

# The Criminal 'Laws' of Counterinsurgency

A new book traces how the CIA and U.S. counterinsurgency warfare operatives adopted lessons from the Nazis' fight against the partisans and evolved into a dangerous law unto themselves, writes retired JAG Major Todd E. Pierce.

By Todd E. Pierce

Douglas Valentine has once again added to the store of knowledge necessary for American citizens to understand how the U.S. government actually works today, in his most recent book entitled *The CIA As Organized Crime*. (Valentine previously wrote *The Phoenix Program*, which should be read with the current book.)

The U.S. "deep state" – of which the CIA is an integral part – is an open secret now and the Phoenix Program (assassinations, death squads, torture, mass detentions, exploitation of information) has been its means of controlling populations. Consequently, knowing the deep state's methods is the only hope of building a democratic opposition to the deep state and to restore as much as possible the Constitutional system we had in previous centuries, as imperfect as it was.

Princeton University political theorist Sheldon Wolin described the U.S. political system in place by 2003 as "inverted totalitarianism." He reaffirmed that in 2009 after seeing a year of the Obama administration. Correctly identifying the threat against constitutional governance is the first step to restore it, and as Wolin understood, substantive constitutional government ended long before Donald Trump campaigned. He's just taking unconstitutional governance to the next level in following the same path as his recent predecessors. However, even as some elements of the "deep state" seek to remove Trump, the President now has many "deep state" instruments in his own hands to be used at his unreviewable discretion.

Many "never-Trumpers" of both parties see the deep state's national security bureaucracy as their best hope to destroy Trump and thus defend constitutional government, but those hopes are misguided. After all, the deep state's bureaucratic leadership has worked arduously for decades to subvert constitutional order.

As Michael Glennon, author of *National Security and Double Government*, pointed out in a June 2017 Harper's essay, if "the president maintains his attack, splintered and demoralized factions within the bureaucracy could actually support – not oppose – many potential Trump initiatives, such as stepped-up drone strikes, cyberattacks, covert action, immigration bans, and mass

surveillance.”

Glennon noted that the propensity of “security managers” to back policies which ratchet up levels of security “will play into Trump’s hands, so that if and when he finally does declare victory, a revamped security directorate could emerge more menacing than ever, with him its devoted new ally.” Before that happens, it is incumbent for Americans to understand what Valentine explains in his book of CIA methods of “population control” as first fully developed in the Vietnam War’s Phoenix Program.

### **Hating the U.S.**

There also must be the realization that our “national security” apparatchiks – principally but not solely the CIA – have served to exponentially increase the numbers of those people who hate the U.S. Some of these people turn to terrorism as an expression of that hostility. Anyone who is at all familiar with the CIA and Al Qaeda knows that the CIA has been Al Qaeda’s most important “combat multiplier” since 9/11, and the CIA can be said to have birthed ISIS as well with the mistreatment of incarcerated Iraqi men in U.S. prisons in Iraq.

Indeed, by following the model of the Phoenix Program, the CIA must be seen in the Twenty-first Century as a combination of the ultimate “Murder, Inc.,” when judged by the CIA’s methods such as drone warfare and its victims; and the Keystone Kops, when the multiple failures of CIA policies are considered. This is not to make light of what the CIA does, but the CIA’s misguided policies and practices have served to generate wrath, hatred and violence against Americans, which we see manifested in cities such as San Bernardino, Orlando, New York and Boston.

Pointing out the harm to Americans is not to dismiss the havoc that Americans under the influence of the CIA have perpetrated on foreign populations. But “morality” seems a lost virtue today in the U.S., which is under the influence of so much militaristic war propaganda that morality no longer enters into the equation in determining foreign policy.

In addition to the harm the CIA has caused to people around the world, the CIA works tirelessly at subverting its own government at home, as was most visible in the spying on and subversion of the torture investigation by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. The subversion of democracy also includes the role the CIA plays in developing and disseminating war propaganda as “information warfare,” upon the American people. This is what the Rand Corporation under the editorship of Zalmay Khalilzad has described as “conditioning the battlefield,” which begins with the minds of the American population.

Douglas Valentine discusses and documents the role of the CIA in disseminating pro-war propaganda and disinformation as complementary to the violent tactics of the Phoenix Program in Vietnam. Valentine explains that “before Phoenix was adopted as the model for policing the American empire, many US military commanders in Vietnam resisted the Phoenix strategy of targeting civilians with Einsatzgruppen-style ‘special forces’ and Gestapo-style secret police.”

Military Commanders considered that type of program a flagrant violation of the Law of War. “Their main job is to zap the in-betweeners – you know, the people who aren’t all the way with the government and aren’t all the way with the Viet Cong either. They figure if you zap enough in-betweeners, people will begin to get the idea,” according to one quote from *The Phoenix Program* referring to the unit tasked with much of the Phoenix operations.

### **Nazi Influences**

Comparing the Phoenix Program and its operatives to “Einsatzgruppen-style ‘special forces’ and Gestapo-style secret police” is not a distortion of the strategic understanding of each. Both programs were extreme forms of repression operating under martial law principles where the slightest form of dissent was deemed to represent the work of the “enemy.” Hitler’s *Bandit Hunters: The SS and the Nazi Occupation of Europe* by Philip W. Blood describes German “Security Warfare” as practiced in World War II, which can be seen as identical in form to the Phoenix Program as to how the enemy is defined as anyone who is “potentially” a threat, deemed either “partizans” or terrorists.

That the Germans included entire racial categories in that does not change the underlying logic, which was, anyone deemed an internal enemy in a territory in which their military operated had to be “neutralized” by any means necessary. The U.S. military and the South Vietnamese military governments operated under the same principles but not based on race, rather the perception that certain areas and villages were loyal to the Viet Cong.

This repressive doctrine was also not unique to the Nazis in Europe and the U.S. military in Vietnam. Similar though less sophisticated strategies were used against the American Indians and by the imperial powers of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, including by the U.S. in its newly acquired territories of the Philippines and in the Caribbean. This “imperial policing,” i.e., counter-insurgency, simply moved to more manipulative and, in ways, more violent levels.

That the U.S. drew upon German counter-insurgency doctrine, as brutal as it was, is well documented. This is shown explicitly in a 2011 article published in the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* entitled *German Counterinsurgency*

Revisited by Charles D. Melson. He wrote that in 1942, Nazi commander Heinrich Himmler named a deputy for "anti-bandit warfare," (Bevollmächtigter für die Bandenkämpfung im Osten), SS-General von dem Bach, whose responsibilities expanded in 1943 to head all SS and police anti-bandit units and operations. He was one of the architects of the Einsatzgruppen "concept of anti-partisan warfare," a German predecessor to the "Phoenix Program."

### **'Anti-Partisan' Lessons**

It wasn't a coincidence that this "anti-partisan" warfare concept should be adopted by U.S. forces in Vietnam and retained to the present day. Melson pointed out that a "post-war German special forces officer described hunter or ranger units as 'men who knew every possible ruse and tactic of guerrilla warfare. They had gone through the hell of combat against the crafty partisans in the endless swamps and forests of Russia.'"

Consequently, "The German special forces and reconnaissance school was a sought after posting for North Atlantic Treaty Organization special operations personnel," who presumably included members of the newly created U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers, which was in part headquartered at Bad Tölz in Germany, as well as CIA paramilitary officers.

Just as with the later Phoenix Program to the present-day U.S. global counterinsurgency, Melson wrote that the "attitude of the [local] population and the amount of assistance it was willing to give guerilla units was of great concern to the Germans. Different treatment was supposed to be accorded to affected populations, bandit supporters, and bandits, while so-called population and resource control measures for each were noted (but were in practice, treated apparently one and the same). 'Action against enemy agitation' was the psychological or information operations of the Nazi period. The Nazis believed that, 'Because of the close relationship of guerilla warfare and politics, actions against enemy agitation are a task that is just as important as interdiction and combat actions. All means must be used to ward off enemy influence and waken and maintain a clear political will.'"

This is typical of any totalitarian system – a movement or a government – whether the process is characterized as counterinsurgency or internal security. The idea of any civilian collaboration with the "enemy" is the basis for what the U.S. government charges as "conspiracy" in the Guantanamo Military Commissions.

Valentine explains the Phoenix program as having been developed by the CIA in 1967 to combine "existing counterinsurgency programs in a concerted effort to 'neutralize' the Vietcong infrastructure (VCI)." He explained further that

“neutralize” meant “to kill, capture, or make to defect.” “Infrastructure” meant civilians suspected of supporting North Vietnamese and Vietcong soldiers. Central to the Phoenix program was that its targets were civilians, making the operation a violation of the Geneva Conventions which guaranteed protection to civilians in time of war.

“The Vietnam’s War’s Silver Lining: A Bureaucratic Model for Population Control Emerges” is the title of Chapter 3. Valentine writes that the “CIA’s Phoenix program changed how America fights its wars and how the public views this new type of political and psychological warfare, in which civilian casualties are an explicit objective.” The intent of the Phoenix program evolved from “neutralizing” enemy leaders into “a program of systematic repression for the political control of the South Vietnamese people. It sought to accomplish this through a highly bureaucratized system of disposing of people who could not be ideologically assimilated.” The CIA claimed a legal basis for the program in “emergency decrees” and orders for “administrative detention.”

### **Lauding Petraeus**

Valentine refers to a paper by David Kilcullen entitled Countering Global Insurgency. Kilcullen is one of the so-called “counter-insurgency experts” whom General David Petraeus gathered together in a cell to promote and refine “counter-insurgency,” or COIN, for the modern era. Fred Kaplan, who is considered a “liberal author and journalist” at Slate, wrote a panegyric to these cultists entitled, The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War. The purpose of this cell was to change the practices of the U.S. military into that of “imperial policing,” or COIN, as they preferred to call it.

But Kilcullen argued in his paper that “The ‘War on Terrorism’ is actually a campaign to counter a global insurgency. Therefore, Kilcullen argued, “we need a new paradigm, capable of addressing globalised insurgency.” His “disaggregation strategy” called for “actions to target the insurgent infrastructure that would resemble the unfairly maligned (but highly effective) Vietnam-era Phoenix program.”

He went on, “Contrary to popular mythology, this was largely a civilian aid and development program, supported by targeted military pacification operations and intelligence activity to disrupt the Viet Cong Infrastructure. A global Phoenix program (including the other key elements that formed part of the successful Vietnam CORDS system) would provide a useful start point to consider how Disaggregation would develop in practice.”

It is readily apparent that, in fact, a Phoenix-type program is now U.S. global

policy and – just like in Vietnam – it is applying “death squad” strategies that eliminate not only active combatants but also civilians who simply find themselves in the same vicinity, thus creating antagonisms that expand the number of fighters.

Corroborative evidence of Valentine’s thesis is, perhaps surprisingly, provided by the CIA’s own website where a number of redacted historical documents have been published. Presumably, they are documents first revealed under the Freedom of Information Act. A few however are copies of news articles once available to the public but now archived by the CIA which has blacked-out portions of the articles.

### **The Bloody Reality**

One “sanitized” article – approved for release in 2011 – is a partially redacted New Times article of Aug. 22, 1975, by Michael Drosnin. The article recounts a story of a U.S. Army counter-intelligence officer “who directed a small part of a secret war aimed not at the enemy’s soldiers but at its civilian leaders.” He describes how a CIA-directed Phoenix operative dumped a bag of “eleven bloody ears” as proof of six people killed.

The officer, who recalled this incident in 1971, said, “It made me sick. ... I couldn’t go on with what I was doing in Vietnam. . . . It was an assassination campaign . . . my job was to identify and eliminate VCI, the Viet Cong ‘infrastructure’ – the communist’s shadow government. I worked directly with two Vietnamese units, very tough guys who didn’t wear uniforms . . . In the beginning they brought back about 10 percent alive. By the end they had stopped taking prisoners. ...

“How many VC they got I don’t know. I saw a hell of a lot of dead bodies. We’d put a tag on saying VCI, but no one really knew – it was just some native in black pajamas with 16 bullet holes.”

This led to an investigation by New Times in a day when there were still “investigative reporters,” and not the government sycophants of today. Based on first-hand accounts, their investigation concluded that Operation Phoenix was the “only systematized kidnapping, torture and assassination program ever sponsored by the United States government. . . . Its victims were noncombatants.” At least 40,000 were murdered, with “only” about 8,000 supposed Viet Cong political cadres targeted for execution, with the rest civilians (including women and children) killed and “later conveniently labeled VCI. Hundreds of thousands were jailed without trial, often after sadistic abuse.” The article notes that Phoenix was conceived, financed, and directed by the Central Intelligence Agency, as Mr. Valentine writes.

