

Behind Colin Powell's Legend – My Lai

From the Archive: With [media focus](#) on the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War's My Lai massacre, Colin Powell's role as a military adviser has continued to elude scrutiny, so we're republishing a 1996 article by Robert Parry and Norman Solomon.

By Robert Parry and Norman Solomon ([first published in 1996](#))

On March 16, 1968, a bloodied unit of the Americal division stormed into a hamlet known as My Lai 4. With military helicopters circling overhead, revenge-seeking American soldiers roused Vietnamese civilians – mostly old men, women and children – from their thatched huts and herded them into the village's irrigation ditches.

As the round-up continued, some Americans raped the girls. Then, under orders from junior officers on the ground, soldiers began emptying their M-16s into the terrified peasants. Some parents desperately used their bodies to try to shield their children from the bullets. Soldiers stepped among the corpses to finish off the wounded.

The slaughter raged for four hours. A total of 347 Vietnamese, including babies, died in the carnage that would stain the reputation of the U.S. Army. But there also were American heroes that day in My Lai. Some soldiers refused to obey the direct orders to kill.

A pilot named Hugh Clowers Thompson Jr. from Stone Mountain, Ga., was furious at the killings he saw happening on the ground. He landed his helicopter between one group of fleeing civilians and American soldiers in pursuit. Thompson ordered his helicopter door gunner to shoot the Americans if they tried to harm the Vietnamese. After a tense confrontation, the soldiers backed off. Later, two of Thompson's men climbed into one ditch filled with corpses and pulled out a three-year-old boy whom they flew to safety.

A Pattern of Brutality

While a horrific example of a Vietnam war crime, the My Lai massacre was not unique. It fit a long pattern of indiscriminate violence against civilians that had marred U.S. participation in the Vietnam War from its earliest days when Americans acted primarily as advisers.

In 1963, Capt. Colin Powell was one of those advisers, serving a first tour with a South Vietnamese army unit. Powell's detachment sought to discourage support for the Viet Cong by torching villages throughout the A Shau Valley. While other

U.S. advisers protested this countrywide strategy as brutal and counter-productive, Powell defended the "drain-the-sea" approach then – and continued that defense in his 1995 memoirs, *My American Journey*.

After his first one-year tour and a series of successful training assignments in the United States, Maj. Powell returned for his second Vietnam tour on July 27, 1968. This time, he was no longer a junior officer slogging through the jungle, but an up-and-coming staff officer assigned to the Americal division.

By late 1968, Powell had jumped over more senior officers into the important post of G-3, chief of operations for division commander, Maj. Gen. Charles Gettys, at Chu Lai. Powell had been "picked by Gen. Gettys over several lieutenant colonels for the G-3 job itself, making me the only major filling that role in Vietnam," Powell wrote in his memoirs.

But a test soon confronted Maj. Powell. A letter had been written by a young specialist fourth class named Tom Glen, who had served in an Americal mortar platoon and was nearing the end of his Army tour. In a letter to Gen. Creighton Abrams, the commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam, Glen accused the Americal division of routine brutality against civilians. Glen's letter was forwarded to the Americal headquarters at Chu Lai where it landed on Maj. Powell's desk.

"The average GI's attitude toward and treatment of the Vietnamese people all too often is a complete denial of all our country is attempting to accomplish in the realm of human relations," Glen wrote. "Far beyond merely dismissing the Vietnamese as 'slopes' or 'gooks,' in both deed and thought, too many American soldiers seem to discount their very humanity; and with this attitude inflict upon the Vietnamese citizenry humiliations, both psychological and physical, that can have only a debilitating effect upon efforts to unify the people in loyalty to the Saigon government, particularly when such acts are carried out at unit levels and thereby acquire the aspect of sanctioned policy."

Glen's letter contended that many Vietnamese were fleeing from Americans who "for mere pleasure, fire indiscriminately into Vietnamese homes and without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves." Gratuitous cruelty was also being inflicted on Viet Cong suspects, Glen reported.

"Fired with an emotionalism that belies unconscionable hatred, and armed with a vocabulary consisting of 'You VC,' soldiers commonly 'interrogate' by means of torture that has been presented as the particular habit of the enemy. Severe beatings and torture at knife point are usual means of questioning captives or of convincing a suspect that he is, indeed, a Viet Cong...

"It would indeed be terrible to find it necessary to believe that an American

soldier that harbors such racial intolerance and disregard for justice and human feeling is a prototype of all American national character; yet the frequency of such soldiers lends credulity to such beliefs. ... What has been outlined here I have seen not only in my own unit, but also in others we have worked with, and I fear it is universal. If this is indeed the case, it is a problem which cannot be overlooked, but can through a more firm implementation of the codes of MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) and the Geneva Conventions, perhaps be eradicated."

Glen's letter echoed some of the complaints voiced by early advisers, such as Col. John Paul Vann, who protested the self-defeating strategy of treating Vietnamese civilians as the enemy. In 1995, when we questioned Glen about his letter, he said he had heard second-hand about the My Lai massacre, though he did not mention it specifically. The massacre was just one part of the abusive pattern that had become routine in the division, he said.

Maj. Powell's Response

The letter's troubling allegations were not well received at Americal headquarters. Maj. Powell undertook the assignment to review Glen's letter, but did so without questioning Glen or assigning anyone else to talk with him. Powell simply accepted a claim from Glen's superior officer that Glen was not close enough to the front lines to know what he was writing about, an assertion Glen denies.

After that cursory investigation, Powell drafted a response on Dec. 13, 1968. He admitted to no pattern of wrongdoing. Powell claimed that U.S. soldiers in Vietnam were taught to treat Vietnamese courteously and respectfully. The Americal troops also had gone through an hour-long course on how to treat prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions, Powell noted.

"There may be isolated cases of mistreatment of civilians and POWs," Powell wrote in 1968. But "this by no means reflects the general attitude throughout the Division." Indeed, Powell's memo faulted Glen for not complaining earlier and for failing to be more specific in his letter.

Powell reported back exactly what his superiors wanted to hear. "In direct refutation of this [Glen's] portrayal," Powell concluded, "is the fact that relations between Americal soldiers and the Vietnamese people are excellent."

Powell's findings, of course, were false. But it would take another Americal hero, an infantryman named Ron Ridenhour, to piece together the truth about the atrocity at My Lai. After returning to the United States, Ridenhour interviewed Americal comrades who had participated in the massacre.

On his own, Ridenhour compiled this shocking information into a report and forwarded it to the Army inspector general. The IG's office conducted an aggressive official investigation and the Army finally faced the horrible truth. Courts martial were held against officers and enlisted men implicated in the murder of the My Lai civilians.

But Powell's peripheral role in the My Lai cover-up did not slow his climb up the Army's ladder. Powell pleaded ignorance about the actual My Lai massacre, which pre-dated his arrival at the Americal. Glen's letter disappeared into the National Archives – to be unearthed only years later by British journalists Michael Bilton and Kevin Sims for their book *Four Hours in My Lai*. In his best-selling memoirs, Powell did not mention his brush-off of Tom Glen's complaint.

MAM Hunts

Powell did include, however, a troubling recollection that belied his 1968 official denial of Glen's allegation that American soldiers "without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves." After mentioning the My Lai massacre in *My American Journey*, Powell penned a partial justification of the Americal's brutality. In a chilling passage, Powell explained the routine practice of murdering unarmed male Vietnamese.

"I recall a phrase we used in the field, MAM, for military-age male," Powell wrote. "If a helo spotted a peasant in black pajamas who looked remotely suspicious, a possible MAM, the pilot would circle and fire in front of him. If he moved, his movement was judged evidence of hostile intent, and the next burst was not in front, but at him. Brutal? Maybe so. But an able battalion commander with whom I had served at Gelnhausen (West Germany), Lt. Col. Walter Pritchard, was killed by enemy sniper fire while observing MAMs from a helicopter. And Pritchard was only one of many. The kill-or-be-killed nature of combat tends to dull fine perceptions of right and wrong."

While it's certainly true that combat is brutal, mowing down unarmed civilians is not combat. It is, in fact, a war crime. Neither can the combat death of a fellow soldier be cited as an excuse to murder civilians. Disturbingly, that was precisely the rationalization that the My Lai killers cited in their own defense.

But returning home from Vietnam a second time in 1969, Powell had proved himself the consummate team player.

For more on Colin Powell's real record, please [check out the "Behind Colin Powell's Legend" series.](#)

Acceptable Bigotry and Scapegoating of Russia

Exclusive: The scapegoating of Russia has taken on an air of bigotry and ugliness, based largely on Cold War-era stereotypes. In this article, Natylie Baldwin counters this intolerance with some of her positive impressions having traveled the country extensively.

By Natylie Baldwin

Over the last year and a half, Americans have been bombarded with the Gish Gallop claims of Russiagate. In that time, the most reckless comments have been made against the Russians in service of using that country as a scapegoat for problems in the United States that were coming to a head, which were the real reasons for Donald Trump's upset victory in 2016. It has even gotten to the point where irrational hatred against Russia is becoming normalized, with the usual organizations that like to warn of the pernicious consequences of bigotry silent.

The first time I realized how low things would likely get was when Ruth Marcus, deputy editor of the *Washington Post*, sent out the following tweet in March of 2017, squealing with delight at the thought of a new Cold War with the world's other nuclear superpower: "So excited to be watching *The Americans*, throwback to a simpler time when everyone considered Russia the enemy. Even the president."



Not only did Marcus's comment imply that it was great for the U.S. to have an enemy, but it specifically implied that there was something particularly great about that enemy being Russia.

Since then, the public discourse has only gotten nastier. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper – who notoriously perjured himself before Congress about warrantless spying on Americans – stated on Meet the Press last May that Russians were uniquely and “genetically” predisposed toward manipulative political activities. If Clapper or anyone else in the public eye had made such a statement about Muslims, Arabs, Iranians, Jews, Israelis, Chinese or just about any other group, there would have been some push-back

about the prejudice that it reflected and how it didn't correspond with enlightened liberal values. But Clapper's comment passed with hardly a peep of protest.

More recently, John Sipher, a retired CIA station chief who reportedly spent years in Russia – although at what point in time is unclear – was interviewed in Jane Mayer's recent New Yorker piece trying to spin the Steele Dossier as somehow legitimate. On March 6, Sipher took to Twitter with the following comment: "How can one not be a Russophobe? Russia soft power is political warfare. Hard power is invading neighbors, hiding the death of civilians with chemical weapons and threatening with doomsday nuclear weapons. And they kill the opposition at home. Name something positive."

In fairness to Sipher, he did backpedal somewhat after being challenged; however, the fact that his unfiltered blabbering reveals such a deep antipathy toward Russians ("How can one not be a Russophobe?") and an initial assumption that he could get away with saying it publicly is troubling.

Glenn Greenwald re-tweeted with a comment asking if Russians would soon acceptably be referred to as "rats and roaches." Another person replied with: "Because they are rats and roaches. What's the problem?"

This is just a small sampling of the anti-Russian comments and attitudes that pass, largely unremarked upon, in our media landscape.

There are, of course, the larger institutional influencers of culture doing their part to push anti-Russian bigotry in this already contentious atmosphere. *Red Sparrow*, both the book and the movie, detail the escapades of a female Russian spy. The story propagates the continued fetishization of Russian women based on the stereotype that they're all hot and frisky. Furthermore, all those who work in Russian intelligence are evil and backwards rather than possibly being motivated by some kind of patriotism, while all the American intel agents are paragons of virtue and seem like they just stepped out of an ad for Nick at Nite's How to be Swell.

The recent Academy Awards continued their politically motivated trend of awarding Oscars for best documentary to films on topics that just happen to coalesce nicely with Washington's latest adversarial policy. Last year it was the *White Helmets* film to support the regime change meme in Syria. This year it's *Icarus* about the doping scandal in Russia.

Similarly, *Loveless*, the new film by Russian director Andrey Zvyagintsev (director of *Leviathan*) is being reviewed – as Catherine Brown points out – by writers from the mainstream American media in a predictably biased fashion. The

film focuses on the disintegration of a married Moscow couple's relationship and the complicated web of factors involved which have tragic ramifications for the couple's 12-year old son.

