

America's Overuse of the Sanctions Option

America's use of economic sanctions to punish various foreign adversaries has grown so promiscuous that U.S. businesses often don't know when they might be crossing some legal line, thus inflicting financial pain not only on other countries but on the U.S. economy, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The roots and manifestations of American exceptionalist thinking go way back. One of those manifestations is the use of economic measures as a weapon intended to coerce or deny. The specific thinking involved is that such measures employed by the United States, and even the United States alone, should be enough to induce or force change in other countries.

The thinking is solipsistic insofar as it centers narrowly on the idea of American will and the exercise of American power and, as too often has been the case, pays insufficient attention either to the other nation's motivations or to what damage or denial the United States is inflicting on itself.

More than two centuries ago the young American republic made one of its first big attempts at such economic warfare. The Embargo Act of 1807 shut down U.S. overseas trade in an attempt to get the warring European powers Britain and France to respect U.S. neutrality.

President Thomas Jefferson's intentions were honorable in that he genuinely sought neutrality in the European war, unlike so many today who, if they see an armed conflict going on somewhere in the world, believe it necessary for the United States to take sides even if there are bad guys on more than one side. Jefferson also saw the embargo as an alternative to war rather than a prelude to it, unlike many today, who are both sanctions hawks and military hawks.

But the embargo was a miserable failure on all counts. Prosecuting war in Europe with all means available was much more important to Britain and France than was anything that the American republic could do to them.

The economic damage to the United States was severe, especially in New England, which sank into depression. And the United States would eventually wind up going to war anyway, against Britain in 1812. Realizing the mistake, Jefferson signed a repeal of the embargo in the closing days of his presidency in 1809.

With the American economy and American power having expanded over the subsequent 200 years, the temptation to think in terms of American denial of trade being an

all-powerful tool has become all the greater. But the thinking is still erroneous, as demonstrated by the miserable failure of the half-century-old embargo against Cuba. That embargo has caused no favorable change in Cuban policies or politics, and probably has only retarded what change would have been taking place for other reasons.

Economically it has not caused another depression in New England, but the fact that it has been a negative for the U.S. economy is reflected in support by U.S. business interests, as represented by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, for change in policy toward Cuba. President Barack Obama deserves credit for bringing about as much change as it is in his power to effect, but the embargo itself will not come down until the U.S. Congress displays changed thinking too.

The President also deserves similar credit for a redirection of policy on Iran, but there also is a similar solipsistic, sanctions-happy attitude in Congress that applies to Iran. That attitude persists despite the substantial damage to the U.S. economy from those sanctions, the years of a sanctions-centered approach having failed to achieve any positive results until there was also engagement and negotiation, and the self-contradictory nature of the stated purposes for keeping those sanctions in place.

The obsessive persistence of this attitude (besides, to be sure, the malign influence of other factors, such as an oppose-anything-Obama-does mindset) is demonstrated by Republican presidential candidates, including the just-declared Marco Rubio, saying that they would, if elected president, re-impose whatever sanctions had been suspended or lifted in accordance with any agreement on the Iranian nuclear program.

The biggest question about such a pledge is why, if Iran had by that time complied for three years with severe restrictions on its program, any U.S. president would want to demolish all those restrictions on the Iranian program (because that's what deal-killing sanctions would do) and allow the Iranians to expand their nuclear activities as fast as they wanted.

The further question about the sanctions themselves is how they could be expected to have any effect at all when the United States would be clearly responsible for killing the deal and when the rest of the world, operating under a new United Nations resolution, would have moved on toward doing normal business with Iran.

The rest of the world includes our closest European allies, as Britain and France, among others, would help to write another chapter in America's unflattering history of ill-advised economic warfare. The United States would be left as lonely and feckless as it has been with the embargo against Cuba.

If even Thomas Jefferson screwed up on this subject, perhaps it's too much to expect today's politicians to do much better, although they do have a lot more national experience to go on. And Jefferson realized his mistake and corrected it much more quickly than what we've seen happening in Congress on Cuba and Iran.

Oh, and there's that issue about the danger of war. Given the way the Iranian nuclear issue has been playing out, the risk of a war occurring in the wake of a destruction by the United States of the negotiated agreement on the subject is probably even greater than the risk that impressment of seamen and other maritime issues posed leading up to war in 1812.

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Russia Impinges on Israeli 'Right' to Bomb Iran

Exclusive: American neocons are in a lather over Russia's decision to go ahead with the sale of anti-aircraft missiles to Iran. The apparent outrage is that Iran thinks it has a right to protect its citizens from Israel's right to launch airstrikes into Iran's territory, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern explains.

By Ray McGovern

The front page of the neocon flagship Washington Post on Tuesday warned that the Russians have decided, despite U.S. objections, "to send an advanced air-defense system to Iran ... potentially altering the strategic balance in the Middle East."

So, at least, says the lede of an article entitled "Putin lifts 5-year hold on missile sale to Iran" by Karoun Demirjian, whose editors apparently took it upon themselves to sex up the first paragraph, which was not at all supported by the rest of her story which was factual and fair balanced, even.

Not only did Demirjian include much of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's [explanation](#) of Moscow's decision to end its self-imposed restriction on the delivery of S-300 surface-to-air missiles to Iran, but she mentioned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's umpteenth warning on Monday about "the prospect of airstrikes to destroy or hinder Tehran's nuclear program."

Lavrov noted that United Nations resolutions “did not impose any restrictions on providing air defense weapons to Iran” and described the “separate Russian free-will embargo” as “irrelevant” in the light of the “meaningful progress” achieved by the negotiated framework deal of April 2 in which Iran accepted unprecedented constraints on its nuclear program to show that it was intended for peaceful purposes only.

The Russian Foreign Minister emphasized that the S-300 is a “completely defensive weapon [that] will not endanger the security of any state in the region, certainly including Israel.” Pointing to “the extremely tense situation in the region around Iran, he said modern air-defense systems are vitally important for that country.” Lavrov added that by freezing the S-300 contract for five years, Russia also had lost a lot of money. (The deal is said to be worth \$800 million.)

Predictably, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton told Fox News that the air-defense system would be a “game-changer” for Israel regarding air strikes. According to Bolton, once the system is in place, only stealth bombers would be able to penetrate Iranian space, and only the U.S. has those and was not likely to use them.

The U.S. media also highlighted comments by popular go-to retired Air Force three-star General David A. Deptula, who served as Air Force deputy chief of staff for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance until he retired in 2010 to make some real money. Deptula called delivering the S-300 system to Iran “significant, as it complicates the calculus for planning any military action involving air strikes.”

It strikes me as a bit strange that the media likes to feature retired generals like Deptula, whose reputation for integrity are not the best. Deptula has been temporarily barred from doing business with the government after what Air Force Deputy General Counsel Randy Grandon described as “particularly egregious” breaches of post-employment rules. He remains, however, a media favorite.

Adding to his woes, Deptula was also caught with 125 classified documents on his personal laptop including 10 labeled “Secret,” 14 labeled “Top Secret” and one with the high protection of “Secret, Compartmented Information.” Deptula pleaded ignorance and was let off further proof that different standards apply to generals like Deptula and David Petraeus.

A More Subdued Tone

The S-300 announcement hit as Secretary of State John Kerry was testifying on Capitol Hill about the framework deal on Iran’s nuclear program. Speaking later

to Fox News, Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Illinois, professed shock that Kerry did not seem more upset. According to Kinzinger, Kerry actually said, "You have to understand Iran's perspective."

And in keeping with Kerry's tone of sang-froid, State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf, referring to the S-300 deal, said, "We see this as separate from the negotiations [regarding Iran's nuclear program], and we don't think this will have an impact on our unity."

White House press secretary Josh Earnest took the S-300 announcement with his customary, studied earnestness. Referring not only to the decision to deliver the S-300s but also to reports of a \$20 billion barter deal that would involve Russia buying 500,000 barrels of oil a day in return for Russian grain, equipment and construction materials, Earnest referred to "potential sanctions concerns" and said the U.S. would "evaluate these two proposals moving forward," adding that the U.S. has been in direct touch with Russia to make sure the Russians understand and they do the potential concerns that we have."

With respect to the various sanctions against Iran, I believe this nonchalant tone can be seen largely as whistling in the dark. With the S-300 and the barter deals, Russia is putting a huge dent in the sanctions regimes. From now on, money is likely to call the shots, as competitors vie for various slices of the Iranian and the Russian pie. Whether or not there is a final agreement by the end of June on the Iranian nuclear issue, Washington is not likely to be able to hold the line on sanctions and will become even more isolated if it persists in trying.

Worse still for the neocons and others who favor using sanctions to punish Russia over Ukraine, the lifting of sanctions against Iran may have a cascading effect. If, for example, the Ukrainian ceasefire holds more or less over the next months, it is possible that the \$1.5 billion sale of two French-built Mistral-Class helicopter carrier ships to Russia, concluded four years ago, will go through.

The contract does not expire for two months and Russia's state arms exporter is trying to work out a compromise before taking France to court. Russian officials are expressing hope that a compromise can be reached within the time left.

And, regarding the outrage among neocons over the audacious idea that Iran should be allowed to defend itself against airstrikes, there is the "exceptional" argument that Israel, United States and their allies should have the unchallenged right to bomb Iran or any other country as they see fit and that the targeted country should have no right to protect its people, indeed that trying to defend itself is some kind of unacceptable provocation.

There is also the hypocrisy regarding how the neocons like to differentiate between “defensive” and “offensive” weapons when the question is about giving U.S.-backed governments weapons that have dual purposes, that can be used offensively as well as defensively.

