

Steve Bannon's Apocalyptic 'Unravelling'

From the Archive: Ousted White House strategist Steve Bannon was a perplexing mix of populist, operative and opportunist, but his political theories crossed into the apocalyptic and bizarre, as Alastair Crooke described last March.

By Alastair Crooke (First published on March 9, 2017)

Steve Bannon is accustomed to start many of his talks to activists and Tea Party gatherings in the following way: "At 11 o'clock on 18 September 2008, Hank Paulson and Ben Bernanke told the U.S. President that they had already stove-piped \$500 billions of liquidity into the financial system during the previous 24 hours – but needed a further one Trillion dollars, *that same day*."

"The pair said that if they did not get it immediately, the U.S. financial system would implode within 72 hours; the world's financial system, within three weeks; and that social unrest and political chaos could ensue within the month." (In the end, Bannon notes, it was more like \$5 trillion that was required, though no one really knows how much, as there has been no accounting for all these trillions).

"We (the U.S.) have", he continues, "in the wake of the bailouts that ensued, liabilities of \$200 trillions, but net assets – including everything – of some \$50-60 trillion." (Recall that Bannon is himself a former Goldman Sachs banker).

"We are upside down; the industrial democracies today have a problem we have never had before; we are over-leveraged (we have to go through a massive de-leveraging); and we have built a welfare state which is completely and totally unsupportable.

"And why this is a crisis ... the problem ... is that the numbers have become so esoteric that even the guys on Wall Street, at Goldman Sachs, the guys I work with, and the Treasury guys ... It's so tough to get this together ... Trillion dollar deficits ... etcetera."

But, Bannon says – in spite of all these esoteric, unimaginable numbers wafting about – the Tea Party women (and it is mainly led by women, he points out) get it. They *know* a different reality: they know what groceries now cost, they know their kids have \$50,000 in college debt, are still living at home, and see no jobs in prospect: "The reason I called the film *Generation Zero* is because this generation, the guys in their 20s and 30s: We've wiped them out."

And it's not just Bannon. A decade earlier, in 2000, Donald Trump was writing in a very similar vein in a pamphlet that marked his first toying with the prospect

of becoming a Presidential candidate: “My third reason for wanting to speak out is that I see not only incredible prosperity ... but also the possibility of economic and social upheaval ... Look towards the future, and if you are like me, you will see storm clouds brewing. Big Trouble. I hope I am wrong, but I think we may be facing an economic crash like we’ve never seen before.”

And before the recent presidential election, Donald Trump kept to this same narrative: the stock market was dangerously inflated. In an interview on CNBC, he said, “I hope I’m wrong, but I think we’re in a big, fat, juicy bubble,” adding that conditions were so perilous that the country was headed for a “very massive recession” and that “if you raise interest rates even a little bit, (everything’s) going to come crashing down.”

The Paradox

And here, precisely, is the paradox: Why – if Trump and Bannon view the economy as already over-leveraged, excess-bubbled, and far too fragile to accommodate even a small interest rate rise – has Trump (in Mike Whitney’s words) “promised ... more treats and less rules for Wall Street ... tax cuts, massive government spending, and fewer regulations ... \$1 trillion in fiscal stimulus to rev up consumer spending and beef up corporate profits ... to slash corporate tax rates and fatten the bottom line for America’s biggest businesses. And he’s going to gut Dodd-Frank, the ‘onerous’ regulations that were put in place following the 2008 financial implosion, to prevent another economy-decimating cataclysm.”

Does President Trump see the world differently, now that he is President? Or has he parted company with Bannon’s vision?

Though Bannon is often credited – though most often, by a hostile press, aiming to present Trump (falsely) as the “accidental President” who never really expected to win – as the intellectual force behind President Trump. In fact, Trump’s current main domestic and foreign policies were all presaged, and entirely present, in Trump’s 2000 pamphlet.

In 2000, Bannon was less political, screenwriter Julia Jones, a long-time Bannon collaborator, notes. “But the Sept. 11 attacks,” Ms. Jones says, “changed him” and their Hollywood collaboration did not survive his growing engagement with politics.

Bannon himself pins his political radicalization to his experience of the 2008 Great Financial Crisis. He detested how his Goldman colleagues mocked the Tea Party’s “forgotten” ones. As Ms. Jones sees it, a more reliable key to Bannon’s worldview lies in his military service.

“He has a respect for duty,” she said in early February. “The word he has used a

lot is 'dharma.'" Mr. Bannon found the concept of dharma in the Bhagavad Gita, she recalls. It can describe one's path in life or one's place in the universe.

There is no evidence, however, that President Trump either has changed his economic views or that he has diverged in his understanding of the nature of the crisis facing America (and Europe).

Tests Ahead

Both men are very smart. Trump understands business, and Bannon finance. They surely know the headwinds they face: the looming prospect of a wrangle to increase the American \$20 trillion "debt ceiling" (which begins to bite on March 15), amid a factious Republican Party, the improbability of the President's tax or fiscal proposals being enacted quickly, and the likelihood that the Federal Reserve will hike interest rates, "until something breaks." If they are so smart, what then is going on?

What Bannon has brought to the partnership however, is a clear articulation of the nature of this "crisis" in his Generation Zero film, which explicitly is built around the framework of a book called *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*, written in 1997 by Neil Howe and William Strauss.

In the words of one of the co-authors, the analysis "rejects the deep premise of modern Western historians that social time is either linear (continuous progress or decline) or chaotic (too complex to reveal any direction). Instead we adopt the insight of nearly all traditional societies: that social time is a recurring cycle in which events become meaningful only to the extent that they are what philosopher Mircea Eliade calls 'reenactments.' In cyclical space, once you strip away the extraneous accidents and technology, you are left with only a limited number of social moods, which tend to recur in a fixed order."

Howe and Strauss write: "The cycle begins with the First Turning, a 'High' which comes after a crisis era. In a High, institutions are strong and individualism is weak. Society is confident about where it wants to go collectively, even if many feel stifled by the prevailing conformity.

"The Second Turning is an 'Awakening,' when institutions are attacked in the name of higher principles and deeper values. Just when society is hitting its high tide of public progress, people suddenly tire of all the social discipline and want to recapture a sense of personal authenticity.

"The Third Turning is an 'Unravelling,' in many ways the opposite of the High. Institutions are weak and distrusted, while individualism is strong and flourishing.

“Finally, the Fourth Turning is a ‘Crisis’ period. This is when our institutional life is reconstructed from the ground up, always in response to a perceived threat to the nation’s very survival. *If history does not produce such an urgent threat, Fourth Turning leaders will invariably find one – and may even fabricate one – to mobilize collective action.* Civic authority revives, and people and groups begin to pitch in as participants in a larger community. As these Promethean bursts of civic effort reach their resolution, Fourth Turnings refresh and redefine our national identity.” (Emphasis added).

Woodstock Generation

Bannon’s film focuses principally on the causes of the 2008 financial crisis, and on the “ideas” that arose amongst the “Woodstock generation” (the Woodstock musical festival occurred in 1969), that permeated, in one way or another, throughout American and European society.

The narrator calls the Woodstock generation the “Children of Plenty.” It was a point of inflection: a second turning “Awakening”; a discontinuity in culture and values. The older generation (that is, anyone over 30) was viewed as having nothing to say, nor any experience to contribute. It was the elevation of the “pleasure principle” (as a “new” phenomenon, as “their” discovery), over the puritan ethic; It celebrated doing one’s own thing; it was about “Self” and narcissism.

The “Unravelling” followed in the form of government and institutional weakness: the “system” lacked the courage to take difficult decisions. The easy choices invariably were taken: the élites absorbed the self-centered, spoilt-child, ethos of the “me” generation. The 1980s and 1990s become the era of “casino capitalism” and the “Davos man.”

The lavish taxpayer bailouts of the U.S. banks after the Mexican, Russian, Asian and Argentinian defaults and crises washed away the bankers’ costly mistakes. The 2004 Bear Stearns exemption which allowed the big five banks to leverage their lending above 12:1 – and, which quickly extended to become 25:1, 30:1 and even 40:1 – permitted the irresponsible risk-taking and the billions in profit-making. The “Dot Com” bubble was accommodated by monetary policy – and then the massive 2008 bailouts accommodated the banks, yet again.