A second article archived by the CIA was by the Christian Science Monitor, dated Jan. 5, 1971, describing how the Saigon government was "taking steps ... that could help eliminate one of the most glaring abuses of its controversial Phoenix program, which is aimed against the Viet Cong political and administrative apparatus." Note how the Monitor shifted blame away from the CIA and onto the South Vietnamese government.

But the article noted that one of the most persistent criticisms of Phoenix was that it resulted "in the arrest and imprisonment of many innocent civilians." These were called "Class C Communist offenders," some of whom may actually have been forced to commit such "belligerent acts" as digging trenches or carrying rice. It was those alleged as the "hard core, full-time cadre" who were deemed to make up the "shadow government" designated as Class A and B Viet Cong.

Yet "security committees" throughout South Vietnam, under the direction of the CIA, sentenced at least 10,000 "Class C civilians" to prison each year, far more than Class A and B combined. The article stated, "Thousands of these prisoners are never brought to court trial, and thousands of other have never been sentenced." The latter statement would mean they were just held in "indefinite detention," like the prisoners held at Guantanamo and other U.S. detention centers with high levels of CIA involvement.

Not surprisingly to someone not affiliated with the CIA, the article found as well that "Individual case histories indicate that many who have gone to prison as active supporters of neither the government nor the Viet Cong come out as active backers of the Viet Cong and with an implacable hatred of the government." In other words, the CIA and the COIN enthusiasts are achieving the same results today with the prisons they set up in Iraq and Afghanistan.

### **CIA Crimes**

Valentine broadly covers the illegalities of the CIA over the years, including its well-documented role in facilitating the drug trade over the years. But, in this reviewer's opinion, his most valuable contribution is his description of the CIA's participation going back at least to the Vietnam War in the treatment of what the U.S. government today calls "unlawful combatants."

"Unlawful combatants" is a descriptive term made up by the Bush administration to remove people whom U.S. officials alleged were "terrorists" from the legal protections of the Geneva Conventions and Human Rights Law and thus to justify their capture or killing in the so-called "Global War on Terror." Since the U.S. government deems them "unlawful" – because they do not belong to an organized military structure and do not wear insignia – they are denied the "privilege" of belligerency that applies to traditional soldiers. But – unless they take a

“direct part in hostilities” – they would still maintain their civilian status under the law of war and thus not lose the legal protection due to civilians even if they exhibit sympathy or support to one side in a conflict.

Ironically, by the Bush administration’s broad definition of “unlawful combatants,” CIA officers and their support structure also would fit the category. But the American public is generally forgiving of its own war criminals though most self-righteous and hypocritical in judging foreign war criminals. But perhaps given sufficient evidence, the American public could begin to see both the immorality of this behavior and its counterproductive consequences.

This is not to condemn all CIA officers, some of whom acted in good faith that they were actually defending the United States by acquiring information on a professed enemy in the tradition of Nathan Hale. But it is to harshly condemn those CIA officials and officers who betrayed the United States by subverting its Constitution, including waging secret wars against foreign countries without a declaration of war by Congress. And it decidedly condemns the CIA war criminals who acted as a law unto themselves in the torture and murder of foreign nationals, as Valentine’s book describes.

Talleyrand is credited with saying, “They have learned nothing and forgotten nothing.” Reportedly, that was borrowed from a 1796 letter by a French naval officer, which stated, in the original language: *Personne n’est corrigé; personne n’a su ni rien oublier ni rien apprendre.* In English: “Nobody has been corrected; no one has known to forget, nor yet to learn anything.” That sums up the CIA leadership entirely.

Douglas Valentine’s book is a thorough documentation of that fact and it is essential reading for all Americans if we are to have any hope for salvaging a remnant of representative government.

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## Potential Chaos in the Kingdom

President Trump has made the “alliance” with troublemaking Saudi Arabia a centerpiece of his chaotic foreign policy, but the latest jockeying for power in Riyadh may portend unexpected trouble, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

A foreign country may be a problematic partner for the United States for two basic types of reasons, both of which apply to Saudi Arabia. First, the partner's foreign policies may range from misguided to immoral, or risk sucking the United States into conflicts in which it is not, or should not be, a party.

Saudi Arabia's calamitous war in Yemen is currently the leading example of this sort of problem. More recently has come the economic and diplomatic offensive against Qatar, which threw a wrench into the Trump administration's aspirations regarding regional security, and in response to which the State Department this week delivered a bemused scolding.

Second, internal fragility may risk having the foreign regime suddenly come apart. This not only would mean that the partnership with the United States also would come apart. It also could mean that close association of the United States with the old regime earns it lasting animosity from the new rulers and from the discontented foreign populace that supported political change.

For an example of this dynamic, one need look only to the other side of the Persian Gulf. The close association of the United States with the Shah of Iran became a major ingredient in post-revolutionary anti-Americanism in Iran. Even after the Shah had been deposed, his admission to the United States for medical treatment was the immediate trigger for seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and a hostage crisis that lasted more than a year.

The association of the United States with the Saudi regime, which has endured so long and has become so taken for granted that it routinely gets referred to as an "alliance," makes it easy to overlook what an anachronism that regime is and how fragile is such a medieval configuration within the context of the Twenty-first Century. An extended royal family, whose name is part of the country's name (imagine if the United Kingdom were instead called "Windsor Britannia"), benefits from enormous but publicly uncounted rake-offs from the country's oil wealth. That wealth has for many years been critical to buying subservience and complacency from the general population, although now and then indications emerge – such as the Saudi origins of most of the 9/11 hijackers – that not all is well beneath the surface complacency.

Besides relying on what the oil money can buy, the regime also has relied heavily on religious sanction to sustain its legitimacy. As part of that reliance, the deals struck with the ulema or clergy have sustained some of the anachronistic features of the country, such as women not being allowed to drive.

## **The Succession Risk**

The large size of the royal family means not only large rake-offs but also substantial potential for divisions within the family. One of the biggest, and surely one of the touchiest, issues, has been leadership succession. The founder of the Saudi kingdom, Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, bequeathed an odd succession plan with the throne first passing to one of his oldest sons but then going, brother to brother (or half-brother) through other sons of Abdulaziz.

Because he had more than three dozen sons, this arrangement could persist for a long time. But everyone knew that eventually the kingdom would run out of sons of even the unusually fecund Abdulaziz, and the throne would have to pass to the next generation. The sons and grandsons of Abdulaziz surely have had different preferences and views as to who in that next generation should get the top job. Latent instability can become overt conflict if discontented members of the ruling clan look for ways to exploit discontent in the wider population.

The aged King Salman, with visibly declining faculties, has made a singularly audacious move that, combined with some of his earlier moves over the past couple of years, sets up his favorite son, Muhammad bin Salman (MbS) to succeed him on the throne.

This is the second time Salman has sidelined a crown prince to move MbS up in the line of succession. The first victim was Salman's half-brother Muqrin. The second was his nephew Muhammad bin Nayef (MbN), who also lost his job as interior minister.

With much of what Salman had done earlier in his career – most of which was spent as governor of Riyadh, with a further informal role as a sort of family disciplinarian – he could benefit from the strength that came from being one of the Sudairi Seven, an alliance of full brothers that also included King Fahd, defense minister Sultan, and MbN's father and predecessor as interior minister, Nayef, all three now deceased. But this latest move was Salman acting on his own; MbN is also part of the Sudairi wing of the family.

### **Showing Unity**

The regime has made a show of unity, announcing that 31 of 34 members of the Allegiance Council, a family organ that is supposed to deliberate on succession matters, approved of the latest change. An image was released of MbS kissing the hand of MbN, who reportedly pledged loyalty to the new crown prince. Family members continue to share an interest in not making any moves that could jeopardize their enormous privilege and personal wealth.

But surely there must be many royal family minds asking: with all the sons and all the grandsons of Abdulaziz to choose from, why should Salman be the one who

gets to take it on himself to make *his* favorite son the designated successor?

It is not as if the 31-year-old MbS had a record that, before his father started catapulting him, made him stand out from the royal crowd. The most distinctive and consequential initiative associated with MbS since he began gaining extraordinary power – the war in Yemen – has been a disaster. The bellicosity and aggressiveness that MbS has displayed toward Iran, and now Qatar, have the makings of additional costly regional misadventures.

MbS talks a good game regarding internal reform with his “Vision 2030” program, but it remains to be seen whether he has better ideas than his elders and predecessors for how to reconcile modernity with the non-modern demands of the religious establishment on which the House of Saud’s legitimacy rests. It also remains to be seen whether he will offer effective ways of weaning a sinecure-ridden society off oil and of handling the discontent that accompanies such dislocation. MbS’s father may have set him up for – when the father is no longer around – failures great enough to rend even the fabric of the royal family’s shared interests.

The downside for the United States is not just in losing a respected and experienced security manager and counterpart in the person of MbN. And it is not only in the prospect, serious though this is, of being involved in more Yemen-like destructive mistakes. It is in how Salman’s power play on behalf of his nuclear family has done nothing to reduce, and may even have increased, the risk that we will awake one day to discover that Saudi Arabia is not the stable partner in the Persian Gulf region that we thought it was. We thought that about the Shah’s Iran, too.

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## Russia-gate Flops as Democrats’ Golden Ticket

**Exclusive:** The national Democrats saw Russia-gate and the drive to impeach President Trump as their golden ticket back to power, but so far the ticket seems to be made of fool’s gold, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The national Democratic Party and many liberals have bet heavily on the Russia-gate investigation as a way to oust President Trump from office and to catapult Democrats to victories this year and in 2018, but the gamble appears not to be paying off.

The Democrats' disappointing loss in a special election to fill a congressional seat in an affluent Atlanta suburb is just the latest indication that the strategy of demonizing Trump and blaming Russia for Hillary Clinton's 2016 defeat may not be the golden ticket that some Democrats had hoped.

Though it's still early to draw conclusive lessons from Karen Handel's victory over Jon Ossoff – despite his raising \$25 million – one lesson may be that a Middle America backlash is forming against the over-the-top quality of the Trump-accusations and the Russia-bashing, with Republicans rallying against the image of Official Washington's "deep state" collaborating with Democrats and the mainstream news media to reverse a presidential election.

Indeed, the Democrats may be digging a deeper hole for themselves in terms of reaching out to white working-class voters who abandoned the party in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin to put Trump over the top in the Electoral College even though Clinton's landslide win in California gave her almost three million more votes nationwide.

Clinton's popular-vote plurality and the #Resistance, which manifested itself in massive protests against Trump's presidency, gave hope to the Democrats that they didn't need to undertake a serious self-examination into why the party is in decline across the nation's heartland. Instead, they decided to stoke the hysteria over alleged Russian "meddling" in the election as the short-cut to bring down Trump and his populist movement.

### **A Party of Snobs?**

From conversations that I've had with some Trump voters in recent weeks, I was struck by how they viewed the Democratic Party as snobbish, elitist and looking down its nose at "average Americans." And in conversations with some Clinton voters, I found confirmation for that view in the open disdain that the Clinton backers expressed toward the stupidity of anyone who voted for Trump. In other words, the Trump voters were not wrong to feel "dissed."

It seems the Republicans – and Trump in particular – have done a better job in presenting themselves to these Middle Americans as respecting their opinions and representing their fears, even though the policies being pushed by Trump and the GOP still favor the rich and will do little good – and significant harm – to the

middle and working classes.

By contrast, many of Hillary Clinton's domestic proposals might well have benefited average Americans but she alienated many of them by telling a group of her supporters that half of Trump's backers belonged in a "basket of deplorables." Although she later reduced the percentage, she had committed a cardinal political sin: she had put the liberal disdain for millions of Americans into words – and easily remembered words at that.

By insisting that Hillary Clinton be the Democratic nominee – after leftist populist Bernie Sanders was pushed aside – the party also ignored the fact that many Americans, including many Democrats, viewed Clinton as the perfectly imperfect candidate for an anti-Establishment year with many Americans still fuming over the Wall Street bailouts and amid the growing sense that the system was rigged for the well-connected and against the average guy or gal.

In the face of those sentiments, the Democrats nominated a candidate who personified how a relatively small number of lucky Americans can play the system and make tons of money while the masses have seen their dreams crushed and their bank accounts drained. And Clinton apparently still hasn't learned that lesson.

