

# Giving Peace a Chance in Korea

Vice President Mike Pence has declared that “all options are on the table” regarding North Korea and “the era of strategic patience is over.” But peaceful negotiations may be the only option that makes sense, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

As the Trump administration rattles the sabers over North Korea and its nuclear-weapons program, peace advocates are countering with warnings about the grave dangers if war breaks out on the peninsula and expressions of hope if fresh thinking about peace and reconciliation can prevail.

“If we are ever going to build the critical mass of an anti-war movement with a U.S. social movement,” said Christine Ahn, the former executive director of the Korea Policy Institute and currently the International Coordinator of Women Cross DMZ, “we have to fight together now, to put an end to this saber rattling, and potential first strike that the U.S. may conduct on North Korea.”

I spoke recently with Ahn about the critical nature of the situation on the Korean Peninsula. In 2015, her group organized a historic crossing of the demilitarized zone by 30 women from 15 countries, including many countries that had participated and fought in the Korean War. It included Gloria Steinem, two Nobel Peace laureates, renowned peace activists from Guam, from the Philippines and from Okinawa, Japan.

Dennis Bernstein: In a moment I want to talk to you about one of the struggles that has to do with this, the deployment of the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, known as THAAD. But first, I’d like you to speak to what you see as the multiple dangers facing Koreans. Do you think we are at a critical moment? Give us your response there please.

Christine Ahn: Well, Dennis, I do think that we are in a critical moment. First and foremost, my concern is that the only communication that we have with North Korea is one of military posturing and aggression. And we see that on both sides. North Korea is conducting missile tests, nuclear tests. They’re building up their arsenal and their capacity to launch the ICBM with a nuclear warhead that could hit the United States.

I don’t think they’re wanting to do it, to be an aggressor or to truly kill Americans. They’re doing it out of self-defense. And as you mentioned earlier, when President Trump was having dinner with President Xi Jinping from China, and over chocolate cake he explains that the U.S. has bombed, sent 59 Tomahawk

cruise missiles to Syria that he was sending a message to China. That if they don't put pressure on North Korea that the U.S. will unilaterally act.

And they have said that all options are on the table, which includes military action which is absolutely insane, to even use that kind of saber rattling. I mean, even the Obama administration, which had a terrible policy, the so-called "strategic patience," which is ultimately more sanctions, more isolation, more aggressive military exercises, in the hopes of regime collapse in North Korea. Well, that didn't happen. And what you see, actually, is images from North Korea of economic development of their [country]... in fact North Korea's GDP [Gross Domestic Product], it grew by more than the EU [European Union]. I mean, it doesn't say a whole lot, but it just shows that despite the international sanctions, and the kind of pressure and isolation that they experience, that they are doing what they can to survive. And they are.

And I just think that, my hope in this dangerous hour, and why I think it's so dangerous, is that there is a political vacuum in South Korea. As your listeners may or may not know, for weeks, starting in last October, the South Korean people took to the streets, to hold candlelight vigils on a weekly basis. They were holding these candlelight vigils to bring light to a deeply corrupt government ... calling for a different kind of government that respected the rights of labor, of working people, of farmers. [...] For the tragic ... deaths of hundreds of high school students that were killed in a ferry accident, while the president [Park Geun-hye] was, who knows what, like, getting her hair done or something. And the massive corruption of the Tragos, the transnational corporations, the Samsungs, the Hyundais. How it has just completely corrupted the political system. And so, the people took to the streets. And they led ultimately to her impeachment. And so, she's now, actually, in prison because of the extraordinary work of people fighting for democracy.

But what we have right now is a very dangerous political vacuum. And so there is going to be a snap election on May 9th. And by all indications the front runner is a guy named Moon Jae-in. He's a former human rights lawyer. He was the chief of staff under Roh Moo-hyun, who was the last progressive president. And he has since been going to visit Pyongyang before going to Washington, D.C.

DB: So he decided to go to North Korea. So he is inclined to be with that people's' movement that you were just describing?

CA: Absolutely. He says that engagement and diplomacy with North Korea is the best guarantee for our security, in South Korea. That is sensibility. And I think that the people in South Korea... you know, Tim Shorrock, a really fabulous journalist, who writes often for the Nation, who is now in South Korea. He wrote a great piece and he said it's like the complete contrast in what we're seeing

in South Korea as people... I mean here in the United States, so many of us, especially the Korean-American community, is completely on edge. We're thinking, "Oh, my God, is the Trump administration going to want to first strike against North Korea?" Because they are so unpredictable, and we have no sense of what their policy is. They said we've done this review, and it ranges from military aggression or coercive diplomacy, to engagement, so it's so schizophrenic and we have no idea. And what we have seen is them sending cruise missiles to Syria and to Afghanistan. And so ... what can we expect?

DB: And it's not only what can you expect, in fact, it was stated today by the Vice President that that was actually not a coincidence, that was a message. That was... those were double messages. The big bomb, the attack on Syria.. that Trump will go after the North.

Now, I need to ask you to, just for a moment, I've heard generals bandying this about on the corporate networks that, really, if the U.S. forces decided they could take out Korea without nuclear weapons, the initial thing would take, you know, maybe it would take several months, to do it. But it could be done. What would happen? What might that look like?

CA: Oh, it's just sheer fantasy. It's just sheer fantasy. And successive administrations from the Bush administration, the Clinton administration before it, and the Obama administration, trust me, they have all thought this through. And, on one hand, you have intelligence think tanks that say that, actually, U.S. intelligence is murky at best. We have no idea where all the nuclear sites are. It's all underground. Our intelligence is very murky.

So, and even based on the intelligence we have in the 1990s, when the Clinton administration almost did conduct a first strike on Pyongyang, the nuclear reactors in North Korea. The Defense Department came back and said "You know what?"... and this was even before North Korea possessed nuclear weapons. They said, "If there was a first strike by the United States, we would have a counter reaction not with nuclear weapons but North Korea's conventional weaponry, that would lead ultimately within the first 24 hours to up to a million people killed."

And so, unfortunately, the military option is not really an option for the United States, unless it's some reckless, mad, insane person that wants to kill innocent civilians. And Seoul, South Korea is just like 40 miles away from the DMZ [demilitarized zone]. And so, for a U.S. president to do something so reckless like that would spell the death, basically, of the U.S./South Korea alliance. And I think the U.S. needs to be very careful in this moment, especially when you have a citizenry, in South Korea, that wants more justice. They want greater equality. They want more transparency. They want good

government. And they want a different kind of policy, inter-Korea policy. They don't want to maintain the hard-line, isolationist stance. [...] By all means, I'm not trying to romanticize how South Koreans are viewing North Koreans. They see a tremendous cost in the process of reunification, but they don't want to ultimately lead to their own mutual destruction.