The “Unravelling” was essentially a cultural failure: a failure of responsibility, of courage to face hard choices – it was, in short, the film suggests, an era of spoilt institutions, compromised politicians and irresponsible Wall Streeters – the incumbent class – *indulging themselves, and “abdicating responsibility.”*

Now we have entered the "Fourth Turning": "All the easy choices are back of us." The "system" still lacks courage. Bannon says this period will be the "nastiest, ugliest in history." It will be brutal, and "we" (by which he means the Trump Tea Party activists) will be "vilified." This phase may last 15 – 20 years, he predicts.

Greek Tragedy

The key to this Fourth Turning is "character." It is about values. What Bannon means by "our crisis" is perhaps best expressed when the narrator says: "the essence of Greek tragedy is that it is not like a traffic accident, where somebody dies [i.e. the great financial crises didn't just arise by mischance].

The Greek sense is that tragedy is where something happens because it has to happen, because of the nature of the participants. Because the people involved, make it happen. And they have no choice to make it happen, because that's their nature."

This is the deeper implication of what transpired from Woodstock: the nature of people changed. The "pleasure principle," the narcissism, had displaced the "higher" values that had made America what it was. The generation that believed that there was "no risk, no mountain they could not climb" brought this crisis upon themselves. They wiped out 200 years of financial responsibility in about 20 years. This, it appears, captures the essence of Bannon's thinking.

That is where we *are*, Bannon asserts: Stark winter inevitably follows, after a warm, lazy summer. It becomes a time of testing, of adversity. Each season in nature has its vital function. Fourth turnings are necessary: they a part of the cycle of renewal.

Bannon's film concludes with author Howe declaring: "history is seasonal and winter is coming,"

And, what is the immediate political message? It is simple, the narrator of Bannon's film says: "STOP": stop doing what you were doing. Stop spending like before. Stop taking on spending commitments that cannot be afforded. Stop mortgaging your children's future with debt. Stop trying to manipulate the banking system. It is a time for tough thinking, for saying "no" to bailouts, for changing the culture, and re-constructing institutional life.

Cultural Legacy

And how do you re-construct civic life? You look to those who still possess a sense of duty and responsibility – who have retained a cultural legacy of values. It is noticeable that when Bannon addresses the activists, almost the

first thing he does is to salute the veterans and serving officers, and praise their qualities, their sense of duty.

It is no surprise then that President Trump wants to increase both the veterans' and the military's budget. It is not so much a portent of U.S. military belligerence, but more that he sees them as warriors for the coming "winter" of testing and adversity. Then, and only then does Bannon speak to the "thin blue line" of activists who still have strength of character, a sense of responsibility, of duty. He tells them that the future rests in their hands, alone.

Does this sound like men – Bannon and Trump – who want to ramp up a fresh financial bubble, to indulge the Wall Street casino (in their words)? No? So, what is going on?

They know "the crisis" is coming. Let us recall what Neil Howe wrote in the *Washington Post* concerning the "Fourth Turning":

"This is when our institutional life is reconstructed from the ground up, always in response to a perceived threat to the nation's very survival. If history does not produce such an urgent threat, Fourth Turning leaders will invariably find one – and may even fabricate one – to mobilize collective action. Civic authority revives, and people and groups begin to pitch in as participants in a larger community. As these Promethean bursts of civic effort reach their resolution, Fourth Turnings refresh and redefine our national identity."

Trump has no need to "fabricate" a financial crisis. It will happen "because it has to happen, because of the nature of the participants (in the current 'system'). Because the people involved, make it happen. And they have no choice to make it happen, because that's their nature."

It is not even President Obama's or Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson's *fault*, per se. They are just who they are.

Trump and Bannon therefore are *not* likely trying to ignite the "animal spirits" of the players in the financial "casino" (as many in the financial sphere seem to assume). If Bannon's film and Trump's articulation of crisis mean anything, it is that their aim is to ignite the "animal spirits" of "the working-class casualties and those forgotten Americans" of the Midwest, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

At that point, they hope that the "thin blue line" of activists will "pitch in" with a Promethean burst of civic effort which will reconstruct America's institutional and economic life.

If this is so, the Trump/Bannon vision both is audacious – and quite an extraordinary gamble ...

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The Agony of ‘Regime Change’ Refugees

Exclusive: There are positive signs of Syrians returning to Aleppo after the ouster of Al Qaeda’s militants. But the legacy of Western “regime change” wars continues to plague Europe and inflict human suffering, writes Andrew Spannaus.

By Andrew Spannaus

European nations have been thrown into a political crisis by the hundreds of thousands of migrants coming north from the Middle East and Africa. The number has grown in recent years, due to a mix of wars and poverty, resulting in a visible increase of the influx of foreigners across Europe, and a popular backlash that has political institutions scrambling to find a way to stem the flow and lessen the sense of emergency.

The problem is that the causes of the mass migration have deep roots that cannot be solved in the short-term; and even a medium- to long-term solution will require serious changes in foreign and economic policy for the entire Western world.

In September 2015, as the number of refugees from Syria increased due to the ongoing military conflict there, German Chancellor Angela Merkel made a surprising announcement. Going against the grain of public opinion, in which anti-immigrant sentiment seemed to be rising rapidly, Merkel announced that her country would open its doors and accept hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers. Germany already has a large number of recent immigrants among its population, and the view was that a wealthy country with a population of over 80 million could certainly do its part to deal with the humanitarian crisis enveloping the Middle East.

The open attitude didn’t last long. In March 2016, Germany played a key role in reaching a deal with President Erdogan of Turkey, who in exchange for billions of euros, essentially closed the land route towards Europe through the Balkans. As a result, only the sea routes remained, with departures principally from

Turkey, Egypt and Libya, making Greece and Italy the primary entry points to Europe. The routes have been further reduced over the past year, with the vast majority of departures currently originating in Libya.

Italy at Forefront

This has meant that in 2017 over 85 percent of total migrants headed towards Europe have arrived in Italy, a country that has led efforts to rescue people risking death in the Mediterranean in recent years. There have been ongoing negotiations with other European nations to relocate the migrants that are taken to Italian ports and lessen the burden on the country of entry, but the number of migrants relocated has been only a small portion of those that arrive.

As a result Italy, which is not particularly efficient in managing the new arrivals despite making significant strides in recent years, feels left alone to deal with a crisis that is straining its resources. One of the side effects is a palpable shift in public attitudes in this Catholic country, from openness to help those in need, to a feeling that the situation is out of control and that the identity of Europe is under threat from the constant influx of migrants from different cultures.

The Italian government is attempting to find a technical solution to reduce the flow across the sea, which includes negotiations with the various factions in Libya, a new code of conduct for NGOs working in the area, and tightening the rules for bringing migrants to Italian ports.

All of these measures address only the last link in the chain of migration from the Middle East and Africa though, and even if they were to succeed, would only block the flow from Libya – where migrants suffer horrendous conditions, including torture – while human traffickers would seek new routes to get around the obstacles put up by European governments.

The Larger Issue

The deeper problem to address is the causes of the migrant crisis. This requires taking a step backwards, to understand how the current situation was created. The first issue is that of Libya itself, a country without any effective centralized control, ruled over by rival factions that are unable or unwilling to stop the numerous human trafficking networks from taking money from desperate migrants and putting them on rafts pointed towards Italy, where they will either be rescued by naval forces or NGOs, or die along the way.

The prime responsibility for the Libyan chaos lies in Paris, London and Washington. The goal of overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi had been present for decades in Western capitals, but it was not until 2011 – under the cover of the

“Arab Spring” – that the French government in particular began to organize the effort to overthrow him, and gain economic and strategic advantages for itself in Northern Africa as a result.

The French had already prepared the attack as they encouraged U.S. President Barack Obama to join the “humanitarian” war that was intended to save the opposition from being massacred by Gaddafi. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton headed up the pro-intervention faction in the Obama Administration to the point that the Libyan campaign became known to many as “Hillary’s War.”

