

Political Pressure Stymies US-Iran Ties

Exclusive: With the Iran nuclear agreement, President Obama opened lines of communications to Iran, but political pressures in Washington prevent a more substantive shift in relations, reports Gareth Porter.

By Gareth Porter

A former Obama administration official has asserted that the Iranian nuclear deal marks a radical break with past U.S. policy, contradicting the official White House stance that the agreement is not leading to a new U.S.-Iran relationship.

John Limbert, a Farsi-speaking veteran diplomat who was among the hostages from the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979 and later Professor of Middle Eastern studies at the U.S. Naval Academy, served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iran policy during Obama's first term.

Limbert writes, "Although officials will never admit it, there has been a drastic change in relations, and we are seeing interactions that a few [years] ago were unthinkable." Limbert recalls that the United States rarely spoke to an Iranian official for 34 years, and that minor incidents between the two states were blown out of proportion, sometimes into crises.

Now, he observes, Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif are "in constant communication" and "are meeting regularly" on issues that go beyond the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Furthermore, the Obama administration has described those contacts as "positive and productive," he writes.

Limbert argues that the attempts by both Washington and Tehran to portray JCPOA as "only a one-off event [that] has no larger implications for U.S.-Iranian relations" are misleading.

"As both governments continue to issue statements that the nuclear agreement has changed nothing and the two sides remain sworn enemies," he writes, "it is clear that much has changed."

Limbert is correct in identifying the state of relations with Iran as a real shift in U.S. policy toward Iran. But the shift is not a "breakthrough" in ending the U.S. policy of treating Iran as an adversary, as he implies.

In fact, it is an adjustment of policy necessitated by the changing U.S.-Iran power relationship. That power relationship is still unequal, but it is now clear that it no longer allows Washington to demand any major policy change by

Iran.

Coercion as Policy

For more than three decades, the presumption underlying U.S. policy was that the United States could force Iran to accept a U.S.-dominated regional order, either through regime change or by using coercive diplomacy to get Iran to change its policies to conform to U.S. interests.

The Reagan administration hoped the Iraqi invasion of Iran would lead to the overthrow of the Islamic Republic and tried to force Iran to give up its peaceful nuclear program. The Bill Clinton administration not only sought to isolate Iran from the capitalist world but also supported an Israeli effort to prevent Iran from acquiring a conventional missile capability as a minimum deterrent.

President George W. Bush's neoconservative core group planned to use U.S. military force to overthrow the Islamic Republic once U.S. troops had gained control over Iraq, and was angry when the Olmert government in Israel failed to use force to take down Iran's only foreign ally, the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, in 2006.

But those policies were based on the neocons' absurdly exaggerated notions about their ability to use U.S. military power to carry out "regime change" in the Middle East.

The Obama administration came to power without such illusions, but President Obama nevertheless adopted an elaborate strategy of coercive diplomacy aimed at getting Iran to accept the U.S. demand for an end to uranium enrichment.

Obama quickly approved a joint U.S.-Israeli cyber-attack against the nuclear facility at Natanz, which was carried out in June 2009. After Iran rejected a U.S. proposal that it give up two-thirds of its stockpile of low-enriched uranium in exchange for nuclear fuel for a research reactor producing isotopes for cancer patients, Obama announced that his "engagement" with Iran was finished, and that it was time for "pressure" on Iran.

In its 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, the administration went so far as to suggest publicly that the United States would use nuclear weapons against Iran if Iran used conventional force "against the U.S. or its allies or partners."

Obama explicitly linked the new policy to the administration's broader campaign of coercive diplomacy on Iran, saying, "[W]e want to send a very strong message both through sanctions, through the articulation of the Nuclear Posture Review..., that the international community is serious about Iran facing consequences if it

doesn't change its behavior."

Economic Sanctions

But economic sanctions were the primary substitute for a military threat that was recognized as no longer effective as an instrument for coercion of Iran. In 2011, the Obama administration sponsored a new system of economic sanctions aimed at depriving the regime of the ability to obtain hard currency from its oil exports. It also promoted the false threat of an Israel attack on Iran in Spring 2012.

As late as October 2012, during his reelection campaign, Obama was still publicly demanding that Iran abandon uranium enrichment. But Iran had not softened its stance in the face of the suite of diplomatic and economic pressures. Instead it had increased its stockpile of low-enriched uranium and began enriching uranium to 20 percent.

The Obama administration knew that Iran was using its enrichment program to enhance its bargain leverage with Washington, but Obama felt that he needed to resolve the issue before it led to overwhelming pressures for war against Iran.

So, Obama agreed to begin negotiations with Iran in 2013 on the explicit understanding that talks would result in a peaceful Iranian nuclear program that would be regarded as legitimate and end the regime of sanctions imposed to pressure Iran over the nuclear issue. It was the first significant step away from the application of coercive diplomacy on Iran by the U.S government.

U.S. Foot-dragging

The Obama administration tried to deny or delay the removal of U.S., European and UN sanctions right up to the end of the nuclear negotiations, but in the end it had to let go of that form of attempted coercion. New political-military developments in the region also made it increasingly obvious that the continued U.S. pursuit of coercive diplomacy toward Iran would be both futile and self-defeating.

Those other factors included the rise of Al Qaeda's Nusra Front and Daesh (or the Islamic State), the direct military role of Iran and Hezbollah in fighting them in Iraq and Syria, and policy rifts between the White House and Saudi Arabia. Those developments make it incumbent on the United States to confer with Iran on the basis of respect for its interests.

Limbert is correct in observing that the Obama administration will never admit that it has made a significant shift in its Iran policy. But the reason is that the administration sees itself as upholding a policy of trying to contain

Iranian power in the region rather than accommodating it.

In doing so, the administration still appears to be seeking whatever leverage on Iran it can find. The sanctions against Iran in U.S. law on the pretexts of terrorism and “money laundering” have created uncertainty on the part of European banks and businesses about investing in Iran.

Under the JCPOA, the United States is obligated to take specific actions to make it clear to banks and businesses that they need no longer fear U.S. sanctions against them if they resume business relations with Iran. But Iran has complained bitterly that the United States has not done that, and the administration needs Iranian help to get out of its policy jam in Syria.

More important in the administration’s continued treatment of Iran as an enemy are bureaucratic and domestic political interests in such a policy that have accumulated over more than three decades. The Treasury Department has acquired enormous influence over foreign policy in its role administering sanctions against Iran, and the operations of its Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence have long reflected the interests of the Israeli lobby.

The Defense Department, Central Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency also have powerful bureaucratic interests in continuing their close working relationships with Saudi Arabia.

For the NSA and CIA, Saudi Arabia has been a source of major off-the-books budgetary support – compensation for services rendered in the case of the NSA and funding for covert operations in the case of the CIA.

For the Pentagon, the Saudi military and other anti-Iran Sunni sheikhdoms have represented a massive market for high-tech military sales that assures steady profits for major military contractors and plentiful future jobs for generals and admirals.

Furthermore, the continued U.S. military access to bases in the Gulf depends on maintaining a security relationship with Saudi Arabia. The U.S. military role is justified in large part by the pretense that Iran – not Saudi Arabia – represents the main threat to stability and security in the region.

All those interests combine to ensure that this administration and its successor will continue to issue ritual denunciations of Iran’s “nefarious activities” in the region. Thus, the chasm between U.S. rhetoric on Iran and political reality can only widen in the years to come. But the harsh rhetoric will limit how far cooperation between Tehran and Washington can go.

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The Hillary Clinton/Neocon Merger

Between the mainstream media's demonization of Donald Trump and the neocons jumping ship to Hillary Clinton's campaign, a Clinton victory might prove grimly inevitable, but that will guarantee more neocon wars, says ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

In this crazy year – actually a non-stop circus for 18 months – the press has engaged in an orgy of vitriol and bloodletting against the presumptive Republican nominee for the presidency with a hysteria I have never seen in my life against any mainstream party candidate. And the Donald probably deserves a great deal of it.

Yes, we can all see now how Trump is engaged in shredding, maybe even remaking the Republican party – creative destruction. That, in the view of many including myself, is basically a good thing, given how far off the rails of reality the party has drifted.

Trump has trashed the neocon war party, blamed George W. Bush for the debacle in Iraq and elsewhere, wants to throttle way back on foreign wars, and has declared a readiness to talk to Russian President Vladimir Putin – otherwise treated in the US press as toxic and satanic. (Though even Chuck Hagel, former Secretary of Defense, recently had the temerity to suggest that things with Russia were getting dangerous and that we should be in constant dialog with Putin.)

Like many others, I have been galvanized at watching the spectacle of Bernie Sanders proclaiming issues in his campaign that had been virtually off limits for political discussion for decades: gap between rich and poor, rapacious international trade deals, a fair wage, free university education, the call for US balance (gasp!) in handling the Arab-Israeli, issue, etc.

The great thing about Bernie – even if he probably won't get nominated – is that he has pushed hawkish, friend-of-Wall-Street Hillary to the left. She has as much acknowledged that. That will be Bernie's greatest legacy. I would have hoped that the issues Sanders has raised can never be shoved back into the political toothpaste tube again.

That was the hope. But now along comes Trump. The Right – and especially the neocons – are hysterical about what he is doing to the Republican party – of neo-cons, hawks, Wall Street cash recipients, fundamentalist Christians, Tea Party, and U.S. global supremacy. They are pulling out all stops in a desperate attempt to block Trump at all costs. Many of them *already* say they will vote for Hillary, such is their fear of the Donald.