And so, that's my hope, is that on May 9th that we have a progressive president in South Korea, and they can talk some sense into Washington, D.C. And, who knows where the wind will turn, but I do have a sense that we can't continue the way that we have. We can't do it because it's too costly for the U.S. to maintain the massive 800 military bases around the world. You know this economy cannot withstand the amount of pressures, and especially in the Trump budget, where he's advocating for a \$54 billion increase in the already \$600 billion bloated military budget. You know, this is the moment when progressives and... when all of us, women, veterans, the Black Lives Matter, the immigrants rights movement, we have to come together, and especially put our focus... I mean the climate march is happening this weekend. The EPA is going to be cut, and so we have to have a true discussion, in this country, about our security, our human security.

DB: Let me just jump in here. One of the terribly interesting things here is that the United States would not have to declare war because they never ended the Korean War. And that's, of course, something that you all have been working on for a long time. But, I would like you to say a little bit more about the hope. You're talking about a candidate on the ground who will actually represent the people after many years of terrible repression and in a right-wing government that was moving from authoritarian to worse. So, it must be an extraordinarily mixed bag on the one hand, you've got this movement, this grassroots movement, that has been fighting for so long, on the verge of electing somebody that might actually represent them. And it's the brink of their version of World War III.

CA: Uhhh, I know, isn't it absolutely nuts? Yes, I mean it is the light at the end of the tunnel, I feel. And I think that you bring up the really good point. People say "Oh, the 'mother of all bombs' that the U.S. unleashed on Afghanistan"...

DB: And I meant to say that you mentioned that all those other presidents you mentioned didn't go to war against the North. Well, all those other presidents also didn't drop "the mother of all bombs" on Afghanistan but this guy came in, and in 100 days he's dropping it.

CA: I know. I know. Well, and that's the point that I make, which is, North Korea doesn't need to see what the brutality that the U.S. military can unleash.

They already have their own experience, and their own history. There's a photo that a Getty Images photographer took in 1951, and I think K.J. Noh sent this really heartbreaking passage of a quote from General MacArthur, who is not a kind-hearted person, who's a brutal military man. Even he said that he almost vomited by seeing the carnage, and the massive destruction that the U.S. military bombing campaign unleashed on both North and South Korea. I mean, 80% of North Korean cities were bombed to bits...

DB: ...80% of the North Korean cities were bombed in this fake Korean, not a fake war, but the way it was conceived...

CA: ...as a police action is how I think Truman sold it to the Congress! And got, you know, this like rogue United Nations command that brought in 20 countries to fight under... it's the first coalition of the willing. And so, the Korean War, I think bringing it back home, and to the cost to our security here at home, is that it was the Korean War that inaugurated the massive military spending. It wasn't Vietnam. It was the Korean War. And I think it would have huge significance if we could formerly end the Korean War.

And so, that's the point that I've been trying to teach, is in 1953, three years into the war, after 4 million people were killed, including up to 40,000 U.S. soldiers, we signed an armistice agreement. It's not something "over there." This is our problem, here, because it was our U.S. military commander, [Gen. William] Harrison, that signed the armistice, the cease fire, with the North Korean commander. And they promised on July 27, 1953, that within 90 days, this is article 4, paragraph 6, of this armistice agreement, where they said "We will return to negotiate a peace settlement."

That was a promise, and it's been 64 years now. And it's not just North Korea that is calling for a peace treaty. I was just on a webinar with one of the leading South Korean women peace activist, Ahn Shin Shanya, she said "We see the massive militarization of South Korea, and the ongoing... the longest foreign military occupation by the United States in Korea's entire history, as a result of this armistice, the cease fire, that has maintained the Korean peninsula in a state of war."

So, I think it's crucial that Americans understand that we... it's not about them, it's about us. It's about our responsibility, because we have 30,000 U.S. troops in South Korea. It is our aggressive posturing, our military exercises, where we simulate an invasion of North Korea, the decapitation of its leader. And it's odd that we're the signatories of that cease fire, with a commitment to signing a peace treaty.

If we could just get that straight I think we could set a lot in motion

[because] ultimately there is no other option. The only option that the Trump administration, and the United States, has with North Korea is diplomatic. Which is a resolution of this conflict. We can freeze North Korea's nuclear program, we can sign a non-aggression pact that begins a mutual peace building process. It is possible. We did it with Iran, we did it with Cuba.

It's going to take political will, and I think for the listeners in the [San Francisco] Bay Area, [U.S. Representative] Barbara Lee, she must be a champion. And I think one thing that I found so significant about Barbara Lee, not only was she one of the only lone and sane voices in trying to stop the war in Iraq, there was a radio interview that she did with somebody, where she said that she actually had a long conversation with her father who was a veteran of the Korean War, before she made that courageous vote in Congress, the vote against the U.S. invasion of Iraq. And he explained to her, "that war was a brutal war, we cannot afford to go to war."

And so, I think Barbara Lee, in her own personal connection to Korea, by way of her father, who is a veteran of the war... We have to call on Barbara Lee, she should try to push Trump about this War Powers Act. She's been a big champion on challenging the U.S. military aggression in Syria, and Afghanistan. We have to call on her to do the same for North Korea.

I really hope that listeners in the Bay Area will pick up the phone and call Barbara Lee's office, and say, "We need you to be a champion. We're here on the West Coast and if North Korea conducts a strike as a counter-strike to our first strike, you know, there is a possibility it could hit the coast of California." We don't need to go there.

DB: Yeah, and speaking of that, we must mention in the final minutes that we have that standing against this hope that you're outlining, is the fact that we've got this deployment, this speeded up deployment, of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, THAAD. And this is a forward fighting tool that makes everybody in the freaking region nervous. And China is on the edge on this one, as well.

CA: Absolutely. Well, first of all, it's a missile defense system that everybody is questioning its feasibility. And so, this is a Lockheed Martin product that I think costs \$15 million to produce. And that's our tax dollars, yours and mine and everybody else listening. And so many experts, from South Korea to MIT here in the United States, have said, "This will do nothing to deter low-range North Korean missiles." And that's what South Korea would need some kind of defense from. And so it's just been sold, and forced down the throat of the South Korean people. And [former South Korean president] Park Geun-hye, at the time last summer, she just agreed to it without any public debate, without any

presidential approval. And so the leading contenders in the South Korean presidential race have said “Let’s wait for the next president, to try to determine whether this is beneficial for the people of South Korea.”

But instead, in this political vacuum, the U.S... when General Mattis went to South Korea, that was like top on his list, “We’re deploying THAAD.” And so, the South Korean people, unfortunately, have been caught in this growing stand-off between the U.S. and China.

And so, China has basically punished South Korea through a number of economic boycotts. They have not allowed K-pop stars to go to concerts. And they have really boycotted the Lotte department stores, as has the South Korean groups that are living in this area, this Seongju, which is a farm land, which is where they are going to put this missile defense site, next to schools where children will be exposed to all kinds of radiation, and other damaging impacts, of having this high radar.