For instance, in regard to Ukraine earlier this year, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland counseled U.S. officials to portray the delivery of sophisticated U.S. military hardware to the coup regime in Kiev as “defensive,” even though the weapons had an offensive capacity, such as targeting ethnic Russian rebels firing artillery or mortars at Ukrainian troops attacking eastern Ukraine.

According to the German newspaper, *Bild*, which published an intercepted conversation between Nuland and U.S. officials in Munich, Germany, she said, “I’d strongly urge you to use the phrase ‘defensive systems’ that we would deliver to oppose Putin’s ‘offensive systems.’”

However, NATO Commander and Air Force General Philip Breedlove left little doubt that these “defensive” weapons would help the Ukrainian government pursue its military objectives by enabling more effective concentration of fire. “Russian artillery is by far what kills most Ukrainian soldiers, so a system is needed that can localize the source of fire and repress it,” Breedlove reportedly said.

So, when “defensive” weapons help a U.S.-backed regime kill its opponents, that’s fine. However, if some truly defensive weapons, such as anti-aircraft missiles to protect a country’s cities, go to a nation that Israel might want to bomb, then that is unacceptable.

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Saudis Pour Oil on the Mideast Fire

Saudi Arabia, now in alliance with Israel and with tacit U.S. approval, is dragging the Middle East into a nightmare of sectarian conflict, pitting its own warplanes and Sunni terrorists against Shiites, Christians and other minorities as part of a misguided competition with Iran, as Anthony F. Shaker describes.

Anthony F. Shaker

While denouncing Iran and its supposed Yemeni “Shi’a” allies in a recent speech, the governor of Saudi Arabia’s eastern province, Saud ibn Nayyef bin Abdel Aziz, put his country’s Shi’a community, fellow citizens, squarely in his sights.

“While our country is going through what it is going through and standing together as one bloc,” he ranted, “we find the descendants of the Safavid Abdullah ibn Saba who try to divide that bloc.”

“Abdullah ibn Saba” refers to a Seventh-Century Jewish convert to Islam whose existence is uncertain but who has become a useful myth. True to every other brand of Salafist takfiris, Wahhabi clerics and Saudi government officials alike insist that a Jew “founded” Shi’ism and that his purpose was to destroy Islam from within.

Happily for them this unsavory and, to historians, comically false claim connects “Iran” and “Shi’ism” to the “Jews.”

Yet, there is nothing out of the ordinary in the governor’s diatribe. The United States’ second most important ally in the Middle East fully intends to play its sectarian card to the hilt. The signs are everywhere.

Saudi Arabia has for decades been operating international youth organizations and “Islamic centers” dedicated to the spread of the Wahhabi ideology in Great Britain, North and South America, Asia, and Africa. These organizations have created the “religious” environment that is enticing so many young people to join jihadi causes in Syria, Iraq and other countries.

Thanks to their pervasive influence, the Saudi government has been able to take on the role of defending “Sunni” Islam. But there is a reason why it has taken decades for such patronizing revisionism of Islam to gain traction among Sunni Muslims.

The Saudis’ official religion, Wahhabism, was founded by an itinerant heretic named Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab. Before he died in 1792, he managed to make alliance with violent tribesmen of the al-Saud tribe in the remote Najd desert. At the behest of the Ottomans, though, Egyptian ruler Muhammad Ali promptly crushed the movement in a military campaign that lasted seven years starting in 1811.

British Interference

It was only thanks to the British-orchestrated insurrection against the Ottomans around World War I that the House of Saud re-entered history big time. It is

hardly a coincidence that wartime marked also the precise point in time when terrorism became an element in the Middle East equation.

With the situation in Palestine approaching a point of no return, the British government wanted quickly to install al-Saud as the new custodians of the two sacred cities, Mecca and Medina, based on a view modeled explicitly on the Vatican State. It mattered little that such an institution would be utterly alien to Muslims.

The British ended up placing Saudi princelings in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere, for good measure. This was how the House of Saud was able to extend its influence in many directions, laying the foundation for a new ethnicity in the form of "Arabism," given the weakness of its Islamic credentials.

It is often forgotten that Wahhabism permeated even the secular debate in the Arabic-speaking world, especially in Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s. Many movements around the world began to pattern themselves on Mussolini's fascist phalanges. The Muslim Brotherhood is only the most prominent. They benefited from both the latter's organizational strengths and the illusion of a homegrown, Wahhabi-inspired religiosity.

"Arabism" and "pan-Arabism" of course, are the other card that Saudi Arabia has recently been playing at the League of Arab States to keep other "Arabs" in line in times of crisis, specifically, against Iran. Never mind that before World War I the word "Arab" used to carry a distinctly pejorative meaning. The truth is that the Wahhabi Saudis have been playing both cards since World War II for purposes that have nothing to do with either religion or the welfare of the Arabic-speaking world.

While their brazen anti-Shi'ism has taken alarming proportions since war broke out in Syria, the politics of "religious purity" is looking more like a flimsy cover, designed less to accommodate their designs on the region than to hide a deep-seated panic.

With Saudi Arabia's frontal assault on the sovereign state of Yemen, its armed forces and its fragile ethnic mosaic, Saudi King Salman thought he had executed a master stroke by extending the sectarian virus to yet another country, with no consequences except for Iran. Backed by his trillion-dollar paper economy, King Salman continues to point accusingly at Iran for supposedly arming the Houthi-led Ansarullah party and for wanting to "dominate" neighboring states.

Unfortunately for the aging Saudi monarch, it takes two to tango. Iran for obvious strategic reasons would never think of playing a similar card even if it wanted to. Why should it? It has lots of "Sunni" friends.

The most that the Saudis can boast, on the other hand, are surreptitious links with a cult-like organization of Iranian exiles called the Mujahidin-e Khalq, with its well-documented history of mass murder and a longstanding association with the Israeli Mossad. This underlying imbalance of forces aggravates the Saudi hysteria over Iran's "overreach" in Yemen, even though the Zaydis there are doctrinally closer to the four branches of so-called Sunni Islam than to Twelver Shi'a.

In the real world, a Saudi miscalculation in Yemen, triggered by the Americans' defensively reactive approval of the air strikes, would risk incalculable and largely self-inflicted damage to Western interests. Instead of toning down this Saudi sectarianism, though, King Salman is ratcheting it up on the home front too, as he tries to repress the Shi'a community in the oil-producing eastern province.

"If you look at any local media here as well as in the mosques, it is all full of sectarianism. Everybody is talking about Shiite and Sunni, saying the Shiites endanger the safety of the Sunnis," *Middle East Eye* reported one eastern resident of Qatif as saying.

A Tight Corner

The Saudis have now maneuvered themselves into a tight corner. Not even Saudi-dependent Pakistan will come to their aid; and Egypt is "there but not there." If the Saudi king fails to "destroy" the Houthi-led Ansarullah party, a goal he has repeatedly declared, together with the bulk of the Yemeni army, he could never regain his country's pride of place under the American wing, alongside Israel. In his tunnel vision, that would only leave Iran unshackled and free to "reign" wherever it pleases.

So far, Saudi Arabia has been relying on secret international networks that the Saudis helped create but which are associated with al-Qaeda, foremost, but also the Syrian Ahrar al-Sham (of the Islamic Front), Nusra Front and the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL). The object is to destabilize or pile pressure on any wayward state.

These organizations may be the Saudis' only remaining true allies in the region but they have almost unlimited manpower. Their members are drawn from more than a hundred nations, the largest European contingency of which has been consistently French. Every few months a new army is raised from the tens of thousands of rootless indoctrinated "Muslims" rushing to visit unspeakable violence upon fellow Muslims and minorities.

There is now solid evidence that Saudi Arabia, together with Turkey, is

facilitating this flow of jihadist manpower.

Just before Saudi Arabia's bombardment of Yemen, terrorist organizations received a second wind in Syria from the thousands of specially trained fighters that had slipped inside the country. They seized a key town near the Jordanian border in the south and the provincial capital of Idlib near Turkey in the north. Saudi officials have made no secret that they were involved and that a new management has taken over, a clear rebuff to American reticence.

Israel is very happy. It has been trying for months to provide cover and logistics to allow those same terrorists to hold on to the Golan permanently, where it has no intention of ceding annexed Syrian territory, peace treaty or no peace.

Foreign-sponsored Wahhabis have proved their mettle fomenting violent sectarian hatreds where none existed before in the history of Islamic civilization. But their real talent is state demolition, under the cover of religious ideology. Nothing more. They have the means to impose their ramshackled set of "Shari'a" laws, the legal origins of which no one can quite make out.

These are not your run-of-the-mill Che Guevara idealists, liberationist "Vietcong" or even the diabolical Khmer Rouges. Nor are they "traditionalists" by any stretch of the imagination. Yet, theirs is the same vicious ideology that is broadcast daily and prayer-like across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Slowly Awakening

Western politicians and media are only now awakening to Saudi Arabia's sickly obsession, since the 1980s, with cleansing Islam of its Shi'a Muslim populations. Although this is integral to Saudi foreign policy, there is an interesting element of skullduggery to the whole affair.

The Saudis have been playing the anti-Shi'a card in secret league with the "Jewish State," as Middle East specialists today can vouch. It was in "secret" only because nearly every Middle Easterner regards Israel as little more than a foreign colony.

Anti-Shi'ism provides the Saudis with a temporary respite. After Iran's revolution, the Saudis rose to the occasion and helped bankroll Iraq's Saddam Hussein when his war against Iran began to falter. Besides trying to drown Iran in blood, and despite Iran's untold military and civilian casualties and thousands of victims of chemical weapons from the eight-year Iran-Iraq War, the Saudis figure that a nice Sunni-Shi'a conflict may now pay better dividends.

It might even induce Israel to make a few minor concessions to the weak

Palestinians and settle the whole “irritating” problem of Palestine. Miscalculating, the Saudis remain dogged in their “secret” alliance with Israel.