### **Citing Women's Rights**

Last month, when asked why she accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars for speaking to Goldman Sachs, Clinton rationalized her greed as a women's rights issue, saying: "you know, men got paid for the speeches they made. I got paid for the speeches I made."

Her excuse captured much of what has gone wrong with the Democratic Party as it moved from its working-class roots and New Deal traditions to becoming a party that places "identity politics" ahead of a duty to fight for the common men and women of America.

Demonstrating her political cluelessness, Clinton used the serious issue of women not getting fair treatment in the workplace to justify taking her turn at the Wall Street money trough, gobbling up in one half-hour speech what it would take many American families a decade to earn.

While it's a bit unfair to personalize the Democratic Party's problems, Hillary and Bill Clinton have come to represent how the party is viewed by many Americans. Instead of the FDR Democrats, we have the Davos Democrats, the Wall Street Democrats, the Hollywood Democrats, the Silicon Valley Democrats, and now increasingly the Military-Industrial Complex Democrats.

To many Americans struggling to make ends meet, the national Democrats seem

committed to the interests of the worldwide elites: global trade, financialization of the economy, robotization of the workplace, and endless war against endless enemies.

Now, the national Democrats are clambering onto the bandwagon for a costly and dangerous New Cold War with nuclear-armed Russia. Indeed, it is hard to distinguish their foreign policy from that of neoconservatives, although these Democrats view themselves as liberal interventionists citing humanitarian impulses to justify the endless slaughter.

Earlier this year, a Washington Post/ABC News poll found only 28 percent of Americans saying that the Democrats were “in touch with the concerns of most people” – an astounding result given the Democrats’ long tradition as the party of the American working class and the party’s post-Vietnam War reputation as favoring butter over guns.

Yet rather than rethink the recent policies, the Democrats prefer to fantasize about impeaching President Trump and continuing a blame-game about who – other than Hillary Clinton, her campaign and the Democratic National Committee – is responsible for Trump’s election. Of course, it’s the Russians, Russians, Russians!

### **A Problem’s Deep Roots**

Without doubt, some of the party’s problems have deep roots that correspond to the shrinking of the labor movement since the 1970s and the growing reliance on big-money donors to finance expensive television-ad-driven campaigns. Over the years, the Democrats also got pounded for being “weak” on national security.

Further, faced with Republican “weaponization” of attack ads in the 1980s, many old-time Democrats lost out to the Reagan Revolution, clearing the way for a new breed of Democrats who realized that they could compete for a slice of the big money by cultivating the emerging coastal elites: Wall Street, Silicon Valley, Hollywood and even elements of the National Security State.

By the 1990s, President Bill Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council defined this New Democrat, politicians who reflected the interests of well-heeled coastal elites, especially on free trade; streamlined financial regulations; commitment to technology; and an activist foreign policy built around spreading “liberal values” across the globe.

Mixed in was a commitment to the rights of various identity groups, a worthy goal although this tolerance paradoxically contributed to a new form of prejudice among some liberals who came to view many white working-class people as fat, stupid and bigoted, society’s “losers.”

So, while President Clinton hobnobbed with the modern economy's "winners" – with sleepovers in the Lincoln bedroom and parties in the Hamptons – much of Middle America felt neglected if not disdained. The "losers" were left to rot in "flyover America" with towns and cities that had lost their manufacturing base and, with it, their vitality and even their purpose for existing.

### **Republican Fraud**

It wasn't as if the Republicans were offering anything better. True, they were more comfortable talking to these "forgotten Americans" – advocating "gun rights" and "traditional values" and playing on white resentments over racial integration and civil rights – but, in office, the Republicans aggressively favored the interests of the rich, cutting their taxes and slashing regulations even more than the Democrats.

The Republicans paid lip service to the struggling blue-collar workers but control of GOP policies was left in the hands of corporations and their lobbyists.

Though the election of Barack Obama, the first African-American president, raised hopes that the nation might finally bind its deep racial wounds, it turned out to have a nearly opposite effect. Tea Party Republicans rallied many white working-class Americans to resist Obama and the hip urban future that he represented. They found an unlikely champion in real-estate mogul and reality TV star Donald Trump, who sensed how to tap into their fears and anger with his demagogic appeals and false populism.

Meanwhile, the national Democrats were falling in love with data predicting that demographics would magically turn Republican red states blue. So the party blithely ignored the warning signs of a cataclysmic break with the Democrats' old-time base.

Despite all the data on opioid addiction and declining life expectancy among the white working class, Hillary Clinton was politically tone-deaf to the rumbles of discontent echoing across the Rust Belt. She assumed the traditionally Democratic white working-class precincts would stick with her and she tried to appeal to the "security moms" in typically Republican suburbs by touting her neoconservative foreign policy thinking. And she ran a relentlessly negative campaign against Trump while offering voters few positive reasons to vote for her.

### **Ignoring Reality**

When her stunning loss became clear on Election Night – as the crude and unqualified Trump pocketed the electoral votes of Pennsylvania, Michigan and

Wisconsin – the Democrats refused to recognize what the elections results were telling them, that they had lost touch with a still important voting bloc, working-class whites.

Rather than face these facts, the national Democrats – led by President Obama and his intelligence chiefs – decided on a different approach, to seek to reverse the election by blaming the result on the Russians. Obama, his intelligence chiefs and a collaborative mainstream media insisted without presenting any real evidence that the Russians had hacked into Democratic emails and released them to the devastating advantage of Trump, as if the minor controversies from leaked emails of the Democratic National Committee and Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta explained Trump's surprising victory.

As part of this strategy, any Trump link to Russia – no matter how inconsequential, whether from his businesses or through his advisers – became the focus of Woodward-and-Bernstein/Watergate-style investigations. The obvious goal was to impeach Trump and ride the wave of Trump-hating enthusiasm to a Democratic political revival.

In other words, there was no reason to look in the mirror and rethink how the Democratic Party might begin rebuilding its relationships with the white working-class, just hold hearings featuring Obama's intelligence chieftains and leak damaging Russia-gate stuff to the media.

But the result of this strategy has been to deepen the Democratic Party's reliance on the elites, particularly the self-reverential mavens of the mainstream media and the denizens of the so-called "deep state." From my conversations with Trump voters, they "get" what's going on, how the powers-that-be are trying to negate the 63 million Americans who voted for Trump by reversing a presidential election carried out under the U.S. constitutional process.

### **A Letter from 'Deplorable' Land**

Some Trump supporters are even making this point publicly. Earlier this month, a "proud deplorable" named Kenton Woodhead from Brunswick, Ohio, wrote to The New York Times informing the "newspaper of record" that he and other "deplorables" were onto the scheme.

"I wanted to provide you with an unsophisticated synopsis of The New York Times and the media's quest for the implosion of Donald Trump's presidency from out here in the real world, in 'deplorable' country. ... Every time you and your brethren at other news organizations dream up a new scheme to get Mr. Trump, we out here in deplorable land increase our support for him. ...

“Regardless of what you dream up every day, we refuse to be sucked into your narrative. And even more humorously, there isn’t anything you can do about it! And I love it that you are having the exact opposite effect on those of us you are trying to persuade to think otherwise.

“I mean it is seriously an enjoyable part of my day knowing you are failing. And badly! I haven’t had this much fun watching the media stumble, bumble and fumble in years. I wonder what will happen on the day you wake up and realize how disconnected you’ve become.”

So, despite Trump’s narcissism and incompetence – and despite how his policies will surely hurt many of his working-class supporters – the national Democrats are further driving a wedge between themselves and this crucial voting bloc. By whipping up a New Cold War with Russia and hurling McCarthistic slurs at people who won’t join in the Russia-bashing, the Democratic Party’s tactics also are alienating many peace voters who view both the Republicans and Democrats as warmongers of almost equal measures of guilt.

While it’s certainly not my job to give advice to the Democrats – or any other political group – I can’t help but thinking that this Russia-gate “scandal” is not only lacking in logic and evidence, but it doesn’t even make any long-term political sense.

**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](#)).**

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## At FBI, Mueller Oversaw Post-9/11 Abuses

**Exclusive:** The U.S. mainstream media gushes over Russia-gate special prosecutor Robert Mueller as an upright man of the Establishment, ignoring how he oversaw abuses of innocent Arabs after 9/11, reports Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Robert Mueller III, the former FBI director who now heads the wide-ranging investigation into alleged misdeeds by President Trump and his associates, just dodged a major legal bullet himself. On Monday, the U.S. Supreme Court gave him and other former senior Bush administration officials legal immunity for the vicious abuses committed against more than 700 foreigners who were rounded up

with little or no cause after the 9/11 attacks.

The court ruled 4-2, nearly 16 years after the fact, that “national security” trumps civil liberties and that however unfounded the arrests, or intolerable their treatment, the detainees had no right to sue senior federal officials for damages.

Punting to Congress, a branch of government rarely known for its defense of individual rights, the court declared, “The proper balance in situations like this, between deterring constitutional violations and freeing high officials to make the lawful decisions necessary to protect the Nation in times of great peril, is one for the Congress to undertake, not the Judiciary.”

Although the climate of fear that followed 9/11 has eased a bit, the decision is highly relevant in the Trump era because the abused victims were all immigrants who had overstayed their visas. If the FBI had any question about the arrestees, it designated them “of interest” and ordered them held until cleared – in other words, guilty until proven innocent.

Dozens of the hapless victims were held at the Administrative Maximum Special Housing Unit in Brooklyn’s Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC), which was the subject of two scathing reports by the Bush Justice Department’s own Inspector General in 2003. Besides documenting a wide range of abuses, the reports concluded that staff members brazenly lied about the rough treatment they meted out.

### **Appalling Abuses**

News accounts of the Supreme Court decision made only brief reference to that treatment. Yet the appalling story can be glimpsed from this summary of facts provided in 2013 by U.S. District Judge John Gleeson:

“The harsh confinement policy was expressly directed at Arab and Muslim noncitizens who had violated immigration laws . . . In other words, it was discriminatory on its face. . .

“They were confined in tiny cells for over 23 hours a day, provided with meager and barely edible food, and prohibited from moving around the unit . . . (or) keeping any property, including personal hygiene items like toilet paper and soap, in their cells. Whenever they left their cells, they were handcuffed and shackled. . . (D)etainees . . . were often physically abused along the way, and were sometimes left for hours in the cold recreation cell, over their protests, as a form of punishment. . . .

“Detainees also were denied sleep. Bright lights were kept on . . . for 24 hours

a day . . . and staff at the MDC made a practice of banging on the MDC Detainees' cell doors and engaging in other conduct designed to keep them from sleeping. They also conducted inmate 'counts' at midnight, 3:00 a.m., and 5:00 a.m. . . . One of the officers walked by about every 15 minutes throughout the night, kicked the doors to wake up the detainees, and yelled things such as, 'Motherfuckers,' 'Assholes,' and 'Welcome to America.'

"The MDC Detainees also were subjected to frequent physical and verbal abuse . . . . The physical abuse included slamming the MDC Detainees into walls; bending or twisting their arms, hands, wrists, and fingers; lifting them off the ground by their arms; pulling on their arms and handcuffs; stepping on their leg restraints; restraining them with handcuffs and/or shackles even while in their cells; and handling them in other rough and inappropriate ways. The use of such force was unnecessary because the MDC Detainees were always fully compliant with orders . . . . The verbal abuse included referring to the MDC Detainees as 'terrorists' and other offensive names, threatening them with violence, cursing at them, (and) insulting their religion . . . .

"(Detainees) . . . were subjected to unreasonable and punitive strip-searches. . . . Female officers were often present during the strip-searches; the strip-searches were regularly videotaped in their entirety . . . and MDC officers routinely laughed and made inappropriate sexual comments during the strip-searches.

"Officers at the MDC . . . also interfered with the Detainees' ability to practice and observe their Muslim faith. . . . In addition, most of the MDC Detainees were held incommunicado during the first weeks of their detention. MDC staff repeatedly turned away everyone, including lawyers and relatives, who came to the MDC looking for the MDC Detainees, and thus the MDC Detainees had neither legal nor social visits during this period."

### **An Abu Ghraib in Brooklyn**

Though not at the level of brutality of water boarding and some of the beatings associated with secret CIA detention centers, these MDC abuses had some similarities to the humiliation and mistreatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in Iraq – and the abuses were taking place right in the heart of New York City. Plus, unlike some of the CIA's torture victims, these detainees had nothing to do with terrorist plots; some were never even questioned by the FBI after their arrest.

