

A New Angle in Abu-Jamal's Case

The decades-old case of convicted police killer Mumia Abu-Jamal has always centered on whether the legal process was rigged against the black political activist, an argument that has new life, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

A potential new front has opened up in the fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, who was convicted of the 1981 murder of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. Abu-Jamal has always maintained his innocence and has spent the last 30 plus years trying to prove it.

Along the way, there have been some victories. First he fought his way off Death Row. Then he fought a battle to get medical care that he was being denied, a situation that sent his health into a dangerous spiral. Now he and his lawyers are citing new information about possible judicial bias that could have a direct impact on the legitimacy of his murder conviction.

During his decades of imprisonment, Abu-Jamal has continued to practice the art of journalism, crafting well-researched columns on issues of racism, human rights – and doing it, first, from death row then from maximum security lock-down. Sometimes his columns, as Emily Dickinson used to say about a good poem, can take the top of your head off.

Tens of thousands of his supporters are charmed and moved by his Weekly Radio commentaries from prison. Many of his supporters assert that the former public radio reporter, and Black Panther Minister of Information (at 15), is a political prisoner, the victim of arguably one of the most corrupt police departments in the United States.

I spoke recently with Rachel Wolkenstein, an attorney for Mumia Abu-Jamal, about the latest development in this decades old case.

Dennis Bernstein: Set this up for us. We are hearing that new information has surfaced. We'd like to get a complete debriefing, but first please remind people briefly who Mumia Abu-Jamal is, in case they haven't heard about this celebrated case.

Rachel Wolkenstein: Mumia Abu-Jamal is a political prisoner, a "class-war prisoner," as I consider him. He is a former Black Panther member, a MOVE organization supporter, a radical journalist who was known as "the Voice of the Voiceless." He was an award-winning radio journalist in Philadelphia in the late 1970s until his arrest on December 9, 1981 in connection with the murder of a

police officer. This is a crime that Mumia did not commit and he has always maintained his innocence.

His case has always been racially biased and politically motivated. Mumia was framed by the Philadelphia police department and the prosecution, with help from the Attorney General's office and the FBI, because he was so outspoken in his defense of the oppressed, particularly the politically oppressed, such as the MOVE organization at that time in Philadelphia. As a teenager he was communications director and journalist for the Black Panther Party. He was known throughout Philadelphia for his beautiful voice and his passionate social and political commentary.

DB: He was also known throughout Philadelphia by perhaps the most corrupt police department in the nation at that time, a police department and prosecutor's office that were studied for their corruption and under federal investigation.



RW: That is correct. Frank Rizzo had been the police commissioner. Interestingly, many elements of the federal COINTELPRO program were actually based on things that Rizzo had done. He then became the mayor of Philadelphia and organized the raids on the Black Panthers when Mumia was a member and a spokesman for the Party. You are absolutely correct, the efforts to have him exterminated were very clearly orchestrated by the FBI.

One of the early things I worked on with my colleagues from the Partisan Defense Committee at that time was obtaining Mumia's COINTELPRO records, which showed that they had a dossier on him when he was just 15 years old, in the late 'sixties. There they said, in effect, despite his young years, he should be on the ADEX file (a list of who the FBI felt should be rounded up and put into concentration camps if there was any political turmoil in the country). They

said Mumia belonged on that list because of his ability to speak out in advocacy.

Mumia went to Chicago to witness the murders that had been committed by the FBI and the Chicago police and to speak about what was happening. He was featured in a front-page story in the Philadelphia Inquirer, which described this young man who was speaking out in defense of the Panthers and against police brutality. The cops in Philadelphia knew who he was and they were tracking him.

When the MOVE commune was surrounded and attacked in 1978 and when, in the aftermath, Delbert Africa, a former Panther, was beaten on the street (in the first televised police beating in the country), Mumia again spoke in defense of the MOVE members and against the attack. He was also specifically targeted by Rizzo and by Edward Rendell [former Philadelphia District Attorney who oversaw Mumia's prosecution], who I consider to be directly responsible for the frame-up of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

So there is a long history there of knowing who Mumia was, targeting him, trying to silence his voice and ultimately to murder him. What happened on the night of December 9, 1981 was that Mumia came across a police altercation in the street. He was driving a cab at that point because he had been drummed out of mainstream news reporting for his defense of the MOVE organization. In the midst of a purported shoot-out, a police officer named Daniel Faulkner was shot and killed. The chief inspector arrived on the scene, a guy named [Alfonzo] Giordano, who had been Rizzo's right-hand man a few years earlier and who was also under investigation for corruption and being on the take.

Giordano knew very well who they had found on the street that night and he began the conscious frame-up of Mumia. They claimed that Mumia confessed that night, they said that Mumia's gun was found on the scene and that it was the murder weapon. They brought forward two witnesses, one a prostitute who was actually doing tricks for the cops and working as an informant so she could do her work on the streets. The other witness was a cab driver who we later learned was coerced into testifying against Mumia.

I should say that I have been working with Mumia for thirty years now and I was involved in a major investigation during his post-trial hearings in Philadelphia from 1995 through 1999. There we brought out an enormous amount of concrete evidence of prosecutorial and police misconduct in the frame-up of Mumia for a crime he did not commit.

DB: Obviously, Mumia was someone who was way ahead of his time, taking on the issue of police violence long before most people had any sense of how systematic this was. So there is apparently new information, new evidence in the case. Tell

us about that.

RW: Well, about a year ago, a very important case was decided by the United States Supreme Court. It involved the fact that one of the justices who became the Chief Justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, Ronald Castille, had been the prosecutor in Philadelphia, following Rendell as the chief DA.

He had been a DA and ran on a law-and-order platform, and was endorsed and received major funding from the Fraternal Order of Police. Nonetheless, when he became a Philadelphia Supreme Court justice he sat and ruled on a number of cases, including Mumia's case, despite requests for him to remove himself on grounds of bias and conflict of interest.

About a year ago, in a different case, after many attempts to get a ruling, it was found that it is a conflict of interest and a denial of a fair and impartial appeal process to allow a judge to sit who had previously been personally involved in a significant fashion in the earlier prosecution of the same case. Basically, it required all the appeals that that judge had sat on and that had been negatively decided against the defendant to be thrown out and to be able to start over again.

Based on this ruling, Mumia's lawyers brought an action last August to challenge Mumia's appeals, because Castille was the district attorney who was in charge of all the appeal issues on Mumia's case at the time that dealt with his Black Panther membership, the rigging of the jury selection to keep blacks off the jury, and various other issues. In all significant issues of Mumia's case, Castille was the person who argued the decisions should be upheld.

When Castille became a supreme court justice, he had already been the architect of all the DA's support of Mumia's conviction. During the period of my involvement in the case, and with all the challenges to Mumia's conviction that began in 1995 and went on through 2008, Castille refused to removed himself from the case and instead ruled against Mumia in each of these cases. The argument is now being made that Castille violated the fundamental precept that as a prosecutor involved in the case he should never have sat as a judge.

So now Mumia's case in court has finally gotten some arguments. The DA's office tried to get it thrown out on grounds that it was brought too late and didn't apply anymore. The judge ruled that it did in fact apply and that the case should go forward. Then it became an issue of the DA's office being ordered to come forward with evidence that shows Castille's involvement. They have been noncompliant with the order and recalcitrant in not providing real information, no record of his involvement in Mumia's case.

This in spite of Castille's statements in his supreme court run that he took personal involvement in these appeals, particularly appeals to the US Supreme Court. So Mumia filed another motion for the DA's office to comply and search their records again and they came up with one paragraph saying, "Well, we had two people going through 31 boxes looking for this and that." But there is no mention whether they went through Castille's files as DA or his chief assistant's files.

Also, one of the people at the DA who has been working on Mumia's appeals since 1986 and has been in the courtroom through all these hearings during the '90's was personally appointed by Castille to be in charge of the appeals division. He is actually arguing the case on behalf of the DA's office now. He is still working on the case thirty years later. We have nothing indicating what role he played or any statement at all indicating whether he had any consultations with Castille regarding this case.

So they are stonewalling, they are concealing information. And it will continue to take a great deal of political pressure in the form of demonstrations and protests to make it clear to the DA's office that we are demanding that they finally open up their files.

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

The Russia-Did-It Certitude Challenged

Many mainstream news outlets confessed to their gullibility over the Iraq-WMD claims, but have fallen into another groupthink over Russia-gate, as Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein heard from ex-U.K. Ambassador Craig Murray.

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

Despite the certitude of the U.S. Congress and the corporate press, not everyone believes that the Russians "hacked" the Clinton campaign and handed Donald Trump his stunning victory. Among those saying that the Russians did not do it is the former whistleblowing British ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, who collaborates with WikiLeaks, which published the Democratic emails last year.

"I know who leaked them," Murray said recently. "I've met the person who leaked them, and they are certainly not Russian and it's an insider. It's a leak, not a

hack; the two are different things.”

Ambassador Murray, a friend and close associate of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, was also an early opponent of the the U.S.-British-led war against Iraq, and an early whistleblower on the wide-ranging program of torture and rendition promoted by U.S. President George W. Bush and condoned by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who was recently absolved by a British court – on a technicality – of being criminally liable for the US torture program.

These days, Ambassador Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He served as British Ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and Rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010.

Dennis Bernstein: My first question, Mr. Ambassador, is whether you are concerned with this Russia-gate frenzy and how it might end up leading us into a direct confrontation with Russia, and thus open the door to World War III?

Craig Murray: Well, there is always that danger when a confrontation exists between nuclear armed powers. The whole anti-Russia propaganda campaign that is going on at the moment is quite extraordinary because there is no factual basis behind it. But it is certainly a continuation of the anti-Russia propaganda that has dominated political discourse in the United States for several years now.

Of course, this is very much in the interests of the armaments industry. We have to remember that there are those who benefit enormously from extra spending on armaments and the armed forces. These people are the ones pushing the agenda.

DB: We’ve been doing sort of a poll of our guests, asking them whether they consider what happened in the United States as a leak or a hack.

CM: Well, through my association with WikiLeaks, I know for sure that it was a leak and not a hack. As Bill Binney, former technical director of the NSA, has pointed out, were it actually a hack the NSA would be able to pinpoint it. In fact, there is no such evidence. This is not something WikiLeaks got from a foreign state or from hackers. No, there is no doubt at all that this was an internal leak. Besides which, we are talking about two separate things in the DNC emails and the Podesta emails, so it would be wrong to presume that there is only one leaker.

Randy Credico: Is this just an artifice to cover up the real motivation with regards to Russia, which is to break the country into small states and to prevent them from getting involved in the world oil supply?

CM: I am not sure they actually want to break up Russia. They rather like having a reasonably strong Russia because it gives them an excuse to invest large

amounts of money in armaments, which are very profitable. The militarist forces on both sides like to play up the strength of the other and portray the other as evil. That is primarily what we have going on here.

