

America's Worldwide Impunity

Exclusive: The mainstream U.S. media is treating the U.S.-led airstrike that killed scores of Syrian troops as an unfortunate boo-boo, ignoring that the U.S. and its allies have no legal right to operate in Syria at all, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

After several years of arming and supporting Syrian rebel groups that often collaborated with Al Qaeda's Nusra terror affiliate, the United States launched an illegal invasion of Syria two years ago with airstrikes supposedly aimed at Al Qaeda's Islamic State spin-off, but on Saturday that air war killed scores of Syrian soldiers and aided an Islamic State victory.

Yet, the major American news outlets treat this extraordinary set of circumstances as barely newsworthy, operating with an imperial hubris that holds any U.S. invasion or subversion of another country as simply, ho-hum, the way things are supposed to work.

On Monday, The Washington Post dismissed the devastating airstrike at Deir al-Zour killing at least 62 Syrian soldiers as one of several "mishaps" that had occurred over the past week and jeopardized a limited ceasefire, arranged between Russia and the Obama administration.

But the fact that the U.S. and several allies have been routinely violating Syrian sovereign airspace to carry out attacks was not even an issue, nor is it a scandal that the U.S. military and CIA have been arming and training Syrian rebels. In the world of Official Washington, the United States has the right to intervene anywhere, anytime, for whatever reason it chooses.

President Barack Obama even has publicly talked about authorizing military strikes in seven different countries, including Syria, and yet he is deemed "weak" for not invading more countries, at least more decisively.

Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton has vowed to engage in a larger invasion of Syria, albeit wrapping the aggression in pretty words like "safe zone" and "no-fly zone," but it would mean bombing and killing more Syrian soldiers.

As Secretary of State, Clinton used similar language to justify invading Libya and implementing a "regime change" that killed the nation's leader, Muammar Gaddafi, and unleashed five years of violent political chaos.

If you were living in a truly democratic country with a truly professional news

media, you would think that this evolution of the United States into a rogue superpower violating pretty much every international law and treaty of the post-World War II era would be a regular topic of debate and criticism.

Those crimes include horrendous acts against people, such as torture and other violations of the Geneva Conventions, as well as acts of aggression, which the Nuremberg Tribunals deemed “the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.”

Justifying ‘Regime Change’

Yet, instead of insisting on accountability for American leaders who have committed these crimes, the mainstream U.S. news media spreads pro-war propaganda against any nation or leader that refuses to bend to America’s imperial demands. In other words, the U.S. news media creates the rationalizations and arranges the public acquiescence for U.S. invasions and subversions of other countries.

In particular, The New York Times now reeks of propaganda, especially aimed at two of the current targets, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin. With all pretenses of professionalism cast aside, the Times has descended into the status of a crude propaganda organ.

On Sunday, the Times described Assad’s visit to a town recently regained from the rebels [this way](#): “Assad Smiles as Syria Burns, His Grip and Impunity Secure.” That was the headline. The article began:

“On the day after his 51st birthday, Bashar al-Assad, the president of Syria, took a victory lap through the dusty streets of a destroyed and empty rebel town that his forces had starved into submission.

“Smiling, with his shirt open at the collar, he led officials in dark suits past deserted shops and bombed-out buildings before telling a reporter that – despite a cease-fire announced by the United States and Russia – he was committed ‘to taking back all areas from the terrorists.’ When he says terrorists, he means all who oppose him.”

The story by Ben Hubbard continues in that vein, although oddly the accompanying photograph doesn’t show Assad smiling but rather assessing the scene with a rather grim visage.

But let’s unpack the propaganda elements of this front-page story, which is clearly intended to paint Assad as a sadistic monster, rather than a leader fighting a foreign-funded-and-armed rebel movement that includes radical

jihadists, including powerful groups linked to Al Qaeda and others forces operating under the banner of the brutal Islamic State.

The reader is supposed to recoil at Assad who “smiles as Syria burns” and who is rejoicing over his “impunity.” Then, there’s the apparent suggestion that his trip to Daraya was part of his birthday celebration so he could take “a victory lap” while “smiling, with his shirt open at the collar,” although why his collar is relevant is hard to understand. Next, there is the argumentative claim that when Assad refers to “terrorists” that “he means all who oppose him.”

As much as the U.S. news media likes to pride itself on its “objectivity,” it is hard to see how this article meets any such standard, especially when the Times takes a far different posture when explaining, excusing or ignoring U.S. forces slaughtering countless civilians in multiple countries for decades and at a rapid clip over the past 15 years. If anyone operates with “impunity,” it has been the leadership of the U.S. government.

Dubious Charge

On Sunday, the Times also asserted as flat fact the dubious charge against Assad that he has “hit civilians with gas attacks” when the most notorious case – the sarin attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013 – appears now to have been carried out by rebels trying to trick the United States into intervening more directly on their side.

A recent United Nations report blaming Syrian forces for two later attacks involving chlorine was based on slim evidence and produced under great political pressure to reach that conclusion – while ignoring the absence of any logical reason for the Syrian forces to have used such an ineffective weapon and brushing aside testimony about rebels staging other gas attacks.

More often than not, U.N. officials bend to the will of the American superpower, failing to challenge any of the U.S.-sponsored invasions over recent decades, including something as blatantly illegal as the Iraq War. After all, for an aspiring U.N. bureaucrat, it’s clear which side his career bread is buttered.

We find ourselves in a world in which propaganda has come to dominate the foreign policy debates and – despite the belated admissions of lies used to justify the invasions of Iraq and Libya – the U.S. media insists on labeling anyone who questions the latest round of propaganda as a “fill-in-the-blank apologist.”

So, Americans who want to maintain their mainstream status shy away from contesting what the U.S. government and its complicit media assert, despite their proven track record of deceit. This is not just a case of being fooled

once; it is being fooled over and over with a seemingly endless willingness to accept dubious assertion after dubious assertion.

In the same Sunday edition which carried the creepy portrayal about Assad, the Times' Neil MacFarquhar pre-disparaged Russia's parliamentary elections because the Russian people were showing little support for the Times' beloved "liberals," the political descendants of the Russians who collaborated with the U.S.-driven "shock therapy" of the 1990s, a policy that impoverished a vast number of Russians and drastically reduced life expectancy.

Why those Russian "liberals" have such limited support from the populace is a dark mystery to the mainstream U.S. news media, which also can't figure out why Putin is popular for significantly reversing the "shock therapy" policies and restoring Russian life expectancy to its previous levels. No, it can't be that Putin delivered for the Russian people; the only answer must be Putin's "totalitarianism."

The New York Times and Washington Post have been particularly outraged over Russia's crackdown on "grassroots" organizations that are funded by the U.S. government or by billionaire financial speculator George Soros, who has publicly urged the overthrow of Putin. So has Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which funnels U.S. government cash to political and media operations abroad.

The Post has decried a Russian legal requirement that political entities taking money from foreign sources must register as "foreign agents" and complains that such a designation discredits these organizations. What the Post doesn't tell its readers is that the Russian law is modeled after the American "Foreign Agent Registration Act," which likewise requires people trying to influence policy in favor of a foreign sponsor to register with the Justice Department.

Nor do the Times and Post acknowledge the long history of the U.S. government funding foreign groups, either overtly or covertly, to destabilize targeted regimes. These U.S.-financed groups often do act as "fifth columnists" spreading propaganda designed to undermine the credibility of the leaders, whether that's Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953 or Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014.

Imperfect Leaders

That's not to say that these targeted leaders were or are perfect. They are often far from it. But the essence of propaganda is to apply selective outrage and exaggeration to the leader that is marked for removal. Similar treatment does not apply to U.S.-favored leaders.

The pattern of the Times and Post is also to engage in ridicule when someone in a targeted country actually perceives what is going on. The correct perception is then dismissed as some sort of paranoid conspiracy theory.

Take, for example, the Times' MacFarquhar describing a pamphlet and speeches from Nikolai Merkushkin, the governor of Russian region of Samara, that MacFarquhar says "cast the blame for Russia's economic woes not on economic mismanagement or Western sanctions after the annexation of Crimea but on a plot by President Obama and the C.I.A. to undermine Russia."

The Times article continues: "Opposition candidates are a fifth column on the payroll of the State Department and part of the scheme, the pamphlet said, along with the collapse in oil prices and the emergence of the Islamic State. Mr. Putin is on the case, not least by rebuilding the military, the pamphlet said, noting that 'our country forces others to take it seriously and this is something that American politicians don't like very much.'"

Yet, despite the Times' mocking tone, the pamphlet's perceptions are largely accurate. There can be little doubt that the U.S. government through funding of anti-Putin groups inside Russia and organizing punishing sanctions against Russia, is trying to make the Russian economy scream, destabilize the Russian government and encourage a "regime change" in Moscow.

Further, President Obama has personally bristled at Russia's attempts to reassert itself as an important world player, demeaning the former Cold War superpower as only a "regional power." The U.S. government has even tread on that "regional" status by helping to orchestrate the 2014 putsch that overthrew Ukraine's elected President Yanukovich on Russia's border.

After quickly calling the coup regime "legitimate," the U.S. government supported attempts to crush resistance in the south and east which were Yanukovich's political strongholds. Crimea's overwhelming decision to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia was deemed by The New York Times a Russian "invasion" although the Russian troops that helped protect Crimea's referendum were already inside Crimea as part of the Sevastopol basing agreement.

The U.S.-backed Kiev regime's attempt to annihilate resistance from ethnic Russians in the east – through what was called an "Anti-Terrorism Operation" that has slaughtered thousands of eastern Ukrainians – also had American backing. Russian assistance to these rebels is described in the mainstream U.S. media as Russian "aggression."

Oddly, U.S. news outlets find nothing objectionable about the U.S. government launching military strikes in countries halfway around the world, including the

recent massacre of scores of Syrian soldiers, but are outraged that Russia provided military help to ethnic Russians being faced with annihilation on Russia's border.

Because of the Ukraine crisis, Hillary Clinton likened Vladimir Putin to Adolf Hitler.

Seeing No Coup

For its part, The New York Times concluded that there had been no coup in Ukraine – by ignoring the evidence that there was one, including an intercepted pre-coup telephone call between U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt discussing who should be made the new leaders of Ukraine.

The evidence of a coup was so clear that George Friedman, founder of the global intelligence firm Stratfor, said in an interview that the overthrow of Yanukovich “really was the most blatant coup in history.” But the Times put protecting the legitimacy of the post-coup regime ahead of its journalistic responsibilities to its readers, as it has done repeatedly regarding Ukraine.

Another stunning case of double standards has been the mainstream U.S. media's apoplexy about alleged Russian hacking into emails of prominent Americans and then making them public. These blame-Russia articles have failed to present any solid evidence that the Russians were responsible and also fail to note that the United States leads the world in using electronic means to vacuum up personal secrets about foreign leaders as well as average citizens.

In a number of cases, these secrets appear to have been used to blackmail foreign leaders to get them to comply with U.S. demands, such as the case in 2002-03 of the George W. Bush administration spying on diplomats on the U.N. Security Council to coerce their votes on authorizing the U.S. invasion of Iraq, a ploy that failed.

U.S. intelligence also tapped the cell phone of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose cooperation on Ukraine and other issues of the New Cold War is important to Washington. And then there's the massive collection of data about virtually everybody on the planet, including U.S. citizens, over the past 15 years during the “war on terror.”

Earlier this year, the mainstream U.S. news media congratulated itself over its use of hacked private business data from a Panama-based law firm, material that was said to implicate Putin in some shady business dealings even though his name never showed up in the documents. No one in the mainstream media protested that leak or questioned who did the hacking.

Such mainstream media bias is pervasive. In the case of Sunday's Russian elections, the Times seems determined to maintain the fiction that the Russian people don't really support Putin, despite consistent opinion polls showing him with some 80 percent approval.

In the Times' version of reality, Putin's popularity must be some kind of trick, a case of totalitarian repression of the Russian people, which would be fixed if only the U.S.-backed "liberals" were allowed to keep getting money from NED and Soros without having to divulge where the funds were coming from.

The fact that Russians, like Americans, will rally around their national leader when they perceive the country to be under assault – think, George W. Bush after the 9/11 attacks – is another reality that the Times can't tolerate. No, the explanation must be mind control.

The troubling reality is that the Times, Post and other leading American news outlets have glibly applied one set of standards on "enemies" and another on the U.S. government. The Times may charge that Bashar al-Assad has "impunity" for his abuses, but what about the multitude of U.S. leaders – and, yes, journalists – who have their hands covered in the blood of Iraqis, Libyans, Afghans, Yemenis, Syrians, Somalis and other nationalities. Where is their accountability?

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](#)).

How US Hardliners Help Iran's Hardliners

U.S. neocons keep pounding the propaganda drum about Iran in line with Israel's regional desires but not helpful to American interests or even to the cause of moderating Iran's behavior, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The unrelenting urge among American politicians to keep punishing Iran – or more precisely, to be seen supporting steps with that objective – continues to work against sensible statecraft and U.S. interests in multiple respects. One of those respects concerns how measures taken by the United States affect political competition within Iran.

Here's the current background to questions of U.S. policy toward Iran. The most important development in recent years regarding such policy – the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the formal name for the agreement that limits Iran's nuclear activity – has been in effect for over a year. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, which does the detailed monitoring of the Iranian program, Iran is fully in compliance with its obligations under the agreement.

Those in the United States who have opposed any agreement with Iran all along continue to seek any possible basis for accusing Iran of violations. One of the most recent such accusations concerned some issues of implementation that opponents described as "secret exceptions" granted to Iran. They were in fact not that but rather were typical of the detailed questions that inevitably arise in implementation of any agreement this extensive.

A Joint Commission was created under the agreement precisely to resolve such questions, and it has successfully been doing exactly that. The principal real questions of adherence to the agreement involve whether the United States and the West have been fully living up to their obligations regarding sanctions relief and refraining from further steps to damage the Iranian economy.

Despite the record of Iranian compliance, the months since conclusion of the JCPOA have seen a stream of anti-Iran bills introduced in Congress. Examination of most of these bills yields little idea of how if they were to come into effect they would advance any U.S. interests pertinent to Iran, and little evidence of any thought that in this respect went into the writing of the bills. The bills instead seem to be vehicles for members to demonstrate, through their sponsorship or support of such legislation, their anti-Iran credentials.

Typical of these proposals is a recent amendment introduced by Rep. Ron DeSantis, R-Florida, that would require any issuer of securities, as it registers with the Securities and Exchange Commission, to declare in its registration statement whether it does business in Iran or with any entity organized under the laws of Iran. Although this may sound like an innocent requirement for information, existing law already requires such a disclosure by issuers of securities with regard to any business done with the government of Iran, the Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Iranian central bank, the entire Iranian petroleum industry, and certain other Iranian individuals and entities subject to sanctions.

So the DeSantis amendment would only serve to impose the reporting requirement on those dealing with portions of the Iranian private sector that not only have no connection with the Iranian regime but also have given no reason to be sanctioned in the long history of U.S. sanctions legislation directed against

Iran. This would discourage commerce with the very sectors in Iran that are most in favor of peaceful engagement with the rest of the world.

The legislation would be counterproductive with regard to any political and economic evolution in Iran in a direction favorable to U.S. interests. (The legislation also probably would violate the U.S. obligation under the JCPOA not to take any new steps to prevent Iran from realizing the economic benefits of sanctions relief.)

Another recent example of a backward approach to affecting political competition within Iran is an interview with Dennis Ross of the Washington Institute for New East Policy. Ross, operating squarely within the school of thought that sees nothing good coming out of any business with Tehran and who sees Iran only as an object for confrontation and punishment, focuses on Iran's conduct within the Middle East.

As usual with that topic and that school of thought, there are many general references to Iranian "aggression" without considering exactly what Iran is or is not doing in the region and why, say, Iranian assistance to an incumbent regime in Syria is any more "aggressive" than what other powers have been doing to stoke a rebellion and to try to overthrow the regime.

And Ross's attempt to square his position that Iran "cannot be a partner in the struggle against ISIS" with the fact that in Iraq, Iran is, just like the United States, not only supporting the incumbent regime but also actively opposing ISIS, seems to come down to an assertion that the Iranians are following narrow (undescribed) policies in Iraq that will leave a lot of angry Sunnis on their Western doorstep but evidently are too stupid to realize that is what they are doing.

For the present purpose note what Ross says about the connection between U.S. actions and political contests within the Iranian regime. He says we should try to decrease the influence of General Soleimani and the Revolutionary Guard, who favor a more "confrontational approach," relative to the influence of president Rouhani, who favors more of a "normalizing approach." So far so good.

But how is the United States supposed to affect that Iranian political balance? Ross says we should do it by being confrontational ourselves – by "applying pressure" that would "demonstrate the costs to Iran of Soleimani's actions." When asked what this means in practical terms, Ross mentions military contingency planning with Israel and the Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Stop Making No Sense!

Let's see if we have this straight. We supposedly are all agreed that we would like to see less influence in Tehran for hardliners such as those centered in the Revolutionary Guard. Those hardliners are the ones who, in debate within Iran, argue that doing peaceful business with the United States (as with the JCPOA) does not bring any benefits to Iran, that the United States is determined to use its military might and other power to harm Iran, that Washington will always be acting in cahoots with Iran's regional rivals in Israel and the Gulf Arab states, and that Iran thus has to stand firm and tough against such predatory U.S. behavior in order to protect Iranian interests.

So acting in a way that *confirms* the hardliners' narrative is supposed to *reduce* their influence in Tehran? The groundlessness of such an argument can be seen with some role reversal. Such confrontation from a foreign adversary tends to strengthen, rather than to weaken, hawkish and hardline sentiment in U.S. politics. It works pretty much the same way in Iranian politics.

The sort of illogicality voiced by Ross has some general roots in American exceptionalism and the notion that the United States should be able to push other states around but that other states don't push the United States around. There is more to it than that, however, where Iran is involved, as suggested by comparing the Iranian case with other cases that offer some parallels. One worth looking at is Burma (a.k.a. Myanmar). President Obama announced this week that the United States is ready to lift economic sanctions on Burma, in light of political reforms there.

This decision is not an obvious call. The Burmese military, which maintained a harsh and closed dictatorship for many years, retains much political power. The former opposition leader and now de facto head of the civilian government, Aung San Suu Kyi, has made many concessions to the military and has become in important respects a partner of the generals rather than a replacement of them. The treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, most conspicuously the Muslim Rohingya community, is still bad. Human rights organizations believe the sanctions are being lifted too soon.

The U.S. administration decided, however, that enough change has taken place in Burma to warrant change in U.S. policy toward Burma. At least as important, the administration determined that further economic and political change in a favorable direction in Burma would be more likely by opening up the country to normal commerce and relations than it would by keeping it isolated.

President Obama's Republican opponents in Congress have, on this issue, taken a constructive and balanced approach. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who has had a strong interest in Burma, made remarks on the Senate floor that appropriately noted both the progress to date and the significant problems and

challenges that remain.

That's a much different approach than McConnell and his colleagues take on Iran, and it is a difference in the approach itself and not just in the two countries involved. If they applied to Burma the same perspective they apply to Iran, what we would be hearing is that moderates in Burma don't matter, that it is nefarious hardliners who still run the show, that gross human rights violations continue, that any relief from sanctions would mean the military-dominated regime would have more resources to do bad things, and that Obama is making a big mistake by lifting sanctions.

Two explanations chiefly account for the difference. One is the objective of denying Mr. Obama any significant foreign policy achievement, consistent with Sen. McConnell's earlier declaration that the number one objective of his caucus was to deny the president a second term. The opening to Iran and the JCPOA constitute such a significant achievement; nothing the administration is doing on Burma is of comparable importance.

The other explanation is that continued isolation and punishment of Iran is part of a larger objective of the administration's opponents of taking sides in the Middle East, and in particular to take whatever side the Israeli government is on. Ross's mention of military contingency planning with Israel directed against Iran represents not so much a way to scare Iran about costs of General Soleimani's activities but instead the side-taking that underlies the impulse to keep Iran perpetually isolated and punished in the first place.

And the counterproductive effect of confirming the Iranian hardliners' narrative is not really counterproductive if the objective is to maintain Iran as a *bête noire* forever; if you want a *bête noire*, a regime in which hardliners dominate is the best kind of *bête noire* to have.