Upon learning of Gaddafi’s brutal murder, Clinton paraphrased Julius Caesar declaring: “We came, we saw, he died.” The result though, rather than being a triumph of democracy, has been a descent into chaos, that among other things has allowed the country to become a key gathering point for terrorist groups such as ISIS.

‘Regime Change’ Chaos

The Libyan chaos, the most immediate hindrance to stopping the flow of migrants to Europe at this moment, leads to the larger issue of Western policy regarding terrorism and the Middle East in general. The series of “regime change” wars in recent years have reflected the goal of using terrorist networks for the West’s strategic advantage, while ignoring the long-term effects of this tactic. The support for the Mujahidin in Afghanistan in the 1980s, in an attempt to weaken the Soviet Union, led directly to the rise of Osama bin-Laden and Al Qaeda in the 1990s.

The financial backing given to Sunni extremism, provided in particular by allies such as Saudi Arabia, spawned the terrorist groups that today target the West. From the war in Iraq to support for the most extreme anti-Assad groups in Syria, the United States and other Western powers have had a major hand in creating the very problem they are scrambling to deal with today.

The Obama Administration began a timid shift away from “regime change,” with the decision not to bomb Syria in 2013, and rather to seek cooperation with Russia. The attempt to rebalance U.S. interests in the Middle East was also reflected in the nuclear deal reached with Iran. The effort ultimately proved to be too little, too late though, as large sections of the institutions resisted the shift and Obama himself essentially ran out of time; by the end of his term he had succumbed to the pressure to maintain a hostile position towards Russia, and failed to define a new strategic orientation towards the Middle East.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly criticized the policies of regime change and is moving forward on cooperation with Russia in Syria, despite the bombing

of a Syrian air base in April in response to dubious claims of a chemical weapons attack by the Syrian government. Yet he has also toed the traditional pro-Saudi, anti-Iran line in the Middle East in general, making it seem doubtful that he is willing, or even able, to actually change U.S. policy in the region. As of now, the conflicts are far from being over, and from this perspective, it becomes clear that no short-term solutions are on the horizon.

An even broader issue is that of development, as economic conditions are once again overtaking political unrest as the main driver of migration. There has been talk recently of a European Plan for Africa, to spur economic development and remove the root causes that drive people to leave their homes and families despite the potential dangers. The reality though, is that the discussion still revolves around the type of limited initiatives that are all too similar to the programs of the International Monetary Fund, focused on improving the climate for private investment and other “structural reforms.”

Some of the goals may be laudable, but the approach is a far cry from that of the Marshall Plan for Europe after World War II – which is often thrown around as a precedent when new plans are announced – that involved large amounts of public investment in rebuilding industrial capacity.

On this front as well, Western nations seem unable to recognize their own mistakes and contribution to the poverty in Africa that is driving a decades-long humanitarian crisis, that has now become an urgent political crisis for much of Europe as well.

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Russia-gate’s Fataally Flawed Logic

Exclusive: By pushing the Russia-gate “scandal” and neutering President Trump’s ability to conduct diplomacy, Democrats and Congress have encouraged his war-making side on North Korea, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

There was always a logical flaw in pushing Russia-gate as an excuse for Hillary

Clinton's defeat – besides the fact that it was based on a dubious “assessment” by a small team of “hand-picked” U.S. intelligence analysts. The flaw was that it poked the thin-skinned Donald Trump over one of his few inclinations toward diplomacy.

We're now seeing the results play out in a very dangerous way in Trump's bluster about North Korea, which was included in an aggressive economic sanctions bill – along with Russia and Iran – that Congress passed nearly unanimously, without a single Democratic no vote.

Democrats and Official Washington's dominant neocons celebrated the bill as a vote of no-confidence in Trump's presidency but it only constrained him in possible peacemaking, not war-making.

The legislation, which Trump signed under protest, escalated tensions with those three countries while limiting Trump's power over lifting sanctions. After signing the bill into law, Trump denounced the bill as “seriously flawed – particularly because it encroaches on the executive branch's authority to negotiate.”

As his “signing statements” made clear, Trump felt belittled by the congressional action. His response has been to ratchet up bellicose rhetoric about North Korea, bluster appearing to be his natural default position when under pressure.

Remember, in April, as the Russia-gate hysteria mounted, Trump changed the subject, briefly, by rushing to judgment on an alleged chemical-weapons incident in Khan Sheikhoun, Syria, and firing off 59 Tomahawk missiles at a Syrian military base.

He immediately won acclaim from Official Washington, although Hillary Clinton and other hawks argued that he should have gone further with a much larger U.S. invasion of Syria, i.e., establishing a “no-fly zone” even if that risked nuclear war with Russia.

What Trump learned from that experience is that even when he is going off half-cocked, he is rewarded for taking the military option. (More careful analysis of the Khan Sheikhoun evidence later raised serious doubts that the Syrian military was responsible.)

Schoolyard Taunts

So, we now have President Trump in a bizarre exchange of schoolyard taunts with the leadership of North Korea, with Trump's “fire and fury like the world has never seen” rhetoric possibly plunging the United States into a confrontation

that could have devastating consequences for the Korean peninsula, Japan and indeed the whole world.

Given the fact that the world has already seen the U.S. nuclear destruction of two Japanese cities at the end of World War II, Trump's loose phrasing seems to suggest that the United States is prepared to use nuclear weapons against North Korea (although he may be referring to "just" carpet-bombing with conventional ordnance).

If nuclear weapons are brought into play, it is hard to fathom what the long-term consequences might be. It's unlikely that Trump – not known for his deep thinking – has even contemplated that future.

However, even a "limited" war with conventional weapons and confined to the Korean peninsula could kill hundreds of thousands of people and severely shake the world's economy. If North Korea manages to deliver retaliatory damage on Japan, a human catastrophe and a financial panic could follow.

Many thoughtful people are now expressing alarm at Trump's erratic behavior, but many of those same people cheered the promotion of Russia-gate as a way to corner Trump politically. They didn't seem to care that the "scandal" was built on a foundation of flimsy or phony evidence and that a key argument – that "all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies" concurred in the Russian-hacking conclusion – was false.

Once that fake "consensus" claim disappeared – after President Obama's intelligence chiefs acknowledged that the Jan. 6 "assessment" was the work of "hand-picked" analysts from only three agencies – there should have been a stepping back from the Russia-gate groupthink. There should have been demands for a reassessment of the underlying assumptions.

However, by then, too many Important People, including editors and executives at major news organizations, had accepted Russia's guilt as flat fact, meaning that their reputations were at risk. To protect their estimable careers, all doubts about Russia's guilt had to be crushed and the conventional wisdom enforced.

That self-serving defensiveness became the backdrop to the Russia-Iran-North Korean sanctions bill. Not only could no rethinking be allowed on Russia-gate but Trump's resistance to the groupthink had to be broken by neutering him along with his presidential powers to conduct diplomacy.

Still eager to please the Democratic #Resistance which sees Russia-gate as the pathway to Trump's impeachment, Democrats – from neocons like Sen. Ben Cardin to anti-interventionists such as Rep. Tulsi Gabbard – joined in the stampede for the sanctions bill.

In their rush, the Democrats even endangered Obama's signature diplomatic accomplishment, the international agreement blocking an Iranian nuclear weapon. Obama had promised Iran sanctions relief, not more sanctions. Now, the prospects for the accord's collapse are increased and the neocon dream to bomb-bomb-bomb Iran revived.

And, by tossing North Korea into the mix, the Democrats left Trump few options other than to unleash his warmongering side and plunge the world toward a potential cataclysm.

So, this is what the Russia-gate opportunism has wrought. The logical flaw in Russia-gate may turn out to be a fatal one.

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 Source of Trump's Real Clout

The image of Donald Trump's "deplorables" – as Hillary Clinton dubbed them – is a bunch of bigoted blue-collar whites waving Confederate flags, but the secret of Trump's real power lies elsewhere, says historian Keri Leigh Merritt.