Recently, Putin seems to be the master of the diplomatic game. And we should not forget that all of these people are part of the global one percent. The way they invest their money and where they live and how they socialize makes them all very much part of the same club in an interconnected world. So we should not be too distracted by the smoke and mirrors that the global elite put up. While these are very dangerous games to be playing, the people playing them have some very cozy relationships behind the scenes.

RC: Tell us about your relationship with Julian Assange and the conditions he is now living under.

CM: Well, I have known Julian Assange for several years now. Like Julian, I was myself a whistleblower. I left the British foreign service in order to expose torture and extraordinary rendition related to the war in Iraq. We have a club of whistleblowers, if you like, of which Daniel Ellsberg is a kind of patron. And obviously WikiLeaks, which is the best publisher for whistleblowers, is very important to us.

I have been appalled by the treatment of Julian and the evidently nonsensical allegations made against him in Sweden. And I am saddened by the continued persecution of WikiLeaks by the United States. Of course, a lot of people are very sore that the dreadful American war crimes were exposed by the leaks believed to be perpetrated by Chelsea Manning. A lot of people don't like the light that WikiLeaks shines on the dark places of government. But in the land which purportedly upholds freedom of speech as a great virtue, it is a dreadful shame to see the persecution of a publisher in this way.

Then, of course, we see the completely ridiculous nature of this whole Russia-gate affair. Really it was just a kind of propaganda excuse for Hillary Clinton's appalling election campaign. All this makes unlikely allies who have ganged up on Julian Assange from the establishment side of both major parties in the United States.

RC: In the wake of the recent UK elections what, if anything, has changed for Julian Assange?

CM: Nothing good at the moment. We still have the conservative party in power and now they are in alliance with the Democratic Unionist Party, who are the most retrograde, religiously motivated party here and who tilt the government even more to the right than it was before. In the medium to longer term, based

on the performance by Jeremy Corbin's Labor Party, which comes as a breath of fresh air in British politics, we may well see a reversal of the current situation.

DB: One of the issues that WikiLeaks confronts head on is the endless wars that the United States has been waging, in Iraq in particular. Tony Blair was being investigated for lying us into the Iraq War but [on July 31] he was absolved of all charges.

CM: Interestingly, what the UK high court said in the recent judgment was that there is no crime of aggression under British domestic law. They claimed that this international crime has never entered into British domestic law by an act of parliament and can therefore not be enforced in the UK.

So it was a very technical acquittal. They are not saying that Blair is innocent, they are saying that legislation has never been enacted making that international war crime a domestic crime in Britain. This is quite extraordinary in many ways. The United Kingdom was one of the three countries that constituted the Nuremberg Tribunal, where the crime of aggression was the main charge.

So for the high court to rule that the United Kingdom accepts the existence of the crime of aggression and can prosecute it internationally but does not accept that it applies domestically is illogical and a case of special pleading. The high court judges are just ganging together to protect Tony Blair and making asses of themselves with this very strange ruling.

DB: Tony Blair has played a role in deciding who will control the massive oil resources in the Middle East and in other places you are familiar with. Do you want to talk about what he has been up to?

CM: Since leaving office, he has been primarily concerned with making money for himself, on a very large scale. He is now worth hundreds of millions. It is fairly obvious that the actions he took while in office with regards to Iraq, with regards to Libya, were all undertaken to promote the interests of British and other Western oil companies and mercenary companies.

He famously worked to block the prosecution of British Aerospace for paying billions of dollars in bribes to Saudi princes to gain arms contracts, on the grounds that that would be against national security because it would damage our alliance with Saudi Arabia. That was one instance where Blair, while prime minister, intervened directly to aid the armaments industry and prevent an anti-corruption prosecution.

Since he left office, he has been cashing in on all of this. He is completely shameless. He is a consultant to the president of Kazakhstan, for example, a

very nasty dictatorship. One thing that has become public through a leak is that he was advising the government of Kazakhstan on how to handle public relations after Kazakh soldiers massacred coal miners for going on strike. Here's Blair, who used to represent a coal mining district, advising on how to do a good PR cover-up of the massacre of coal miners.

The man is completely unprincipled. He is just out to get whatever money he can. I wouldn't say he has much power nowadays. He rather prostitutes himself to the wealthy, particularly those from countries with dubious human rights records who view it as helpful to cash in on his global image.

RC: We know about the War Logs and what they exposed in Afghanistan. Can you talk about what happened in Uzbekistan?

CM: It is very different to know about it intellectually and to come face-to-face with it. Within a month of first arriving in Uzbekistan, we got detailed photos of a guy who had been literally boiled alive at one of the big prison camps. He had been alive when placed in the boiling liquid. That sort of thing makes you realize what it really means when people talk of torture.

There is no doubt that the CIA were actually colluding in such torture and to a large extent financing it. Hundreds of millions of American taxpayer dollars were put into the Uzbek security services and the CIA was getting their so-called intelligence from those torture sessions.

We also discovered that the CIA was flying people into Uzbekistan under the extraordinary rendition program. In pretty much every case, they were never seen again. At that time, I assumed that all the people being flown in to be tortured were Uzbeks who had been captured abroad and flown back to their own country. I didn't realize that the Americans were flying in other nationals to be tortured by the Uzbek security services.

RC: What were they trying to elicit from these people who were being tortured?

CM: In virtually every case, they were making them confess to membership in Al Qaeda and to the existence of widespread terror plots to attack Western countries. I am ninety-nine percent certain that every one of these stories was untrue. Often I could show the information was wrong.

But the object was to exaggerate the threat posed by Al Qaeda because that was the justification for our foreign policy, for all our invasions, and for all the restrictions on civil liberties at home. The security services required a strong terrorist threat in order to justify their actions. By sending people to be tortured, they were manufacturing the false existence of a terrorist threat.

RC: What happened when you went public with this?

CM: I arrived in August and I think by December I was sending back top-secret internal telegrams protesting this, which were bound to get me sacked. In some ways, I consider myself something of a fraud as a whistleblower. I protested internally, I did everything I could within the system to stop it. I was making the case that these actions were illegal and that we were colluding in these actions by receiving this intelligence.

I thought that if we got this before government lawyers, they would advise the government to put an end to it. What happened to me then was similar to what happened to Julian Assange. After a twenty-year unblemished career, I suddenly found that I was up on charges of trying to extort sex from visa applicants, of being an habitual alcoholic, and so on.

DB: Ambassador Murray, what would be your understanding of how high in the US government people knew about this rendition program?

CM: In the UK I am certain that it did go all the way up the chain as far as Tony Blair. I made sure my protests went that high. When I was told to shut up, I was told that this had all been authorized from the very top. In the States, I know it went as high as Donald Rumsfeld because he had signed off on torture techniques personally. The lawyers who drafted documents on what was permissible in terms of torture certainly passed those by George W. Bush.



DB: Was what happened in the Ukraine a case of Russian aggression or a US soft coup?

CM: I am actually quite critical of both parties. There is no doubt that the United States was interfering very strongly in Ukrainian politics. On the other hand, I also think that the Russians supported levels of violence that were unnecessary. I get very criticized by the left. The left has become very pro-Putin, as a reaction I suppose to the lies of the right. But it is

overcompensation to paint Putin as a saint. So the US was undoubtedly engaged in attempts at a coup, something it has been doing for decades.

RC: Ambassador, you were involved in peace negotiations in Sierra Leone back in 1998. At the time you ran across someone named Spicer who was an arms merchant and ran mercenary companies and who later went to Iraq. Could you just encapsulate that period in a few minutes?

CM: Spicer, together with a guy called Tony Buckingham, was initially in charge of a company which was called Executive Outcomes, made up of former British special forces personnel who sold themselves to oil companies in Angola and other oil-rich African states in order to physically take control of oil resources during times of civil war. They perpetrated an awful lot of atrocities, including machine gunning villagers from helicopters.

After Executive Outcomes, they moved on to a company called Sandline which was involved in a very crooked deal to take control of the diamond resources of Sierra Leone. To me, involved in the peace negotiations there, it was sickening to witness the desire of Western companies and Western governments to get out of it access to Sierra Leone's diamond and titanium resources.

Then of course the people at Executive Outcomes and Sandline went on to really strike the jackpot in Iraq, where they ran a private mercenary company called Aegis, which worked for both the British and United States governments and employed tens of thousands of mercenaries. The people responsible for it made billions of dollars from the privatization of killing. All of this is quite startling and far too little known.

DB: Getting back to where we started, what do you see as the importance of Julian Assange in the context of what is called mainstream journalism?

CM: Julian Assange has been a central figure in breaking the monopoly on what we are allowed to know. People now increasingly distrust the mainstream media and get their information from places where you have direct access to source documentation rather than read the opinion of some journalist on it. I think that is very important. I think other whistleblowers have made a mistake by going through the mainstream media, who have then acted as gatekeepers on what we find out through those leaks. The Panama Papers were a great example of that kind of lost opportunity.

Julian is really the figurehead for freedom of information and a figurehead for governments to trounce. He is an enormously intelligent and articulate individual who has a tremendous contribution to make to international debate, aside from the material that he publishes. Obviously, he would be able to

fulfill that role to a much greater degree if he were free.

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

Playing Politics with the World’s Future

The strategy of neutering President Trump in his dealings with Russia – and his administration’s own ignorance about complex Mideast issues – are combining to create grave dangers, writes ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

Finally ... the U.S. Congress has produced a piece of legislation. And it passed with quasi-unanimous, bi-partisan support. Only its substance is not so much a deep reflection on the foreign policy interests of America, but rather, the desire to hurt, and incapacitate the U.S. President in any future dealings with Russia. (And never mind the worrying impulse towards conflict with Russia this entails, or its collateral damage on others).

The aim has been to see President Trump hog-tied, and “tarred and feathered” for his “risky behavior” on Russia. This aim simply has overpowered any other considerations – such as likelihood that the outside world will conclude that America’s ability to pursue or even to have a foreign policy is non-existent in the face of its internal civil war. It is a key juncture. For an overwhelming majority of Democratic and Republican Senators and Congressmen, bringing down “The Donald” is all – and the devil take the consequences for America, in the world.

Senator Dianne Feinstein, D-California, blandly stated that the concerns of U.S. allies come second to the need to punish Russia for its election interference. When asked whether the bill took account of European Union’s interests, one of the main authors, Senator John McCain, R-Arizona, said simply: “Not that I know of. Certainly not in the portion of the bill I was responsible for.”

Another of the bill’s author, Bob Menendez, D-New Jersey, laconically replied to the same question: “Not much, to be honest with you.”

McCain carelessly then quipped that essentially that it was “the job of the E.U. to come around to the legislation, not for the legislation to be brought around

to them.”