But the European Union too had been making its calculations, given the dimming prospects of an Israeli-Palestinian peace after several initiatives by Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama turned into foreign-policy fiascos. With Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu’s ongoing feud with Obama, the West seems to have no idea how to deal with Israel’s unending subjugation of the Palestinians.

But it is the United States that faces the starkest of choices. One is to support the Saudi-Israeli rampage across the Middle East and risk the region’s social and political collapse as well as a final military conflagration. Or, beat a hasty retreat and let the people of Iran find their natural, rightful place in a part of the world they have inhabited continuously for at least 5,000 years, before the Western colonialism and its aftermath blew everything apart.

Sadly, the Western plan on paper has been, yesterday as it is today, to carve the Middle East up into ethno-religious enclaves. The only conceivable reasoning for this is the forlorn hope that that it will somehow confer at least short-term “legitimacy” on the idea of a “Jewish State,” as Israel leaders stridently demand.

King Salman needs the Sunni-Shia conflict more than ever, too, just to perpetuate the waning rule of his dynasty and the aberrant social conditions of his subjects. Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabism has rotted away society to the core, just as it has everywhere else it has taken root.

Dr. In’am al-Rabu’i, the president of children’s studies at the Armed Forces Hospital in Jeddah, warns that the country suffers from widespread sexual ailments. This has been known for some time. But a recent study has shown that a whopping 23 percent of all Saudi children have been raped at least once, mostly within families.

This is a country whose vitality has been sapped, yet it sits atop an ocean of oil. That the world economy depends on this oil should not give terrorism carte blanche.

One is hard-pressed to see how the West could be allies at all with a government which couldn’t be bothered to hide its terrorist connections anymore. It is patently wrong to ascribe the Saudi present animosities toward Iran to “ancient religious disputes,” much less throw the blame equally on all parties and lay back to watch the fireworks.

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Neocon ‘Chaos Promotion’ in the Mideast

Exclusive: After the Persian Gulf War in 1991, America’s neocons thought no country could stand up to the high-tech U.S. military, and they realized the Soviet Union was no longer around to limit U.S. actions. So, the “regime change” strategy was born and many have died, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Former Washington insider and four-star General Wesley Clark spilled the beans several years ago on how Paul Wolfowitz and his neoconservative co-conspirators implemented their sweeping plan to destabilize key Middle Eastern countries once it became clear that post-Soviet Russia “won’t stop us.”

As I recently reviewed a YouTube [eight-minute clip](#) of General Clark’s October 2007 speech, what leaped out at me was that the neocons had been enabled by their assessment that after the collapse of the Soviet Union Russia had become neutralized and posed no deterrent to U.S. military action in the Middle East.

While Clark’s public exposé largely escaped attention in the neocon-friendly “mainstream media” (surprise, surprise!), he recounted being told by a senior general at the Pentagon shortly after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 about the Donald Rumsfeld/Paul Wolfowitz-led plan for “regime change” in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Iran.

This was startling enough, I grant you, since officially the United States presents itself as a nation that respects international law, frowns upon other powerful nations overthrowing the governments of weaker states, and in the aftermath of World War II condemned past aggressions by Nazi Germany and decried Soviet “subversion” of pro-U.S. nations.

But what caught my eye this time was the significance of Clark’s depiction of Wolfowitz in 1992 gloating over what he judged to be a major lesson learned from the Desert Storm attack on Iraq in 1991; namely, “the Soviets won’t stop us.”

That remark directly addresses a question that has troubled me since March 2003 when George W. Bush attacked Iraq. Would the neocons widely known as “the crazies” at least among the remaining sane people of Washington have been crazy

enough to opt for war to re-arrange the Middle East if the Soviet Union had not fallen apart in 1991?

The question is not an idle one. Despite the debacle in Iraq and elsewhere, the neocon “crazies” still exercise huge influence in Establishment Washington. Thus, the question now becomes whether, with Russia far more stable and much stronger, the “crazies” are prepared to risk military escalation with Russia over Ukraine, what retired U.S. diplomat William R. Polk deemed a potentially dangerous nuclear confrontation, a “Cuban Missile Crisis in reverse.”

Putin’s Comment

The geopolitical vacuum that enabled the neocons to try out their “regime change” scheme in the Middle East may have been what Russian President Vladimir Putin was referring to in his state-of-the-nation address on April 25, 2005, when he called the collapse of the Soviet Union “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the [past] century.” Putin’s comment has been a favorite meme of those who seek to demonize Putin by portraying him as lusting to re-establish a powerful USSR through aggression in Europe.

But, commenting two years after the Iraq invasion, Putin seemed correct at least in how the neocons exploited the absence of the Russian counterweight to over-extend American power in ways that were harmful to the world, devastating to the people at the receiving end of the neocon interventions, and even detrimental to the United States.

If one takes a step back and attempts an unbiased look at the spread of violence in the Middle East over the past quarter-century, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Putin’s comment was on the mark. With Russia a much-weakened military power in the 1990s and early 2000s, there was nothing to deter U.S. policymakers from the kind of adventurism at Russia’s soft underbelly that, in earlier years, would have carried considerable risk of armed U.S.-USSR confrontation.

I lived in the USSR during the 1970s and would not wish that kind of restrictive regime on anyone. Until it fell apart, though, it was militarily strong enough to deter Wolfowitz-style adventurism. And I will say that for the millions of people now dead, injured or displaced by U.S. military action in the Middle East over the past dozen years the collapse of the Soviet Union as a deterrent to U.S. war-making was not only a “geopolitical catastrophe” but an unmitigated disaster.

Visiting Wolfowitz

In his 2007 speech, General Clark related how in early 1991 he dropped in on

Paul Wolfowitz, then Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (and later, from 2001 to 2005, Deputy Secretary of Defense). It was just after a major Shia uprising in Iraq in March 1991. President George H.W. Bush's administration had provoked it, but then did nothing to rescue the Shia from brutal retaliation by Saddam Hussein, who had just survived his Persian Gulf defeat.

According to Clark, Wolfowitz said: "We should have gotten rid of Saddam Hussein. The truth is, one thing we did learn is that we can use our military in the Middle East and the Soviets won't stop us. We've got about five or 10 years to clean up those old Soviet client regimes Syria, Iran (sic), Iraq before the next great superpower comes on to challenge us."

It's now been more than 10 years, of course. But do not be deceived into thinking Wolfowitz and his neocon colleagues believe they have failed in any major way. The unrest they initiated keeps mounting in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Lebanon not to mention fresh violence now in full swing in Yemen and the crisis in Ukraine. Yet, the Teflon coating painted on the neocons continues to cover and protect them in the "mainstream media."

True, one neocon disappointment is Iran. It is more stable and less isolated than before; it is playing a sophisticated role in Iraq; and it is on the verge of concluding a major nuclear agreement with the West barring the throwing of a neocon/Israeli monkey wrench into the works to thwart it, as has been done in the past.

An earlier setback for the neocons came at the end of August 2013 when President Barack Obama decided not to let himself be mouse-trapped by the neocons into ordering U.S. forces to attack Syria. Wolfowitz et al. were on the threshold of having the U.S. formally join the war against Bashar al-Assad's government of Syria when there was the proverbial slip between cup and lip. With the aid of the neocons' new devil-incarnate Vladimir Putin, Obama faced them down and avoided war.

A week after it became clear that the neocons were not going to get their war in Syria, I found myself at the main CNN studio in Washington together with Paul Wolfowitz and former Sen. Joe Lieberman, another important neocon. As I reported in "How War on Syria Lost Its Way," the scene was surreal funereal, even, with both Wolfowitz and Lieberman very much down-in-the-mouth, behaving as though they had just watched their favorite team lose the Super Bowl.

Israeli/Neocon Preferences

But the neocons are nothing if not resilient. Despite their grotesque disasters, like the Iraq War, and their disappointments, like not getting their

war on Syria, they neither learn lessons nor change goals. They just readjust their aim, shooting now at Putin over Ukraine as a way to clear the path again for “regime change” in Syria and Iran. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Why Neocons Seek to Destabilize Russia.”](#)]

The neocons also can take some solace from their “success” at enflaming the Middle East with Shia and Sunni now at each other’s throats – a bad thing for many people of the world and certainly for the many innocent victims in the region, but not so bad for the neocons. After all, it is the view of Israeli leaders and their neocon bedfellows (and women) that the internecine wars among Muslims provide at least some short-term advantages for Israel as it consolidates control over the Palestinian West Bank.

In a Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity [memorandum](#) for President Obama on Sept. 6, 2013, we called attention to an uncommonly candid [report](#) about Israeli/neocon motivation, written by none other than the Israel-friendly New York Times Bureau Chief in Jerusalem Jodi Rudoren on Sept. 2, 2013, just two days after Obama took advantage of Putin’s success in persuading the Syrians to allow their chemical weapons to be destroyed and called off the planned attack on Syria, causing consternation among neocons in Washington.

Rudoren can perhaps be excused for her naive lack of “political correctness.” She had been barely a year on the job, had very little prior experience with reporting on the Middle East, and in the excitement about the almost-attack on Syria she apparently forgot the strictures normally imposed on the Times’ reporting from Jerusalem. In any case, Israel’s priorities became crystal clear in what Rudoren wrote.

In her article, entitled “Israel Backs Limited Strike Against Syria,” Rudoren noted that the Israelis were arguing, quietly, that the best outcome for Syria’s (then) 2 ½-year-old civil war, at least for the moment, was no outcome:

“For Jerusalem, the status quo, horrific as it may be from a humanitarian perspective, seems preferable to either a victory by Mr. Assad’s government and his Iranian backers or a strengthening of rebel groups, increasingly dominated by Sunni jihadis.

