.

**Sam Hussein** is an independent journalist, senior analyst at the Institute for Public Accuracy and founder of [VotePact.org](http://VotePact.org). Follow him on twitter: [@samhusseini](https://twitter.com/samhusseini).

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## Bernie Sanders' Economic Bill of Rights

Marjorie Cohn reports on a more complete U.S. definition of human rights that, as Sanders urges, picks up where FDR left off.

## Sanders Calls for FDR's Vision to be Fulfilled

By [Marjorie Cohn](#)

[Truthout](#)



Presidential candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders delivered a [full-throated defense of democratic socialism](#) in his June 12 [speech](#) at George Washington University. Sanders quoted President Franklin D. Roosevelt's [1944 State of the Union](#) address: "We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true

individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence.”

Sanders, like FDR, proposed an Economic Bill of Rights, including the rights to health care, affordable housing, education, a living wage and retirement.

“Economic rights are human rights,” Sanders declared. “That is what I mean by democratic socialism.”

Sanders cited figures of vast wealth disparity in the United States, where “the top one percent of people own more wealth than the bottom 92 percent.” He said there is higher income and wealth inequality today than at any time since the 1920s. And, Sanders stated, “Despite an explosion in technology and worker productivity, the average wage of the American worker in real dollars is no higher than it was 46 years ago and millions of people are forced to work two or three jobs just to survive.”

He also noted, “In America today, the very rich live on average 15 years longer than the poorest Americans.”

### **Economic Rights Are Human Rights**

The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) sets forth two different categories of human rights: (1) civil and political rights, and (2) economic, social and cultural rights.

Civil and political rights comprise the rights to life, a fair trial and self-determination; freedom of speech, expression, assembly and religion; and freedom from torture, cruel treatment and arbitrary detention. Economic, social and cultural rights include the rights to health care,

education and social security; the right to form and join unions and to strike; and the right to equal pay for equal work, unemployment insurance, paid maternity leave, and the prevention, treatment and control of diseases.

These two types of human rights are enshrined in two international treaties – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

The United States has ratified the ICCPR, but not the ICESCR. U.S. policy since the Reagan administration has been to define human rights only as civil and political rights, excluding economic, social and cultural rights from the realm of human rights.

The treaty involving economic, cultural and social rights – which has been ratified by 169 countries – guarantees the rights to work with favorable conditions, to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, to education, to housing, to an adequate standard of living, and to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and cultural freedom. It protects the rights to form and join trade unions, social security and social insurance, equal rights for men and women, and protection and assistance to the family.

Cuba, which has a human rights record that is frequently criticized by the U.S., puts the United States to shame with its recognition of economic rights. Cubans enjoy universal health care; universal free education including higher education; the right to form and join unions; and government-subsidized abortion and family planning. Cuba has

a higher life expectancy than the U.S., as well as a relatively small ecological footprint due to low energy consumption.

### **Democratic or Corporate Socialism**

President Donald Trump and his fellow oligarchs oppose democratic socialism, Sanders said, but “they don’t really oppose all forms of socialism.” Indeed, “they absolutely love corporate socialism that enriches Trump and other billionaires.”

Sanders cited the \$700 billion bailout of Wall Street in 2008 by the Treasury Department “after their greed, recklessness and illegal behavior created the worst financial disaster since the Great Depression – with millions of Americans losing their jobs, their homes and their life savings – Wall Street’s religious adherence to unfettered capitalism suddenly came to an end.”

He also mentioned tax breaks and loopholes for fossil fuel companies, pharmaceutical companies, Amazon, and the Trump family.

As Dr. Martin Luther King observed, the United States “has socialism for the rich, rugged individualism for the poor.”

### **Winning Strategy**

Sanders noted that FDR and his progressive coalition were successful, and their legacies continue to flourish in programs and



protections like Social Security, regulation of Wall Street and unemployment compensation. He pointed out that Roosevelt aimed to go further.

“In 1944, FDR proposed an economic bill of rights but died a year later and was never able to fulfill that vision. Our job, 75 years later,” Sanders said, “is to complete what Roosevelt started.”