The U.S. President had little option but to sign the legislation, but that does not mean that diplomacy is completely blocked. As expected, he issued a Signing Statement (see [here](#)), in which, while accepting the mandate of Congress, Trump took issue with the new Congressional encroachments into his prerogatives (Article Two of the Constitution) in terms of foreign policy, and he reserved the right to decide on how the Congressional mandate might be implemented (i.e. in respect to the quadrilateral negotiations over Ukraine). He has some wriggle room, especially in terms of how the legislation is enforced (or not, as the case might be), but certainly not enough wriggle room to mollify Europe – or, more pertinently, to persuade Russia that America now has anything, substantive to offer; or were it offered, able to be delivered. In other words, for Russia, the U.S., effectively, is severely agreement-incapacitated.

Medvedev’s Assessment

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev wrote in response:

“The signing of new sanctions against Russia into law by the U.S. president leads to several consequences. First, any hope of improving our relations with the new U.S. administration is over. Second, the U.S. just declared a full-scale trade war on Russia. Third, the Trump administration demonstrated it is utterly powerless, and in the most humiliating manner, transferred executive powers to Congress. This shifts the alignment of forces in U.S. political circles.

“What does this mean for the U.S.? The American establishment completely outplayed Trump. The President is not happy with the new sanctions, but he could not avoid signing the new law. The purpose of the new sanctions was to put Trump in his place. Their ultimate goal is to remove Trump from power.” (Emphasis added).

The key new provision in law is dubbed *The Russia Sanctions Review Act of 2017*. It codifies into law past sanctions on Russia imposed by previous Administrations, and prohibits the President from lifting any existing sanction against Russia without the prior permission of Congress. The law states that the process of securing such consent requires that the President send to Congress a (prior) report stating and arguing the presumed benefit that would accrue to the U.S. through the lifting of any sanction. The Congress then may institute hearings on the President’s report, and on the merit of his argument about the potential quid pro quo – justifying his proposed action. In the light of these hearings, Congress may then consider a resolution of approval or disapproval (within 30 days of receiving the President’s statement).

The influential *Lawfare* site points out, however, that “the provision is drafted quite broadly to cover actions *that have any ameliorative effect* despite falling short of formally lifting sanctions. For example, congressional review is required for a waiver, “a licensing action that significantly alters United States’ foreign policy with regard to the Russian Federation,” and any action which would allow Russia to regain access to properties in Maryland and New York” (Emphasis added).

In short, Congress gave itself a 30-day review period to vote down any changes Trump tries to make in terms of America’s foreign relations with Russia.

Offending Europe

These are the teeth, but the Act has other little flourishes: The legislation targets the Russian energy sector, allowing the U.S. to sanction companies involved in developing Russian oil pipelines. It “would almost surely affect a controversial pipeline project between Russia and Germany known as Nord Stream 2, which is owned by Gazprom but includes financial stakes from European companies. The project aims to carry Russian natural gas under the Baltic Sea, bypassing countries like Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic States,” as the *New York Times* reports.

Some may see these events simply as the riposte to alleged Russian intervention in America’s internal affairs (as Feinstein has argued), but polls (even CNN polls) suggest that there are very obvious political limits to the Establishment (in both parties) using “Russia-gate” as a mechanism to mobilize and widen public support for removing President Trump. Polls indicate that 79 percent of Republicans are “not at all” or “not very” concerned about Trump’s alleged links with Russia, and that inversely, precisely the same proportion, 79 percent, of Democrats precisely are “very” or “somewhat” concerned. (55 percent of Independents side with Republicans with 37 percent “not at all” and 18 percent “not very” concerned). The point here is that the Republican support for Trump’s desire for détente with Russia has not eroded one jot, whereas the “concern” of the Independents and even among Democrats is eroding somewhat.

This is the crux: the clique around former CIA head John Brennan *et al* have put their shirt on “Russia-gate” to bring down Trump – claiming scandal. But what goes around – quite often – comes comes around. Unless the Establishment can keep up the tempo of innuendo or produce new revelations, “Russia-gate” may just become a stale narrative – or a butt of satire. Worse, the meme could turn and bite the hand of those who have been feeding it. There may too be other skeletons in the cupboard, but belonging to the other party: like who paid Fusion GPS (who were commissioned to produce the “dirty dossier” on Trump)? Might the murdered Seth Rich story take another turn? Or, the fugitive former

DNC Chairwoman's IT staffer, Imran Awan, give the narrative a different twist? Or something as yet unknown.

Vague Sanctions

How far will the anti-Russian attrition go? The *Ron Paul Institute* sees in one section of the Act, the possibility that websites which take a line in opposition to Russia sanctions could be held to be doing the work of Russian intelligence – by seeking to influence readers in a manner that Russian intelligence would want. Might this be interpreted as “engaging in transactions” – albeit, over the internet? (The Act specifies punishment for “persons” who are “engaging in transactions with the intelligence or defense sectors of the Government of the Russian Federation.”)

The author writes, [that] at first sight, one might think he is reading too much into the text, “however as a twelve-year Capitol Hill veteran bill-reader, I can assure you that these bills are never written in a simple, expository manner. There is always a subtext, and in this case we must consider the numerous instances where the Director of Central Intelligence and other senior leadership in the US intelligence community have attempted to establish the idea that foreign news channels such as RT or Sputnik News, are not First Amendment protected press, but rather tools of a foreign intelligence organization.”

So, are Trump's hopes for détente with Russia all done? Too early to say, I suggest. Medvedev seems categorical, but maybe his dark prognostication is intended more to underline to Americans that their relations with Russia are not some domestic “game show” – but rather, are profoundly serious. For the time being, substantive U.S. politics with Russia will be on “a long vacation.”

The deeper question is whether the U.S. Deep State is overreaching itself. First, we have this sanctions bill, and then the news that special counsel Robert Mueller, as part of his investigation into the Trump campaign's potential dealings with the Kremlin, is using a Grand Jury to issue subpoenas. While the use of a Grand Jury does not necessarily mean an indictment is imminent, it is a tool to compel witnesses to testify or force people to turn over sensitive documents that may aid investigators in their probe.

It is a sign of a yet more aggressive approach to gathering “Russia-gate” evidence – a search that will now encompass all the Trump family's financial affairs. Overreach? (So far, evidence of misdeed, is missing.)

As indicated earlier, Trump's Republican base (unlike support from the Republican establishment) is not eroding, but rather is becoming angered and resentful. The more the MSM and the East Coast élites attack the deplorables'

“alt” news and websites – the greater the pushback, it seems. The divisions in America are too embittered now, for any thought that America can somehow re-wind the tape, and just start again with Obama having left office – as though Trump never had happened.

Strategic Incoherence

Whereas, America’s Russia foreign policy clearly has been zombie-fied for now, the policy dysfunction goes much wider than Russia (and this cannot be laid at the feet of the Deep State). The policy in the Middle East simply, is strategically incoherent:

Last Tuesday, President Trump, standing beside Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri heaped Lebanon with praise: “Lebanon is on the front lines in the fight against ISIS, al-Qaeda *and Hezbollah*,” Trump said. Hariri had – delicately – to correct the President: Hizbullah is a member of his governing coalition, and is a part of his government, and is his ally in parliament. Actually, Lebanon is fighting ISIS and al-Qaeda in Syria, precisely via Hezbollah.

But this trivial incident should not be written off as some distracted President “mis-speaking”: rather it is symptomatic of how dysfunctional the West Wing has become in respect to the Middle East. There seems to be no adult in the team – just jaundiced ignorance that does not bother to try to understand Middle East complexities.

Joe Scarborough sums this condition well in an article which – whilst highly complimentary to the personal qualities of Trump’s family – also warns against “the stubborn arrogance that often infects the winning side of Presidential campaigns.” Trump’s victory led his son-in-law to believe “he could reinvent government like Al Gore, micromanage the White House like James Baker, and restructure the Middle East like Moses. Kushner’s confidence seemed to reach its apex,” Scarborough continues, “whenever the subject turned to Middle East peace. His bizarre belief that the world began anew the day Trump was inaugurated was exposed again this week when a leaked audiotape caught Kushner telling White House interns: “*We don’t want a history lesson. We’ve read enough books.*””

Well perhaps he needs to read some books on Iran, before deciding to call Iran in default on JCPOA (the accord that tightly restricts Iran’s nuclear program). He does not need to like Iran, but merely to understand that it is a major regional power (with real “battalions” at its command), and, unlike most in the Middle East, is capable of acting shrewdly, effectively and forcefully – if needs be.

Mishandling a Crisis

The sense of an absence of strategic knowledge in the West Wing is not confined to Trump's adversaries, by the way. Iran sees the U.S. calling "Iran in default of JCPOA" as merely serving to cement its fast growing alliance with Russia and China – but the complaint has also found an (unexpected) home in Israel, too – for example, see [this](#), from one of Israel's most well-connected journalists, Ben Caspit:

"The story that best illustrates this situation occurred last week when the Temple Mount crisis threatened to ignite the entire Middle East in a global conflagration originating in the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Throughout that entire crisis, the US administration was effectively AWOL. Although they attempted to take credit for some deep involvement in efforts to reach a solution, the truth is that the Americans were not a significant factor during the harshest days of the crisis, when it looked like the entire Middle East would spiral downward into a new round of violence.

"President Trump himself was not involved in events as they unfolded. His special envoy, Jason Greenblatt, lost his standing as an 'impartial mediator' in the very first days of the crisis. One senior Palestinian source told *Al-Monitor* on condition of anonymity that 'Greenblatt picked a side and represented Netanyahu throughout the crisis ... the Americans' behaviour throughout the crisis only furthered the feeling prevalent in Ramallah over the past few weeks that Greenblatt and Jared Kushner are irrelevant."

" 'They are completely unfamiliar with the other side,' [another Palestinian source told Caspit] 'they don't understand the region, and they don't understand the material. You can't learn about what is happening here in a seminar lasting just a few weeks...'

"A senior Israeli minister speaking on condition of anonymity added, 'The Americans aren't really a presence here. They let us do whatever we want. They don't set the tone, and they don't dictate the agenda.'

"Ostensibly, this near freedom of action should be the dream of the Israeli right. But even among them, people are beginning to express their concern about how things are unfolding. 'This was as clear as can be during the [Temple Mount crisis](#). There was no responsible adult in the mix.' "

Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum.

Trump's Buffoonish Presidential Act

There was a chance President Trump could have brought some positive change, especially in reeling in foreign wars, but his bizarre narcissism and flaming incompetence have overwhelmed everything else, as Michael Winship describes.

By Michael Winship

Donald Trump is not a president but he plays one on TV. And a terrible one at that.

Watching him last week during what were, arguably, the worst of many horrible days of this presidency, was to see pure, rampaging id. Aggressive, needy, without logic or reason, Trump continues to rule with ignorance and incoherence, seemingly oblivious to the havoc he causes or maybe just thoroughly enjoying it. Whether his new chief of staff John Kelly, a career Marine officer, can bring order and discipline – drop and give me 20, Trump – remains to be seen.