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Simple Ignorance vs. Politically Slanted Ignorance

Libertarian presidential nominee Gary Johnson flubbed a question about the war-torn Syrian city of Aleppo but a more pervasive form of ignorance comes in the

form of politically slanted “knowledge,” writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

The vast majority of people “live locally.” Wherever they are residing, that is the arena of their life, and it is that environment that they know best. Even up-and-coming American political leaders are subject to this rule. This became embarrassingly obvious when, on Sept. 8, Gary Johnson made his now famous faux pas.

Gary Johnson, who once was governor of New Mexico and therefore knows a lot about that state and its strengths and weaknesses, appeared on MSNBC’s weirdly named, but widely watched, a.m. program “*Morning Joe*” (the “*Joe*” referring, I assume, to both host Joe Scarborough and the local U.S. term for coffee).

The principal reason Mr. Johnson was on the show was that he is running for president of the United States on the Libertarian Party ticket. And, of course, the president of the U.S. is the world’s most powerful leader and his or her awareness level is expected to reflect that.

Therefore, those running for president are assumed to know everything about what is going on in the world as well as in their own country. This is of course impossible, though there is always a short list of issues that are center-stage.

So, what happens is that leaders have “briefing books” prepared on these priority issues. But again, the priorities are judgment calls and can be different for different leaders. Unfortunately for Johnson, foreign policy issues were low on the priority list for the Libertarians – who are more or less isolationist.

That is why, when Gary Johnson was asked by another guest on that “*Morning Joe*” show, what he would do, if he were president, about the crisis in Aleppo, he answered “And what is Aleppo?” It was a real gaffe, and Johnson was almost immediately taken to task by the “pundits” of social media for being a dummy.

One might ask why would anyone expect an ex-governor of New Mexico to know anything about a Syrian city mostly wrecked by civil war? Well, again, because he is running for president. And Aleppo should, many assume, be on his short list. Be that as it may, it was not on Johnson’s, whose ideological outlook puts Syria in someone else’s local venue. His is New Mexico and maybe, eventually, the rest of the U.S.

Power of the Briefing Book

Do you think that this is unusual? Unfortunately it is not. What is unusual is

that Johnson got caught in his ignorance. Fear of just such exposure is one of the reasons leaders now give so few press conferences. Yet history has also shown us that recent presidents have been unafraid to make foreign policy decisions which impact millions, often fatally, without adequate knowledge.

As we will see, these decisions almost always reflect their own conditioned ignorance but are made in a way that allows them to be obscured and rationalized after the fact. It just so happens that such decisions helped lead to the Syrian civil war and the destruction of Aleppo.

In the time since his gaffe on "*Morning Joe*," Johnson has had created the appropriate briefing book and is now speaking in a seemingly authoritative way about Aleppo and the Syrian civil war. For him, the transformation has worked like magic. The gaffe itself increased the level of attention he has received from the official mass media, and given his new level of superficial knowledge, there are even calls for him to be included in the upcoming presidential debates. Go figure!

Johnson's situation points to the power of the briefing book, so it is important to ask where these analyses come from.

They are put together by the leader's staff as well as alleged "experts." For instance, in the case of the president, that would be department heads. When it comes to foreign policy, that would include the Secretary of State, the National Security Adviser, the Director of National Intelligence, the heads of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency and other "intelligence agencies."

Of course these folks are also political appointees who may know next to nothing about particular topics. So they have their own versions of briefing books prepared by people down the line who may actually know something about what is going on.

In fact, as this process goes on, you do usually reach a level of staff who are real experts in, say, both the history of and the state of the crisis in Syria. They speak and read the local language, have in-country intelligence sources and so can produce a fairly accurate, unbiased assessment of the situation. They make their analysis and pass it up the ladder.

Here comes the problem. At some level of this process the relatively accurate analysis comes to people, usually those department chiefs or their immediate assistants, who are working in and responding to a preexisting political and ideological environment. Consciously or unconsciously, they begin to censor the analysis of the experts so as to reconcile it with the prevailing groupthink of

the leadership.

The ignorance of the leadership, superficially hidden by what turns out to be censored analyses, is by no means unique to U.S. politicians. Vladimir Putin of Russia, Ali Khamenei of Iran, Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, King Salman of Saudi Arabia, Xi Jinping of China – and the list can go on and on – all see the world as through glasses darkened by cultural, ideological, political and historical preconceptions.

And they all have their experts who do their best to give the boss a more or less accurate picture of the world. And, also, they all have their own versions of department heads who censor the picture to support the present preconceived worldview.

I offer this account of policy-making to the reader not as an excuse for the near-sightedness of almost all of the world's politicians, but as an explanation, the back story so to speak, out of which so many bad policies come.

The Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw once commented that “false knowledge is more dangerous than ignorance.” Actually, the two are so tied to each other that most of us can't recognize false knowledge when we are confronted with it. There are too many panes of dark glass in the way.

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“We Are Adopting Principles of Fascism”

Retired Army JAG Major Todd Pierce explains how his perspective on U.S. foreign policy and politics has changed as he watched the nation's slide into “perpetual war,” in Part Two of an [interview](#) with Philip Weiss of Mondoweiss.

[\(Click here for Part One\)](#)

Philip Weiss: However humble your ambition, you've traveled widely, been a friend of a lot of interesting people and at 65 you're going to the New School, and you visit your son in Paris, where he's studying philosophy after he left the priesthood. A very full life. But you're full of dark warning. So why can't I say there are areas of great freedom in your life, to be celebrated. And

darkness will always be there?

Todd Pierce: I'm trying to preserve the freedom I've had. I see a genuine threat to it. And I see it from people whom I know. The people in this Veteran intelligence group I'm in [Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity] includes the four NSA whistleblowers, Kirk Wiebe, Bill Binney, Ed Loomis, and Thomas Drake. Binney has got to be one of the smartest people in the world, I don't think that's an exaggeration. He was one of the smartest people at the NSA.

PW: You've met him?

TP: Yes. And he agrees with me fully. Because he's seen the NSA. We're a more sophisticated form of what I think has to be called fascism. The term fascism was applied to the way the communists and Stalin got on as well. You bring the term fascist to what it really means, and that ultimately is, ultra-militarism and authoritarianism combined with an expansionist foreign policy. And that's us—what you can see us becoming.

PW: What do you mean?

TP: We're selective. Bill Binney and these guys were all arrested at gunpoint by the FBI. They were able for a number of ways—including Bill Binney being quite smart and turning the tables and showing that the government was making things up— they were able to get out of it. The other person is Diane Roark, who was in charge of oversight of the NSA for the congressional intelligence staff. They've got the capabilities to spy on everybody and collect every bit of data that we share, and they're doing it, and yeah they haven't had to— again going back to Posner and Vermeule— they don't need to do those things yet.

PW: Like what?

TP: Well, let's say we do ramp up a war with Russia and we do get a more active antiwar movement. Say a Donald Trump who's already let everybody know what he thinks of the constitution, or Hillary Clinton.... And Obama has said he can kill American citizens. The military goes to them and says, "Hey, these dissenters are going to cause us to lose a war, like the Vietnam War. Let's put them in military detention, let's impose censorship." Everything's in place right now.

PW: How many Americans would accept that?

TP: A poll Chas Freeman showed me says that 55 percent of Republicans already say they could accept a military junta running things today in the United States. Almost that they desire one. There's a breakdown. Do you think we need one now or do you think we should have one if there's a constitutional

violation? I think it's about 29 percent of Democrats said, "Yeah, time for a military junta now," 43 percent said, "Yeah, if there's a constitutional violation," and Republicans even higher. In any case, a high number of Americans believe we should have a military junta, which means martial law.

PW: Idiots express these views all the time.

TP: Yes, but during World War II, what did it lead to? It led to the removal of 120,000 Japanese Americans from the west coast into what was called at the time, concentration camps. It wasn't a benign thing. Our myth is, well these people gathered willingly and it was... No, they were told, get here for transportation to the— concentration camp was the word the government was using at the time, till it was put in disrepute. And they were put under armed guard, and there were cases of people who, just by being near the boundary and the fence, got shot by trigger happy guards. Even though most people acceded to it, the Japanese Americans, so there wasn't heavy force, military force was always there.

PW: Binney has a reason to say fascist, being at the point of the lance. He was atypical. Lefties pointed at certain events in the '80s and said fascism. You remember them saying that?

TP: Yes, absolutely. You could point to those things, and you could say it was proto-fascism. There's authoritarianism; what Nixon was doing and later Reagan were all elements of it. But I think it took an event like 9/11 to bring it to greater fruition. So the seed of it was there then and it could easily have evolved into things we have now, because we know of things that Nixon was saying. But it didn't get to the point we're at today. Reagan never said— his Department of Justice didn't go into court and say, "Yeah I can kill an American citizen," in the case of the Sandinistas. But they did do so in the Obama administration, and I was in the court when they did. Because I was there the day Anwar al-Awlaki's father brought a case to get injunctive relief to not kill his son.

I was just an observer, we heard the case was going to be heard. And there the DOJ was saying, the president as commander in chief has to have the power to take any means necessary. And if that means killing an American citizen, he has that within his power. What was it a couple of months later [September 2011] al-Awlaki's son was killed. And for good measure they killed his grandson a few days later.

His grandson was not collateral damage; he was killed separately, a few days or a week later. They said later that Awlaki was an operational leader, which again means nothing. But then what was his son? He wasn't collateral damage, there was

no reason to believe he was an operational leader, still they kill him. Was that because they saw him as a symbol? Just like you have preventive detention, you have preventive assassination?

PW: At Nuremberg they hanged propagandists.

TP: [Julius] Streicher, yes. But he went beyond propaganda, too. I forget the details, but I have read his case. But you can make the argument that he went beyond propaganda. I think it included incitement to aggressive war and a few other things like that. Of course we wage aggressive war, but we present it as we have good intentions, unlike the Germans. Raymond Aron talks about that: How good intentions are used to justify all sorts of war crimes.

PW: There was someone in the Obama administration who wrote, it's perpetual war, get used to it.

TP: Rosa Brooks. She wrote that after she had actually left the Pentagon. Rosa Brooks was good on human rights.

PW: Could that article be read as a rationalization of endless war?

TP: It was saying, "OK, let's get down to work now to put in place some of the human rights protections that we need." But, again, the nature of the article, reading it, was justifying perpetual war. At least my cynical reading of it was. And again let's put in statute some things to protect the human rights. Number one, that doesn't work when you get into a mindset that we're at war. You saw that with the Japanese American removal. You always get around the law because there's always a claim of military necessity. So again to accept the idea that we're in perpetual war, is to help continue the perpetual war.

There's a wonderful quote by [E. Barrett] Prettyman, a federal court judge, in fact the building is named after him. He said it in regard to a fourth amendment case, actually a case of the JDL [Jewish Defense League]- I don't remember the facts, they were doing something with Russians and they got charged. "We are dealing with doctrines and not with the presumable taste and sense of individual officials. Maybe none of these examples would ever occur. But the question before us is not whether they would happen but whether they legally could."

PW: So that's the Section 1021 issue [of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)]?

TP: Exactly. I've said this a number of times to colleagues. I am not saying that these things will all happen. I don't know what external circumstances will drive people. But they legally could happen. And as the DOJ said, legal detention could happen to a guy just because of expressive activities. So that's

the quote I like to use in justifying my very dark view.

PW: So you agree, yours is a dark view?

TP: I think it's a dark view because of what legally could happen. But I'm not saying it's going to, I'm saying it could happen. I like to point out, this right might be casually given away as necessity for a war, then you might get a Donald Trump who's president, and he has already made clear his intention to violate the Constitution, and gets cheered for it. A year ago there was a guy who was in the process of getting hired by West Point, as a constitutional law teacher—and he had written an article, though... [that] argued that we are going to have to start putting law professors into military detention, and take other legal measures because they are subverting our will to fight. That struck home. These fascistic strains exist. The fact that guys like Posner and Vermeule teaching at Harvard and University of Chicago openly say, "We have to go back and study Carl Schmitt." That doesn't make us a fascist society, but—

PW: Could studying Schmitt be innocent?

TP: Carl Schmitt was actively engaged in justifying the Nazis. He wasn't a Nazi to begin with, he would be considered a Conservative revolutionary, but like so much of that wing of radical rightwing German politics, went into the Nazis. But Schmitt was writing actively, he was assisting the Nazis in getting into power, he spoke of the need for a dictatorship in 1922. His theory of the friend/enemy distinction is the fundamental principle of fascism— that a nation must have an enemy. That's essentially the fascist view.

PW: Tell me about the Vietnam precedent.

TP: Well, Sam Adams was a CIA analyst in Vietnam who was disagreeing with Westmoreland's numbers on how many Vietcong there were in 1967. He argued that you had to count more of them than Westmoreland was counting. Westmoreland was trying to make it seem as if we were winning. And Adams was trying to be objective and present the facts as they were to the decision makers. Sam Adams took it up the chain of command in the CIA, and eventually the CIA met with the Department of Defense to try and come up with a consensus on the numbers. But the military, the Department of Defense had more influence and basically won the argument. So the numbers were lower than they presented to the public and the president. The Tet offensive came about a couple months later in 1968. That false number cost the United States a lot of lives, cost the Vietnamese a lot of lives. That could have been prevented if they had been using intelligence.

PW: There was a lawsuit over this.

TP: Right. CBS had Sam Adams on *60 Minutes* where he made these allegations.

Westmoreland sued. And Westmoreland agreed to settle it without a finding, conceding that CBS had its facts right. But it's put a chill into the media ever since. That's what the people who write about it say. Ever since then, *60 Minutes* has not been quite as willing to go out on that limb. [Former CIA analyst] Ray McGovern, he and a few other people he knew put these organizations together [including Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity] back when the Iraq War was starting to try and present information to the public that was actually accurate. I met Ray McGovern and Phil Giraldi and Colleen Rowley when I was getting *amicus* support for one of the cases that I was working on. They signed on. That's when I got involved in their organizations. I'm not an intelligence officer, but my work in psyops and military commissions qualifies me.

And what if Donald Trump gets elected, what's going to restrain him? This article in [the Washington Post pointed out](#), really nothing. That's not because of him, but because of the way the office of the presidency has accumulated power in the last 50 years.

PW: That goes for Hillary Clinton, too?

TP: Absolutely. Hillary Clinton was part of the administration that argued that they could kill American citizens purely on the president's say so. Then made the specious claim that Harold Koh was responsible for as legal adviser to the State Department that we're not at war because we don't have boots on the ground in Libya. We're just firing missiles from a few miles out. As if the people dying in Libya from those missiles didn't think they were being attacked and at war by a foreign power.

PW: Do you have compassion for those folks?

TP: I've got compassion for those people who were unjustly attacked in different ways. My father was a Bataan death march survivor. He came back and I didn't want to say that— at least one death march survivor that I'm acquainted with had said that what kept them going was the hatred they developed in the prisoner of war camp. But yet, it's a natural emotion, as anybody knows, I believe, if you look within yourself, when something really bad happens to you or when someone brutalizes you. Whatever country it is. People victimized by the National Socialists of Germany or the Soviet Union military rule of Eastern Europe, or any other despotic regime. You come to hate your oppressor.

In my father's case, and in other prisoners of war I met, they didn't carry that hatred beyond the prison of war camp. We never grew up with an anti-Japanese idea.

But a lot of Americans just accepted that the Japanese American removal was necessary or fell under military necessity. And when you learn a little about it, you find, that not only was it unjust to those 120,000 people whose loyalties were to the United States but it was all driven by lies, and not hysteria, because it was planned years before by the military command on the west coast and in Hawaii.

What it was driven by was racism, as we now know too, but also I would say the bias of the military—of dealing with any threat. Like Cheney using the 1 percent doctrine. If there is so much as a 1 percent risk, you must take extraordinary means to defend yourself from this very faint risk. That was the same principle that the military was following on the west coast, that there might be a Japanese American out there whose loyalty might be more to Japan than the United States and if so, he might be tempted to engage in sabotage.

The ironic thing is that the person who is really given much of the blame for driving this, in addition to General [John] DeWitt, but working with the provost marshal under DeWitt was a Jewish

American, [Major Karl] Bendetson. He was really the driving force. So the irony is that at the same time people were being put in concentration camps in Europe—and realize this was before Germany had gone all the way to the final solution. At this point in 1942, the extermination camps weren't well known, and the Germans said, we're just putting internal enemies into these camps.

But we were doing the same thing on the west coast, and it was being driven in large part by this Jewish American. Then you realize that the Zionists are doing the same thing in Israel or Palestine. I'm saying, "There's no ethnic group that is above committing these type of oppressive acts."

And I should say, you asked about my acquaintanceship with Jewish Americans, what formed my attitudes. Well—Leon Uris. When I was growing up, I read the book *Exodus* and I saw the movie. It did influence my understanding of the Middle East as it did probably almost all Americans.

PW: What was the influence?

TP: The idea that the Jews in Israel were the victims and were gallantly trying to get their independence. Very much analogically to the US. It was intended as propaganda and it was very successful propaganda. Look at my own case. But it goes to the point. We have been engaged not only in Israel, but in our own wars that we now claim to be in— they're entirely based on propaganda and false propaganda. I don't think the American people realize that so much. It goes to Vietnam too. Sam Adams tried to reveal that they were lying. That entire war was

fought on false claims by the United States.

I mentioned to you that Benjamin Netanyahu, working with his admitted fascist father, and Menachem Begin, who was deemed a fascist, as well by Hannah Arendt and Einstein, set up what you could say was a disinformation or influence operation called the Jonathan Institute. Netanyahu has been engaged, following in his father's footsteps, promoting what should be called fascist propaganda ever since, continuing now as Prime Minister. And as you know, it's more sophisticated than ever.

PW: On what basis do you say Netanyahu is fascistic?

TP: There's a couple good books, I don't have the titles offhand, explaining how Likud grew out of the Herut party. And Herut grew out of the maximalist wing of Revisionist Zionism. Even within Revisionist Zionism, they were the fascists. Jabotinsky was radical right, but not necessarily fascist in how I am looking at it. But Begin and some others including Netanyahu's father came out of that faction that was influenced by General Pilsudski of Poland, who was a fascist. And this was interwar Europe, when there were a lot of fascist movements, with slight variations based on their own nationalistic orientation.

And so this group of European Jews were, as well, influenced by those fascist ideas and they had their own movement. They even had reached out to Hitler—early. Today a lot of people say, "Why didn't we do something about Hitler early?" Well, a whole lot of people didn't realize where Hitler was going, including these Jewish fascists. So they reached out to Hitler but were rebuffed. They definitely were in contact with Mussolini. And Mussolini's own fascist movement, according to various sources on fascism, had Italian Jews that were part of it. Fascism wasn't something that was anathema to Jews, though of course Nazism became that. So that's a movement that Netanyahu's father Ben Zion and Menachem Begin came out of.

I haven't looked at this stuff for so long. But Jacob Talmon was an Israeli political scientist, who wrote a book on the origins of totalitarian democracy in 1952. He was addressing the Eastern European countries under the influence of the Soviet Union, which were democratic in name only. And if you tie that in to Edward Bernays's argument— you have to have propaganda to direct the people in the right direction. Fascism's founding principle is how to manipulate the masses. So propaganda was always central to fascism.

Totalitarian democracy allows for the form of democracy, but it requires the fascist principle that all the people must be driven to the same ideas. And of course militaristic and authoritarian because you can't have dissenters in a fascist state, or not too strong of a dissident movement.

That's the point I'm making: Israel and the United States since 9/11, you have to consider us to be a form of totalitarian democracy. We're not the worst of it. I'm not saying that for a second. But we have a couple of billionaires who can really buy up the election, Sheldon Adelson on the Republican side, and Haim Saban on the Democratic side. What politician can be successful if they don't fall into one of those camps?

If you look at the platforms, both parties have given their undying loyalty to Israel, and it's clear that Israel's policies are our policies. As you know, there are a number of Israelis now who are saying that Netanyahu and Lieberman represent a fascist form of governance.

PW: But what is America? I'm a free man in New York, you're a free man in Minnesota. I've been fired from jobs for my views, but— what is America?

TP: As I discussed the other day, No we're not a fascist state in what anyone thinks of as a fascist state. But we are adopting principles of fascism. You as a free man in New York, and me as a free man in Minnesota, we are pretty well protected by our civil liberties. But what about someone in the Mid-East? There's a discussion going on, that we can kill anyone who we deem to be the enemy.