And it’s just putting Korea, you know, we interviewed a bunch of South Korean women who have been organizing against this THAAD missile defense system. And they say “They are taking us so far away from building trust, and rapport, and reconciliation with North Korea. We don’t want this.” And, unfortunately, who’s benefitting? And it’s the military contractors. And so, we have to push back. We want a genuine alliance, I think, for the people. We can do that. It doesn’t have to be a military alliance that just sends its military contractors. We have to think a different way. And, unfortunately, we have our big fight here against the Trump administration, but hopefully the silver lining is there is a progressive president in South Korea that’s going to have to shift.

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## Behind Trump’s Anti-Iran Tough Talk

Appeasing the Saudi-Israel axis in the Mideast, President Trump is talking tough against Iran and bringing his administration even more into line with neocon orthodoxy, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

The Trump administration is bending over backward to be, and to sound, hostile

and confrontational toward Iran. This effort to flaunt a role for itself as a dedicated enemy of Iran has roots in the same factors that underlie the more widely established anti-Iranism in the United States, staying ahead of which is clearly an administration objective.

These factors include a troubled history highlighted for Americans by the hostage crisis of 1979-81. They include pressure from intra-regional rivals of Iran – especially the Israeli government but also the Gulf Arab regimes – that have an interest in depicting Iran as the source of all trouble in the Middle East and as a demon that distracts attention from problems that are more their own doing.

The United States and especially the current administration willingly succumbs to such pressure, with a habit of dividing the world simplistically into friends and enemies and taking the side of supposed friends in local conflicts in which the United States itself does not really have a valid reason to take sides. Related to that habit is the felt need to have a clear enemy as a kind of adversarial lodestar, a role that the Trump administration is all the more eager to thrust on Iran given the politically sensitive ambiguities of Trump's relationship with Russia.

Lately the administration has been working overtime to trumpet its hostility to Iran, because it was required to submit a certification to Congress regarding whether Iran is observing its obligations under the multilateral nuclear agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). A certification that Iran is indeed complying with its obligations was the only plausible way to discharge this legal obligation of a report to Congress, given that Iran *is* in fact in compliance, as the International Atomic Energy Agency, implementing the most comprehensive and intrusive international monitoring arrangement that any nation has ever willingly accepted for its own nuclear program, has repeatedly determined since the agreement went into effect.

### **Avoiding One More Lie**

In short, the agreement is working exactly as it was supposed to work in keeping Iran's nuclear activities peaceful. Any other statement to Congress on the subject would have been a lie. This President has no compunction about lying, of course, but such a lie would have meant needlessly creating a new crisis amid the other crises, foreign and domestic, that the President already has created.

The administration's unease flows from how this inescapable certification may appear to be a positive gesture toward Iran. As such, it could be seen as weakening the administration's anti-Iran credentials. Moreover, the admission that the JCPOA is working runs counter to Trump's denunciation of the agreement



as the “worst deal ever.”

Thus we have the administration’s compensatory rhetoric of today, which includes as much negative verbiage as possible about Iran in general as well as aspersions about the JCPOA. Most of the rhetoric falls in the familiar, non-specific vein that pays no attention to exactly what Iran is or is not doing and how that does or does not affect U.S. interests and instead is essentially sloganeering. But the recent extra straining to dump on Iran and the nuclear agreement has resulted in some especially peculiar and downright silly formulations.

For example, Vice President Mike Pence, half a world away on a visit to Australia and promising at a press conference with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull that the United States would abide by a refugee resettlement agreement that Trump had described as another “dumb deal,” went out of his way to comment on how his President expresses “frustration with other international agreements, most notably the so-called nuclear agreement with Iran.” “So-called”?

On which aspect of the JCPOA is Pence trying to cast doubt by using that label? That it involves nuclear matters? That it is an agreement? That the agreement is with Iran? Pence’s comment can be filed in the same place as Trump’s comment about the “so-called judge” who suspended implementation of the anti-Muslim travel ban.

### **A Misleading Certification**

Then there is the certification itself, which is in the form of a short letter from Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to Speaker of the House Paul Ryan. The letter was publicly released under the heading, “Iran continues to sponsor terrorism.” Good luck to anyone looking at titles as a way to search for a document that is about compliance with a nuclear agreement. The only support within the letter for that misleading title is the single sentence, “Iran remains a leading state sponsor of terror, through many platforms and methods.”

Like many other rhetorical linkages of Iran to terrorism, this statement ignores the major changes in Iranian tactics in the years since the Iranian revolution, the fact that Iran is on the same side as the United States in combating terrorist groups such as ISIS, and the fact that the roots of the sort of violent extremism that ISIS represents are to be found far more with rivals of Iran than with Iran itself.

The day after the certification was sent to Congress, Tillerson made a statement to the press that was designed to disseminate as much compensatory anti-Iran rhetoric as possible. Tillerson’s statement had all the usual generalities that

pay no attention to what anyone else in the region is doing (such as in Yemen, where the Saudi and Emirati intervention in that civil war has been far more destructive and destabilizing than anything that Iran has done), but perhaps the most preposterous part of the statement was its linkage of Iran to the most salient international security problem *du jour*, North Korea.

### **Stop Making Sense**

Tillerson said, “An unchecked Iran has the potential to travel the same path as North Korea, and take the world along with it. The United States is keen to avoid a second piece of evidence that strategic patience is a failed approach.”

And then later in the statement, “The JCPOA fails to achieve the objective of a non-nuclear Iran; it only delays their goal of becoming a nuclear state. This deal represents the same failed approach of the past that brought us to the current imminent threat we face from North Korea. The Trump administration has no intention of passing the buck to a future administration on Iran.”

Huh? Far from passing a buck, the Obama administration, through an immense diplomatic effort, accomplished far more to resolve what had been widely and loudly touted (such as by the 2012 Republican presidential nominee) as the number one security problem facing the United States than any other administration before or after. Far from leaving Iran “unchecked,” the JCPOA imposes the most severe limitations on, and most extensive international monitoring (which continues in perpetuity) of, a national nuclear program.

If “strategic patience” has characterized some aspect of past U.S. policy on Iran, it was the earlier, pre-Obama, approach of simply piling on more sanctions and hoping that somehow that would persuade the Iranians to curtail their nuclear activities. Instead, the result was more and more centrifuges spinning and more and more uranium getting enriched – a process that the JCPOA not only halted but reversed.

### **A False Analogy**

Whatever one may think, pro or con, about the Agreed Framework that attempted to address North Korea’s nuclear activities, it was a far cry from the much more detailed, effective, and enforceable JCPOA. Bottom line: Iran does not have nuclear weapons, and all possible paths to making an Iranian nuclear weapon have been closed. That represents a world of difference from what we face with North Korea, and it is ridiculous to talk about these two cases together in terms of a “second piece of evidence.”