“Trump now has a chance at governing, but it may be only a slim chance,” Chris Whipple, author of a book about White House chiefs of staff, said in [an interview with *The New York Times*](#):

“The fundamental problem is that Donald Trump is an outsider president who has shown he has no idea how to govern – who, more than any of his predecessors, desperately needs to empower a chief of staff as first among equals to execute his agenda and tell him hard truths.

“But does anyone believe that this president wants such a person around?”

All of this is taking place at such a breakneck pace, trying to keep track feels a little bit like those guys who paint the George Washington Bridge from one end to the other and then start all over again. Speed that up multiple times without a moment's rest and you have life in the land of Trump.

For the moment, though, let's focus on three speeches delivered by Trump during the last week of July that epitomize the depths to which the weight belts of this White House have sunk us.

On Monday, July 24, came that wildly inappropriate address to the Boy Scouts National Jamboree in West Virginia, at which he told 24,000 young people all about fake news and his stunning electoral victory and a rich friend who sold his business and bought a yacht to pursue a life of wine, women and song.

The scouts had been instructed beforehand to be “courteous” and many of them

applauded, even cheered, his remarks and booed Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton when he mentioned them. One 15-year-old scout from Indiana told *The Washington Post*, “There were disagreements all over camp. Some people saying ‘F Trump,’ some people saying ‘MAGA.’ I heard there was a troop from New York that had a troop from Texas right next to them and the leaders had to keep them separate.”

That many of our worthy New York lads resisted the urge to pelt our whackdoodle commander-in-chief with s’mores and trail mix may only be explained by a healthy fear of the Secret Service. The Boy Scouts’ chief executive apologized to those offended by the speech, saying, “We sincerely regret that politics were inserted into the Scouting program.” But then, in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal*, Trump claimed, “I got a call from the head of the Boy Scouts saying it was the greatest speech that was ever made to them, and they were very thankful.”

It will come as no shock that the Boy Scouts deny such a call ever took place. In any case, as even Fox News regular Kat Timpf said to *The Post*, “It’s a strange thing to use your time in front of tens of thousands of teenagers to brag about your election win and your partying days in New York.”

You remember the old joke: What’s the difference between government and the Boy Scouts? The Boy Scouts have adult leadership.

Encouraging Police Abuse

At the end of the week, on Friday, July 28, there was the president’s now-notorious speech to law enforcement officers in Long Island’s Suffolk County, where police have been fighting murder and other violence perpetrated by the brutal street gang MS-13. Trump used the occasion to deliver one of his fearmongering “American carnage”-style speeches as he described gang members as “animals” who “have transformed peaceful parks and beautiful, quiet neighborhoods into bloodstained killing fields.”

MS-13 began in California, but many if not most of its members are from Central America. It is “transnational.” Trump’s subtext was ugly and clear: Too many immigrants commit heinous crimes. (This week’s White House rollout of the RAISE Act to slash the amount of immigration to the US was the latest legislative manifestation of Trump and the right wing’s xenophobia).

Much of this anti-immigrant rhetoric was lost, however, as the focus of public and media attention shifted to remarks in the speech that all but endorsed police brutality:

“When you see these thugs being thrown into the back of a paddy wagon, you just see them thrown in, rough, I said, please don’t be too nice. Like when you guys

put somebody in the car and you're protecting their head, you know, the way you put their hand over. Like, don't hit their head and they've just killed somebody. Don't hit their head. I said, you can take the hand away, okay?"

As many responded in disbelief and revulsion, Trump's spin team tried to brush this off as one big funny joke but even if it was meant in jest – and what snowballs have you been fighting with in hell? – his words were revolting, and resulted in pushback from police departments (including Suffolk County's) and other professional law enforcement organizations. "The last thing we need," the Police Executive Research Forum's Chuck Wexler said in a radio interview, "is a green light from the president of the United States for officers to use unnecessary force."

A Reelection Rally

The third speech, on Tuesday, July 25, in Youngstown, Ohio, was the one least noticed, perhaps because there was so much other Trump news – part of the day was spent by the president dissing Attorney General Sessions and it also was just hours after the Senate voted to begin debate on their proposals to repeal Obamacare. What's more, it wasn't an official White House event but part of yet another campaign rally – the sixth since he became president – meant to placate and keep inflated his Macy's balloon-sized ego.

You won't find the text on the official White House website, but it was in many ways the most cringe-inducing of the three addresses, once again hammering at the empty catchphrases that have characterized Trump's candidacy and presidency:

"I'm back in the center of the American heartland, far away from the Washington swamp to spend time with thousands of true American patriots," he began. "... I'm here this evening to cut through the fake news filter and to speak straight to the American people. Fake news. Fake, fake, fake news. Boy oh boy, people. Is there anyplace that's more fun, more exciting and safer than a Trump rally?"

He painted what was in many ways an even more lurid picture of immigrant violence than he would later in the week on Long Island:

"The predators and criminal aliens who poison our communities with drugs and prey on innocent young people, these beautiful, innocent young people will find no safe haven anywhere in our country. And you've seen the stories about some of these animals. They don't want to use guns, because it's too fast and it's not painful enough."

He then went into more explicit detail – "Make America Afraid Again" was the headline at *Slate.com* – then attacked the notion of sanctuary cities and said:

“We are dismantling and destroying the bloodthirsty criminal gangs, and well, I will just tell you in, we’re not doing it in a politically correct fashion. We’re doing it rough. Our guys are rougher than their guys.”

Read the Youngstown speech in its entirety. While awash in his standard campaign bluster, it is even more disturbing when uttered by the man who as president is supposed to set an example of leadership. Which brings us to this astonishing statement:

“Sometimes they say he doesn’t act presidential. And I say, hey look, great schools, smart guy, it’s so easy to act presidential but that’s not gonna to get it done. In fact, I said it’s much easier, by the way, to act presidential than what we’re doing here tonight, believe me. And I said with the exception of the late great Abraham Lincoln, I can be more presidential than any president that’s ever held this office. That I can tell you. It’s real easy. [Cheers] But sadly, we have to move a little faster than that.”

Wow. What’s appalling, Mr. President, is that the moves you envision diminish us as a nation, remove all traces of grace and charity, play to the basest instincts and demean the high office you hold. I am trying to move as fast as I can, too, sir. In the opposite direction from wherever you are.

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Making Police Truly ‘Protect and Serve’

As President Trump suggests police should be rougher with suspects, other voices from the police community say the behavior should go in the opposite direction, treating the public with more respect, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Former Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper, who laments that many Americans have experienced police as “an overly aggressive, militarized enemy of the people,” believes “the police in America [should] belong to the people – not the other way around.”

In a recent interview Stamper asserted that “Policing is the public’s business, and the public has the full right and responsibility to work collaboratively with local law enforcement.”

Stamper is calling for fundamental changes “in the federal government’s role in local policing as well as citizen participation in all aspects of police operations: policy-making, program development, crime fighting and service delivery, entry-level and ongoing education and training, oversight of police conduct, and—especially relevant to today’s challenges—joint community-police crisis management.” Says Stamper, “nothing will ever change until the system itself is radically restructured.”

Norm Stamper was a cop for 34 years, the first 28 in San Diego, the last six as Seattle’s police chief from 1994-2000. He resigned in the immediate wake of the so-called “Battle in Seattle” of 1999, where police famously confronted the first major international protests against the World Trade Organization with extreme and excessive force.

Chief Stamper took full responsibility for the breakdown and police overreaction and resigned directly following the confrontations. He has since devoted himself to reforming police actions and procedures through extensive community involvement in policing affairs. His most recent book is *To Protect and Serve: How to Fix America’s Police*. I spoke to Stamper in Oakland, California on July 26.

Dennis Bernstein: I’d like you to begin by telling us how you went from police chief in Seattle to globally-known police reformer?

Norm Stamper: It came with a recognition for me that not only is what we are doing not working but it is causing great damage to the community/police relationship. My position is that policing in this country needs to be radically reformed.

DB: Are you heartened by the formation of groups like Black Lives Matter to take back their communities? Do you support that kind of organization to restrain the police during this transition you are envisioning?

NS: Not only do I support it, I believe that a massive grassroots citizen strategy for educating and mobilizing is essential. Based on my 34 years of experience, I just don’t see the institution reforming itself. It may make modest incremental improvements but then slide backwards in terms of progress. We need citizens leading this movement.

DB: Why did you resign your position as Chief of the Seattle police?

NS: Most people would say I resigned in the immediate wake of the “Battle in Seattle.” I was extremely unhappy with the police response to what had begun as a nonviolent protest against globalization. We thought we were ready, we were not. We felt prepared to meet the challenges associated with a new and different

form of organizing, a sort of early equivalent of social media, using cell phones, etc. But we were wrong on pretty much all accounts.

On the second day I made the worst decision of my career in authorizing the use of chemical agents against non-violent, non-threatening protesters. At that point I realized that my time was up and that the best way to begin a process of soul-searching and critiquing was to remove myself and end my tenure.

DB: Tell us a little more about what was going through your mind when you came to acknowledge your error.

NS: On top of the list was the realization that I was using militarized tactics against young people who had the courage and wisdom to oppose globalization in so many of its manifestations, to call into question such issues as intellectual property rights, child labor laws, and also criminal justice issues. How do we achieve a truly just society that is accessible to all people, not just here, but all around the world? It was very troubling to me to know that I was leading a militarized response to those conditions.

DB: Since that time we have witnessed the militarization of police departments and some very brutal killings committed by police. What is your impression of what we have seen since your resignation?

NS: First, it is obvious that police forces haven't learned the lessons we learned here in Seattle with respect to handling mass protests. But let's look at the catalysts for those protests: the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, the cold-blooded murder of Laquan McDonald in Chicago, the murder of Walter Scott in Charleston, the tragic death of twelve-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland. What would possess a police officer to shoot a fleeing man in the back, in some cases someone completely unarmed? Then to lie about it, have fellow officers join in the cover-up, to have police executives and sometimes civic executives pretend that nothing happened.

We are never going to make progress until we learn what it takes to de-escalate conflict situations, to avoid them if possible, and to engage in crisis intervention tactics that have proven to work in the mental health field, for example. And why is it so hard to figure out a way to discipline police officers so that when they encounter these situations the outcomes are not fatal? This speaks to the need for fundamental reform. Not tinkering with the system but rather fundamentally reconfiguring American police work.

DB: It has come to the point where officers can simply say that they fear for their lives and then proceed to execute.

NS: If a police officer has undergone the proper training and enough of it, and

is supervised and led by people who understand the sanctity of human life, we can put an end to this kind of behavior. I am tired of police chiefs standing in front of a bank of microphones and talking about the tragedy, for the victim and the victim's family, for the community and for the police officers. The question is, how do we prevent such tragedies in the future? The answer is definitely not to continue what we are doing these days.