By Keri Leigh Merritt

Since before the election, poor white voters largely have been blamed for the rise of Donald Trump. Although their complicity in his election is clear and well established, they're continually targeted as if their actions are the primary reason Trump won. But in fact, higher-earning, college-educated whites supported him at even greater rates.

It's quite easy to brand the working class as the most rabidly xenophobic and racist group of whites. Whether they're brandishing Confederate flags or vociferously vowing to "Make America Great Again," their beliefs about white supremacy are completely exposed for the world to witness. It's much harder to see how those atop the economic pyramid not only greatly benefit from white supremacy but actually use racism to their advantage – generally from behind the scenes.

In short, when we hold the working class responsible for white supremacy, other

whites are absolved of racial wrongdoing. By allowing the spread of civic ignorance, by propagating historical lies and political untruths, and by engendering an insidious form of racism, upper-class whites are undoubtedly just as culpable – if not more so – than working-class whites in the quest to maintain white supremacy.

Certainly, there is no apology for the racism of working-class whites, nor any excuse; but we should seek to understand the ways in which white supremacy and power are completely intertwined. Throughout American history, the economic elite have used vile forms of racism to perpetuate the current hierarchy – politically, socially and economically. White supremacy is most commonly conceptualized as a way for lower-class whites to feel socially superior to people from other ethnic backgrounds. More important, though, white supremacy is a tried-and-tested means for upper-class whites to grow their wealth and power.

Whether pitting laborers of different races against each other, stoking racial fears through a sensationalistic and profit-driven media or politically scapegoating entire nationalities, America's white elite have successfully modernized age-old strategies of using racism to prevent the formation of a broad coalition of people along class lines.

The Goal of Manipulation

To be sure, the concept of white privilege must seem far-fetched to working-class whites who come from generations of cyclical poverty. They constantly are told that African-Americans are the primary recipients of welfare and social benefits, and that policies like affirmative action are greatly detrimental to all whites. By controlling key aspects of the economy, especially education, politics and the media, the white elite often very easily manipulate less affluent whites.

First, by governing and managing the education system in this country, the upper classes remain in control of the equality of *opportunity*. While much of America is plagued by an underfunded, failing public school system that gets exponentially worse the deeper the area's poverty, the affluent live in areas with higher property taxes, and thus, better local school systems. Despite this disparity, the rich also are always able to send their children to private (and increasingly, "charter") schools, escaping the bleak educational realities that most Americans are left to suffer.

As the abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher wrote about the lack of public education in the slave South, "[I]gnorance is an institution. They legislate for ignorance the same way we legislate for schoolhouses." Today, as Republicans continue slashing education funding at the federal, state and local levels, they

legislate for ignorance. They fear statistics and facts, realizing what may follow the political enlightenment of the lower classes. "Knowledge is not only power," Beecher aptly concluded, "but powder, also, liable to blow false institutions to atoms."["Anti-Slavery Lectures," *The New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1855, 5.]

Second, elite authority over the educational system also means regulation over the teaching of subjects like history, government and civics. An overwhelming majority of Americans have shockingly little understanding of our own past and our own government, often leading to lower-class political apathy.

Third, a small number of extremely wealthy white men control and operate much of the American media. With just a handful of corporations owning the majority of our country's media, it is worth remembering that news today is essentially a product to be sold, a commodity. Trump himself has created a political firestorm by branding certain news outlets as "fake news," but the media monopoly obviously presents valid concerns about fair and balanced reporting. Each of the few very powerful, rich men have their own reasons for deciding what qualifies as "news."

Divide and Conquer

Finally, business owners and corporate leaders have historically sought to keep workers segregated, either physically or by job. Since antebellum times, masters attempted to engender racism between poor white laborers and enslaved blacks, trying to keep each side distrustful of the other.

By perpetuating and encouraging a vile form of racism, they attempted to establish psychological segregation, ultimately thwarting the prospect of an interracial coalition. Today, elites use white supremacy as a powerful tool in preventing unionism – as just witnessed with the failure of the United Auto Workers election at a Mississippi Nissan factory.

Thus, even though working-class whites certainly support Trump and his policies, it is important to remember why. Indeed, poorer whites may be the ones branded as hardened white supremacists, but let's not forget who benefits the most from racism: the white economic elite.

"You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings," the famous populist leader Tom Watson once told a gathering of white and black laborers. "You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both." With a few short breaths, Watson had laid bare the most important reason why white supremacy has always thrived in this country, especially during times of severe

economic inequality.

Many vestiges of the past – including a long history of upper-class whites using racism to their advantage – have re-emerged in Trump’s America. As our nation impetuously tumbles toward a very uncertain future, we must take heed that the racist rhetoric and divisive political issues have only just begun. The millionaires and billionaires of this country literally have a fortune to protect, and white supremacy has always helped assure their place at the apex of society.

As Watson rightfully crowed to his interracial crowd, “You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both.” [Thomas E. Watson, “The Negro Question in the South,” *The Arena* (Boston), VI, Oct. 1892, 540-550.]

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The NYT’s Grim Depiction of Russian Life

As a top propaganda outlet pushing the New Cold War, The New York Times paints life in Russia in the darkest hues, but this one-sided depiction misses the reality of the increasingly vibrant country that Gilbert Doctorow sees.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Our five-week stay at our home in the Russian countryside was approaching its conclusion when I got an email from a friend in France asking me to comment on [an article](#) in *The New York Times* entitled “Russia’s Villages, and Their Way of Life, Are ‘Melting Away’.”

The article surely met the expectations of its editors by painting a grim picture of decline and fall of the Russian countryside in line with what the author sees as very unfavorable demographic trends in the Russian Federation as a whole. The fact that his own statistics do not justify the generalization (a net population loss of a few thousand deaths over live births in 2016 for a population of 146 million) does not get in the way of the paint-by-color canvas. Nor does the author explain why what he has observed in a village off the beaten track in Northwest Russia, in precisely the still poor region of

Pskov, gives an accurate account of country life across the vast territory of Russia, the world's largest nation-state.

As the author notes, the main source of income from the land of the town he visited was – in the past – linen. That cultivation turned unprofitable and was discontinued. Consequently, the able-bodied part of the population has been looking for employment and making their lives elsewhere (a process internal migration common all over the world, including the United States).

The author fails to mention that linen production is not a major agricultural indicator in Russia today, whereas many other crops are booming. Linen goes into the lovely traditional handicraft tablecloths and napkins sold to tourists at riverboat landings, and that is the extent of demand.

I could respond to the overriding portrait of countryside decay in the *Times* article by drawing on my observations a year ago from the deck of one of those riverboats navigating the canals and rivers connecting St. Petersburg and Moscow. From that deck and from the experience of walking around the little picturesque towns where we made stops, I understand that growing domestic Russian tourism has pumped financial resources into historic centers, like Uglich. They are coming alive, with infrastructure improvements and reviving trade.

But tourist sites are not going to be representative of the country at large, either. So I will instead use two sources of information that I am confident have greater relevance to the issue at hand. The first, and surely the most politically significant, comes from a couple of family friends who for nearly 50 years have spent summers at a parcel of land deep in the hinterland, 280 kilometers southeast of St. Petersburg, close to regional industrial center of Pikalyovo, (Leningradskaya Oblast) with its train station along the line linking the northern capital to Vologda.

My Own Eyes

The second source is my own experience in and around our property in Orfino, a hamlet numbering 300 inhabitants in the Gatchina district, also Leningradskaya Oblast, but 80 kilometers due south of St. Petersburg.

The homesteads around Pikalyovo were always hard to get to, with very poor local roads. There was no commercial infrastructure, so the bold and determined vacationers coming here had to bring most provisions for their stay with them. They were rewarded for their efforts by the produce grown in their gardens and by foraging for berries and highly desirable boletes and other wild mushrooms in the surrounding forests.

When the Soviet Union collapsed and the Russian economy followed suit in the 1990s, the Pikalyovo region suffered the kind of economic misery and population loss that the *Times* describes today in the Pskov region. Our friends saw that normal folks left, and the concentration of drunkards and thieves rose proportionately. The theft of anything of value in common space became acute when scrap metal scavengers pulled up kilometers of electrical cables for their copper content, leaving swathes of the district temporarily without electricity.