He then set forth his vision of a 21st Century Economic Bill of Rights, which would recognize that all Americans should have:

- The right to a decent job that pays a living wage
- The right to quality health care
- The right to a complete education
- The right to affordable housing
- The right to a clean environment
- The right to a secure retirement

Sanders listed Democratic presidents vilified by the oligarchs of their time for their programs of alleged “socialism.” Lyndon Johnson was attacked for Medicare, Harry Truman’s proposed national health care program was dubbed

“socialized medicine,” and Newt Gingrich called Bill Clinton’s health care plan “centralized bureaucratic socialism.”

Although none of the other leading 2020 Democratic presidential candidates has embraced socialism, the party’s base has. Candidate John Hickenlooper, former governor of Colorado, was roundly booed at the California Democratic convention earlier this month when he said, “If we want to beat Donald Trump and achieve big progressive goals, socialism is not the answer.”

Thomas Piketty, author of “Capital in the Twenty-First Century,” argues, “Without a strong egalitarian-internationalist platform, it is difficult to unite low-education, low-income voters from all origins within the same coalition and to deliver a reduction in inequality.”

Keith A. Spencer, writing at *Salon*, cites Piketty for the proposition that “nominating centrist Democrats who don’t speak to class issues will result in a great swathe of voters simply not voting.”

Moreover, a 2018 Gallup poll determined that a majority of young Americans have a positive opinion of socialism. According to a recent Axios poll, 55 percent of women between the ages of 18 and 54 would prefer to live in a socialist country.

Sanders said the U.S. and the rest of the world face two different political paths. “On one hand,” he noted, “there is a growing movement towards oligarchy and authoritarianism in which a small number of incredibly wealthy and powerful billionaires own and control a significant part of the

economy and exert enormous influence over the political life of our country. On the other hand, in opposition to oligarchy, there is a movement of working people and young people who, in ever increasing numbers, are fighting for justice.”

After his speech, Sanders told *CNN*'s Anderson Cooper, that real change is generated by mass movements. He cited the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the gay movement and the labor movement.

“It is time for the American people to stand up and fight for their right to freedom, human dignity and security,” Sanders affirmed. “This is the core of what my politics is all about.” He clarified, “The only way we achieve these goals is through a political revolution.”

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## Propaganda Prospering Far and Wide

Human minds are very hackable, writes Caitlin Johnstone, and that causes a major problem for democracy.

By **Caitlin Johnstone**

[CaitlinJohnstone.com](http://CaitlinJohnstone.com)



**Forbes** reports that the CEO of CrowdStrike, the extremely shady cybersecurity corporation which was foundational in the construction of the official CIA/CNN Russian hacking narrative, is now a billionaire.

George Kurtz ascended to the billionaire rankings on the back of **soaring stocks** immediately after the company went public, carried no doubt on the winds of the international fame it gained from its role as a central protagonist in the most well-known hacking news story of all time. A loyal servant of empire well-rewarded.

Never mind that U.S. insiders such as Hillary Clinton **had been prepping for escalations against Russia** well in advance of the 2016 elections, and that their preexisting agendas to **shove a geostrategic obstacle off the world stage** benefitted from the hacking narrative as much as George Kurtz did.

Never mind that CrowdStrike **is tied to** the NATO **narrative management firm** known as the Atlantic Council, **which receives funding** from the U.S., the EU, NATO, Gulf states and powerful international oligarchs. Never mind, either, that CrowdStrike was financed with a whopping **\$100 million from Google**, which has **had a cozy relationship** with U.S. intelligence agencies **since its very inception**.

Never mind that to this day the DNC servers have not been examined by the FBI, **nor indeed were they examined** by the Special Counsel of Robert **"Iraq has WMD"** Mueller, preferring

instead to go with the analyses of this extremely shady outfit with extensive and well-documented ties with the oligarchic leaders of the U.S.-centralized empire. Also never mind that the Crowdstrike analyst who led forensics on those DNC servers had in fact worked for and was promoted by Robert Mueller while the two were in the FBI.

The CEO of the Atlantic Council-tied Crowdstrike, which formed the foundation of the official CIA/CNN Russian hacking narrative, is now a billionaire. I'm telling you, the real underlying currency of this world is narrative and the ability to control it.<https://t.co/XsBCvkIDzJ>

– Caitlin Johnstone ? (@caitoz) June 12, 2019

## The Real Currency

As I never tire of saying, the real underlying currency in our world is not gold, nor bureaucratic fiat, nor even raw military might. The real underlying currency of our world is narrative, and the ability to control it.