“‘This is a playoff situation in which you need both teams to lose, but at least you don’t want one to win, we’ll settle for a tie,’ said Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli consul general in New York. ‘Let them both bleed, hemorrhage to death: that’s the strategic thinking here. As long as this lingers, there’s no real threat from Syria.’”

Clear enough? If this is the way Israel’s leaders continue to regard the

situation in Syria, then they look on deeper U.S. involvement overt or covert as likely to ensure that there is no early resolution of the conflict there. The longer Sunni and Shia are killing each other, not only in Syria but also across the region as a whole, the safer Tel Aviv's leaders calculate Israel is.

Favoring Jihadis

But Israeli leaders have also made clear that if one side must win, they would prefer the Sunni side, despite its bloody extremists from Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. In September 2013, shortly after Rudoren's article, Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren, then a close adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, told the Jerusalem Post that Israel favored the Sunni extremists over Assad.

"The greatest danger to Israel is by the strategic arc that extends from Tehran, to Damascus to Beirut. And we saw the Assad regime as the keystone in that arc," Oren said in [an interview](#). "We always wanted Bashar Assad to go, we always preferred the bad guys who weren't backed by Iran to the bad guys who were backed by Iran." He said this was the case even if the "bad guys" were affiliated with Al-Qaeda.

In June 2014, Oren then speaking as a former ambassador [said](#) Israel would even prefer a victory by the Islamic State, which was massacring captured Iraqi soldiers and beheading Westerners, than the continuation of the Iranian-backed Assad in Syria. "From Israel's perspective, if there's got to be an evil that's got to prevail, let the Sunni evil prevail," Oren said.

Netanyahu sounded a similar theme in his March 3, 2015 speech to the U.S. Congress in which he trivialized the threat from the Islamic State with its "butcher knives, captured weapons and YouTube" when compared to Iran, which he accused of "gobbling up the nations" of the Middle East.

That Syria's main ally is Iran with which it has a mutual defense treaty plays a role in Israeli calculations. Accordingly, while some Western leaders would like to achieve a realistic if imperfect settlement of the Syrian civil war, others who enjoy considerable influence in Washington would just as soon see the Assad government and the entire region bleed out.

As cynical and cruel as this strategy is, it isn't all that hard to understand. Yet, it seems to be one of those complicated, politically charged situations well above the pay-grade of the sophomores advising President Obama who, sad to say, are no match for the neocons in the Washington Establishment. Not to mention the Netanyahu-mesmerized Congress.

Corker Uncorked

Speaking of Congress, a year after Rudoren's report, Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tennessee, who now chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, divulged some details about the military attack that had been planned against Syria, while lamenting that it was canceled.

In doing so, Corker called Obama's abrupt change on Aug. 31, 2013, in opting for negotiations over open war on Syria, "the worst moment in U.S. foreign policy since I've been here." Following the neocon script, Corker blasted the deal (since fully implemented) with Putin and the Syrians to rid Syria of its chemical weapons.

Corker complained, "In essence I'm sorry to be slightly rhetorical we jumped into Putin's lap." A big No-No, of course especially in Congress to "jump into Putin's lap" even though Obama was able to achieve the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons without the United States jumping into another Middle East war.

It would have been nice, of course, if General Clark had thought to share his inside-Pentagon information earlier with the rest of us. In no way should he be seen as a whistleblower.

At the time of his September 2007 speech, he was deep into his quixotic attempt to win the Democratic nomination for president in 2008. In other words, Clark broke the omerta code of silence observed by virtually all U.S. generals, even post-retirement, merely to put some distance between himself and the debacle in Iraq and win some favor among anti-war Democrats. It didn't work, so he endorsed Hillary Clinton; that didn't work, so he endorsed Barack Obama.

Wolfowitz, typically, has landed on his feet. He is now presidential hopeful Jeb Bush's foreign policy/defense adviser, no doubt outlining his preferred approach to the Middle East chessboard to his new boss. Does anyone know the plural of "bedlam?"

Ray McGovern works for Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served for a total of 30 years as an Army infantry/intelligence officer and CIA analyst and is a member of the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

How Washington Adds to Yemen's Nightmare

Exclusive: Tangled in corrupt old alliances, such as with the Saudi monarchy, the Obama administration has now joined a war in Yemen that pits some of the region's most anti-democratic forces and Al-Qaeda against a home-grown rebel

movement with limited backing from Iran, as Jonathan Marshall describes.

By Jonathan Marshall

“So often, when we insert ourselves in ways that go beyond persuasion, it’s counterproductive, it backfires,” President Barack Obama told a recent news conference held at the Summit of the Americas. It’s a powerful insight he would do well to remember when he next takes stock of America’s latest intervention in Yemen.

Joining a growing list of U.S. foreign policy failures in the Middle East, including Iraq, Syria and Libya, Yemen is fast becoming a humanitarian disaster. Its indigenous conflict, cruelly fueled by Washington and Saudi Arabia, has killed hundreds of people, wounded more than 2,000, and displaced more than a quarter million people, according to the United Nations. All this at a time when 16 million of its desperately poor inhabitants are critically short of food, water and fuel.



Good luck trying to find any good guys among the various warring factions in Yemen; you certainly won't find a single good actor among any of the intervening foreign powers.

On the one hand, you have the Houthi rebels, named after the former religious leader of a minority Shiite sect known as the Zaydis. Earlier this year they overran most of the country after years of resisting oppressive central government rule. Their key issues are political, not religious, including how to divide the country's energy revenue between regions.

Backing the Houthi rebels, for now, are army units loyal to Washington's previously favored strongman, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. (Saleh previously fought the Houthis but switched sides to undermine his successor as

president.) The Houthis also enjoy support from the Tehran regime, which sees an opportunity to meddle in Saudi Arabia's backyard.

Lined up against them is the Yemen branch of the Islamic State; Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP); Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies; the military junta in Egypt; and an indicted war criminal, the president of Sudan.

Oh yes, and the Obama administration, which once again is directly or indirectly allied with Islamist extremists and the region's most anti-democratic forces. Following Saudi Arabia's airstrikes, the *New York Times* reported, local al-Qaeda fighters seized control of the capital of Yemen's "oil-rich Hadhramaut Province," while "al-Qaeda's strongest opponents, the Houthis and Yemen's American-trained counterterrorism troops, have been busy fending off attacks from the Saudi military."

As usual, the administration isn't sending any "boots on the ground," to avoid political backlash at home. But it is providing "logistical and intelligence support" for bombing runs by Saudi Arabia, including refueling operations and rescue missions to save Saudi pilots who ejected from their American-supplied F-15 fighter-bombers. Washington is also stepping up weapons deliveries to members of the Saudi-led coalition.

This naked aggression against a sovereign state has never been approved by the UN Security Council and stands in apparent violation of the United Nations charter. Congress has not approved this latest act of war either. "Right now (the operation) does not have any foundation in international law," complained Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, not that anyone in the United States cared what he had to say.

American disregard for international law is so complete that hardly anyone cared what UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had to say about the war in Yemen, either.

"The coalition air raids, and the continuing attempts by the Houthis and their allied armed groups to expand their power, have turned an internal political crisis into a violent conflict that risks deep and long-lasting regional repercussions," he declared. "The last thing the region and our world need is more of the chaos and crimes we have seen in Libya and Syria."

The Obama administration barely even bothered to justify its support for outside military intervention into Yemen's civil war. Depending on whether you believe the National Security Council, the State Department or the White House press office, the administration is either seeking to "defend Saudi Arabia's border," to support "the legitimate president of Yemen," or to promote negotiations among the warring parties.

In a typical example of unconscious doublespeak, Secretary of State John Kerry told an interviewer that Washington was “not going to stand by while the region is destabilized,” as if bombing will somehow stabilize Yemen.

What really motivates Washington was probably best explained by Rep. Adam Schiff, D-California, who said U.S. support “may give the Saudis some comfort that, even if we do reach an agreement with Iran on its nuclear program, that doesn’t mean that we’re not going to be willing to confront Iran as it tries to expand its quite nefarious influence.”

Although the Houthis are an authentic home-grown force, and has important doctrinal differences with Iran, Saudi Arabia sees Iranian puppet masters behind every Shiite-led movement in the Middle East, just as Washington saw Soviet control behind every Third World rebellion during the Cold War.

Since Iran replaced Israel as Saudi Arabia’s chief bête noir, Riyadh has openly questioned whether the Obama administration can be trusted any longer as an ally and even threatened to downgrade its relations with Washington. Obama has sought to reassure the oil kingdom by approving \$46 billion in new arms sales, and by insisting that his administration will resist the spread of Iran’s influence, by force if necessary, everywhere in the region.

Decades before Iran became an enemy, however, Saudi Arabia began intervening in its southern neighbor. Besides grabbing land, the Saudis poured vast sums of money into Yemen to promote its extreme brand of Sunni Islam known as Wahhabism. In 2009, it invaded northern Yemen to attack the Houthis, unsuccessfully.

Washington has also inserted itself in Yemen’s civil conflicts for decades. In 1962, the Kennedy administration and the Saudi monarchy backed a bloody tribal insurgency against a pro-Egyptian regime in what was then North Yemen (the “Yemen Arab Republic”). Joining them in this covert operation were Israel and Iran, then ruled by the Shah. And among the insurgents they supported were Yemeni followers of the Zaydi sect, who would later be known as the Houthis. Few Yemenis probably care to savor the ironies.

President Obama’s interventions in Yemen until recently could be summed up in one word: drones. He directed an infamous drone strike in December 2009, which killed 41 civilians, many of them women and children; later, Obama later prevailed on the president of Yemen to jail the Yemeni journalist who exposed that drone attack. Another drone strike in 2013 wiped out members of a wedding party. U.S. drone strikes have continued to kill innocent civilians into 2015.