Pikalyovo came to the attention of national news during the 2008-2009 financial crisis when its three main industrial enterprises shut down, causing widespread misery. The best known of these enterprises, a clay processing plant owned by the oligarch Oleg Derispaska's conglomerate Basic Element, caused a major scandal when state television carried reports on how the factory had not paid its employees for months while the boss was seeking and obtaining government assistance with repayment and rescheduling of his foreign loans. In the spring of 2009, there were protest demonstrations in Pikalyovo that resulted in both Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin personally entering the dispute to pressure Deripaska to do the right thing.

The economic woes of the regional economic hub did nothing to improve the living conditions in nearby hamlets like the one where our friends have their parcel. Our friends started cutting back on their visits and missed a year or two altogether. All of this would seem to confirm the storyline of the *Times* reporter, but the latest word from Volodya and Tamara overturns the storyline completely.

A Revival

A few weeks ago, our friends decided to go back to the property to prepare it for sale. They had had enough, they thought. However, once there, they discovered things were definitely looking up. A newly completed 35 kilometer highway makes their settlement much more accessible.

But, more importantly, the neighbors have changed – for the better. A retired colonel moved in a couple of years ago and started raising pigs, cows and chickens, offering meat, eggs and dairy products for sale, thereby ending our friends' need for brought-in provisions. His example attracted others. New and dynamic settlers are putting into practice the “return to the land” trend that is an undeniable feature of current Russian social life. Our friends have decided not to sell, and to spend more time on their property.

In legal terms, the parcel of land my wife owns in the hamlet of Orfino (population 300) is categorized as a “subsistence farm.” The nature of the farming to be done there even features in the plan attached to the cadastral

registry: the 700 square meters where the house was built facing the "Central Street" can be used for fruit trees and vegetable garden; the back field of another 700 square meters is allocated for potatoes, cabbage and similar crops.

In the vernacular, however, together with the two-story planed log house we built here five years ago, the property is considered a "dacha," a summer residence. Nearly one in two urban Russian households has a dacha.

Young people think of dachas as weekend getaway locations to hold a barbecue for friends and family. If they have a feeling for Russian traditions, it is where they take their Saturday *banya*, or sauna in dedicated outhouses heated by wood burning stoves and then socialize over a beer. Older folks and pensioners find this frivolous. In their view, the dacha is not so much a place to idle time away as it is a place of honest toil, working the land and communing with nature. And even some of the younger generation buys into the concept of growing their own organic foods on their land, thus getting along without industrially farmed supermarket produce, whether domestic or imported.

One hundred years ago, Orlino was populated mostly by wealthy merchants whose businesses were in the extended district. They lived here year-round in substantial houses, some of which have survived to this day. To the back of the houses, what were essentially barns were built on, and there they kept some small livestock. No one in Orlino today keeps chickens, pigs, goats, not to mention cows. But they do till the land with great enthusiasm and look after their fruit trees and red berry shrubs.

The notion of subsistence farming suggests border-line poverty. But Orlino was never poor, and its residents are not indigent today. Oldsters whose pensions are inadequate are supported by their children or nephews/nieces' families living in the local towns, in the district capital of Gatchina 50 kilometers away, or even in St. Petersburg. In return, these relatives visit in the summer to spend some days of vacation and take advantage of the large lake on the edge of the hamlet, which is lovely for swimming or boating when the weather is cooperative.

Good Use of Land

The notion of subsistence farming also suggests tough practicality. But making good use of the land does not exclude aesthetic pleasures, and every parcel of land in the hamlet is decorated by flower beds showing great ingenuity and effort.

Similarly, in the last year the Orlino farmers have all gone the way of their brethren across Russia and invested in greenhouses made of pre-formed

polycarbonate walls, most commonly resembling hoops in profile. Here they put in tomatoes, cucumbers and other highly prized vegetables for their dining table which do not do well in the short growing season of the North, and in the very adverse climatic conditions which were exemplary this year in terms of cool temperatures and incessant rains. Given the expense of these greenhouses, the investment is not so much economically justified as it is a point of pride in self-sufficiency and green-thumb skills.

Electricity is the only utility that spells dependency for Orfino residents. Otherwise, each household has its own well, its own septic tank system, its own gas cylinder for the cooking stove and its own supply of birch logs for a wood-burning stove that is the mainstay of heating.

Many households have cars. The most recent arrivals, being by far the most prosperous, often have four-wheel-drive utility vehicles. This is a valuable benefit given the deplorable condition of many local roads. But then there is a significant minority who depend on the local bus system to get around. It is cheap, runs to schedule and gets you from point A to point B without fuss. The hamlet has a couple of grocery stores, so that staples are always available within easy walking distance.

An Economic Hub

For luxuries, there is the town of Siversk 10 kilometers away. Numbering perhaps 10,000 people, it is the local economic hub, with several factories, including a manufacturer of good quality upholstered furniture.

Siversk has a train station with hourly connections to Gatchina and St. Petersburg. It also has several supermarkets run by major national retail chains, so that you will find exactly the same product assortment as in St. Petersburg or Moscow. And there are a number of high quality specialty food stores and at least one bakery which is indistinguishable from what you might find in Vienna or Frankfurt

In the not so distant past, even urban Russians had not much interest in salads or in fish. Chicken legs or sausages or pork cutlets for the barbecue were what folks shopped for as main courses. Now even our Siversk stores offer pre-packaged mixed lettuce salads or rucola coming from greenhouse complexes in Greater St. Petersburg.

And the leading fish store offers not only salmon steaks from Scandinavian producers, but several varieties of delicacy fish from Europe's largest fresh water lake, situated 50 kilometers to the east of St. Petersburg. Still more impressive is the assortment of fish coming down each day from Murmansk:

excellent flounder and superb *gorbusha*, a wild salmon usually considered to be a Pacific Ocean variety but also available in the waters north and west of Siberia. For those with deeper pockets, the fish vendor in little Siversk occasionally offers a fresh sterlet, the magnificent 1 kilogram-size representative of the sturgeon family that is farmed on the Volga in Astrakhan, far to the South.

I offer these observations from shopping to make the following point about the Russian country life as I see it: a lively economy with a population growing ever more sophisticated and aspiring to the good life.

The Lower Strata

When I shared these thoughts with my friend in France, he shot back: what about the lower strata of society? How are they faring?

My ready response draws on my five-year acquaintance with our “average Joe” neighbor in Orlino, Sergei. When we settled here five years ago, he drilled our artesian well, installed the electric pump and all sanitary plumbing in our house. Now he winterizes the house each year and keeps an eye on the property when we are away, for compensation to be sure, but more out of friendship, because he has other, more lucrative sources of income as a subcontractor or day worker on local construction projects. There is a lot of work of this kind now that Orlino’s fallow fields are slowly being converted into housing estates.

Sergei is a master of several building trades. He also drives a tractor. He is mechanically gifted.

Sergei is about 55, the father of a grown son and daughter, the grandfather of two. When we first met, he was living in an apartment in a multi-unit wooden house dating back 60 or 70 years that was neither comfortable nor attractive. In the past three years he has realized a long time dream and built for himself a two-story cement block house, now clad in siding. The interior space is perhaps 250 square meters. When you pass it from the road, in a row of several other very substantial recent houses, you would place it as solidly upper-middle class. And next to his house Sergei has put up a very fine and large greenhouse. Beyond that is an extensive field of splendid potatoes and vegetables.

To be sure, the second story of Sergei’s house still needs work and he and his wife live now only on the ground floor. Moreover, the investment of all spare cash into the house has scuttled other needs. When Sergei’s ancient Toyota pick-up finally rusted into irreparable condition, he found himself without motorized transport. Until further notice, until he can put together the down payment for a new vehicle, he gets around town on a bicycle.

Sergei is no fool. He gripes about local corruption and terrible roads. But on the whole he is satisfied with his lot and optimistic about the future. Any belt-tightening that has been made necessary by Western sanctions he takes in his stride. He is resolutely patriotic.

I realize full well that the observations taken from my personal experience of the Russian countryside and from the experience of close friends is anecdotal and so not statistically significant. But then neither are the observations of *The New York Times* reporter.