American reviewers manage to paint the factors detailed in the film that are prevalent in most modern capitalist cities (e.g. being self-centered, materialistic and preoccupied with technological gadgets) as somehow uniquely Russian sins. They also ignore a prominent character in the film that defies their negativity about modern Russia – a character that represents altruism and the growth of civil society in the country.

A common theme in all this is that Russia is a bad country and Russians can't help but be a bunch of good-for-nothings at best and dangerous deviants at worst. Indeed, according to media depictions, sometimes they manage to be both at the same time. But what they don't manage to be is positive, constructive or even complicated. Sipher knows that the average American has been deluged with this anti-Russian prejudice, as reflected in his challenge at the end of his initial tweet about the largest country, geographically at least, in the world: Name something positive.

Countering the Negative

Most people know, at least in the abstract, that few individuals or groups are purely good or bad. Most are a complex combination of both. But many – including those who normally consider themselves to be open-minded liberals – have allowed their lizard brains to be triggered by the constant demonization of Russia in the hopes of taking down Trump whom they deem to be a disproportionate threat to everything they hold dear. So as a counterweight to all the negative constantly pumped out about Russia and to take Sipher up on his challenge, I will list some positive things about Russia and the contribution of the country and its people to the world.

Contemporary Russia's Domestic Policy

Russia has one of the most educated populations in the world, universal health care for its people, a home ownership rate of 84%, strong gun control laws, no death penalty, 140 days of guaranteed maternity leave for women at 100% salary, and Moscow was just voted the 4th safest megacity in the world for women.

And, despite claims that are often repeated in corporate media and even by many in the alternative press, Russia has independent and critical voices in the print media. Even on television, which is heavily influenced by the Kremlin, the Western position is often given airtime by either pro-Western Russian critics or Westerners themselves. During both of my visits to Russia (in 2015 and 2017) I

interviewed a cross-section of Russians who all confirmed that they had access to Western media through both satellite and the internet. Furthermore, while violence against journalists is a concern, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, journalist murders have decreased significantly under Putin compared to the era of Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s.

Am I saying that Russia is a utopia without any problems? No. Like most countries, it has plenty. Most Russians, including Putin, admit this. These problems include still significant poverty rates, comparatively low productivity and life expectancy, and corruption. But it is important to note the direction of trends, which are mostly positive since Putin took over. Under his leadership, poverty rates have been cut in half, life expectancy has increased by several years – especially among men who had suffered the worst mortality crisis since WWII, crime has dropped, pensions have increased and are paid regularly, the unemployment rate has been around 5% for years, great investments in infrastructure and agriculture have been seen along with development throughout the country.

And that development has not just been seen in Moscow and St. Petersburg – the latter city which, by the way, culturally and architecturally rivals those in France and Italy.

There are plenty of medium-sized cities throughout Russia that are becoming well-developed and culturally engaging. As one example, during my 2015 trip, I visited Krasnodar, located in the Black Sea region. The rate of civic construction in the city during 2014 surpassed even Moscow. As a consequence of the challenges of this rapid development, the public felt that decisions were not being made with sufficient feedback from residents, several of whom got together and created a group called the Public Council which eventually found ways to get city authorities to listen to their concerns.

The group had received significant media attention, networked with youth groups and infrastructure specialists, and received foreign experts in urban planning, public arts, transportation and city marketing. They have also organized periodic clean-up and renovation days, which are sponsored by local businesses that donate use of equipment. Currently, they are working on the creation of protected green zones, including one that connects all of the city's hiking paths and another to connect its 16 lakes. They have received no opposition from the Russian government and have elicited the interest of other cities who want to model their approach to local issues.

While in Krasnodar I met a dozen or more professionals, from lawyers to engineers and doctors, who lived in the city and were part of another civic group engaged in charitable, conservation and youth programs. At one point, I

took a walking tour of the city. In terms of architecture, I saw the old and the new side by side, including a large shopping center that was built around a large tower that had been there for generations that local residents saved from destruction by the mall planners, a square with controversial fountains, and a main thoroughfare that was closed to auto traffic, allowing pedestrians free reign. Couples – including some of mixed race, parents pushing baby strollers, and bicyclists – all wound their way through the streets as both Russian and American music was piped in and building walls on one side of the street for a stretch displayed delicate illustrations of Russian history.

Fifteen hundred miles away in the Ural mountain region, the city of Yekaterinburg – named after Catherine I – has the infamous distinction of being the place where Czar Nicholas II and his family were massacred by the Bolsheviks in 1918. On the site where the family's bodies were exhumed, a magnificent Russian Orthodox Church has been erected and dedicated to the last royal family. Nearby is the Yeltsin Library, denoting the Russian Federation's first President, although his legacy is not popular in Russia today.

The city is also home to a wide variety of precious metals and gems, along with a thriving economy. According to Sharon Tennison, an independent program coordinator who has traveled there numerous times over the past 15 years, hundreds of new apartment blocks can be seen on the outskirts of the city to accommodate the recent economic and population growth.

Yekaterinburg has a bustling cultural life that includes an opera house, a ballet, numerous theaters and museums, as well as dozens of libraries. In this respect, the city has continued its preoccupation with the classical arts as in Catherine's period. At the same time, many modern Russian rock bands with a distinctive sound have formed there (known as Ural rock).

The city also has a low rate of violence and crime.

As the New York Times and NPR like to point out and generalize out from, there are some rural and industrial areas in Russia that still need attention and investment. However, there are other towns in the countryside that are doing well.

Russia's Contributions to the World

Russia has made many cultural and humanitarian contributions to the world. In the 18th and 19th centuries, imperial Russia produced some of the most renowned figures in the world of arts. These include writers, such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, whose works are often cited by American readers as among the greatest of all time; great composers include Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky and

Rachmaninoff.

The country also has a rich history of pre-Soviet philosophers who debated questions of politics, history, spirituality and meaning. One of the most famous is Vladimir Solovyev, classified as belonging to the Slavophile school but distinguished from his fellow Slavophiles by his openness to and integration of several lines of thought.

He acknowledged the intuitive as well as the rational. He was friends with Dostoyevsky but had disagreements over Orthodoxy since Solovyev was an advocate of ecumenism and healing the schism between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Furthermore, he is credited with influencing Nicolai Berdyaev, Rudolf Steiner and the Russian Symbolists, among others. He admired the Greek goddess Sophia who he characterized as the “merciful unifying feminine wisdom of God.” Solovyev was adept at integrating several spiritual strands, such as Greek philosophy, Buddhism, Kabbalah, and Christian Gnosticism.

Solovyev was famous for his debates with Slavophile contemporary, Nicolai Fedorov. In these and other writings, questions about morality and technological progress, how much humans should control nature, and prioritizing which problems to invest man’s resources in solving were all given great consideration by Solovyev and are still relevant today, in both Russian society and the larger world.

It is interesting to note that, of all the early Slavophile philosophers, Putin chose Solovyev, the one who was the least strident and most open to the synthesis of differing values and viewpoints, as part of his assignment of books for Russia’s regional governors to read a few years back. Of course, that didn’t stop several western pundits – who showed they knew virtually nothing of Solovyev but perhaps some cherry-picked and out-of-context tidbits they’d found online – from distorting his writings, which naturally had to be horrible because Putin recommended them.

Moving on to the 20th century, it should not be forgotten that the Soviet Union bore the brunt of defeating the Nazis during WWII, losing 27 million people, and saw a third of their country destroyed in the process.

In the 21st century, Russia provided significant aid to Americans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy. They also provided safe transport to Yemeni-Americans out of that devastated country after the U.S. State Department effectively abandoned them in 2015. Russia provided medical aid to 60,000 people affected by the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2014. Last September, Russia provided 35 tons of aid to earthquake victims in Mexico.

For someone who spent years in Russia as a professional expert working for the U.S. intelligence community, John Sipher is either not well-informed on his subject or is intentionally being disingenuous when it comes to the suggestion that Russia has done nothing positive, whether under Putin's governance or before.

The Purpose of Scapegoating Russia

In early 2017, journalists Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes published a book called *Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton's Doomed Campaign*. Largely based on interviews with insiders from Hillary Clinton's failed 2016 presidential campaign, the book was an attempt to analyze why she lost. The insiders agreed that Clinton had trouble providing a plausible explanation to voters as to why she was running other than that she simply wanted to be president. They also noted her trouble connecting with average Americans and her failure to campaign in certain rust belt areas that Trump ultimately got support in. The book also states that within 24 hours of Clinton's loss, members of her campaign had decided to home in on the excuse of "Russian interference" to explain away her humiliating defeat.

In addition to a bloc of Clinton's supporters continuing to push this excuse for her loss and the ratings motive that channels like CNN and MSNBC have in continuing to milk the scandal, there is also Robert Mueller's investigation which has dragged on for over a year.

The most notable thing about the Mueller investigation to anyone who takes a sober look at it is its constantly evolving purpose. First, the purpose of the investigation was to find any evidence to support the allegation that Russia had hacked into the DNC's emails. When no substantial evidence could be found to support that allegation, the purpose evolved into collusion between Trump and Russia to steal the election on behalf of Trump.

When no substantial evidence could be found to support that allegation, the purpose evolved yet again into Russia influencing the election on behalf of Trump, possibly without his knowledge or participation. When no substantial evidence could be found to support that allegation and all that could be found was a paltry number of social media ad buys – many of which were purchased after the election or advocated conflicting positions or didn't even have anything to do with the election, the purpose became "sowing discord."

After all of this, we have an indictment against 13 private individuals who worked for a "troll farm" that had been exposed several years ago and is run by a caterer with no proven orchestration by Putin or the Kremlin. Mueller also knows that this indictment will never be legally tested because the 13

individuals will never be extradited and stand trial.

After all the shrieking and howling 24/7 for close to a year and a half that Trump was an illegitimate president installed by the Kremlin, this is the best Mueller and the mainstream Democrats can come up with. It's pretty obvious by now that this investigation has simply been feeding into the media and Democratic Party circus mentioned above rather than uncovering anything substantive with which to impeach Trump.

The 2016 election showed that the Democrats faced a sleeping giant that had been awakened – one that the Democratic Party had helped to create for decades by enabling lower living standards, outsourcing of good-paying jobs, the proliferation of low-wage jobs, unaffordable education, lack of health care coverage, public health problems, and decrepit infrastructure.

Consequently, there was a demand for meaningful policies that would help average Americans, policies that polls show they want. But mainstream Democrats will not deliver on such policies, like \$15/hour minimum wage, Medicare for All, and pulling out of our wars and investing the money saved in jobs and infrastructure. They won't deliver on these things for the same reason that Republicans won't deliver on them: because their donors don't want them to. But they are not going to admit that to the American people who were going to keep demanding, so they needed a scapegoat and a diversion.

It's a cheap trick that the political elite is using to appeal to the basest instincts of their fellow Americans while shoring up support for their most reckless tendencies in the area of foreign policy.

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How the Russian Presidential Election Race Looks in its Final Days

Following up on his Feb. 24 article, "[First Impressions of Russia's Upcoming](#)

Presidential Election,” independent political analyst Gilbert Doctorow takes a close look at how the election is shaping up in the days before the vote.

By Gilbert Doctorow

The candidates for the presidency in Russia’s election this Sunday are now in the home stretch. Not much has changed in the past several weeks as regards the standings of each in the polls of voter sympathies. Vladimir Putin holds the lead, way out in front, with nearly 70% of voters saying they will cast their votes for him. The candidate of the Communist Party, Pavel Grudinin, has held on to second place, at just over 7% despite suffering some severe setbacks over revelations of his bank accounts held abroad. And third place, with just over 5% goes to the nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy of the LDPR.

Liberal candidate, Ksenia Sobchak, who positioned herself to catch the protest vote “against all,” has about 1.5%. The remaining four candidates – Sergei Baburin, Maxim Suraikin on the Communist Left and Boris Titov, Grigory Yavlinsky on the Liberal Right – have fractions of one percent of the electorate committed to them.



Candidate Putin appears on track to achieve the 70:70 target that his campaign team set for him, meaning a turnout on election day of 70% of the electorate, of which 70% vote for Putin. Such results would support a claim to popular validation of his domestic and foreign programs for the coming six years. It would give him a free hand for substantial reworking of the cabinet, which, rumor says, may come in the days immediately ahead.