North Korea is the severe challenge that it is today because of its nuclear weapons – which is the dimension that kept getting emphasized about Iran until,

after the JCPOA closed the nuclear weapon option, those who have wanted to maintain hostility toward Iran have searched for other rationales for their hostility. Without its nukes, we would hardly be caring at all about the North Korean hermit kingdom. If Trump or anyone else could obtain an agreement with North Korea that was anything like the JCPOA, it would be a huge diplomatic triumph – and no doubt touted as such. It also would have been a huge diplomatic triumph a decade or two ago, when such an agreement might have been more reachable than it is today.

Trump himself has joined in the overtime effort to pump out anti-Iran rhetoric. At a press conference this week with the Italian prime minister, Trump again denounced the JCPOA as a “terrible agreement” that was “as bad as I’ve ever seen negotiated.” As usual, no hint was given as what any better alternatives would look like, or why we should believe that any such alternatives are, or would have been, attainable.

Then Trump asserted that Iran is “not living up to the spirit of the agreement.” What could he possibly be referring to? Trump didn’t say.

### **Iranian Compliance**

If one focuses on the nuclear obligations in the JCPOA itself, it would be difficult to find any lack of good spirit in Iran’s verified adherence to the letter of the panoply of commitments it undertook. (Iran completed its initial requirements under the agreement, such as reducing its supply of low enriched uranium, with alacrity and more promptly than many expected.)

If spirit instead refers to a larger relationship beyond the nuclear agreement itself, the first thing to remember is that the parties that negotiated the agreement realized that if they attempted too broad an agenda – including Iran’s grievances against the United States as well as U.S. complaints about Iran – then it probably would have been impossible to conclude a nuclear accord.

The next thing to note is that the preponderance of hostility is coming more from the Trump administration toward Iran than the other way around, as the most recent wave of rhetoric illustrates. It was a change of administrations in Washington, not in Tehran, that resulted in discontinuation of what had been a channel of communication at the foreign minister level that was effective at addressing problems (such as U.S. sailors straying into Iranian territorial waters) beyond the nuclear issues.

And it is not just rhetoric. The most significant departure in the last three months by either government regarding actions in the Middle East was the Trump administration’s direct, armed attack on Iran’s ally Syria.

Perhaps most pertinent to anything that could be called the spirit of the JCPOA are all the doubts being voiced by the Trump administration as to whether it will even live up to the letter of the agreement. Contained in the certification to Congress is the statement, "President Donald J. Trump has directed a National Security Council-led interagency review of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that will evaluate whether suspension of sanctions related to Iran pursuant to the JCPOA is vital to the national security interests of the United States." Translation: we haven't decided whether we're going to comply with our obligations under the accord. How's that for living up to the spirit of the agreement?

All this striving to burnish anti-Iran credentials not only precludes any possibility of building constructively on the JCPOA to address other issues in the Middle East in a way that advances U.S. interests. The rhetoric – designed to excoriate one state rather than to illuminate the causes of regional problems – obscures the nature of those problems, distorts public and Congressional understanding of them, and consequently makes those problems all the harder to address effectively.

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## The Pro-War Twist of the 'Resistance'

**Exclusive:** The anti-Trump "#Resistance" has become a movement to defend the Democratic establishment's pro-war policies, to purge anti-war Democrats, and even to embrace Donald Trump's attack on Syria, reports James W Carden.

By James W Carden

The Resistance, a self-aggrandizing term for what amounts to a relatively small but still powerful clique of embittered Clinton surrogates, has been keeping itself busy of late, fanning the flames of McCarthyite recriminations against anyone who dares question the rather flimsy public evidence that Russia influenced the results of the 2016 election, all the while cheering on President Trump's expansion of the war in Syria.

Like its approach to the question of Russia and the election, the Resistance will brook no dissent over whether or not President Trump did the "right thing"

in unleashing 59 Tomahawk missiles on a country which we are not at war with and which has never attacked us.

As with their hysterical claims that Russia stole the election from Hillary Clinton, the Resistance is loathe to allow facts, logic or evidence to get in the way of its view that Donald Trump acted in the security interests of the United States by bombing the Syrian military which (with air support from the Russians) is currently in the process in routing ISIS and Al Qaeda.

Neoliberal Clinton partisan Ruth Marcus of the *Washington Post* wrote that in her view “Trump is, if not behaving normally, at least adopting normal positions.” Bombing Syria, in the absence of a legal mandate from the United Nations or with expressed authorization of Congress – both legal requirements if the U.S. Constitution and American treaty obligations are to be respected – is, to Marcus anyway, evidence of “Trump’s good judgment.”

Nor was Marcus alone. Clinton herself endorsed Trump’s decision to use force just hours before the attack, telling a crowd of well-heeled Resisters in New York that “I really believe that we should have and still should take out [Assad’s] air fields and prevent him from being able to use them to bomb innocent people and drop sarin gas on them.”

Former high-ranking Obama State Department officials Antony Blinken and Anne Marie Slaughter – he in the pages of the *New York Times*, she on Twitter – also praised Trump’s bombing of Syria as “the right thing” to do. *The New Yorker’s* Ryan Lizza declared, “The moral case for President Trump’s strike on Syria is uncontroversial.”

### **Punishing Anti-War Democrats**

In the days following the Tomahawk missile attack on Syria, it became obvious that antiwar voices need not apply to the Resistance, which clearly remains in thrall to the 25-year-old interventionist orthodoxy begun under President Bill Clinton and which continues to be treated as unassailable dogma within the Democratic Party to this day. Those few who had the temerity to dissent from the Resistance party line were to be given no quarter.

One of the few prominent elected officials in Washington to voice skepticism of the Trump administration’s case for military action against Syria was Hawaii’s Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, who condemned the attack in a statement which accused the administration of having “acted recklessly without care or consideration of the dire consequences of the United States attack on Syria without waiting for the collection of evidence from the scene of the chemical poisoning.”

The knives came out for Gabbard even before the proverbial ink on the statement

was dry. To no one's surprise, *The Washington Post* quickly ran a smear job by Elise Viebeck titled "What is Tulsi Gabbard thinking on Syria?" In it, Viebeck declared that "Gabbard has dug herself into a hole in recent weeks with her bizarre but insistent views about Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his country's bloody six years of civil war."

But what really seemed to offend Viebeck – and by extension, her employers at the *Post* – was Gabbard's effrontery in committing an act of *lese majeste* against that which all right-thinking people in Washington "know" or, as Viebeck put it: "her striking departure from the consensus that Assad's government launched the attack."

Viebeck chronicled the Resistance's disgust with the Congresswoman's penchant for independent, critical thinking. No less a Resistance figure than MSNBC's Joy Reid tweeted that "People who have insisted Gabbard is the future of the Democratic Party may need to consider her outré views on issues like Assad." Other Resistance leaders piled on, too: The Daily Kos; Center for American Progress president and close Clinton adviser Neeera Tanden; and former Vermont Governor and ex-Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean all voiced their opinion that Gabbard should face a primary challenge in 2018. Indeed, according to Dean, the heath insurance lobbyist, "Gabbard should not be in Congress."