Russia is a vast land and you can pretty much find what you are looking for there. Nonetheless, the gross economic statistics published by Rosstat are upbeat and fully contradict the notion of a country in decline, including its rural component.

Gilbert Doctorow is an independent political analyst based in Brussels. His latest book *Does Russia Have a Future?* was published in August 2015. His forthcoming book is *Does the United States Have a Future?*

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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Can Trump Find the ‘Great’ Path?

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

By Robert Parry

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

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

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

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

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

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

interests.

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

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

Hobbling Trump

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

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

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

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

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

But Flynn, like many on the Right, bought into Official Washington's false groupthink that Iran was the principal sponsor of terrorism and needed to be bomb-bomb-bombed, not dealt with diplomatically as Obama did in negotiating tight constraints on Iran's nuclear program. The bomb-bomb-bomb approach fit

with the desires of the Israeli and Saudi governments, which viewed Iran as a rival and wanted the American military to do the dirty work in shattering the so-called "Shiite crescent."

So, because of Kushner's views on Israel-Palestine and because of the Flynn/Right-Wing hostility toward Iran, Trump fell in line with much of the neocon consensus on the Middle East, demonstrated by Trump's choice of Saudi Arabia and Israel for his first high-profile foreign trip.

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

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

A Daunting Task

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

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

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

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

Similarly, on the Ukraine crisis, Trump could order the CIA to reveal the truth about the U.S. role in fomenting the violent coup that ousted elected President

Viktor Yanukovych and touched off a bloody civil war, which saw the U.S.-backed regime in Kiev dispatch neo-Nazi militias to kill ethnic Russians in the east.

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

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

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

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

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

A Populist Party

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

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

By taking this unorthodox approach, Trump could reorient American politics for a generation, with Republicans emerging as a populist party focused on the needs of the country’s forgotten citizens, on rebuilding the nation’s physical and

economic infrastructure, and on genuine U.S. security requirements abroad, not the desires of “allies” with powerful lobbies in Washington.

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

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

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

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

The World’s Shift to Electric Cars

Exclusive: Despite resistance from the oil industry and Team Trump, the transition to electric vehicles is accelerating, with key foreign countries and some U.S. states taking the lead, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Even as the Trump administration [scrubs federal web sites](#) of data about climate science and clean energy and [appoints](#) coal industry lobbyists to senior policy positions, other nations are responding vigorously to the reality of global warming.

[Great Britain](#) and [France](#) have recently announced ambitious timetables for phasing out fossil-fueled cars by 2040. Even bolder are [Norway](#), which expects all new cars sold by 2025 to be electric, up from 37 percent today, and India,

which set 2030 as its target date for going all-electric.

Together with the rising domestic popularity of all-electric and hybrid electric vehicles, the potential political contagion from such foreign programs is spurring major U.S. fossil fuel producers into spending millions of dollars to kill clean transportation alternatives.

A shadowy outfit called Fueling U.S. Forward, devoted to promoting greater use of oil and natural gas, recently produced a misleading attack video called "Dirty Secrets of Electric Cars." The *New York Times* exposed the group as "a public relations group for fossil fuels funded by Koch Industries, the oil and petrochemicals conglomerate led by the ultraconservative billionaire brothers David H. and Charles G. Koch."

The stakes, both financial and environmental, are high. The U.S. transportation sector currently consumes 14 million barrels of petroleum products every day. Transitioning away from all that gasoline and diesel to cleaner electric transportation will be critical to lowering carbon emissions before global warming wreaks havoc on human civilization and natural ecosystems. It will also help alleviate vehicle air pollution that kills an estimated 50,000 people each year in the United States alone.

Unlike the power sector, where the renewable energy revolution is well underway across the nation, transportation remains largely stuck in the last century. In my car-friendly state of California, for example, thanks to a boom in solar and wind energy, electric power today accounts for only about 20 percent of statewide greenhouse gas emissions. Transportation, by contrast, contributes 36 percent, far more than any other sector.

When charged by clean solar, wind, hydro or nuclear power, electric cars and trucks contribute almost no greenhouse or toxic air emissions. Even in states with a high proportion of coal-fired generation, efficient electric vehicles (EVs) account for fewer emissions than the average new gas-powered car.

With coal-burning plants increasingly giving way to cleaner natural gas-fired plants and renewable generation of energy, more than 70 percent of Americans now live in areas where EVs cause fewer emissions even than the cleanest conventional cars, according to recent research by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS). On average, across the country, EVs create as little carbon pollution as gasoline-powered cars that get 73 mpg – if such cars even existed.

Critics, like the Koch-funded Fueling U.S. Forward, complain that it takes more energy to manufacture an electric car than a gas-powered car, mostly because of the need for big batteries. But those manufacturing emissions are more than

offset by the reduced emissions from driving a mid-sized electric car after just 5,000 miles, the UCS report notes.

Electric Vehicles on a Roll

Electric vehicles today number only about 2 million, or just 0.2 percent of all light passenger vehicles in use globally today, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). The good news is that their numbers are growing about 60 percent per year. In the United States, customers bought 53,000 electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles in the first six months of 2017 – not counting Tesla sales – up from 33,000 in the same period a year ago.

Momentum is growing in the EV industry. Tesla briefly this year enjoyed the highest market cap of any U.S. automaker. In July, Volvo announced that it plans to produce only hybrid or all-electric vehicles by 2019. China, which now leads the world in EV sales, has tough incentives to increase them further. A multi-nation coalition called the Electric Vehicles Initiative – including Canada, China, Finland, France, Germany, India, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, United Kingdom, and, for now, the United States – is encouraging the global deployment of 20 million EVs by 2020.

IEA cites estimates that the global stock of electric cars will range between 40 million and 70 million by 2025, if governments continue to support R&D, purchase incentives, and charging infrastructure. The transition to EVs may accelerate if, as some experts forecast, they become fully cost competitive with gasoline-powered cars within a decade.

Bloomberg New Energy Finance projects that “cars with a plug [will] account for a third of the global auto fleet by 2040 and displace about 8 million barrels a day of oil production – more than the 7 million barrels Saudi Arabia exports today.”

The Trump administration can be counted on to do what it can to slow this revolution, but 10 states have aggressive programs to promote the adoption of electric vehicles: California, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island and Vermont. Just as with renewable energy, their success may pave the way for similar programs in other states, even “red” ones.

Fiscal conservatives should applaud their efforts to jump-start the EV market. A study by the American Lung Association in California last year documented health costs of \$24 billion a year – for lost work days, respiratory illnesses, and premature deaths – from vehicle emissions in just those 10 states. The report estimated an additional \$13 billion in climate-related costs (agricultural

losses, flooding, fires, etc.). Converting two-thirds of cars on the road to electric vehicles by 2050 would save those states about \$21 billion a year, well worth the effort.

And if they succeed, proponents may also prove instrumental in helping U.S. automakers like Tesla, GM, and Ford remain world leaders in the fast-growing market for electric vehicles. The United States can't afford to be stranded in the slow lane of adapting its economy to climate change while the rest of the world speeds ahead.

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How the 'Center' Is Spinning Apart

There's the old warning that at times the "center cannot hold," but today's "center" appears to be self-destructing, creating unnecessary crises and conflicts that worsen the world's predicament, notes ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

That "icon" of the "centrists," Facebook, recently wrote to a site on the U.S. "Alt-Right" telling them that various posts which they had authored must be immediately taken down, or would be deleted. The references which had offended were the words "trannies" for transgenders and "cross-dressers." The message from Facebook further suggested that gender "identity" is considered a "protected characteristic" (under the law – which it is not), and that reference to transgenders as "trannies" could be considered "hate speech" (i.e. a legal offence).

A totally trivial issue, in itself, except that it goes to the heart of the disputed vision which encapsulates the present U.S. civil stand-off: On the one side, the notion that diversity, freely elected sexual orientation, and identity rights, equals societal cohesion and strength. Or, on the other hand, the vision encapsulated by Pat Buchanan: that a nation (including its new-comers) are bound more by the possession of a legacy of memories, a heritage of manners, customs and culture, and an attachment to a certain "way-of-being," and principles of government. And it is this that constitutes the source of a nation's strength.