However, the campaign is about process as much as it is about results, and at that level there is a great deal which merits consideration because of what this electoral campaign says about the condition of Russian democracy today and where the country is headed.

The campaign has had several dimensions, some of which require that you be physically present to experience them, others of which can be followed from remote, as I have done. For total immersion, one would have to follow the various candidates around the country as they have visited factories, hospitals, farms and all manner of locations to speak and meet with voters. This has been done daily by the Russian media, and so some feel for it can be acquired remotely. For a further broadly based understanding, one would have to pick up the print media at newsstands and tune in to the major federal radio stations

which have allocated time to the candidates under rules established by the Central Election Commission. All of this I and others watching from abroad have missed.

What has been available to us outside the country is all of the televised debates, since they were posted on YouTube often within minutes of their broadcast on air. That and campaign materials posted on Russian social media, which I will discuss below. All of this constitutes invaluable material to see the impressive extent of pluralism, free speech and media access allowed in Putin's Russia to his challengers, however slight their share of voter support may be. That in itself is quite a revelation.

Nonetheless, the purpose of the analysis which follows is to reach a fair-minded understanding of the processes under way, not to hand bouquets to the incumbent or to anyone else. Following that guiding principle, I will highlight not only the high degree of democratic freedom in evidence but also the thumb on the scales in favor of the ruling party.

The Debates: Some Observations

When I wrote my first impressions of the campaign on February 24, just after the first televised debate, the full strategy of holding debates and their format were not known to any of us, including the candidates themselves, as I deduce from the bitter complaints they made over the early hour of the broadcast, over its being taped rather than going out live, over there being no face to face dueling, just a couple of minutes time to respond to questions pitched by the presenter to each of them separately. On that first day, the candidates were outraged that the subject for the debate was foreign relations, when as it turned out, none but Zhirinovsky has much experience or knowledge or interest in foreign policy – their programs being constructed strictly around domestic policy and the economy in particular.

To be sure, it is peculiar that the candidates were kept in the dark about the procedures and format, for which the Central Election Commission is to blame. As we subsequently saw, these debates had formats that varied in some important ways from channel to channel, including the issue of live versus taped broadcast.

Over the course of the nearly three weeks of debates, changes came about in format that were initiated by the candidates themselves, beginning with Ksenia Sobchak, who was quickest off the mark and most determined not to be told how to behave by the very people she urges the electorate to vote against as a played out generation. Specifically, Sobchak was the first to do what any experienced public figure regularly does on interview programs or talk shows: ignore the

question and use the microphone given to her to speak directly to voters about what she considered important. She was not censored, the tapes were not cut and thereafter such a possibility was stated by presenters on some of the debates so that other candidates could avail themselves of the same option. Few did.

Sobchak definitely added color and at times scandal to the entire debating process. In this respect, she was fully the match of nationalist party candidate Vladimir Zhirinovsky who has for decades has had exactly that niche position to himself in electoral politics and in talk shows. The other candidates were not dull, but were far more polite, and so less newsworthy.

Part of Zhirinovsky's bag of tricks as television personality has always been his dress code. At times he has come to interviews and talk shows looking formal in a business suit, but very often he has worn firetruck red sports jackets or other attention-grabbing outfits. Here again, Ksenia Sobchak has done the same in the debates, changing her coiffure, changing her clothes to project different policy positions in her electoral platform. On one day she wore a sweat shirt with big anti-war legend to support what she had to say on how Putin is the war party, whereas she stands for good neighborly relations with all and redirection of Ministry of Defense spending to domestic infrastructure needs.

Along the way, Sobchak has taken some very unpopular stands, particularly with respect to Crimea and what she calls the illegitimate Russian occupation there. This has cost her dearly. Polls show that with a bit more than 1% ready to vote for her, 80% of the electorate say they would never vote for her, making her the most unpopular of all the candidates in the race. However, one can have no doubt that Sobchak and her advisers hold the view that it is better to be hated than to be unknown.

At 36, she has plenty of time ahead to choose policies that will be more in line with the broad population and at that point everyone on the stage with her will have retired. My clear conclusion is that this race has shown Sobchak as the person to watch in the Duma elections of 2021 and in the next presidential race of 2024.

Looking back at the whole series of debates, it is clear now in retrospect that the organizers intended to give all candidates the opportunity to set out broad platforms touching upon every major sector of domestic and foreign policy. On separate days the following issues were featured on each of the channels:

- foreign policy
- youth, education and development of human potential
- development of the regions
- development of industry and especially the military industrial complex

- demography, motherhood and childhood
- health, the social sphere and provisions for the handicapped
- the Russian national idea

It is essential to remember that equal time was granted to all, that all were invited to participate in person or by proxy regardless of their actual support levels in the population. In the United States such equal access may occur during the primaries in each party, but is choked off once party nominations for the two main parties, Democratic and Republican are closed, with only their respective nominees invited to debate on national television. If the Russian practice were applied to the U.S., it would be as if the Greens and Libertarians were debating with Democrats and Republicans, along with candidates of other still smaller parties with miniscule numbers of registered voters.

The Russian debates were held not only on the two leading news channels, Rossiya-1 and Pervy Kanal, but also on the less watched but still important federal channels Public Broadcasting (ORT) and Television Center (TVTs), both of which posted some debates on YouTube. There were televised debates as well at the regional level to which some candidates sent proxies. One on the Ryazan station of Rossiya-1 for example dated 14 March was posted to YouTube. By their presence or absence, the candidates themselves made it fairly clear that they valued above all Rossiya-1 and Pervy Kanal, and these are the channels that I monitored.

From among these many posted videos, I have decided to highlight here the debates from 13 March, the next to the last day of such televised debates. I think it is preferable to drill down on one day than to skim the surface on several weeks of shows. Moreover, the debates of the 13th on the two leading channels are useful to highlight some very specific Russian features of the country's political class across the board.

In Pervy Kanal, the subject of the day was relations between the federal capital, Moscow, and the regions. The candidates were unanimous in decrying the present situation, which has not successfully addressed and perhaps has even aggravated over the past couple of decades the very large discrepancies between the "donor regions" of Moscow and a handful of other regions enjoying budgetary surpluses, the best salaries in the country and extensive public services and amenities versus the "deficit regions" which are more than 80% of the federal regions, all in chronic need of funding from the central government, struggling with heavy debts to credit institutions and where the salary levels and public services are many times below those of the donor regions.

For this, the Communist Left candidates found cause in the privatization of state assets that led to plundering of resources and removal of wealth from

where it is generated to Moscow and beyond to offshore accounts. The Liberal Right candidates found fault with excessive concentration of budgetary decision making and political power in Moscow, resulting in provincial governors waiting in the corridors of the Ministry of Finance to get handouts to be spent as Moscow directed, not in accordance with local priorities.

Of course, both Liberals Sobchak and Yavlinsky hammered home the need for local mayors and governors to be elected by those whom they govern, not appointed by the Kremlin from among apparatchiki. The issue is valid and highly relevant to whether/how Russia can become dynamic as an economy and as a polity.

And it also was of considerable value to the voter to hear from Boris Titov that fellow liberal Ksenia Sobchak was caught in a contradiction over her support for greater financial independence of the regions, given that her announced preference for Finance Minister should she win the election is Alexei Kudrin, who formerly served under Putin in this capacity, was always and remains in favor of centralization while disparaging local control of finance as likely only to feed corruption and misuse of power.

In passing, this discussion on Pervy Kanal brought out a number of other very important failings of the Putin years as they affect the broad population. One in particular is worth mentioning: the limited nature of "gasification" of the countryside, which is not more than 60% of the population. It was noted that Gazprom has earned 600 billion euros in the past decade largely from exports but has invested only 10 billion euros in bringing gas to the households of Russia itself. The point is painful to the whole rural population of the country which has to cope with the difficult logistics of bottled gas for cooking and wooden logs for heating.

The Rossiya-1 debate of March 13 highlighted the special characteristics of Russia's political class whatever their policy orientation. This typology is not unique, but special and on the Continent, it is closest, perhaps, to France. By this I mean the high intellectual achievements of *all* the candidates. Two of the candidates, Sergei Baburin and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, hold Ph.D. degrees. All seven are well educated in terms of general culture, well-read and appreciative of wit and the ability to draw lessons from literature in fellow candidates whose political positions they otherwise may ridicule.

The topic for the Rossiya-1 debate, "culture, art and preservation of historical memory" was particularly amenable to honest discussion among the candidates. The show which resulted in many ways resembled more a drawing room scene from a Tolstoy or Dostoevsky novel than a political debate in the closing phase of a presidential election race. The candidates were unanimously scathing in their criticism of the current management of culture by Minister Medinsky even if

their perspectives on the reasons for the unacceptable state of things are diametrically opposed, ranging from the intrusive and corrupting influence of power and wealth in the appraisal of the Communist Left as opposed to the Liberal Right's underlining mediocracy resulting from the stultifying influence of a bureaucracy directing and financing culture without the participation of sponsors from the broad base of the business community.

The salon nature of the discussion in which candidates even hastened to support the critiques of the status quo leveled by others was heavily encouraged by the demeanor of the "moderator," Vladimir Solovyov who, for this debate handled himself not according to the script of the CEC, that is, as a detached timekeeper and referee to keep the debaters within order, but instead as he usually does on his own talk shows, intervening and guiding the discussion while expressing his personal opinions.

It was fascinating to observe the common cultural heritage of all candidates regardless not only of political views but of personal wealth and life experience. In this regard, one or another of the Communist-minded candidates, otherwise critical of the bourgeoisie and oligarchy, were treated with respect similarly to that shown to the consumptive Socialist youth Hippolyte Terentiev by the very proper and aristocratic General Yepanchin and his wife and daughters in *The Idiot* who took him in during his final weeks. And surely one of the most exceptional moments in this electoral campaign was the lengthy citation by Pavel Grudinin's proxy Maxim Shevchenko of the conversation between Christ and the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*, all to make a point about power and art in the Russian mind.

In my "first impressions" and in the transcript of the first televised debate on the Pervy Kanal state network that I issued a couple of days later, I suggested that the Russian campaign is all high-level, intellectual combat in an agora of ideas, which to American ears in particular would be a day and night contrast with the tawdry spectacle of mudslinging and ad hominem argumentation that constituted the 2016 American presidential race.

However, my initial impressions did not take in what was excised from the first debate when it was posted on YouTube: namely a vicious exchange between two candidates, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Ksenia Sobchak, which may just have sunk lower than even the Clinton-Trump debates. Russia, like the Soviet Union before it, often justifies the arch remark that what is fully prohibited is also permitted. In the full, uncut video, a pirated version of which of course found its way onto the internet within hours, we hear Zhirinovskiy describe Sobchak, who was at a lectern just next to his, as a "streetwalker," if I may be allowed a euphemism. In response to which, she doused him with the water in her drinking

glass.

A less enjoyable and more irritating problem with the first televised debates which fit precisely the habits of Russian political talk shows, such as the moderators of these debates otherwise host, was shouting down speakers and boisterous heckling. Here again, the most egregious offenders were precisely Zhirinovskiy and Sobchak. Be that as it may, a technical solution was eventually implemented at least on the Perviy Kanal so that by the last debates only one selected candidate had a live microphone at a time.

This obvious and easy to implement solution ensuring unhindered speech by each candidate was not implemented at Rossiya-1 for reasons that are unclear. The result was a second shameful incident marring the record of the debates in what was the very last round on Rossiya-1 yesterday, 14 March. Moderator Vladimir Solovyov claimed he could do nothing towards the end of the show when all 6 male candidates simultaneously subjected Sobchak to verbal abuse for her "fifth column" positions with respect to the national defense and her betrayal to American interests in her latest interview with CNN. Sobchak walked out of the studio in tears just minutes before the curtain came down.

Absence of Putin

One distinguishing feature of the debates was the absence of the President, who chose to neither participate in person, nor to send a proxy.

As it turned out, the absence of Putin from these debates was entirely justified by the utterly unruly behavior and scandals at times during the series. Moreover, had the President or his representative been present he would have been the subject of attack from all seven challengers in unison, a very unfair situation for him and not very enlightening for the electorate.