Yet senior FBI and Justice Department officials were complicit in the abuse. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, in a [2015 ruling](#) that the lawsuit could proceed, cited evidence that two of the defendants, Attorney General John Ashcroft and

FBI Director Mueller, “met regularly with a small group of government officials in Washington, D.C., and mapped out ways to exert maximum pressure on the individuals arrested in connection with the terrorism investigation.”

They “discussed and decided upon a strategy to restrict the 9/11 detainees’ ability to contact the outside world and delay their immigration hearings. The group also decided to spread the word among law enforcement personnel that the 9/11 detainees were suspected terrorists[] . . . and that they needed to be encouraged in any way possible to cooperate.” And it was the FBI that recommended housing the detainees in the maximum security facility where their rights were sure to be abused.

Such official misconduct and brutality constitutes a stain on this nation’s honor. Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the majority, said “Nothing in this opinion should be read to condone the treatment to which the (plaintiffs) contend they were subjected.”

### **A Terrible Precedent**

But the court’s decision to protect high-level federal officials who made that treatment possible sets a terrible precedent. As the American Civil Liberties Union warned, it “would effectively immunize tens of thousands of federal officers . . . from damages, no matter how egregious the officers’ conduct. Indeed, [it] would effectively immunize federal officers from damages liability even for torture, so long as the torture arises in a context involving national security or noncitizens.”

Citing such egregious precedents as the Alien and Sedition Acts, the wholesale suppression of civil liberties during World War I, and the internment of Japanese-American citizens during World War II, a dissenting Justice Stephen Breyer insisted that the Court had an obligation to defend “fundamental constitutional rights.”

“History tells us of far too many instances where the Executive or Legislative Branch took actions during time of war that, on later examination, turned out unnecessarily and unreasonably to have deprived American citizens of basic constitutional rights,” he wrote. With the latest court ruling, that dark history is sure to be repeated.

[For more on the real Robert Mueller, see Consortiumnews.com’s “Russia-gate’s Mythical Heroes.”]

**Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to Consortiumnews.com.**

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# Iran's Missile Strike Adds to Syrian Crisis

For the first time in 30 years, Iran fired missiles from its territory – in a strike against ISIS in Syria, putting down a marker that Iran won't tolerate more terror attacks against Tehran, Patrick Henningsen explained at 21<sup>st</sup> Century Wire.

By Patrick Henningsen

On June 19, Iran's Revolutionary Guard announced that it had fired several missiles at ISIS positions in the Deir Az Zor province in Syria. The reason given for this unprecedented military strike was retaliation for double terrorist attacks which struck Tehran two weeks ago. Readers should not underestimate the significance of this event.

According to a statement issued by the news agency for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, Sepahnews, "Multiple medium-range missiles were fired from the Iranian provinces of Kermanshah and Kurdistan, and a large number of terrorists were killed and their weapons were destroyed."

Regarding the alleged ISIS attack, which killed 13 people and wounded 50 others, the Revolutionary Guard added, "The spilling of any pure blood will not go unanswered."

Make no mistake about it – this was a major media event. It's been 30 years since Iran has fired missiles at targets outside of its own borders. Iranian television featured images of the IRGC missiles being launched at night.

The IRGC has also warned that more missile strikes will follow should ISIS militants plot any future attacks on Iran. "If they carry out a specific action to violate our security, definitely there will be more launches, with intensified strength," said General Ramazan Sharif of the IRGC (also cited by AP).

Fars News Agency added, "The IRGC warns the Takfiri terrorists and their regional and trans-regional supporters that they would be engulfed by its revolutionary wrath and flames of the fire of its revenge in case they repeat any such devilish and dirty move in future."

This latest move by Iran is worrying for a number of reasons. Justified or not, Iran's launch from its western provinces, over Iraqi airspace and into Syria

will most certainly heighten tensions in an already tense Syrian theatre. If the situation escalates, the question of who has the upper hand may not matter should the situation descend into all-out war involving the U.S.

### **Syria: A Crowded Theatre**

Iran's missile strike took place on June 18, targeting an ISIS command center located near the embattled city of Deir Az Zor, a key choke point on the road to the ISIS-held city Raqqa in northeastern Syria. This area is currently a hive of international military activity featuring a host of players – the Syrian Army, Russia, Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah militia and opposing U.S., U.K., Australia, France, Turkish and German forces positioned alongside numerous U.S.-allied (and paid for) militias like the Kurdish SDF, YPG militias – all presumably camped in the region to “defeat ISIS.”

Add to this the problem of U.S. having repeatedly attacked Syrian military forces in a manner that has aided the strategic advances of ISIS. Following from this point, it should be well-known by now, based on successive U.S. aggressions inside Syria, that the Pentagon is probing both Syrian and Russian defenses, testing their level of patience, perhaps in the hope that either Syria or Russia might retaliate against a U.S. aircraft or U.S. support positions on the ground.

In the event that the U.S. loses a single aircraft, or loses one member of its combat team to the hands of a Syrian or Russian military asset, then Washington will no doubt seize on this event as an “act of aggression,” initiate its media machine to begin consensus-building internationally, ramping-up military operations on par with Iraq in 2003. This would be the excuse that the U.S.-led Coalition has been needing in order to blow the Syrian theatre open into a wide regional or possibly, *world-wide war*.

The missile strike by Iran could be a mid-term game changer in the sense that it places Iran squarely into the frame of fighting international terrorism, and ISIS. Up until this point, parties in the U.S. led by the neoconservative right, the Trump White House, and the sister lobbies of Israel and Saudi Arabia – have tried hard to enforce a strict party line that Iran is somehow, “The number one state sponsor of terror on the planet,” despite the fact that no evidence is ever presented to back-up this sensational geopolitical plank.

### **Benefiting Saudi Arabia**

One of the main beneficiaries of this talking point is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which gains on two fronts; the “Iranian terror” line deflects from Saudi Arabia's own sordid role in supporting and funding armed militants, terrorist groups (including active factions in Syria) and radical mosques worldwide. This

dovetails well with the Trump Administration's current embrace of Saudi Arabia as an ally in the "War on Terror" and the simultaneous casting-out of Gulf state Qatar from the U.S.-led Coalition's inner circle in Middle East military and diplomatic affairs.

But that has provoked counter-moves. This week, Turkish troops were deployed to Qatar in a show of support for Qatar by Ankara. This is just another signal that the geopolitics of the region and around Syria, is getting more complicated by the day.

However, Washington and Riyadh's efforts to bracket Qatar with "state sponsor of terror" Iran will be even more difficult following the twin-terror attacks against Tehran and Sunday's retaliatory missile strike. For this reason, the IRGC believes that Saudi and the U.S. are linked to the Tehran attacks.

The FT explains: "However a statement from the Revolutionary Guards linked the 'brutal attack' [on Tehran] to Donald Trump's visit last month to Riyadh, where the US president singled out Iran for fuelling 'the fires of sectarian conflict and terror'.

"'This terrorist act took place a week after a joint meeting between the US president and head of a reactionary regional country [Saudi Arabia] which has been a constant supporter of terrorism,' the statement said. 'The fact Isis claimed responsibility proves that they [Saudi Arabia] were involved in the brutal attack.'"

Despite all of this, Trump has placed all his chips on Saudi Arabia as Washington's only major Arab partner in the region. Does Washington really think Saudi Arabia is of high moral standing in the region? You can blame the Saudi decline in popularity for a number of reasons – supporting Wahhabi extremism, beheading Shia clerics, or Saudi's ability to buy their seat at the head of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, or cynically *acquiring* the U.N. Women's Rights chair. Perhaps Washington is over-estimating Saudi Arabia's position in the Middle East.

### **Tehran Attack: Who Did It?**

Another interesting but under-reported component of this story has to do with the reason for Iran's missile retaliation. Although ISIS apparently claimed credit for the Tehran attacks on June 6, other evidence suggests that another well-known international terrorist entity might have been involved.

After events in Tehran, the U.S.-backed regime change terrorist proxy, the MEK (Mojahedin-e Khalq) was named by senior Iranian politician Mr. Hamid-Reza Taraghi, as a partner in the terrorist attacks. This theory gains a bit more

credence following a statement from former member of the MEK, Massoud Khodabandeh, who has stated that ISIS drew on MEK “expertise” for the terror attacks on Tehran. Certainly, the MEK have been active in carrying out operations inside of Iran for decades now, while ISIS has not. Massoud Khodabandeh’s analysis of the attacks is stunning, and raises two essential points:

“The targets selected by ISIS were sites constantly targeted by the MEK. The Iranian Parliament and its members had always been primary targets for the MEK since the 1980s. The group had managed to assassinate several members of the Parliament and tried to plant a bomb there at one point. They were unsuccessful and some members were killed by security forces while other terrorist teams were arrested. Similarly, after Ayatollah Khomeini’s shrine was created, Massoud Rajavi, the late MEK leader, announced that ‘Khomeini’s grave must be exploded’. It became a mantra among MEK members which they would chant in indoctrination sessions. The MEK tried unsuccessfully to send terrorist teams there in 1991 and 2002.”

“While ISIS and the MEK have the same interests in attacking Iran, ISIS could have caused much greater anti-government fear and hatred among the civilian population in line with its regime change agenda if they had bombed a civilian target like transport infrastructure or a shopping mall. They could have done more damage by targeting the Revolutionary Guards whose forces are in Syria. Instead, the ISIS targets matched those which had been constantly under attack by the MEK for thirty years.”

The MEK factor is extremely worrying because it signals a new leg in Washington’s asymmetric war in the region. History shows us that when great powers sow this level of chaos, the chances for a multi-country conflagration becomes more likely.

### **Apportioning Blame**

Regardless of where blame is apportioned in this case, Iran seems to have accepted the claim by ISIS for these attacks on Iranian soil, effectively giving Tehran an internationally recognized green light to act unilaterally against ISIS assets inside Syria.

For those who subscribe to the school of thought that implicates Saudi Arabia and the U.S. for aiding and supporting ISIS covertly, then Iran has not only called their bluff, but co-opted their own “anti-ISIS” narrative too.

Presently, Iran has military assets deployed in Syria at the invitation of the government in Damascus, so it’s certain that both Damascus and Moscow were aware

of Iran's missile strike in advance, but not the U.S. – once again demonstrating that without significant ground assets deployed in the region the U.S. cannot really control the situation around Raqqa. This means that Washington, no matter how hard its media machine can spin, are simply not able to dictate facts on the ground in Syria.

Clearly, Iran seized an advantage here, but how this plays out in terms of increased tensions with the U.S.-led Coalition in Syria remains to be seen.

The most worrying aspect of this development is the timing. On the same day as Iran fired missiles into Deir Az Zor province in Syria, a U.S. F/A-18E Super Hornet shot down a Syrian SU-22 fighter jet near Raqqa. Washington claimed it as an act of "collective self-defense" as the Syrian jet had dropped bombs "near US-backed forces." As a result of this overt act of aggression by the U.S., the Russian Defense Ministry announced that it is halting its "Deconfliction" cooperation with its U.S. counterparts set out in their bilateral Memorandum on the Prevention of Incidents and Ensuring Air Safety in Syria.

Add to this the fact that each day the U.S. continue to kill more Syrian civilians during their supposed "anti-ISIS" strikes in Raqqa, and it's not difficult to see that the U.S. position is becoming increasingly isolated in the Middle Eastern theatre, leaving its only two remaining solid partners as a pair who themselves are now widely regarded as rogue states in the region: Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The scene has now been set for a wider war. All it will take is a small spark between the two major opposing geopolitical forces or their allies.

**Patrick Henningsen is an American-born writer and global affairs analyst and founder of independent news and analysis site 21st Century Wire and host of the SUNDAY WIRE weekly radio show broadcast globally over the Alternate Current Radio Network (ACR). [This article first appeared at <http://21stcenturywire.com/2017/06/20/dangerous-development-iranian-missile-launch-into-syria-against-isis-places-the-us-in-a-precarious-position/> ]**

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## The Price that Julian Assange Pays

People who challenge power are often viewed by their supporters as more icons than human beings thus missing the personal costs of their actions, a reality that Julian Assange's mother revealed to Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein.

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

June 19 marked the fifth full year that Wikileaks founder Julian Assange spent at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he was given asylum against the threat of arrest from a Swedish prosecutor pursuing a sex-abuse investigation (since dropped) and possible extradition to the United States for a potential espionage charge related to publication of U.S. secrets.