DB: There was a terrible case here in Northern California where a sheriff's trainer named Erick Gelhaus shot a thirteen-year-old boy [Andy Lopez] who he supposedly thought had a real gun. Gelhaus fired something like seven shots in ten seconds. We learned later that Gelhaus was writing a column for *Soldier of Fortune* and was giving advice along the lines of "If you do shoot a thirteen-year-old holding a BB gun, you have to be able to show that you were really afraid." This is a guy who had just got back from Iraq where he was taking out "insurgents." He had twenty years of training for the sheriff's department. Not only was Gelhaus not indicted, he was promoted!

NS: That story is repeated in jurisdiction after jurisdiction in this country. And we will continue to make those mistakes until we adopt a number of reform measures that I am advocating.

DB: Describe a few of those measures. What is your prescription for change?

NS: Three major recommendations would go a long way toward preventing the kinds of things we are talking about. Number one, end this drug war which has made police officers foot soldiers in a war against their own people, against people who are disproportionately young, poor, and of color.

The war against drugs has caused far more harm than good. It has cost one and a half trillion dollars thus far and, today, drugs are more readily available, at lower prices and higher levels of potency, than ever before. And, as we learned in the 1920s and 1930s, prohibition doesn't work, it is a lousy organizing mechanism for US drug policy and should be replaced with a regulatory system.

Second, license every police officer in the country, making sure that every officer thoroughly understands and is able to apply the Constitution of the United States. Think of "stop and frisk," think of laws of arrest, think of the use of lethal force, think of the gathering and preservation of evidence.

Build standards around every procedural justice set of tasks and then insist that every officer in the country, from Ferguson to the NYPD, understands and meets those standards. And if an officer gets fired, they don't get picked up anywhere else in the country because they don't have a license, they cannot practice law enforcement.

Thirdly, we must put the community in the driver's seat. Citizens should be involved as partners in policy-making, program development and crisis management. They should have a say in hiring decisions. Credible citizen oversight mechanisms must be implemented, including subpoena power and the capacity to investigate and reach decisions regarding alleged police misconduct and lethal force issues.

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

Shielding Israel from Popular Outrage

A bipartisan bill in Congress seeks to criminalize boycotts of Israel with fines and imprisonment, as the so-called BDS movement passes its twelfth birthday, notes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

As of this July, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israeli racism and apartheid is 12 years old. This means that over the last dozen years, a worldwide grassroots movement has grown up – a movement of civil society – that has organized active opposition to Zionist racism and Israeli oppression.

While the vast majority of governments have either ignored or assisted Israel's violations of international law and the basic principles of human rights, millions of "civilians" have refused to follow their leaders on this issue.

The BDS movement is now far ranging. It presses for divestment from companies that support or do business with Israel, particularly those that operate in the Occupied Territories. It urges the boycott of all Israeli products, from foodstuffs to cosmetics. It protests the appearance of Israeli cultural organizations outside of Israel. It urges the boycott of Israeli academic institutions that lend support to the state (an effort that, in 2015, Israeli president Reuven Rivlin called a "strategic threat of the first order"). And, it discourages tourist and artist visits to Israel, particularly by well-known celebrities. For more information about specific BDS achievements over the last 12 years, go to website of the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights.

In all these efforts the movement has proved increasingly successful. Some

surveys have suggested that as many as one-third of Americans and 80 percent of Canadians support BDS. The movement is also strong in Western Europe and growing in Australia and Latin America. Thus, no one should sell this ongoing campaign short. Certainly, the Israeli government does not.

Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Public Diplomacy devotes a lot of time and money to "push back" against the BDS movement. Israel's attempt to counter this growing popularity is grounded on a simplistic, libelous campaign that seeks to identify the BDS movement as a new form of anti-Semitism.

At least among the general population, there are two things that make this a very hard sell: (1) a lot of BDS supporters are Jewish, underlining the fact that the Zionist state and Judaism are not the same thing, and (2) the State of Israel continues to reinforce the BDS characterization of it as a racist state by public acts of discrimination against Palestinians.

As more people come to support BDS, fewer people support Israel. A survey released in mid-June by an organization known as The Brand Israel Group, "a coalition of volunteer advertising and marketing specialists" who consult for pro-Israel organizations, indicated that "approval of Israel among American college students dropped 27% between the group's 2010 and 2016 surveys" while "Israel's approval among all Americans dropped 14 points." Brand Israel's conclusion: "the future of America no longer believe that Israel shares their values." This is the case not because of any big increase in anti-Semitism, but due to ever-growing evidence of Israeli racism.

Political Roadblocks

Unfortunately, Israel's inability to keep a favorable public image does not necessarily mean its near-term defeat. Here in the U.S. there are two reasons for this: (1) as obnoxious as Israeli behavior is, and also as obscenely massive the U.S. aid package that helps to sustain that behavior, neither the behavior nor the aid package is yet a prime voting issue for most American citizens, and (2) due to the resulting lack of political pressure from the voters, American Zionists still have a clear field to use money and other forms of patronage to pressure both the U.S. Congress and the political parties to ignore the blatant racism and continue to strongly support the Zionist state.

That support can extend to becoming Israel's ally in the effort to defame and then try to destroy BDS. The argument that BDS is a modern form of anti-Semitism has become the backbone of an effort to make it illegal. As noted above, the BDS movement is not anti-Semitic. It is anti-Zionist, which in fact makes it anti-racist.

There is plenty of evidence that the Zionists do indeed practice racism in Israel and its Occupied Territories, and therefore, in truth, the Zionist charge against BDS creates a paradox. It requires you to accept that a supporter of BDS can simultaneously be anti-Semitic and anti-racist. Alas, in the absence of voter pressure, this absurdity does not matter to most U.S. politicians. Nor does the fact that outlawing BDS constitutes an obvious violation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

BDS, Human Rights and Jewish Morality

On a wider field, two things are simultaneously at stake: the future viability of human rights and the moral status of the Jewish people.

First, consider the threat to human rights as an international principle. The Zionists seem to believe that what weakens the viability of human rights is that one country – Israel – is being “picked on” for misbehaving, while other countries, allegedly doing the same things or worse, are not similarly censured. Despite the fact that there happens to be good reasons for “picking on Israel,” this Zionist complaint is an exaggeration used to deflect legitimate criticism. It also misses the point.

A Threat to Human Rights

The threat to human rights does not come from individuals overly blaming one country for what others also do. It comes from people – in the form of governments, lobbyists, and a sadly misled element of the Jewish community – actually championing Israel (or any other racist country for that matter) while it pursues overtly discriminatory policies based on, in this case, religion. This precedent, persisting over decades, must end up deadening the ability of governments, as well as the United Nations, to take human rights seriously and develop mechanisms for their promotion and protection.

The same situation that threatens the integrity of human rights standards threatens the moral character of the Jewish people. In a recent article entitled “Israel’s Irrational Rationality,” David Shulman, professor emeritus at Hebrew University, confesses that it is Israeli government policy to maintain “a steady level of state terror directed against a large civilian population [Palestinians] All of it stains the character of the state and has, in my experience, horrific effects on the minds and hearts of young soldiers who have to carry out the orders they are given.”

However, Shulman knows it does not stop there. He observes that what we have here is an “ongoing moral failure of the country as a whole.”

Yet who constitutes “the country as a whole”? The ideology of Zionism demands an

identification of Israel with the Jewish people – all of whom are virtual Israeli citizens whether they want to be or not. This means that the Zionists insist that the Jewish people as a whole be identified with Israel’s practices and policies – including the disregard for human rights and implementation of “ongoing state terror.”

Despite this Zionist contention that Israel and the Jews are equivalent, we know that this cannot be literally true. Israel’s sins cannot be the sins of the Jewish people as a whole. At the beginning of this essay I indicated that increasing number of Jews are actively supporting Palestinian rights and thus opposing both Israel’s undermining of the principle of human rights and its erosive effect on the moral status of the Jewish people.

However, the logic of the situation does make one thing literally true, and that is that the Zionist ideology, as it has evolved in practice, is a dangerous enemy of Jewish morality. As long as Zionism stands against human rights while at the same time insisting that Israel stands in for the Jews, it must be the enemy.

Ignorance of this logic is also an enemy. Therefore, it is time to heed the call of Rebecca Vilkomerson, head of Jewish Voice for Peace: “Seventy years into the ongoing dispossession and displacement of Palestinians, fifty years into Israel’s military occupation, and ten years into the siege of Gaza, we think it is time for American Jewish communities [and those in the rest of the world as well] to have some really uncomfortable conversations.”

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. He blogs at www.tothepointanalyses.com.

The Dawn of an Orwellian Future

Exclusive: The U.S. mainstream media continues to spread its own “fake news,” like the falsehood about an intelligence community “consensus” on Russia-gate “hacking,” as algorithms begin to marginalize dissent, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It seems that The New York Times can’t let a good lie lie. Even after being

pushed into running an embarrassing correction retracting its false claim that there was a consensus of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies that Russia hacked Democratic emails and made them public to help Donald Trump defeat Hillary Clinton, the Times is back suggesting exactly that.

The Times' current ploy is to say the Russian hacking claims are the "consensus" judgment of the U.S. intelligence community without citing a specific number of agencies. For instance, on Friday, the Times published an article by Matt Flegenheimer about the U.S. Senate vote to prevent President Trump from lifting sanctions on Russia and deployed the misleading phrasing:

"The Trump administration has opposed the sanctions against Russia, arguing that it needs flexibility to pursue a more collaborative diplomacy with a country that, by American intelligence consensus, interfered in last year's presidential election."

So, instead of explaining the truth – that the Jan. 6 "Intelligence Community Assessment" was the work of a small group of "hand-picked" analysts from three of the agencies under the watchful eye of then-CIA Director John Brennan and beneath the oversight of then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper – the Times opts to give its readers the misleading impression that there was a "consensus" within the U.S. intelligence community.

In other words, unless a Times reader knows the truth by having read it at a non-mainstream media outlet such as Consortiumnews.com, that reader would continue to believe that all 17 intelligence agencies were in agreement on this foundational point in the Russia-gate affair.

Marginalizing Dissent

And the continuation of this willful deception comes as the Times and other mainstream media outlets make progress in their plans to deploy Internet algorithms to hunt down and marginalize what they deem "fake news," including articles that challenge the mainstream media's power to control the dominant news narrative.



A report by the World Socialist Web Site found that "in the three months since Internet monopoly Google announced plans to keep users from accessing 'fake news,' the global traffic rankings of a broad range of left-wing, progressive,

anti-war and democratic rights organizations have fallen significantly.”

Google’s strategy is to downgrade search results for targeted Web sites based on a supposed desire to limit reader access to “low-quality” information, but the targets reportedly include some of the highest-quality alternative news sites on the Internet, such as – according to the report – Consortiumnews.com.

Google sponsors the First Draft Coalition, which was created to counter alleged “fake news” and consists of mainstream news outlets, including the Times and The Washington Post, as well as establishment-approved Web sites, such as Bellingcat, which has a close association with the anti-Russia and pro-NATO Atlantic Council.