The point here, is that the "centrist" center visibly is folding. The insistence to manage and control discourse (*per* Michel Foucault), around a strictly delimited, political ideology is drawing now public disdain (and street

demonstrations in the U.S.) targeted both at social media, and at elements of the MSM (mainstream media outlets, such as CNN). That is to say, the more the centrist diversity meme is pushed in the U.S., the greater the popular push-back, it seems.

The sites opposing such “correctness” are attracting a much higher audience than those espousing it. But that is not the whole story. It is not even the half of it: “the center” is giving way on multiple fronts (with huge, and likely turbulent consequence).

Foreign Policy Chaos

Most evidently, this is occurring in foreign policy generally, and in the Middle East more particularly. It has been only lightly reported in the MSM, but the U.S. National Security Council again has failed – according to reports – to offer any compelling arguments as to how America might, in any way, succeed in Afghanistan even with a hefty increase in military forces, (as advocated by NSC Advisor H.R. McMaster). It has been a long-haul war – and there will be no pleasing outcome to this war for anyone; rather the opposite – but that has been long evident to almost all who followed events there.

Secondly, Hizballah has routed – in just four days – Al Qaeda from the Arsal *enclave* in north Lebanon. Once again, Lebanon is contiguous with Syria, just as Iraq is now contiguous, adjoining and open to Syria. Aided by the psychological shock to insurgents of the news of the halting of CIA of weapons and salaries supplied to (some, not all) insurgent groups, the Syrian army and its partner forces are quite rapidly taking back the Syrian state. The U.S. has decided, it seems, that there are no good options for America in Syria, either. And that, when Raga’a falls and ISIS is defeated, the White House may well conclude that U.S. objectives there will have been met.

Thirdly, the Iraqi *people* have been passing through a significant metamorphosis. Mobilized and radicalized by ISIS’s physical brutality and ideological totalitarianism in northern Iraq, this is a nation in motion: The political landscape, henceforth, will change too. The Shi’a of Iraq are sensing their empowerment.

The (unpopular) government, and the (respected, but now elderly) *Hauza* (religious leadership) – necessarily – are having to swim with this new tide of popular mobilization and self-assertion. These profound shifts in mood already are finding their reflection in Iraq’s strategic positioning in that Iraq is moving closer to Russia (i.e. the purchase of Russian T20 tanks), and to Syria and Iran. The “spine” of the Middle East is consolidating in a new way.

This mood-change may well shape, too, the future of Sunni Islam: Most ordinary Iraqi Sunnis have been repelled, and disgusted, by the excesses of Wahhabist Da'esh, (as have Syrians of all sects). Sunni citizens of Mosul – now free to relate their experiences – have been telling their Iraqi compatriots (I have been told) of their lingering anger at the ISIS's beheadings of the local Sunni clergy for complaining about the un-Islamic actions of foreign jihadists in the ranks of Da'esh in Mosul. This adverse experience of Nejd Islam will have repercussions, ultimately, on Saudi Arabia and its leadership, (now heartily disliked in Iraq) – and America, Saudi Arabia's close ally.

In short – for Europe and America – the “center” of its Middle East policy is folding (while its Gulf Cooperation Council-led bulwark is in crisis). Across the West, cries of distressed Syria “hawks” are in the air.

There will, of course, be repercussions: Israel will threaten that “it cannot stand idly-by” with Hizbullah and Iran situated on the Golan armistice line, and may try to test Russia's resolve as guarantor of the southwest Syrian de-escalation zone. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is particularly angry that Israel has been outmaneuvered in Syria (by Russian President Putin), that the hope to create an Israeli-controlled *cordon sanitaire* inside southwest Syria has been frustrated. And Israel and its allies now will push the U.S. hard for a punitive containment vice to be imposed on Iran in retribution.

The new Saudi Regent (Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salma or MbS) represents another unpredictable and volatile element in this mix. Despite this, the Pentagon is well aware that much of Israel's bluster concerning Iran, is just that: bluff. Israel, Saudi Arabia and UAE have no capacity to take on Iran, beyond a day – without America's full backing.

Wobbly Economic Center

The other part of “the center,” which is looking increasingly wobbly, is that of economic policy. A consensus seems to be hardening among some market leaders that asset values cannot simply go on levitating upwards – carried up on a sea of liquidity, and near zero interest rates – entailing near zero volatility and one-sided trades that have the market listing like some capsizing, overloaded boat after all the passengers have rushed to one side of the craft.

Some market participants however, seem to believe that the Central Bankers will never have “the spine” either to hike rates, or to shrink their balance sheets, and thus face a market “tantrum.” These participants – until recently, perhaps a majority – believe that the new normal “boat” of low inflation and low rates – will continue to be floated off, practically indefinitely, albeit with the help of a further \$20 trillion to \$50 trillion of “qualitative easing” or QE.

This argument is far from new, but recently a substantial number of major financial leaders (and some Central Bankers) have been sounding grave warnings about the high multiple valuations of financial assets, about pockets of sub-prime debt re-emerging (automobile loans), and debt-to-GDP levels (personal and public) soaring above 2008 crisis values.

Global debt is up \$68 trillion or 46 percent, since the eve of the 2008 financial crisis, and now stands at 327 percent of global output. A critical mass of senior financial opinion seems now to be turning. They put this troubling monetary and market distortion against the prospect of a U.S. debt ceiling likely to guillotine U.S. Federal Government spending quite imminently, and against the probability that deeply conflicted Congress – with polarization in both main parties – being able neither to pass a budget; nor produce the Trump “reflation”; nor even launch a significant infrastructure re-build.

Their fear is that there is a substantial tranche of congressmen and senators in both parties that are so hostile to Trump that they would be happy to see him fall flat on his face – even at the cost of economic crisis. Or, they worry that even if some stimulus is passed, that the Central Banks will remove the liquidity punchbowl from markets too fast. Either way, they see grave risks running through to the end of this year, and into 2018.

In short, not just foreign policy but financial policy, too, may find itself hostage to the dissolved center of U.S. politics – with all which that implies, i.e., the lack of the functioning, largely centralized, mainly cohesive unit, that used to be the American government as it has been known since World War Two.

Inviting Push-back

And here we return to our initial, rather trivial anecdote about Facebook trying to re-establish the centrist meme of gender choice being an undiscussable “protected category.” The point is that the center *is not holding*: the more it tries, the more it invites, and gets, willful push-back.

Equally, as the hawks clamor to restore the former centrist foreign policy meme that arming, training and paying Wahhabi jihadists to slaughter 100,000 Syrian soldiers (many, if not most of whom, were Sunni) represents an American interest is no longer holding. See, for example, David Stockman’s *Bravo! Trump, For The Tweet That Is Shaking The War Party* (Trump: “The Amazon Washington Post fabricated the facts on my ending massive, dangerous, and wasteful payments to Syrian rebels fighting Assad....”).

And the meme that too much debt should be solved by adding even more debt – and

that the consequent soaring asset inflation should be welcomed as mere confirmation that economic recovery is unfolding, as it should – is no longer holding also. This whole approach is now in sharp contention.

Even the Central Bankers now worry about asset inflation (that they themselves have nurtured) but they worry even more about the consequences of any attempt to roll it back. They lie between a rock and a hard place.

Where will this take us? Possibly, the psychological turmoil of the reverses in U.S. foreign policy will continue to roil throughout the summer; but come autumn, there may be less U.S. appetite (or attention available) for foreign policy initiatives as the economic “winter” approaches. Or, at worst, the sheer overwhelming conflict on the domestic front could invite the notion that a foreign initiative would prove a welcome distraction from economic woes.

Iran and North Korea are the current U.S. rhetorical punch bags, but neither should ever be contemplated as candidates for some “distraction.” Rather they represent potential nemeses.

As for the economic woes – not so much QE 4 – but direct, deficit funding helicopter money beckons, perhaps. Which is to say that freshly minted new, “empty” money would be used to directly fund Federal expenditure. (Trump in business, has never shied away from debt).