Washington’s single-minded focus on counter-terrorism not only created new recruits for al-Qaeda but predictably helped set the stage for the latest

crisis. As Brandeis University researcher Aaron Zelin warned in 2010:

“The politics are treacherous. Launching drone strikes could hinder efforts to solve the northern and southern conflict peacefully. . . . If the United States tried to target an AQAP operative in a Huthi stronghold in northern Yemen and accidentally killed individuals who sympathize with the Huthi cause, it would most likely break the fragile peace and lead to a resumption and major escalation of war between the Huthis and the Yemeni government.

“Further, in the past round of battle from August, 2009 to February, 2010, Saudi Arabia , which collects a large amount of American military aid , overtly entered the war. A small counterterrorism operation could quickly spiral into a regional war that has nothing to do with AQAP, but could further destabilize the security situation in Yemen and detract from the fight against AQAP.”

Zelin recommended that Washington shift its focus from military aid to leading an international donor initiative to reduce poverty, diversify Yemen’s economy and help the country’s swelling refugee population, as well as encouraging the country to peacefully resolve conflicts with the Houthis and other aggrieved groups.

Instead, as documented by Human Rights Watch, Yemen’s government repeatedly used U.S. military aid to support an all-out assault against the Houthis (“Operation Scorched Earth”), causing extensive civilian casualties. The latest round of conflict, leading to Houthi victories, began in September 2014, just after the White House declared that the success of America’s counterterrorism strategy in Yemen was a “model” for dealing with militants everywhere.

If Washington had instead listened to Zelin and other experts, the United States might today be helping to heal the country, reducing the appeal of Islamist extremists and rebel insurgents alike. Instead, we find ourselves supporting bombing runs by a Wahhabist regime against the enemies of al-Qaeda in Yemen, in the name of containing Iran. Is it any wonder that U.S. foreign policy is in such shambles?

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The Nasty Blowback from America's Wars

Exclusive: There are historical warnings to countries that inflict violence abroad, that the imperial impulse will blow back on the domestic society with suppression of public debate and repression of common citizens, that the war will come home – as is happening in the United States, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Brutality thrives in American police treatment of common citizens reflecting an ethos of violence that has flourished over the past dozen years with almost no one in authority held accountable. Much of this behavior can be traced back to U.S. wars of choice and it is not as though we were not warned of the inevitable blowback.

On Feb. 26, 2003, three weeks before the U.S./UK attack on Iraq, Coleen Rowley, then division counsel and special agent at the FBI office in Minneapolis, had the prescience and the guts to send a letter to then FBI Director Robert Mueller. The New York Times published it a week later.

Rowley warned Mueller that launching unjustified war would prove counterproductive in various ways. One blowback she highlighted was that the rationale being applied to allow preemptive strikes abroad could migrate back home, “fostering a more permissive attitude toward shootings by law enforcement officers in this country.” Tragically, the recent spate of murders by police has proved Rowley right.

And not only killing. Police brutality toward the citizenry, some of it by former soldiers who themselves were brutalized by war, has soared. Yet, the dark side of what was done by U.S. troops abroad as well as the damage that was done to their psyches and sense of morality is rarely shown in the U.S. mainstream media, which prefers to veer between romanticizing the adventure of war and lamenting the physical harm done to America's maimed warriors.

One has to go to foreign media for real-life examples of the brutalization *of*, as well as *by*, the young soldiers we send off to battle. (See, for example, this segment from Germany's “60 Minutes”-type TV program, Panorama.)

The glib, implicit approval of violence (embedded, for instance, in the customary “Thank you for your service”) simply adds to the widespread acceptance of brutality as somehow okay.

Gratuitous Beatings

Cases of police beating citizens who are detained or taken into custody have multiplied, with police offenders frequently held to the same unconscionable let's-not-look-back "accountability" that has let George W. Bush and Dick Cheney walk free so far for launching the "war of aggression" on Iraq.

The post-World War II Nuremberg Tribunal carefully defined such a war as "the supreme international crime, differing from other war crimes only in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole." Accumulated evil? Having just emerged from the nightmare of world conflagration, the jurists on the Tribunal understood that it was the unleashing of the dogs of war launching an aggressive war that also loosed all the other atrocities and barbarities associated with warfare.

Looking back on the last decade, think of crimes like kidnapping, black prisons and torture as well as the slaughter of so many civilians as the Bush/Cheney war of choice has spread violence and death now in the form of the brutal Islamic State and America's endless "drone wars" across almost the entire Middle East.

But part of that accumulated evil is also playing out at home on the streets of American cities and in even in our deserts. On April 9, San Bernardino's "sheriff's deputies" were caught on video viciously brutalizing a man who had already prostrated himself on the desert floor with his hands behind his back.

Warning: Watching this video may make you ill or cry. If so, take heart. For this would merely show that, because you still have a conscience, you are sickened by what you see, and that you can still "cry our beloved country."

Conscience is a good thing, for it often brings the courage to speak out and confront the banality of evil that always flows and inevitably blows back from wars of aggression. Indifference to human suffering is another one of those accumulated evils of the whole.

We need to summon the kind of courage Coleen Rowley showed three weeks **before** the United States launched the "supreme international crime." We need to monitor closely what happens **after** the unconscionable abuse by police of the helpless man in San Bernardino, **after** the recent police shootings of unarmed black men, and **after** the excessive brutality that America's over-militarized police now regularly inflict on citizens during routine arrests.

"If you see something, say something" we are constantly told. If we see this video coverage, watch this sort of brutality, and do nothing, I fear for what will become of our country.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served as an infantry/intelligence

officer, and then as a CIA analyst for a total of 30 years.

Neocons, R2Pers and Hypocrisy

Exclusive: R2Pers say America has a “responsibility to protect” endangered people around the world, but this R2P moral imperative is selective, often indistinguishable from neocons tolerating some slaughters and choosing to wage war against certain enemies – just dressed up in liberal rhetoric, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Sometimes I’m challenged over my linking belligerent neoconservatives with “liberal interventionists” who justify U.S. military invasions under the “humanitarian” banner of “responsibility to protect” or R2P meaning to intervene in war-torn countries to stop the killing of civilians, like the 1994 slaughter in Rwanda.

And, most people would agree that there are extraordinary situations in which the timely arrival of an external military force might prevent genocide or other atrocities, which was one of the intended functions of the United Nations. But my overall impression of R2Pers is that many are careerist hypocrites who voice selective outrage that provides cover for the U.S. and its allies to do pretty much whatever they wish.

Though one can’t generalize about an entire group since some R2Pers act much more consistently than others many of the most prominent ones operate opportunistically, depending how the dominant narrative is going and where the power interests lie.

So, while many R2Pers were eager to seek war against the Syrian government when it cracked down on both peaceful and violent opponents in 2011 and especially after a mysterious Sarin gas attack in 2013 many of the star R2Pers went silent when Israel bombarded Gaza in 2008-09 and again in 2014.

The reason is obvious: There was no powerful lobby defending the Syrian government but there was one protecting the Israeli government. Additionally, the mainstream U.S. media is hostile to the Syrian government but almost universally supports the Israeli government. In other words, many R2Pers practice a double standard depending on who’s doing the killing of civilians.

In 2011, the neocons and the R2Pers teamed up for a war against Libya, which was

sold to the United Nations Security Council as simply a limited intervention to protect civilians in the east whom Muammar Gaddafi had labeled “terrorists.” However, once the U.S.-orchestrated military operation got going, it quickly turned into a “regime change” war, killing Gaddafi and unleashing bloody chaos across Libya and neighboring African countries. It turns out that Gaddafi was right about many of his enemies being Islamic terrorists.

The Ukraine Case

We saw this neocon-R2P “chaos promotion” again in Ukraine where neoconservative officials and “liberal interventionist” activists rallied to the cause of the Maidan protesters when they challenged the elected government of President Viktor Yanukovich in late 2013 and early 2014.

On Feb. 20, 2014, when unidentified snipers killed both police and protesters, the neocons and R2Pers along with the Western media blamed Yanukovich though he insisted that he had ordered the police NOT to use deadly force and later studies suggested the snipers were likely working for the anti-Yanukovich side and had fired from locations controlled by the Right Sektor, extremists associated with the Maidan’s neo-Nazi “self-defense” commandant Andriy Parubiy.

If indeed the sniper attack was a false-flag provocation, it worked, laying the bloody groundwork for the violent overthrow of Yanukovich two days later. Since then, the U.S.-backed regime in Kiev has dragged its feet on the sniper investigation, but independent field reports, including one from the BBC, indicated that the snipers likely were associated with the protesters, not the Yanukovich government. [Another worthwhile documentary on this mystery is “Maidan Massacre.”]

But the West favored a Ukraine narrative that made the Maidan coup-makers the good guys and Yanukovich’s supporters the bad guys. This was the view not only of neocons, like Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, but prominent R2Pers like New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof. In April 2014, he returned to his family’s ancestral home in Karapchiv in western Ukraine to interview some of its residents and presented their views as the true voice of the people.

Kristof depicted his father’s old home town as an idyllic place where everyone loves the music of Taylor Swift and dreams of their place in a prosperous Europe if only President Barack Obama would send them weapons to kill Russians (or go “bear-hunting” as Kristof wrote in one column).