And herein lies the fear. Just what does that do to Hillary – ever tacking to the shifting winds of popular opinion? Bottom line is that Democratic Party nominee Hillary Clinton will no longer have to worry about winning over the Sanders's Left – some of whom might well stay home on Election Day. The massive support of Republicans, and especially neocons, will bail Hillary out.

Hillary will indeed embrace this Republican support – and will accommodate to it. Indeed her basic political instincts have been all along in that direction anyway – rather than to the left.

And that means we are guaranteed to have a President Hillary Clinton far to the right of Obama – who barely qualifies even as centrist himself.

In short, the essential pressures that Bernie has been exerting to pressure Hillary to the left – so vital to balanced government – are being cancelled out. Bernie's influence, and all those who revel in the fresh air of his platform, will be drowned out in the new love-fest between Hillary Clinton and the Republicans, whose key neocon figures like Robert Kagan and Charles Krauthammer now enthusiastically and publicly embrace her.

The handwriting on the wall is clear: the advisers, counselors, so-called brain trusts and special aides around her (some of whom even infiltrated into Obama's ranks) – those who remain blindly impervious in their serial defeats in foreign policy – they will all be back in full force to offer us same-old-same-old losing foreign policies dating back to George W. Bush.

And so the U.S. will continue to be virtually the only democratic country in the world whose political spectrum runs boldly from Right to Center – and then stops. There is no Left in America. We operate on half a spectrum.

Why do I cringe in using the word "Left" – even to describe myself? Because Left is a dirty word in the U.S. One can speak freely of politicians on the Right. But to say that someone is on the Left is fightin' words – it smacks of the un-American.

Trump's delivery of the neocons and Republican establishment to Hillary Clinton's door will be his final and greatest damage to our political order. He will bring out all the very worst instincts in Hillary that some of us had hoped

might have been softened or nuanced through Bernie Sanders's unwavering spotlight on what really ails the nation. Precisely in his own defeat will Trump bring about his greatest revenge in decisively coloring the next administration.

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Democrats, Too Clever by Half on Clinton

Exclusive: Democratic Party honchos who wanted Hillary Clinton's coronation are having some regrets as her weaknesses become obvious, her poll numbers sink, and Donald Trump surges toward the lead, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Last year when Democratic insiders looked forward to Election 2016, they expected a run-of-the-mill Republican, possibly even legacy candidate Jeb Bush. So they countered with their own "safe" next-in-line legacy candidate, Hillary Clinton, who would supposedly win by playing up the prospect of the first woman president.

In such an expected match-up, the concern of rank-and-file Democrats about Clinton's hawkish foreign policy would be negated by the GOP nominee still defending President George W. Bush's Iraq War and again surrounded by neocons pounding the drums for even more wars. With both parties putting forward war candidates, anti-war Democrats would accept Clinton as the lesser evil, or so the thinking went.

The likely Republican nominee also would be burdened by reactionary domestic proposals, including GOP plans for privatizing Social Security and Medicare. By contrast, centrist Clinton would look reasonable in promising to protect those popular programs, albeit with some modest trimming of benefits to please the budget hawks.

But the Democratic insiders didn't count on the unlikely emergence of populist billionaire Donald Trump, who repudiated Bush's Iraq War and the GOP's neocon foreign policy and rejected Republican orthodoxy on "entitlement reform," i.e., slashing Social Security and Medicare.

The unabashed Trump also has made clear that he is not afraid of countering Clinton's "woman card" by playing his own "man card," including attacks on her

troubled marriage and her tolerance of Bill Clinton's notorious womanizing, even claiming that she was her wayward husband's "enabler."

At first, the Democratic hierarchy couldn't believe its luck as the Republican Party seemed to splinter over Trump's disdain for the GOP's neocon interventionism and rejection of the party's cutbacks in Social Security and Medicare. Trump's mocking attacks on his rivals also shattered the decorum that Republican leaders had hoped would mark their primary campaign.

So, the Democratic insiders initially rubbed their hands with glee and imagined not only an easy presidential victory but major gains in the House and Senate. However, new polls show Trump running neck-and-neck with Clinton nationally and in key battleground states, while other polls reveal strong public doubts about Clinton's honesty, thus wiping the premature smiles off the Democrats' faces.

Panic Mode

Indeed, some Democrats reportedly are slipping into panic mode as they watch Clinton's poll numbers tank and the Republican Party come to grips with the Trump phenomenon. The new storyline of Campaign 2016 is the tale of top Republicans reconciling to Trump's populist conquest of the party. At least, these GOP leaders acknowledge, Trump has excited both average Republicans and many independents.

The obsessive media coverage of Trump's meetings on Thursday with senior congressional Republicans made the narcissistic real estate mogul and reality TV star look like some major world leader being received in Washington as a conquering hero. And, with the GOP rallying behind Trump, the likelihood is that his poll numbers and favorable/unfavorable ratings will continue to improve.

So, instead of Democratic dreams of a landslide victory, the party insiders are worrying now about their decision to coronate a deeply flawed and wounded candidate in Hillary Clinton. Not only could she lose to Trump but she could take many of the House and Senate candidates down with her. It's dawning on some Democrats that they may have squandered a historic opportunity to realign American politics to the left by promoting the wrong person in 2016.

At a moment when the American people are demanding change – even willing to risk entrusting the White House to the unorthodox and inexperienced Donald Trump – the Democratic Party may be stuck with an uninspiring status quo candidate who also is pro-war, indeed far more hawkish than President Barack Obama.

Thus, in the fall election, not only would Trump be in a position to bait Clinton about her dysfunctional marriage, reminding the nation of the messy scandals of the 1990s, but he could challenge her on her warmongering positions,

including her years of support for the Iraq War and her hawkish policies as Secretary of State, including her instigation of the disastrous “regime change” war in Libya. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a Neocon.”](#)]

This November could be the first time in modern American history when the Republican nominee would be the relative “peace candidate” and the Democrat would be the “war candidate.” That changing places could lose Clinton much of the “anti-war left,” a significant faction within the Democratic coalition with many “peace Democrats” either voting for Trump or choosing a third party, such as the Greens.

Of course, the Democrats didn’t have to be in this position. The party leaders could have encouraged a more competitive primary contest instead of trying to keep alternative candidates, such as Sen. Elizabeth Warren and some younger Democratic prospects, on the sidelines, all the better to give Hillary Clinton an unimpeded path to the nomination. The party insiders treated Clinton like an incumbent president seeking reelection, a foregone conclusion.

Alternatives, Anyone?

But the best laid plans of mice and politicians often go astray. How weak Clinton is as a candidate has been underscored by her struggle to put away a progressive challenge from Sen. Bernie Sanders, a 74-year-old “democratic socialist” from Vermont, who isn’t even technically a Democrat, listing himself as an Independent.

Even though the vast majority of “super-delegates” – i.e., party insiders – have lined up behind Clinton and she leads in pledged delegates, Sanders continues to win primaries, including recent ones in Indiana and West Virginia, and he could roll up a series of victories in upcoming western state races.

Clinton could stagger to the Democratic convention in July with a dispirited party lining up glumly to witness her long-delayed coronation. The onlookers might sense that they had made a terrible mistake but couldn’t correct it. They would be left to grit their teeth and hope that Clinton’s self-inflicted wounds, such as her private emails as Secretary of State, don’t fester and become fatal.

Arguably, it is the Democrats who would benefit the most from a contested convention, one that might give them an opportunity to reconsider the choice of Clinton and either nominate Sanders, who fares much better against Trump in poll match-ups, or pick someone else, possibly a fresh face like Sen. Warren.

While that may be highly unlikely – even if Sanders sweeps the remaining primaries – it is beginning to dawn on Democratic insiders that their scheme to grease the skids for a Clinton nomination might end up slipping Donald Trump

into the White House.

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](#)).

Donald Trump's Unsurprising Surprise

Exclusive: Donald Trump's ascension to the Republican presidential nomination was predictable, paved by years of right-wing fear-mongering and dissemination of anti-knowledge, says former GOP congressional staffer Mike Lofgren.

By Mike Lofgren

A lot of pundits have egg on their faces. Nate Cohn recently [issued a mea culpa](#) in the *New York Times* confessing his underestimation of Donald Trump. The *Washington Post's* Dana Milbank has even had to make good on his bet that he would [literally eat his words](#) if the real estate mogul were nominated.

As late as September 2015, esteemed numbers whiz Nate Silver [was telling us](#) that Trump had a 5 percent chance of winning the Republican nomination. Déjà vu: as with the awful consequences of invading Iraq or selling no-documentation mortgages to indigent homebuyers, most of our designated experts didn't see it coming.

My experience with GOP politics was a bit more up-close and personal than that of most pundits. For 28 years, I worked on Capitol Hill as a Republican staffer. The 2008 selection of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin as vice presidential candidate was embarrassing enough to me, but once the congressional GOP appeared eager to drive the country into a debt default in 2011, I decided to leave and become a political independent.

By that point it seemed plausible to me that Trump – or someone similar – was likely if not inevitable. Although conservative ideologues denounce him for being doctrinally impure, he is the logical culmination of deeper psychological trends both in the party and the broader American culture that I have observed over the years.

Since the demise of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, the Conservative Media-Entertainment Complex – Rush Limbaugh, Fox News, and all the rest – has poisoned the well of civic engagement with rancor, scapegoating and pessimism about the

state of the nation. These self-styled super-patriots seem to get a thrill from talking down the country, and if you add up all the groups they condemn, their targets probably constitute a majority of the U.S. population.

This cultural pessimism was an ingredient in the makeup of fascist movements during the Twentieth Century: enemies are at our borders; the deadliest enemy is within; the nation will collapse if we don't purge subversive elements.