We are operating a fascist system in our foreign policy. That's where the fascism is plain to see. That's what both parties are fully in agreement with. Not as we are at home—we are still relatively secure in our liberties. It's hard to see that we would become, the ordinary term is fascist— if there's a better term tell me— but the foreign policy— as others have frequently said, including Hannah Arendt, when you wage a totalitarian foreign policy like that, it eventually spills over more and more into your domestic system, and we're seeing this in Section 1021, and Israel passed its anti-terrorism law this summer. They've always had provisions previously not to entirely suppress dissent but to make it uncomfortable, and they are constantly through propaganda changing people's opinions, so they become more and more militaristic and they support the radical right wing. Like Likud and Lieberman.

PW: Where do you see that propaganda in our country?

TP: Just in the general news. The New York Times, as your site has pointed out, has very imperfect coverage of what happens in the Middle East and Palestine. It's like a self-censorship.

And we saw it with the coverage of the Iraq War. Again, I go back as I mentioned the other day to the post-Vietnam War era. When these generals came out with this false claim, "We would have won but for the media." The Department of

Defense has deliberately— you can find articles and papers on how do you control the media— they've developed policies on how you control it. Shape it, direct it. That's what we're living under, the embedded journalist program. That was strictly as a result of that. Because they knew that people being put in close proximity with soldiers would develop a natural sympathy with them. Not in the sense of feeling sorry for them, but, "We're together in this."

PW: The war on terror has gotten skewed coverage?

TP: Absolutely, in part because most people don't understand it. Again, going back to the media, Antiwar.com found out they were being surveilled by the FBI because they opposed the war. They are immediately suspect because of that, and everything we thought we had resolved by stopping COINTELPRO back in the 70's has been taken to a higher level, where the NSA surveils everyone.

We have total surveillance of the US population through the NSA. That's what these huge data storage facilities are about, to store all the data that they've gathered. They've gone to the public and say, "We're not listening to your phone calls." But what they are doing is storing it. It's all there, just like a huge data file. Like the Stasi— they would go look at their file on someone, and go use that against them. Well, we have all that data collected, including people's attitudes. So if the day comes, which, if people like Vermeule and Posner have said, we may have to impose censorship and have military detention, they might have been more careful in what they said about detention.

The book is Terror in the Balance. The idea is that we always have to balance civil liberties against national security. But it's a false argument. Because our greatest national security is having a full and open discussion on our policy. We didn't want to allow that with Johnson and Nixon but it happened and, like I say, these generals said we should put these dissenters in detention.

The antiwar movement proved to be more wise than our generals were. Our generals would have driven us into national bankruptcy for the lost cause of Vietnam.

PW: What is wrong with the media coverage of the war on terror?

TP: Just the presumptions of all of it. Number one, the beginning presumption is that 9/11 happened out of the blue. The U.S. was sitting there, everyone was peacefully going about their business. And nobody writes about the hundreds, well over a thousand, military bases throughout the world. No one is talking about the relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Syria in the past, Jordan. The United States has been propping up these police states all these years, which led to the 9/11 attack. Because al Qaeda said, "We may be oppressed by the Saudis, but it's the United States that's propping it up."

[Prussian general and military theorist, Carl von] Clausewitz writes, "war never comes about without history." There's always history to it. We treat 9/11 as if we were all innocents. Then it unleashes the most ferocious opinions toward Muslims and then there's this constant incitement of Islamophobia. Not necessarily from the main media, but Fox certainly does.

PW: So in 9/11, we're the innocents. That persists to this day?

TP: Even more so with the debate over, "Is it radical Islamic terrorism?" Again, you look at who used those words first, it was Netanyahu. It's a consistent propaganda theme that he's used, as in that book over there [pointing at *Fighting Terrorism* by Benjamin Netanyahu]. That this isn't about legitimate political grievances or even any political grievances, this is all about this radical Islam. And it's not just a few Muslims. When you read into it, it's really Islam itself, it's a radical and murderous religion. And that's become the predominant theme in the U.S., I would say, whether it's by the hard right or the people who try to present themselves as more moderate.

But look at what we've been doing. Look at what you'd see if you're a Muslim country. Then you can figure that you're probably in line for some kind of military attack.

PW: What do you think of Islam?

TP: Well I'm not going to express a particular opinion on it except to say I believe it's mischaracterized in a variety of ways. The caliphate was not the threat that the Islamophobes make it out to be. There was a caliphate in Turkey, the Ottoman Empire, till 1922, and it was never a threat to the west. They do have their way of governing, as we do. We always profess, especially conservatives, a commitment to Judeo-Christian values. Well, you know what that led to with the Native Americans.

The fact that it is a predominant religion in the Middle East means that to appeal to people, you refer to Islam, to unite people. Just as we do in various ways, and they do in Israel. So I don't think it's inherently a murderous religion, as the Islamophobes make it out to be, and Netanyahu constantly makes it out to be. What we're dealing with is a group of people from the Islamic territories and lands who sit on oil and are in the way of Israel's expansion. And so they have legitimate political grievances because of what we've been doing to them. Which is not to say they're all innocents or they govern their countries well.

But again, going on to classic military strategists, like Clausewitz, we can't be in a constant state of war, both morally and militarily. And the fact is that

we are the aggressors, really. None of these Islamic countries threatened the United States until a group of anti-Saudi terrorists, guerrillas, insurgents did, only because we were propping up the Saudi regime. It's all based upon politics. As Clausewitz says, war is a continuation of politics, or policy by other means. And we do the same thing. We're hypocritical in all this.

PW: You say that We have to know ourselves.

TP: That goes to Sun Tzu and Clausewitz. They said in various ways, To understand the nature of the conflict, you have to know yourself, you have to know the enemy. If you don't know yourself, you don't know what is motivating the enemy. If we can't recognize that, maybe what we did in support of what was done in Beirut in 1982 had an effect upon the people we now deem to be our enemy, we can't understand what motivates them. And not knowing what motivates them has us doing the resisting them in maybe ways that make things worse rather than better.

A few officials come to recognize this at a micro level, in terms of counterinsurgency, that maybe it's not so good to wipe out a family with a drone in Pakistan. But the same thing applies at a macro level in our foreign policy. If we don't accept that the U.S. has created some of these grievances, then we can't bring about a reconciliation, a resolution that is satisfactory to everybody and strategically necessary to the U.S..

The idea that we can fight a perpetual war, as some people now talk about, is exactly against everything that classical strategists understood. It should be self-evident to anybody. We've seen what happens if you try. Look at the Soviet Union in the 1980s, when they collapsed as a result of their perpetual war.

PW: Is that why they collapsed?

TP: It certainly was a big part of it— all the expense in Afghanistan and the dissent. These things are all interrelated. We try and make it out that the war is over there and has no effect here. But we're constantly taking more and more money out of our own domestic budget to keep the military going.

Or the police issue: We're training them to become militarist. Not to come down on the police, but we're seeing cases that to anyone smacks of an execution. The person in Chicago who was shot fifteen times—the person running away and was shot in the back by a police officer. We send our police officials over to Israel to be trained in what is military occupation tactics. But our own military members come back and they have adopted this viewpoint from their own experience in Afghanistan and Iraq. That's been imported.

Again, it's spilling over into our own domestic system. That's the ultimate

cost, as Hannah Arendt said. French officials recognized this after a while, when they were fighting in Algeria. Eventually, the ultimate risk is that you lose your democracy as a result, and I would say that we're already far along in that process.

PW: You're an autodidact.

TP: I know what that means but refresh my memory.

PW: You're a self-taught intellectual.

TP: I would definitely agree with that. Self-taught by pursuing knowledgeable works.

PW: It's a term of praise to me, but it has a certain liability. You were, in my view, deeply influenced by your father's experience of the horrors of war and you wanted to be a political scientist but you were raised in circumstances where that was not available, and you worked construction and read books. But now at age 65, you're going to be a political scientist.

TP: That was the one area I was really interested in as a kid.

PW: But in the meantime, you have gotten a rich experience of the world that most academics don't have.

TP: I would add, looking back, I did have this interest in the military, coming out of my dad's experience. So it wasn't just the academic interest in politics, but rather the convergence of circumstances, the Vietnam War going on and the issue of insurgency.

PW: OK. But the risk with an autodidact is, he has independent ideas. But all ideas have a social component. They come out of a community. Have you ever had the charge thrown at you, that there is no establishment rigor in your thoughts, they're not shaped by a community, they're entirely independent?

TP: Maybe in law school in my first year. I went in there thinking pretty independently. And I did well. Not to flatter myself, but I was right on the approach that I was taking. Which was acknowledged. But I'm never out there in the sense that I'm outside of everyone. I'm arguing from within but using the principles that are given but seeing them slightly different.

I mentioned the cases with the judge in St. Cloud, I was clearly outside the norm there, and another law clerk pointed that out to me. There was a guy whose offense would have gotten him put into prison for 10 years. My friend who was a clerk said he and I were the only two clerks out of 10 or 11 who would have thought independently where we would have looked at the facts rather than accept

what the county attorney said. And furthermore, I had the only judge who would have listened. His own judge would have said, "No, we can't do that."

PW: What does that tell you about human society? We run with the pack?

TP: I absolutely agree with that. I hate to use the word, but there is something about group mentality, and it's not just where people consciously say, "I'm going along with the group." It's almost unconscious in thinking that way, which is always at work when you go to war.

PW: So if human beings behave in this fashion, what is the hopeful scenario of how we demolish this propaganda? You and I love this country. What's the hopeful way this war ends? You say in Vietnam the antiwar movement had the wisdom, and notwithstanding two million deaths or whatever, the country righted itself in the end.

TP: Today I'm not as hopeful as people might have been in '67, '68. Because then it was more apparent and there was more self-interest at stake; people were being drafted. Today we have so successfully shielded people from direct consequences of the war that they don't connect the two, but it's in effect every single moment. Education, policing, etc— all are being sacrificed for the war. If you look at the budget, the first bite of the apple is the defense industry and the Defense Department. We have to take care of defense. And we get the crumbs which are left, and we try and work it out so we get enough for education and roads. So we are already paying a huge economic price domestically to maintain the wars and the military. But people don't make that connection very well.

So I'm not as hopeful today because the government has shielded the people more from the effects of the government's bad policies. The other side of it is the terrorism acts that I think are directly attributable to the war. In San Bernardino, Chattanooga, Orlando— all are direct consequences of the war. It's like 9/11 two. This was a direct effect of our foreign policy, but we see ourselves as innocents.

Every terrorist incident that takes place, officials say, "We don't know what the motive is, we're searching, blah blah." But there are always sufficient clues that it is driven by belief, by injustice, or as David Hume said, sympathy that people feel when they see such a great injustice being done, and some way or another it hits a tipping point and they engage in some act of violence. The person in Orlando said, "I'm doing this because of your bombing Afghanistan, my country." Even though he never lived there.

That's not to say that we should be suspicious of all these people, because it

can happen to people who are not even Muslim. In the Vietnam era we saw people becoming sympathetic to the Vietcong because they could see that they were being victimized by the US military. It took a while for people to realize how victimized they were. So there are these human emotions that are triggered by the type of war we're fighting right now.

We are paying the cost, but they're indirect, so we're not seeing it, and that's what's being covered up. So that's why there's a necessity for a counter narrative to be presented. There are two motivations. It's not about Islam, it's about violent political acts being committed in propping up a very despotic Middle East. It's about the US role in maintaining a very repressive system of governance in the Middle East.

PW: Including in Israel?

TP: Including in Israel.

PW: Would you have had this understanding a year ago, or five years?

TP: It began to be formed when I was in the Gulf War. That began shifting my way of thinking. I admit I was very much a neocon and going along with the neocons' thinking on national security. And the Gulf War opened my eyes a bit. I talked to a number of Saudis, I took advantage of being there to meet people individually. I began to see how they saw things a bit more. And it took time; but then when 9/11 happened and then seeing what we had become, that opened my eyes a little further. Then just continuing to search for and find an explanation for what's all going on.

PW: Did you ever say, "I love the military"?

TP: No never.

PW: Why are you laughing?

TP: Well, I didn't like the regimentation.... I'm pretty normal; most people don't like that regimentation.

PW: What do you think of military culture's influence? Is that the problem?

TP: We survived as a democracy for years, even in Vietnam. We had challenges to democracy then, COINTELPRO, military surveillance; but we weren't militaristic then. That's why we got so much opposition. It wasn't long before that that Eisenhower said, watch out for the military industrial complex.

The military set out deliberately following the Vietnam War to change people's attitudes. The movie Top Gun was one of the first examples where they began

working with Hollywood. Changing the narrative, changing the perception. They had a deliberate strategy to elevate the military in the eyes of the people. That in itself isn't necessarily that bad either, but a number of circumstances came together, including the neocon constant incitement toward war, and then 9/11, of course, that was the final trigger that was necessary to bring us into this. And we're moving deeper into this militaristic world, as both presidential candidates show.

PW: How much time have you spent in Guantanamo?

TP: I went down there probably 35, 40 times. Once a month we would go down and see our client. We'd fly down there on Monday morning, check in, do all the things we had to do. Then see our client for the next couple of days, and come back on a Thursday or Friday.

PW: What does Guantanamo look and feel like?

TP: Well, again, even defense attorneys don't get to go into the actual prison camps. And there's a number of different ones, three or four different camps, and one that was closed. We don't get to see that ordinarily. What you get into, you have the regular military base. It's a navy base. That's like middle-America, they've even got a high school. They're going to spend an exorbitant amount of money to build a new high school. Again, talk about misplaced priorities. But you have families down there... You have that side of the camp running normally, like any military base.

Then you have a detention facility, and that comes under a different military command. And you drive out to it, and when you get close, it becomes like something you would think of in any militaristic society. The checkpoint, you go in and constant security. The guards [are] very paranoid, seeing everybody, including their fellow soldiers, as I was, as a potential terrorist. Former guards have talked about this... How the guard force is constantly incited to be hostile. When they were getting deployed for the first time to Guantanamo, they first took them to the World Trade Center site, and said, "You're going to be guarding the people that are responsible for this." Which is not the case, other than maybe 5 people, if that. So it's constant conditioning for everyone there, that we've got the worst of the worst. And that did not change under Obama.

I started under the Bush regime, and there were no changes. The people who were running things were the same people, or anyway had the same attitude. We had to go through a process under Obama, to have each detainee have his record reviewed, and he could present facts to the review board. But I don't think they changed a bit from what had been done under Bush. Bush had already begun releasing people. The whole story that these were the worst of the worst was

unraveling. So Bush released a lot. That continued under Obama, but no greater and no less, really, if you look at the statistics. So there was no change that you could see other than during that brief period of [Obama promising], we're going to close Guantanamo.

PW: Where are your clients?

TP: One of them is in Sudan, where he is from, and the other one is still in Guantanamo, the appellate case. He was one that the government would say is too dangerous to release.

PW: The one who wouldn't meet with you?

TP: Yes. His crime is as a propagandist, is how the government describes it. We're waiting for a decision right now. All the offenses that [Salim] Hamdan and our client were convicted of were originally

held not to be war crimes on review. This goes to the fraudulence of the whole military commission system. I don't have time to say that here, but they made up offenses and said they were war crimes.

Virtually everything coming out of the Bush administration originally was made up. They fabricated legal precedents and misstated them. Under our system, you can only have military commissions in three different circumstances: one would be under military occupation, one would be under martial law, and the third would be for war crimes. Well, we were officially not under martial law and the United States and Guantanamo are not under occupation. The only thing left is war crimes. So they made up these offenses that they claim are war crimes.

War crimes are clearly delineated in Nuremberg and now the international court—but [they are] none of these offenses they used to charge these people with, because 90 percent of these people had not done anything other than possibly fight as guerrillas, and that's not a war crime. They might have been sympathetic to al Qaeda, or might have been foot soldiers or a go-fer, like my client, but no one charged with the usual offenses had planned the 9/11 attack. Nobody planned on killing civilians.

So they tried to wrap it up into one giant conspiracy, the same as the German Nuremberg defendants had been charged with conspiracy. But that conspiracy was to wage aggressive war or commit genocide. There's no conspiracy by the people in Guantanamo to wage aggressive war or commit genocide. They're not even charged with that. Only the few that were alleged to be responsible for 9/11 have been charged with actual war crimes.

So they made up the material support for terrorism charge which was intended to

get anybody they wanted even if it was only for something they said. Or for the video that one client made about why people in the Middle East feel they have a legitimate grievance against the United States. Material support for terrorism was deemed to be a war crime. Solicitation was deemed to be a war crime. Finally, conspiracy was charged, and they said that was a war crime, even though it wasn't a conspiracy to commit aggressive war or genocide.

In fact, that conspiracy to commit aggressive war would more fit Cheney and the whole bunch of neoconservatives that were involved in pushing us into Iraq.

In the DC Court of Appeals, what we argued was, these are not violations of the international law of war, they are not international war crimes. The government said they were. The court of military review agreed with the government. Then we got to the DC circuit, and we said the same thing, and the government turned around and said the defense is absolutely right.

But then they invented something that they call the domestic common law of war. And what they say are the legal precedents are the Civil War— that was one period of time where they held a lot of military commissions. But that was under martial law. They weren't war crimes, they were martial law violations. The other time was the Quirin case, where eight German soldiers entered our lines, and they took their uniforms off and plotted or some of them did to commit sabotage. They were enemy soldiers concealing their identity in our territory. It breaches the law of non-intercourse as a form of perfidy. That was 1942.

So, anyway, they used that as a precedent. But none of the people that we have captured and have been charging with conspiracy committed that offense; none of them came through our lines. They were all in Afghanistan. Or some other place. Maybe being an insurgent— but it's no war crime to be an insurgent. Otherwise all generals would be in war crimes tribunals, because the US army sponsors insurgents in places like Libya and Syria.

So we're saying that it's a war crime to be an insurgent if you're not on our side. But if you are, it goes to, one person's freedom fighter is another person's terrorist. The whole system was fabricated from falsehoods, and that's what we're operating under now.

One of the people [unnamed colleague] I disagree with most is very supportive of what we have been doing. But he sort of slipped one time and said, this military commissions act, it's almost like we are exercising martial law over the whole world. We are. We are taking those precedents from our own martial law period over our own territory and applying it to the world. Someone who may be anti-drone warfare in Afghanistan or Pakistan is guilty of a war crime, and gets targeted with a drone attack.

So we are doing to the Mideast and other parts what the Germans did to Europe in World War II. They held that any anti-German opinion was basically a war crime. And putting aside the Jewish issue—but non-Jewish people who might be opposed to the Nazis invasion, before the Germans invaded, they would be put into military detention.

That's the problem with the idea that you're at war, because you adopt the most extreme understanding of who the enemy is and then justify killing them or putting them in military detention because they're the enemy.

PW: This case will go through the federal appeals system?

TP: We're waiting for the decision. We've already won once in the DC Court of Appeals. They vacated the conviction of Salim Hamdan, and his case was in parallel with ours. So they were ready to drop the conviction, but the government asked for an *en banc* decision in our case. It's already been held that material support for terrorism and solicitation are not war crimes. So that conviction of our client has been vacated. Conspiracy is the one issue remaining...

I also worked on one of the five cases that are charged with 9/11, for about a year. That's where I ended up doing a lot of research that I'm now talking about, on the origins of the conflict, which can really be dated to the end of World War I, and the colonialization and division by the French and British of Iraq and Syria and Lebanon, and the brutal measures that France and Britain used to suppress any dissent to their colonialism. So that's where I became acquainted with some experts in the field.

PW: Why is that the background?

TP: In all these cases, it goes to, "Is a rebellion legitimate or is it a war crime?" Well the government says, "It's a war crime. Unless it's our own." When you understand what is really being done depending on the individual client, what we're calling terrorists are what would more properly be known as guerrillas. It's a form of guerrilla warfare. Putting aside the places that they have been charged with killing civilians. I'm not justifying that in any way; but we've also done it ourselves.

In World War II we really adopted the idea of terror bombing. That's no secret. So it's really been us as much as anyone else who have driven the standards of international law downward. And the Nazis had done it before they attacked Warsaw, and the fascists attacked Guernica. The British and French adopted it as early as 1920, what they called colonial policing.

You could say that the West, whatever the Ottomans had done to the Arabs

beforehand, when France and Britain took over after World War I—in one article I came across, the British said, “What do you do to a troublesome village? You drop a couple of 500 pound bombs and some more 250 pound bombs on them, and the problem goes away.” This was a general who would have been in the Royal Air Force, as it was being formed, describing the use of air power in counter guerrilla operations. About 1920.