This creation of a modern-day Ministry of Truth occurred under the cover of a mainstream-driven hysteria about “fake news” and “Russian propaganda” in the wake of Donald Trump’s election.

Last Thanksgiving Day, the Post ran a front-page article citing accusations from an anonymous Web site, PropOrNot, that identified 200 Web sites – including such Internet stalwarts as Truthdig, Counterpunch and Consortiumnews – as purveyors of “Russian propaganda.”

Apparently, PropOrNot’s standard was to smear any news outlet that questioned the State Department’s Official Narrative on the Ukraine crisis or some other global hot spot, but the Post didn’t offer any actual specifics of what these Web sites had done to earn their place on a McCarthyistic blacklist.

An Orwellian Future

In early May 2017, the Times chimed in with a laudatory article about how sophisticated algorithms could purge the Internet of alleged “fake news” or what the mainstream media deems to be “misinformation.”

As I wrote at the time, “you don’t need a huge amount of imagination to see how this combination of mainstream groupthink and artificial intelligence could create an Orwellian future in which only one side of a story gets told and the other side simply disappears from view.”

After my article appeared, I received a call from an NPR reporter who was planning a segment on this new technology and argued with me about my concerns. However, after I offered a detailed explanation about how I saw this as a classic case of the cure being far worse than the disease, I was not invited onto the NPR program.

Also, as for the relatively small number of willfully produced “fake news”

stories, none appear to have traced back to Russia despite extensive efforts by the mainstream U.S. media to make the connection. When the U.S. mainstream media has tracked down a source of “fake news,” it has turned out to be some young entrepreneur trying to make some money by getting lots of clicks.

For instance, on Nov. 26, 2016, as the anti-Russia hysteria was heating up in the weeks following Trump’s election, the Times ran a relatively responsible article revealing how a leading “fake news” Web site was not connected to Russia at all but rather was a profit-making effort by an unemployed Georgian student who was using a Web site in Tbilisi to make money by promoting pro-Trump stories.

The owner of the Web site, 22-year-old Beqa Latsabidse, said he had initially tried to push stories favorable to Hillary Clinton but that proved unprofitable so he switched to publishing anti-Clinton and pro-Trump articles whether true or not.

While creators of intentionally “fake news” and baseless “conspiracy theories” deserve wholehearted condemnation, the idea of giving the Times and a collection of Google-approved news outlets the power to prevent public access to information that challenges equally mindless groupthinks is a chilling and dangerous prospect.

Russia-gate Doubts

Even if the Russian government did hack the Democratic emails and slip them to WikiLeaks – a charge that both the Kremlin and WikiLeaks deny – there is no claim that those emails were fake. Indeed, all evidence is that they were actual emails and newsworthy to boot.

Meanwhile, U.S. government accusations against the Russian network, RT, have related more to it covering topics that may make the Establishment look bad – such as the Occupy Wall Street protests, fracking for natural gas, and the opinions of third-party presidential candidates – than publishing false stories.

In some cases, State Department officials have even made their own false allegations in attacking RT.

The current Russia-gate frenzy is a particularly scary example of how dubious government conclusions and mainstream media falsehoods can propel the world toward nuclear destruction. The mainstream media’s certainty about Russia’s guilt in the disclosure of Democratic emails is a case in point even when many well-informed experts have expressed serious doubts – though almost always at alternative media sites.

See, for instance, former WMD inspector Scott Ritter's [warning about lessons unlearned](#) from the Iraq debacle or the opinions of U.S. intelligence veterans who have [questioned the accuracy of the Jan. 6 report](#) on Russian hacking.

Perhaps these concerns are misplaced and the Jan. 6 report is correct, but the pursuit of truth should not simply be a case of grabbing onto the opinions of some “hand-picked” analysts working for political appointees, such as Brennan and Clapper. Truth should be subjected to rigorous testing against alternative viewpoints and contradictory arguments.

That has been a core principle since the days of the Enlightenment, that truth best emerges from withstanding challenges in the marketplace of ideas. Overturning that age-old truth – by today unleashing algorithms to enforce the Official Narrative – is a much greater threat to an informed electorate and to the health of democracy than the relatively few times when some kid makes up a bogus story to increase his Web traffic.

And, if this new process of marginalizing dissenting views is successful, who will hold The New York Times accountable when it intentionally misleads its readers with deceptive language about the U.S. intelligence community's “consensus” regarding Russia and the Democratic emails?

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](#)).

The U.S. Hypocrisy of ‘Human Rights’

Long before President Trump, the U.S. government had made a mockery of “human rights,” condemning abuses by adversary states but silent when crimes were committed by U.S. agents or U.S. allies, explains Todd E. Pierce.

By Todd E. Pierce

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is reportedly considering closing the Office of Global Criminal Justice, a tiny agency with a meager budget of \$3 million a year, located within the State Department.

According to its website, the office “advises the Secretary of State . . . on issues related to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.” It “also

coordinates U.S. Government positions relating to the international and hybrid courts currently prosecuting persons responsible for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity – not only for such crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Cambodia – but also in Kenya, Libya, Côte d’Ivoire, Guatemala, and elsewhere in the world.”

Furthermore, it deploys “a range of diplomatic, legal, economic, military, and intelligence tools to help expose the truth, judge those responsible, protect and assist victims, enable reconciliation, deter atrocities, and build the rule of law.”

The *New York Times* reported that human rights advocates saw the proposal as an example of “the Trump administration’s indifference to human rights outside North Korea, Iran and Cuba.” Human rights activists also said that shutting the Office “would hamper efforts to publicize atrocities and bring war criminals to justice.” *Newsweek* reported, however, that the Obama administration also reportedly considered downgrading the office and merging it with another agency.

According to the *Newsweek* article, the office offered rewards for information on “war criminals, and has inveighed against brutal dictators, including Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.” But the article also noted it “has not criticized Saudi Arabia or other American allies with dismal human rights records.”

The same *Newsweek* piece explained that the office was formed following the 1996 passage of the War Crimes Act. That Act defined a war crime as a “grave breach” of the Geneva Conventions. The War Crimes Act, codified as 18 U.S. Code § 2441, makes it an offense, “whether inside or outside the United States,” to commit a war crime, if one is a member of the Armed Forces of the United States or a national of the United States. *Newsweek* writer Nina Burleigh correctly noted that when “the CIA began using torture early in the Iraq War and, later, jailing people indefinitely and without trial in Guantanamo, the U.S. was in open breach of the conventions.” As noted above, the Office of Global Criminal Justice has inveighed against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. But it seemed to have had no problem with the Syrian government when CIA officials outsourced torture to the Syrian government earlier in the so-called Global War on Terror.

A Symbol of Hypocrisy

So, if there was ever a U.S. government agency standing as a symbol for U.S. hypocrisy, the Office of Global Criminal Justice is it. It is not hard to see in decoding their mission statement that “elsewhere in the world” does not mean leaders of any U.S.-allied nations.

But even more hypocritical is having a U.S. government agency charged with tasks to “help expose the truth, judge those responsible, protect and assist victims, enable reconciliation, deter atrocities, and build the rule of law,” when the U.S. Department of Justice is doing the exact opposite in enforcing the War Crime Act itself.

That hypocrisy is seen in a series of cases beginning in 2006 with the decision in *Rasul v. Rumsfeld*, by the D.C. District Court. As law professor Steve Vladeck explained, when asked of that case in a [2006 article](#), “Is torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (CIDT) within the scope of government employment? At least somewhat surprisingly, . . . the answer to that question is ‘yes.’”

Since 2006, the principle in the decision of *Rasul v. Rumsfeld* that Vladeck referred to has become a time-honored principle of U.S. jurisprudence, and a symbol of U.S. hypocrisy when compared to other U.S. pronouncements on torture and war crimes, as seen in a long series of cases down to the present day.

The manner that those decisions are written eliminates all illusions that the United States government is opposed to war crimes when done by “a member of the Armed Forces of the United States or a national of the United States” – they have been granted impunity under the law to offend. Famously, that was expressed by President Obama when he stated that those CIA officials guilty of torture would not be held criminally accountable for acts that are defined as “war crimes,” that is, torture. Little wonder that Donald Trump could so readily say he believed torture worked, since that is what many CIA officials continue to say.

Failing to prosecute war crimes is in itself a war crime under international law, and, to use the words of the “Office of Global Criminal Justice,” the opposite of its mission to “expose the truth,” and “judge those responsible.” But taking matters a step further, the U.S. government has designed a legal procedure to deny protection and assistance to victims. This is exactly what leaders of countries that are in line for U.S.-sponsored regime change are routinely accused of doing by the Office of Global Criminal Justice.

Shielding Torturers

The issue in a series of lawsuits involving the war crime of torture is whether former Guantanamo prisoners who were victims of U.S. government officials could sue the officials for civil damages. The courts have held, however, that government officials were entitled to immunity for the acts they had committed and were being sued for torture, as it was “within the scope of their employment.” These decisions are based on procedures based on the Westfall Act,

which is too convoluted to explain here, but it serves to nullify the War Crimes Act.

Typical of the language in the court's decisions is: "several detainees were subjected to abuse – including 'forced grooming, solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, forced medication, transport in 'shackles and chains, blackened goggles, and ear coverings,' and the disruption of ... religious practices" – even after a CSRT had determined that there were not enemy combatants... The court held that the defendants' actions were 'of the kind' [they were] employed to perform," even though the mistreatment occurred when several of the plaintiffs "had no intelligence value."

The court noted that "[t]hough the intelligence rationale has dissipated, the need to maintain an orderly detention environment remained after CSRT clearance." The court continued: "Authorized or not, the conduct was certainly foreseeable because maintaining peace, security, and safety at a place like Guantanamo Bay is a stern and difficult business."

That was what German military and Gestapo officers said of the prisons they worked in when they went on trial for war crimes at Nuremberg. Most common as their legal defense against war crime charges was that the defendants were only following "superior orders," in German, "Befehl ist Befehl" ("orders are orders") – a tactic now known as the Nuremberg defense. In other words, the earlier generation of war criminals effectively claimed their actions were "within their scope of employment." That defense didn't work at Nuremberg for Germans, but it works now for U.S. officials in U.S. courts.

The closing the Office of Global Criminal Justice just makes official what has been U.S. policy since 9/11. If it is true that hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue, then the U.S. government has showered tribute upon vice with the hypocrisy of the Office of Global Criminal Justice. If it closes, it means we won't even pay tribute anymore to virtue, preferring to fully embrace vice in a display of our "authenticity." And that may be the one example where the "Office of Global Criminal Justice" fulfills its mission to "expose the truth."

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<http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/tillerson-mulls-closing-of-war-crimes-office/>]

Risk of Unleashing 'Mad Dog' Mattis

Exclusive: Despite a constructive meeting between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin at the G-20, Official Washington's hawks still hold a strong hand, in part, because Trump has ceded broad power to the military, says David Marks.