As film maker Jen Senko has documented, a steady diet of Fox News alarmism can make viewers angry, paranoid and irrational. With that kind of conditioning, is it any wonder that many Republicans are susceptible to Trump's description of the world's foremost economic and military power – us – as “weak” and “pathetic?”

Deliberate Obstruction

A related cause of Trump's rise is the GOP's political strategy, which only deepens the pessimism that Republican media have fanned. Gridlock, filibusters, government shutdowns, playing chicken with the debt limit: they all reinforce the belief that the country is ungovernable.

A senior Republican Capitol Hill staffer once explained to me – approvingly – that it was a conscious strategy to create gridlock and lower the public approval of Congress. These alleged worshippers of the Constitution would cripple and discredit the branch of government that is the first and arguably premier institution listed in that document.

Republicans have attempted to repeal Obamacare 62 times, but for the last six years we have been waiting in vain for the Republican health care plan to replace it. When they do not have undisputed control of government (and we have seen the fiscal and human disasters unleashed when they have dominated Kansas, Louisiana, and Michigan), the GOP is determined to seize up the gears.

Abraham Lincoln's accusation against the antebellum slavocracy applies: “Your purpose, then, plainly stated, is that you will destroy the Government . . . You will rule or ruin in all events.”

If this is the new politics-as-usual, who can blame people for supporting an imperious outsider who promises to break the deadlock by knocking heads together? Trumpism was brewed in the kitchen of Mitch McConnell, the senator who vowed to derail Obama's presidency.

I have written before about the GOP's contribution to anti-knowledge in our society. As Nineteenth-Century humorist Josh Billings put it, “The trouble with people is not that they don't know, but that they know so much that ain't so.”

Despite three decades of evidence that tax cuts do not pay for themselves, Republican politicians hew to that line with dogmatic persistence. A couple of millennia of history ought to have taught us that invasions of the Middle East are not likely to go well, but the GOP was gung-ho about Iraq and questioned the patriotism of skeptics.

Many in the Republican base believe with a faith that transcends evidence that Obamacare authorizes death panels just as Obama himself is Kenyan born. Under those circumstances, why should it surprise us when Trump promises \$12 trillion in tax cuts while eliminating the \$19-trillion national debt in eight years, or claims that Ted Cruz's father was involved in the Kennedy assassination?

Anti-knowledge is virulent in the GOP, but it is a problem in the larger society as well. A study by the journal *Science* polled on public attitudes about evolution in the United States, 32 European countries, Turkey and Japan; the only country where acceptance of evolution was lower than in ours was Islamic Turkey. States like Louisiana mandate that public schools teach the bogus "controversy" about evolution.

This epistemic closure, whereby facts are a matter of political opinion, threatens not only the country's future scientific preeminence, but our ability to have rational discussions about public policy. Trump's rise is a fire bell in the night warning us of a dangerous cultural development.

Fear and Authoritarianism

For the past 15 years, the people who constitute our bipartisan elite consensus – politicians, generals, media personalities, think-tank experts – have been dinning into our heads the message that we must be very afraid of terrorism, despite the fact that we are more likely to die slipping in the bathtub than in a terrorist attack. It has worked.

Voters in the Republican primary in South Carolina, where Trump won in a walk, declared terrorism their foremost concern, eclipsing a low-wage economy, deteriorating living standards leading to an increase in the death rate of GOP voters' core demographic, and the most expensive and least available health care in the developed world.

The fear that our elite consensus fostered has awakened the latent authoritarianism and paranoia that lurk in all too many ordinary people. This dynamic explains why Trump's candidacy took off like a moon rocket in November and December of 2015, the period of the terrorist attack in Paris and the murders in San Bernardino.

Government officials and the media whipped up a mood in the country that

approached hysteria; Trump deftly exploited it. By being the only politician brazen enough to openly advocate torture – not merely to gain information (a dubious claim), but to inflict pain for its own sake – he tapped into the revenge fantasies of millions of Americans who have been fed a steady diet of fear since 9/11.

We have deluded ourselves that the United States could be a “normal” country while waging a seemingly endless war on terror. We have likewise believed we could carry on with one of our political parties behaving like an apocalyptic cult, along with our public discourse being polluted by bogus “facts” amplified by ferociously partisan media.

Donald Trump is merely a symptom, not the cause, of these troubling cultural markers. His political ascent, then, is really no surprise, as I sensed when I said “goodbye to all that” on Capitol Hill five years ago.

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Neocons and Neolib: How Dead Ideas Kill

Exclusive: Hillary Clinton wants the American voters to be very afraid of Donald Trump, but there is reason to fear as well what a neoconservative/neoliberal Clinton presidency would mean for the world, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

For centuries hereditary monarchy was the dominant way to select national leaders, evolving into an intricate system that sustained itself through power and propaganda even as its ideological roots shriveled amid the Age of Reason. Yet, as monarchy became a dead idea, it still killed millions in its death throes.

Today, the dangerous “dead ideas” are neoconservatism and its close ally, neoliberalism. These are concepts that have organized American foreign policy and economics, respectively, over the past several decades – and they have failed miserably, at least from the perspective of average Americans and people of the nations on the receiving end of these ideologies.

Neither approach has benefited mankind; both have led to untold death and destruction; yet the twin “neos” have built such a powerful propaganda and

political apparatus, especially in Official Washington, that they will surely continue to wreak havoc for years to come. They are zombie ideas and they kill.

Yet, the Democratic Party is poised to nominate an adherent to both “neos” in the person of Hillary Clinton. Rather than move forward from President Barack Obama’s unease with what he calls the Washington “playbook,” the Democrats are retreating into its perceived safety.

After all, the Washington Establishment remains enthralled to both “neos,” favoring the “regime change” interventionism of neoconservatism and the “free trade” globalism of neoliberalism. So, Clinton has emerged as the clear favorite of the elites, at least since the field of alternatives has narrowed to populist billionaire Donald Trump and democratic socialist Bernie Sanders.

Democratic Party insiders appear to be counting on the mainstream news media and prominent opinion-leaders to marginalize Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee, and to finish off Sanders, who faces long odds against Clinton’s delegate lead for the Democratic nomination, especially among the party regulars known as “super-delegates.”

But the Democratic hierarchy is placing this bet on Clinton in a year when much of the American electorate has risen up against the twin “neos,” exhausted by the perpetual wars demanded by the neoconservatives and impoverished by the export of decent-paying manufacturing jobs driven by the neoliberals.

Though much of the popular resistance to the “neos” remains poorly defined in the minds of rebellious voters, the common denominator of the contrasting appeals of Trump and Sanders is that millions of Americans are rejecting the “neos” and repudiating the establishment institutions that insist on sustaining these ideologies.

The Pressing Question

Thus, the pressing question for Campaign 2016 is whether America will escape from the zombies of the twin “neos” or spend the next four years surrounded by these undead ideas as the world lurches closer to an existential crisis.

The main thing that the zombie “neos” have going for them is that the vast majority of Very Important People in Official Washington have embraced these concepts and have achieved money and fame as a result. These VIPs are no more likely to renounce their fat salaries and overblown influence than the favored courtiers of a King or Queen would side with the unwashed rabble.

The “neo” adherents are also very skilled at framing issues to their benefit,

made easier by the fact that they face almost no opposition or resistance from the mainstream media or the major think tanks.

The neoconservatives have become Washington's foreign policy establishment, driving the old-time "realists" who favored more judicious use of American power to the sidelines.

Meanwhile, the neoliberals dominate economic policy debates, treating the "markets" as some new-age god and "privatization" of public assets as scripture. They have pushed aside the old New Dealers who called for a robust government role to protect the people from the excesses of capitalism and to build public infrastructure to benefit the nation as a whole.

The absence of any strong resistance to the now dominant "neo" ideologies is why we saw the catastrophic "group think" over Iraq's WMD in 2003 and why for many years no one of great significance dared question the benefits of "free trade."

After all, both strategies benefited the elites. Neoconservative warmongering diverted trillions of dollars into the Military-Industrial Complex and neoliberal job outsourcing has made billions of dollars for individual corporate executives and stock investors on Wall Street.

Those interests have, in turn, kicked back a share of the proceeds to fund Washington think tanks, to finance news outlets, and to lavish campaign donations and speaking fees on friendly politicians. So, for the insiders, this game has been a case of win-win.

The Losers

Not so much for the "losers," those average citizens who have seen the Great American Middle Class hollowed out over the past few decades, watched America's public infrastructure decay, and worried about their sons and daughters being sent off to fight unnecessary, perpetual and futile wars.

But inundated with clever propaganda – and scrambling to make ends meet – most Americans see the reality as if through a glass darkly. Many of them, as Barack Obama indelicately said during the 2008 campaign, "cling to guns or religion." They have little else – and many are killing themselves with opiates that dull their pain or with those guns that they see as their last link to "freedom."

What is clear, however, is that large numbers don't trust – and don't want – Hillary Clinton, who had a net 24-point unfavorable rating in one recent poll. It turns out that another indelicate Obama comment from Campaign 2008 may not have been true, when he vouched that "you're likable enough, Hillary." For many Americans, that's not the case (although Trump trumped Clinton with a 41-point

net negative).

If the Democrats do nominate Hillary Clinton, they will be hoping that the neocon/neolib establishment can so demonize Donald Trump that a plurality of Americans will vote for the former Secretary of State out of abject fear over what crazy things the narcissistic billionaire might do in the White House.