We like to believe that it was only Arabs that began killing civilians. We brought that in to the Mideast with western colonial policing. Whatever the Ottomans were doing before the end of World War I, we legitimated it or took it to a higher level with the west’s colonial policing policies of killing civilians to terrorize them.

PW: You’re not hopeful this is going to end?

TP: I think human nature— people don’t change until they have to. The Germans were happy going on for the most part most of them, until they hit Stalingrad. Then they began reconsidering things. I think that’s the nature of human beings; until they hit bankruptcy or some other calamitous event they don’t see that maybe this is the wrong course, they don’t want to change course. What is going to be the turning event, it’s hard to say, because these terrorist attacks are pinpricks, we’re not going to hit Stalingrad like the Germans did. We’ll just slowly erode our economy and— again, we’re doing it already, but we can conceal it.

So what do you do? There was the White Rose group in Germany, at the University of Munich— Sophie Scholl, her brother and some friends. Her brother and the friends had been to Stalingrad or the eastern front and came back because they were medical students. They came to realize what the Germans were doing to the people in the east, and they formed the White Rose group. I think ‘43, ‘44.

So they tried to inform the German people of what was really being done in their name by the government. And they were somewhat successful. They got messages out. Unfortunately they got caught and were executed. But even then, some of their messages they had sent out got taken out to the West and were then used as leaflets to drop to the people. So they really contributed far more after their death to the defeat of Germany and the Nazis.

It’s those people who see what’s wrong that have to try and change the dominant narrative to one of truth, to what is truthfully taking place.

PW: What did the US hit in Vietnam, calamity wise?

TP: The Tet Offensive. Building up to it was the constant propaganda. There’s a book written about Westmoreland by a former Army Officer, Lewis Sorley. The

title is, *Westmoreland, the General Who Lost Vietnam*. Sorley wasn't anti-Vietnam. He was a lieutenant colonel who just believed that Westmoreland's tactics were wrong, and believed that [Gen. Creighton] Abrams was doing something different, when he wasn't. He wrote this book about how LBJ was trying to use propaganda to sell to the American people that he could have both Vietnam and the war of poverty and have no consequences and that we were winning there. But Westmoreland was an eager participant in what was called the progress offensive, and beyond what even LBJ wanted of him. Part of that was concealing the numbers of how many people were actually opposed.

The South Vietnamese government was a despotic government, they had the population under a harsh martial law. South Vietnam was not a democracy where the people were in any way happy. It was a harsh military regime. Which turned a lot of the Vietnamese away from supporting the government. And the government in Hanoi may have been as bad or worse, but it was driven by nationalistic feeling more than the South was. And there was a lot of support in South Vietnam for unification with the north and against the South Vietnamese government. Westmoreland was covering up and concealing that. And that failure of intelligence allowed the Tet Offensive to take place.

The revisionists like to say the Tet Offensive was our greatest victory, we killed so many Vietcong. But ultimately war is about perceptions. It wasn't about the media turning against us and making a victory look like a defeat. But the critical audience was the Vietnamese people and they could see that, yes, the Vietcong actually does have quite a bit of power.

The American generals said, "The critical audience that we had to maintain this concept of the will for war was the American people." *No*, it was the Vietnamese people. If we didn't have their support, the war could never have been won, no matter how much the American people supported it.

That's the same as what's going on in the Mid-East today. It's the people of the Mid-East who have to make decisions, but we have shown by everything we've done, including causing the vast migration out of Mid-East into Europe— all these things have turned any common sense view of what's going on against what the United States is doing. We have done everything wrong from a strategic point of view from the very beginning of 9/11, is the point I've tried to make.

PW: What should we do?

TP: I say, get out of Afghanistan. We've been there 15, 16 years now and failed every day. Our staying there is what stokes the Taliban insurgency. Not to say they're all going to give up when we leave, but we can't win as long as we're there. Because that is the cause of the Taliban fighting against us.

We have no choice but to get out of there, unless we want to continue as the Soviets had done squandering our treasure. It goes to the theme of groups like ISIS and al Qaeda, that the United States is generally an imperialist power taking over the lands of Islam. And as long as we're in Afghanistan, we just maintain the apparent truth of that claim. We need to stop acting as imperialist powers to get this anti-imperialist guerrilla war to a lower level. At least in the foreseeable future, there's going to be continuous opposition to a U.S. imperialist policy.

A fascist foreign policy is going to inherently generate opposition. Hannah Arendt called it: A totalitarian foreign policy, by its very nature, triggers opposition. That goes to understanding ourselves and understanding our enemy. If we can't understand that about ourselves, then how can we ever reduce the violence coming from the opposition? Again, you can find this all in Clausewitz, written 200 years ago.

PW: Where are you on the election?

TP: I'm for anybody but Trump or Clinton. I see in both of them the emphasis on militaristic values. They each have a slightly different tack, depending upon the constituency. Trump has actually talked a little bit more prudently about a war. He's not actually trying to gin up a war with Russia, but then he gets as advisers people like Michael Ledeen and General [Michael] Flynn.

I have read Flynn's book and it's just more of the same: radical Islamic terrorism is the enemy along with Russia and Iran. You can't have an adviser like Flynn and think this guy is going to have a different policy. Plus, Trump has made it clear that even if he doesn't plan to go to war against Russia, it's not out of prudence, but his own talk has always been about promoting fascist values— putting journalists in prison, detention, whatever.

Hillary Clinton has a track record of that under Obama, basically attacking journalists, like James Risen and others. So I see no difference between the two.

PW: And her foreign policy?

TP: I have great trust in her that she is going to get us into wars. No matter what she says, she has done it already, she has a track record. She is the one who was promoting the Libyan war over Obama's hesitancy, from what I understand. Then Syria, and the Ukraine coup she obviously had to be in on that with her subordinate, [Assistant Secretary of State] Victoria Nuland.

So we know what she'll do. Trump might actually be too lazy or less interested in those things. But again his talk has been just as bad.

PW: Does his Islamophobia bother you?

TP: Absolutely. He's adopting Netanyahu's theme, that this is all radical Islamic terrorism. Again with all of his attacks on Obama for not using that phrase, he has legitimized it even more for Netanyahu. He's tied up with Flynn, and Flynn's made clear that he considers himself a virtual member of the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces]. The US and the IDF are far closer than anyone thinks. If you think about it, we're really operating as a joint command in the Middle East, whether it's us restocking their ammunition, or our special operations groups working hand in glove.

PW: You mentioned Hunter Thompson's 180 rule before I started taping. What's that?

TP: Thompson said his belief was that he tried to follow the 180 degree philosophy, and that was that, anytime government officials tell you one thing, the truth is 180 degrees from that. Or close to 180 degrees. In other words, they're lying; and you have to believe the exact opposite. When you start to think about it, on important issues, that's pretty much true. War issues. "We were winning in Vietnam," the truth was the exact opposite. "The surge succeeded." The truth is the exact opposite. "We're winning here, we're winning there." The truth is the exact opposite.

PW: You're about to go to the New School. What's your role?

TP: I think I'm going to be a very lowly student in a Masters of Arts in Politics program. Obviously this is a culmination of my lifelong interest, including the tradition the New School has as a university in exile. I have been reading this material all my life. The New School had these anti-totalitarian Jewish Germans come over, Hannah Arendt and Ernst Fraenkel. And they have maintained that same approach to politics. I figure it's a very logical place to go. And I'm still involved in the al-Bahlul case and continuing to study for what may be necessary.

PW: Has meeting the accused been important to your thinking?

TP: I don't think so. My approach in all this has come about from what we're doing to ourselves. Not that I don't have moral qualms about what we're doing to them. But recognizing what we're doing to ourselves. We're not violating the constitution so much as we're supplanting it. We're keeping it in name but it no longer means anything.

To be clear, I do have sympathy for people who are being made the victims, who we are killing in these unjust wars.

PW: What does it mean that you're now friends with lefties?

TP: The lefties you refer to are people that I would have been ideologically opposed to in the '80s— not the '60s and '70s so much. But the '80s. And recognizing my own fallibility, whatever ways we may have disagreed in the past, that's irrelevant. Because today, quite honestly, it's only the left that has taken a critical view of what the U.S. is doing, with the exception of Ron Paul. And, of course, not all of the left, as we saw with Hillary Clinton being nominated. But there's a remnant of the left that does criticize what we're doing and has an understanding of what Israel is doing to the Palestinians and that does make us natural allies.

PW: So I came to the Israel issue for very selfish reasons. Sounds like you are concerned for your community.

TP: I try to make a point of that. My criticism isn't that our militarism is out there winning these wars, though it would be that, as well as our motives are illegitimate. My criticism is that the militarism is out there losing these wars to our detriment, beside the moral cost that we've become complicit in. The point I've tried to make is that people like Petraeus and all these other generals, and the politicians who are supporting them, they're the ones who are leading us over the cliff or into the abyss and they're wrong. Just like Westmoreland. They're the ones who are costing us.

Germany's enemy wasn't the Jews in the '30s and the '40s, as the Nazis claimed. It turned out it was their own Nazi party, and the military leaders who went along with it, they're the ones who destroyed Germany. And it was our generals in Vietnam that were destroying the United States, and unfortunately their effect is continuing today because we adopted their false stab in the back narrative.

PW: What about the politicians?

TP: Yes. They each feed off each other. Absolutely.

[...]

PW: The name you've mentioned more than any other in our conversation is Hannah Arendt. Why?

TP: She makes a lot of points that are valuable to understand what is going on today. I'm not that acquainted with everything she's written. I'm not even sure that she would agree with me today were she alive. But the points she made are valuable to an analysis of what is happening today. They are points she developed first hand seeing a totalitarian regime coming to power.

Philip Weiss is the founder and co-editor of Mondoweiss.net, where this interview [originally appeared](#).

The Value of Oliver Stone's 'Snowden'

Exclusive: Oliver Stone's "Snowden" takes you inside the vast electronic expanse of U.S. intelligence gathering via the personal story of Edward Snowden's decision to expose these secrets to the world, writes Lisa Pease.

By Lisa Pease

If you think you already know the story of Edward Joseph Snowden, the man who leaked evidence of the global mass surveillance programs that the U.S. and U.K. governments have been conducting not just on enemies abroad but on their citizens at home, think again. Very few people know the complexities of the man and his backstory.

Even if you saw "Citizenfour," Laura Poitras's Oscar-winning documentary about Snowden's historic act, Oliver Stone's movie, "Snowden," tells a significantly different story, using dramatic license to take you on an emotional journey into Snowden's experiences and motivations.



As Stone emphasized in person at a screening that I attended, the film is not a documentary and was decidedly fictionalized for dramatic effect. That said, many specifics and incidents are true – and Stone remained true to Snowden in terms of his intelligence, temperament and reasoning that helped shape the actions he took.

This riveting film – Stone's latest foray into the dangers and excesses of the National Security State – has all the ingredients that we've come to expect from the frequent Academy Award winner and nominee. Stone's touch is everywhere evident in the film.

The story that Stone and co-writer Kieran Fitzgerald weaves is compelling. The characters grow and evolve over the course of the film. The score is evocative.

Shots are artfully crafted to make a rich movie-going experience. The visuals – and in one particular sequence, visualizations – are stunning.

Stone takes us along on Snowden's personal journey of discovery in a film that is anchored by the love story between initially political opposites who grow, change and learn to make sacrifices to protect each other.

The film opens near the end of his story, with Snowden holed up in the Mira Hotel in Hong Kong, awaiting his first rendezvous with activist Laura Poitras and the lawyer-turned-journalist Glenn Greenwald. The film jumps back and forth in time from that "present" to Snowden's past, which proceed in parallel throughout the film.

Snowden had originally tried to join the Special Forces, having been upset by the 9/11 tragedy that befell New York City and by proxy the rest of America. Due to an injury, Snowden turns to his interest in computers, and his technical prowess helps him rise quickly through the ranks of the CIA and brings him to the attention of the National Security Agency at the highest levels.

Like so many Americans, Snowden believed that what the secret elements of our government were doing were benign and necessary, due to the rise of terrorism. Snowden wanted to participate in covert operations and was given the opportunity. But when he realized that covert operations involved compromising people who had committed no crimes just so they could be forced to help the CIA, he had a change of heart and for a time left the agency.

And, the more Snowden learned from his work in America's intelligence services, including the communications-spying NSA, the more he understood that with great power comes a great temptation to use it for evil as well as for good. Eventually, the weight of bearing the secrets he carried caused him to break some oaths in order to honor the higher calling of protecting the American people from unwarranted and unjustifiable surveillance.

The Human Value of Privacy

In the film, at one point, Snowden gets upset when his girlfriend says so what if the government listens in – she had nothing to hide. But everyone has something to hide. That's why you have a password on your computer, why your medical records aren't made public, why your taxes stay between you and the IRS (unless, of course, you are running for president, in which case there is an expectation of greater transparency).

The film showed the toll that bearing difficult secrets took not only on Snowden's life but on the lives of his friends. Snowden's girlfriend at one point complained that he hadn't touched her in months, a result of Snowden's

acute awareness of how every breath could be heard, every action seen or recorded unless extraordinary precautions were taken.

The real Edward Snowden, after noting how hard it was to watch himself portrayed in this scene to the world as the “worst boyfriend ever,” waxed eloquent on that subject during a live Q&A following a special screening of the film:

“Privacy isn’t about something to hide. Privacy is about something to protect. That’s who you are. That’s what you believe in, that’s who you want to become. Privacy is the right to the self. Privacy is what gives you the ability to share with the world who you are, on your own terms, for them to understand what you’re trying to be. And to protect for yourself the parts of you that you’re not sure about, that you’re still experimenting with.

“If we don’t have privacy, what we’re losing is the ability to make mistakes. We’re losing the ability to be ourselves. [Saying that you don’t care about privacy] because you have nothing to hide is like arguing that you don’t care about free speech because you have nothing to say.”

Stone’s film artfully weaves in a number of real-world examples of things people might wish to hide. No one will go to bed after viewing this without putting a piece of tape over their laptop camera, for instance, and I expect a surge in microwave sales among security professionals.

The actors do excellent jobs portraying the real-life characters we have come to know through news broadcasts and documentaries. Edward Snowden is played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt so well that at a screening in New York, the real Edward Snowden’s parents came up and thanked him for giving them the “essence” of their son.

I don’t know if actress Shailene Woodley did an accurate portrayal of Lindsay Mills, but the Bernie Sanders surrogate and anti-Dakota Access Pipeline activist was charming, smart, vulnerable and the perfect complement to the more serious, introverted Snowden, as played by Gordon-Levitt.

One of the things I hadn’t learned from the initial coverage of the real-life Snowden in the early media stories was how genius-level bright he is. That point is well made in the film and was equally evident in his articulate responses to the questions posed in the live Q&A session after the screening. The real Snowden made a powerful statement about privacy in his attempt to illuminate the crux of the issue with government spying:

I only wish Snowden had pointed out that one of the most terrible parts of government spying is how it provides blackmail material on those who would attempt to rein in the excesses of the National Security State. How can elected

officials ever get the CIA or NSA to stop doing illegal things when the agencies hold all the darkest secrets of those same officials?

Longtime FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover rose to power in the previous century largely because he either knew or pretended to know the dirt on many politicians. Now, there is the prospect of U.S. intelligence insiders possessing extensive records of everyone's electronic conversations and photographs, meaning that any misstep or personal foible becomes part of each person's permanent record, available to an intelligence agency wanting to misuse it.

The implications of that troubling reality is one reason why this special film will stay with you, haunting you with its implications, long after you've left the darkness of the theater and returned to the privacy – or not – of your home. And if you want to know who the CIA's assets are in the media, just pay attention to who gives this film a bad review. The CIA and NSA *really* do not want you to see it.

But let me give you one last reason to see "Snowden." It belongs to an increasingly rare genre, a well-made film about a topic that matters. Over the years and decades, Hollywood has turned more and more to escapist movies with minimal attention to the great issues of the day. If we want to see more movies that are intelligent and relevant, we need to support films like this one.

Lisa Pease is a writer who has examined issues ranging from the Kennedy assassination to voting irregularities in recent U.S. elections.

"Everything That We Have Done Since 9/11 Is Wrong"

"Everything that we have done since 9/11 is wrong," says retired Army JAG Major Todd Pierce, whose personal journey to that conclusion helps explain why so many ex-military people are growing disillusioned with U.S. foreign policy.

Philip Weiss of Mondoweiss was curious how Todd Pierce, a military man from Minnesota, became a critic of what looks increasingly like America's permanent warfare, so Weiss interviewed Pierce in a two-part [in-depth interview](#), which we received permission to republish at Consortiumnews.com. (This is Part One)

Philip Weiss: Tell me about your background.

Todd Pierce: I was born in Princeton, Minnesota, in 1951. My mother had grown up on a farm and her family background was Swedish immigrant and Scottish immigrant. My father was from Iowa. One uncle of his had been the minister to China during the Boxer rebellion, Edwin Conger. His wife kept all her correspondence, and it became a source book for the Boxer rebellion.

Something that shaped my thinking was my father was in the Bataan death march. He got released in 1945, by U.S. Army Rangers and Filipino guerrillas. They were rescued from the Japanese in a heroic raid. I knew of this through his mother my grandmother. He didn't talk about it. So after 3 years he got released from that prisoner of war camp under conditions every bit as hard as a concentration camp, and five years later he had come to Princeton and he married my mother. And he became certified as a highway engineer for the state of Minnesota.

PW: How did the Bataan death march affect him?

TP: He had been through these atrocities. He did have PTSD as we call it now after the war. As one of his letters points out, he had been in the place where 30,000 Filipinos had been killed and 15,000 Americans. Then in the next letter to my aunt, he said, "Please forgive me for mentioning that, I was in a down mood that day." He never mentioned those kinds of things again. He'd seen the worst you could see, and 3 years later he was living a normal life.

He married my mother. Then my mother came down with rheumatic fever three years later. She was in deteriorating condition thereafter till she died in 1958. My brother, my sister and I lived with my two different grandmothers for a couple of years, and then my father remarried, and we lived in St Paul all five of us. But I had been living with my grandparents on the farm. I preferred to go back to Princeton and the farm. One reason, I was given much more freedom there, which wasn't to my benefit. And I had a very unremarkable education career.

My grandfather was a very independent guy, he stood up for things. He was your typical Scots-Irish guy, and I got a lot of things good from him in that way. But that side of the family didn't place any emphasis on education. So remarkably I was able to get through high school without doing any work and missing a lot of school, and graduated.

PW: Your teachers must have told you you were smart.

TP: It was registered. I'm not saying that to flatter myself. They would remind me, you could do more, you could go to college. Growing up on that side of the family, it wasn't that I didn't have ambition, but I thought what could I do without going to college—perhaps be an electrician. That was the extent of my ambition at that time. If it had seemed a realistic choice when I was in high

school, I would have wanted to get a PhD in political science. That was always my interest. But by that time, it was already, "Yeah, there are no jobs for this."

I got out of high school, came down and got a job in a factory in Minneapolis. Lamar, it was a hairspray factory, and worked there for about 6 months. So I had a pretty unimpressive career. First in that hairspray factory, then working for General Tire, putting tires on cars in Minneapolis

PW: When did you go into the military?

TP: I had enlisted in the Marines in high school in 1969 with the intent of going into the infantry. I look back and shudder at my poor judgment. But I failed my physical because I hurt my back that winter before going in. So I put that aside. But it was like I had unfinished business, I wanted to get into the Marines, to finish what I had started. The Vietnam War was going on, and I had turned against it at that time. But my uncle and my dad had been in World War II and been willing to step forward to defend the country, and I had that embedded in me coming from where I was. I ended up going to the Marine reserve, then going to work as a plasterer when I came back. I didn't like working in factories.

So I went to Marine Corps boot camp, but I quickly tired of going to drill once a month and getting my hair short. I thought of going active duty but the Marine first division officially came back from Vietnam and so there were a lot of excess people on the base at Camp Pendleton, painting rocks.

I ended up going into the National Guard reserves and going back to Princeton, and for ten years I did farming and construction. I did plastering and cement work. And I was pretty good at reading blueprints. Not everyone in construction can do that. And from that time till I was 30, I was always involved in farming.

PW: Do you know how to milk a cow.