As soon as you really grok this dynamic, you start noticing it everywhere. George Kurtz is one clear example today of narrative control's central role in the maintenance and expansion of existing power structures, as well as an illustration of how the empire is wired to reward those who advance pro-empire narratives and punish those who damage them; just compare how he's doing to how Julian Assange is doing, for example.

But you see examples pop up every day:

- The U.S. State Department just got busted using a \$1.5

million troll farm to manipulate public discourse on social media about Iran.

- Video footage has just surfaced of the director general of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons admitting that the OPCW did indeed deliberately omit any mention in its official findings of a report from its own investigation which contradicts the establishment narrative about a chemical strike in Douma, Syria, an admission which answers controversial questions asked by critics of western imperialism like myself, and which the mainstream media have not so much as touched.
- *Mintpress News* broke a story the other day about a new narrative management operation known as “The Trust Project,” a coordinated campaign by establishment-friendly mass media outlets for “gaming search-engine and social-media algorithms in collusion with major tech companies like Google and Twitter.”
- In an interview with *The Canary*, UN Special Rapporteur on torture Nils Melzer explicitly named the mass media as largely responsible for Assange’s psychological torture, excoriating them for the way that they “have shown a remarkable lack of critical independence and have contributed significantly to spreading abusive and deliberately distorted narratives about Mr. Assange.”
- In a new essay, “Freeing Julian Assange,” journalist Suzie Dawson reports that “Countless articles appear to have been obliterated from the internet” about Assange and *WikiLeaks*, amounting to some 90 percent of the links Dawson examined which were shared in tweets by or about *WikiLeaks* and Assange since 2010.

- I just finished reading [this excellent Swiss Propaganda Research essay](#) about the little-known fact that “most of the international news coverage in Western media is provided by only three global news agencies based in New York, London and Paris.”

I write about this stuff for a living, and even I don't have the time or energy to write full articles about every single narrative control tool that the U.S.-centralized empire has been implementing into its arsenal. There are too damn many of them emerging too damn fast, because they're just that damn crucial for maintaining existing power structures.

Because whoever controls the narrative controls the world.

Power used to be much easier to identify in our society: just look for the fellow with the sparkly hat made of gold sitting in a really big chair and bossing everyone around. As our society advanced philosophically, however, people started fighting for ideals called “freedom” and “democracy” in their respective nations. And, as far as our parents and teachers have taught us, freedom and democracy are exactly what we have now.

Except that's all crap. Freedom and democracy only exist within the Western empire to the extent that it keeps up appearances. Because the trouble with democracy, it turns out, is that human minds are very hackable, when they are pursued with enough resources. Wealthy and powerful people do have the resources, which means that it's very possible for wealthy and powerful people to manipulate the masses into voting in a way that consistently benefits the wealthy

and powerful. This is why billionaires and narrative control consistently go hand-in-hand.

This dynamic has allowed for western power structures to operate in a way that western democracy was explicitly designed to prevent: for the benefit of the powerful instead of for the benefit of the voting populace. So now we've got people in so-called liberal democracies voting to maintain governments which advance wars which don't benefit them, to advance intrusive surveillance and police state policies which oppress them, to advance austerity policies which harm them, to advance labor policies which exploit them, and to maintain eco-cidal environmental policies which threaten the very survival of our species. All because the wealthy and powerful are able to use their wealth and power to manipulate the way people think and vote.

I remember in the run-up to the Iraq War a friend I had known all my life suddenly said to me, 'We must do something about this monster in Iraq.' I said, 'When did you first think that?' He answered honestly, 'A month ago'.  
#Propaganda @medialens

– Malcolm Pryce (@exogamist) April 12, 2018

This is why I pay far more attention to narrative control than to politics. Politics is downstream from narrative control, which is why the 2020 U.S. presidential race is already a contest to see what level of Democratic corporatist warmonger will be running against the incumbent Republican corporatist warmonger. The narrative-controlling class does its level best to hide the fact that anything's

fundamentally wrong with the system, then when people notice it's deeply broken they encourage them to use completely impotent tools to fix it. "Don't like how things are run? Here, vote for our *other* puppet!"