Trump's policy prescriptions have been all over the place – and it is hard to know what reflects his actual thinking (or his genuine ignorance) as opposed to what constitutes his skillful showmanship that made him the “survivor” in the real-life reality TV competition for the Republican nomination.

Does Trump really believe that global warming is a hoax or is he just pandering to the know-nothing element of the Republican Party? Does he actually consider Obama's Iran nuclear deal to be a disaster or is he just playing to the hate-Obama crowd on the Right?

Opposing the 'Neos'

But Trump is not a fan of the “neos.” He forthrightly takes on the neocons over the Iraq War and excoriates ex-Secretary of State Clinton for her key role in another “regime change” disaster in Libya. Further, Trump calls for cooperation with Russia and China rather than the neocon-preferred escalation of tensions.

In his April 27 foreign policy speech, Trump called for “a new foreign policy direction for our country – one that replaces randomness with purpose, ideology with strategy, and chaos with peace. ...It's time to invite new voices and new visions into the fold. ...

“My foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people, and American security, above all else. That will be the foundation of every decision that I will make. America First will be the major and overriding theme of my administration.”

Such comments – suggesting that “new voices” are needed and that “ideology” should be cast aside – were fighting words for the neocons, since it is their voices that have drowned out all others and their ideology that has dominated U.S. foreign policy in recent years.

To make matters worse, Trump outlined an “America First” strategy in contrast to neocon demands that the U.S. military be dispatched abroad to advance the interests of Israel and other “allies.” Trump is not interested in staging “regime changes” to eliminate leaders who are deemed troublesome to Israel.

The real estate tycoon also has made criticism of “free trade” deals a

centerpiece of his campaign, arguing that those agreements have sold out American workers by forcing them to compete with foreign workers receiving a fraction of the pay.

Sen. Sanders has struck similar themes in his insurgent Democratic campaign, criticizing Hillary Clinton's longtime support for "free trade" and her enthusiasm for "regime change" wars, such as those in Iraq and Libya.

Examining her long record in public life, there can be little doubt that Clinton is a neocon on foreign policy and a neoliberal on economic strategies. She stands firmly with the consensus of Official Washington's establishment, which is why she has enjoyed its warm embrace.

She has followed Wall Street's beloved neoliberal attitude toward "free trade," which has been very good for multinational corporations as they shipped millions of U.S. manufacturing jobs to low-wage countries. (She has only cooled her ardor for trade deals to stanch the flow of Democratic voters to Bernie Sanders.)

Wars and More Wars

On foreign policy, Clinton has consistently supported neoconservative wars, although she might shy from the neocon label per se, preferring its less noxious synonym "liberal interventionist."

But as arch-neocon Robert Kagan, who has recast himself as a "liberal interventionist," told The New York Times in 2014, "I feel comfortable with her on foreign policy. If she pursues a policy which we think she will pursue it's something that might have been called neocon, but clearly her supporters are not going to call it that; they are going to call it something else."

Summing up the feeling of thinkers like Kagan, the Times reported that Clinton "remains the vessel into which many interventionists are pouring their hopes."

In February 2016, distraught over the rise of Trump, Kagan, whose Project for the New American Century wrote the blueprint for George W. Bush's Iraq War, openly threw his support to Clinton, announcing his decision in a Washington Post [op-ed](#).

And Kagan is not mistaken when he views Hillary Clinton as a fellow-traveler. She has often marched in lock step with the neocons as they have implemented their aggressive "regime change" schemes against governments and political movements that don't toe Washington's line or that deviate from Israel's goals in the Middle East.

She has backed coups, such as in Honduras (2009) and Ukraine (2014); invasions,

such as Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011); and subversions such as Syria (from 2011 to the present) all with various degrees of disastrous results. [For more details, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a Neocon](#)" and "[Would a Clinton Win Mean More Wars?](#)"]

Seeking 'Coercion'

A glimpse of what a Clinton-45 presidency might do could be seen in a recent Politico [commentary](#) by Dennis Ross, a former special adviser to Secretary of State Clinton now working at the staunchly pro-Israel Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

In the article, Ross painted a surreal world in which the problems of the Middle East have been caused by President Obama's hesitancy to engage militarily more aggressively across the region, not by the neocon-driven decision to invade Iraq in 2003 and the similar schemes to overthrow secular governments in Libya and Syria in 2011, leaving those two countries in ruin.

Channeling the desires of right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Ross called for the United States to yoke itself to the regional interests of Israel, Saudi Arabia and other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in their rivalry against Shiite-led Iran.

Ross wrote: "Obama believes in the use of force only in circumstances where our security and homeland might be directly threatened. His mindset justifies pre-emptive action against terrorists and doing more to fight the Islamic State. But it frames U.S. interests and the use of force to support them in very narrow terms. ...

"The Saudis acted in [invading] Yemen in no small part because they feared the United States would impose no limits on Iranian expansion in the area, and they felt the need to draw their own lines."

To counter Obama's hesitancy to apply military force, Ross calls for a reassertion of a muscular U.S. policy in the Middle East, much along the lines that the neocon establishment and Hillary Clinton also favor, including:

–Threatening Iran with "blunt, explicit language on employing force, not sanctions" if Iran deviates from the Obama-negotiated agreement to constrain its nuclear program (the bomb-bomb-bomb-Iran zombie lives!);

–"Contingency planning with GCC states and Israel ... to generate specific options for countering Iran's growing use of Shiite militias to undermine regimes in the region";

–A readiness to arm Sunni tribes in Iraq if Iraq’s prime minister doesn’t;

–Establish “safe havens with no-fly zones” inside Syria if Russian President Vladimir Putin does not force Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down.

Employing the classic tough talk of the neocons, Ross concludes, “Putin and Middle Eastern leaders understand the logic of coercion. It is time for us to reapply it.”

One might note the many logical inconsistencies of Ross’s arguments, including his failure to note that much of Iran’s supposed meddling in the Middle East has involved aiding the Syrian and Iraqi governments in their battle against the Islamic State and Al Qaeda. Or that Russia’s intervention in Syria also has been to support the internationally recognized government in its fight against Sunni extremists and terrorists.

But the significance of Ross’s prescription to “reapply” U.S. “coercion” across the region is that he is outlining what the world can expect from a Clinton-45 presidency.

Clinton made many of the same points in her speech before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and in debates with Bernie Sanders. If she stays on that track as president, there would be at least a partial U.S. military invasion of Syria, a very strong likelihood of war with Iran, and an escalation of tensions (and possible war) with nuclear-armed Russia.

The logic of how all that is supposed to improve matters is lost amid the classic neocon growling about showing toughness or reapplying “coercion.”

So, the Democratic Party seems to be betting that Hillary Clinton’s flood of ugly TV ads against Trump can frighten the American people enough to give the neocons and the neolibs one more lease on the White House – and four more years to wreak their zombie havoc on the world.

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](#)).

Exploiting Global Warming for Geo-Politics

Exclusive: When a severe drought hit Syria a decade ago, the U.S. government chose not to help but rather exploit the environmental crisis to force a “regime change,” a decision that contributed to a humanitarian crisis, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

For Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump, the only thing to fear about climate change is fear itself. As he declared in a 2014 tweet, “This very expensive GLOBAL WARMING bullshit has got to stop.” Perhaps taking his words to heart, the four major U.S. TV networks cut their already minimal coverage of climate issues to a combined total of just two-and-a-half hours for all of 2015.

So it should come as little surprise that few media bothered to cover a frightening new report this month by Germany’s prestigious Max Planck Institute, which concluded that searing temperatures in the Middle East and North Africa could render much of the region uninhabitable by the end of this century and create a “climate exodus” that dwarfs today’s mass migration of refugees from the area.

But we don’t have to wait decades to see the explosive impact of climate change on the Middle East. For the past decade, scientists, humanitarian workers and U.S. diplomats have watched as devastating heat and drought disrupted Syria, causing hunger, unemployment, internal migration and civil unrest.

Aggravated by government mistakes and foreign intervention, those ills helped trigger the tragic violence that has killed nearly half a million Syrians and displaced more than half its population.

As a study published last year by the National Academy of Sciences declared, “Before the Syrian uprising that began in 2011, the greater Fertile Crescent experienced the most severe drought in the instrumental record. For Syria . . . the drought had a catalytic effect, contributing to political unrest.”

Thanks to documents released by Wikileaks, we know that none of this came as any surprise to Washington.

In August 2006, the U.S. embassy in Damascus reported that Syria faced a “water crunch” that could “balloon into a crisis in the medium to long term.” Although Damascus had “initiated steps to transition Syria’s agricultural sector to modern, more water-efficient, irrigation techniques,” the report warned that

“the country’s emerging water crisis carries the potential for severe economic volatility and even socio-political unrest.”

Instead of helping the country overcome this looming crisis, however, the embassy began drafting recommendations for ways to destabilize Syria’s government – ranging from fomenting sectarian disputes to fanning rumors of coup plots within the country’s security services. By 2009, predictions of a crisis had come true.

“A combination of low rainfall and serious sand storms have all but wiped out the (wheat) crop in Syria’s three eastern provinces,” the embassy reported. It also cited estimates that “up to 120 villages in eastern Syria had been ‘abandoned’ due to ‘climate change’” and that more than a quarter million desperate people had left the region in search of food and jobs.

The business publication *Trade Arabia* called it “one of Syria’s largest internal migrations since France and Britain carved the country out of the Ottoman Empire in 1920.”

Feeding Dissent

One of the prime destinations for Syria’s dispossessed families was the hard-hit town of Dara’a, near the Jordanian border. It would become the epicenter of Syria’s 2011 unrest. The Syrian government admitted that the scope of the disaster far exceeded its capacity to respond. It appealed to the UN for aid – hoping that Washington would reconsider its refusal to contribute humanitarian assistance.