TP: Yes. I milked cows. I was a milkhauler, I picked up livestock to take to the stockyards. Did fieldwork, plowing, discing, combining, haybaling. And I'd say that farming does imprint a view of the world. It's not a forgiving lifestyle. It's black and white, a life of absolutes. If you don't do something, something bad will generally follow. If you don't get out and milk your cows, your cows will get sick.

PW: Did the '70s affect you?

TP: The counterculture was always there. My friends were hippies. And beginning in the late 60s, I was a reader of Ramparts magazine and Hunter Thompson. I was

part of the counterculture. My friends who were hippies— we always were interested but were relatively uneducated and just searching. But later I was working in New Mexico and I hung out with grad students—reading books and philosophy, and discussing things. That was my first real experience amongst a more intellectual atmosphere.

PW: Did you have any awareness of Israel?

TP: Virtually none. Though let me say my stepsister who I wasn't close to had married an Iraqi student from the Colorado School of Mines. She lived in Denver. He was studying petroleum engineering. And honestly our family was entirely Israeli oriented. Because when the 1967 war broke out, he was buying a car, and the salesman said something anti-Arab, and he got mad about it. And our family was—you know, he was an Arab, but our sympathies were with Israel.

PW: Did you have sympathy for him?

TP: Sympathy for him, yes. But not putting ourselves in his place and thinking about it. We were very typical Americans. We had Israeli-centric eyes.

PW: But you were against the Vietnam War?

TP: In '67, I was 16 years old, and I was pro-Vietnam War at that point. I was reading a lot of books like The Green Berets [1965]. I was looking at it from an American perspective, this is part of counter insurgency. And with the '67 war, I thought that Israel is our ally and the Arabs are aligned with the Soviet Union. And that was a deciding factor in how I looked at things.

I always was anti-totalitarian from the youngest age. That goes to my dad's experience. And that interest in World War II also extended to Germany, and one of the first books I read when I started reading more history was Shirer's *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*— the kid's version of the Third Reich. And it was the time of the Cold War, so I came across things like the Hungarian Revolution and East Germany and the Berlin wall. So I was anti-totalitarian from the youngest age.

And though I turned against the Vietnam War, unlike some of my friends, who were having the prevailing attitude that if we're wrong, the other side must be right, I never defended the Vietnamese either. I was anti-communist. But for a variety of reasons, I turned against the war from an American perspective. "Why are we there?"

PW: What about education?

TP: I started taking night classes at junior college. And construction was

always up and down, and during one of the low periods [...] I was able to get an internship because of my construction experience. So that was where I got interested in computers.

And I decided to go in the army reserve and become a computer programmer. Now when I left the National Guard a few years earlier, I said, "Never again." I will be honest with you, I didn't care for regimentation. But this was the only way someone would pay me to go to school.

And Stewart Brand who was part of the counterculture said, "The Vietnam War is over, people should consider going in the military and getting training in computers." I thought, "Yeah." So countercultural ideas, the good ones, have always had some influence.

Later I came to know Ken Babbs who, along with his partner Ken Kesey, you could say were the originators of the hippie movement. And I told Ken Babbs, "Blame it on Stewart Brand, or give him credit for me going in the military, however you want to look at it."

PW: Is Babbs still around?

TP: Yes, he's in Eugene, Oregon. How I got acquainted with him— in [the book] *Electric Kool Aid Acid Test* [author] Tom Wolfe asks this guy, who's a Vietnam Vet, what was it like, and Babbs pointed to a pile of papers in the corner. "There it is, read all about it." It was a manuscript for a book on Vietnam. That manuscript got lost, not surprisingly, perhaps, and years later, in 2010, 2011, the story goes, a friend of Babbs sent him a copy of the manuscript that he didn't realize was out there. And Babbs and his wife produced a book called *Who Shot the Water Buffalo*. That was when I was a defense counsel with military commissions. And trying to bring in a better understanding of how we fought our wars. So I contacted Babbs, and being a Guantanamo defense attorney, that was my introduction, and we started corresponding, and he later invited me out to a visit.

PW: Was that a good book?

TP: Here's a point— let me fill this out. Babbs was one of the first American military service members in Vietnam. He was sent there as a Marine helicopter pilot before the war heated up, and then when he was there the war started heating up. I asked him in an oral history, what were his ideas once he got there. Did you think the war could be won? He said, No, I knew almost right away that war could not be won. I was taking Marines out on patrol, and even in those early years they would just pretend to be out on patrol because they didn't want to get too far away and not get back to the helicopter to pick them up. So they

were already shirking their duty, because they didn't want to put their lives on the line for what they already knew was a lost cause.

PW: They knew that the people didn't want them there.

TP: Yes.

PW: How political were you then?

TP: In 1983 I got hired as a computer technician in the active duty reserve program, and I was on active duty for almost 10 years. And during that time, that's when I got more politically interested and began spending a lot of time in the library. And I will admit that I became a neoconservative. I had been a liberal through the 70s, then came the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. And it just seemed like something is wrong here. I was a blue collar Reagan Democrat at that time, though I didn't like Reagan. I may have even have voted for John Anderson. I forget, but I was leaning more to the right at that time. As did a lot of people.

This is when the guerrilla war was heating up with El Salvador and Nicaragua. And being anti-totalitarian and anti-communist, I wasn't a right winger, I was a social democrat type you could say, but there had been some Nicaraguan Sandinistas who had broken off, and one of them was a former nun from southern Minnesota. She had been married to a Sandinista, but as the government became more Leninist he became disaffected and left the country.

And another guy was studying for a doctorate in Iowa who was a former Sandinista. He had actively supported the revolution when he had been in Europe, he was very knowledgeable about liberation theology. And Minnesota was a hotbed for support for the Sandinistas, with the Socialist Workers Party playing a large role. My interest was always in ideologies, revolutionary ideologies.

PW: You weren't on that team?

TP: No. I was against Trotsky and against Stalin and on the other team. I was coming from the liberal critical side toward Communism, and I got more involved in my reading, and I got acquainted with a person here who would remain a neoconservative, an attorney, who had gotten involved because of the involvement of the pro-Sandinista side at her Lutheran church. She didn't think she was getting the fullest picture. We joined forces. I was also talking to a number of different professors who had opinion pieces in the papers consistent with my own. And I met an IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] officer then teaching at the University of Minnesota. Some friends introduced me. If I had a political mentor then, it was this IDF officer.

PW: Would you take the same stance today vis-a-vis the Sandinistas, given the left-wing crowd you're in?

TP: I don't apologize for being anti-Sandinista. The people who interested me were the critics from the left side criticizing the Leninism. I was talking about the influence in global education of a pro-Sandinista point of view without any opposing viewpoint. That was the issue. There didn't seem to be a counter narrative. I wasn't interested because of a kneejerk pro-American perspective.

PW: But your left-wing friends in New York, the late Michael Ratner and Michael Smith, this would be a real difference between you.

TP: They would have been on a different side. And like I say, I would remain anti-Sandinista today, but today, I would be against interventionism. Someone I am friends with now is David MacMichael, he worked with the CIA at various levels. He's a member of the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity group, which Ray McGovern and a few others started in opposition to the Iraq War. MacMichael is elderly now, and he's much more on the left today than he would have been in the 50s and 60s. In the 80s he served as an expert witness for the Sandinista government in a lawsuit against the United States. And when I worked in military commissions I got acquainted with Paul Reichler, co-counsel for Nicaragua in that lawsuit. So talk about coming full circle.

I would respectfully disagree. I remain anti-totalitarian. That's why I am doing what I am doing today. That's why I volunteered to defend Guantanamo defendants. Because we had adopted the same techniques I had spent my life in opposition to.

When 9/11 came, almost immediately when we picked up people in Afghanistan and Bush and Cheney were saying, "They don't get the protection of the Geneva Conventions," my position is, "No, that's wrong." I had the experience of my dad in my background, and I said, "Wait a minute, this is what we used to accuse communist regimes of doing, violating human rights, etcetera. It's no more right when we're doing it than it was back when I was in opposition to the Sandinistas."

PW: How long were you a neocon?

TP: One of the professors I knew referred me to the National Association of Scholars, which was started by Herb London and Steve Balch, both of New York, and I got involved with them. Balch said, "Why don't you start a state chapter of the Minnesota Association of Scholars." That was 1987. And our first issue that we took a stand on was a call for a more balanced approach on global education.

In this period of time, I also got acquainted with the Institute on Religion and Democracy. All the neocons! And I got acquainted with Peter Collier and David Horowitz. I was arranging for various people to come into the state and speak at colleges. And I also got acquainted with Michael Ledeen's wife, Barbara Ledeen, who had worked with a group that sponsored Horowitz and Collier.

One guy I met in the association of scholars, I won't name names, but he was known as a Straussian at Carleton, and in our first meeting getting this association together he said, "Where do you teach?" He figured I must have been a professor. I broke the news, "I don't even have a college degree." I was putting on a good act.

PW: What was your religious training, and had you met Jews?

TP: We were very irreligious in my family. We went through the formality of getting confirmed in the Lutheran church, but just like in school, I didn't go to confirmation very much. My neighbor wrote my confirmation report. At the end of ninth grade, we had to meet every morning for a week with the pastor to prepare for confirmation and then write a five-page paper. I went the first day and didn't go the rest of the week. I talked to the pastor, and he said, well, if you get the paper in we'll confirm you. So my neighbor wrote the paper. I don't know how I persuaded her. I couldn't tell you what it was on.

The only Jews I knew were a local grocer, who would drive up from Minneapolis every day. He and his brother had a dry goods and grocery store, named Mark's.

PW: They were hardworking guys?

TP: Yes they were, and they gave credit, which farmers needed.

PW: What about anti-Jewish prejudice?

TP: None, that I was aware of. Minneapolis, according to The Mary Tyler Moore Show, had antisemitism, but it just wasn't an issue where I grew up. We liked these guys, we shopped there, they were always friendly. My grandmother liked them. I got to know Aaron, he was a real character, with a lot of jokes, he could have been on the comedian circuit. His brother Bert was older and a little bit more reserved.

PW: Now you were meeting them professionally. Were you thinking, "Wow, these are Jews?"

TP: No, it wasn't the way I thought. I thought, "This IDF officer, he knows something about war and politics."

PW: You told me your ideas really started to change with the Gulf War.

TP: Right. August 2, 1990 came along with the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. I believe that was a Saturday, and our unit had a mission to the Mideast, as theater area material management center. They said right away, "We'll be mobilized for this." I was a very patriotic person. I supported the Gulf War. But it also opened my eyes to how corrupt things were.

PW: How was that?

TP: Just the way things were done. We got mobilized to Fort Polk [Louisiana] in September. Then to Saudi Arabia beginning of October. The first thing we got told was, "You will be here at least a year." And I was told to train someone in the computer job, because the computer was going to be left in Saudi Arabia.

The US Army wanted to be in the Middle East. Even before we left Baton Rouge, I was told that my computer, the computer I was the sole technician for, would not be coming back. They weren't going to see what Saddam Hussein would do, they had their opening to get into the Middle East.

This particular computer I maintained, maintained all the ammo stockages in the theater; any ammo that came into the theater was digitally inventoried on the computer and allocated. So it was sort of an inside view of what was being done at a high level of command. And like I say, it opened my eyes to how things really worked in the military.

PW: Why did they want to be in Saudi Arabia?

TP: To me at the time, but more with hindsight—it was that yeah, the United States wanted to get more involved, more directly in the Middle East. We were already propping up the Saudi regime in a variety of ways. And Osama bin Laden, one of the complaints he had was that the United States was in Saudi Arabia. When you break that down, the complaint was about the United States propping up the Saudi regime, which was corrupt and keeping most of the wealth for themselves in the Saudi family. When you got there, you could see that first hand. I'd go for a walk, and you could see a palace there and the rest of the people largely in poverty.

We got there in October, and most of the units were out of there by May. But because we had a permanent mission there we were still there and I don't know when they planned on getting us out. But the people from Baton Rouge and Arkansas said, "When are we getting out of here," and they started calling congressional members, saying, "The war is over." And about May they said, "We're going to keep part of the unit here, and send the rest back to Baton Rouge, and we'll continue the mission."

But what was the mission? The war was over, so what was the mission? The mission

was to plant the United States in the Middle East, with a remnant here in Saudi Arabia.

I got out of there only because a regular army soldier wanted to stay there, a computer technician. So he transferred to our unit and he stayed there. We left part of the unit there in the Khobar towers. I helped them move in. It was a giant apartment complex. Like the projects in Chicago.

PW: Did that make you cynical?

TP: That was where I really became cynical in a whole lot of ways, both at the micro level— officers having adulterous affairs and having a motive to stay there, with one another, and I'm being careful not to name names, but high ranking officers, who were actually lobbying to keep us there, because they didn't have a financial interest in going back, plus they had their mistress there. It was the lower level people suffering in various ways financially, and this was before cell phones; phone calls home were expensive, and they were trying to maintain contact with their families.

PW: People have had affairs in the command before.

TP: No, that's not new at all. It happens at every level in the military. Not just the adulterous affairs, but more just the conflict that goes with it, and how that works out personnel wise. I didn't worry about who was having sex with who, but rather what consequences that had for me and the other soldiers. You see people getting promoted faster and what not.

PW: What about the macro level?

TP: That computer is probably still there. Rusting now that things are updated. But they were setting up a system of logistic bases. They had already started one in Saudi Arabia, then they had another base in Kuwait, where they launched the war in 2003. We were putting a stranglehold on Iraq from the very beginning of the end of the Gulf War.

PW: Whose plan was that?

TP: I have to believe that we were doing it from the time we left. From the highest level. George H.W. Bush and Cheney, they had exhibited some prudence in not invading Iraq at the time, but at the same time they were exercising total control over Iraq in a variety of ways.

Let me throw in one other thing here, very quickly. I came back and I got a promotion and a job down in Fort McCoy [in Wisconsin]. I was applying to law school at the time, and fulfilling the requirements by getting a four year

degree. And I entered Hamline Law School in 1993, at age 42.

But that experience in Fort McCoy made me even more cynical. The way the commanders were. Again, adultery. Which is there everywhere you go. But the personality of the commander was very controlling. I got down there and I'm hearing right away from enlisted men and officers, "Don't say a word, don't question anything." And every week they had a meeting with the commander who would talk, and the second week, a captain raised a question, "Why isn't this being done?" The people around me were whispering, "He'll be gone in a week." And sure enough, the next week he was shipped out to a less desirable place.

PW: How did you go from law school to becoming a JAG?

TP: My goals were modest. I wasn't looking for a large law firm partnership or anything. My goal was just to be a prosecutor in a medium-sized Minnesota county where I live. I was more of a law and order guy.

But when I was finishing law school, [a former army colleague] had become commander of the legal support unit for an army reserve unit. And by that time I had joined the army psyops [Psychological Operations] unit as a reservist, one weekend a month, as a noncommissioned officer, but that unit was being disbanded so I called him up and I said, "Do you have any positions?" He did and said, "I can't promise you but I might get you a commission as a JAG..." [T]he paperwork went in and I got the commission. So then I became a JAG. I got commissioned in 1996 and I was 45 years old.

Meantime, I applied to be a judicial law clerk in St Cloud, with a judge. I got hired by him, and it was fortuitous, we were very compatible in outlook. He was a state judge, very senior, appointed by a Democrat. In the course of working for him, I won't give you too many details, but my outlook shifted, after I saw a couple of cops testifying falsely on a couple of cases. I thought, "Yeah, there's a place for the defense more than I appreciated before." My sympathies shifted. I remained more conservative at that point. But conservative in the idea that, "No, you got to have the defense and defend these civil liberties."

That was a transformational experience. We had a few cops come in, and a cop was lying. This cop who was investigating false allegations became involved with the alleged victim's mother, and you read the police report and the thing just fell apart. And the charge was very serious: a charge of sexual conduct with a 15 year old girl. The case was filled with inconsistencies, and I persuaded the judge to dismiss the charges. No judge wants to dismiss a charge of criminal sexual conduct involving a 16 year old girl, because it is going to get a lot of attention. But I went back to him three times.

The charges were against the mother's new husband. They'd met in a nudist camp. He had a pension as a teacher, and the daughter never liked the guy. I don't blame her, but she made the allegation of sexual contact, and the story rang false for a lot of reasons. The cop had gotten in an affair with the mother. I persuaded the judge, this is inherently incredible, it couldn't be true. It took three times to convince the judge and he dismissed the charge.

The judge said, "Yeah, go ahead and write up an order dismissing the charge, but make it very careful and make it bulletproof." And I did. And that was later vindicated by the prosecution and the police.

PW: What effect did that have on you?

TP: Well it added another layer of cynicism.

PW: Our conversation began with you saying the foreign policy positions of the Democrats and Republicans are fascistic. That's a strong statement. Do you think that in this belief, with your long ideological history, that you have a romance about when America was good?

TP: I have a yin and yang view. Yeah, there's much that's good about America and relatively speaking in the course of human events and history, we are often exactly as we have held ourselves up to be. We did break ground in opening up more freedom for the world. But at the same time we were committing genocide [through] constant warfare against the indigenous people. Which cannot be denied and cannot be legitimized, or justified.

PW: How are we doing in terms of those freedoms?

TP: Many people could argue that at any point in our history we really were hypocritical because of the way we treated indigenous people. And you can make an argument that every war we had, even the revolutionary war, was driven by economic self-interest, but again, it brought about good outcomes. We were always on an imperialistic course with manifest destiny and subjugating the indigenous people. And you can't justify that and you can't defend it in a moral sense. But we really took that to a higher level with the Spanish American war, where we become a global imperialist and joined the other imperialist powers. My great-great uncle was part of that, as a minister to China. But even then it was always mixed. John Quincy Adams said we don't go abroad to slay dragons or tyrants, but we stay at home. Like any country you have schizophrenic political attitudes.

So how do you measure our achievement? In the long term, I guess you have to measure by what we brought about in human rights.

But I think it's like we hit a peak and now we're on a downhill side. Now human rights has become a pretext to go to war and to use as a weapon against other countries, not equally against despotic regimes, but selectively at whoever we want to target.

It goes to Hannah Arendt's point about totalitarian foreign policy, which I take to be a fundamental principle of fascism, and as others have written, fascism, contrary to what some will say— what's a fascist regime, and they get into minutiae, what did Mussolini do. While more astute observers point out that fascism is what fascism does. Even if we don't have anybody speaking Italian to us doesn't mean that we can't be fascist.

And fascism is a national manifestation, so every country is going to have its own cultural form of it. We're seeing an American form of it, particularly in the political conventions. Last night [at the Democratic Convention], some antiwar protester said, "No more war," and they were drowned out with people chanting, "USA, USA."

They didn't treat them any different at the Democratic one from the Republican. This morning, Joe Scarborough said, "You know the Democrats have gotten rid of their Vietnam syndrome." They're back in full warfare mode. They're just triumphant. There's a satisfaction that both parties are united on their foreign policy. No more of this antiwar dissent, or Democrats apologizing for what we're doing. We finally silenced the antiwar left. There's a triumphalism being expressed.

PW: St. Cloud led where?

TP: I learned there was an active reserve JAG officer opening at Fort Snelling [in Minneapolis]. I thought, "I have to apply and see what happens." I got hired. I went on active duty in 1998, as again an active Army Reserve JAG officer. About the same time the Kosovo War was beginning, and in large part coming out of the Gulf War, I had become anti-interventionist, to give him his due credit, partly under Pat Buchanan's influence. He was making the argument, the Cold War is over, get the peace dividend, it's time to come home, America, invest in the United States, lower the defense budget. I'd been anti-communist and anti-Soviet, but I wasn't militaristic.

So, I was very much in line with that. I had already had two indications through the military of our real long term goals in foreign policy. Being told our computer would stay in the Middle East, then seeing how we ramped up our logistics bases there. Then when I was in the psyops unit, during training, our commander came to us one day and said, "You know, if you guys are thinking your mission is going to be reduced, you're wrong." We had just come back from the

Gulf conflict. "We're actually going to be doing more things around the world on these psyops missions." That was probably 1993 or 1994. [...] And bear in mind, the psyops are mainly in the army reserve. The way it's set up, they don't need that many people on hand except during a war. So when a war breaks out that, they need psyops and they've got them all ready in the Reserve.