At the same time, it is very clear that those managing the incumbent's campaign were exploiting every *legal* means to dominate, indeed to overwhelm all his opponents taken together with high quality viewer and listener time singing his praises and arguing for more of the same in the coming six years. These legal means included the delivery of his annual address to the Federal Assembly, the Russian equivalent to the State of the Union address of the American President, in the midst of the electoral campaign, on March 1. This gave Vladimir Putin two hours on all the airwaves to set out what is in effect a program for his next term.

Another device used to put the President before the electorate in a privileged manner was the launch in the past week of two new, sophisticated and full-length documentary films about Vladimir Putin. One, entitled "World Order 2018"

features the popular talk show host Vladimir Solovyov as Putin's interlocutor or interviewer.

As we have seen, Solovyov was also the moderator of the debates on the channel Rossiya-1. The film itself is professional if not brilliant. It contains a number of good sound bites from Putin, such as his recollections of his first visit to Germany in 1992 as an assistant to St. Petersburg mayor Anatoly Sobchak. As he explains here, their meeting with Chancellor Helmut Kohl provided Putin with material that he later used to advantage when he returned to Germany in 2002 as Russian President and delivered a speech to the Bundestag. There are also interesting remarks by Putin about the days immediately following the coup d'état in Kiev on February 22, 2014 and the behavior of the U.S. And I would point to Putin's comments about relations with Turkey and about the special Turkish interest in the Crimean Tatars.

The second documentary, simply entitled "Putin," was produced by the professional film maker Andrei Kondrashov, who is in the President's election campaign team. Kondrashov is no newcomer to Putin promotion. In March 2015, on the first anniversary of the reunification of Crimea with the Russian Federation, he launched the entertaining "Crimea, A Way Home," which featured dramatic footage of the way Putin and his security team rescued deposed Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich from almost certain capture and execution by the radical nationalists. With the help of excellent visuals, Kondrashov's new film gives us the family history of the Putins in the countryside of the Tver region, interviews with those who knew Vladimir Putin in his youth and at turning points in his career, all told with great human warmth.

To avoid violation of the federal regulations on a candidate's using the federal television channels for unfair free publicity, these documentaries were released onto the Russian social networks Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki, where they apparently have won a large audience. In its first week, "World Order" is said to have found 15 million viewers. Meanwhile, sound bites from these documentaries were picked up by the major news programs of the federal channels as "news," pure and simple. Legal, to be sure, but aggressive campaign devices.

To this we can add Vladimir Putin's interview with Megyn Kelley of CNN in his capacity as President, not candidate, filmed in part immediately following his delivery of his address to the Federal Assembly on 1 March and in conclusion the next day on his visit to Kaliningrad. From start to finish, this filmed interview shows Putin as projecting strength. We see this in his blunt rejection of U.S. allegations of Russian electoral interference in 2016 coming out of the Mueller indictments.

We see it still more clearly in his lengthy explanation of the military hardware

part of his March 1 address, showing off Russia's new cutting edge technology nuclear weapons systems and claiming full restoration of strategic parity with the United States. Who could ignore his wry smile over how the vast sums which the United States had spent developing global ABM systems for the sake of a first strike capability were now demonstrably money thrown out the window.

More generally, there is an issue over the way that leading news programs on the federal channels have become pro-Putin voice boxes. Nowhere is this more true than in Dmitri Kiselyov's News of the Week shows on Sunday evenings.

In my "First Impressions" article, I remarked on Kiselyov's 15-minute segment on 17 February devoted to Communist candidate Pavel Grudinin. That was an expanded version of what was being reported in the news bulletins on Rossiya- and Pervy Kanal daily. The objective was to discredit the underlying claims of Grudinin's candidacy, namely that his profitable Lenin State Farm complex in the Moscow suburbs, paying wages double the national average and providing cheap housing, free day care, free medical care for his employees is the model he intends to generalize all over the country to bring socialist welfare to every home.

Kiselyov directed attention to the complaints filed against Grudinin by elderly pensioners who say they were defrauded by Grudinin in the 1990s when he essentially privatized the state farm and deprived some of its members of their stake in the land assets. Kiselyov further argued that the prosperity of Grudinin's farm comes not from the strawberries it cultivates in great quantities for the Moscow market but from land transactions including rentals and sales from the highly desirable territory it owns in the sought after metropolitan area. A third line of attack focused on the villa and other residence owned in Latvia by Grudinin's son, whose wife had acquired Latvian citizenship. These were described as "emergency airport" facilities for the candidate in case he ever felt the need to leave Russia in a hurry. Kiselyov closed his commentary with a recommendation to Communist Party president Zyuganov that he withdraw support from the non-Party Grudinin before he does irreparable damage to his party and thereby also harms Russia's young democracy. The whiff of sarcasm there and condescension was pungent.

This singling out of the Communist Party candidate for attack by state television news acting as investigator was patently unfair. That kind of sleuthing and exposure should have been done by the other candidates, not by the State. Nonetheless, as it turned out Kiselyov's and Russian state television's focus on Grudinin's moral weaknesses was not unjustified. He was finally "nailed" in an unrelated matter impugning his integrity and the whole claim of the Left to be morally superior to the corrupt and oligarch-infested regime of Vladimir Putin and the United Russia Party.

It was discovered that contrary to Grudinin's declarations to Zyuganov and to the federal electoral commission when applying for registration of his candidacy, Grudinin has some 13 bank accounts in Switzerland holding assets close to a million dollars, as well as some 5 kilograms of physical gold worth a couple of hundred thousand dollars. This was confirmed in writing to the Central Election Commission (CEC) by UBS Bank in Switzerland. The CEC decided not to disqualify Grudinin, as was their option, but could be highly provocative and destabilizing. They merely will post these accounts abroad on the highly visible list of assets owned by each of the candidates at every voting station. But the damage was done to Grudinin's reputation among the Party faithful. Grudinin stopped entirely appearing on the debates and sent only proxies.

The scandal also damaged the reputation of Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov for failure to do due diligence. One almost certain consequence of these elections will be Zyuganov's retirement from office and the coming to power in the Communist Party of young blood.

A word of explanation about the lists of candidate assets: this has become a tradition in Russian federal elections within the concept of full transparency. At each polling station voters can read about the holdings of the candidates and their immediate family as regards assets in banks, apartments and other real estate, and cars among other property categories. In this regard, two liberal candidates, Ksenia Sobchak and Boris Titov, will stand out for their personal wealth valued at more than one million euros. However, both are supporters of the free market with its rewards, whereas the Communists make a virtue of wealth redistribution and equality.

It is unlikely there will be any great surprises in the election's outcome on 18 March, but it would be a mistake to conclude that the whole exercise is a farce. Russia's young democracy is a work in progress. The debates and other procedures of the electoral campaign are evolving, even if the content – namely credible and experienced candidates for the nation's highest office – remains unsatisfactory. Partly this results from the concentration of political power in Moscow and the still rudimentary self-government across the country that would normally develop future leaders. This will have to be addressed in Putin's final term in office if there is to be a handover of power in 2024 to a worthy successor.

The balloting itself will be another test of the consolidating mechanisms of democracy. The Kremlin says it has done everything possible to ensure fair and transparent elections. Advanced technology has been put in place to make every polling station accessible online, so that electoral monitoring by remote is a reality. Moreover, on a pilot basis the Russians have deployed what they say is

block-chain technology to make the voting hack-proof.

As an international election observer serving with an NGO, I expect to see firsthand the results of these efforts to reassure Russians and the world at large that democracy is on the move in Russia. I will issue a report on what I see in the days immediately following the election.

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Torture-Tainted Nominations Recall Failure to Prosecute Bush-Era Abuses

The declining human rights standards on display with the Haspel and Pompeo nominations are the latest in a long line of policy failures that include the Obama administration's lack of prosecutions of Bush-era torture, Nat Parry notes.

By Nat Parry

President Donald Trump's nominations of Gina Haspel to lead the CIA and Mike Pompeo to be America's top diplomat are the latest indications of steadily eroding human rights standards in the United States and the rollback of the rule of law that has characterized U.S. counterterrorism policies since Sept. 11, 2001.

Haspel, a CIA operative who oversaw the torture of terrorism suspects at a secret prison in Thailand and then helped destroy tapes of the interrogations, and Pompeo, who has made statements in support of torture and mass surveillance, are both expected to be confirmed by the Senate with little fanfare.

After all, when Pompeo was nominated for his current post of CIA Director his confirmation sailed through the Senate on a vote of 66-32. This, despite what Human Rights Watch's Maria McFarland Sanchez-Moreno called "dangerously ambiguous" responses to questions about torture and mass surveillance.

"Pompeo's failure to unequivocally disavow torture and mass surveillance, coupled with his record of advocacy for surveillance of Americans and past endorsement of the shuttered CIA torture program, make clear that he should not

be running the CIA," Sanchez Moreno said in January 2017.

Shortly following Pompeo's confirmation, his deputy director at the CIA was named as Gina Haspel, who "played a direct role in the CIA's 'extraordinary rendition program,' under which captured militants were handed to foreign governments and held at secret facilities, where they were tortured by agency personnel," the New York Times reported last year.

She also ran the CIA's first black site prison and oversaw the brutal interrogations of two detainees, Abu Zubaydah and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri. In addition, she played a vital role in the destruction of interrogation videotapes that showed the torture of detainees both at the black site she ran and other secret agency locations. The concealment of those interrogation tapes violated both multiple court orders as well the demands of the 9/11 Commission and the advice of White House lawyers, as Glenn Greenwald has reported.

Despite these serious misgivings, Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said he is not currently urging Democrats to oppose Pompeo's nomination to be Secretary of State or Haspel's nomination to lead the CIA. So much for the #Resistance.

The Democratic acquiescence follows a long pattern of tolerating human rights abuses and normalizing torture. When President Barack Obama declared that he wanted to "look forward, not backward," and to close the chapter on the CIA's torture practices under the Bush administration without allowing any prosecutions for crimes that were committed, he ensured torture would remain a "policy option" for future presidents, in the words of Human Rights Watch.

Tortured Debate

We began to see this play out during the Republican primary debates in 2016, when the GOP contenders were all jockeying for the pro-torture vote. At the time, Trump made clear his unambiguous support for the use of torture. When he was pressed on his statements about bringing back waterboarding and devising even more brutal torture methods, Trump decided to double down rather than backtrack.

On Feb. 7, 2016 candidate Trump appeared on "This Week" with George Stephanopoulos. "As president, you would authorize torture?" Stephanopoulos asked.

"I would absolutely authorize something beyond waterboarding," Trump said. "And believe me, it will be effective. If we need information, George, you have our enemy cutting heads off of Christians and plenty of others, by the hundreds, by the thousands."

When asked whether we “win by being more like them,” i.e., to mimic the tactics of Islamic State terrorists, Trump stated flatly, “Yes.”

“I’m sorry,” he elaborated. “You have to do it that way. And I’m not sure everybody agrees with me. I guess a lot of people don’t. We are living in a time that’s as evil as any time that there has ever been. You know, when I was a young man, I studied Medieval times. That’s what they did, they chopped off heads.”

“So we’re going to chop off heads?” Stephanopoulos asked.

“We’re going to do things beyond waterboarding perhaps, if that happens to come,” Trump replied.

Trump even insinuated that his competitor in the GOP race Ted Cruz was a “pussy” for hinting that he might show some degree of restraint in the use of torture. Alarmed, several human rights groups jumped in to remind the U.S. of its moral and legal obligations not to engage in sadistic and cruel practices such as waterboarding.

Amnesty International’s Naureen Shah issued a rebuttal to the debate over waterboarding, which she described as “slow-motion suffocation.” She pointed out the obvious that “the atrocities of the armed group calling itself Islamic State and other armed groups don’t make waterboarding okay.”

Policy Option

What the “debate” over bringing back torture highlighted, and what the current nominations of torture advocates to lead the State Department and CIA drive home, is why prosecutions of the Bush-era CIA torture program were essential, and why it was so damaging that the Obama administration shirked its responsibilities in this regard for eight years.

As human rights advocates have long maintained, prosecuting Bush administration and CIA officials involved with the torture of terrorism suspects in the post-9/11 period was needed so that torture would not be repeated in the future by subsequent administrations who may consider themselves above the law.

Indeed, this is precisely why there is a requirement under international law for allegations of torture to be investigated and prosecuted – so that torture does not become a policy option to be utilized or shelved depending on the political whims of the day.