The embassy recommended offering some aid in light of the growing crisis: “While it is unlikely that Syrians will starve, we agree with UN interlocutors that the ongoing migration from the rural east to Syria’s western corridor, and the accompanying social and economic dislocation, could trigger a humanitarian crisis.”

By January 2010, the embassy was citing estimates by the UN World Food Program that 1.3 million Syrians had been affected by the drought and 800,000 were “in dire need of assistance.” UN experts begged the United States to contribute aid to prevent a worsening disaster. But American supporters of regime change argued for continuing to withhold aid.

Andrew Tabler of the neo-conservative Washington Institute for Near East Policy crowed in early 2010 that U.S. economic sanctions had “badly hit the Assad regime,” making it harder to trade with Syria than with Iran.

“The regime’s economic woes only made sanctions more effective,” he observed.

Oil production had “plunged 30 percent” over the past five years, Syria’s manufacturing sector was shrinking fast, and, not least, “a massive . . . drought devastated Syrian agriculture.”

“That’s why President Obama may be tempted to ease Syria’s pain,” Tabler observed. “He shouldn’t.”

The Obama administration earmarked no aid for Syria that year, as the country remained in crisis.

In October 2010, just half a year before anti-regime demonstrations erupted in the crowded town of Dara’a, the *New York Times* reported from Syria that “after four consecutive years of drought, this heartland of the Fertile Crescent . . . appears to be turning barren, climate scientists say. Ancient irrigation systems have collapsed, underground water sources have run dry and hundreds of villages have been abandoned as farmlands turn to cracked desert and grazing animals die off. Sandstorms have become far more common, and vast tent cities of dispossessed farmers and their families have risen up around the larger towns and cities of Syria.”

The story added, “The four-year drought in Syria has pushed two million to three million people into extreme poverty, according to a survey completed here this month by the United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food . . . Herders in the country’s northeast have lost 85 percent of their livestock, and at least 1.3 million people have been affected, he reported.”

The paper called the crisis “a rising security concern” for the government, especially “because it is taking place in the area where its restive Kurdish minority is centered.”

The story legitimately blamed poor government planning and misguided irrigation investments for compounding the problem. But Syria had no monopoly on inept water management, as drought-stricken California amply proves. Such criticisms also give too little weight to the regime’s substantive (and sometimes unpopular) reforms, including reduced fuel and food subsidies, a law to restrict groundwater depletion from the digging of new wells, and promotion of drip irrigation.

Stolen Water

Many critics also ignored the fact that Syria was losing precious water as Turkey diverted flows from the Euphrates River. And Syria had never recovered from its loss of water from the Golan Heights and Sea of Galilee after Israel occupied those lands in 1967.

In any case, few governments could have coped with what one expert called “the worst long-term drought and most severe set of crop failures since agricultural civilizations began in the Fertile Crescent many millennia ago.”

Compounding the drought and the effects of internal migration was the enormous economic and social stress caused by the more than 1.2 million Iraqi refugees who sought safe haven in Syria after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.

As last year’s study published by the National Academy of Sciences observed, “The population shock to Syria’s urban areas further increased the strain on its resources. The rapidly growing urban peripheries of Syria, marked by illegal settlements, overcrowding, poor infrastructure, unemployment, and crime, were neglected by the Assad government and became the heart of the developing unrest.”

The escalation from unrest to all-out war doubtless owed more to politics than climate change. But Syria’s social and government institutions, weakened by years of national hardship and privation, were by 2011 easy targets for foreign powers and domestic extremists bent on toppling the Assad regime.

The current crisis may be only a taste of what’s to come as rising temperatures and dwindling water supplies make life even more desperate in the region. The implications are serious not only for the Middle East and North Africa, but for Europe, which already faces extreme political pressure from the influx of migrants and refugees.

As Secretary of State John Kerry said last year, “You think migration is a challenge to Europe today because of extremism, wait until you see what happens when there’s an absence of water, an absence of food, or one tribe fighting against another for mere survival.”

The Obama administration’s attention to climate change as a strategic, economic and humanitarian issue stands in sharp and welcome relief to Republican Party denialism. But its worthy efforts to coordinate an international response to global warming are not enough.

Washington must also stand ready to help even inept or unfriendly governments – like Assad’s in Syria – cope with the immense social and economic stresses that millions of their citizens are today suffering as the planet warms. As Syria’s tragedy illustrates, taking advantage of regimes weakened by environmental catastrophes to coerce political changes is a recipe for humanitarian disaster and endless violence.

Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international affairs, including The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War and the International

Drug Traffic (Stanford University Press, 2012). Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were “Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions”; “Neocons Want Regime Change in Iran”; “Saudi Cash Wins France’s Favor”; “The Saudis’ Hurt Feelings”; “Saudi Arabia’s Nuclear Bluster”; “The US Hand in the Syrian Mess”; and “Hidden Origins of Syria’s Civil War.”]

Still at War with Iran-Nuke Deal

As neocons look forward to dominant roles in a Clinton-45 administration, they are continuing their attacks on the Iran nuclear deal, thus keeping hope alive to eventually bomb-bomb-bomb Iran, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar describes.

By Paul R. Pillar

The never-say-die efforts to kill the Iranian nuclear agreement have been taking some strange turns lately. Two in particular.

One is that some of the same opponents who, before the agreement was adopted, spent much energy berating the terms of the agreement are now focusing instead on criticizing certain actions by the U.S. administration toward Iran that the opponents assert are *not* among the terms of the agreement, and that the opponents say should not be taken for that very reason. The assertions are incorrect.

The issues at hand mostly concern the stickiness of the U.S. sanctions system and the persistence of fears among European banks and others about doing any business with Iran – even business that is permitted under the sanctions relief granted as part of the nuclear agreement. Efforts by U.S. officials to undo some of the stickiness are not beyond the obligations of the agreement; they are a necessary part of implementing terms that are an intrinsic and fundamental aspect of the bargain incorporated in the agreement.

Another, lesser, issue that has received comment concerns U.S. purchase of some of the heavy water that, under the agreement, Iran must remove from its stockpiles. Any such purchase is a direct facilitation of the carrying out by Iran of obligations that lessen its nuclear capabilities.

The opponents cannot have it both ways: first saying the terms were terrible and then saying what’s terrible is not to adhere strictly to the terms – or rather, to the opponents’ newest interpretation of the terms. If the agreement really says what the opponents now say it says, they should have been delighted with the document that emerged from the negotiations – one that, according to their

interpretation, would have imposed all of the same limitations and scrutiny on Iran's nuclear program that the actual accord does, but with almost no economic benefit accruing to Iran and even with the Iranians incurring additional economic loss in the form of expensively produced heavy water being poured down the sewer.

Another strange turn has come within the last week in the form of attention to a profile of presidential aide Ben Rhodes written by David Samuels and appearing in the *New York Times* Sunday magazine. If this piece was written to be exploitable by opponents of the nuclear agreement, that is not surprising given that the writer is a confirmed opponent himself. The picture that Samuels conveys is of Rhodes as a master manipulator of public perceptions who got the press that was covering the Iran negotiations to eat out of his hand in a way that conveyed false impressions of what the White House was up to.

Now, whatever one may think of Ben Rhodes, and even if one were to believe that the press covering U.S. foreign relations and security policy were as dumb and dependent as portrayed, there is no there there. There were no impressions, manipulated or otherwise, that ought to cause anyone any heartburn.

One of the supposed instances of manipulated and false impressions is that the administration contended it didn't do anything on this issue until after Hassan Rouhani was elected president of Iran in September 2013 despite there having been some earlier secret U.S.-Iranian talks. In fact, the earlier talks have been well known for some time and had been reported long ago by that supposedly gullible press.

Moreover, it would have been surprising, and disappointing to anyone who would like the makers of U.S. foreign policy to be diligently looking ahead and considering all possibilities for advancing U.S. interests, if the administration had *not* tried to reconnoiter what the possibilities were for negotiating restrictions on the Iranian nuclear program.

And Rouhani's election did make a significant difference, both in bringing into office on the Iranian side a team with the knowledge and commitment to reach such an agreement, and in rendering irrelevant on the American side the political difficulty of any major dealings with the loathsome Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. So where's the deception, and what's the problem?

The Samuels piece also suggests that the manipulator Rhodes got people to believe that the administration's main purpose in negotiating the agreement was nuclear proliferation but that it really had other objectives in mind having to do with broader Middle Eastern matters. But the Obama administration wasn't the one going out of its way to talk up an Iranian nuclear threat, even though other

administrations have been known to talk up such threats to pursue other agendas. This time there was plenty of agitation from other sources about the danger of an Iranian nuke.

The agreement certainly needs to be assessed, pro or con, primarily in terms of nuclear nonproliferation, and it is in such terms that nonproliferation specialists have overwhelmingly endorsed the agreement. The agreement also needs to be assessed, pro or con, in terms of other effects it may have on regional politics and stability. And it was so assessed in the public debate; certainly the con side addressed it especially vigorously in such terms – you know, all that talk we heard about how Iran supposedly would be “emboldened” to do all sorts of “nefarious” things in the region. So where’s the deception, and how did it affect in any way the debate on the agreement?

The suggestion of duplicity with Ben Rhodes pulling strings from his West Wing office reminds one of those teasers for the eleven o’clock news that are phrased as a question: “Is there...[some shocking development, if it existed]?” only to find out, if one stays up and tunes in to the news broadcast, that the answer is: no, there isn’t.