To gain insights into what this long ordeal has meant to Assange, an Australian native, Randy Credico of WBAI's "On the Fly" and Dennis Bernstein of "Flashpoints" on Pacifica Radio interviewed Assange's mother, Christine Assange. The interview also explored the deep history that led her son to found Wikileaks and to challenge the enormous powers of the U.S. and British governments by exposing the truth about their dangerous, deadly and often illegal policies.

Randy Credico: I guess I should begin by asking, how long has it been since you've seen your son Julian?

Christine Assange: A number of years, but we communicate.

RC: Yes, you communicate, but it's not the same, so far away. It must be difficult. I mean he's not in prison, but it may as well be prison. I know for a mother to be separated from her son like this, it must be grueling, and a difficult row to hoe on a daily basis.

CA: It is. It's very hard to put into words this experience that we're going through over the last seven years. There have been periods where I've coped and periods where I haven't. It tends to go up and down, as I guess Julian does as well. And it's very hard to communicate with your son when you know that every phone call that you're making, every text that you're sending, is being listened to. Or even a letter that you write. You end up feeling that it's almost useless trying to communicate anything real.

RC: That must really take its toll. So it will be five years [on June 19th]. Five years! Can you believe that he's been there for five years at this point in time?

CA: No, the idea is horrifying to me actually. I mean we know that he's been detained for seven years without charge, but five of those have been in the Ecuadorian Embassy [in London], and we thank the people of Ecuador for their protection.

But during those five years, Randy, the U.K. government and the Swedish government have refused all of Julian's requests for the normal one hour a day of life-giving fresh air, exercise and sunshine. It's a human right abuse of the

grandest order.

Anyone who is involved with rights of refugees around the world should be highlighting his case. Here we are in the Western supposedly free world, interning someone without charge, and then denying them the rights that even people in Third World prisons get, including the right to have medical tests. He had a very bad shoulder with bad chronic pain for years, and they refused to allow him to have an MRI test.

Dennis Bernstein: Let me just ask you this question: do you remember the last time you were able to give your son a nice big hug?

CA: Yes, four years ago.

DB: Could you tell us what you remember about it?

CA: It's hard keeping up with all the fighting, Dennis. It's very hard to explain. But I got a big hug when I left. I was only there for a few weeks. I've actually got a few things here that I've got to look after. But probably the best time I remember him is the one with the picture you've got on your show, of me and him with his arm around me. That was when he'd just gotten out of prison, and I'd gone over there to campaign for him.

And we were out in the snow, at about 3 o'clock on the morning, outside of the place that he was staying. And that was with an Australian television crew and we were all Aussies together in that moment. And I was giving him a big hug, and they were cheering, and it was a really good moment. It all feels so far away, and so foreign for us all to be there together. And for me to hold Julian, with his countrymen around giving support, was a really good moment.

DB: And now that we've got Julian's mom on the phone, could you talk a little bit about ... the first clue that he was going to be perhaps an interesting person, a troublemaker, or somebody who was really interested in public affairs? How do you remember that beginning?

CA: Well I don't think there was any one point at which it happened. Julian had always been an incredibly curious child, and always wanted to know why – wanted to know how things worked. And I actually encouraged that in him as a child. He would ask how something would work, and rather than say, this is how it works, I would ask him, how do you think it works?

And then we would explore theories at his age level about how something would work, and he was very turned on by all that. I also read him a lot of books. From the time he was a baby, he was read books every day, from fairy tales, to Greek legends, to the adventure heroic classics – Tarzan, for example, where

good was trouncing evil, and there were heroic adventures.

The justice part of it was not to any form of ideology, it was just about showing empathy and fairness in everyday life. So I think all those things together – and he came from a creative background – all that enabled him to sort of explore justice, and the power to change.

Then he wanted to know how the world worked. He wanted to be a physicist because he wanted to get to the bottom of it. And he went to university for physics and was disappointed that most of the job opportunities involved working for the US government, developing weapons, etc., and so he wasn't very happy with that.

And then the next thing I remember, we were having a discussion about the ills of the world and what could make a change in the world and I asked him, what do you think would lead to a change? And he said he thought there are two possibilities: one was a cataclysmic event that knocked some sense into people because they'd have to really look at their environment.

The other one was technology. And I think Wikileaks was the result of the technology that he saw would change the world.

DB: You said something very interesting: that it wasn't about grand things, but about fairness in everyday life. Can you think of one of those everyday examples that sort of blossomed into the Julian Assange that we know in terms of his vision now for information?

CA: Well not anything specific in terms of day-to-day life, but just in general with people we were dealing with in the family or with neighbors: we wouldn't walk past somebody who was lying in the street, for example. If there was someone lying in the street, whether they were drunk or if it was a drug overdose, or if they were sick – we would stop and ask them if they were alright. And Julian would continue that. We were in a situation where we were helping some people involved in a justice situation that had to do with the court system, and Julian was boots and all defending people.

But also when he was a young teenager, he was very into computers. So I bought him a computer, and he went exploring on it, and later on he joined up with some other young people. And there was not a lot available in terms of being challenging and adventuring in the suburbs, but these bright young friends of his were challenging themselves on computers, and one of the ways they were doing it was to what they called "look-see" hacking, which was where they'd break in and they'd look at things, they wouldn't damage anything, but let people know their system was insecure.

Now, in the process of doing that, I remember during the Gulf War that he got in

and had a look, and he told me, "There's stuff going on here that's not right, there are people doing things that are not right here, and we're not being told about it – it's not coming out in the media."

And I think that also galvanized him into his concept of Wikileaks, which was basically a concept around really good media. And that is that the media hold the governments and the corporations through, basically the truth, responsible to the people.

RC: He has done an incredible job. We are much better off – we are more knowledgeable about our government's evil actions around the world, and obviously he's being penalized for that. First of all, he's been vilified by these phony allegations. How did you react when these allegations came out of the Swedish government prosecutor's office?

CA: Well I remember the time exactly. It was about 11 o'clock at night when I got a phone call, and the person didn't even introduce themselves, they just said, "Mrs. Assange, how does it feel to have your son accused of a double rape?"

And straight from my solar plexus I just said, "He didn't do it." Because I know my son, and I know that Julian wouldn't do it. But then I had to go through the whole process of investigating the case because, to defend him, I had to know exactly what was going on.

And so, like those who defended him with knowledge, we had to troll through all the documents, to find out the basis of the allegations, and then what we found was a complete and utter set up. And that was a horrifying feeling to find out that your son would actually be set up on something as serious as a rape allegation, purely because he published the truth about corrupt power.

DB: Where exactly are you right now?

CA: I'm in Australia.

DB: Oh, you're in Australia! You're very far away, but you're very close to us here, and we're really appreciating the kind of material that you're sharing about Julian Assange on this, his fifth year of his being held captive, really you have to say by threats of the United States government, who has a special penchant for hurting whistleblowers.

I'm thinking of this carpenter – this illiterate carpenter – who actually fled from fascist Italy and ended up in fascist Argentina. And he used to spout these phrases, and one of the things he used to say is, "Truth has few friends, and those few are suicides" [Antonio Porchia]. Now that's a very dark comment, but

it does seem, if you think about Julian Assange or other great truth tellers, what was waiting for them was a jail cell, or a bullet. Your thoughts on that – that courage that it takes to go forward?

CA: Well the original truth teller was Jesus Christ, wasn't he? He was throwing the money changers out of the temple. And now 2,000 years later we've got defense contractors, the oil industry and Wall Street. And he said, "And you shall know the truth and it shall set you free."

And nothing has really changed since then. We still have corrupt power consolidating itself, and really destroying the world, and not working on the behalf of people. And it sort of brings me back to what we should be doing, as people. What should we do? Our leaders let us down again and again. They say they're going to do something and when they get in power they're either bad leaders who were leading us on, or they're good leaders who are under pressure themselves. And they're fighting each other and name-calling, but it's still not working, is it?

So I see Wikileaks as a uniting point for everybody – from the Left and the Right and everything in between – uniting around the First Amendment, which is what you call it in America, or the free press around the world, to hold our leaders in the business world and in the government accountable through transparency and truth.

And good leaders are actually supported by Wikileaks because if they are indeed under pressure from the Deep State – for example, supposing we assume that Donald Trump is a good guy, and does want to, as he says, "drain the swamp", which is the Deep State, then he's going to need Wikileaks – not just during the campaign, when Wikileaks was wonderful and he loved Wikileaks, but even more so now, when the Deep State is going to try to prevent his campaign.

Now if he's not in fact a good guy, but a bad guy all along, then of course he's going to want to suppress Wikileaks. And our assessment of Donald Trump very much hinges on whether he is going to protect Wikileaks and Julian.

DB: We were just speaking with one of the attorneys, Jesselyn Radack, who has worked with Julian Assange, and we were talking about the message that might be being sent now by the very strong crackdown and arrest of the most recent whistleblower coming out of the National Security Agency [Reality Winner]. Does that give you pause or concern that Julian might have a tough row ahead?

CA: Oh, I've always known he's going to have a tough row ahead, you only have to look at the way they've treated their own whistleblowers, as you said, in their own CIA and NSA. The Obama administration arrested and prosecuted more

whistleblowers than all other presidents combined, so things were certainly not looking good, even before this change of administration.

I'm not talking about Reality Winner. I'm not sure where she's coming from but, even so, wherever she's coming from, the protocol should still be the same. And I don't know if that's the case. If you are a whistleblower there should be protections for you and then it should be investigated and authenticated. And there should be a transparent legal process, and your rights should be protected during that time period. The reason I say I don't know where she's coming from, is because they've been talking about so-called leaks about Russians, and all the rest of it, and we know that they've been set up, that the Russians didn't hack the DNC.

They're going to say that there were leaks and they're not leaks, but because we don't know who, that's the reason why we need to protect all whistleblowers, including her, and why it should go through due process, the same as for any other citizen.

DB: We know that Julian was pretty troubled by the way in which *The Intercept* blew their source in this context. He seems to have been a lot more careful in his work in terms of protecting sources. I'm wondering if you noted that.

CA: Oh, absolutely. I remember when Wikileaks was being set up, that Julian was saying to me, "We're going to spend two years with the best minds in the world, to create an anonymous drop box, so that nobody can crack it, because we want to protect our sources. And we want people to feel so comfortable in leaking to us and not to feel frightened that they're going to be revealed". So he's kept to that, even to the risk to his own life and liberty.

Wikileaks has never revealed a source – no source has been exposed by Wikileaks. Chelsea Manning exposed herself on the Internet. And very few other media have been willing to rise to that challenge. So it's best to leak to Wikileaks if you're going to leak. It's a pity that she [Reality Winner] didn't leak to Wikileaks.

RC: Yes. I must say, he really is a remarkable individual. I am not a techie, but he really knows all of this stuff really well, he's brilliant, but he comes off so genuine. It's really amazing to see him on all of these talk shows, on radio – how well he comes off. And he's got a great sense of humor, he's got an incredible education, he's so well-spoken, so dignified when he's on. Does that amaze you?

CA: Yes... well yes and no... because he's grown up with me, and I've seen him, and he's always been a refined person. He's never been a crude person. He's been an

honest person and an empathetic person, and he's always been very bright, so that he got to where he is on the world stage doesn't surprise me.

Though of course in another way it does, and I'm in awe of him as well – not in any kind of demigod way, but just as a human being with such resilience and courage, and so strong in the truth. And taking the most incredible amount of attacks, not just from governments and corporations, and what they're getting up to behind the scenes, but trolls.

I mean the thing that probably hurt me the most when watching him stand up for his work, was seeing other journalists, particularly UK journalists, trolling him on Wikileaks with the most vile, immature, picky, vicious comments. I couldn't believe that this was coming out of the mouths of so-called journalists! And he's resilient, and the ability to rise above it is quite awe-inspiring, isn't it?

DB: And he continues on despite it all. He certainly has a resolve and a focus that borders on super-human. He has not been distracted from the work, in fact he has managed to expand it. It's sort of a bit of a miracle.

CA: Well, Julian is very grounded. His convictions come out of critical analysis, they don't come out of an easy path of jumping on some ideological bandwagon, so that when the going gets tough, he's grounded in where he's coming from. Because he drove himself, he's not easily shaken by attacks, by ideological attacks, for example, or personal attacks. I think they've called him every "ist" there is – narcissist, racist, marxist, capitalist – and on and on it goes. But he knows that the reason he's doing this is about media truth and justice, and government transparency, and he's grounded in that reality, and that's why he's not so easily shaken.