Pretty soon that desired outcome had become a reality. On May 2, 2014, pro-regime neo-Nazis massacred scores of ethnic Russians by the burning down of the

Trade Union Building in Odessa. Amid the horror and reports of graffiti hailing the Galician SS, one of western Ukraine's contributions to the Nazi war effort there was little protest from the R2P community or from the West in general. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Ukraine's Dr. Strangelove Reality.](#)"]

Similarly, when Kiev's coup regime announced its "anti-terrorist operation" to destroy the resistance in eastern Ukraine and again dispatched neo-Nazi militias to spearhead the killing the thousands of deaths, mostly among ethnic Russians, were blamed on "Russian aggression" and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The R2Pers showed very little outrage even when the Kiev forces began shelling cities and leveling towns. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Seeing No Neo-Nazi Militias in Ukraine.](#)"]

Muted Outrage

A couple of human rights groups did take note of some outrages. Amnesty International [reported](#) abuses committed by Kiev's far-right Aidar militia against civilians: "Members of the Aidar territorial defence battalion, operating in the north Luhansk region, have been involved in widespread abuses, including abductions, unlawful detention, ill-treatment, theft, extortion, and possible executions. Some of the abuses committed by members of the Aidar battalion amount to war crimes, for which both the perpetrators and, possibly, the commanders would bear responsibility under national and international law."

Human Rights Watch [said](#) "Ukrainian government forces used cluster munitions in populated areas in Donetsk city" despite the fact that "the use of cluster munitions in populated areas violates the laws of war due to the indiscriminate nature of the weapon and may amount to war crimes."

However, the language in these reports was relatively restrained, possibly because both groups receive large donations from billionaire George Soros, who has sided with the Kiev authorities and is supporting the crushing of the eastern Ukrainian resistance. The human rights complaints also drew scant notice in the mainstream U.S. news media, which has also taken sides against the ethnic Russians and in favor of the Kiev regime.

So, although more than 5,000 Ukrainians have been killed the vast majority ethnic Russians in the east there has been virtual silence among the R2Pers about the responsibility to protect the ethnic Russians. Indeed, when the Russian government has supplied these people with weapons to defend themselves, many "liberal interventionists" have joined with the neocons in condemning Moscow and Putin, fuming about a "Russian invasion."

So, it's apparently okay for the U.S.-backed government in Kiev to engage in the

slaughter of an ethnic population in eastern Ukraine even employing neo-Nazis to do the dirtiest work with many R2Pers cheering what looks a lot like ethnic cleansing.

Bombing Yemen

A similar situation is now playing out in Yemen where a long-running civil war saw Houthi rebels capturing the capital Sanaa and other major cities. President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia seeking protection and encouraging the Saudi royal family to reinstall him.

The Saudis, citing alleged Iranian support for the Houthis, began a U.S.-backed bombing campaign that has apparently killed hundreds of civilians, prompting Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to denounce the airstrikes as “a crime” and “a genocide.”

Though the Saudis are undeniably intervening in another nation’s civil war, the Obama administration supports this intervention and doesn’t seem too troubled by the large-scale civilian deaths being inflicted. Instead of restraining the Saudis, the United States is rushing military resupplies and providing logistical and intelligence support.

Rather than protest this Saudi “invasion,” Secretary of State John Kerry chastised the Iranians for supposedly helping the Houthis. In one of his most clueless and disingenuous remarks and there is plenty of competition Kerry told the PBS NewsHour on Wednesday that Washington was “not going to stand by while the region is destabilized.”

Kerry, of course, was one of the U.S. senators in 2002 to authorize President George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq, a conflict that not only killed hundreds of thousands of people but gave rise to the hyper-violent “Al-Qaeda in Iraq” which has since morphed into the “Islamic State,” which has spread its particularly savage brand of jihad across the Middle East and into Africa.

Another major breeder of Mideast destabilization has been the Saudi royal family, which spurred Iraq’s Saddam Hussein to invade Iran in 1980, reviving the ancient Sunni-Shiite rivalries which have escalated to the present day. Elements of the Saudi royal family also supported Saudi Osama bin Laden as he founded and built Al-Qaeda to engage in terrorism against the West. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Secret Saudi Ties to Terrorism.”](#)]

For Kerry to present himself and the Saudis as the protectors of Middle East stability would be laughable if there weren’t so many dead and maimed innocents across the region. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“What’s the Matter with John Kerry?”](#)]

Kerry also reprised his infamous fact-free-rush-to-judgment style that he used in pushing the United States nearly into a war with Syria over his dubious charge that President Bashar al-Assad's government was responsible for an Aug. 21, 2013 Sarin attack outside Damascus and in blaming Russia for the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine on July 17, 2014. In both cases still unresolved subsequent information suggested a different conclusion. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Kerry's Latest Reckless Rush to Judgment.](#)"]

Regarding the Saudi bombing of Yemen, Kerry justified the attacks by blaming Iran: "There are obviously supplies that have been coming from Iran. There are a number of flights, every single week that have been flying in. We trace those flights, and we know this. We are well aware of the support that Iran has been giving to Yemen."

Beyond the hypocrisy of Kerry's protest given U.S. interference in dozens of civil wars there is the contrary analysis by many Yemen watchers that while Iran may have given the Houthis some money and possibly weapons Tehran exercises very little control over the Houthis who are Zaydi Shia, an offshoot of Shiite Islam considered relatively close to Sunni Islam.

The Houthis also are not anti-American – and they are anti-Al-Qaeda. They made overtures to the Obama administration, expressing a desire to press ahead with the war against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. But the Saudi intervention, with U.S. support, has damaged the Houthis' ability to continue that fight and, indeed, has allowed Al-Qaeda to capture more territory and free scores of its imprisoned militants.

Yet, while this tangle of contradictions and hypocrisies may be expected from the U.S. State Department, one might think that the "principled" R2Pers would hold themselves to a higher standard and denounce the Saudi-led and U.S.-backed slaughter of innocents. But, again, the cries of humanitarian protests have been muffled.

High-Profile Hypocrite

Possibly the most high-profile R2P hypocrite is U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power, who earned wide acclaim for developing R2P theories and scolding U.S. officials for not stopping the Rwanda genocide in 1994.

Power even got in trouble in 2002 when she [responded](#) to a hypothetical question about the possible need to dispatch U.S. troops to prevent Israel from committing genocide against the Palestinians. In her rambling and convoluted answer, she suggested that a military solution might have to be imposed on Israel:

“It may mean, more crucially, sacrificing, or investing I think more than sacrificing, literally billions of dollars, not in servicing Israel’s military but actually investing in the new state of Palestine; in investing billions of dollars it would probably take also to support I think what will have to be a mammoth a protection force, not of the old Srebrenica kind or of the Rwanda kind, but a meaningful military presence.

“Because it seems to me at this stage and this is true of actual genocides as well and not just major human rights abuses which we’re seeing there that is that you have to go in as if you’re serious, you have to put something on the line.

“And unfortunately, imposition of a solution on unwilling parties is dreadful, I mean it’s a terrible thing to do, it’s fundamentally undemocratic, but sadly you know, we don’t just have a democracy here either, we have a liberal democracy, there are certain sets of principles that guide our policy, or they are meant to anyway, and there it’s essential that some set of principles becomes the benchmark, rather than a deference to people who are fundamentally, politically destined to destroy the lives of their own people.”

Power also did some of the political calculation involved, saying: “What we need is a willingness to actually put something on the line in the service of helping the situation. And putting something on the line might mean alienating a domestic constituency of tremendous political and financial import” an obvious reference to Jewish-American supporters of Israel.

However, when it became clear that her answer had upset that powerful constituency and thus threatened her future employment in government, she scurried away from it, disavowing her comments to an Israeli journalist.

Then, in a closed 2011 meeting with 40 Jewish leaders, Power reportedly broke down in tears showing what Rabbi Shmuley Boteach described as “her unabashed display of emotional attachment to the security of the Jewish people.” Boteach is a self-professed supporter of Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

In other words, when her career was in danger, she pitched the Palestinian people and their human rights over the side. She also has been a staunch defender of the Kiev regime’s brutal “anti-terrorist operation” against the ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine, showing little regard for their lives and safety.

Clearly, Samantha Power and many other R2Pers fashion their responsibility to protect around protecting their own political and financial interests.

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](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

Reasons for the Mideast's Despair

The West is quick to show disdain for the Muslim world and almost as quick to bomb it. But the only way to ultimately diffuse Islamic extremism is to understand the West's historic role in causing the problem and then pursuing practical ways to address legitimate concerns, as Alon Ben-Meir explains.

By Alon Ben-Meir

The intensified public discussion about the root causes of violent extremism among some Muslims has focused mainly on the socio-economic and political conditions that exist in Arab countries and among Arab communities in Europe and the U.S., which provide a breeding ground for extremism.

But to effectively counter violent extremism, we must also carefully consider how the development of events in the wake of World Wars I and II have impacted the psychological disposition of the Arab population throughout the Middle East.

Starting with the arbitrary division of the region by Western powers, the wars, revolutions and scores of violent conflicts that followed have added layer upon layer of deep resentment and hatred of the West, and the puppet Arab leaders who were installed to serve their Western masters.

The following provides a brief historic, panoramic view of what the vast majority of the Arab population has experienced, which has informed their perception of the world around them, left an indelible mark on their psyches, and framed the beliefs and behavior of many.

President Barack Obama stated at the Summit of Countering Violent Extremism that "the Muslim world has suffered historical grievances [and] does buy into the belief that so many of the ills in the Middle East flow from the history of colonialism or conspiracy."

Whether the colonial powers were only partially or fully to blame is hardly

relevant because the Arab masses continue to believe that colonialism was behind the ills and suffering they endured. From the perspective of the majority of the Arabs, the developments of major events that followed the two World Wars simply confirmed their perception.

Even before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, Britain and France reached a secret pact in 1916 (the Sykes-Picot Agreement) to divide Ottoman-held territories in the Middle East between the two powers irrespective of sect, ethnicity and religious affiliations. Dividing the "pie" between them was viewed as exploitive, arrogant and dismissive of the welfare of the indigenous populations, ushering in decades of strife and turmoil.