This is a point that UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counterterrorism Ben Emmerson made following the release of the Senate’s torture report in late

2014. Senior officials from the Bush administration who sanctioned crimes, as well as the CIA and U.S. government officials who carried them out, must be investigated and prosecuted, Emmerson said.

“It is now time to take action,” Emmerson said on Dec. 9, 2014. “The individuals responsible for the criminal conspiracy revealed in today’s report must be brought to justice, and must face criminal penalties commensurate with the gravity of their crimes. The fact that the policies revealed in this report were authorized at a high level within the U.S. government provides no excuse whatsoever. Indeed, it reinforces the need for criminal accountability.”

International law prohibits the granting of immunity to public officials who have engaged in acts of torture, Emmerson pointed out. He further emphasized the United States’ international obligation to criminally prosecute the architects and perpetrators of the torture methods described in the report:

“As a matter of international law, the U.S. is legally obliged to bring those responsible to justice. The UN Convention Against Torture and the UN Convention on Enforced Disappearances require States to prosecute acts of torture and enforced disappearance where there is sufficient evidence to provide a reasonable prospect of conviction. States are not free to maintain or permit impunity for these grave crimes.”

Zeid Raad al-Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that it’s “crystal clear” that the United States has an obligation under the UN Convention against Torture to ensure accountability.

“In all countries, if someone commits murder, they are prosecuted and jailed. If they commit rape or armed robbery, they are prosecuted and jailed. If they order, enable or commit torture – recognized as a serious international crime – they cannot simply be granted impunity because of political expediency,” he said.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed hope that the release of the torture report was the “start of a process” toward prosecutions, because the “prohibition against torture is absolute,” Ban’s spokesman said.

Needless to say, these appeals largely fell on deaf ears, with no criminal investigations launched whatsoever. Instead, the U.S. Congress responded with a symbolic “reaffirmation” of the ban on the torture – a largely redundant and unnecessary piece of legislation since torture has long been unambiguously banned under international law, the United States Constitution and U.S. criminal statutes.

For his part, Obama used the publication of the Senate report as an opportunity

to tout the virtues of the United States, and actually praised the CIA for its professionalism in carrying out its responsibilities.

American Exceptionalism

Following the publication of the Senate report, in a statement obliquely trumpeting the notion of “American Exceptionalism,” Obama said: “Throughout our history, the United States of America has done more than any other nation to stand up for freedom, democracy, and the inherent dignity and human rights of people around the world.” He went on to offer a tacit defense of the torture techniques while touting his own virtue in bringing these policies to an end.

“In the years after 9/11, with legitimate fears of further attacks and with the responsibility to prevent more catastrophic loss of life, the previous administration faced agonizing choices about how to pursue al Qaeda and prevent additional terrorist attacks against our country,” he said. Although the U.S. did “many things right in those difficult years,” he acknowledged that “some of the actions that were taken were contrary to our values.”

“That is why I unequivocally banned torture when I took office,” Obama said, “because one of our most effective tools in fighting terrorism and keeping Americans safe is staying true to our ideals at home and abroad.”

He went on to claim that he would use his authority as President “to make sure we never resort to those methods again.”

But clearly, by blocking criminal investigations into the policy’s architects, Obama did very little in a practical sense to ensure that those methods are not used again. And now that we are faced with the prospect of torture-tainted heads of the CIA and State Department, we are reminded once again of the importance of upholding the laws of the land.

Nat Parry is co-author of Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush.

Intel Committee Rejects Basic Underpinning of Russiagate

The assumption underpinning Russiagate – that Vladimir Putin preferred Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton – is not supported by the facts, according to “Initial Findings” of the House Intelligence Committee, as Ray McGovern reports.

By Ray McGovern

Let's try to make this simple: The basic rationale behind charges that Russian President Vladimir Putin interfered in the 2016 U.S. election to help candidate Donald Trump rests, of course, on the assumption that Moscow preferred Trump to Hillary Clinton. But that is wrong to assume, says the House Intelligence Committee, which has announced that it does not concur with "Putin's supposed preference for candidate Trump."

So, the House Intelligence Committee Republican majority, which has been pouring over the same evidence used by the "handpicked analysts" from just the CIA, FBI, and NSA to prepare the rump Intelligence Community Assessment (ICA) of Jan. 6, 2017, finds the major premise of the ICA unpersuasive. The committee's "Initial Findings" released on Monday specifically reject the assumption that Putin favored Trump.

This puts the committee directly at odds with handpicked analysts from only the FBI, CIA, and NSA, who assessed that Putin favored Trump – using this as their major premise and then straining to prove it by cobbling together unconvincing facts and theories.

Those of us with experience in intelligence analysis strongly criticized the evidence-impoverished ICA as soon as it was released, but it went on to achieve Gospel-like respect, with penance assigned to anyone who might claim it was not divinely inspired.

Until now.

Rep. K. Michael Conway (R-Texas), who led the House Committee investigation, has told the media that the committee is preparing a separate, in-depth analysis of the ICA itself. Good.

The committee should also take names – not only of the handpicked analysts, but the hand-pickers. There is ample precedent for this. For example, those who shepherded the fraudulent National Intelligence Estimate on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq 15 years ago were named in the NIE. Without names, it is hard to know whom to hold accountable.

Here's the key ICA judgment with which the House committee does not concur: "We assess Putin, his advisers, and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump over Secretary Clinton." Not to be picky, but if House investigators have been unable to find enough persuasive evidence to convince them that "Putin's supposed preference" was Trump, there is little reason to take seriously the ICA's adolescent observations – like Putin held a "grudge" against Clinton because she called him nasty names – and other tortured

reasoning in an Intelligence Community Assessment that, frankly, is an embarrassment to the profession of intelligence analysis.

I recall reading the ICA as soon as it was published. I concluded that no special expertise in intelligence analysis was needed to see how the assessment had been cobbled together around the “given” that Putin had a distinct preference for Trump. That was a premise with which I always had serious trouble, since it assumed that a Russian President would prefer to have an unpredictable, mercurial, lash-out-at-any-grievance-real-or-perceived President with his fingers on the nuclear codes. This – not name-calling – is precisely what Russian leaders fear the most.

Be that as it may, the ICA’s evidence adduced to demonstrate Russian “interference” to help Trump win the election never passed the smell test. Worse still, it was not difficult to see powerful political agendas in play. While those agendas, together with the media which shared them, conferred on the ICA the status of Holy Writ, it had clearly been “writ” to promote those agendas and, as such, amounted to rank corruption of intelligence by those analysts “handpicked” by National Intelligence Director James Clapper to come up with the “right” answer.

Traces of the bizarre ideological – even racial – views of Intelligence Dean Clapper can also be discerned between the lines of the ICA. It is a safe bet that the handpicked authors of the ICA were well aware of – and perhaps even shared – the views Clapper later expressed to NBC’s Chuck Todd on May 28, 2017 about Russians: “[P]ut that in context with everything else we knew the Russians were doing to interfere with the election,” he said. “And just the historical practices of the Russians, who typically, are almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever, which is a typical Russian technique. So, we were concerned.”

Always Read the Fine Print

What readers of the intelligence assessment might have taken more seriously was the CYA in the ICA, so to speak, the truth-in-advertising cautions wedged into its final page. The transition from the lead paragraph to the final page – from “high confidence” to the actual definition of “high confidence” is remarkable. As a reminder, here’s how ICA starts:

“Putin Ordered Campaign To Influence US Election: We assess with high confidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election, the consistent goals of which were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. ...”

But wait, the fair warning on page 13 explains: “High confidence ... does not imply that the assessment is a fact or a certainty; such judgments might be wrong. ... Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that show something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.”

Questionable Logic

The “logic” referred to rests primarily on assumptions related to Trump’s supposed friendliness with Putin, what Clinton Campaign Manager John Podesta called in 2015 a “bromance.” It assumes that Trump has been more than willing to do the Kremlin’s bidding from the White House, whether due to financial relationships Trump has with the Russians, or because he “owes them” for helping him get elected, or whether he is being blackmailed by “the pee tape” that Christopher Steele alluded to in his “dodgy dossier.”

This is the crux of the whole “treason” aspect of the Russiagate conspiracy theory – the idea that Trump is a Manchurian (or as some clever wags among Russiagaters claim, a *Siberian*) candidate who is directly under the influence of the Kremlin.

Even as U.S.-Russian relations drop to historic lows – with tensions approaching Cuban Missile Crisis levels – amazingly, there are still those promoting this theory, including some in the supposedly “progressive” alternative media like The Young Turks (TYT). Following Putin’s announcement on developments in Russia’s nuclear program earlier this month, TYT’s Cenk Uygur slammed Trump for not being more forceful in denouncing Putin, complaining that Trump “never criticizes Putin.” Uygur even speculated: “I’m not sure that Trump represents our interests above Putin’s.”

This line of thinking ignores a preponderance of evidence that the U.S posture against Russian interests has only hardened over the past year-plus of the Trump administration – perhaps in part as a result of Trump’s perceived need to demonstrate that he is not in “Putin’s pocket.”

The U.S. has intensified its engagement in Syria, for one thing, reportedly killing several Russians in recent airstrikes – a dangerous escalation that could lead to all-out military confrontation with Moscow and hardly the stuff of an alleged “bromance” between Trump and Putin. Then there was the Trump administration’s recent decision to provide new lethal weapons to the Ukrainian military – a major reversal of the Obama administration’s more cautious approach and an intensification of U.S. involvement in a proxy war on Russia’s border. The Russian foreign ministry angrily denounced this decision, saying the U.S.

had “crossed the line” in the Ukraine conflict and accused Washington of fomenting bloodshed.

On other major policy issues, the Trump administration has also been pushing a hard anti-Russian line, reiterating recently that it would never recognize Crimea as part of Russia, criticizing Russia for allegedly enabling chemical attacks in Syria, and identifying Moscow as one of the U.S.’s major adversaries in the global struggle for power and influence.

“China and Russia,” the administration stated in its recent National Security Strategy, “challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity.” In the recently issued Nuclear Posture Review, the U.S. identifies Russia as a “contemporary threat,” and has a chapter outlining “A Tailored Strategy for Russia.” The document warns that Russia has “decided to return to Great Power competition.”

How does this in any way indicate that Trump is representing “Putin’s interests” above “ours,” as Uygur claims?

In short, there is no evidence to back up the theory that Putin helped Trump become president in order to do the Kremlin’s bidding, and no one pushing this idea should be taken seriously. In this respect, the Republicans’ “Initial Findings” – particularly the rejection of “Putin’s supposed preference for candidate Trump” have more credibility than most of the “analysis” put out so far, including the Jan. 6, 2017 ICA that has been held up as sacrosanct.

Democrats Angry

The irrepressible Congressman Adam Schiff, Ranking Member of the House Intelligence Committee, and his fellow Democrats are in high dudgeon over the release of the Committee’s “Initial Findings” after “only” one year of investigation. So, of course, is NBC’s Rachel Maddow and other Russiagate aficionados. They may even feel a need to come up with real evidence – rather than Clapperisms like “But everyone knows about the Russians, and how, for example, they just really hated it when Mrs. Clinton called Putin Hitler.”

I had the opportunity to confront Schiff personally at a think tank in Washington, DC on January 25, 2017. President Obama, on his way out of office, had said something quite curious at his last press conference just one week earlier about inconclusive conclusions: “The conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking were not conclusive” regarding WikiLeaks. In other words, the intelligence community had no idea how the DNC emails reached WikiLeaks.

Schiff had just claimed as flat fact that the Russians hacked the DNC and

Podesta emails and gave them to WikiLeaks to publish. So I asked him if he knew more than President Obama about how Russian hacking had managed to get to WikiLeaks.

Schiff used the old, "I can't share the evidence with you; it's classified." OK, I'm no longer cleared for classified information, but Schiff is; and so are all his colleagues on the House Intelligence Committee. The Republican majority has taken issue with the cornerstone assumption of those who explain Russian "hacking" and other "meddling" as springing from the "obvious fact" that Putin favored Trump. The ball is in Schiff's court.

Last but not least, the committee's Initial Finding that caught most of the media attention was that there is "no evidence of collusion, coordination, or conspiracy between the Trump campaign and the Russians." This, of course, poured cold water on what everyone listening to mainstream media "knows" about Russian "meddling" in the 2016 election. But, in the lack of persuasive evidence that President Putin preferred candidate Trump, why should we expect Russian "collusion, coordination, conspiracy" with the Trump campaign?