Also when I was undergoing that psyops training, down at Fort Bragg, one of the instructors was a master sergeant who had been in Iraq during the Gulf War, and she was up in the Kurdish area after the war, and she and a captain had nothing to do, they were twiddling their thumbs— and this goes to show the incompetence of the military and the lack of sound reasoning—her and this captain were up there as psyops working with the Kurds. They're supposed to be helping them get food, and they decide, well, we need to do something in line with psyops, so they started preparing this propaganda message, Rise up against Saddam Hussein.

And she hated the Kurds because they did exactly what they'd asked them to do. The Kurds in the north rose up and got decimated by Saddam's forces. And she just couldn't contain herself, [...] she hated the Kurds, because they'd actually listened to her. I presume she got some kind of rebuke for it officially.

PW: That was in the news, right?

TP: There was another rebellion in the south. That was driven by George H.W. Bush. [He] made some statements that encouraged southern Iraqis, the Shiites to rise up, the so called Marsh Arabs. She was up in the Kurdish area, and I'm just relying on her anecdote here, but according to this person who would have been a senior NCO, on her own, she and this other officer incited the Kurds to rise up and rebel. She hated the Kurds, because she didn't care about the Kurds getting killed as a result—and I'm guessing but she probably got in a little bit of trouble, maybe a reprimand, for an ad hoc psyops campaign. But she didn't get too severe a reprimand, because she was working as a senior instructor.

They succeeded in inciting them to rebel, but she didn't want them really to rebel. They were just doing that because "Hey— this is what we do." It was just a gross dereliction.

PW: What was next for you?

TP: I got off active duty in November 2002 as they were ramping up for the Iraq war. And I took a job as assistant county attorney in Fillmore County, in southeastern Minnesota, in February 2003, then I left in April 2004 and started working at the Minnesota secretary of state's office, and worked there till March 2008.

Then I went on active duty for Guantanamo in June 2008.

PW: Did you elect to do that?

TP: Yes, I volunteered. Again, going back to the very beginning stage of the global war on terror, they said, "We're not going to recognize the Geneva Conventions." I was on active duty then. I opposed that, and I opposed the Iraq war.

PW: What does that mean to oppose the war inside the military?

TP: There was a senior NCO who put up a sign, No war in Iraq, in her yard. And someone saw that and reported her. They were looking at punishing her. It never made it into the papers. That put me in a quandary, because they wanted to have punitive action against her, and I'm trying to recall if it ever got to the stage where I had to say yes or no. I opposed any action. And I had very good relations with the general. I would have told him not to do anything.

PW: Where were you on 9/11?

TP: I was on active duty as a JAG officer. I went into work that morning. And our staff was small, me and a lieutenant colonel, and he routinely would come in late. And that day he didn't come in till 2 or 3 o'clock, which I won't say anything more about. It was all happening when I got to work, and the second plane hit and we knew it was terrorism, and so we began wrapping up immediately our command, because we were responsible for all the Reserve units in six states. Also we knew people were being mobilized almost immediately. I was in on all the discussions because the more senior guy hadn't shown up yet. And you could just see the hysteria taking hold of a lot of people.

Then at the end of the day, late in the day, because we worked late, finally my senior officer arrives, so I can go home, and I picked up my son [from school in Minneapolis] so we could go home, and see my stepson who was back from the Marines on leave. He'd been in a year and a half, and I was anxious to see him. And there was a huge traffic jam. And finally we got north, and we came to an overpass, and there was a guy on the overpass with a kid waving a flag. He backed the traffic up five miles because everyone honked a horn and slowed down a bit. It was something like after Pearl Harbor. But I was ticked off. I wanted to get home and see my stepson.

The next night— the same thing. The guy was out there again with a flag. The third night, I pulled over. I had my uniform on, and I said, "Hey you're backing up traffic for ten miles. You've done this now for a couple days, we get it." He said, "I just want to show my support." I said, "I'm in the military, I want to get home, you're doing a disservice to me."

The guy was out there again the next night. I called the highway patrol. I said,

“Look, I understand free expression, but backing up traffic? Can you at least suggest that he stop?” But they said, “Oh no, we can’t.”

Fortunately, he wasn’t out there after the weekend.

PW: Why wasn’t it freedom of expression?

TP: It was hysteria. Immediately— out came this outpouring. He was patriotic, but again to me, sitting out there—he was backing traffic up for miles. I never criticized anyone’s patriotism, though we could get on to a different topic, of how it’s become hyper-militarism.

PW: Where else did you see the hysteria?

TP: Just watching my fellow officers. They were changing before our very eyes. “We have to go to war, we have to start killing people.” Then it all started. Picking people up with no Geneva Conventions.

PW: But what were your feelings on 9/11? I remember myself that day. I said, “I’d go after those bastards.”

TP: Absolutely. Remember, I was still inclined to be hawkish. I was non-interventionist but I was still hawkish, and I said, “We got to go after the guys who are behind this.” I had no doubt about that. I was mobilizing troops and I was fully in support of these guys. But let’s do it right. Let’s do it legally. I was going back to all my time having an interest in guerrilla war and how do you deal with it. When you start acting outside the law, when you act hypocritically, you are aiding the enemy. This is a fundamental principle of counter insurgency, which we’ve never followed in spite of Petraeus’s talk. You’re aiding the enemy.

Hey, we’re doing everything wrong. Almost from the beginning we did everything wrong. We went into Afghanistan— yeah, hunt down Al Qaeda, the perpetrators. Then it turned into removing the Taliban. The Taliban aren’t terrorists. The Taliban may be horrible people, they are not terrorists. You can’t expand the war.

Then it expanded to Iraq. Even at the beginning, they were talking about Iraq. So everything we have done is wrong and has led to the creation and expansion of ISIS. We brought it into existence by our own policies.

PW: Did you ever say this to Michael Ratner? He used to say the same thing.

TP: I said it frequently on an email list I was on with him. I remember he responded to me when I talked about martial law— that these principles, if we follow them, are a threat to our civil liberties and political dissent.

PW: That was happening in the Vietnam days?

TP: The military wanted to do it. I went in and did quite a bit of research on Westmoreland and these guys. I read this book *On Strategy*, which is a mimicry of Clausewitz's book, *On War*. It pretended to be taking Clausewitz's thought and applying it to Vietnam. In fact, Clausewitz said the strongest form of warfare is defensive. He was writing as a Prussian national, in opposition to Napoleon's invasion, and he said, "Stay at home, defend your country, don't go out on offensive operations." And in this book *On Strategy*, Podhoretz turned that upside down. The book is by Harry Summers, but Podhoretz is listed. There's a section on the offensive. How the offensive is a stronger form of war, and as a footnote, Podhoretz is given as an authority for that, not Clausewitz, who said the opposite.

Clausewitz's book wasn't popular with the Germans because Clausewitz also said you need to have civilian leadership making the decisions on war, because the military is more narrow minded. So the German military almost immediately reinterpreted Clausewitz's book, and that's how it's handed down to the Americans.

The point of Colonel Harry Summers's book, *On Strategy*, was we would have won the Vietnam War had our will not been diminished by the antiwar movement and the press. I had actually adopted that view a bit in the '80s myself. Till becoming sober again. But the press had been targeted as the enemy, for having reported the news. In the course of our argument on the right to know, I read these memoirs by Generals Davidson and Westmoreland and Admiral Sharpe. They were all in agreement that the press lost the war for us, the antiwar movement. Davidson and Sharpe said for the next war, we got to have military detention and censorship. Basically, we got to bring back the martial law we had during the Civil War and in Hawaii during the World War, which they had all been familiar with.

In Hawaii, they needed Japanese-Americans as a work force, so they didn't have the mass removal. They had martial law. I went to the museum in Hawaii. They had signs, imposing censorship. And that's what these Vietnam-era generals would have known all about [...], and they were advocating that for the Vietnam War. It's unconstitutional, so it's difficult to do, but the military internalized this way of thinking, so they've been coming up with these ways of basically suppressing news and information ever since.

PW: How long did you serve as a Guantanamo defense attorney?

TP: I began June 2008, and it actually continues to this day. I'm still on a case before the DC Court of Appeals, we're still waiting on a decision.

PW: How many guys have you met at Guantanamo?

TP: At Guantanamo itself, I have only met one client, one prisoner [Ibrahim] al-Qosi. The appellate case I'm still on, he would never meet with us. Though one time, to the surprise of my co-counsel, he agreed to meet; and it was my co-counsel who was down there, so they met and actually they ended up talking throughout the day. His name is [Ali Hamza] al-Bahlul. He told my co-counsel, "I want to give you a message to send to your president." The guards wouldn't let him bring in his pen and notebook for some random reason, but he had a MacDonald's coffee cup, and al-Bahlul twisted the lid of the coffee cup to use as a stylus and etched his message into the styrofoam. "Stop waging war on us and we'll stop fighting back."

It's clear all the time, what is their motivation. We sent the whole cup to the White House.

So I only met al-Qosi. Now I have met a number of former prisoners after [their release]— British and Sudanese.

PW: Did the meetings have an effect on you?

TP: Actually, it didn't have any real effect on my thinking. It only confirmed the conclusion I had already come to, that here's why they fight. Our client was a very calm person, low-key person. This was his personality, this wasn't just putting on an act. He had gone to Afghanistan in the late 1980s from Sudan, and volunteered, maybe having been encouraged by CIA propaganda to go fight the Russians. He came late in the war, so he might have done a little fighting late in the war, and that war ended, but the group he joined up with happened to be bin Laden's, because that was one of the groups fighting and organizing people. So he went to continue fighting the Russians in Chechnya, but he got there just at the time when a cease fire was going down. So he didn't do much fighting there. He probably was never involved with much fighting. Then he went to Sudan, when bin Laden went there. He became more of a gofer for bin Laden and did some menial jobs trading produce from bin Laden's farm, which he wasn't very good at.

PW: Bin Laden had a farm in Sudan?

TP: Yes, he invested quite heavily in Sudan for a while. But the US put pressure on the Sudanese government to kick him out, so then he went back to Afghanistan. Our client al-Qosi followed him to Afghanistan. There he was basically a driver and a logistics guy, picking people up and bringing them there. He definitely agreed with al Qaeda's goal of fighting the west, for the reasons al Qaeda said. We were being monitored, so I didn't get into real specifics. So I couldn't quote you.

On Israel, I did casually say or carefully say something about Israel, and—yeah, that’s an issue. But I knew that because the other client had created a propaganda video or a documentary of why we fight.

PW: The coffee cup one?

TP: Yeah. In 1998 or 99. The video is called *The State of the Umma*, the Umma being the Islamic people. It’s their version of our World War II propaganda movie, *Why We Fight*. And they list the reasons. The three reasons in 1998 or 1999 were: The US troops staying in Saudi Arabia. It’s not just they’re on supposed holy ground, rather it’s why they’re there, they’re propping up a Saudi regime that is plundering the state’s coffers.

The second reason they cited, I think in this order, I believe was the sanctions on Iraq which led to the deaths of indisputably 500,000 children, which Madeleine Albright said was worth it, and they obviously disagreed. She was asked about it on 60 Minutes, and I think Lesley Stahl said, “Well we hear there’s been 500,000 children that died as a result of sanctions, Madame Secretary.” “Well, we felt it was worth it.” She later said it’s not what I meant. But that’s what went out, as her response.

And the third reason was the Israeli military occupation of Palestine. And those were the three reasons listed in 1998 or 1999. That’s what they were operating under when they planned 9/11. 9/11 was not intended to bring the United States down, but it was a classic guerrilla technique: how do you bring the enemy into your territory. Bin Laden had concluded, “Why are we going to fight the Saudis when the Saudis are the tool of the Americans? Get the real enemy.” And none of this is to defend anything bin Laden did. But he attacked a building, the Pentagon, that was a legal military target. And the World Trade Center, you could make an argument that it was too, because it was crammed with national security offices. There were a lot of federal government offices in there.

They wanted to draw the United States into their battle space, so they would have a better advantage in fighting us. But the purpose in targeting the United States was because it was the United States pulling all the strings in the Middle East. Including with Israel. Because we’re a Joint Military Command with Israel, you could say, today. Then with Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. You can tell me if you disagree. But when you look at the ammo carriers— when Israel runs out of ammo in an assault on Gaza, we’re the logistics train, bringing up and resupplying them. Just like my unit in Saudi Arabia was the logistics train for the troops, we’re doing the same for the Israeli Defense Forces when they launch a war.

PW: So would you say you became politicized?

TP: My politics today are non-ideological, if you can call it that. As far as ideologies, I can disagree with everybody. Libertarians may be right against the wars, but they advocate economic policies that allow the Sheldon Adelsons to get ever richer, so that they can push for a war. So, functionally, they're supporting war. Uri Avnery captured the Republicans perfectly. When Netanyahu spoke to Congress, he said it reminded him of a German Reichstag session, and half the Democrats are as bad. So there is at least a remnant of Democrats who aren't fascists.

So I don't consider myself ideological. But a pragmatist. Certainly with ethics—we don't go out and kill people at random. But also arguing, "This is against our national interest; what we're doing in the Middle East is not advancing our national interest."

PW: Where is Israel in your thinking?

TP: I think it's right up there with everything I'm criticizing about the United States. Again, militarily, we're functionally a joint military command. We know all about the PNAC [Project for a New American Century] thing. And before that it was Oded Yinon, writing in 1982, advising the Israeli government to fragment the Middle East. He was an Israeli foreign service officer saying, "Rather than dealing with these other Arab states and being in a state of war, what we should do is fragment them, break them into pieces." And later when Netanyahu was prime minister, in 1996, Richard Perle came along making that same recommendation [in the report, *A Clean Break*].

PW: A lot of people make a lot of recommendations. Is that the active thread in their thinking?

TP: Yes. I'm acquainted with Ilan Pappé and 1948 now. So I know much of that was being done well before today. And whatever opinions are of 1948, and criticisms—myself I'm a bit of a pragmatist, ok, so, Israel is in existence, and life and history is filled with injustices, like the Native Americans. You can't undo all that. So as a pragmatist, Israel has got those borders. Even though in 1948 it went beyond those borders. They got those '67 borders [from the 1949 armistice], and so, to reconcile and bring some peace— you're not going to undo '48, but we got to not allow them to continue that conquest that's taking place. I mean, if the United States was continuing to wage war against the indigenous people, say, or Mexico or South America, continuing the war against the indigenous people, I'd say, "OK whatever happened 150 years ago, there's got to be a statute of limitations here, it's got to be fixed, we can't continue it." That's the crime going on today; we can't allow an ongoing crime to continue.

So reading all this, and seeing the part where the expansion is continuing. And

Ben Zion Netanyahu [Benjamin Netanyahu's father] said, "Wipe out the Arabs, get rid of them; and my son agrees with me!" Though he's more cautious about what he says. I can give you the exact quote.

PW: How influential has that thinking been in the U.S.?

TP: Well I think before 9/11 it had obviously been influential with the neoconservatives. Which I had left. But I was still leaning toward the conservative side of things, in large part because of Bill Clinton and Hillary and their wars on Kosovo. That's what resonated with Buchanan's criticism. Because no one on the left was talking about this. So that by default put me on the right, as an anti-Interventionist.

And you got the Christian Zionists. So it was always there. But with 9/11 it expanded exponentially. When 9/11 happened it created a readymade audience for the neocons to say we got to do what Israel does. Karen Kwiatkowski worked in the Pentagon at the time, and she said the IDF officers had regular access. They didn't even have to go through, like I did, with a pass, to get through.

So right away we turn to the IDF. But what the IDF knows is not counter terrorism, in the sense of a democracy defending itself against outside assault—what the IDF knows is how to exercise a military occupation, in the most repressive manner.

And the law of war allows a belligerent nation when they're occupying a nation to protect itself from what the law calls hostile acts. But there's a danger, when you adopt this idea of martial law and military occupation, you're bringing in totalitarian law. The law of war is fundamentally totalitarian law. Because it allows you to protect yourself as the belligerent against any possible threat. So in the case of Israel, a kid writes a graffiti on a wall in the occupation, that can be deemed a hostile act, and they are put in military detention.

PW: Do you remember a case like that?

TP: Yes, I remember reading about such a case. So a hostile act, here's where it raises questions about our drone targeting. We deemed everybody in Iraq who opposed us to be a terrorist, even though they were a legitimate resistance force under the principle we established in France and elsewhere, in World War II. But we're deeming them to be terrorists. And are we doing the same with people who we're targeting with drones?

And maybe someone who is a journalist— and there have been a lot of journalists killed by the United States— are we deeming them to be undertaking a hostile act just because of opinions that they're expressing? I suspect we are.

I was at a Code Pink event on drone warfare, and they had a guest there speaking about a relative who'd been killed. He was a youth, 16 or 17, and he went to an anti-drone war event. A Pakistani politician held a large event in one of the larger cities against drone warfare, and this kid had gone to it, and on his way back he was killed by a drone. Again, when you look at the way the war of law has been interpreted under martial law, the customary way we think of a hostile act is someone carrying an AK-47, but just as I was in psyops—propaganda is deemed to be a hostile act, and propaganda is loosely interpreted. So in a strict military mind, in that tunnel vision mind, if you're weakening our will, like they described in *On Strategy*, then you're aiding the enemy. Therefore you are the enemy.

That's what the generals were arguing in Vietnam. These antiwar protesters are weakening our will, therefore they're aiding the enemy, therefore they should be treated like the enemy and put in military detention. If you can put somebody in military detention, then you can kill them as well. Because it's the same principle. In one of the early military commission cases, they had put this US citizen [Yaser Esam] Hamdi in military detention. It was bought up on habeas corpus appeal, and the Supreme Court justices said, I think it was Sandra Day O'Connor who wrote the Opinion, in warfare you can kill your enemies, so of course you can put your enemies in military detention. And the reverse is true. If you can put somebody in detention, you can also kill them, because they're the enemy.

I've talked to the group that monitors drone warfare in London. And I have asked, how many journalists have been killed. They said 9 or 10 at least. Again putting things together, I don't think it's wildly speculative to say, we have targeted people who are most outspoken against military policy either as journalists or activists in the Islamic world, under the principle that they're committing hostile acts against us. Which may just be what they're saying.

And al-Awlaki the same way. He's accused of being a propagandist. But when they've been challenged they say, "He was actually an operational leader." That conjures up the vision that he's planning military acts. But you could say as well [that] I, as a psyops NCO, was an operational leader too. In my case I was a member of the military. But what they're saying is, "If you're engaged in propaganda, you're engaged in war. Therefore you're a lawful target. You're taking direct part in hostilities." And that's what gets to a lot of civilians, that we don't bother even to defend what we did. We say they have an operational role in the war, when they might just be expressing dissenting thoughts.

PW: What do you mean, we haven't defended?

TP: Other than Awlaki, we haven't bothered really. When we kill a group of

people and they're civilians, they're collateral damage. We've never gone into specifics of this, because no one has even challenged us who has any voice. When you kill this journalist, they keep track of it, in London. But they don't have a voice that anyone listens to beyond their narrow circle. But, like I say, they told me that at least 9 or 10 journalists have been killed.

PW: Dissenting voices, where are they in the culture?

TP: They're virtually nonexistent in my opinion. Which is a danger. We've evolved into this fully militaristic society. You have writers like Phil Giraldi, Ray McGovern, Glenn Greenwald, and websites like Consortiumnews, Antiwar.com, the Intercept, Alternet, and Mondoweiss.net opposing militarism. How many others are there? Very few. We've just been overwhelmed. The Democrats court Petraeus and Petraeus endorses Clinton, and Republicans court General Flynn who collaborates with neocon Michael Ledeen. The mainstream has been fairly unified. Trump is a bit of an outlier. But like I told a lawyer friend who wanted to start a superPAC against Trump, I'm against Trump, but I'm also against the entire Republican party, and I'm not sure that they're not worse. Trump you can at least recognize as a fascist. It's the ones who we don't understand how their policies are fascist that are the real danger. Ted Cruz and Rubio and what's his name Bush, all these guys wanted to continue the George W. Bush policies.

And Hillary Clinton, going back to the first Clinton administration, people said then, she and Madeleine Albright were the hawks in that administration. And she's changed nothing.

PW: Are you worried about the lack of voices questioning these policies?

TP: Absolutely. I've mentioned the case of Ernest Fraenkel. Ernst Fraenkel was describing the situation in 1939 that at least is in formation here. Section 1021 [of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2012] gives the prerogative to the government. What it says is that a military officer could go and arrest someone should the commander deem that person to be a terrorist threat or a terrorist. That's exactly what the Gestapo used to do with an internal enemy. That's what 1021 provides a legal basis for.