The root of all our problems right now is the fact that human minds are very hackable with enough resources, combined with the fact that war, oppression, exploitation and ecocide are highly profitable. This dynamic has caused human collective consciousness to generally dead-end into a kind of propagandized, zombified state in which all our knowledge and all our thinking moves in alignment with the agendas of existing power structures. It's much easier to continue believing the official narratives than to sort through everything you've been told about your society, your nation and your world since grade school and work out what's true and what's false. Many don't have the time. Many more don't have the courage.

We will remain in this collective dead-end, hurtling toward either Orwellian dystopia or extinction via climate collapse or nuclear Armageddon, until we find a way out of it. It won't come from the tools our rulers have given us, and it won't come from repeating any of the old patterns which got us here. In order to escape from the increasingly adept narrative control matrix that is being built around our collective mind by the powerful, we're going to have to change our relationship with narrative altogether. We will either pass this great test or we will fail it, and we absolutely have the freedom to go either way.

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on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or her [website](#). She has a [podcast](#) and a new book [“Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers.”](#) This article was re-published with permission.

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## Russia-gate’s Monstrous Offspring

Russia-gate has shed any premise of being about Russian interference, writes Daniel Lazare, but the idea that America may in anyway be responsible for its own fate is of course unthinkable.

By [Daniel Lazare](#)

*Special to Consortium News*



Americans used to think that Russia-gate was about a plot to hack the 2016 election. They were wrong. Russia-gate is really about an immense conspiracy to do four things:

No. 1: Ratchet up tensions with Russia to ever more dangerous levels;

No. 2: Show that Democrats are even more useless than people imagined;

No. 3: Persecute Julian Assange;

No. 4: Re-elect Donald Trump as president.

This was the takeaway from Mitch McConnell’s devastating [“case closed”](#) speech last week in which the Senate majority leader jeered at President Barack Obama for mocking Mitt Romney’s claim (seven years ago now) that Russia was America’s “number one geopolitical [foe.](#)” As Obama [famously](#)

replied during that presidential debate: “The 1980s are now calling to ask for their foreign policy back because the Cold War’s been over for 20 years.”

But that was so 2012. Now, says McConnell, it looks like Romney was right:

“We’d have been better off if the administration hadn’t swept [Russian President Vladimir] Putin’s invasion and occupation of Georgia under the rug or looked away as Russia forced out western NGO’s and cracked down on civil society. If President Obama hadn’t let Assad trample his red line in Syria or embraced Putin’s fake deal on chemical weapons, if the Obama administration had responded firmly to Putin’s invasion and occupation of Ukraine in 2014, to the assassination of Boris Nemtsov in 2015, and to Russia intervention in Syria – maybe stronger leadership would have left the Kremlin less emboldened, maybe tampering with our democracy wouldn’t have seemed so very tempting.

“Instead,” McConnell went on, “the previous administration sent the Kremlin a signal they could get away with almost anything, almost anything. So is it surprising that we got the brazen interference detailed in special counsel Mueller’s report?”

### **Lies and Distortions**

Like so much out of Congress these days, this was a farrago of lies and distortions. It wasn’t Moscow that started the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, but Tbilisi. While Russia has

indeed cracked down on U.S.-backed NGO's, Washington has done the same by forcing Russia's highly successful news agency RT to register as a foreign agent and by sentencing Maria Butina, a Russian national studying at American University, to 18 months in prison for the crime of hobnobbing with members of the National Rifle Association. The charge that Syrian President Bashar al Assad "trampled" Obama's red line by using chemical weapons is hardly as clear-cut as imperial propagandists like to believe – to say the least – while the agreement between Putin and former Secretary of State John Kerry to rid Syria of chemical weapons was not fake at all, but an example, increasingly rare unfortunately, of diplomacy being used to prevent an international crisis from getting out of hand.

And so on ad nauseum. But what could Democrats say in response given that they've spent the last three years trying to out-hawk the GOP? Answer: nothing. All they could do was try to turn tables on McConnell by charging him with not being anti-Russian enough. Thus, New York's Sen. Chuck Schumer accused him of "aiding and abetting" Moscow while Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin accused him of running interference for Putin because he "feels the Russians were on the side of the Republicans in 2016 and just might be again in 2020."