Ah, but the Russians want to "sow discord." Sounds to me like a Clapperism.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. During his 27-year career at CIA, he was Chief of the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch and preparer/briefer of the President's Daily Brief under Nixon, Ford, and Reagan. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Trump Promotes Longtime Russia Hawk Just as Russiagate Loses Momentum

The fact-free and logic-challenged allegations of Trump-Russia collusion have further lost credibility with the appointment of a virulently anti-Russia hawk to replace Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Caitlin Johnstone points out.

By Caitlin Johnstone

Rex Tillerson, whose hotly scrutinized ties to Russia have been a centerpiece of Rachel Maddow's conspiratorial ravings for many months, has been fired. Replacing him as Secretary of State will be Mike Pompeo, who has been a consistent and longstanding Russia hawk for years, going so far as accusing President Obama of endangering America by simply agreeing to meet with Vladimir

Putin in 2015.

Like pretty much everything that happens anywhere ever, this occurrence is being cited as evidence of collusion between Donald Trump and the Russian government.

“Tillerson Fired by Trump Hours After Blaming Russia for Chemical Attack in U.K.,” blared a headline from the increasingly pro-establishment Intercept, referring to a comment Tillerson had made about the plot hole-riddled claims of the UK government that a Russian double agent had been poisoned by the Kremlin.

“By firing Tillerson one day after he publicly stated that Russia behind a WMD attack on British soil, we now have proof Trump is colluding with Putin,” tweeted Vanity Fair editor and tentacle porn connoisseur Kurt Eichenwald. “I don’t know if he did in the election. But he is doing it NOW in front of our eyes. He is Kremlin-owned.”

“Interesting that Tillerson’s ouster came one day after he very publicly broke with the official WH line and said the poisoning of Sergei Skripal ‘clearly’ came from Russia,” said a popular tweet from The Atlantic’s Natasha Bertrand.

“WH saying Tillerson was informed Friday, but State Dept statement today seems to indicate he just found out today. Which *really* makes one wonder about the role of the Russia statement yesterday,” chimed in MSNBC’s Chris Hayes.

This is plainly stupid, and the exact opposite is likely the case. Rex Tillerson had been making comments against Russia throughout his brief career as Secretary of State just like Pompeo and many others in Trump’s cabinet, recently blaming Moscow for chemical attacks in Syria and warning of future interference in US elections in the 2018 midterms. He was not replaced by a far more virulently anti-Russia hawk because he sided with the establishment narrative on Russia as he had many times before.

For his part, Trump told reporters “it sounds to me like it would be Russia” in response to questions about who was responsible for the UK poisoning, and cited differences with Tillerson on the Iran nuclear deal as a reason for his firing. If you take Trump on his word (not that I am suggesting anyone should ever do such a thing), his administration is likely to side with the UK on any escalations it chooses to make against the Russian Federation, and he fired Rex Tillerson because this administration and its allies want to advance a more aggressive agenda against Iran.

And that could very well be among the reasons for Tillerson’s firing; Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did reportedly talk “Iran, Iran, and Iran” in their recent meeting. It could also have something to do with the possibility that Pompeo is being groomed for a 2020 presidential candidacy,

as sources have reportedly told WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Julian Assange.

I think another possibility worth considering is the timing of the fatal blow the Russiagate narrative has suffered as House Intelligence Committee Republicans officially ended their investigation with the conclusion that there is no evidence of Trump-Russia collusion, and no evidence that Vladimir Putin tried to help Trump win the election. The Mueller investigation still continues, as does the Senate Intelligence Committee investigation, with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer stating that “We have a responsibility to get to the very bottom of what happened in the 2016 elections and to report on those findings in an unbiased way. If the House isn’t going to do it, the Senate must.”

But going by what we’re hearing from the Senate Intelligence Committee it looks like their investigation might be heading in the same direction, with Senate Intelligence Chairman Richard Burr telling CNN on Monday that he’s seen no evidence of collusion either.

“I’ve read a lot about it, but haven’t seen any,” Burr said.

It is worth weighing the possibility that now that the American public has been paced into supporting new cold war escalations with Russia, the Russiagate psyop which was used to harness rank-and-file Democrats’ fear of Trump to inflame fears of Putin is no longer necessary, and is now being let go in place of more brazen hawkishness. As far as the US intelligence community and its allies are concerned, Russiagate’s only purpose has been to manufacture public support for escalations against Russia to secure strategic regions and ultimately hobble the Russia-China tandem, and that scaffolding can safely be removed if Russia hysteria no longer requires fear of Trump collusion to be sustained.

The soulless Mike Pompeo would be a fine overseer of that agenda, and as Secretary of State, the position Hillary Clinton used so effectively to spearhead the decimation of Libya, he’d be in an excellent position to do so.

Also noteworthy is the fact that Trump just promoted a torture supporter in Mike Pompeo and an actual torturer in his replacement as CIA Director Gina Haspel, yet leading Democrats are largely concerned that the administration won’t be “tough” enough.

“If he’s confirmed, we hope that Mr. Pompeo will turn over a new leaf and will start toughening up our policies towards Russia and Putin,” said Chuck Schumer, arguably the most powerful Democrat in America, who recently sparked controversy for citing religious voodoo in defense of the oppression and warmongering of the Israeli state.

This administration is continuing and expanding all of Bush and Obama's most bloodthirsty agendas, and if it attacks Iran it will likely surpass both of them in terms of psychopathic bloodshed, and yet they're worried he's not "tough" enough. They criticize Trump for weakness over his willingness to meet for peace talks with Kim Jong Un after feigning shock at his obnoxious tweets about the North Korean leader, and they blast him for being too cuddly wuddly with Russia despite this administration's already having caved to the longstanding neoconservative agenda to arm Ukraine against Russia, killed Russians in Syria as part of its insane regime change occupation of that country, adopted a Nuclear Posture Review with greatly increased aggression toward Russia and blurred lines between when nuclear strikes are and are not appropriate, sent war ships into the Black Sea "to counter Russia's increased presence there," forced RT and Sputnik to register as foreign agents, expanded NATO with the addition of Montenegro, assigned Russia hawk Kurt Volker as special representative to Ukraine, shut down a Russian consulate in San Francisco and thrown out Russian diplomats.

In short, both parties appear to be doing everything in their power to get as many people killed as possible, and nobody seems to have their foot anywhere near the brake pedal. Heads up.

Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly at Medium. Follow her work on Facebook, Twitter, or her website. She has a podcast and a new book Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers. This article was re-published with permission.

Gang of Four: Senators Call for Tillerson to Enter into Arms Control Talks with the Kremlin

Four United States senators are urging a new approach to U.S.-Russian relations based on renewed arms control efforts, but you probably haven't heard about it from the mainstream media, Gilbert Doctorow and Ray McGovern report.

By Gilbert Doctorow and Ray McGovern

In a sad commentary on the parlous state of the U.S. media, a letter to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson from four United States Senators dated March 8 calling for opening arms control talks with the Kremlin ASAP is nowhere to be found in mainstream newspapers a day after its release on the Senate home page of one of the authors, Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.).



Nothing in the *New York Times*. Nothing in the *Washington Post*. And so, it is left to alternative media to bring to the attention of its readership a major development in domestic politics, a significant change in what its own senior politicians are saying should be done about Russia that was brought to our attention bythe Russian mainstream media including the agency RIA Novosti, RBK, Tass within hours of initial posting.

What we have is, first, a genuine man bites dog story. Two of the senators who penned the letter, Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont), have in recent months been among the most vociferous promoters of the unproven allegations of Trump collusion with the Russians. Now they are putting aside for the moment their attacks on Trump and members of his entourage who dared shake hands or share a joke with a Russian ambassador. They are openly calling upon the Secretary of State to send U.S. personnel to negotiate with Putin's minions over our survival on this planet.

The authors were in a tough spot explaining their new marching orders for State. And they have done their best to impose consistency on what is patently a new policy direction holding great promise for sanity to be restored in U.S.-Russian relations.

First, they cover their backsides by the lengthy recitation of Russia's bad deeds, including alleged election meddling in the 2016 presidential election, violation of international law in Ukraine and the like.

Secondly, they make the proposed arms talks look like a walk down the Rose Garden, with the Russians being told what to do from a position of strength. The objective is focused on inserting two of Russia's latest weapons systems described by Vladimir Putin in his March 1 speech into the framework of the START treaty as it comes up for renewal. That and to resolve issues over alleged Russian violation of the Intermediate Range Missiles convention.

However, buried in this mumbo jumbo is that reference to Putin's speech and the new weapons systems he described, which actually numbered six among them several

never heard about before inside the Beltway and looking pretty ominous. So, one may conclude that Putin's intended "shock and awe" speech did have some effect in DC, even if so far no one is saying so, and even if so far, our leading newspapers have called time out till they can decide how to deal with the unwelcome news.

Wittingly or not, the Gang of Four has just opened a breach in the wall of contempt and loathing for Putin and Russia that has been building in Washington for months if not years now. The immediate task is for word of this development to go out to the broad public and for the relics of our once formidable arms negotiations teams to be brought out of mothballs to face Russian counterparts who have been waiting keenly for this moment.

Democratic Fissures

The unusual way in which the letter was made public – and the evident uncertainty on the part of the mainstream media as to how to play it – reflects widening fissures among Democrats.

Even among the most rabid fans of Hillary Clinton (and haters of President Trump) there is a growing sense that, for example, Congressman Adam "trust-me-the-Russians-hacked-our election" Schiff (D-Calif.) may not be able to deliver anything beyond the "trust me." And many are beginning to question whether the sainted Special Counsel, Robert Mueller may not be able to come up with much more than click-bait farms in St. Petersburg and dirt to put dubious characters like Paul Manafort in jail on charges unrelated to Russiagate. (After all, Mueller has already been at it a very long time.)

And what would that mean for the re-election prospects of candidates like the superannuated Democratic-machine product Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), whose prospects are already waning?

Not to be ruled out is the possibility that the four senators may also be motivated by a new appreciation of the dangers of blaming everything on Russia, with the possible result of U.S.-Russia relations falling into a state of complete disrepair. The key question is whether President Putin can be de-demonized. That will depend on the mainstream media, which, alas, is not accustomed to reassessing and silencing the bellicose drums – even in the face of new realities like the petering out of Russiagate and Putin's entirely credible declaration of strategic parity.

Gang of Four Letter to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson

As posted on the [website of Senator Merkley](#)

March 8, 2018

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

We write to urge the State Department to convene the next U.S.-Russia Strategic Dialogue as soon as possible.

A U.S.-Russia Strategic Dialogue is more urgent following President Putin's public address on March 1st when he referred to several new nuclear weapons Russia is reportedly developing including a cruise missile and a nuclear underwater drone, which are not currently limited by the New START treaty, and would be destabilizing if deployed. There is no doubt we have significant disagreements with Russia, including Russia's brazen interference in the 2016 U.S. elections; continued violation of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF); invasion of Ukraine and illegal annexation of Crimea; and destabilizing actions in Syria. However, it is due to these policy rifts, not in spite of them, that the United States should urgently engage with Russia to avoid miscalculation and reduce the likelihood of conflict.

First, we encourage the administration to propose alternative solutions to address Russia's violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov admitted to the existence of this ground launched cruise missile (GLCM), but contended that the system was INF Treaty compliant.

Senior officials from the United States and Russia have said that the INF Treaty plays an "important role in the existing system of international security." As such, we urge the State Department to resolve Russia's violation through existing INF Treaty provisions or new mutually acceptable means.

Second, we urge the United States to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). The Trump administration's own 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) references Russia's robust nuclear modernization program as a main justification behind the U.S. need to recapitalize its three legs of the nuclear triad. An extension of New START would verifiably lock-in the Treaty's Central Limits – and with it – the reductions in strategic forces Russia has made.

The New START Treaty, which entered into force in 2011, provides transparency and predictability into the size and location of Russia's strategic nuclear delivery systems, warheads, and facilities. New START's robust verification

architecture involves thousands of data exchanges and regular on-site inspections. The United States confirmed in February that Russia met New START's Central Treaty Limits and it stated that "implementation of the New START Treaty enhances the safety and security of the United States." These same Central Treaty Limits could also govern two of the new types of nuclear weapons referenced by President Putin on March 1st – a case the United States can argue through the Treaty's Biannual Consultative Commission (BCC).