RC: He is the most fearless individual. I mean he's got the entire Intelligence Community, the Military Community [against him] – not just here in the U.S. but in Britain – even your own government.

What is your own government doing to protect one of their citizens? Under Prime Minister Turnbull?

CA: They've never done anything under any of them! The Labor government under Julia Gillard called what he did illegal and wanted to take his passport away, and she actually said she was quite happy to hand him over to the U.S. and change our extradition laws specifically to make it easier for him to be handed over.

Basically we don't have a real government, we've got a puppet government – it's just a U.S. puppet, and they're constantly auditioning through the US Embassy

for a place in the spotlight. Prime Minister Turnbull was an ex-Director of Goldman Sachs Australia. Not sure if you're familiar with the term "government sets"? That's where big US banks put their people in governments around the world.

So basically it would appear that in the Australian political landscape, if you want a promotion, you will swear on your credentials that you're willing to tow the line on Assange.

DB: And finally, we've got Julian's mom here, and I have to end this way – forgive me, Mom, but what are you most proud of in terms of your son? What part of his actions, his work, makes you the most proud as his mom?

CA: That he's standing ethically in truth for justice, with courage. That he's willing to risk his life and his liberty for his fellow man, basically. And that's what he's doing – he's risking his health, his liberty and even his life, because we've heard all the horrible stuff coming out of various commentators: things like "We're gonna shoot the son of a bitch" coming from Bob Beckel, a Democratic strategist.

And all the horrible things that Mike Pompeo said about him being a demon and "an unsafe intelligence actor." And nonsense stuff about him being involved in child pornography from both sides, trying to set him up. I mean most people would have fallen over by now. But I think that because Julian is standing for something that's good and right and correct, I think that's where he derives his strength.

RC: He does have a lot of support, and I've been getting a lot of support from his supporters for this show, on Twitter and social media.

[...] What can people do? What do you recommend people do to help out Julian?

CA: [...] Some of the American supporters have been very busy lately. They've organized the Boycott UK and it's under the hashtag #BoycottUK and also the hashtag #FreeAssangeNOW .

This is a very good idea because we all know that money makes the world go round and in fact some are saying that a lot of the opposition to Julian is from greedy corporations because he exposes things like some of the reasons for war, and some of them profit from defense contracts. They also know that by reducing profits for major corporations, they will lean on government to change their policy. So boycotting big UK businesses until they free Julian – all big businesses that are operating in the UK.

Another California supporter ... has put up a campaign called "5 dollars for 5

years” and that is about how Julian spent five years in the Ecuadorian Embassy giving the truth, fighting for us, for our right to know. How about if we donate five dollars – a dollar for each year that he spent there? And that will go to top up the Julian Assange Defense fund which is at [justice4assange.com](http://justice4assange.com). And you can donate your five dollars there.

Also on that site there’s a lot of information – it’s the best site in the world for finding out the facts about what’s been happening to Julian Assange for the last seven years. And let me tell you, it reads like The Bourne Conspiracy – what the government’s been up to to try to shut my son up is criminal and unbelievable.

So, just in America, just these last few weeks, American citizens have been standing up to fight.

But what you’re doing is also incredibly important, Randy. We find that when people are apprised of the facts about Wikileaks, and the facts about Julian, that most come onboard to support him, and some even come onboard as very active supporters. So it’s about getting out the facts, because there’s an awful lot of propaganda and lies. But once people know the facts they are supportive, so that’s also very important that people talk to each other about the facts, find out the facts. And there’s a very good FAQ at [justice4assange.com](http://justice4assange.com).

So getting out the facts is really important, boycotting is very important, and funding Julian and funding Wikileaks is also important. We often feel very alone and powerless in the world at the moment, but we do have two things that we can still do.

One thing is where we spend our consumer dollar. It might only be five dollars, but if a million people donate five dollars, that’s really putting Julian and Wikileaks in a strong position to fight.

The other thing is the vote: keep your politician on speed dial and yank his or her chain every so often to remind them that we actually pay their wages, and we expect them to stand up for truth and government accountability, we expect them to not get in bed with corruption, and we are not impressed with them persecuting truth-telling media.

So there are just three things you can do straightaway. And of course you can always form your own Free Assange group – it can be a group of one or two or more. And this is what some ladies have done in America and around the world – nice people who have formed Free Assange groups. They are just ordinary people – they’re not actually highly political people, they’re often mothers who want to see the world protected for their children, and they often have no political

experience, but a lot of heart and drive and creativity. And they often make the best advocates.

RC: Well, Ms. Christine Assange, I really appreciate you being part of this show. You are welcome back anytime. You are really doing an incredible job on behalf of your son, who is a hero. And I would like to give you the last word. If there's something you want to convey to Julian and his supporters there in London, I'm going to give you the last word.

CA: Well, firstly, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to all the supporters around the world who have stood up and fought to protect and defend Wikileaks and Julian. Sometimes you've only done one action, sometimes you've done more – it doesn't matter, you did something.

The people in London at the Ecuadorian Embassy have just been troopers. Both Ecuador and its embassy staff and the people of Ecuador and the people from the Julian Assange Defense Fund and Wise Up Action – those guys who stood outside that embassy, day-in, day-out – in the rain, hail, snow and sun – to support my son and protect him. And at one stage, when they tried to raid the embassy illegally and grab Julian, these people were his protectors. And I would encourage anybody who is visiting London anytime to drop into the embassy and stand outside the embassy and join these historic groups.

Show Julian that you care. Show the powers that be that the people care and they're not going away. Wikileaks, after all, is supplied by the people, with information for the people, for their protection. It's 100% funded by the people, and it's defended and protected by the people, including our lawyers. This is a people's publisher, and it just goes to show you what the people can achieve when they get together. Wikileaks is rocking the halls of power, and they're terrified. And they have come back as bad as IS [Islamic State] terrorists against the truth, but the people are standing firm.

And to my son, I love you, I'm still here, I'm still fighting, I'm incredibly proud of your work. You're a terrific human being, and we're all standing here and we will keep fighting until we get you out of there.

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

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# Spoiling for a Wider War in Syria

**Exclusive:** America's neocons are back pounding the war drums, urging President Trump to escalate U.S. military attacks inside Syria even if that means hitting Russian targets and risking a new world war, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The U.S. mainstream media's near universal demonization of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin – along with similar hatred directed toward Iran and Hezbollah – has put the world on a path toward World War III.

Ironically, the best hope for averting a dangerous escalation into a global conflict is to rely on Assad, Putin, Iran and Hezbollah to show restraint in the face of illegal military attacks by the United States and its Mideast allies inside Syria.

In other words, after the U.S. military has bombed Syrian government forces on their own territory and shot down a Syrian warplane on Sunday – and after Israel has launched its own strikes inside Syria and after Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies have financed and armed jihadists to overthrow Assad – it is now up to the Syrian government and its allies to turn the other cheek.

Of course, there is also a danger that comes from such self-control, in that it may encourage the aggressors to test the limits even further, seeing restraint as an acceptance of their impunity and a reason to ignore whatever warnings are issued and red lines drawn.

Indeed, if you follow The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and other big U.S. news outlets, perhaps the most striking groupthink that they all share is that the U.S. government and its allies have the right to intervene militarily anywhere in the world. Their slogan could be summed up as: "International law – that's for the other guy!"

In this upside-down world of American hegemony, Assad becomes the "aggressor" when he seeks to regain control of Syrian territory against armed insurgents, dominated by Al Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS), or when he protests the invasion of Syrian territory by foreign forces.

When Assad legally seeks help from Russia and Iran to defeat these foreign-armed and foreign-backed jihadists, the U.S. mainstream media and politicians treat his alliances as improper and troublemaking. Yet, the uninvited interventions into Syria by the United States and its various allies, including Turkey and

Israel, are treated as normal and expected.

### **Demanding Escalation**

The preponderance of U.S. media criticism about U.S. policy in Syria comes from neoconservatives and liberal interventionists who have favored a much more ambitious and vigorous “regime change” war, albeit cloaked in prettier phrases such as “safe zones” and “no-fly zones.”

So, you have Tuesday’s Wall Street Journal editorial, which praises Sunday’s U.S. shoot-down of a Syrian military plane because it allegedly was dropping bombs “near” one of the U.S.-backed rebel groups – though the Syrians say they were targeting an Islamic State position.

Although it was the U.S. that shot down the Syrian plane over Syria, the Journal’s editorial portrays the Russians and Syrians as the hotheads for denouncing the U.S. attack as a provocation and warning that similar air strikes will not be tolerated.

In response, the Journal’s neocon editors called for more U.S. military might hurled against Syria and Russia: “The risk of escalation is real, but this isn’t a skirmish the U.S. can easily avoid. Mr. Assad and his allies in Moscow and Tehran know that ISIS’s days are numbered. They want to assert control over as much territory as possible in the interim, and that means crushing the SDF [the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces].

“The Russian threat on Monday to target with anti-aircraft missiles any U.S. aircraft flying west of the Euphrates River in Syria is part of the same intimidation strategy. Russia also suspended a hotline between the two armed forces designed to reduce the risk of a military mistake. Iran, which arms and assists Mr. Assad on the ground, vowed further Syrian regime attacks against SDF, all but daring U.S. planes to respond amid the Russian threat.

“The White House and Pentagon reacted with restraint on Monday, calling for a de-escalation and open lines of communication. But if Syria and its allies are determined to escalate, the U.S. will either have to back down or prepare a more concerted effort to protect its allies and now U.S. aircraft.

“This is a predicament President Obama put the U.S. in when his Syrian abdication created an opening for Vladimir Putin to intervene. Had the U.S. established a no-fly or other safe zone to protect refugees, the Kremlin might have been more cautious.”

As senior U.S. commanders have explained, however, the notion of a sweet-sounding “no-fly or other safe zone” would require a massive U.S. military

campaign inside Syria that would devastate government forces and result in thousands of civilian deaths because many air defenses are located in urban areas. It also could lead to a victory for Al Qaeda and/or its spinoff, Islamic State, a grisly fate for most Syrians.

### **Propaganda Value**

But the “safe zone” illusion has great propaganda value, essentially a new packaging for another “regime change” war, which the neocons lusted for in Syria as the follow-on to the Iraq invasion in 2003 but couldn’t achieve immediately because the Iraq War turned into a bloody disaster.

Instead, the neocons had to settle for a proxy war on Syria, funded and armed by the U.S. government and its regional allies, relying on violent jihadists to carry out the brunt of the fighting and killing. When Assad’s government reacted clumsily to this challenge, the U.S. mainstream media depicted Assad as the villain and the “rebels” as the heroes.

In 2012, the Defense Intelligence Agency, then under the direction of Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, warned that the U.S. strategy would give rise to “a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria.”

Flynn went further in a 2015 interview when he said the intelligence was “very clear” that the Obama administration made a “willful decision” to back these jihadists in league with Middle East allies. (Flynn briefly served as President Trump’s national security adviser but was ousted amid the growing Russia-gate “scandal.”)

Only in 2014, when Islamic State militants began decapitating American hostages and capturing cities in Iraq, did the Obama administration reverse course and begin attacking ISIS while continuing to turn a blind-eye to the havoc caused by other rebel groups allied with Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front, including many outfits deemed “moderate” in the U.S. lexicon.

But the problem is that almost none of this history exists within the U.S. mainstream narrative, which – as the Journal’s neocon editors did on Tuesday – simply depicts Obama as weak and then baits President Trump to show more military muscle.

### **What U.S. National Interests?**

The Journal editorial criticized Trump for having no strategy beyond eradicating ISIS and adding: “Now is the time for thinking through such a strategy because Syria, Russia and Iran know what they want. Mr. Assad wants to reassert control over all of Syria, not a country divided into Alawite, Sunni and Kurdish parts.

Iran wants a Shiite arc of influence from Tehran to Beirut. Mr. Putin will settle for a Mediterranean port and a demonstration that Russia can be trusted to stand by its allies, while America is unreliable. None of this is in the U.S. national interests.”

But why isn't this in U.S. national interests? What's wrong with a unified secular Syria that can begin to rebuild its shattered infrastructure and repatriate refugees who have fled into Europe, destabilizing the Continent?