Of course, all the handwringing over Gabbard's comments were simply another opportunity for the right-minded to double down on their criticism of Gabbard's controversial meeting with Syria's Bashar al-Assad in January. Then as now, the *Washington Post* was at the forefront of the character attacks, running a piece by Josh Rogin titled "How Tulsi Gabbard became Assad's mouthpiece in Washington" on Jan. 29. Yet Rogin's piece was so sloppy and error-ridden that the *Post* had to append a humiliating paragraph long correction to it after it was published.

### **Ignoring Syrian Reality**

Nevertheless, the Resistance's cry of "what about Assad?" is a case of Democratic luminaries polishing up their reputations for virtue and signaling their commitments to career advancement, nothing more. It leaves out the fact that the Syrian opposition also bears responsibility for the start of the violence in 2011.

As Father Frans van der Lugt, a Dutch missionary to Syria who was murdered by rebel forces in 2014, put it: "From the start, the protest movements were not purely peaceful. From the start I saw armed demonstrators marching along in the protests, who began to shoot at the police first. Very often the violence of the security forces has been a reaction to the brutal violence of the armed rebels."

The murdered Dutch priest also observed as early as 2011, that “The opposition of the street is much stronger than any other opposition. And this opposition is armed and frequently employs brutality and violence, only in order then to blame the government.”

The “what about Assad?” line also begs us to ignore what the likely consequences of his removal from power would actually mean: Who exactly do they think would fill the vacuum? The obsession with Assad also willfully ignores the immorality of U.S. policy, which involves repeatedly bombing Syria while funding and training violent extremists who seek to overthrow a sovereign government.

U.S. policy, wholeheartedly supported by the Resistance, tramples international law and makes a mockery of the tenets of Just War Theory. It results in violence, death and destruction abroad and sets the stage for retaliatory acts of violence upon our own people at home.

And so, in order to elide these considerations, the neoliberal left returns to the eternal, tiresome: “But what about Assad?” To which there is a pretty straightforward answer: Assad is fighting (quite successfully at present) the same enemies who attacked us on 9/11 in an attempt to stave off the wholesale takeover of Syria by Saudi-sponsored Salafists who would, as they promised in the early days of the uprising, drive “Christians to Beirut, Alawites to the grave.” Never mind what they would do to women, Shia and other apostates should they topple Assad and gain power.

Anti-interventionist and pro-peace Democrats object to this joint Saudi-Turkish project of turning Syria, which under Assad had been a secular, multi-confessional police state, into a theocratic Sunnistan, thereby carving out a state for our worst enemies.

### **Backing the Terrorists**

The Resistance may need reminding that international politics, like domestic politics, is about choosing, and the choice that pro-war Democrats (the vast majority of whom are die-hard Clinton supporters who still have not been able to reconcile themselves to her defeat) have made is clear: they’ve thrown their support behind radical Islamist terror groups in Syria because they have bought into the tedious fiction about the existence of “moderate” Syrian rebels.

But the Resistance would be better off leaving the fantasy of peace-loving moderate Syrian rebels to the hipsters at VICE and the neocons and neoliberal war hawks comfortably ensconced at Brookings, the Center for American Progress, CNN, The Daily Beast, The Atlantic magazine, and The Atlantic Council.

Another trend among the self-fashioned “Resisters” these days is towards an

unthinking acceptance of U.S. government talking points, particularly with regard to Russian hacking and the Trump administration's declassified four-page report on the Syrian chemical weapons attack.

Yet given the less than inspiring record of American interventions based on faulty, distorted or simply fabricated intelligence, as in the cases of Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011), the question isn't why someone like Gabbard is out there questioning the Trump administration's story, the question is: why aren't more doing so? And wouldn't questioning Trump's unilateral, illegal decision to bomb Syria seem to be the right and proper role of something which bills itself as "The Resistance"?

But no. As a friend and colleague of mine recently put it, if they were honest, the Resistance's motto really ought to be: "Long live the Cold War with Russia. Long live neoliberal Wahhabism and chaos in the Middle East."

Yet the Resistance drones on, drowning out anti-war, anti-Wahhabi, pro-detente voices all in a bid to reinforce the neoliberal foreign policy orthodoxy within the Democratic Party in the vain hope of solidifying their positions of power and influence within it.

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## The Bait-and-Switch 'War on Terror'

The U.S. "war on terror" has always been a bait-and-switch scam on the American people, with Washington putting the desires of its Mideast allies ahead of defeating Al Qaeda and ISIS, Gareth Porter reports for Middle East Eye.

By Gareth Porter

New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman outraged many readers when he wrote an opinion piece on April 12 calling on President Trump to "back off fighting territorial ISIS in Syria." The reason he gave for that recommendation was not that U.S. wars in the Middle East are inevitably self-defeating and endless, but that it would reduce the "pressure on Assad, Iran, Russia and Hezbollah."

That suggestion that the U.S. sell out its interest in counter-terrorism in the



Middle East to gain some advantage in power competition with its adversaries was rightly attacked as cynical. But, in fact, the national security bureaucracies of the U.S. – which many have come to call the “Deep State” – have been selling out their interests in counter-terrorism in order to pursue various adventures in the region ever since George W Bush declared a “Global War on Terrorism” in late 2001.

The whole war on terrorism has been, in effect, a bait-and-switch operation from the beginning. The idea that U.S. military operations were somehow going to make America safer after the 9/11 attacks was the bait. What has actually happened ever since then, however, is that senior officials at the Pentagon and the CIA have been sacrificing the interest of American people in weakening Al Qaeda in order to pursue their own institutional interests.

It all began, of course, with the invasion of Iraq. Counter-terrorism specialists in the U.S. government knew perfectly well that U.S. “regime change” in Iraq through military force would give a powerful boost to Osama bin Laden’s organization and to anti-American terrorism generally.

Rand Beers, then senior director for counter-terrorism on the National Security Council staff, told his predecessor Richard Clarke in late 2002, “Do you know how much it will strengthen al-Qaeda and groups like that if we occupy Iraq?”

After it quickly became clear that the U.S. war in Iraq was already motivating young men across the Middle East to wage jihad against the U.S. in Iraq, the chief architect of the occupation of Iraq, Paul Wolfowitz, came up with the patently false rationalization that Iraq would be a “flytrap” for jihadists.

### **Breeding Terrorists**

But in January 2005, after a year of research, the CIA issued a major intelligence assessment warning that the war was breeding more Al Qaeda extremist militants from all over the Middle East and even giving them combat experience that they would eventually be able to use back home.

In a 2006 National Intelligence Estimate, the intelligence community warned that the number of people identifying themselves as jihadists was growing and was becoming more widespread geographically and even the predicted growing terrorist threats from “self-radicalized cells” both in the U.S. and abroad.

The war managers continued to claim that their wars were making Americans safer. CIA Director Michael Hayden not only sought to sell the flypaper argument on Iraq, but also bragged to the Washington Post in 2008 that the CIA was making great progress against Al Qaeda, based mainly on its burgeoning drone war in Pakistan.