Each of these strange turns in the tactics of the would-be agreement-killers is an additional example of what we saw so much of when debate on the agreement was most intensive last year: a grasping by the opposition for any straw to raise any kind of doubt about the agreement, however little sense the arguments made.

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

America’s Two-Faced Policy on Iran

The Obama administration seeks to demonize Iran – along with Russia and China – while also demanding their help in areas of U.S. interest, an approach that is both disingenuous and dangerous, as former British diplomat Alastair Crooke explains.

By Alastair Crooke

In an article entitled “Why America needs Iran in Iraq,” former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad argues that “the chaos in Baghdad, culminating in the temporary occupation of the parliament by followers of Shiite Islamist cleric

Muqtada al-Sadr, is undermining the war against the Islamic State; weakening Iraq's economy; and accelerating the country's disintegration.

"Without cooperation between the United States, Iran and Iraq's top Shiite cleric, Ayatollah Sistani, the crisis could very well lead to the collapse of the entire political system set up in Iraq during the temporary U.S. occupation ... To prevent this, Washington needs Tehran's help. And Iran should be as motivated to seek stability [in Iraq] as much as Washington, because" Khalilzad asserts, "Iran, currently is losing favour in Iraq."

Putting aside the questionable implication that Iran might somehow, through cooperation with America, raise its standing amongst Iraqis, Khalilzad's presumption that Iran should now attend to America's needs in Iraq, coupled with Secretary of State John Kerry's insistence that Iran should help America to end the conflict in Syria too, throw into sharp relief the paradox inherent at the heart of U.S. diplomacy towards Iran, Russia (and China also).

This approach has been dubbed the "middle way" by former special adviser to the Assistant Secretary of State, Jeremy Shapiro: the U.S. Administration has no desire for an all-out confrontation with these three states. They are militarily hard nuts, and there is not much appetite for yet more military confrontation amongst a weary and wary American public (to the continuing frustration of the neocons).

More prosaically, the global financial system is now so brittle, so delicately poised, that it is not at all certain that the prospect of conflict would give the lift to America's flagging economy that war generally is supposed to give. It might just snap the financial system, instead – hence the Middle Way.

Shapiro points out the obvious contradiction to this two-track approach: the U.S. no longer can ignore such powerful states. Its window of absolute, unchallenged, uni-polar power has passed. *America needs the help of these states*, but at the same time, it seeks precisely to counter these states' potential to rival or limit American power in any way.

And America simply ignores the core complaints that fuel the tensions between itself and these states. It simply declines to address them. Shapiro concludes that this foreign policy approach is unsustainable, and bound to fail: "This dual-track approach, condemning Russia [or Iran] as an aggressor one day, [whilst] seeking to work with Moscow [or Tehran] the next ... would [ultimately] force ever-greater confrontation."

The 'Middle Way'

In a sense, the U.S. approach towards Iran seems to be mirroring the so-called

“middle way” policy which the U.S. Administration pursues towards Russia, whereby the putative “reset” with Russia was set aside (when President Vladimir Putin assumed the Presidency for the second time), and Obama – rather than seek outright confrontation with Russia – ruled that America however, would only co-operate with Russia when it suited it, but the U.S. would not deign to address Russia’s core issues of its “outsider” status in Europe, or its containment in Asia – or its concerns about a global order that was being used to corner Russia and to crush dissenter states who refused to enter the global order on America’s terms alone.

And Obama did little to drawback the NATO missile-march towards Russia’s borders (ostensibly, it may be recalled, to save Europe *from Iranian missiles*).

Ostensibly, too, the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) could have been America’s “reset” with Iran. Some, including a number of prominent Iranian politicians, thought it was.

But National Security Advisor Susan Rice was very explicit to Jeffrey Goldberg in *The Atlantic* that this was never intended: “It is assumed, at least among his critics, that Obama sought the Iran deal because he has a vision of a historic American-Persian rapprochement. But his desire for the nuclear agreement was born of pessimism as much as it was of optimism.

“The Iran deal was never primarily about trying to open a new era of relations between the U.S. and Iran,” Susan Rice told [Goldberg]. “It was far more pragmatic and minimalist. The aim was very simply to make a dangerous country substantially less dangerous. No one had any expectation that Iran would be a more benign actor.”

And so, we see a similar pattern, the possibility of a real “reset’ with Iran is pre-meditatively set aside (as per Rice), whilst the dual-track approach of condemning Iran for its ballistic missile tests (which have nothing to do with JCPOA), and its support for Hizbullah, are condemned one day, whilst Iran’s help in Iraq and Syria is being demanded on the next day.

At the same time, Iran’s core dispute with the U.S. – its complaints that exclusion from the international financial system is not being ameliorated as JCPOA was supposed so to do – are not being addressed. Rather they are being met with a shrug that implies “did they really expect anything else?”

Well, some (but by no means all) Iranian politicians had done just that: they had raised the Iranian public’s expectations that *all* sanctions – other than specific U.S. sanctions – would be lifted. They rather bet their credibility on it, as it were, and may pay a political price eventually.

And as NATO deploys a further 4,000 troops in the Baltic states and Poland, on Russia's border, so too the U.S. Congress continues its figurative advance on Iran's frontiers.

Here is Iran's (conservative) *Keyhan* newspaper: "The draft of a new resolution has been presented to the US Congress in which Iran is accused of creating tension in the Persian Gulf, and the US Government has been urged to confront Iran and impose new sanctions against our country. Randy Forbes, a Republican member of the US House of Representatives, has drafted a resolution, which if passed by the Congress, condemns *Iran's military presence in the Persian Gulf as a provocation*" (emphasis added)

Shapiro's specific warning about the "middle way" approach was that "political and bureaucratic factors on both sides would force ever-greater confrontation." But this is not the only risk, nor does it even constitute being the biggest risk (besides that of having undermined those in Iran and Russia who had put their "hat in the ring" of contemplating *Entente* with the United State).

America's Bad Faith

Rather, it is by making this policy approach quite general to those states which have taken on themselves the burden of being the symbol for a non-Western, alternative vision (Russia, Iran and China, *inter alia*), that a perceived breach of *the spirit* of the JCPOA (at the least), will have wider repercussions.

Russia and China both spent political capital in order to help persuade Iran to sign up to the JCPOA: Will they not wonder whether America is to be trusted? China has complicated negotiations in hand with America on trade and financial issues, whilst Russia has been trying to resolve ballistic missile, as well as Ukraine sanctions issues, with America.

Is it not a straw in the wind for the consequences to this policy when a prominent Russian commentator, Fyodor Lukyanov, who is not at all hostile to rapprochement with the West, writes in *End of the G8 Era* that using Russia's prospective inclusion in the G8 as an instrument of pressure on Russia is pointless?:

"The G8 reflected a certain period of history when Russia really wanted to be integrated into the so-called Extended West. Why it did not happen? Something went wrong? This is another topic. The most important thing is that it did not happen at all ... it seemed (in the 1990s) that this membership would not mean just participation in yet another club, but a strategic decision aimed at the future.

"However, the desirable future did not come, and probably won't come. It is

obvious now, that the world does not develop in the direction of the Western model. So, now we have what we have, and there is no reason to restore the G8.”

May this general sentiment come to be reflected in Iran too, as the sanctions-lifting issue drags on? Did the U.S. then “win one over Iran” through the JCPOA accord – as the shrugs of U.S. shoulders at Iranian complaints, might imply? Was Iran just naïve? Did they really think that the U.S. was simply going to empower Iran financially?

It is pretty clear that the Supreme Leader understood the situation precisely – he had, after all some experience of U.S. non-compliance with agreements from the Lebanese hostage negotiations of the 1980s.

But what has Iran lost by the JCPOA? A few Iranians may have had their fingers burned in the process, but Iran achieved three important things: the world now knows that it was not Iran that was the impediment to a nuclear deal; the deal has transformed Iran’s public image – and created an opening – with the rest of the world (including Europe); and it has, in the process, constructed and strengthened strategic political and economic ties with Russia and China.

But most important of all, the rift *within* Iran that stemmed from the sense amongst some Iranian orientations, that President Ahmadinejad’s rhetoric was a principal obstacle to normalizing with the West, *has been addressed*: an Iranian government, with a Western-friendly face, has been given, and seen to have been given, the full chance to negotiate a solution to the nuclear issue. Whatever the final outcome, that boil has been lanced.

No, the Iranian leadership has not been naïve.

Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum, which advocates for engagement between political Islam and the West.

China Closes the Innovation Gap

While the U.S. expands spending on wars and “regime changes” – and slashes its budget for science and infrastructure – China is making different choices, now rapidly closing the gap on scientific innovation, writes John V. Walsh.

By John V. Walsh

The headline reads, "The Rapid Rise of a Research Nation: China's economic boom is mirrored by its similarly meteoric rise in high quality science." This was not a headline in *People's Daily* or *China Daily* but in the most prestigious of Western scientific publications, *Nature*.

The 38 pages, which follow that headline in a special Supplement to the journal *Nature*, tell us that China is now second in the world in high *quality* science publications and growing fast. This certainly contradicts the Western, dare I say racist, stereotype of the hardworking, but unimaginative, Asian drudge, dutifully churning out mounds of low-quality work.

But how can we know that claim about China is true? Are we dealing here with release of data by the Chinese government, which, again according to Western stereotype, produces little but fabrications? (This writer has not found that to be the case, but there is merit in using sources that are immune to Western prejudices.)