Lastly, as the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review notes, Russia maintains a numerical advantage to the United States in the number of non-strategic nuclear weapons. The Senate, in its Resolution of Ratification on New START in 2010, took stock of this imbalance and called upon the United States to commence negotiations that would "secure and reduce tactical nuclear weapons in a verifiable manner." Attempts by the Obama administration to negotiate an agreement on this class of weapons met resistance from Russia. However, even absent the political space for a formal agreement or binding treaty with Russia, we urge the State Department to discuss ways to enhance transparency on non-strategic nuclear weapons.

Extending New START, resolving Russia's INF violation, and enhancing transparency measures relating to non-strategic nuclear weapons will also help quiet growing calls from many countries that the United States is not upholding its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations. The Treaty's three mutually reinforcing pillars: non-proliferation, peaceful uses of the atom, and disarmament can only be advanced through U.S. leadership on all three.

There is no guarantee that we can make progress with Russia on these issues. However, even at the height of Cold War tensions, the United States and the Soviet Union were able to engage on matters of strategic stability. Leaders from both countries believed, as we should today, that the incredible destructive force of nuclear weapons is reason enough to make any and all efforts to lessen the chance that they can never be used again.

Sincerely,

Senators Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont)

Gilbert Doctorow is an independent political analyst based in Brussels. His latest book, *Does the United States Have a Future?* was published in October 2017. Both paperback and e-book versions are available for purchase on www.amazon.com and all affiliated Amazon websites worldwide.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church

of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served in Army and CIA intelligence analysis for 30 years and, after retiring, co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Who's Afraid of Talking With Kim Jong Un?

Americans should welcome President Trump's apparent willingness to speak with North Korea's Kim Jong Un, but instead naysayers are warning of dire consequences, Jonathan Marshall explains.

By Jonathan Marshall

Three months ago, I quoted approvingly Donald Trump's campaign pledge to supporters in Atlanta that he would "absolutely" speak to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un even if there were only a "10 percent or a 20 percent chance that I can talk him out of those damn nukes."

"What the hell is wrong with speaking?" the candidate said. "We should be eating a hamburger on a conference table."

This week, the ever-mercurial President Trump agreed to take Kim up on a surprise offer to meet face-to-face in two months to search for peace. The meeting will be the first ever held between the leaders of the United States and North Korea, two countries that remain technically at war.

Whether the two men agree to eat hamburgers or kimchi, Americans should applaud Trump's renewed willingness to talk rather than fight. Instead, all manner of naysayers are warning of potentially dire consequences. A few of their points have merit, but none outweigh the likely consequences of doing nothing to stop an impending war.

For the past year, the two leaders have communicated only by trading epithets like "Little Rocket Man" and "lunatic mean old trickster and human reject." Such exchanges would be entertaining if President Trump had not also threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea and bring down "fire and fury like the world has never seen." While Pyongyang has tested new warheads and missiles, Washington has been conducting war exercises and moving nuclear-capable stealth bombers and submarines within range of North Korea.

The Unacceptable Risk of War

In recent months, experts have put the odds of a catastrophic war—which would likely kill hundreds of thousands of Americans in addition to countless Koreans and Japanese—at between 25 and 50 percent. President Trump’s foreign-policy adviser, Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, said the likelihood of Trump launching a preemptive war will rise to 70 percent if North Korea conducts another nuclear test. “At the pace we’re on, it’s just a matter of time,” he added.

Yet instead of hailing the prospect of talks as a great win for the life expectancy of people on both sides of the Pacific, some analysts insist on treating Kim’s proposal as a zero sum game.

“By some assessments, this is really a victory for Kim, who for years has sought proof of his status and North Korea’s power by dangling the offer of leader-to-leader talks with the United States,” writes Karen DeYoung, senior national security correspondent for the Washington Post.

And liberal New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof, while claiming that he is “all for negotiations,” focuses on his “fear” that Trump “has given North Korea what it has long craved: the respect and legitimacy that comes from the North Korean leader standing as an equal beside the American president.”

Does Kristof really think peace will be easier to achieve by disrespecting Kim and insisting on his illegitimacy? Deep down, does Kristof care more about one-upmanship than preventing nuclear war?

Will Trump Flub the Deal?

Many critics also warn that North Korea will take advantage of Trump’s ignorance and lack of preparation to gain some unspecified advantage.

“President Trump’s infamous penchant for going off script and his admiration of authoritarian types could weaken our negotiating position,” declared Suzanne DiMaggio of the Washington-based New America Foundation, who helped arrange backdoor diplomatic contacts between the two countries last year.

Zack Beauchamp, a news analyst for Vox.com, warns that Trump is “very easy to manipulate” and “easily swayed by flattery,” weaknesses that make it “easy to imagine the North Koreans tricking Trump into a deal that, in the long term, helps their strategic position while hurting America’s.”

Not to be outdone, senior White House and national security reporters for CNN caution, “there’s a real chance Trump could be walking into a massive trap.”

Critics are right that Trump knows almost nothing about Korea. (“It’s not so

easy," he conceded last year, after talking with Chinese President Xi.) Trump has yet to appoint an ambassador to South Korea. The president doesn't bother to talk with his Secretary of State, who said only hours before the White House announcement, "We're a long way from negotiations." And persistent reports suggest that Trump's national security adviser, H. R. McMaster, is on his way out—bad timing, if true.

But what is Trump likely to bargain away out of ignorance or vanity? Perhaps, critics fear, he will relax sanctions, agree to scale back military exercises with South Korea, or start exploring a long-term peace deal with North Korea before first nailing down iron-clad guarantees of North Korean nuclear disarmament.

But none of those measures would put the security of South Korea, much less the United States, at risk. No one seriously believes North Korea can win a conventional war. And its small arsenal of nuclear warheads is useful only for deterring a preemptive U.S. attack. Any other use would invite the total annihilation of North Korea.

The Danger of Overconfidence

One legitimate worry is that an unprepared Trump may engage in talks with false expectations of a quick PR victory, overconfident that economic sanctions have forced North Korea to the table.

"If Trump goes . . . and expects to announce a denuclearized North Korea, he will leave disappointed and maybe angry enough to believe that talks are useless and only military options are left," says Vipin Narang, associate professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Trump needs to understand that Kim sees nuclear weapons as essential to his regime's security. Dismantling his arsenal and opening up his country to intrusive inspections in order to ease sanctions would simply make his regime prey to a resumption of sanctions at a later date—without the benefit of a credible deterrent.

Kim will disarm, if ever, only after years of confidence-building, bolstered by guarantees from other powers, and after Washington signs a permanent peace treaty. The same conditions will doubtless be required before North Korea significantly liberalizes human rights.

Trump should go into the talks with the more modest but absolutely vital aim of heading off an impending war. Realistic near-term goals include freezing further missile and warhead testing by North Korea and eliciting guarantees against proliferation of North Korea's technology to other countries.

To achieve those ends, he may need—in consultation with Seoul—to restrain U.S.-South Korean war exercises and partially relax sanctions. He and Kim should also map out a reasonable timetable for negotiating a final peace settlement between our countries. But Trump should refuse to let critics at home dissuade him from seeking an alternative to war.

Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international relations and history. His articles on Korea include [“No Time for Complacency over Korea War Threat,”](#) [“America Isn’t on the Brink of Nuclear War—It Just Looks That Way,”](#) [“What’s Wrong with Talking to North Korea?,”](#) [“Trump’s North Korea Delusions,”](#) [“The New Trump: War President,”](#) [“Hurtling Toward Fire and Fury,”](#) [“Risk to US from War on North Korea,”](#) [“North Korea Fears ‘Regime Change’ Strike,”](#) [“The Negotiation Option With North Korea,”](#) and [“Behind the North Korean Nuke Crisis.”](#)

The Illusion of War Without Casualties

America’s wars in the post-9/11 era have been characterized by relatively low U.S. casualties, but that does not mean that they are any less violent than previous wars, Nicolas J.S. Davies observes.

By Nicolas J.S. Davies

Last Sunday’s Oscar Awards were interrupted by an [incongruous propaganda exercise](#) featuring a Native American actor and Vietnam vet, featuring a montage of clips from Hollywood war movies.

The actor, Wes Studi, said that he “fought for freedom” in Vietnam. But anyone with even a rudimentary understanding of that war, including for instance the millions of viewers who watched Ken Burns’ Vietnam War documentary, knows that it was the Vietnamese who were fighting for freedom – while Studi and his comrades were fighting, killing and dying, often bravely and for misguided reasons, to deny the people of Vietnam that freedom.

Studi introduced the Hollywood movies he was showcasing, including “American Sniper,” “The Hurt Locker” and “Zero Dark Thirty,” with the words, “Let’s take a moment to pay tribute to these powerful films that shine a great spotlight on those who have fought for freedom around the world.”

To pretend to a worldwide TV audience in 2018 that the U.S. war machine is “fighting for freedom” in the countries it attacks or invades was an absurdity

that could only add insult to injury for millions of survivors of U.S. coups, invasions, bombing campaigns and hostile military occupations all over the world.

Wes Studi's role in this Orwellian presentation made it even more incongruous, as his own Cherokee people are themselves survivors of American ethnic cleansing and forced displacement on the Trail of Tears from North Carolina, where they had lived for hundreds or maybe thousands of years, to Oklahoma where Studi was born.

Unlike the delegates at the 2016 Democratic National Convention who broke out in chants of "no more war" at displays of militarism, the great and the good of Hollywood seemed nonplussed by this strange interlude. Few of them applauded it, but none protested either.

From Dunkirk to Iraq and Syria

Perhaps the aging white men who still run the "Academy" were driven to this exhibition of militarism by the fact that two of the films nominated for Oscars were war movies. But they were both films about the U.K. in the early years of the Second World War – stories of British people resisting German aggression, not of Americans committing it.

Like most cinematic paeans to the U.K.'s "finest hour," both these films are rooted in Winston Churchill's own account of the Second World War and his role in it. Churchill was roundly sent packing by British voters in 1945, before the war was even over, as British troops and their families instead voted for the "land fit for heroes" promised by the Labour Party, a land where the rich would share the sacrifices of the poor, in peace as in war, with a National Health Service and social justice for all.

Churchill reportedly consoled his cabinet at its final meeting, telling them, "Never fear, gentlemen, history will be kind to us – for I shall write it." And so he did, cementing his own place in history and drowning out more critical accounts of the U.K.'s role in the war by serious historians like A.J.P. Taylor in the U.K. and D.F. Fleming in the U.S.

If the Military Industrial Complex and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences are trying to connect these Churchillian epics with America's current wars, they should be careful what they wish for. Many people around the world need little prompting to identify the German Stukas and Heinkels bombing Dunkirk and London with the U.S. and allied F-16s bombing Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and the British troops huddled on the beach at Dunkirk with the destitute refugees stumbling ashore on Lesbos and Lampedusa.

Externalizing the Violence of War

In the past 16 years, the U.S. has invaded, occupied and dropped 200,000 bombs and missiles on seven countries, but it has lost only 6,939 American troops killed and 50,000 wounded in these wars. To put this in the context of U.S. military history, 58,000 U.S. troops were killed in Vietnam, 54,000 in Korea, 405,000 in the Second World War and 116,000 in the First World War.

But low U.S. casualties do not mean that our current wars are less violent than previous wars. Our post-2001 wars have probably killed between 2 and 5 million people. The use of massive aerial and artillery bombardment has reduced cities like Fallujah, Ramadi, Sirte, Kobane, Mosul and Raqqa to rubble, and our wars have plunged entire societies into endless violence and chaos.

But by bombing and firing from a distance with very powerful weapons, the U.S. has wreaked all this slaughter and destruction at an extraordinary low rate of U.S. casualties. The U.S.'s technological war-making has not reduced the violence and horror of war, but it has "externalized" it, at least temporarily.

But do these low casualty rates represent a kind of "new normal" that the U.S. can replicate whenever it attacks or invades other countries? Can it keep waging war around the world and remain so uniquely immune from the horrors it unleashes on others?

Or are the low U.S. casualty rates in these wars against relatively weak military forces and lightly armed resistance fighters giving Americans a false picture of war, one that is enthusiastically embellished by Hollywood and the corporate media?