But Hayden and the CIA had a huge bureaucratic interest in that war. He had lobbied Bush in 2007 to loosen restraints on drone strikes in Pakistan and let the CIA launch lethal attacks on the mere suspicion that a group of males were Al Qaeda.

It soon became clear that it wasn't really weakening the Al Qaeda in the northwest Pakistan at all. Even drone operators themselves began privately criticizing the drone attacks for making many more young Pakistanis hate the United States and support Al Qaeda. The only thing Leon Panetta, Hayden's successor as CIA director, could say in defense of the program was that it was "the only game in town".

Barack Obama wanted out of a big war in Iraq. But CENTCOM Commander Gen. David Petraeus and Joint Staff director Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, talked Obama into approving a whole new series of covert wars using CIA drone strikes and special operations commando raids against Al Qaeda and other jihadist organizations in a dozen countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia. At the top of their list of covert wars was Yemen, where Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) had just been formed.

### **Cruise Missiles and Drones**

Since 2009, the Joint Special Operations Command and the CIA have launched 16 cruise missile strikes and 183 drone strikes in Yemen. Unfortunately, they lacked the intelligence necessary for such a campaign. As many as one-third of the strikes killed innocent civilians and local notables – including the cruise missile strike in December 2009 which killed 41 civilians and attack on a wedding party in December 2013. Virtually every independent observer agrees that those killings have fed Yemeni hatred of the U.S. and contributed to AQAP's luster as the leading anti-U.S. organization in the country.

The CIA again claimed they were doing a splendid job of hitting AQAP, but in fact the Yemeni offshoot of Al Qaeda continued to be the primary terrorism threat while the covert war continued. Three times between late 2009 and 2012, it mounted efforts to bring down airliners and nearly succeeded in two of the three.

In late 2011 and early 2012, the contradiction between the U.S. pretension to counter-terrorism in its Middle East policy and the interests sharpened even further. That's when the Obama administration adopted a new anti-Iran hard line in the region to reassure the Saudis that we were still committed to the security alliance. That hardline policy had nothing to do with a nuclear deal with Iran, which came more than a year later.

At first, it took form of covert logistical assistance to the Sunni allies to arm Sunni anti-Assad forces in Syria. But in 2014, the Obama administration began providing anti-tank missiles to selected anti-Assad armed groups. And when the Nusra Front wanted the groups the CIA had supported in Idlib to coordinate with the jihadist offensive to seize control of Idlib province, the Obama administration did not object.

The Obama national security team was willing to take advantage of the considerable military power of the Nusra Front-led jihadist alliance. But it was all done with a wink and a nod to maintain the fiction that it was still committed to defeating Al Qaeda everywhere.

When the Saudis came to Washington in March 2015 with a plan to wage a major war in Yemen against the Houthis and their new ally, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the deep state was ready to give Saudi a green light. A predictable consequence of that decision has been to fuel the rise of AQAP, which had already emerged as the primary threat of terrorist attack on the U.S., to an unprecedented position of power.

### **The Biggest Winner**

As documented by the International Crisis Group, AQAP has been the biggest winner in the war, taking advantage of state collapse, an open alliance with the Saudi-supported government and a major infusion of arms – much of its provided indirectly by the Saudis.

Endowed with a political strategy of playing up AQAP's role as champion of Sunni sectarian interests against those Yemenis whom they wrongly call Shia, AQAP controlled a large swath of territory across southern Yemen with the port of Mukalla as their headquarters. And even though the Saudi coalition recaptured the territory, they maintain a strong political presence there.

AQAP will certainly emerge from the disastrous war in Yemen as the strongest political force in the south, with a de-facto safe haven in which to plot terrorist attacks against the U.S. And they can thank the war bureaucracies in the U.S. who helped them achieve that powerful position.

But the reason for the betrayal of U.S. counter-terrorism interests is not that the senior officials in charge of these war bureaucracies want to promote Al Qaeda. It is because they had to sacrifice the priority of countering Al Qaeda to maintain the alliances, the facilities and the operations on which their continued power and resources depend.

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*Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare.* [This article first appeared at Middle East Eye.]

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## How US Race Laws Inspired Nazism

As much as Americans like to think of Germany's Nazism as a foreign evil, Adolf Hitler and his henchmen drew inspiration and guidance from U.S. race laws, as documented in a new book, reviewed by David Swanson.

By David Swanson

James Q. Whitman's new book is called *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*. It is understated and over-documented, difficult to argue with. No doubt some will try.

In cartoonish U.S. historical understanding, the United States is, was, and ever shall be a force for good, whereas Nazism arose in a distant, isolated land that lacked any connection to other societies. In a cartoonish reversal of that understanding, which would make a good straw man for critics of this book, U.S. policies have been identical to Nazism, which simply copied them. Obviously this is not the case.

In reality, as we have long known, the U.S. genocide of Native Americans was a source of inspiration in Nazi discussions of expanding to their east, even referring to Ukrainian Jews as "Indians." Camps for Native Americans helped inspire camps for Jews. Anti-Semites and eugenicists and racists in the U.S. helped inspire those in Germany, and vice versa.

U.S. bankers invested in the Nazis. U.S. weapons dealers armed them. Nazis borrowed from U.S. propaganda techniques developed in World War I. Admirers in the U.S. of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy attempted at least one coup against President Franklin Roosevelt. The U.S. refused to admit significant numbers of Jewish refugees or to help evacuate them from Germany. The State Department turned down Anne Frank's visa. The coast guard chased a ship of Jews away, sending them back to their fate. Et cetera. We have known all of this.

We have known how the U.S. treated African-Americans, Japanese-Americans and others at the time of World War II, how it experimented on Guatemalans even during the trials of Nazis for human experimentation, and continued to allow

human experimentation in the U.S. for many years. And so forth. The good versus evil cartoon was never real.

What Whitman's book adds to the complex story is an understanding of U.S. influences on the drafting of Nazi race laws. No, there were no U.S. laws in the 1930s establishing mass murder by poison gas in concentration camps. But neither were the Nazis looking for such laws. Nazis lawyers were looking for models of functioning laws on race, laws that effectively defined race in some way despite the obvious scientific difficulties, laws that restricted immigration, citizenship rights, and inter-racial marriage. In the early Twentieth Century, the recognized world leader in such things was the United States.

### **Troubling Parallels**

Whitman quotes from the transcripts of Nazi meetings, internal documents, and published articles and books. There is no doubt of the role that U.S. (state, not just federal) legal models played in the development of the Nuremberg Laws. The 1930s was a time, we should recall, when Jews in Germany and primarily African-Americans in the United States were lynched.

It was also a time when U.S. immigration laws used national origin as a means of discrimination – something Adolf Hitler praised in *Mein Kampf*. It was a time of de facto second-class citizenship in the United States for blacks, Chinese, Filipinos, Puerto Ricans, Japanese, and others. Thirty U.S. states had systems of laws banning interracial marriage of various sorts – something the Nazis could find nowhere else and studied in comprehensive detail, among other things for the examples of how the races were defined.