Before considering the evidence for *Nature's* claim of high quality Chinese science, we should ask of what significance is it to the layman? Just this, as the U.S. continues its belligerent "pivot to Asia," which has been designed by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, President Barack Obama and the foreign policy Elite to confront China, we should know what our leaders are getting us into.

Two pillars of a country's power (supporting the hard, soft and military varieties) are its economy and its technology. Since late in 2014 China has been the world's largest economy according to the International Monetary Fund, using the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) metric. It continues to grow at about 7 percent – or "only" 7 percent as the Western media are fond of telling us although no Western nation comes near that rate of growth.

Now China appears to be on the cusp of becoming the world's foremost Research and Development (R&D) engine. And that pushes the Chinese economy forward even more rapidly, for technology and science are the driving forces for modern economic development.

We would do well to remember that the last time that the U.S. confronted China directly in armed conflict was the Korean War. When the U.S., using the United Nations as cover, advanced all the way to the border with China, the Yalu river, China entered the war and the U.S. was driven back south to the 38th parallel. The result was restoration of the *status quo ante bellum*, with Korea divided in the way it remains to this day. At that time China was weak and backward; now it is strong and advanced.

Historical Domination

In a broader historical context, for the last 500 years the West has been in the dirty business of invading and colonizing the rest of the planet. This process continues today in the form of neocolonialism, most recently with U.S. wars, “regime change” ops and sanctions aimed at resisting nations.

In this entire 500-year period, the West has always enjoyed technological superiority in such encounters, and that has been one of the keys to its success at domination. Some would say that technology was *the* key to subjugation of the planet by the West.

We can envisage the Toledo steel armor and swords of the original conquistadores from 1492 onward to the titanic aircraft carriers of the U.S. lumbering around the South China Sea today. But the advance of science and technology in China means that this will not long remain the case. In fact that day may have passed already for all practical purposes.

So we would be well advised to know what sort of predicament our Elite are creating for us with their “pivot to Asia.”

Let us turn to the evidence. How do we know with a high level of confidence that China has succeeded so impressively in its science and technology? The information comes from *Nature* Index (NatureIndex.com), a product of the journal *Nature*. Perhaps relatively few laymen are aware of *Nature*, but virtually every working scientist regards it as one of the most outstanding of scientific publications, a reputation well deserved.

As but one example, the original paper by Watson and Crick on the double helical structure of DNA, along with the paper, by Maurice Wilkins and Rosalind Franklin, providing the data that led to the Watson-Crick structure, appeared in *Nature*.

Nature is published by Elsevier, which has been around for a good long time. Elsevier, headquartered in the Netherlands at the time, published Galileo’s “Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems” smuggled out of Italy to escape Vatican suppression while Galileo was under house arrest. Descartes was also published by Elsevier. The list goes on over the centuries.

Measuring Progress

Now dear reader, you will have to bear with me for a few brief paragraphs to describe how NatureIndex makes the determination of *quality* in science. It is all spelled out in great detail at NatureIndex.com. NatureIndex is built on a database of all the original articles published in 68 of the highest quality

scientific journals in the world listed [here](#). The selection of those journals is done by a group of prominent active research scientists listed [here](#). All the selected journals are based in the West as are all but a handful of the selecting scientists.

In a given year at the moment approximately 60,000 original articles appear in these journals. Each author of the 60,000 papers is given a score based on the number of these articles to which he or she has made a contribution. This number is called the Fractional Index (FC). For technical reasons the FC has to be weighted for certain disciplines giving rise to another number, the Weighted Fractional Index (WFC) for each scientist.

Add up the WFC's for all the scientists in China appearing in the list of contributors in a given year and you have the WFC for the nation of China. The same can be done for any other country. It is as simple as that.

Basically the WFC is a metric for quality because the journals chosen to be part of the Index are those that publish the very best science as best as it can be determined at the moment. Publication of a paper in these journals is a highly competitive business, and every scientist wants to publish his or her best work in them.

The WFC is no bureaucratic or governmental measure. Each article that appears has been reviewed and accepted, usually by at least three scientists acting completely independently, and in fact not even knowing who their fellow reviewers of a given manuscript are. That means we have at least 180,000 independent reviews per year.

And then there are the many more articles rejected by these reviewing scientists. That means the WFC for the countries surveyed is determined by hundreds of thousands of independent reviews each year! They all act independently of one another. Adam Smith would love the model.

This author has been involved for a lifetime in such scientific reviews, as both reviewer and reviewed. The reviews are generally tough, honest and mostly fair. And in general the more prestigious the publication, the more demanding the review.

Again the bottom line is the WFC for each of the countries surveyed. The higher the WFC, the higher the quality of the country's total output. For the 12 months of 2015 the U.S. had the number one WFC by far. But second was China. (The order of the top 20 is: U.S., China, Germany, UK, Japan, France, Canada, Switzerland, South Korea, Italy, Spain, Australia, India, Netherlands, Israel, Sweden, Singapore, Taiwan, Russia, Belgium.)

Nature magazine began analyzing China's output in 2012 and it recently (December, 2015) published a hard copy Supplement summarizing the Index in which the WFC for China for the period 2012 to 2014 was assessed. There is much of interest in the 38 pages of this Supplement. It contains evaluations of the science by region, institution (which includes both academia and corporations) and city. The awe of those who prepared the supplement for the advances in Chinese science is palpable in the Supplement.

Changing Places

For those interested in comparisons, as we should well be if we wish to know accurately our place in the world, the following paragraph from the NatureIndex Supplement is striking: "But what sets China apart is its WFC. While China's contribution (to the global total) grew 37% from 2012 through 2014, the United States saw a 4% drop over the same period."

That paragraph should be read and reread by those who would dismiss the development of China as "merely" quantitative or completely fake.

Moreover, the decline in the WFC of the U.S. comes as no surprise to researchers in the U.S., my colleagues, who have watched many laboratories close and talented investigators forced to quit as federal funding failed to keep pace with expenses. It is sad indeed to watch this tragedy unfold, with all the attendant waste of talent, training and education.

To return to the Nature Index Supplement for China for 2012-2014, here are excerpts from the opening section, which convey much of the magnitude and significance of China's accomplishment:

"China has ambitious plans to source as much as 15% of its energy from renewable resources by 2020, at the same time its economy is expected to slow (to 6.8 -7.0 percent per year. JW). It also aspires to be the next space superpower while facing major health and environment challenges, such as an ageing population and water shortages. (China also has set as a goal the total elimination of poverty and the creation of a 'moderately prosperous society' by 2020. JW)

"The Chinese government knows that surmounting these challenges while achieving its goals can only be accomplished through science. Indeed, China is pegging its future prosperity on a knowledge-based economy, underpinned by research and innovation. For a country that invented paper, gunpowder and the compass, such lofty ambitions could be realized. This year (2015) pharmacologist Tu Youyou became the first Chinese researcher to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine for helping to discover a new drug for malaria that has saved millions of lives."

This should be quite enough to convince the reader of the extent, rapidity and quality of science in China. But is there corroborative data for the Nature Index study? Yes, from our own U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). The NSF released an assessment of China's R&D in January 2016 entitled: "U.S. science and technology leadership increasingly challenged by advances in Asia: China is now the second largest performer of research and development."

This assessment is drawn from Science and Engineering Indicators, 2016, which is in turn produced by the National Science Board (NSB) a leadership body of the NSF whose 25 members are presidential appointees. The assessment is worth reading in full, but the bottom line is the following:

"According to *Indicators 2016*, China is now the second-largest performer of R&D, accounting for 20 percent of global R&D as compared to the United States, which accounts for 27 percent."

That means of course that China now produces almost three-fourths as much R&D as the U.S., if we are to believe the NSF's figures, and China's output is growing fast. Here are some other quotes from the NSF assessment:

"Between 2003 and 2013, China ramped up its R&D investments at an average of 19.5 percent annually, greatly exceeding that of the U.S. China made its increases despite the Great Recession. (This last indicates to this writer a deep commitment to R&D.)

"China has also made significant strides in S&E (Science and Engineering) education, which is critical to supporting R&D as well as knowledge and technology-intensive industries. China is the world's number-one producer of undergraduates with degrees in science and engineering. These fields account for 49 percent of all bachelor's degrees awarded in China, compared to 33 percent of all bachelor's degrees the U.S. awards.

"In 2012, students in China earned about 23 percent of the world's 6 million first University degrees in S&E. Students in the European Union earned about 12 percent and those in the U.S. accounted for about 9 percent of these degrees. (Note that China is now producing more undergraduate degrees in S&E than the U.S. and the European Union combined, i.e., more than the entire "West." jw)

"The number of S&E graduate degrees awarded in China is also increasing. However, the U.S. continues to award the largest number of S&E doctorates and remains the destination of choice for internationally mobile students." (But with the enormous numbers of undergraduate S&E degrees awarded in China, it would seem to be only a matter of time before graduate degrees follow. jw)

U.S. Retrenchment

Now let us see what the NSF has to say about the growth rate of R&D in the U.S., something it knows probably better than anyone else. Again we quote:

“Federal investment in both academic and business sector R&D has declined in recent years, reflecting the effects of the end of the investments of ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act), the advent of the Budget Control Act, and increased pressure on the discretionary portion of the federal budget.

“Since the Great Recession, substantial, real R&D growth annually – ahead of the pace of U.S. GDP – has not returned. Inflation-adjusted growth in total U.S. R&D averaged only 0.8 percent annually over the 2008-13 period, behind the 1.2 percent annual average for U.S. GDP.