Even when the U.S. was losing 900-1,000 troops killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan each year from 2004 to 2007, there was much more public debate and vocal opposition to war than there is now, but those were still historically very low casualty rates.

U.S. military leaders are more realistic than their civilian counterparts. General Dunford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has told Congress that the U.S. plan for war on North Korea is for a ground invasion of Korea, effectively a Second Korean War. The Pentagon must have an estimate of the number of U.S. troops who are likely to be killed and wounded under its plan, and Americans should insist that it makes that estimate public before U.S. leaders decide to launch such a war.

The other country that the U.S., Israel and Saudi Arabia keep threatening to attack or invade is Iran. President Obama admitted from the outset that Iran was the ultimate strategic target of the CIA's proxy war in Syria.

Israeli and Saudi leaders openly threaten war on Iran, but expect the U.S. to fight Iran on their behalf. American politicians play along with this dangerous game, which could get thousands of their constituents killed. This would flip the traditional U.S. doctrine of proxy war on its head, effectively turning the U.S. military into a proxy force fighting for the ill-defined interests of Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Iran is nearly 4 times the size of Iraq, with more than double its population. It has a 500,000 strong military and its decades of independence and isolation from the West have forced it to develop its own weapons industry, supplemented by some advanced Russian and Chinese weapons.

In an article about the prospect of a U.S. war on Iran, U.S. Army Major Danny Sjursen dismissed American politicians' fears of Iran as "alarmism" and called his boss, Defense Secretary Mattis, "obsessed" with Iran. Sjursen believes that the "fiercely nationalistic" Iranians would mount a determined and effective resistance to foreign occupation, and concludes, "Make no mistake, U.S. military occupation of the Islamic Republic would make the occupation of Iraq, for once, actually look like the 'cakewalk' it was billed to be."

Is This America's "Phony War"?

Invading North Korea or Iran could make the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan look in hindsight like the German invasions of Czechoslovakia and Poland must have looked to German troops on the Eastern front a few years later. Only 18,000 German troops were killed in the invasion of Czechoslovakia and 16,000 in the invasion of Poland. But the larger war that they led to killed 7 million Germans and wounded 7 million more.

After the deprivations of the First World War reduced Germany to a state of near starvation and drove the German Navy to mutiny, Adolf Hitler was determined, like America's leaders today, to maintain an illusion of peace and prosperity on the home front. The newly conquered people of the thousand-year Reich could suffer, but not Germans in the homeland.

Hitler succeeded in maintaining the standard of living in Germany at about its pre-war level for the first two years of the war, and even began cutting military spending in 1940 to boost the civilian economy. Germany only embraced a total war economy when its previously all-conquering forces hit a brick wall of resistance in the Soviet Union. Could Americans be living through a similar "phony war", one miscalculation away from a similar shock at the brutal reality of the wars we have unleashed on the world?

How would the American public react if far greater numbers of Americans were

killed in Korea or Iran – or Venezuela? Or even in Syria if the U.S. and its allies follow through on their plan to illegally occupy Syria east of the Euphrates?

And where are our political leaders and jingoistic media leading us with their ever-escalating anti-Russian and anti-Chinese propaganda? How far will they take their nuclear brinkmanship? Would American politicians even know before it was too late if they crossed a point of no return in their dismantling of Cold War nuclear treaties and escalating tensions with Russia and China?

Obama's doctrine of covert and proxy war was a response to the public reaction to what were in fact historically low U.S. casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq. But Obama waged war on the quiet, not war on the cheap. Under cover of his dovish image, he successfully minimized the public reaction to his escalation of the war in Afghanistan, his proxy wars in Libya, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen, his global expansion of special operations and drone strikes and a massive bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria.

How many Americans know that the bombing campaign Obama launched in Iraq and Syria in 2014 has been the heaviest U.S. bombing campaign anywhere in the world since Vietnam? Over 105,000 bombs and missiles, as well as indiscriminate U.S., French and Iraqi rockets and artillery, have blasted thousands of homes in Mosul, Raqqa, Fallujah, Ramadi and dozens of smaller towns and villages. As well as killing thousands of Islamic State fighters, they have probably killed at least 100,000 civilians, a systematic war crime that has passed almost without comment in the Western media.

“...And It Is Late”

How will the American public react if Trump launches new wars against North Korea or Iran, and the U.S. casualty rate returns to a more historically “normal” level – maybe 10,000 Americans killed each year, as during the peak years of the American War in Vietnam, or even 100,000 per year, as in U.S. combat in the Second World War? Or what if one of our many wars finally escalates into a nuclear war, with a higher U.S. casualty rate than any previous war in our history?

In his classic 1994 book, Century of War, the late Gabriel Kolko presciently explained,

“Those who argue that war and preparation for it is not necessary to capitalism's existence or prosperity miss the point entirely: it simply has not functioned in any other way in the past and there is nothing in the present to warrant the assumption that the coming decades will be any different...”

Kolko concluded,

“But there are no easy solutions to the problems of irresponsible, deluded leaders and the classes they represent, or the hesitation of people to reverse the world’s folly before they are themselves subjected to its grievous consequences. So much remains to be done – and it is late.”

America’s deluded leaders know nothing of diplomacy beyond bullying and brinkmanship. As they brainwash themselves and the public with the illusion of war without casualties, they will keep killing, destroying and risking our future until we stop them – or until they stop us and everything else.

The critical question today is whether the American public can muster the political will to pull our country back from the brink of an even greater military disaster than the ones we have already unleashed on millions of our neighbors.

Nicolas J S Davies is the author of Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq. He also wrote the chapter on “Obama at War” in Grading the 44th President: a Report Card on Barack Obama’s First Term as a Progressive Leader.

To Stop War, Do What Katharine Gun Did

Legendary whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg’s advice to stop current and future wars is simple: do what Katharine Gun did, writes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

Daniel Ellsberg has a message that managers of the warfare state don’t want people to hear.

“If you have information that bears on deception or illegality in pursuing wrongful policies or an aggressive war,” he said in a statement released last week, “don’t wait to put that out and think about it, consider acting in a timely way at whatever cost to yourself... Do what Katharine Gun did.”

If you don’t know what Katharine Gun did, chalk that up to the media power of the war system.

Ellsberg’s [video](#) statement went public as this month began, just before the 15th anniversary of when a British newspaper, the Observer, revealed a secret NSA

memo – thanks to Katharine Gun. At the UK's intelligence agency GCHQ, about 100 people received the same email memo from the National Security Agency on the last day of January 2003, seven weeks before the invasion of Iraq got underway. Only Katharine Gun, at great personal risk, decided to leak the document.

If more people had taken such risks in early 2003, the Iraq War might have been prevented. If more people were willing to take such risks in 2018, the current military slaughter in several nations, mainly funded by U.S. taxpayers, might be curtailed if not stopped. Blockage of information about past whistleblowing deprives the public of inspiring role models.

That's the kind of reality George Orwell was referring to when he wrote: "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past."

Fifteen years ago, "I find myself reading on my computer from the Observer the most extraordinary leak, or unauthorized disclosure, of classified information that I'd ever seen," Ellsberg recalled, "and that definitely included and surpassed my own disclosure of top-secret information, a history of U.S. decision-making in Vietnam years earlier." The Pentagon Papers whistleblower instantly recognized that, in the Observer article, "I was looking at something that was clearly classified much higher than top secret... It was an operational cable having to do with how to conduct communications intelligence."

What Ellsberg read in the newspaper story "was a cable from the NSA asking GCHQ to help in the intercepting of communications, and that implied both office and home communications, of every member of the Security Council of the UN. Now, why would NSA need GCHQ to do that? Because a condition of having the UN headquarters and the Security Council in the U.S. in New York was that the U.S. intelligence agencies promised or were required not to conduct intelligence on members of the UN. Well, of course they want that. So, they rely on their allies, the buddies, in the British to commit these criminal acts for them. And with this clearly I thought someone very high in access in Britain intelligence services must dissent from what was already clear the path to an illegal war."

But actually, the leak didn't come from "someone very high" in GCHQ. The whistleblower turned out to be a 28-year-old linguist and analyst at the agency, Katharine Gun, who had chosen to intervene against the march to war.

As Gun has recounted, she and other GCHQ employees "received an email from a senior official at the National Security Agency. It said the agency was 'mounting a surge particularly directed at the UN Security Council members,' and that it wanted 'the whole gamut of information that could give U.S. policymakers an edge in obtaining results favorable to U.S. goals or to head off surprises.'"

In other words, the U.S. and British governments wanted to eavesdrop on key UN delegations and then manipulate or even blackmail them into voting for war.

Katharine Gun took action: "I was furious when I read that email and leaked it. Soon afterwards, when the Observer ran a front-page story – 'U.S. dirty tricks to win vote on Iraq war' – I confessed to the leak and was arrested on suspicion of the breach of section 1 of the Official Secrets Act."

The whistleblowing occurred in real time. "This was not history," as Ellsberg put it. "This was a current cable, I could see immediately from the date, and it was before the war had actually started against Iraq. And the clear purpose of it was to induce the support of the Security Council members to support a new UN resolution for the invasion of Iraq."

The eavesdropping was aimed at gaining a second – and this time unequivocal – Security Council resolution in support of an invasion. "British involvement in this would be illegal without a second resolution," Ellsberg said. "How are they going to get that? Obviously essentially by blackmail and intimidation, by knowing the private wants and embarrassments, possible embarrassments, of people on the Security Council, or their aides, and so forth. The idea was, in effect, to coerce their vote."

Katharine Gun foiled that plan. While scarcely reported in the U.S. media (despite cutting-edge news releases produced by my colleagues at the Institute for Public Accuracy beginning in early March of 2003), the revelations published by the Observer caused huge media coverage across much of the globe – and sparked outrage in several countries with seats on the Security Council.

"In the rest of the world there was great interest in the fact that American intelligence agencies were interfering with their policies of their representatives in the Security Council," Ellsberg noted. A result was that for some governments on the Security Council at the time, the leak "made it impossible for their representatives to support the U.S. wish to legitimize this clear case of aggression against Iraq. So, the U.S. had to give up its plan to get a supporting vote in the UN."

The U.S. and British governments "went ahead anyway, but without the legitimating precedent of an aggressive war that would have had, I think, many consequences later."

Ellsberg said: "What was most striking then and still to me about this disclosure was that the young woman who looked at this cable coming across her computer in GCHQ acted almost immediately on what she saw was the pursuit of an illegal war by illegal means.... I've often been asked, is there anything about

the release of the Pentagon Papers on Vietnam that you regret. And my answer is yes, very much. I regret that I didn't put out the top-secret documents available to me in the Pentagon in 1964, years before I actually gave them to the Senate and then to the newspapers. Years of war and years of bombing. It wasn't that I was considering that all that time. I didn't have a precedent to instruct me on that at that point. But in any case, I could have been much more effective in averting that war if I'd acted much sooner."

Katharine Gun "was not dealing only with historical material," Ellsberg emphasizes. She "was acting in a timely fashion very quickly on her right judgment that what she was being asked to participate in was wrong. I salute her. She's my hero. I think she's a model for other whistleblowers. And for a long time I've said to people in her position or my old position in the government: Don't do what I did. Don't wait till the bombs are falling or thousands more have died."

By making her choice, Gun risked two years of imprisonment. In Ellsberg's words, she seemed to be facing "a sure conviction – except that the government was not willing to have the legality of that war discussed in a courtroom, and in the end dropped the charges."

As this month began, Katharine Gun spoke at a London news conference, co-sponsored by ExposeFacts and RootsAction.org (organizations I'm part of) and hosted by the National Union of Journalists. Speaking alongside her were three other whistleblowers – Thomas Drake, Matthew Hoh and Jesselyn Radack – who have emerged as eloquent American truth tellers from the NSA, State Department and Justice Department. The presentations by the four are stunning to watch.

Their initiatives, taken at great personal risk, underscore how we can seize the time to make use of opportunities for forthright actions of conscience. This truth is far from confined to what we call whistleblowing. It's about possibilities in a world where silence is so often consent to what's wrong, and disruption of injustice is imperative for creating a more humane future.

Norman Solomon is the coordinator of the online activist group RootsAction.org and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of a dozen books including *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*.