### **Democrats Feed the Super Hawks**

The result: a Democratic consensus that Russia can't be trusted and that America must put itself on a war footing to prevent Putin from "toppl[ing] the mighty oak that has been our republic for two hundred years," as Schumer put it. It's an across-the-board agreement that the long-awaited Mueller

report has only strengthened by regurgitating the intelligence-community line that “[t]he Russian government interfered in the 2016 presidential election in sweeping and systematic fashion” and then cherry-picking the facts to fit its preconceived thesis. (See [“Top Ten Questions About the Mueller Report,”](#) May 6.)

Democrats claim to oppose National Security Advisor John Bolton, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Vice President Mike Pence, but the anti-Russian hysteria they promote strengthens the hand of such super-hawks. It makes military conflict more likely, if not with Russia then with perceived Russian surrogates such as Venezuela or Iran.

Simultaneously, it backfires on Democrats by making them look weak and foolish as they argue that even though the Mueller report says “the investigation did not establish that members of the Trump Campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government,” somehow “significant evidence of collusion” still exists, as an increasingly unhinged Rep. Adam Schiff [maintains](#). In the Alice-in-Wonderland world of congressional Democrats, no evidence does not mean no evidence. In fact, it means the opposite.

Voters are unmoved. Ten times more Americans – 80 versus 8 percent – care about healthcare than about Russia according to [a recent survey](#). When CNN pollsters asked a thousand people in mid-March to name the issues that matter most, [not one mentioned Russia or the Mueller probe](#). If they didn’t care when collusion was still an open question, they care even less now that the only issue is obstruction plus a phony constitutional crisis that desperate Democrats have conjured up out of thin air.

## Trump the Chief Beneficiary

Besides Fox News – whose ratings have soared while Russia-obsessed CNN's have plummeted – the chief beneficiary is Trump. Post-Mueller, the man has the wind in his sails. Come 2020, Sen. Bernie Sanders could cut through his phony populism with ease. But if Jeff Bezos's *Washington Post* succeeds in tarring him with Russia the same way it tried to tar Trump, then the Democratic nominee will be a bland centrist whom the incumbent will happily bludgeon.

Former Vice President Joe Biden – the John McCain-loving, speech-slurring, child-fondler who was for a wall along the Mexican border before he was against it – will end up as a bug splat on the Orange One's windshield.

Beto O'Rourke, the rich-kid airhead who declared shortly before the Mueller report was released that Trump, "beyond the shadow of a doubt, sought to ... collude with the Russian government," will not fare much better. Sen. Elizabeth Warren meanwhile seems to be tripping over her own two feet as she predicts one moment that Trump is heading to jail, declares the next that voters don't care about the Mueller report because they're too concerned with bread-and-butter issues, and then calls for dragging Congress into the impeachment morass regardless.

Such "logic" is lost on voters, so it seems to be a safe bet that enough will stay home next Election Day to allow the rough beast to slouch towards Bethlehem yet again.

## Assange Convicted in Eyes of Press

Then there's Julian Assange, currently serving a 50-week sentence in a supermax prison outside of London after being

ejected from the Ecuadorian Embassy. By claiming that the *WikiLeaks* founder was “dissembling” by denying that Russia was the source of the mammoth Democratic National Committee leak in July 2016, Special Counsel Robert Mueller has effectively convicted him in the eyes of Congress and the press.

*The New York Times* thus reports that Mueller has “revealed” that Russian intelligence was the source while, in a venomous piece by Middlebury College professor Allison Stanger, *The Washington Post* declared that Assange “is neither whistleblower nor journalist,” but someone who helped Russian intelligence interfere in “the American electoral process.”

Schumer thus greeted Assange’s April 11 arrest by tweeting his “hope [that] he will soon be held to account for his meddling in our elections on behalf of Putin and the Russian government,” while, in a truly chilling statement, Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia declared that “[i]t will be really good to get him back on United States soil [so] we can get the facts and the truth from him.”

Now that Julian Assange has been arrested, I hope he will soon be held to account for his meddling in our elections on behalf of Putin and the Russian government.

– Chuck Schumer (@SenSchumer) April 11, 2019

Assange is guiltier than ever. If Washington gets its hands on him, he’ll no doubt be hauled before some sort of Star Chamber and then clapped in a dungeon somewhere until he confesses that Russian intelligence made him do it, even

though a careful reading of the Mueller report strongly suggests the opposite. (See [“The ‘Guccifer 2.0’ Gaps in Mueller’s Full Report,”](#) April 18.)