By David Marks

During the 2016 campaign, Donald Trump boasted that he would "bomb the hell out of ISIS," but he also suggested a reversal of the "regime change" strategies of his recent predecessors. So, some peace voters thought Trump might actually be preferable to Hillary Clinton, who often came across as the more hawkish candidate.

However, in Trump's near-half-year in office, he has slid more into line with the war hawks both by continuing to beat his chest over his own application of military force and by shifting control over many attack decisions to military field commanders and the Pentagon high command.

In mid-April, after a U.S. airstrike in Afghanistan, President Trump explained his thinking as he reveled in the first use of the massive "mother of all bombs" that was dropped on an Islamic State target in Afghanistan.

Trump said, "What I do is I authorize my military, we have the greatest military in the world, and they've done the job, as usual. We have given them total authorization, and that's what they're doing. Frankly, that's why they've been so successful lately. If you look at what's happened over the last eight weeks and compare that really to what has happened over the last eight years, you'll see there is a tremendous difference."

That bombing in Afghanistan followed Trump's order to fire 59 Tomahawk missiles aimed at a Syrian government airfield that he alleged to be the launch point for an April 4 chemical weapons attack on the town of Khan Sheikoun.

Besides the missile strike – for which Trump got no authorization from either Congress or the United Nations Security Council – U.S. warplanes bombed pro-government forces inside Syria for allegedly getting too close to U.S.-backed rebels and shot down a Syrian plane for the same reason. These attacks against Syrian government targets represented an escalation of U.S. participation in the six-year-old conflict. President Obama had limited direct U.S. attacks against ISIS positions inside Syria.

Meanwhile, the number of U.S. military personnel in the Middle East has been

slowly but surely rising since Trump took office. Yet, these actions have not evoked much protest from the public or Congress and have even been praised by many as a sign of strength by Trump.

The Pentagon's 'Mad Dog'

Trump's Secretary of Defense James Mattis, nicknamed "Mad Dog" from his days a Marine general, has a unique relationship with Trump. He reportedly dines alone frequently with the President and has served as the point man for those acquiring "total authorization" to launch attacks. Due to his combination of access to Trump and Trump's readiness to cede decisions to the Pentagon, Mattis has an unprecedented ability as Secretary of Defense to elevate the U.S. military's role in world affairs.

Although Mattis intentionally limits his contact with the public and the press, some of his past statements reveal his mindset. In Iraq in 2003, Mattis coached arriving Marines, "Be polite, be professional, but have a plan to kill everybody you meet." And in 2005, the man who has been unleashed by the President said, "You go into Afghanistan, you got guys who slap women around for five years because they didn't wear a veil. You know, guys like that ain't got no manhood left anyway. So it's a hell of a lot of fun to shoot them. Actually it's quite fun to fight them, you know. It's a hell of a hoot. It's fun to shoot some people. I'll be right up there with you. I like brawling."

The man who likes "brawling" is also the first Secretary of Defense since George Marshall in 1947 confirmed with a waiver of the National Security Act. By law, members of the armed forces must have a seven-year waiting period before becoming Defense Secretary. The reason for the legislation was to respect civilian control of the military and to keep those favoring military solutions – as an early recourse – away from the levers for taking the country to war. The Congress after World War II attempted to prevent the very situation that is now unfolding.

In George Marshall's case, the waiver recognized his deep experience in statesmanship, since he served as Secretary of State and directed the Marshall Plan for rebuilding Europe before he became Defense Secretary. "Mad Dog" Mattis received his waiver without mention of his diplomatic abilities. Yet, the waiver for Mattis easily passed the Senate, 81-17, and the House, 235-188. He was then confirmed by the Senate in a 99-1 vote.

Leading what little debate there was over the Mattis waiver and confirmation, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-New York, said, "While I deeply respect General Mattis's service, I will oppose a waiver. Civilian control of our military is a fundamental principle of American democracy, and I will not vote for an

exception to this rule.”

Worked Up Over Russia

In his confirmation hearings, Mad Dog supported what in Official Washington are the most conventional perspectives, including referring to Russia as a “principal threat.”

The sentiment of the vast majority of Congress was summed up by Tim Kaine, D-Virginia, a member of both the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees, saying “In his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee yesterday, he demonstrated a clear-eyed view of our current national security environment and a deep appreciation for the challenges facing U.S. service members and their families.”

Kaine, who was Hillary Clinton’s vice-presidential running mate, added, “I believe he is well-prepared to lead the Department of Defense and provide the incoming administration with wise and strategic counsel on matters of national security.”

Kaine’s comments highlight a bizarre twist in the Trump presidency: the first Cabinet member approved by the Senate became an important neoconservative plant inside the administration despite Trump’s rhetorical rejection of neocon “regime change” policies. The incoherence of Trump’s emerging foreign policy appears to be directly related to Mattis and the interventionists – both neocons and liberals – who supported his ascent.

With Mattis at the Pentagon’s helm, the Trump administration has rapidly shifted toward a military dynamic, taking aim at many of the old neocon targets, including Syria and Iran. Mattis’s combative perspective seems to be at the core of these policies although – as a military officer – he does recognize the realities of war.

In late May, Mattis gave a rare interview to CBS’s *Face The Nation*. Speaking about North Korea, he declared that the conflict could turn “catastrophic” and “would be probably the worst kind of fighting in most people’s lifetimes.”

In early June, Mattis went before the Senate Armed Services Committee to make his case on the need for more military resources. Significantly, he requested more money for an increase of troops that he claims will check the Taliban in Afghanistan.

His comments overtly revealed his disdain for the legislative branch, citing

inadequate funding as a chief cause of the military's problems, having "blocked new programs, prevented service growth, stalled industry initiative, and placed troops at greater risk."

Since 2001, the Afghan War has cost hundreds of billions of dollars with over 2,000 deaths of U.S. soldiers and civilian casualties in the tens of thousands. With this in mind, Mattis's complaints raise more questions about his objectives and what's really achievable. Yet, Official Washington's elite opinion circles regard his proposed escalation and his money requests as serious and rational.

But at least Mattis doesn't sugarcoat prospects for war in the "cakewalk" terms favored by some neocons. Shortly after his Senate testimony, Mattis appeared before the House Appropriations Committee and described a war scenario with North Korea:

"I would suggest that we will win. It will be a war more serious in terms of human suffering than anything we've seen since 1953. It will involve the massive shelling of an ally's capital, which is one of the most densely packed cities on earth," referring to Seoul, South Korea, with a population of 25 million.

"It would be a war that fundamentally we don't want," Mattis said, but "we would win at great cost."

Mattis added that because the threat and consequences were so great, he and President Trump, along with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, were considering non-military options. He added, "We're exhausting all possible diplomatic efforts in this regard."

Hammering a Nail

But there is an old saying that if all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. And, that is a danger if international policy is deeply influenced by a hard-charging Marine general, especially with an inexperienced President prone to accepting simple and direct "solutions."

In the wake of Trump's meeting on Friday with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the real question becomes whether Putin's more complex understanding of the world's problems will influence Trump on flashpoints such as Syria, Iran, Ukraine and North Korea.

Or put somewhat differently, will Trump heed the inclinations of Secretary of State Tillerson, the former Exxon chief executive officer known for international wheeling-and-dealing, or will Trump lean toward Mattis and his readiness to mix it up militarily in places like Afghanistan, Syria and possibly even Ukraine?

The last thing that the neoconservatives and the liberal interventionists want is accommodation and compromise on some of these high-profile issues, which might envision a negotiated settlement in Syria that doesn't result in Bashar al-Assad's ouster, or a peace deal in Ukraine that doesn't force Crimea back under the control of Ukraine, or an arrangement in Europe that lowers tensions with Russia.

Resolutions of these issues would not serve the interests of the Military-Industrial Complex well, nor those of Official Washington's think tanks that rely on the largesse of military contractors and provide comfortable salaries for many of the key neocons and liberal hawks.

Those interests would be best served if "Mad Dog" Mattis is let off the leash as often as possible, if worldwide conflicts escalate, and if the Pentagon budget continues to swell. If that happens, Trump will not be the only one responsible; you can blame Congress for its readiness to sacrifice the principle of civilian control over the military to an aggressive military man.

The shallow compliments showered upon men like Mattis are symptoms of a country blindly embracing an egotistical and militaristic mindset.

David Marks is a veteran documentary filmmaker and investigative reporter. His work includes films for the BBC and PBS, including *Nazi Gold*, on the role of Switzerland in WWII and biographies of Jimi Hendrix and Frank Sinatra.

The Fight over Mexican-American Books

Latino-rights activists are challenging Arizona's ban on school books and courses that provide students with information about Mexican-American history and culture, as Dennis J Bernstein describes.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Arizona's resistance to allowing school books and courses that teach Mexican-American history and culture has generated resistance, both in underground efforts to provide the books to students and to challenge the ban on courses in courts as discriminatory.

The Librotraficante Caravan, co-organized in Houston Texas by writer, teacher and activist, Tony Diaz, headed back to Arizona this month with a new shipment of banned books. According to Diaz, Houston activists made the 1,000-plus-mile

ride once again to draw attention to Arizona's decision to remove from classrooms books mostly dealing with Mexican-American culture.

The journey also included the restocking of the underground libraries they formed during their 2012 Caravan, and updates on the advancement of Ethnic Studies in each state they pass through. According to the group's press release, "With their 2012 Caravan, the Librotraficantes joined a nationwide movement to defy Arizona's ban and to keep it in check."

There is also a federal court case, which commenced on June 26, contesting the book ban and the ban on ethnic studies in Arizona, that the caravan was organized to call attention to. According to Diaz, the court case will be reviewed again with new evidence consisting of studies proving that the outlawed Mexican American Studies courses in Tucson increased student success and learning power at many levels. The case had been reviewed by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, which sent the case back to the Arizona Supreme Court to be considered with the additional evidence.

"We were in the courtroom when a Federal Judge told America that if you have proof that a course helps a particular group of students succeed, yet you outlaw the course, that looks like discrimination," said Tony Diaz. "We hope that the upcoming Arizona Supreme Court ruling will drive a stake in the heart of this un-American law that tramples on Intellectual freedom."

The six-city caravan departed from the Casa Ramirez Folk Art Gallery in Houston on June 21, and made stops in San Antonio, El Paso, Las Cruces and Albuquerque before culminating in Tucson, Arizona.

Dennis Bernstein: Why don't you remind people all about what this caravan and what it was meant to do.

Tony Diaz: Thanks for all the work that you do for freedom of speech. And, really, that's what the first caravan was about. When our crew here in Houston, Texas heard about students lamenting that books had been yanked out of their hands from Tucson classrooms, it perked our ears. We looked into it.