The U.S. had also shown how to conquer territories of undesirables, such as in the Philippines or Puerto Rico, and incorporate them into an empire but not give first-class citizenship rights to the residents. Up until 1930, a U.S. woman could lose her citizenship if she married a non-citizen Asian man.

The most radical of the Nazis, not the moderates, in their deliberations were the advocates for the U.S. models. But even they believed some of the U.S. systems simply went too far. The "one-drop" rule for defining a colored person was considered too harsh, for example, as opposed to defining a Jew as someone with three or more Jewish grandparents (how those grandparents were defined as Jewish is another matter; it was the willingness to ignore logic and science in all such laws that was most of the attraction).

The Nazis also defined as Jewish someone with only two Jewish grandparents who met other criteria. In this broadening the definition of a race to things like behavior and appearance, the U.S. laws were also a model.

One of many U.S. state laws that Nazis examined was this from Maryland: "All marriages between a white person and a Negro, or between a white person and a person of Negro descent, to the third generation, inclusive, or between a white person and a member of the Malay race or between a Negro and a member of the Malay race, or between a person of Negro descent to the third generation, inclusive, and a member of the Malay race . . . [skipping over many variations] . . . are forever prohibited . . . punished by imprisonment in the penitentiary for not less than eighteen months nor more than ten years."

### **Jim Crow Inspiration**

The Nazis, of course, examined and admired the Jim Crow laws of segregation as well but determined that such a regime would only work against an impoverished oppressed group. German Jews, they reasoned, were too rich and powerful to be segregated. Some of the Nazi lawyers in the 1930s, before Nazi policy had become mass murder, also found the extent of the U.S. segregation laws too extreme.

But Nazis admired racist statements from contemporary U.S. pundits and authorities back at least to Thomas Jefferson. Some argued that because segregation was de facto established in the U.S. South despite a Constitution mandating equality, this proved that segregation was a powerful, natural, and inevitable force. In other words, U.S. practice allowed Nazis to more easily think of their own desired practices in the early years of their madness as normal.

In 1935, a week after Hitler had proclaimed the Nuremberg Laws, a group of Nazi lawyers sailed to New York to study U.S. law. There, they were protested by Jews but hosted by the New York City Bar Association.

U.S. laws on miscegenation lasted until the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* ruling. Vicious and bigoted U.S. policies on immigration and refugees are alive and well today. Whitman examines the U.S. legal tradition, noting much that is to admire in it, but pointing to its political or democratic nature as something that the Nazis found preferable to the inflexibility of an independent judiciary.

To this day, the U.S. elects prosecutors, imposes Nazi-like habitual offender (or three-strikes-you're-out) sentences, uses the death penalty, employs jailhouse snitches' testimony in exchange for release, locks up more people than anywhere else on earth, and does so in an extremely racist manner. To this day, racism is alive in U.S. politics. What right-wing dictators admire in Donald Trump's nation is not all new and not all different from what fascists admired 80 or 90 years ago.

It's worth repeating the obvious: the United States was not and is not Nazi

Germany. And that is a very good thing. But what if a Wall Street coup had succeeded? What if the United States had been bombed flat and faced defeat from abroad while demonizing a domestic scapegoat? Who can really say it couldn't have or still couldn't happen here?

Whitman suggests that Germans do not write about foreign influence on Nazism so as not to appear to be shifting blame. For similar reasons many Germans refuse to oppose the slaughter of and mistreatment of Palestinians.

We can fault such positions as going overboard. But why is it that U.S. writers rarely write about U.S. influence on Nazism? Why, for that matter, do we not learn about U.S. crimes in the way that Germans learn about German crimes? It seems to me that it is U.S. culture that has gone the furthest overboard into a sea of denial and self-idolatry.

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## Populism v. Elites in French Election

**Exclusive:** Popular resistance to neoliberal economic policies gets its next test in Sunday's election in France with two populists from the Right and Left challenging two mainstream candidates, explains Andrew Spannaus.

By Andrew Spannaus

French voters will head to the polls this Sunday to elect a new president, in the next test for the electoral revolt that has swept across Europe and the United States over the past year. Marine Le Pen of the *Front National*, the right-wing nationalist party seeking to exploit the wave of popular protest that has buoyed outsider candidates throughout the West, aims to place first or second in order to participate in a run-off in two weeks to determine the next leader of France.

European political élites are hoping that the populist revolt will fall short, allowing a more moderate candidate such as the centrist Emmanuel Macron to win. This could change the narrative of the anti-establishment sentiment that has raised questions about the very survival of the supranational institutions of

the European Union (E.U.), under attack due to economic policies that have led to declining living standards for much of the population.

After the victory of Brexit in June of 2016, and the success of outsider candidates in the U.S. presidential elections, the European political class began 2017 wondering if the wave of discontent would produce upset victories in the elections scheduled in key countries such as the Netherlands, France and Germany, with Italy also preparing to hold a general election by early 2018 at the latest.

In the Netherlands, the right-wing, anti-immigrant Freedom Party led by Geert Wilders was thought to have the potential to be the top vote-getter overall, despite the expectation that the other major political forces would then refuse to enter into a coalition with Wilders, preventing him from forming a government. Just as he has for his entire political career, Wilders focused his 2017 campaign on a demagogic call to de-Islamize Holland, claiming it was time to take the country back from both immigrants and the E.U. bureaucracy, presented as a threat to the Dutch national identity.

On economics Wilders made an attempt to intersect the discontent of the middle and working classes, calling for the Netherlands to leave the European Union and promising lower healthcare costs, a lower retirement age, and better social assistance for the elderly. This, despite professing to be a follower of the free-market policies of Margaret Thatcher.

In the March 15 election the Freedom Party did poorly, winning only 13 percent of the vote, far behind the Dutch People's Party for Freedom and Democracy of incumbent Prime Minister Mark Rutte, that came in first with over 21 percent. Wilders was hurt significantly by Rutte's ability to exploit a diplomatic row with Turkish President Erdogan to show that he, too, was willing to be tough on Islam, thus stealing the protest candidate's thunder. Voters appeared to discount his attempt to act as an economic populist, preferring to follow the pleas from the establishment to reject the more extreme candidate and favor stability.

### **The French Test**

Next up is France, this weekend, where Marine Le Pen has attempted to soften the image of the *Front National*, associated with chauvinist positions since her father Jean-Marie founded the party in 1972. Marine has continued the calls to defend France's national identity, but has also taken her criticism of the European Union to a higher level, with a detailed critique of the economic globalization policies that have hurt the middle class and created hardship and uncertainty for various segments of the population.



France has a tradition of nationalism and skepticism towards supranational institutions. Indeed when called to vote on a proposed European Constitution in 2005, the French rejected it decisively (as did the Dutch that same year, by an even larger margin). This didn't stop European élites from moving forward with their plan for integration, but it's no surprise that the population is quick to criticize E.U. institutions for the negative effects of "deregulated globalization," as Le Pen calls it.