I've argued about this with a lawyer I have a lot of respect for. I say, "This applies to US citizens." He said, "It doesn't apply to US citizens." But the other section explicitly refers to foreigners. There's sections 1021 and 1022, and 1022 applies to foreign terrorists. Within that section, it says it only applies to foreign people. But 1021 doesn't say anything about foreign or domestic. Just by a standard statutory interpretation, I would argue that 1022 explicitly excludes U.S. citizens. Which it doesn't have to do. While 1021

doesn't exclude US citizens.

PW: Has it ever been applied?

TP: What I argue is the correct legal interpretation has been applied, in the *Hedges v. Obama* lawsuit. That's why I keep going back to it. In *Hedges v Obama*, Chris Hedges and a couple of other activists brought a case against the government for injunctive relief. They said, "We don't know what we can do anymore, we don't know who we can talk to, we don't know what we can say." The district court granted the injunctive relief of 1021 and the second circuit court of appeals issued a stay, and the DoJ went in and said, "Yeah, we're at war, the president is commander in chief, and furthermore, you have the Congress—and when the Congress and the president are in agreement, the president's powers are at its apex. 1021 was passed by Congress, so therefore the presidential powers are at the apex. "

So if they deem someone to be a terrorist or a terrorist threat, they could be put in military detention. That doesn't exclude someone for something they write. The government made the argument, it doesn't exclude just expressive activities. It can include expressive activities. It gets back to the kid writing graffiti on the wall. That's a hostile act if the military leader deems it to be so. So in *Hedges v Obama*, the DoJ made that argument that expressive activities could be included and could be considered a hostile act, meriting military detention. But the case was dismissed because Hedges and others didn't have standing because their expressive activities had never been affected. Which is how these cases are always dismissed.

So in other words, we have this Government on record saying, "We're not ruling out any powers."

PW: In my complacency as a journalist who's a dissenter leading a happy life, I say, Todd you have a dark view of world. There's a difference between prosecution and marginalization. We're not being heard, but we're not being thrown in jails.

TP: Well, number one I say *Hedges v. Obama* vindicates my concern. What the DoJ said to the court vindicates my concern. Number two, I'm not saying this is imminent. Posner and Vermeule wrote a book, they're the two who say we have to go back and study Carl Schmitt. Prominent law professors, one at Chicago, one at Harvard, they say, go back and study the work of Nazi Carl Schmitt. In *The Executive Unbound*, three years ago they wrote, "there's always a political factor."

So yes, the president has all these unlimited powers and the Congress has no

constraints on them, but they say, “Don’t worry, there are political factors that will inhibit the president.” So what they’re saying in essence is, “So Hedges, yeah the government says they can throw you in military detention, but don’t worry. They won’t do it.” But in the right situation, as these generals said in Vietnam, if it means a military setback or defeat, yes, we’ve got to resort to these measures. So right now we’re fighting a nondescript enemy, whether it’s ISIS or al Qaeda, but now we’re ramping up against Russia..

Yes, at the present day, as of right now, I agree, I think it would be unlikely. But one factor always to be considered in warfare, is the legitimacy of your cause, who you’re defending. That’s what you’re fighting over in a guerrilla war. So you always want to maintain the utmost legitimacy. [...] We profess to be a democracy, so we profess to protect civil rights. We don’t want to squander that legitimacy if we can help it.

Philip Weiss is the founder and co-editor of Mondoweiss.net, where this interview originally appeared.

US Media Ignores CIA Cover-up on Torture

A group of U.S. intelligence veterans chastises the mainstream U.S. media for virtually ignoring a British newspaper’s account of the gripping inside story on how the CIA tried to block the U.S. Senate’s torture investigation.

MEMORANDUM FOR: Sen. Dianne Feinstein, Vice Chairman, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

SUBJECT: U.S. Media Mum On How Your Committee Faced Down Both CIA and Obama

We write to thank you for your unwavering support for your extraordinarily courageous and tenacious staff in (1) investigating CIA torture under the Bush/Cheney administration and (2) resisting CIA/White House attempts under the Obama administration to cover up heinous torture crimes like waterboarding.

We confess to having been shocked at the torture detailed in the version of the [executive summary](#) your Committee released on December 9, 2014. We found ourselves wondering what additional behavior could have been deemed so repugnant that the White House and CIA insisted it be redacted; and if the entire 6,700-page investigation – with whatever redaction might be truly necessary – would

ever see the light of day. We think you could take steps now to make it less likely that the full report be deep-sixed, and we will make some suggestions below toward that end.

With well over 400 years of intelligence experience under our collective belt, we wondered how you managed to get the investigation finished and the executive summary up and out (though redacted). We now know the backstory – thanks to the unstinting courage of the committee’s principal investigator Daniel Jones, who has been interviewed by Spencer Ackerman, an investigative reporter for The (UK) Guardian newspaper. The titanic struggle depicted by Ackerman reads like a crime novel; sadly, the four-part series is nonfiction:

I. “Senate investigator breaks silence about CIA’s ‘failed coverup’ of torture report”

II. “Inside the fight to reveal the CIA’s torture secrets”

III. ” ‘A constitutional crisis’: the CIA turns on the Senate”

IV. “No looking back: the CIA torture report’s aftermath”

Ackerman’s reporting on Jones’s tenacity in facing down the gorilla CIA makes abundantly clear how richly deserved was the encomium you gave Jones when he left the committee staff in December 2015.

You noted, “Without his indefatigable work on the Intelligence Committee staff, the Senate report on the CIA’s Detention and Interrogation Program would not have been completed, nor would its 525-page executive summary have been released to the public.”

It seems equal praise might well be due to any Snowden-like patriot/whistleblower who “inadvertently” included the “Panetta Review” in the reams of material given your committee by the CIA.

Remarkably, a full week after *The Guardian* carried Ackerman’s revelations, none has been picked up by U.S. “mainstream” newspapers. Not the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post* – not even *The Hill*.

(As for alternative media, Charles P. Pierce’s timely piece for *Esquire* whetted his readers’ appetite for the gripping detail of the *Guardian* series, explaining that it would be “unfair both to Ackerman’s diligence and Jones’s courage” to try to summarize even just the first installment. “Read the whole damn thing,” Pierce advises.)

And so, the culprits who should be hanging their heads in shame are out and

about, with some still collecting book royalties and some blithely working for this or that candidate for president. As if nothing happened. Sadly, given the soporific state of our mainstream media – particularly on sensitive issues like these – their silence is nothing new, although it does seem to have gotten even worse in recent years.

The late William Colby, CIA director from 1973 to 1976, has been quoted as saying: “The CIA owns everyone of any significance in the major media.” Whether or not Colby was quoted correctly, the experience of the past several decades suggests it is largely true. Better sourced is a quote from William Casey, CIA director from 1981 to 1987: “We’ll know our disinformation program is complete when everything the American public believes is false.”

In these circumstances, we know from sad experience that there is no way any of us can get on any of the Sunday talk shows, for example – despite our enviable record for getting it right. Nor does it seem likely that any of the “mainstream” media will invite you to discuss the highly instructive revelations in The Guardian. We respectfully suggest that you take the initiative to obtain media exposure for this very important story.

One additional request: As you and your investigators know better than anyone, it is essential to safeguard the integrity not only of the unredacted executive summary but also of the entire 6,700-page committee report on the CIA’s Detention and Interrogation Program.

And, again, you are aware that as soon as Sen. Richard Burr, R-North Carolina, took the gavel from you, he took steps seemingly aimed at ensuring that the full report never sees the light of day. Could you ask him why, as soon as he became chair, he asked the executive branch to transfer their copies to the Senate Intelligence Committee?

Many interpreted that as an ill-disguised attempt to thwart holding accountable those responsible for the abuses. Moreover, if the report cannot be reviewed by those who might be asked to participate in activities like torture in the future, how is it even possible for anyone to learn from the prior unfortunate experience?

The public is entitled to the entire story about the CIA torture program and its lies to Congress, the White House, and to us. Any attempt to bury the fullest investigation of the torture program – an investigation that provides an example of Congressional oversight at its best – would undermine the democratic accountability that is supposed to be provided by the separation of powers.

Furthermore, as you were quoted in the Guardian series, the agency searches “may

have undermined the constitutional framework essential to effective congressional oversight of intelligence activities or any other government function”

Senator Jay Rockefeller, D-West Virginia, was exactly on point: “You either have oversight and separation of powers with the checks and balances that come with that, or you don’t. It’s amazing that, once again, no one at the CIA was held accountable.” Consequently, the issue now is not only the cover-up of torture by the CIA but – at least equally important – the “unbridled agency that spied on Americans (including Senate Intelligence Committee staffers) as eagerly as they spied on foreign adversaries,” as the *Guardian* described it in referring to the Church Committee investigation in the 1970s.

Does American democracy deserve any less than an intense investigation of the CIA’s obstruction of the democratic process in the 2000s?

The Guardian revelations make it still more difficult for the kind of excuses made by those who can hardly pretend to be disinterested observers – former CIA directors George Tenet, Porter Goss, Michael Hayden, for example – who wrote *Rebuttal: The CIA Responds to the Senate Intelligence Committee’s Study of Its Detention and Interrogation Program*, published on September 9, 2015. We published our own (VIPS) critique of “Rebuttal” five days later. And before the final vote on John Brennan’s nomination to become CIA director, we tried to warn you not to trust him.

We believe you will agree that more needs to be done to replant the moral moorings of honesty that must anchor the intelligence profession to which we have given so many years. And we think that one step in that direction would be for you to seize this new opportunity to give prominence to the edifying story of how your committee and its staffers stepped up so effectively to their responsibilities in investigating and exposing the very sad and delicate chapter of CIA torture.

The play-by-play provided by the *Guardian* series, with its appropriate focus on the top investigator Daniel Jones, has created an opportunity we hope will not be squandered; a chance to tell a truly uplifting story sure to encourage others to behave in similarly exemplary manner.

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

Jean Maria Arrigo, PhD, member of 2005 American Psychological Association task force evaluating the role of psychologists in U.S. intelligence and military interrogations of detainees (associate VIPS)

Eugene DeFriest Betit, Ph. D., DIA, US Army (ret.)

Thomas Drake, former Senior Executive, NSA

Bogdan Dzakovic, Former Team Leader of Federal Air Marshals and Red Team, FAA Security, (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Mike Gravel, former Adjutant, top secret control officer, Communications Intelligence Service; special agent of the Counter Intelligence Corps and former United States Senator

Matthew Hoh, former Capt., USMC, Iraq & Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan (associate VIPS)

Larry C Johnson, CIA & State Department (ret.)

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF (Ret.); ex-Master SERE Instructor for Strategic Reconnaissance Operations (NSA/DIA) and Special Mission Units (JSOC)

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Edward Loomis, NSA, Cryptologic Computer Scientist (ret.)

Linda Lewis, WMD preparedness policy analyst, USDA (ret.) (associate VIPS)

David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Near East, CIA and National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Todd E. Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (Ret.)

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (ret.)

Scott Ritter, former MAJ., USMC, former UN Weapon Inspector, Iraq

Peter Van Buren, U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA

Lawrence Wilkerson, Colonel (USA, ret.), Distinguished Visiting Professor, College of William and Mary (associate VIPS)

Valerie Plame Wilson, former CIA Operations Officer

Unseemly Competition for Israel's Blessing

President Obama's record \$38 billion in U.S. military aid to Israel shows neither U.S. major party wants to be "out-Israeled." The Trump campaign endorses an Israeli claim that Palestinians want to ethnically cleanse Jews, ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar notes.

By Paul R. Pillar

The Republican Party and Republican candidates have been moving over the past few years ever more fully into the embrace of Israel's right-wing government, even more than American politicians in general do. This trend has been apparent notwithstanding the traditional preference of AIPAC, the core of the Israel lobby, to keep its support bipartisan so that its influence on U.S. policy will not be largely dependent on the success of only one U.S. party.

The de facto alliance between the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu and the 2012 presidential campaign of Mitt Romney can be considered a part of this trend. A more obvious part was the spectacle last year of Congressional Republicans inviting the head of a foreign government – i.e., Netanyahu – to denounce from the podium of the House chamber a major U.S. foreign policy initiative.

For this year's campaign, the Republican Party platform surrenders all traces of independent thought on issues involving Israel and defers completely to the preferences and themes of Netanyahu's government. The platform makes no mention whatever of Palestinians, of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or of a two-state solution or any other resolution of that conflict.

It explicitly denies that there is any such thing as an Israeli occupation. It calls for outlawing any boycotts or other peaceful measures directed against Israeli policies in Israeli-controlled territories. It speaks of "no daylight between America and Israel." This section of the platform would read no differently if it had come straight out of a printer in Netanyahu's office.

Republican canvassers for Donald Trump are showing in another way their attitude toward the occupation by opening offices in settlements in the occupied West Bank to seek votes from U.S. citizens who live there. Those running the

operation say their funds are raised locally but they coordinate daily with the Trump campaign. Their operation is based in what, according not only to long-established U.S. policy under multiple administrations but also the position of the international community generally, is an illegal Israeli presence.

Endorsing Netanyahu's Video

Now the Trump campaign has endorsed a video from Netanyahu asserting that Palestinian leaders call for "ethnic cleansing" of Jews from any future Palestinian state. Such an endorsement is especially significant because the assertion in the video is an especially inapt portrayal of relevant issues.

Any objective and fair-minded observer would conclude, as a matter of accuracy and of propriety, that the video should be roundly criticized. That is what the Obama administration – even though it has no reason to be picking new fights with Netanyahu's government – has done.

A State Department spokesperson stated, "We obviously strongly disagree with the characterization that those who oppose settlement activity or view it as an obstacle to peace are somehow calling for ethnic cleansing of Jews from the West Bank. We believe that using that type of terminology is inappropriate and unhelpful."

Netanyahu's statement in the video that "the Palestinian leadership actually demands a Palestinian state with one precondition: no Jews" is false. The Palestinian leadership has clearly and explicitly stated that Jews and members of any other religious or ethnic groups would be welcome to reside in, and accept citizenship of, a Palestinian state. What the Palestinians have rejected is continuation of Israeli citizens in Israeli settlements as a kind of extra-territorial Israeli presence within a Palestinian state.

Netanyahu appears to have based his assertion on a comment in 2013 by Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas that "in a final resolution, we would not see the presence of a single Israeli – civilian or soldier – on our lands." Netanyahu's substitution of "Jew" for "Israeli" in his incorrect assertion is the same technique he uses more broadly to wrap everything his government does in the cloak of world Jewry. It is the same false equivalence that underlies the habitual pinning by some of Netanyahu's defenders of the label anti-Semitism on any and all criticism of his government's policies.

A Painful History

The whole matter of minorities in states with a Jewish or Arab majority has a relevant and painful history. A continuing characteristic of that history has been one of Arabs having control of less land than the relative sizes of the

populations would suggest.

In the United Nations partition plan that in 1947 laid out boundaries for new Jewish and Arab states in what had been the British mandate of Palestine, the Jewish state was allocated 56 percent of the land even though Jews constituted only 33 percent of the population. As a result, while the projected Arab-run state would have had only a tiny (one percent) Jewish minority, the projected Jewish-run state would have had a population that was 45 percent Arab.

What many Arabs considered the injustice of such a division of land underlay the rejection of the U.N. plan by Arab governments and leaders. In the ensuing war of 1948-1949, the Arabs' military failure left them with only about 22 percent of Palestine. And then Israel's military conquests in 1967 gave it control of the whole thing.

It is hardly surprising that today, as Palestinians think about a future Palestinian state that would be only a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of what they consider to have once been theirs, they reject even more inroads, in the form of permanent Israeli settlements, on whatever fraction they would be left with.

The international community has seen things the same way. Every peace plan over the last couple of decades has included the concept that, wherever final boundaries might be drawn, withdrawal of some Israeli settlements would be necessary, partly to make possible the economic viability of a Palestinian state.

Reality Turned Upside-Down

As Matt Duss observes, if the "ethnic cleansing" accusation were to be applied to Palestinian leaders, it also would have to be applied to other international figures who have worked on the problem, including at least the last three U.S. presidents.

In his video, Netanyahu highlights the fact that Israel has a 20 percent Arab population and that this shows Israel's "diversity" and "openness." He tries to pair this observation with the issue of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. The Israeli Arabs are not an obstacle to peace, he says, so why should the settlements be considered illegitimate and an obstacle to peace? Of course, there is really no comparison at all between colonization of conquered territory by the conqueror against the will of – and to the detriment of – the existing inhabitants, and the residence of Arabs within Israel because they and their ancestors had been living there all along.

But another observation to make about Netanyahu's rhetoric on this subject is

how much it contrasts with his insistence at other times that the Palestinians explicitly recognize Israel as a “Jewish state.” This precondition has been one of the current impediments to getting any productive Israeli-Palestinian negotiations under way.

Palestinian leaders reject that demand not only because it might prejudice resolution of the so-called right of return issue but also because they would be formally endorsing the second-class citizenship of their Arab brethren within Israel. Consistency evidently is not Netanyahu’s objective; indefinitely putting off any peaceful settlement of the conflict, while finding ways to blame Palestinians for the impasse, is.

A major backdrop to the charge about ethnic cleansing, one that liberal voices in Israel have noted, is the forcible replacement of one population with another that actually has occurred in Palestine. The biggest instance was when some 700,000 Palestinian Arabs were forced from their homes during the 1948 war in what Arabs call the Nakba or catastrophe. That is a major reason why that 20 percent Arab population that Netanyahu used as a rhetorical prop in his video is not any larger than it is. Currently Netanyahu’s government conducts a more gradual form of forcible replacement of one population with another through, on one hand, continued expansion of Israeli settlements and, on the other hand, the confiscation of land, demolition of homes, erection of economic impediments, lethal force, and other measures that squeeze life out of the Palestinian community in the West Bank. Use of the term *ethnic cleansing* may be appropriate, but not because of anything that Palestinians are doing or have the ability or opportunity to do.

The Trump campaign’s reaction to all of this, as voiced by Trump’s adviser on U.S.-Israeli relations, is that Netanyahu “makes exactly the right point” and that the Obama administration “should be ashamed of their misguided reaction” to Netanyahu’s video.

Evidently the strategy – notwithstanding Trump briefly making the lobby nervous earlier this year by saying he would be “neutral” in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – is an especially uncompromising version of the usual American political strategy of making sure one is not out-Israeled by one’s opponent. And it is not as if Hillary Clinton has given any indication that she will mount a challenge on these issues from the other direction.

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Russian Hardliners Gain from US Putin-Bashing

The harsh U.S. rhetoric denouncing Russian President Putin is having the adverse effect in Russia of strengthening hard-line “populists” in upcoming elections who think Putin’s ruling party is too soft on the U.S., reports Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Last week, Hillary Clinton told reporters on her campaign plane that the Russians are trying to disrupt the U.S. elections to discredit the process and sow discord among Americans. This goes one step further than her previous charges of Russian influence thought the “Kremlin’s candidate,” Donald Trump, or still earlier, the claim that the Democratic National Committee’s server had been hacked by intelligence services reporting to Vladimir Putin. Of course, all these charges were made without proof.

Meanwhile, in the Russian Federation, where folks are facing their own national elections on Sept. 18, a kind of mirror-image denunciation of foreign (meaning American) interference in their domestic politics is also heard from many in the Russian Establishment.

In the past week, the widely respected Levada Center, best known for its public opinion polls, found itself accused by federal authorities of being a “foreign agent” due to revenues it earns from multinational companies for whom it does marketing studies. Its director said that if the label sticks, the Center may be forced to close its doors.

Also, this past week, the International Republican Institute (IRI), a “non-governmental organization” chaired by Sen. McCain and with an operation in Moscow, was declared a threat to Russian national security and ordered to halt its activities in Russia. (Most of IRI’s money comes from the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. State Department and the U.S.-government-funded National Endowment for Democracy, whose president has called for Russian President Vladimir Putin’s ouster.)

But the way the elections in both the U.S. and Russia are taking shape has considerably more in common than these complaints of outside interference. I see a much bigger common factor in the growing, possibly decisive role of populism in both Russia and the U.S. this year.

In the United States, the rise of populism and its possible victory at the polls in November over the opposition of the political establishment of the Democratic and Republican parties have been obvious from the start and throughout the progression of the candidacy of Donald Trump.