Often it is said that there is no precedent to our present extraordinary monetary circumstances, but the history of the *Assignat* in France of the early 1790s, offers some hints. Despite massive money creation, Andrew White, in his book *Fiat Money Inflation in France* (published in 1896) notes that “[t]hough paper money had increased in amount, prosperity had steadily diminished. In spite of all the paper issues, commercial activity grew more and more spasmodic. Enterprise was chilled and business became more and more stagnant”.

Finally, just to be clear, Donald Trump undoubtedly is facilitating the dissolution of the Establishment’s “center” – but that, after all, was his declared aim. But he is not responsible for it. This potential was already latent: he simply saw it – and adroitly, climbed aboard.

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How Trump Defines the Future

President Trump has defined the future as a battle between old-style nationalism and neoliberal globalism, a challenge that the West's elites mock at their own peril, as ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke describes.

By Alastair Crooke

Europe, the *Guardian* tells us, has its old "mojo" back. There is a new optimistic mood – "or even a triumphalist mood, in much of Europe." German Chancellor Angela Merkel is praised for achieving a "nuanced" final statement at the recent G20 meeting, and for "standing up" to President Trump, on behalf of the "liberal international order." Really? If this is the "mood," so be it, but even the *Guardian* op-ed writer argues that the narrative that Europe somehow "is back" – having beaten back the "populist wave" – is flawed: "the spirit of cohesion is overstated."

Actually, the Euro-élites must have had their attention fixed elsewhere. For the "Great Disrupter," as David Stockman calls President Trump, threw a hefty stone into the liberal pond: It is fine to ignore it, but what is happening is that the old division between those inside the supposedly democratic, globalist "sphere," and those of the delinquent "regimes" outside it – and lying beyond its civilized walls – is being, bit-by-bit, dissolved.

The "war" that used to be between one sphere and another is being overtaken by the insurgency within spheres. The bitterness and polarization so induced is having its effect: the "international liberal order" (as the *Guardian* terms it), may no longer work as the highly centralized, quasi-cohesive establishment that it has been for the last six decades. There is no more a "center"; no more a cohesive certainty; nor a common directionality, or purposiveness.

If Europe wants to present the G20 deliberation as the clever finessing of discordant views, that is understandable. But whereas Europe included in the declaration the commitment to "free" trade, U.S. negotiators parried this with a "right" – the right to protect against unfair trade practices, and to consider the imposition of tariffs, where appropriate (i.e. on steel products).

On climate change, the G19 stood by the Paris accord, but America, by contrast, retained its decision to *withdraw* from it. The consensus stood by carbon-reduction measures, but found this juxtaposed – uncomfortably – with an American call (rather), to use fossil fuels more cleanly. It was agreement, I would suggest, to disagree, rather than some Merkel-made synthesis.

Trump's Biggest Rock

But the biggest rock thrown by Trump in the G20 pond, passed almost unnoticed. But potentially, it can hurt the Europeans in the spot, just where it hurts most. And this did not even occur at Hamburg. It occurred on the way there.

Conservative commentator Pat Buchanan summarizes: "Calling the Polish people 'the soul of Europe,' [Trump] related how, in the Miracle of the Vistula in 1920, Poland, reborn after 12 decades of subjugation, drove back the invading Red Army of Leon Trotsky.

[Then Trump] described the gang rape of Poland by Nazis and Soviets after the Hitler-Stalin pact. He cited the Katyn Forest massacre of the Polish officer corps by Stalin, and the rising of the Polish people against their Nazi occupiers in 1944.

"When the Polish Pope, John Paul II, celebrated his first Mass in Victory Square in 1979, said Trump, 'a million Polish men, women and children raised their voices in a single prayer ... "We want God" ...'

"What enabled the Poles to endure [all their tribulations] was an unshakable belief in and a willingness to fight for, who they were – a people of God and country, faith, families, and freedom – with the courage and will to preserve a nation built on the truths of their ancient tribe and Catholic traditions.

" 'The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive. Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at any cost? Do we have enough respect for our citizens to protect our borders? Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it? [emphasis added].

" 'We can have the largest economies and the most lethal weapons anywhere on Earth, but if we do not have strong families and strong values, then we will be weak and we will not survive."

Ignoring the Point

Did the G20 élites miss the point? Trump is asking the Europeans whether "you [still] have *the will*, the steadfastness, the clear-sightedness and strength, by which 'to take back' your culture, your way-of-being, your values" – your nations? The message was, I believe, not directed so much at the Poles, but rather, at other Europeans. Trump implicitly targeted the part where it hurts Europe the most: the immigration issue, at diversity and politics, and at the fear of Europeans for their cultural submersion, under the wave of immigration.

(The G20 offered no solutions to this crucial question).

Did Merkel – the media-designated new “Leader of the West” – impress with her “resolute” response to mobs rioting in Germany’s second city, Buchanan asks, rather pointedly? The scenes from Hamburg, perhaps, he implied, reinforced Trump’s point.

Many in Europe may be offended by Trump’s words, perceiving them to be wholly contrary to everything for which they stand. They too, may dislike Trump, viscerally. But these feelings should not blind them to the very key point that he – rightly or wrongly – is pressing: Is diversity and identity politics our strength (as we are told), or is the possession of some sort of historical and cultural (including a spiritual) legacy, something which binds us, and gives a people its inner strength?

It is, at the very least, a valid question. And, it is the sides which are taken on this issue, which represent the new fault line that is displacing the old “good guy” globalist, versus the delinquent, “bad guy,” non-global sphere. This new insurgency is in-house. And the “center” has gone – bifurcated possibly irreparably, into two.

Meeting with Putin

And so, to Trump’s final symbolic “act of disruption”: the prolonged and warm encounter with President Putin. If not on exactly the same page as Trump, Russia nonetheless, has been pursuing a parallel path of political and cultural re-sovereignty. The lengthy meeting with the Russian President disconcerted and outraged many (see [here](#), for example). But the provoking of such an (over) reaction of outrage precisely would be viewed as its main merit by many Trump [supporters](#), who value disruption of the old paradigm.

Trump was not as alone and as isolated as the mainstream media portrayed him: the élites may revile and deprecate his abdication of American global leadership, and for dangerously insisting that job losses resulting from unfair trade practices must be redressed, but there is, however, a constituency within Europe that is entirely in sympathy with his approach.

Trump’s questioning of the orthodoxy that the U.S. must retain hegemony over the global order, and his sense that the free trade system simply has lost America its manufacturing base, possesses a self-evident content for many ordinary Americans and Europeans. Trump says simply enough: “We (the U.S.), can no longer afford it. We are up to the ceiling, and out of the windows, piled high in debts, and we anyway get zilch in return from all these ingrates who shelter under our bankrupting global security umbrella. Let us not go on trying to

impose this on others; we shall rebuild ourselves, and pursue our own, culturally distinct, American way-of-being – and let them pursue theirs’. It is simple; it is plain; it has appeal.

Whether one thinks Trump is right or wrong on these issues, is beside the point. The essential point is that the key components – the Poland speech, the G20 dissidence, and the warm Putin meeting – do form a concerted, strategic whole. Too, the atmospherics were better at the G20, than at the G7 meeting in Sicily in May – President Trump seemed actually to be enjoying himself in Hamburg at dinner, (and why not). But two summits into Trump’s Presidency, it is hard to escape two conclusions:

Firstly, that things have changed – maybe permanently. Surprisingly, of all people, it was “globalist” Emmanuel Macron, who best caught this sense when he remarked: “Our world has never been so divided; centrifugal forces have never been so powerful; our common goods have never been so threatened.”

And secondly, the immediate relapse on the President’s return to Washington into the Donald Trump Jr. Russia “hysteria” over a “faux scandal” as an Op-Ed in the *Washington Post* describes it (whatever the whys and wherefores of the affair), reinforces the conclusion (as Mike Krieger notes) “that America may no longer work as the largely centralized, semi-cohesive unit it has been for our entire lives.” Maybe he puts it too mildly. To outsiders, Americans seem to be eating each other alive.

Aptly, Krieger quotes William Yeats:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

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