What's the big problem with “a Shiite arc of influence”? The Shiites aren't a threat to the United States or the West. The principal terror groups – Al Qaeda and ISIS – spring from the extremist Saudi version of Sunni Islam, known as Wahhabism. I realize that Israel and Saudi Arabia took aim at Syria in part to shatter “the Shiite arc,” but we have seen the horrific consequences of that strategy. How has the chaos that the Syrian war has unleashed benefited U.S. national interests?

And so what that Russia has a naval base on the Mediterranean Sea? That is no threat to the United States, either.

But what is the alternative prescription from the Journal's neocon editors? The editorial concludes: “The alternative would be to demonstrate that Mr. Assad, Iran and Russia will pay a higher price for their ambitions. This means refusing to back down from defending U.S. allies on the ground and responding if Russia aircraft or missiles attempt to take down U.S. planes. Our guess is that Russia doesn't want a military engagement with the U.S. any more than the U.S. wants one with Russia, but Russia will keep pressing for advantage unless President Trump shows more firmness than his predecessor.”

So, rather than allow the Syrian government to restore some form of order across Syria, the neocons want the Trump administration to continue violating international law, which forbids military invasions of sovereign countries, and keep the bloodshed flowing. Beyond that, the neocons want the U.S. military to play chicken with the other nuclear-armed superpower on the assumption that Russia will back down.

As usual, the neocon armchair warriors don't reflect much on what could happen if U.S. warplanes attacking inside Syria are shot down. One supposes that would require President Trump to authorize a powerful counterstrike against Russian targets with the possibility of these escalations spinning out of control. But such craziness is where a steady diet of neocon/liberal-hawk propaganda has taken America.

We are ready to risk nuclear war and end all life on the planet, so Israel and

Saudi Arabia can shatter a “Shiite arc of influence” and so American politicians don’t have to feel the rhetorical lash of the neocons and their liberal-hawk sidekicks.

**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](#)).**

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## How Fear of Russia Misleads Americans

NSA whistleblower Thomas Drake sees grave dangers in the U.S. government and media exaggerating foreign threats as a means to mislead and control the American public, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Russia has been made “the go-to scapegoat” for distracting Americans from the serious problems afflicting the U.S. government, says Thomas Drake, a former senior executive at the National Security Agency who blew the whistle on multi-billion-dollar waste and violations of the rights of citizens through secret mass surveillance programs after 9/11.

As retaliation, the Obama Administration indicted Drake in 2010 as the first whistleblower since Daniel Ellsberg charged with espionage, carrying a possible 35-year prison term. However, in 2011, the government’s case against him collapsed and he went free in a plea deal. He became the recipient of the 2011 Ridenhour Truth-Telling Prize.

I sat down with Thomas Drake on June 3, 2017, at the home of ConsortiumNews editor Robert Parry in Arlington, Virginia, on the occasion of the awarding of the 2016 Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award to Oliver Stone.

Dennis Bernstein: I want to ask you about a story. ConsortiumNews has offered quite a different perspective on the relationship between the U.S. government and Russia [questioning the allegations about] Trump collaborating with Putin. What’s your take on this story? Do you think that ConsortiumNews is onto something in terms of really questioning that whole line?

Thomas Drake: Yes. This hyperbolic narrative that is posited almost to the point of hysteria. They would say that Russians are behind everything. “It’s all the Russians’ fault and you can blame Russia.” It’s just pure political pretension and there is a significant amount of propaganda behind it.

It's intended to distract. It's intended to keep people from really looking at some of the deeper truths of our own government and so it is very convenient for the political elites, on both sides of what has become the Democratic/Republican divide, which in fact is not a divide; it's two sides of the same coin, with slightly different narrative – to project all the blame on Russia and particularly the hyper-conflation of the littlest thing that would appear to be that Trump is ruining the country or Trump is the worst thing that has ever happened. Just really taking this way, way beyond the pale.

And ConsortiumNews – having written for ConsortiumNews going back several years now as a result of my case and mass domestic surveillance and government abuse of power – is one of the few – it's surreal for me to say this right now – it's one of the few alternative media outlets who have the courage to stand up to the elite narrative and get behind this hyper-partisan politicization of blaming it all on external entities.

And, in this case, Russia has become the go-to scapegoat, frankly. And it's easy to simply focus on that as your excuse without having to concern yourself with the deeper trends in terms of the darker history of American politics.

And Gary Webb – I am quite familiar with his case. Remember he had his own profession turn on him because they wanted to curry favor with power and they wanted to have access to power. So it was full access press and power is an aphrodisiac. Henry Kissinger said that. ...

DB: Access press, as in, if you don't say the right thing [...] they can toss you into prison.

TD: Yep, precisely. And so you're willing to overlook what may be done under the cover or blanket of government, the government structure. And so ConsortiumNews is one of the few. ...

I was sort of the pre-Snowden Snowden. ...

DB: He cites you for opening that door....

TD: Well, he has said there wouldn't have been him without me. And he has cited a number of people who have preceded him, right? And I was there at the foundation, at this extraordinary willful violation of, in secret, of what I call the subversion of the Constitution. Really, it was a silent coup against the Constitution....

DB: What are the multiple dangers of the way in which information is used now, and slanted to support policy as opposed to inform?

TD: Well, it's self-interest. It's largely self-interest driven. You have, what I have sometimes called Gov-Corp, which is a combination of government and corporations and it's an extraordinarily pathological relationship because they feed on each other. One protects the other and when you have the government corrupting itself to serve very powerful interests at the expense of public interests, guess what? Something has to give and what gives is public transparency. What gives is accountability. What gives is responsible power. What gives is the promise. What gives is "we the people", right?

Power just... generally at least, power is about the people and it's pathological, and so unfortunately the checks and balances that have in the past – Ellsberg is eyewitness to this – he's certainly a key person by simply standing up with his colleague Edgar Russo, standing up to power in terms of the bright and shiny light called Vietnam, right? He clearly brought into the public purview what was really going on with Vietnam and, ultimately, as we know, I was a very young teen growing up in the '70s. He was already in his early 40s at the time. That, yeah, the government can use power... and that, yeah, power does tend to corrupt. Lord Acton was right.

So, what became known as the imperial presidency of Nixon, this era makes that era look like a hyper type of person, especially post-9/11. It's just extremely concerning. It's what I would call the devolution of democracy and constitutional rights following 9/11 and Ellsberg has said and I have said, what was actually unlawful and unconstitutional has been made legal from his time.

And the old, what became the infamous statement made by Nixon, "You know, if the President says it's okay, it's not illegal." I heard almost those exact same words when I confronted the lead attorney in the Office of General Counsel. That was the first week in October 2001. I had already found out about the massive domestic surveillance program that had been unleashed. And I confronted him and he said, "This is great. The White House has approved the program. It's all legal." ... The hairs on the back of my neck were like... I'm having major flashbacks... Wait a minute, just because the White House approves it, it makes it okay? I mean, history is not kind. He says, "Yep, we're the executive agent – all approved. Yes. Don't ask any more questions."

So, because the White House approved it, then it's okay to violate the Constitution. All those checks were put in place as a result of the ... president resigning, the standing committees and intelligence House and the Senate, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and a whole lot of others, right? So that was the check and balance, right? Nah, just, hey 9/11, the failure of the government to provide the common defense. 3,000 people murdered that day. It should never have happened. It really should never have happened. And so we are

going to use that as sort of a reverse false flag. We're going to use that as an excuse, because, "Hey, after all, the Constitution is not a suicide pact... you know, we don't know where the enemy is."

So just this weird, everything is existential now. We now know how the enemy is because of 9/11. And so it's weird for me, having been brought up as a very young lad during the Cold War and remembering alarms going off and they'd turn off the lights and block the hall and face your lockers, right? The air raid sign drills and fears of the nuclear winter. It's like these people want a World War 2.0.

We have far more in common with the Russians than we don't. We have far in common than our own disputes. I assume there are some differences, right? I recognize, I am well aware, in terms of historical notes, but hey we have far more in common than we have difference.

DB: I guess what we all have in common is the state of the Earth at this point.

TD: The state of the Earth? We are the third rock from the sun. I mean, this is our home. The world is a much smaller place, in part because of technology and in part because we find out that, yeah, we really are dependent on each other.

And yet there is this addiction to conflict. There is this addiction to have threats. There is this addiction to divide. And this is not pretty. I mean, human history, the dark side of human history, and if the 20th century is not an optic lesson, then I don't know what is.... I could go back to any of the others, in terms of written history that we know of, right? And yet here we are. And so, to me it is a sign of an empire...

The U.S. is an empire... and it is a sign of an empire that is losing it. And so, just like the Roman Empire, I mean, if you go back to the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, you know.... Those who don't learn the lessons of the past are doomed to repeat them.

DB: Well, and the beat goes on. We're going to let you join the party.

TD: The beat does go on. Yeah.

DB: But as we speak, there's a major bombing, frightening bombing in Iran today.

TD: I did not know that. Wow.

DB: After the President of the United States is in Saudi Arabia. When is the last time you heard of a major suicide bomb in Iran?

TD: Not in Iran, no.

DB: So, here we go and who knows what comes next, who know what that's going to bring in that part of the world. We thank you for all of your courage and all the suffering you did for all of us so we could know more. Thank you very much.

TD: Yeah. No. I have really become a warrior for peace. That's what I have become. Ultimately it's about who we are as human beings and who we are for each other and after all it is us, right? And in terms of U.S. culture and background, I think Pogo was right. We have met the enemy and the enemy is us. We are our own worst enemies.

It's just that, for some of us, it's critical to hold power accountable. We recognize we don't govern ourselves very well. If you put people over others, yeah, bad things happen. But bad things tend to happen. And it's that whole control, power. It's all about – psychopathy is an area of study that I increasingly have as an issue, because of this idea that people gaining pleasure from the distress of others. So, it's a disease. It really is. And some of us, at great sacrifice, weren't going to just sit idly by and watch it all happen.

I care deeply about who we are as human beings. And I've spent a lot of time in front of college students and high school students and civic auditoriums and small group settings and churches and college campuses talking about these things. These are things that matter.

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

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## US Risks Wider War by Downing Syrian Plane

Another U.S. military strike inside Syria – this time, shooting down a Syrian bomber – has escalated tensions with Russia, even opening the possibility that Russian anti-aircraft missiles will target U.S. warplanes, reports Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

The Pentagon's announcement that the U.S. military had shot down a Syrian warplane inside Syrian territory merited only inside-the-paper treatment at *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* on Monday, but it became the featured article on the Russian version of Google News citing a Moscow newspaper

reporting a warning from Russia's Federation Council that "the USA can receive a return blow in Syria."

The article in Moskovsky Komsomolets and several similar accounts in other leading Russian print media recounted the warning issued by the Deputy Chairman of the Committee on International Affairs in Russia's upper house, Vladimir Jabarov, that the shoot-down of the Syrian SU-22 bomber on Sunday by the U.S.-led coalition can lead to "a major conflict." The Senator noted that Syrian air space is protected both by a Syrian operated S-300 ground to air defense system and by Russian-operated state-of-the-art S-400 missiles.

Jabarov called for diplomats of the interested parties to meet as soon as possible to discuss the incident. And he warned, in dark tones, that the plane's destruction could lead to a return attack from the Syrian armed forces. The article also quotes the first deputy chairman of Russia's Committee on Defense and Security in the upper chamber, Frants Klintsevich, describing the shoot-down as "a provocation directed against Russia."

The Syrian government said its bomber was operating against Islamic State forces near Raqqa, though the U.S. coalition claimed Syrian forces and the plane had attacked rebels, called the Syrian Democratic Forces and operating under the guidance of U.S. Special Forces.

It perhaps should go without saying that under international law the Syrian government has the right to operate inside Syrian airspace and that the U.S. military has no legal right to have personnel inside Syria (since they lack the Syrian government's permission) let alone to attack the Syrian military or its allied forces. Another curious feature about this situation is that the U.S. mainstream media sees nothing illegal or unusual about the U.S. military operating inside another country uninvited and shooting down government aircraft.

That assumption that the U.S. military has the right to intervene in any conflict of its choosing was reflected in the decision by the Times and Post to minimize coverage of the shoot-down of the Syrian bomber and accept uncritically the Pentagon's explanation that the shoot-down was in response to Syrian government attacks on U.S.-backed forces. (The Wall Street Journal did lead its Monday's print edition with a story about the shoot-down of the Syrian plane, but also acted as if the U.S. military was within its rights in doing so.)