In a recent full-page analytical article headlined, "The Trump Phenomenon," the *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, one of Russia's most serious and well-written daily newspapers, identifies economics as the driving force behind the populist wave that Trump is riding. Specifically, he made himself a voice of the millions of working-class Americans who have suffered over the last 30 years from the deindustrialization and outsourcing which have been part and parcel of the globalization that successive U.S. administrations from the two mainstream parties have actively promoted through "free trade" deals.

Meanwhile, the foreign policy component of Trump's agenda gives voice to the views of the majority of Americans who consistently over the past 30 years have said they want their country to stop being the world's policeman and to pursue more peaceful policies by acting in consensus as an equal partner with the world's other major powers.

This resistance to the Establishment's insistence on U.S. global dominance has been a constant feature of Pew polls, including one last spring that found nearly six in ten Americans (or 57 percent) feeling that the U.S. should deal with its problems and other countries should deal with their own. Only 37 percent thought the U.S. should help other countries deal with their problems.

But this attitude has been dismissed by the foreign policy establishment as revealing nothing more than public ignorance of the world's dangers and complexities, a preoccupation with consumerism, and an unwillingness to accept hardships for the common security by exercising global leadership.

Consequently, one can summarize and conclude that Donald Trump's planned foreign policy has deep populist roots. His proposals to find dialogue with Russia on common security interests are neither a sign of his being "Putin's candidate" or of arbitrarily and capriciously adopting a position solely to run against what the Establishment is saying for the sake of drawing attention to himself.

Hard-line Russian 'Populism'

By contrast, the curious and important thing to note about Russian populism is that it is driven far less by economics, although the Russian citizenry is hurting badly from the third year of recession that came out of the fall in energy prices and Western sanctions over Crimea and Ukraine.

The driving factor of Russian populism is instead national pride over the

reunification with Crimea and the country's resistance to U.S. and European punishment. This populism is expressed through belt-tightening, import substitutions and other measures.

Russians have traditionally been a complaining people but my own reading of the popular mood not so much from media as from talking to ordinary people – and especially to ordinary people over the fence and in the grocery store of the hamlet where I have a summer home, 80 kilometers south of St. Petersburg – is that they are getting by and making the best of it without fuss.

Populism has merged with patriotism, as shown by the massively successful May 9 celebrations of Russia's World War II victory which channeled a wellspring of emotion into the Immortal Regiment marches in cities and towns across the country. This patriotic pride explains the 82 percent approval rating that Vladimir Putin currently enjoys.

Translated into electoral politics, the patriotic sense of mind means that Russian populism will likely bring a turn to the right at the voting booths this Sunday. Although the governing party United Russia advertises itself as “the party of the President [Putin],” it also is the party of Dmitry Medvedev, who is its chairman. As prime minister, Medvedev is still seen as a liberal who promotes free-market economics rather than state-guided reindustrialization. He is seen as soft on the U.S. and soft on Europe.

In other words, the street says the governing party, United Russia, will not retain its majority of seats in the Duma and its showing may dip as low as 30 percent of the vote, a reaction not to Putin but to the party's perceived lack of toughness against the West. The consequence would likely be a coalition cabinet, bringing in ministers from the runners-up. And who might those runners-up be?

In the U.S. media, there is the very mistaken view that Russia has no opposition parties. That view is predominantly only because the U.S. State Department and Official Washington's specialist institutes and think tanks disdain any politicians and movements in Russia that are not on the U.S. payroll. Unless you are Yabloko or Parnas, you are not an opposition party, so our experts tell us.

Nothing could be further from the truth. I am persuaded that the position of being the second largest party in the Duma will be hotly contested between the Communists, who throughout the 1990s actually were the country's majority party, and the Liberal Democratic (LDPR) party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, which was the first non-Communist party founded back in what was still Soviet Russia.

On questions of economic policy, those two parties stand at opposite poles. But

on the question of foreign policy, they are both more royalist than the king. Judging by the level of paid outdoor advertising on highways around the metropolises of St. Petersburg and Moscow, I would put my money on an LDPR high turnout and vote on Sept. 18.

In what little exposure U.S. media has given Vladimir Zhirinovskiy in the past, Western readers might assume that is just a buffoon who has served the Kremlin's interests by drawing nationalists away from the Communists and so reducing its threat. But my reading of Zhirinovskiy, including from seeing and sparring with him up close, is that his buffoonery has been calculated as has Donald Trump's.

Playing the clown and wearing the outlandish bright red sports jacket on TV spared Zhirinovskiy from being taken too seriously by the Establishment even as he delivered below the belt punches against the powers-that-be.

A Challenge to Putin's Party

In a feature television program celebrating his 70th birthday in July, Zhirinovskiy made it clear that in his 27 years in parliament he has seen it all, understands very well how the Kremlin has maintained power by one dirty trick after another. In particular, he explained to the Pervy Kanal presenter and journalist Vladimir Soloviev how the single-mandate scheme which is being used in 2016 to complement the party list system of electing Duma deputies gives an unfair advantage to United Russia.

The scheme, which was taken from practices in some West European democracies, has been popularized as a means of bringing into parliament at least some deputies who are well known and dedicated to the district that elects them. But since United Russia has more candidates with more experience in power across the country, it can profit best from this scheme.

In LDPR's full-page advertisement-campaign manifesto in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, Zhirinovskiy and his associates denounce another feature of this year's national elections: the appearance on the ballot of a half-dozen ersatz parties, parties that long ago combined forces and disappeared as separate entities. Zhirinovskiy is calling them "subsidiaries" of United Russia, launched solely for the purpose of sopping up protest votes that otherwise might go to Duma parties like his own.

It is to be expected that there will be no vote-rigging or other illegal abuses in Sunday's national elections such as set off the dramatic protests during the last Duma elections in December 2011. The tricks that Zhirinovskiy is denouncing are legal even if they are unethical. They are no different from what goes on in mature democracies like the U.S. (gerrymandering and giving built-in advantages

to the two major political parties, for example) for the purpose of “managed democracy,” which is by no means a made-in-Russia concept.

The astute critique of the Russian elites in power which Zhirinovskiy puts forth underlines the justified fear of United Russia that it will lose control of parliament. Meanwhile, Zhirinovskiy has changed his wardrobe to a classy business suit and changed his demeanor to almost calm, measured speech as I saw a few days ago when we both took part in the Pervy Kanal’s leading political talk show, “Sunday Evening with Vladimir Soloviev.”

This was my second chance to observe him up close in the past four months and the difference was palpable. You could sense that he feels power within reach and is hoping for a ministerial portfolio in the new post-election government.

A good showing for Zhirinovskiy’s party on Sept. 18 and demotion to minority party for United Russia may well mean the renunciation of any lingering hopes of getting along with or being buddies with the U.S. It could result in new, harder-line marching orders for Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, who has been the principal negotiator with the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.

On Sunday, before the show, I had a five minute tete-a-tete with TV host Vladimir Soloviev about Trump. Given Soloviev’s position as the darling of Russian state television, the man who gets to do the big interviews with Vladimir Putin, I think it is safe to say that Soloviev represents a significant part of the Kremlin establishment. And he does *not* want to see Trump elected.

This runs directly counter to everything the American neocons, the Democratic standard bearer and the mainstream U.S. media are saying about the Putin-Trump “relationship.” But it is perfectly logical. Soloviev sees Trump as volatile and unpredictable. In this resistance to a potentially unpredictable Trump, we see characteristic Russian trust in the virtues of stability. Better the devil you know...etc.

But there is also something else going on. Soloviev, like a large swath of Russians both in and out of power, enjoys seeing the U.S. as a malicious enemy. In a direct mirror image of the U.S. budget process, having such an enemy is good for those seeking resources for the Russian armed forces and their military-industrial complex.

The bottom line is that the rise of populists in Russia may bring in more hard-liners on foreign policy just when – if Trump were to prevail – the rise of populists in the United States may bring in doves.

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in August 2015.

Getting Fooled on Iraq, Libya, Now Russia

Exclusive: After the British report exposing falsehoods to justify invading Iraq in 2003, a new U.K. inquiry found similar misconduct in the 2011 attack on Libya, but no lessons are learned for the West's new propaganda about Russia, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A British parliamentary inquiry into the Libyan fiasco has reported what should have been apparent from the start in 2011 – and was to some of us – that the West's military intervention to “protect” civilians in Benghazi was a cover for what became another disastrous “regime change” operation.

The report from the U.K.'s Foreign Affairs Committee confirms that the U.S. and other Western governments exaggerated the human rights threat posed by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and then quickly morphed the “humanitarian” mission into a military invasion that overthrew and killed Gaddafi, leaving behind political and social chaos.

The report's significance is that it shows how little was learned from the Iraq War fiasco in which George W. Bush's administration hyped and falsified intelligence to justify invading Iraq and killing its leader, Saddam Hussein. In both cases, U.K. leaders tagged along and the West's mainstream news media mostly served as unprofessional propaganda conduits, not as diligent watchdogs for the public.

Today, we are seeing an even more dangerous repetition of this pattern: demonizing Russian President Vladimir Putin, destabilizing the Russian economy and pressing for “regime change” in Moscow. Amid the latest propaganda orgy against Putin, virtually no one in the mainstream is exercising any restraint or finding any cautionary lessons from the Iraqi and Libyan examples.

Yet, with Russia, the risks are orders of magnitude greater than even the cases of Iraq and Libya – and one might toss in the messy “regime change” projects in Ukraine and Syria. The prospect of political chaos in Moscow – with extremists battling for power and control of the nuclear codes – should finally inject some sense of responsibility in the West's politicians and media, but doesn't.

When it comes to Putin and Russia, it's the same ole hyperbole and falsehood that so disinformed the public regarding the "threats" from Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi. Just as President George W. Bush deceptively painted Hussein's supposed WMD as a danger to Americans and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton dishonestly portrayed Gaddafi as "genocidal," U.S. officials and pundits are depicting Putin as some cartoonish villain or some new Hitler.

And, just as The New York Times, Washington Post and other mainstream media outlets amplified the Iraq and Libyan propaganda to the American people – rather than questioning and challenging it – these supposedly journalistic entities are performing the same function regarding Russia. The chief difference is that now we're talking about the potential for nuclear annihilation. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Existential Madness of Putin-Bashing.](#)"]

According to the new U.K. report on Libya, Britain's military intervention – alongside the U.S. and France – was based on "erroneous assumptions and an incomplete understanding" of the reality inside Libya, which included a lack of appreciation about the role of Islamic extremists in spearheading the opposition to Gaddafi.

In other words, Gaddafi was telling the truth when he accused the rebels around Benghazi of being penetrated by Islamic terrorists. The West, including the U.S. news media, took Gaddafi's vow to wipe out this element and distorted it into a claim that he intended to slaughter the region's civilians, thus stampeding the United Nations Security Council into approving an operation to protect them.

That mandate was then twisted into an excuse to decimate Libya's army and clear the way for anti-Gaddafi rebels to seize the capital of Tripoli and eventually hunt down, torture and murder Gaddafi.

Ignored Terror Evidence

Yet, there was evidence before this "regime change" occurred regarding the extremist nature of the anti-Gaddafi rebels as well as those seeking to overthrow Bashar al-Assad in Syria. As analysts Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman wrote in a pre-Libya-war report for West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, "the Syrian and Libyan governments share the United States' concerns about violent salafist/jihadi ideology and the violence perpetrated by its adherents."

In the report entitled "[Al-Qaeda's Foreign Fighters in Iraq,](#)" Felter and Fishman also analyzed Al Qaeda's documents captured in 2007 showing personnel records of militants who flocked to Iraq for the war. The documents revealed that eastern Libya (the base of the anti-Gaddafi rebellion) was a hotbed for suicide bombers traveling to Iraq to kill American troops.

Felter and Fishman wrote that these so-called Sinjar Records disclosed that while Saudis comprised the largest number of foreign fighters in Iraq, Libyans represented the largest per-capita contingent by far. Those Libyans came overwhelmingly from towns and cities in the east.

“The vast majority of Libyan fighters that included their hometown in the Sinjar Records resided in the country’s Northeast, particularly the coastal cities of Darnah 60.2% (53) and Benghazi 23.9% (21),” Felter and Fishman wrote, adding:

“Both Darnah and Benghazi have long been associated with Islamic militancy in Libya, in particular for an uprising by Islamist organizations in the mid-1990s. ... One group – the Libyan Fighting Group ... – claimed to have Afghan veterans in its ranks,” a reference to mujahedeen who took part in the CIA-backed anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, as did Al Qaeda founder, Osama bin Laden, a Saudi.

“The Libyan uprisings [in the 1990s] became extraordinarily violent,” Felter and Fishman wrote. “Qadhafi used helicopter gunships in Benghazi, cut telephone, electricity, and water supplies to Darnah and famously claimed that the militants ‘deserve to die without trial, like dogs,’”

Some important Al Qaeda leaders operating in Pakistan’s tribal regions also were believed to have come from Libya. For instance, “Atiyah,” who was guiding the anti-U.S. war strategy in Iraq, was identified as a Libyan named Atiyah Abd al-Rahman.

It was Atiyah who urged a strategy of creating a quagmire for U.S. forces in Iraq, buying time for Al Qaeda’s headquarters to rebuild its strength in Pakistan. “Prolonging the war [in Iraq] is in our interest,” Atiyah said in a letter that upbraided Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi for his hasty and reckless actions in Iraq.

The Atiyah letter was discovered by the U.S. military after Zarqawi was killed by an airstrike in June 2006. [To view the “prolonging the war” excerpt in a translation published by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, [click here](#). To read the entire letter, [click here](#).]

Hidden Motives

This reality was known by U.S. officials prior to the West’s military intervention in Libya in 2011, yet opportunistic politicians, including Secretary of State Clinton, saw Libya as a stage to play out their desires to create muscular foreign policy legacies or achieve other aims.

Some of Clinton’s now-public emails show that France’s President Nicolas Sarkozy

appeared to be more interested in protecting France's financial dominance of its former African colonies as well as getting a bigger stake in Libya's oil wealth than in the well-being of the Libyan people.

An April 2, 2011 email from Clinton's personal adviser Sidney Blumenthal explained that Gaddafi had plans to use his stockpile of gold "to establish a pan-African currency" and thus "to provide the Francophone African Countries with an alternative to the French franc."

Blumenthal added, "French intelligence officers discovered this plan shortly after the current rebellion began, and this was one of the factors that influenced President Nicolas Sarkozy's decision to commit France to the attack on Libya." Another key factor, according to the email, was Sarkozy's "desire to gain a greater share of Libya oil production."

For Clinton, a prime motive for pushing the Libyan "regime change" was to demonstrate her mastery of what she and her advisers called "smart power," i.e., the use of U.S. aerial bombing and other coercive means, such as economic and legal sanctions, to impose U.S. dictates on other nations.

Her State Department email exchanges revealed that her aides saw the Libyan war as a chance to pronounce a "Clinton doctrine," but that plan fell through when President Obama seized the spotlight after Gaddafi's government fell in August 2011.

But Clinton didn't miss a second chance to take credit on Oct. 20, 2011, after militants captured Gaddafi, sodomized him with a knife and then murdered him. Appearing on a TV interview, Clinton celebrated Gaddafi's demise with the quip, "we came; we saw; he died."

Clinton's euphoria was not long-lasting, however, as chaos enveloped Libya. With Gaddafi and his largely secular regime out of the way, Islamic militants expanded their power over the country. Some were terrorists, just as Gaddafi and the West Point analysts had warned.

One Islamic terror group attacked the U.S. consulate in Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012, killing U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other American personnel, an incident that Clinton called the worst moment of her four-year tenure as Secretary of State.

As the violence spread, the United States and other Western countries abandoned their embassies in Tripoli. Once prosperous with many social services, Libya descended into the category of failed state with rival militias battling over oil and territory while the Islamic State took advantage of the power vacuum to establish a foothold around Sirte.

Though Clinton prefers to describe Libya as a “work in progress,” rather than another “regime change failure,” U.S. and U.N. efforts to impose a new “unity government” on Libya have met with staunch resistance from many Libyan factions. Since April, the so-called Government of National Accord has maintained only a fragile presence in Tripoli, in Libya’s west, and has been rejected by Libya’s House of Representatives (HOR), which functions from the eastern city of Tobruk.

Over the past few days, military forces loyal to Gen. Khalifa Haftar, who is associated with HOR in the east, seized control of several oil facilities despite angry protests from Western nations, including the U.S., U.K., and France. But Western nations have little credibility left inside Libya, which not only faced colonization in the past but has watched as the U.S.-U.K.-French military intervention in 2011 has led to widespread poverty, suffering and death.

Inept Intervention

The U.K. report only underscores how deceptive and inept that intervention was. As described by the U.K. Guardian newspaper, then-Prime Minister “David Cameron’s intervention in Libya was carried out with no proper intelligence analysis, drifted into an unannounced goal of regime change and shirked its moral responsibility to help reconstruct the country following the fall of Muammar Gaddafi, according to a scathing report by the foreign affairs select committee.

“The failures led to the country becoming a failed state on the verge of all-out civil war, the report adds. The report, the product of a parliamentary equivalent of the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq war, closely echoes the criticisms widely made of [then-Prime Minister] Tony Blair’s intervention in Iraq, and may yet come to be as damaging to Cameron’s foreign policy legacy.”

Earlier this year, Cameron stepped down as prime minister following the approval of the “Brexit” referendum calling on the U.K. to leave the European Union, a position that Cameron opposed. This week, Cameron also resigned his seat in Parliament.

Though Blair and Cameron have at least faced personal disgrace over their roles in these two failed “regime change” invasions, there has been less accountability in the United States, where there were no comprehensive examinations of the policy failures that led to the wars in Iraq and Libya (although studies were undertaken regarding Bush’s false claims about Iraq’s WMD and the Obama administration’s failure to adequately protect the U.S. consulate in Benghazi).

There has been even less accountability in the mainstream U.S. news media, where, for instance, The Washington Post's editorial page editor Fred Hiatt, who repeatedly reported Iraq's non-existent WMD as flat fact remains in the same job today pushing similar over-the-top propaganda regarding Russia.

A New Cold War

As with the fiascos in Iraq and Libya, U.S. policymakers continue to ignore or sideline American intelligence analysts who possess information that would cast doubt on the escalation of hostilities with Russia.

Even as the Obama administration has charted this new Cold War with Russia over the past two years – a prospect that could cost U.S. taxpayers trillions of dollars and carries the risk of thermonuclear war – there has been no National Intelligence Estimate getting a consensus judgment from America's 16 intelligence agencies about how real the Russian threat is, according to intelligence sources.

One source said a key reason why an NIE had not been done was that U.S. policymakers wanted a more alarmist report than the intelligence analysts were willing to produce. "They call [the alarm about Russia] political, not factual," the source said. "They weren't going to do one, period. They can't lie."

The source added that the analysts would have to acknowledge how helpful Putin has been in a number of sensitive and strategic areas, such as securing Syria's agreement to surrender its chemical weapons and convincing Iran to accept tight limits on its nuclear program.

"Israel has nuclear weapons and a crazy leader," the source said about Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "If not for Putin, the guy may have used it [a nuclear bomb] in Iran. He [Putin] calmed things down in Syria. They [CIA analysts] aren't that stupid. To tell the truth, you have to say he [Putin] saved the Middle East a lot of trouble."

U.S. intelligence analysts also might have had to include their assessments regarding whether Syrian rebels – not Assad's military – deployed sarin gas outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, and whether an element of the Ukrainian military – not ethnic Russian rebels – shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014.

Those two propaganda themes blaming Syria and Russia, respectively, were promoted heavily by mainstream Western media and various Internet-based information warriors. The two themes have been central to the Western-backed "regime change" project in Syria and to the new Cold War with Russia. If U.S. intelligence analysts knocked down those themes in an NIE, valuable propaganda

assets would be exposed and discredited.

Also, in the wake of the two British government reports undermining the propaganda that was used to justify “regime change” in Iraq and Libya, the blow to Western “credibility” if there were similar admissions about falsehoods regarding Syria and Russia could be devastating.

Instead, the hope of Official Washington is that the American public won’t catch on to the pattern of deception and that the people will continue to ignore the famous warning that President George W. Bush infamously garbled: “fool me once, shame on ... shame on you; fool me – you can’t get fooled again.”

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](#)).