The creation of most of the Arab states following World War II hardly changed the plight of the Arabs living in these countries. The French and the British appointed governors, kings and emirs who ruled with iron fists, further intensifying hatred toward the Western powers and toward the authoritarian regimes under which they groaned.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was regarded as yet another Western conspiracy. The humiliation of the Arab armies by the nascent Israeli forces, the loss of substantial territory, and the creation of the Palestinian refugees have added a further layer of deep resentment. The Israeli occupation, which led to the rise of Hamas and Hezbollah, continues to feed the Palestinians a daily ration of indignity to this very day.

The 1953 overthrow of the freely-elected Mosaddegh government in Iran, engineered by the CIA and British intelligence because of the parliament's decision to nationalize the oil industry, was seen as the most flagrant intervention in the internal affairs of a Muslim state. The installation of the Shah, a Western puppet, and his ruthless treatment of his subjects were never forgotten by the Iranians and still remain a source of anger and antipathy toward the U.S.

When Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was hailed as a nationalist hero, rose to power in Egypt and dared to challenge the West's dominance and "ownership" of the Suez Canal, the French and British, in cahoots with Israel, answered with war.

The war with Egypt once again trampled Arab pride as the retaking of the Canal and the occupation of the Sinai by Israel was viewed by the Arabs as a blatant manifestation of the West's vulgarity of self-entitlement and Israel's hunger for more Arab land.

And then came the 1967 Six Day War. In 144 hours, Israel conquered Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian territories more than three times its own size. Though the

defeat of the Arab armies on the battlefield was humiliating, it was the psychological defeat that shattered the Arabs' self-esteem.

Although the 1973 Yom Kippur War salvaged Egypt's national pride (Egyptian forces were allowed to remain on the East side of the Suez Canal, which provided Anwar Sadat a political victory), it did little to allay the Arabs' humiliation as Israel continued to occupy Arab land on three fronts.

The 1979 Iranian revolution marked the first major Muslim country to revolt against the United States, sending a clear message to Arabs and Muslims that the West will no longer impose its whims with impunity. Unsurprisingly, the Mullahs' victory did not change the core resentment and hatred toward the West.

Although the 2001 Afghanistan war was arguably necessary to destroy al-Qaeda following the 9/11 attack, the prolongation of the war, its destructiveness and the death toll were and continue to be seen as consequences of the West's never-satisfied appetite for dominating Muslim/Arab lands.

The Afghanistan war produced a new generation of militant Muslims who operated both with and independent of al-Qaeda, ready to challenge Western powers and the autocratic Arab regimes that want to maintain the status quo.

Notwithstanding how much Saddam Hussein was reviled for his ruthlessness, the vast majority of Arab youth viewed the 2003 Iraq War as an unprecedented assault on the Arabs' heartland and people. Iraq was essentially dismantled, pitting Sunnis against the Shiite majority; tens of thousands were killed and violent Islamists converged into Iraq, which eventually led to the birth of ISIS while poisoning a new generation of young Arabs with intensely anti-Western sentiments.

The Arab Spring, which ushered in great hope and promise for the future, turned out to be a cruel winter. The U.S. and the EU have selectively interfered in the various Arab Spring countries without any clear strategy, believing that pushing democracy down the throat of the people would provide a panacea for their political ills.

All considered, the vast majority of the Arab people accept their lot in silent desperation. But the relatively small minority who are engaged in violent extremism rose to defy by whatever means both Western powers and the authoritarian Arab regimes. These jihadists differ in age, financial ability, education and family prominence; they do not fit a single profile nor do they follow a single path to extremism.

However, they all have one thing in common: hatred of the West and the own corrupt leaders. They no longer believe that their governments will heed their

call for change; they believe Western influence is a curse and only jihad can change their destiny and the course of history.

Religious extremism and the deliberate distortion of Islamic teaching provided the outlet that could justify any violent action to remedy decades of servitude and subjugation. Dying while fighting the enemy is extolled as martyrdom, the ultimate sacrifice that opens the gates of heaven and offers true freedom and dignity, of which they were deprived on earth.

Though the use of force is at times necessary to destroy an irredeemable foe such as ISIS, it is critical to recognize that no amount of military force can eradicate ideology and religious conviction. A multitude of measures are necessary to counter violent extremism, including education, economic assistance, job opportunities, integration, addressing grievances, engagement in social activities, and much more.

But to successfully combat this long-term problem, Western powers must act on a number of fronts to set the stage for reconciliation. Reconciliation must begin by recognizing and admitting to past mistakes. Regardless of the extent of the West's abuse and exploitation of Arab resources and people, acknowledging its long history of misguided policies is critical to establish a dialogue which is still largely missing in the strategy of countering violent extremism.

The West can offer a model of democratic government, but must not impose it arbitrarily. The Arab states will find their own way to reconcile religion with the form of democracy they choose, and the West must honor the outcome of fair and free elections.

The West owes many of the Arab states, especially those with overwhelmingly poor populations such as Egypt, the financial and technical support needed to embark on sustainable economic development projects that empower the people. Poor, hungry and despairing youth need food even before freedom, and job opportunities, healthcare and education before meaningless elections.

The U.S. must never cease its effort to diffuse the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and bring an end to the occupation, which provides a continuing source of extremism. In doing so, the U.S. addresses one of the Arabs' foremost grievances against it, while strengthening Israel's national security.

Finally, since the West and the Arab states have a common interest in degrading, if not eliminating, radical militants, their collaboration must be strategic in order to avoid the potential of creating a new crisis. Does the U.S. know what the fate of Syria and Iraq will be once ISIS is defeated, and how that will impact the Sunni-Shiite "war" spearheaded by Saudi Arabia and Iran?

None of the above is meant to suggest that the Arab states have been merely the victims of imperialism. They have and continue to contribute to the plight of their people. The Arab world is rampant with inequality, gross human rights violations, and tens of millions of poverty-stricken young men and women with little prospect of finding a meaningful purpose to their lives.

If the Arab leaders want to end the scourge of violent extremism, they must assume some responsibility and not simply blame the West for their grievances and decades of socio-economic and political dislocation and despair.

Unless they invest now in economic development, education, healthcare and opportunities for growth, and allow for social and political freedom (albeit gradually), the radicalization of the young will only be intensified and the unforgiving storm will continue to sweep one country after another.

To be sure, countering violent radicalism will be a long and costly campaign. It will take foresight, courage and wisdom to learn from past mistakes. Together with the West, the Arab states must chart a new course of trust and mutual respect to tackle the herculean job that lies ahead.

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Hyping the Iranian ‘Threat’

Iran hasn’t invaded another country for centuries and is helping the U.S. push back against the Islamic State in Iraq, but Israeli leaders and American neocons want to enlist the West in the Saudi cause of promoting Sunni Islam over Shiite Islam, while America’s interests suffer, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

The idea of Iran as a regional marauder that is gobbling up other countries in the Middle East and against which pressure must therefore be unrelenting has become one of the favorite themes of those determined to kill the nuclear agreement with Tehran. As an argument for rejecting the nuclear deal, this approach has always suffered from major factual and logical flaws.

Given the casual and automatic manner in which references to Iran supposedly sowing mayhem all over the region are routinely worked into almost any

discussion of policy toward Iran, it perhaps is too much to expect many people to stop and study the flaws. Perhaps we should just remind people who make those casual references that if Iran really were bent on causing all that mayhem, that is all the more reason to support an agreement to assure that the marauder does not get a nuclear weapon.

But let's not abandon facts and logic just yet. The main fact on this subject is that Iran hasn't been doing anything close to the country-gobbling, capital-controlling, instability-creating stuff in the Middle East that it routinely gets accused of doing. Its regional activity is best characterized as the understandable and unsurprising reactions of a major regional state to an assortment of conflicts in its neighborhood that are not of its own making.

As Jon Alterman has put it, "The reality is the Iranians don't control any Arab capital, and they couldn't if they tried. Iraqis have a strong sense of nationalism and self-interest, as do Syrians, Lebanese and Yemenis. If you were an Iranian trying to impose your will, you'd be tearing your hair out. There is no Iranian 'order' in the region." Instead, there is a lot of disorder, and amid that disorder the Iranian goal, says Alterman, "is to survive in a hostile world."

There is no fundamental difference between most of what Iran actually is doing in the region and what either the United States or its regional Sunni friends are doing in reacting to the same disorder. Yet when the latter step into something like the confusing sectarian/tribal/personal conflict in Yemen, as the Saudis have done with their U.S.-supported military intervention replete with airstrikes, it is looked on benignly, but when the Iranians provide lesser assistance to one of the players in the same conflict, this gets described as country-gobbling trouble-making. Such inconsistency is all the more glaring when Iran and the United States are weighing in on the same side, as they are in Iraq.

A particular variant of the Iran-as-marauder argument that has featured prominently in the most recent efforts to kill the nuclear agreement is the notion that granting Iran relief from some of the sanctions to which it currently is subjected would give Iran more resources for more trouble-making in the region, and this would mean Iran would in fact cause more trouble.

This assumes that any extra funds in the Iranian bank account would go into whatever foreign activities the anti-agreement people want us to think of as trouble-making, rather than toward meeting the demands and high expectations of the Iranian public for domestic improvement.

That assumption does not square with what Iranian leaders know their political

future depends upon; they fully realize that the crowds that greeted Foreign Minister Javad Zarif upon returning from the negotiations in Lausanne expect that improvement in their way of life at home; people in the crowds were not cheering Zarif because they believe there will be more money for foreign adventurism.