Assange languishing behind bars, war breaking out in Latin America or the Persian Gulf, Trump in the Oval Office for four years more – it’s the worst of all possible worlds, and the Democratic Party’s bizarre fixation with Vladimir Putin is what’s pushing it.

Ultimately, Russia-gate is yet a variation on the tired old theme of American innocence. If something goes wrong, it can’t be the fault of decent Americans who, as we all know, are too good for our deeply flawed world. Rather, it must be the fault of dastardly foreigners trying to hack our democracy. It’s a deep-rooted form of xenophobia that has fueled everything from the criminalization of marijuana (smuggled in by evil Mexicans) to the 1950s Red Scare (a reaction to Communism smuggled in by evil Russians), and the war on terrorism (the work of evil Muslims). The idea that America may in anyway be responsible for its own fate is of course unthinkable.

But Russia-gate may be the greatest delusion of all. After decades of celebrating Donald Trump as the essence of American flash and hustle, the corporate media have decided that the only way he could have gotten into the White House is if Putin put him there. The upshot is a giant conspiracy to force Americans to turn their back on reality, an effort that can only end in disaster for all concerned, Democrats first and foremost.

**Daniel Lazare is the author of “The Frozen Republic: How the**

Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy” (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique* and blogs about the Constitution and related matters at [Daniellazare.com](http://Daniellazare.com).

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## The Tragedy of Venezuela is the Tragedy of the US

Trump doesn't give a farthing about Venezuela and is letting his underlings let slip the dogs of war in so long as it secures Florida's electoral votes for Trump 2020, says Lawrence Wilkerson.

**By Lawrence Wilkerson**

[Anti-War.com](http://Anti-War.com)



Knowing what I know about my own administration's attempt to unseat Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in 2002, I was not surprised when the effort was recently renewed by the Trump Administration, particularly when such arch-defenders of Latin American rights as Elliott Abrams, Marco Rubio, and Rick Scott – not to mention John Bolton – began to appear on the White House payroll.

Knowing as well that Trump did not give a farthing for what happened in Venezuela but was concentrated on what he is always focused on, domestic politics, I knew these underlings would be allowed to cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war in Venezuela so long as doing it secured

Florida's electoral votes for Trump in 2020.

What I did not know – but looking back to 2002, should have – is how utterly incompetent the CIA would be in pulling off the “soft coup d’etat” that its leaders promised Trump. The events of the past 48 hours have demonstrated that incompetence markedly, as well as the real motivations of Trump’s lackeys on Venezuela, from the shrimp-lusting-after-Cuba Marco Rubio to the bombastic former governor of Florida Rick Scott, to the pardoned criminal Abrams, to the supine and totally incompetent Juan Guaido and his backer, Leopoldo Lopez in Caracas. What a crew the GOP can muster!

And they just might have let slip the dogs of war.

And they let them slip into a potentially first-class disaster – just like Somalia in 1992, Iraq in 2003, Libya in 2011, Syria in 2012, Afghanistan today and yesterday, and on and on.

I know the Venezuelan military; I’ve trained some of them. They are not your usual “I want to shower after meeting them” crowd, as I would describe for instance the Honduran military. Instead, they are reasonably professional, reasonably aware of Venezuela’s historical commitment to democracy, and reasonably competent at their day jobs. They are proud of the fact that they are not Panama, i.e., a country into which the U.S. can send paratroopers overnight, kill several thousands, grab a narco-trafficker, and leave.

The majority of them, if the U.S. military arrives in Venezuela, will take to the hills – very formidable hills, with jungle-like backdrops – and they will harass, kill, take prisoner from time to time, and generally hold out

forever or until the “gringos” leave. We might remember how the North Vietnamese and the Taliban accomplished this; well, so will the Venezuelans.

Were I looking down from Mars and with no dog in this fight, I might say that it would be suitable comeuppance for the sheer stupidity of the Trump gang. One might shout loudly as the quagmire develops, “Get elected now, Mr. Reality-TV man!”

But the bloodshed in Venezuela – military and civilian – and the dead and wounded U.S. Marines and soldiers will afford this old soldier no comfort at all. Instead such an outcome will make me regret even more profoundly our Founding Fathers’ grievous error in creating the Electoral College because they feared the *demos* in democracy.

Keep going, Trumpster. You’ll founder this ship of state soon enough.

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