Given the potential for a dangerous U.S. military showdown with Russia, whose forces have been invited into Syria by the internationally recognized government, the Kremlin initially tamped down concern about the clash. Russian state television on Sunday night and into Monday paid almost no attention to the

shoot-down, apparently awaiting a decision on a suitable response to the American "provocation."

That response came on Monday when the Russian military command once again declared that the deconflicting hotline between U.S.-allied and Russian forces on air movements over Syria has been severed. That is to say the Russians reinstated the response they made following Donald Trump's Tomahawk missile attack on a Syrian air base in April. In effect, this Russian action halts all flights into the area from the U.S. aircraft carrier that launched the plane that shot down the Syrian bomber. In line with that decision, the Kremlin warned that all allied air operations near where the Russian air force is flying will be targeted and destroyed.

### **U.S. Reactions**

Only then did *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* begin to react to the seriousness of the confrontation. The former produced an analytical article entitled "Russia Warns U.S. After Downing of Syrian Warplane," published Monday at its Web site. The Post did the same under the heading "Russia threatens to treat U.S. coalition aircraft as targets over Syria."

These articles are unusual in one respect: they quote extensively from official Russian sources, including the accusation that the U.S. actions in Syria are in violation of international law. They also mention the dynamism of the Syrian armed forces in bringing the fight to the east of the country even if this means pushing against U.S.-assisted rebels.

What these newspapers do not explain is how and why the Syrian army has been energized to pursue national unification: namely it is the direct result of freeing up Syrian forces, which had been tied down in the west, through the implementation of "deconfliction" settlements that Iran, Turkey and Russia hammered out in the so-called Astana talks earlier this spring. Those settlements never received U.S. approval, though Moscow hoped they would become a platform for a broader U.S.-Russian understanding regarding possible areas of cooperation before the first meeting between Presidents Putin and Trump.

Instead, the U.S. shoot-down of the Syrian bomber, the first direct U.S. attack on a Syrian aircraft in the six-year conflict, signals a return to the Pentagon's actions undermining the accommodating policies of a U.S. president in Syria. Last September, when Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reached agreement on a partial cease-fire in Syria with the support of President Obama, a U.S. air attack killing Syrian troops in the besieged eastern outpost of Deir Ezzor scuttled the arrangement.

Now it appears that the Pentagon may be sabotaging another possibility of accommodation between Putin and Trump by escalating the U.S. military intervention in Syria at a time when the Syrian government has been consolidating its control over large swaths of Syria. The latest clash also heightens the possibility that Russian air defenses may shoot down a U.S. warplane and push tensions to even a higher level.

**Gilbert Doctorow is an independent political analyst based in Brussels. His latest book *Does Russia Have a Future?* was published in August 2015. His forthcoming book *Does the United States Have a Future?* will be published on 1 September 2017.**

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## Trump Complies with War-Hawk Wishes

President Trump is plunging ahead with expanded Mideast wars, with emerging escalations in Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere, building on the bloody policies of his predecessors, as retired Col. Ann Wright explains.

By Ann Wright

The militarization of U.S. foreign policy certainly didn't start with President Donald J. Trump; in fact, it goes back several decades. However, if Trump's first 100 days in office are any indication, he has no intention of slowing down the trend.

During a single week in April, the Trump administration fired 59 Tomahawk missiles into a Syrian airfield, and dropped the largest bomb in the U.S. arsenal on suspected ISIS tunnels in Afghanistan. This 21,600-pound incendiary percussion device that had never been used in combat – the Massive Ordnance Air Blast or MOAB, colloquially known as the “Mother of All Bombs”—was used in the Achin district of Afghanistan, where Special Forces Staff Sergeant Mark De Alencar had been killed a week earlier. (The bomb was tested only twice, at Elgin Air Base, Florida, in 2003.)

To underscore the new administration's preference for force over diplomacy, the decision to experiment with the explosive power of the mega-bomb was taken unilaterally by General John Nicholson, the commanding general of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. In praising that decision, President Trump declared that he had given “total authorization” to the U.S. military to conduct whatever missions they wanted, anywhere in the world – which presumably means without consulting the interagency national security committee.

It is also telling that President Trump chose generals for two key national security positions traditionally filled by civilians: the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Advisor. Yet three months into his administration, he has left unfilled hundreds of senior civilian governmental positions at State, Defense and elsewhere.

While President Trump has not yet enunciated a policy on the subject of political assassinations, there has so far been no indication that he plans to change the practice of relying on drone killings established by his recent predecessors.

Back in 1976, however, President Gerald Ford set a very different example when he issued his Executive Order 11095. This proclaimed that "No employee of the United States government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, political assassination."

President Ford instituted this prohibition after investigations by the Church Committee (the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, chaired by Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho) and the Pike Committee (its House counterpart, chaired by Rep. Otis G. Pike, D-New York) had revealed the extent of the Central Intelligence Agency's assassination operations against foreign leaders in the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Permitting Assassinations**

With a few exceptions, the next several presidents upheld the ban. But in 1986, President Ronald Reagan ordered an attack on Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi's home in Tripoli, in retaliation for the bombing of a nightclub in Berlin that killed a U.S. serviceman and two German citizens and injured 229. In just 12 minutes, American planes dropped 60 tons of U.S. bombs on the house, though they failed to kill Gaddafi.

Twelve years later, in 1998, President Bill Clinton ordered the firing of 80 cruise missiles on al-Qaida facilities in Afghanistan and Sudan, in retaliation for the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The Clinton administration justified the action by asserting that the proscription against assassination did not cover individuals whom the U.S. government had determined were connected to terrorism.

Days after al-Qaida carried out its Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, President George W. Bush signed an intelligence "finding" allowing the Central Intelligence Agency to engage in "lethal covert operations" to kill Osama bin Laden and destroy his terrorist network. White House and CIA lawyers argued that this order was constitutional on two grounds. First, they embraced

the Clinton administration's position that E.O. 11905 did not preclude the United States' taking action against terrorists. More sweepingly, they declared that the ban on political assassination did not apply during wartime.

The Bush administration's wholesale rejection of the ban on targeted killing or political assassinations reversed a quarter-century of bipartisan U.S. foreign policy. It also opened the door to the use of unmanned aerial vehicles to conduct targeted killings (a euphemism for assassinations).

The U.S. Air Force had been flying unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), since the 1960s, but only as unmanned surveillance platforms. Following 9/11, however, the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency weaponized "drones" (as they were quickly dubbed) to kill both leaders and foot soldiers of al-Qaida and the Taliban.

The United States set up bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan for that purpose, but after a series of drone attacks that killed civilians, including a large group gathered for a wedding, the Pakistani government ordered in 2011 that the U.S. drones and U.S. military personnel be removed from its Shamsi Air Base. However, targeted assassinations continued to be conducted in Pakistan by drones based outside the country.

### **The Obama Approach**

In 2009, President Barack Obama picked up where his predecessor had left off. As public and congressional concern increased about the use of aircraft controlled by CIA and military operators located 10,000 miles away from the people they were ordered to kill, the White House was forced to officially acknowledge the targeted killing program and to describe how persons became targets of the program.

Instead of scaling the program back, however, the Obama administration doubled down. It essentially designated all military-age males in a foreign strike zone as combatants, and therefore potential targets of what it termed "signature strikes." Even more disturbing, it declared that strikes aimed at specific, high-value terrorists, known as "personality strikes," could include American citizens.

That theoretical possibility soon became a grim reality. In April 2010, President Obama authorized the CIA to "target" Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen and a former imam at a Virginia mosque, for assassination. Less than a decade before, the Office of the Secretary of the Army had invited the imam to participate in an interfaith service following 9/11. But al-Awlaki later became an outspoken critic of the "war on terror," moved to his father's homeland of

Yemen, and helped al-Qaida recruit members.

On Sept. 30, 2011, a drone strike killed al-Awlaki and another American, Samir Khan – who was traveling with him in Yemen. U.S. drones killed al-Awlaki's 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, an American citizen, 10 days later in an attack on a group of young men around a campfire. The Obama administration never made clear whether the 16-year-old son was targeted individually because he was al-Awlaki's son or if he was the victim of a "signature" strike, fitting the description of a young military-age male. However, during a White House press conference, a reporter asked Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs how he could defend the killings, and especially the death of a U.S.-citizen minor who was "targeted without due process, without trial."

Gibbs's response did nothing to help the U.S. image in the Muslim world: "I would suggest that you should have had a far more responsible father if they are truly concerned about the well-being of their children. I don't think becoming an al-Qaida jihadist terrorist is the best way to go about doing your business."

On Jan. 29, 2017, al-Awlaki's 8-year-old daughter, Nawar al-Awlaki, was killed in a U.S. commando attack in Yemen ordered by Obama's successor, Donald Trump.

### **Weddings and Funerals**

Meanwhile, the media continued to report incidents of civilians being killed in drone strikes across the region, which frequently target wedding parties and funerals. Many inhabitants of the region along the Afghan-Pakistan border could hear the buzz of drones circling their area around the clock, causing psychological trauma for all those who live in the area, especially children.

The Obama administration was strongly criticized for the tactic of "double-tap" – hitting a target home or vehicle with a Hellfire missile, and then firing a second missile into the group that came to the aid of those who had been wounded in the first attack. Many times, those who ran to help rescue persons trapped inside collapsed buildings or flaming cars were local citizens, not militants.

The rationale traditionally offered for using drones is that they eliminate the need for "boots on the ground" – whether members of the armed forces or CIA paramilitary personnel – in dangerous environments, thereby preventing loss of U.S. lives. U.S. officials also claim that the intelligence UAVs gather through lengthy surveillance makes their strikes more precise, reducing the number of civilian casualties. (Left unsaid, but almost certainly another powerful motivator, is the fact that the use of drones means that no suspected militants would be taken alive, thus avoiding the political and other complications of detention.)

Even if these claims are true, however, they do not address the impact of the tactic on U.S. foreign policy. Of broadest concern is the fact that drones allow presidents to punt on questions of war and peace by choosing an option that appears to offer a middle course, but actually has a variety of long-term consequences for U.S. policy, as well as for the communities on the receiving end.

By taking the risk of loss of U.S. personnel out of the picture, Washington policymakers may be tempted to use force to resolve a security dilemma rather than negotiating with the parties involved. Moreover, by their very nature, UAVs may be more likely to provoke retaliation against America than conventional weapons systems. To many in the Middle East and South Asia, drones represent a weakness of the U.S. government and its military, not a strength. Shouldn't brave warriors fight on the ground, they ask, instead of hiding behind a faceless drone in the sky, operated by a young person in a chair many thousands of miles away?

### **Insider Attacks**

Since 2007, at least 150 NATO personnel have been the victims of "insider attacks" by members of the Afghan military and national police forces being trained by the coalition. Many of the Afghans who commit such "green on blue" killings of American personnel, both uniformed and civilian, are from the tribal regions on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan where U.S. drone strikes have focused. They take revenge for the deaths of their families and friends by killing their U.S. military trainers.

Anger against drones has surfaced in the United States as well. On May 1, 2010, Pakistani-American Faisal Shahzad attempted to set off a car bomb in Times Square. In his guilty plea, Shahzad justified targeting civilians by telling the judge, "When the drone hits in Afghanistan and Iraq, they don't see children, they don't see anybody. They kill women, children; they kill everybody. They're killing all Muslims."

As of 2012 the U.S. Air Force was recruiting more drone pilots than pilots for traditional aircraft – between 2012 and 2014, they planned to add 2,500 pilots and support people to the drone program. That is nearly twice the number of diplomats the State Department hires in a two-year period.

Congressional and media concern over the program led to the Obama administration's acknowledgment of the regular Tuesday meetings led by the President to identify targets for the assassination list. In the international media, "Terror Tuesdays" became an expression of U.S. foreign policy.

To many around the world, U.S. foreign policy has been dominated for the past 16 years by military actions in the Middle East and South Asia, and large land and sea military exercises in Northeast Asia. On the world stage, American efforts in the areas of economics, trade, cultural issues and human rights appear to have taken a back seat to the waging of continuous wars.

Continuing the use of drone warfare to carry out assassinations will only exacerbate foreign distrust of American intentions and trustworthiness. It thereby plays into the hands of the very opponents we are trying to defeat.

During his campaign, Donald Trump pledged he would always put "America First," and said he wanted to get out of the business of regime change. It is not too late for him to keep that promise by learning from his predecessors' mistakes and reversing the continued militarization of U.S. foreign policy.

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**<http://www.afsa.org/killer-drones-and-militarization-us-foreign-policy> ]**

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