The assumption also does not square, as Juan Cole points out, with the actual record of how the Iranians have apportioned their resources. And the assumption that Iranian regional activities will be a function of the balance in Iran's bank account is certainly inconsistent with the image of Iranian leaders as ideologically-driven hotheads who are out to inflame and destabilize whatever they can.

In fact, the assumed connection between sanctions relief and greater regional activism makes the Iranians look much more like cool-headed green eyeshade types than are the Americans who promoted the biggest destabilizing, country-breaking, terrorism-stimulating event in the Middle East in recent times: a war that turned out to cost trillions.

Note a further inconsistency in what the deal-killers are saying. Many of the same people (the Israeli prime minister is a prominent but by no means the only example) who are saying that Iran should not be given sanctions relief lest the Iranians have more resources for regional trouble-making are also contending that continued pressure through sanctions is the way to get a "better deal" on the nuclear issue.

Even if either of these contentions were valid (and neither one is), they could not possibly both be valid. The sanctions from which Iran will get relief were enacted for the clearly expressed purpose of inducing concessions from Iran on the nuclear issue. With the framework agreement that was announced last week, that purpose has been achieved.

But opponents of the deal are suggesting that the United States should now say, "Well, that's not really what we had in mind for those sanctions. We're going to keep them in place indefinitely because we don't want to give you resources for doing other things."

How is that supposed to give the Iranians incentive to cooperate on anything, and specifically on nuclear matters? And for those who whine a lot about damage to U.S. credibility (many of those opposing the nuclear deal are among the principal habitual whiners), how will this switcharoo affect how other nations view U.S. credibility, and how much they will believe the United States the next time it tries to use a tool such as economic sanctions to persuade someone to change a policy?

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Israel's Unsavory New 'Allies'

The American people, who still want to stop Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, are only dimly aware that longtime U.S. "allies" Israel and Saudi Arabia have shifted into an effective alliance with those Sunni jihadists as part of their regional war against Iran and Shiite Islam, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

It is often alleged that the basis for U.S.-Israeli relations lies in "shared concerns and interests." But what really holds the relationship together is a systemic aspect of American politics – the system of special interest lobbying and the money that underlies it.

That practice is just about as old as the country itself, and the Zionist lobby is a past-master at exploiting this system. With the Supreme Court rulings telling us that political spending and donations are [forms of free speech](#), this rather perverse aspect of U.S. politics is not going to change in the foreseeable future.

Therefore, one would assume that the present deterioration in relations between the Obama White House and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as refreshing as it is, only represents a temporary glitch rather than a permanent breach in the alliance between the two countries. Well, perhaps, but getting the relationship back to the status quo ante may be harder than many expect.

For example, on March 29, the [New York Times reported](#) that former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations to let him know that she wants to "improve relations with Israel." That sort of statement is a standard prerequisite for anyone planning to run for the presidency in 2016.

While there was no elaboration on the meeting coming from Clinton's office, Mr. Hoenlein was quite forthcoming. According to him, "Secretary Clinton thinks we need to all work together to return the special U.S.-Israeli relationship to a constructive footing, to get back to basic shared concerns and interests."

Wishful thinking aside, is that really possible? While Clinton is attuned to her political interest in keeping the Zionist lobby bipartisan in 2016, Mr. Hoenlein seems blind to the fact that the U.S. and Israel no longer have any “shared concerns and interests” in the Middle East. In fact, looked at it objectively, their “concerns and interests” are now in opposition.

A Major Foreign Policy Goal since 2001

Since the terrorist attacks of 2001, a major foreign policy goal of the U.S. government has been the pursuit and destruction of the Sunni extremist organization al-Qaeda and its offshoots. To that end the Americans invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and, more problematically, Iraq in 2003.

The popular frustrations that resulted from those wars brought Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008 in order to change tactics but not the goal. In other words, the American public still approved of going after al-Qaeda, but were tired of the costly war-making approach characteristic of the Bush Republicans and their neoconservative advisers.

In truth the Bush approach of invasion and “regime change” proved disastrously counter-productive. It caused the collapse of political stability in both Afghanistan and Iraq thus creating power vacuums that became breeding grounds for al-Qaeda.

Obama rationalized the anti-al-Qaeda campaign. He ended the unpopular American occupation of Iraq and wound down the Afghan War. In their places he substituted drone warfare. Drones kill jihadists (and a lot more folks as well) with no great risk to American lives (though harm to the psychological health of the computer jockeys guiding these weaponized model airplanes is certainly a cost).

You just remotely steer the drones to the place where your informants say your target happens to be (dinner party, family visit, wedding, etc.) and launch the drone’s missiles into that spot. Straightforward, except for the fact that, on average, drones kill 28 civilians for every enemy individual they target. In fact, that is what the U.S. was doing in Yemen before the Saudis started their present, much more indiscriminate, bombing campaign (using real airplanes) throughout that country.

U.S. allies in the region, specifically Israel and Saudi Arabia, had no problem with the drone attacks against al-Qaeda until 2011. That was when civil war broke out in Syria and when al-Qaeda and its offshoots showed up to fight against the embattled Assad regime in Damascus.

Keep in mind that Assad was seen as an enemy of Israel. Syria called for help from Shiite Iran and Hezbollah (also enemies of Israel). Soon the fighting

spread across the border into northern Iraq, and the Iraqi government also called for help from Iran.

From an American, anti-al-Qaeda perspective, things began to look really bad. ISIS (aka the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), an al-Qaeda inspired movement operating in both Syria and Iraq, declared itself the “new caliphate” and started to take and hold territory while cutting off the heads of anyone who got in the way.

The Obama administration did not want to go back into another Middle East war (they still had residual troops on the ground in Afghanistan) but fortunately “boots on the ground” proved unnecessary. Why? Because there was another power right in the region willing to pick up the slack – a power which was just as much an enemy of al-Qaeda as the U.S. was. That power was Iran.

That meant that certainly by 2014 the United States and Iran understood that they were on the same side of a struggle that, in the U.S., represented a primary concern of the American people for the past 15 years.

On the Iranian side the concern was even more immediate because the aggressive behavior of ISIS threatened Iran’s western border as well as its Lebanese ally, Hezbollah. Given this situation, the last thing both countries wanted was open hostilities with each other. That encouraged both parties to work hard to settle the dispute over Iranian nuclear power.

The Divergence

Unfortunately, Israel, and by extension the American Zionist lobby, had lost interest in U.S. concerns about al-Qaeda. Indeed, Tel Aviv had come to take the opposite point of view, seeing some merit in Islamic terrorists as long as they were Sunnis.

One has to keep in mind that the Israelis are obsessed with Shiite Iran and its nuclear energy program, which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has hysterically proclaimed a danger to the survival of Israel. From that point of view any enemy of Iran is a friend of Israel – even if it is al-Qaeda.

Indeed, in 2013 Michael Oren, then Israeli ambassador to the United States (actually he grew up in West Orange, New Jersey), told the Jerusalem Post, “We always wanted Bashar Assad to go, we always preferred the bad guys who weren’t backed by Iran to the bad guys who were backed by Iran.”

A year later, Oren was at an Aspen Institute Conference and declared that Israel

would prefer the victory of ISIS to the continuation of an Iranian-backed Assad. Nor have the Israelis been shy about acting on this preference. They have established a non-aggression pact with an al-Qaeda Syrian affiliate called the al-Nusra Front, cared for al-Nusra wounded in Israeli hospitals, and mounted attacks on the Lebanese and Iranian forces opposing al-Nusra.

So, at least in Syria, Israel is actively supporting a group that had, in an early incarnation, attacked the U.S. – one that represents forces that still pose a major worldwide risk to U.S. security. Perhaps someone ought to update Congress on this point.

This rearrangement of allies has made for strange bedfellows – not only the U.S. and Iran, but also Israel and Saudi Arabia. And that brings us to the present situation in Yemen. Until the recent Saudi air strikes in Yemen, that country was the most active site of U.S. drone attacks against al-Qaeda operatives.

But the Saudis don't see the war on al-Qaeda as any more important than the Israelis. Their main concern is, once more, Shiite Iran whom they see as much more an enemy than either jihadists or Zionists. So the Saudis have thrown a temper tantrum over the recent deal over Iran's nuclear program.

Part of their acting out was to tell Washington to pull its drone operators out of Yemen because the Saudis were going to bomb that country and particularly its Shiite Houthi population to ruination. Ruination of course, means the creation of a power vacuum in Yemen, and just as in Syria and Iraq, power vacuums create the ideal breeding ground for extremist groups like al-Qaeda.

Finally, there are unconfirmed reports that at least some of the munitions the Saudis are dropping on Yemen are made in Israel.

Obviously the real "concerns and interests" of the United States in the Middle East have noticeably diverged from those of Israel. As a consequence Israel is now loudly complaining that Washington has abandoned it.

Well, Washington might do well to play the same game – to loudly complain about Israel's traitorous behavior. After all, the U.S. gives that country a lot of money and weaponry and now the Israelis chose to support their benefactor's enemy.

We can count on the Zionist lobby to try to obfuscate this fact. And, given that their financial and ideological power helps shape self-serving political interests in Congress, they may be able to pull it off, at least in that venue. They are also financially backing the Republicans when it comes to the 2016 presidential race. Can those politicians who support the Israeli perspective win that election?

Hopefully, the Israeli point of view will now prove to be a hard sell when it comes to the American voter. The recent agreement with Iran has created a new reality for the country's foreign policy – one that is consistent with the popular desire for no further U.S. military involvement in the Middle East.

It is going to be difficult for bought-off politicians, even those allied with Fox TV, to throw everything into reverse and declare al-Qaeda an ally and Iran still the mortal enemy. With some good luck, that will translate into political failure in 2016 for anyone who wants to undo the new accord with Iran.

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