” ‘Decreased federal investment is negatively impacting our nation’s research universities,’ said Kelvin Droegemeier, NSB vice chair and vice president for research at the University of Oklahoma. ‘Our universities conduct 51 percent of the nation’s basic research and train the next generation of STEM-capable workers. Federal support is essential to developing the new knowledge and human capital that allows the U.S. to innovate and be at the forefront of S&T.’”

I would pull from this quotation one phrase that is of special significance for the decline in federal funding for R&D, to wit *“increased pressure on the discretionary portion of the federal budget.”* Discretionary spending excludes earned benefits, principally Social Security and Medicare which are in the non-discretionary category.

Do I have to tell readers that the biggest portion of the federal discretionary budget is the Pentagon? According to OMB the military consumed 55 percent of the federal discretionary budget in 2015 whereas science got 3 percent!!

“International Affairs” also received 3 percent. In other words, the U.S. is building -and using – vast amounts of instruments of destruction while China is building up its scientific and technical enterprise.

I have outlined the facts and evidence for China’s great leap forward in science and technology. In the light of China’s impressive record in both economic development and in R&D, should the U.S. not terminate its bellicose pivot to the Western Pacific and seek a peaceful win-win relationship with China?

The reality reviewed here suggests that confrontation with China belongs to the colonial and neocolonial past, which for China ended decisively in 1949. The U.S. establishment must recognize that reality or court disaster for America and the world.

Correction: *Nature* is published by Nature Publishing Group, not Elsevier as stated. The Nature Index data base, however, includes prominent journals

published by Elsevier. The essential point is that *Nature* is one of most prestigious publications in the world and many would rank it as number one.

Details on the rather complicated pyramid of publishing entities responsible for *Nature* nowadays can be found [here](#).

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Dangers from Hating Government

Since Ronald Reagan declared "government is the problem," the hostility to public solutions has snowballed, leading to the Republican Party's selection of Donald Trump, someone who's never served in public office, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The determination beyond reasonable doubt of the presidential nominees of each of the two major political parties has invited much analysis of what a Clinton-vs.-Trump contest means in terms of larger political fault lines. [Robert Merry's view of the election](#) in terms of globalism and nationalism is an example. But the contest also is part of a larger pattern not only in terms of issue preferences that these two candidates represent but also in terms of the qualities that these individuals would bring to the presidency.

Much of what any president does in office cannot be programmed in advance and cannot be derived from positions on issues enumerated in a campaign or party platform or expressed in a campaign speech. Much of the important things a president does derive instead from the experience, intellect, instincts, and values that he or she brings into the job and that in turn are based on that individual's background.

In that respect one of the most glaring attributes of presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump is that, were he to become president, he would be the only president in the history of the United States to have entered that office with no prior public service. Every U.S. president to date, from Washington through Obama, has either held elective office at the level of at least the U.S. Congress or governor of a state, or been appointed to public

office at the level of the federal cabinet, or been a senior military officer at the level of a general who has commanded major campaigns.

Many U.S. presidents have combined two or more of these qualifications. Not only has Trump been none of these things; he doesn't even have any junior-level experience, civilian or military, that has anything to do with public service.

Even within the private sector, Trump's background does not extend to the sorts of decision-making situations that would confront, say, the chief executive officer of a large, well-established corporation.

Instead, Trump's career, apart from his flings at presidential campaigning, has almost exclusively been about deal-making aimed at personal enrichment and enhancing recognition of the Trump brand name. Against the backdrop of U.S. history and past U.S. presidents, Trump's personal qualifications are breathtakingly narrow and shallow, and his endeavors inwardly oriented.

Differences in Jobs

High public office entails demands that are different in several important respects from even the most difficult and remunerative endeavors in the private sector. One difference involves not being able to pick the business lines one will pursue or the problems one will solve. The problems tend to impose themselves, especially though not exclusively in foreign affairs.

When making deals about building resorts or naming golf courses, the deal-maker works with a particular situation because he thinks there is profit to be made there; if there isn't profit to be made, he just looks somewhere else to do business instead. The occupant of the Oval Office has nothing like that sort of freedom to choose what problems to handle.

Another major difference involves having to deal with multiple and conflicting constituencies and interests – which is intrinsic to the art and skill of politics. The CEO of a major corporation gets into this somewhat, in the sense of having to deal with labor and customers as well as shareholders, but even there a bottom line of shareholder value (or executive suite value) predominates.

Juggling commercial balls is not like juggling political balls, given the fundamentally different sorts of claims for consideration from would-be stakeholders. And for a wheeler-dealer financial engineer, multiple constituencies need not be involved at all.

We also should consider the basic dimension of the public interest versus self-interest, and where the values of an individual really lie as indicated by past

life choices. Of course, public office as well as private sector pursuits can be used as a vehicle for pursuing blind personal ambition – for a good portrait of a current example, see [Frank Bruni's take on Ted Cruz](#). But complete absence of any public service is itself a strong statement about this dimension.

As with other aspects of the Trump phenomenon – such as the xenophobia, the misogyny, and the wall-building nationalism – Trump's success in this election campaign reflects larger attitudes, be they those of angry white men or something else. As many commentators have observed, some of the most prominent themes that Trump has ridden to the nomination had already been nurtured and ridden, sometimes in slightly different and less crude form, by others – especially within the Republican Party, and in that sense the party deserves to get Trump as its nominee.

The same is true of the rejection, also represented by Trump, of public service and of selfless dedication to a greater public good. Government service and government programs are not the only way to serve the public good in general, but for many specific public needs they are the only way to serve them.

We hear the rejection incessantly in the form of the “government bad, private sector good” mantra that takes innumerable forms every day on Capitol Hill, from bureaucrat-bashing to ignoring crying needs that can only be answered by a larger government program – such as repairing debilitated transportation infrastructure, of which anyone who rides Washington's maintenance-deferred, and frequently breaking down, Metro system to work is acutely aware.

Disdain for Government

We have seen other manifestations of the same set of attitudes from other candidates in this year's Republican race. There is Cruz, who even before his inane call to abolish the IRS (so then who collects taxes?) had devoted his tenure in the Senate to trying to shut down government rather than trying to make it work better. There is Marco Rubio, who even before his presidential campaign got rolling, had lost interest in doing his senatorial job and in working at it full time for six full years on behalf of the constituents who had elected him to do so.

And speaking of senators doing or not doing their jobs, there is of course the willful crippling of the Supreme Court for at least a year by the majority party in the Senate refusing to consider President Barack Obama's nomination to fill a vacancy.

Aspects of these attitudes, voiced as they are so incessantly from one side of the political spectrum, have cultivated corresponding attitudes in the larger

American population. Heroes to the American public do not tend to be, as they once were, those who made exceptional sacrifices or performed exceptional deeds on behalf of the public good. Today they are at least as likely to be successful entrepreneurs – someone such as, say, Steve Jobs – who are admired for some combination of their financial success and the way they have satisfied us not as citizens but as consumers.

We have seen a slight foreshadowing of the Trump phenomenon in the presidential nominations in the most recent years. Consider the two Republican opponents who ran against Barack Obama. In 2008 it was John McCain, a senior senator and a war hero. In 2012 it was Mitt Romney, who – although his single term as governor of Massachusetts would have kept alive the unbroken string of public service experience among U.S. presidents – has devoted the rest of his career to being a private equity artist. i.e., a financial engineer, making deals to turn profits without a public interest being served, very much in the manner of Trump's dealings. Trump brought this mini-trend full circle last year with his disgraceful comments in which he said McCain was not a war hero but a loser.

The rejection of a sense of public spirit, and with that rejection the associated attitude that government is always a problem and never part of the solution, inflicts immense damage on the public good, even though much of that damage is less apparent than the condition of Washington's Metro.

Or sometimes it only becomes apparent when the damage becomes great enough to cause a crisis, as it has recently with the contamination of the public water supply in Flint, Michigan. Efforts of Republicans in Congress to deflect blame away from the Republican governor whose administration had taken control of the city and aim it instead at part of the despised federal bureaucracy, the Environmental Protection Agency, ignored how Congress had intentionally legislated away the power of EPA to do much in such situations.

President Obama, who visited Flint this week, spoke accurately about the "corrosive attitude" that opposes government investments in public infrastructure. "It's a mind-set that says that environmental rules designed to keep your water clean or your air clean are optional or not that important," Mr. Obama said. "That attitude is as corrosive to our democracy as the stuff that results in lead in your water."

People focused on making fortunes in the private sector should reflect on the lesson provided by Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson in the most recent *Foreign Affairs*, in which they explain, "It was the emergence in the first half of the twentieth century of a robust U.S. government willing and able to act boldly on behalf of the country as a whole that led to spectacular advances in national well-being over many decades."

Steve Jobs was a terrific innovator, but look inside that iPhone that helped make him a hero, note Hacker and Pierson, and “you’ll find that most of its major components (GPS, lithium-ion batteries, cellular technology, touch-screen and LCD displays, Internet connectivity) rest on research that was publicly funded or even directly carried out by government agencies.”

The authors sadly note that “it has been the withering of government capabilities, ambitions, and independence in the last generation or two that has been a major cause of the drying up of the good times” that had prevailed in particular during the first three decades after World War II.

The dominant public philosophy in the United States about individual citizens’ relationship with their nation and their government has experienced a big turn for the worse in the half century since John Kennedy was urging citizens to ask what they can do for their country rather than what their country can do for them. The nomination by a major party of someone who has done nothing for his country and instead boasts of an ability to make money-making deals is a culmination of this terrible trend.

Donald Trump has exploited that trend, but there are many others who share responsibility for the trend and continue to exert their malign influence on American attitudes today.

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