That's when we found out that Arizona had passed this draconian law that prohibits courses that promote the overthrow of the government. Which is basically what they have accused books of poetry, literature, you know, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Critical Race Theory*, *House on Mango Street*. You know what that is – that's straight up fascism and oppression. So, we said, "If you're going to ban the books, we're going to smuggle them back."

And the students wanted the books back. So we started an 1,100 [mile], six city caravan, and we started underground libraries, basically tracing the Chicano

literary history of the Southwest and making stops in each of the cities along the way. If people go to librotraficante.com they can see the original map, and it really does trace the legacy of literature in the Southwest. This time around was really powerful, Dennis, and I really want to share this with your readers, is that we revisited all the underground libraries, and we stocked them with banned books. And each of them is thriving. [...] So it was really powerful, to not only convene with our communities again, but also ... get all the way to Tucson for the Arizona Supreme Court hearing.

And it's beautiful to see our community defy that ban. I'm hoping the rest of the country catches up. But people should know that right now [week of June 26], at the Arizona Supreme Court, the ban of Mexican American Studies is being tested. We hope it will get overturned. If not, people need to know, if that is not overturned, that will be the law that suppresses African American Studies, Mexican American Studies, Asian American Studies, LGBTQ Studies, Women's Studies, in every corner of the land. So it's important that we keep an eye on this. And that we all work really hard to keep spreading all this knowledge, right now.

DB: Say a little bit more about how the banned writers have participated, what their reactions have been. It is really incomprehensible, shall we say, in 2017 that the folks in Tucson, and other places, are afraid of extraordinary, beautiful books that have been the mainstay in many libraries all over the country.

TD: No, it's shocking, it's depressing. At the same time, we gotta remind folks that it's our communities that edify us, inspire us. Because, yeah, it is troubling to know that there are forces at work that want to stifle these beautiful books, such as *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya. But we are in a Chicano Renaissance when someone who is from a Mexican American background can read those works and wind up convening with Mr. Anaya, himself.

It was wonderful because the caravan passed through Albuquerque, and we stopped at Rodolfo's house. We took some tequila shots with him just one more time to be edified spiritually and physically, but on top of it he said "Occupy Arizona." He donated books, he donated some funds to the cause. He gave us shelter and fired us up.

[...] So people know the far right can try and defy that book. It's going to be in February, an opera. This may be the first Chicano opera. So ... they can pass all these racist bills, we're still going to fight it. The underground libraries will flourish. They're flourishing in every place that they [exist]... they've taken on lives of their own. It's beautiful. And people can see the addresses if they go to librotraficante.com, they can see the addresses.

But, *Bless Me, Ultima*... we were at a farmers' market in Los Habanos, spreading word about the underground library, the ban, and a mom said, "You know, I took my son to see the play version of *Bless Me, Ultima*. My son didn't want to go. He hated school. But he was crying at the end of it."

And he said "I know what this is about, I see that, that owl is [...] us, it's my family, it's all of us." And that's what Arizona wants to prevent us... from having—that powerful experience. But, you know, what's great is they can't stop us. It's too late. The genie is out of the botella, and it's never going back in. It's time for a renaissance, right now.

DB: What is the proof? What is the power of these programs?

TD: Oh, man, so, even now they will be used in court. For example, Nolan Cabrera has written the definitive research that proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Tucson Unified School District Mexican American program, kindergarten through 12th grade, not only helped students do better in Mexican American Studies courses, but that transferred over to reading and writing scores, graduation rates.

Stanford had a study that also proved the power of culturally relevant courses. But, on top of it, the court case has had at the top of it, Curtis Acosta, one of the original MAS [Mexican American Studies] instructors, Maya Arce, one of the students, who is the daughter of one of the founders of the program.

DB: A well read fellow, of course.

TD: By the way, it really is mind blowing, on top of it, what we heard as evidence is that this far right-winger, whose out of office, by the way. So, I'm not even sure why he keeps coming back and haunting America. He won't go away to... I guess the Devil doesn't need him right now. You know, basically he keeps citing Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, who, you know, it's a powerful book. He claims he read it. So, evidently even if you read it, you may not turn to social justice.

DB: We're speaking with Tony Diaz, a teacher, an activist, a visionary, one of the founders of El Librotraficante. And they are smuggling books, can you believe it? They're smuggling books back into Arizona because there, in Arizona, which you could say is still Texas, people say it is, they say that these are dangerous books. These are books, you all are smuggling books that are going to overthrow the country, they are going to corrupt the minds of students.

But, you know, we would broadcast from Arizona and we spoke to a bunch of the students who were in these programs, that were counting on these books. And these students talked about, and I don't exaggerate, they say they called them,

the programs and the books, "life savers." We spoke to kids who were contemplating suicide because they had so little self worth. And then here comes these programs that transforms their lives. You want to talk about that?

TD: By all means, and here's the other part of it. Obviously Arizona doesn't... Arizona officials don't care that their youth are telling them that these classes influenced their lives. Obviously, Arizona officials don't care that we have evidence. Luis Rodriguez, his life was saved from gangs by literature. Obviously, they are deaf to those stories. But guess what? Now, they've got research that proves it.

But here's the scary thing: they're not going to listen to the students. They're not going to listen to the teachers. Day one of the trial, the Arizona attorney was grilling a former math teacher in the program because of a poem he wrote. They were grilling him because he wrote a poem, that he never performed in public; it was for a conference that was outside of class. And he was angry, so perhaps he ridiculed some public officials. He also spoke Spanish in class, called the people [who shut down the program] "mentirosos" which means liars.

People should know that the lawyers for Arizona are persecuting teachers who wrote poems. That's it. The poem was not used in class. It wasn't in any of these dangerous books. It wasn't in the curriculum. They really want all of our freedom of speech, and imaginations, to be controlled. It is mind-boggling.

DB: Imagine, calling a politician a liar! Oh, my gosh, it's like a shocking thing. Have you ever heard a politician lie? Are you laughing?

TD: I'm laughing, and I'm crying.

DB: Crying.

TD: And, I'm trying to get a lawyer ready because if I... okay I've written a lot of poems now. Do we all have to lawyer up, now? Is that what we have to do?

DB: Well, I heard that some lawyers use the law as a legal excuse to lie. And we see that quite a bit. But, we're talking about truth tellers, we're talking about books that are full of profound truths, visionary thinkers who help to change history. These are folks, the books you're smuggling back into Phoenix, into Arizona, these are the books that not only don't lie but they help create a new language, for a new way of living. That's the nature of the poet.

TD: Exactly. And, now, this is a chance for the American imagination to expand in ways that we all need to have happen. But let me tell you what's going on in that courtroom. The judge threw out the possibility of introducing evidence we have about [former Arizona State Senator, John] Huppenthal's involvement in

other related legislation.

The Judge essentially said "I'm not going to let you admit the evidence where Huppenthal supported English-only laws [because] there's a lot of evidence that says a country that allows too many languages is also becoming weaker." So, the judge basically sighted white-supremacy literature as balancing out the ability to make any connections between English-only laws.

So, what I'm terrified about, is all the precedents that will be set in this court case, if it is upheld. Because it's going to curtail the imagination. And, you know, hey, *The Tempest* [by Shakespeare] was cited. You gotta get your summer reading list together. Buy all the books that are cited in the Arizona Banned Court Trials. So you can add *The Tempest* to that.

Maybe *The Tempest* will save Mexican American literature. Because it was an extended conversation about *The Tempest* where Chris Acosta used it in his class room, and you had the Arizona lawyers arguing about what it could mean. And it basically shows how, in the hands of people with no imagination, they can try and... basically, deport William Shakespeare, from the curriculum!

The sense this makes is nonsense, Dennis.

DB: Alright, well, it is an extraordinary situation, banning books... Librotraficante is so far on the edge, ahead of its time, in the middle of its time, more important now than ever.

Let's just come back for a moment to the court case. Again, just briefly remind people what's happening in court? The caravan went to the courtroom, there are actions. There's probably a break in the court right now. But what's at the heart of the matter, at this court case?

TD: Sure, and so, right now [week of June 26] at the Arizona Supreme Court, this [was] the first week of what could be up to three weeks of testimony, where the court case is being reviewed. It is in place, right now. So, right now there is a law in Arizona banning Mexican American Studies. This is the first week, of course. There's about a six lawyer team, working pro-bono. They are New York lawyers that have come in, and they are doing a great job.

Richard Martinez is the legal eagle leading the team, but Arizona has made it very difficult. So, we came in to spread awareness, to show support, because the Tucson [educator] family should have been... they should have been extolled for this curriculum that they had in place for several years. Instead, they've been maligned, fired, sued. And the Arizona officials placed the first week of proceedings, this week, in one month it will be the second week, and two months later, there may be a third week.

So, that already is difficult to deal with. But what people need to know is that if this law is upheld, it can spread just like the Anti-Immigrant Bill [SB 1070] that Arizona has spread. And that's the real issue that people should be concerned about.

[...] I'm also happy that when El Librotraficante joined the national movement, to keep this law in check, which was enforced in 2012, it has not spread. And it's like here in Texas, we always look at the same language that was out there, that's been out there, to sniff out any similar laws and we've done that.

Likewise, we need people to pay attention to what's going on here in the court, because they have to make sure that other right-wingers or anybody who wants to oppress freedom of speech doesn't copy the language. And that's what we're listening to in the courtroom, is how in the world is this wretched discrimination going to keep in place, right now?

I'm not sure why this is going in place, as your listeners know, racist former sheriff, Joe Arpaio's tent city was torn down recently. Jan Brewer is no longer in office. She is the former Arizona governor who signed this law into place, as well as the show-me-your-papers law. Why are their legacies, of their racists laws, still in place? You know, it would be wise for Arizona to drop this case. And I'm hoping we can still believe in the courts. I'm hoping this can be overturned. I'm hoping they can implement it.

But here's the good news, in the course of that time, in Texas, I've actually submitted a textbook for Mexican American Studies in Texas. In California, as your listeners enjoy, now some major high school districts require students to take Ethnic Studies before graduating. And [in] Hawaii they've implemented Ethnic Studies.

So, it's time for Arizona to foster a curriculum that promotes a multicultural [view]. That's what's at stake in the Tucson courtroom right now. And people need to pay attention to it. I think it's going to be several months before they come up with a decision. But it's going to be a few months where they actually go over all the details, and all the evidence.

DB: Alright, well we're going to leave it right there. But how do people get more information about Librotraficante, what you all are doing, maybe they want to participate.

TD: That would be beautiful. If they go to librotraficante.com, they can see, if they click on the tab that says "Banned" they can get a list of all the books that were on the curriculum. I'm sure some of their favorite authors are on there. They can also click on Underground Libraries to find out where all the

underground libraries are. There's actually even more underground libraries, but they are so underground that they're not listed on it. These other ones are at communities centers that people could volunteer at. Keep the books too. And then on Facebook, we will be posting updates on what's going on in the courtroom.

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