The *Front National* claims to be the alternative to the moneyed interests on the Right and the Left that have created a system that has "paralyzed the economy" and caused "mass unemployment". The F.N. has also been smart enough to present a specific proposal attacking the free-market precepts the E.U. institutions defend. The idea is to leave the Euro, but not to return to a floating exchange rate system with competitive devaluations and speculative attacks on currencies; they propose to go back to a stable exchange-rate regime similar to that of the Bretton Woods system in effect in the decades after World War II.

In Europe this was called the European Monetary System (EMS), with international accounts settled using the European Currency Unit (ECU) starting in 1979. In the late 1990s, the E.U. institutions transformed this into the single currency, which meant turning power over to a single central bank and demanding control over the macroeconomic policy of all of the participating countries.

The F.N. has also called for eliminating the independence of the French Central Bank, returning to national banking, with the goal of guaranteeing investments for the real economy rather than suffering under the policies of austerity. Not surprisingly, many economists claim these measures would never work, as they fear that such a change would open the floodgates to a wholesale revision of the dominant neoliberal policies in effect today.

Le Pen is set to do significantly better than Wilders did in the Netherlands, although her prospects seem to have dimmed a bit in recent weeks. There is no guarantee she will make it to the run-off, and even if she does, most observers are convinced that in that case the French would rally around her opponent to defeat her. Of course, some skepticism regarding such predictions is definitely in order, considering recent precedents. Le Pen has done a better job of tying her message to the economic discontent of the population, but it remains to be seen if that will be enough to "normalize" her with the French population.

### **A Left Alternative**

Another option disgruntled French voters are considering is Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a former Socialist who has founded his own party called "Unsubmissive France," whose appeal has grown rapidly in these elections. Mélenchon's role is similar

to that of Bernie Sanders in the U.S. primaries, as his populist, anti-globalization message is not that far from the rhetoric of Marine Le Pen, but without the xenophobia. Mélenchon is heavily critical of both NATO and the E.U. – although he does not call for leaving the Euro immediately – and he supports a significant expansion of social spending and state intervention in the economy.

Mélenchon isn't truly an outsider, given that he has been in the French political system for decades, even serving as Education Minister from 2000 to 2002, but the jump in his support reflects the openness to candidates who challenge the system. He has almost doubled his popularity compared to his last run for president in 2012, when he took in 11 percent of the votes. The most recent polls show him at 19 percent, not far from Macron and Le Pen, both at 22-23 percent, and essentially tied with the conservative Francois Fillon.

Thus out of the top four candidates, two are considered extreme, raising the specter of a run-off between anti-establishment figures that would upend the political situation in France, and send shockwaves throughout Europe as a whole. This has led current President Francois Hollande to intervene recently against the risk of populism, blaming the insurgent candidates of promoting "simplifications and falsifications."

If Le Pen or Mélenchon are in fact eliminated in the first round, or lose in a run-off, the pro-E.U. political class around Europe appears ready to celebrate the defeat of populism and the survival of the plan to move forward with European integration. Notwithstanding the black eye represented by the U.K.'s confirmation of the Brexit, it would appear that the anti-Euro, anti-immigrant attitudes that many feared would dominate this election season, are taking a back seat to more moderate and traditional political views.

Declaring victory over the populists could be a big mistake, however. It's one thing to rejoice over the failure of anti-foreigner sentiment as a driver of electoral politics; it's another entirely to believe that just because more extreme political movements are failing in this election season, Europe can also avoid the calls for changes in E.U. economic policy.

An attempt to close ranks, to continue to resist against legitimate popular protests against austerity, declines in living standards and widespread unemployment and job instability, would mean ignoring the deep-seated problems brought to the fore by the revolt of voters across the Western world.

The only way to truly win the battle against undesirable elements of European nationalism and populism, is to address the real issues raised by an economic policy that has weakened the middle class and caused most of the population to lose trust in the political and financial élites. In the absence of an effective

response to this problem, the protest is not only certain to return in the future, but may well be stronger and more unpredictable when it does.

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## Why Not a Probe of 'Israel-gate'?

**Special Report:** As Official Washington fumes about Russia-gate, Israel's far more significant political-influence-and-propaganda campaigns are ignored. No one dares suggest a probe of Israel-gate, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The other day, I asked a longtime Democratic Party insider who is working on the Russia-gate investigation which country interfered more in U.S. politics, Russia or Israel. Without a moment's hesitation, he replied, "Israel, of course."

Which underscores my concern about the hysteria raging across Official Washington about "Russian meddling" in the 2016 presidential campaign: There is no proportionality applied to the question of foreign interference in U.S. politics. If there were, we would have a far more substantive investigation of Israel-gate.

The problem is that if anyone mentions the truth about Israel's clout, the person is immediately smeared as "anti-Semitic" and targeted by Israel's extraordinarily sophisticated lobby and its many media/political allies for vilification and marginalization.

So, the open secret of Israeli influence is studiously ignored, even as presidential candidates prostrate themselves before the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump both appeared before AIPAC in 2016, with Clinton promising to take the U.S.-Israeli relationship "to the next level" – whatever that meant – and Trump vowing not to "pander" and then pandering like crazy.

Congress is no different. It has given Israel's controversial Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a record-tying three invitations to address joint sessions of Congress (matching the number of times British Prime Minister Winston Churchill

appeared). We then witnessed the Republicans and Democrats competing to see how often their members could bounce up and down and who could cheer Netanyahu the loudest, even when the Israeli prime minister was instructing the Congress to follow his position on Iran rather than President Obama's.

Israeli officials and AIPAC also coordinate their strategies to maximize political influence, which is derived in large part by who gets the lobby's largesse and who doesn't. On the rare occasion when members of Congress step out of line – and take a stand that offends Israeli leaders – they can expect a well-funded opponent in their next race, a tactic that dates back decades.

Well-respected members, such as Rep. Paul Findley and Sen. Charles Percy (both Republicans from Illinois), were early victims of the Israeli lobby's wrath when they opened channels of communication with the Palestine Liberation Organization in the cause of seeking peace. Findley was targeted and defeated in 1982; Percy in 1984.

Findley recounted his experience in a 1985 book, *They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby*, in which Findley called the lobby "the 700-pound gorilla in Washington." The book was harshly criticized in a New York Times review by Adam Clymer, who called it "an angry, one-sided book that seems often to be little more than a stringing together of stray incidents."

### **Enforced Silence**

Since then, there have been fewer and fewer members of Congress or other American politicians who have dared to speak out, judging that – when it comes to the Israeli lobby – discretion is the better part of valor. Today, many U.S. pols grovel before the Israeli government seeking a sign of favor from Prime Minister Netanyahu, almost like Medieval kings courting the blessings of the Pope at the Vatican.

During the 2008 campaign, then-Sen. Barack Obama, whom Netanyahu viewed with suspicion, traveled to Israel to demonstrate sympathy for Israelis within rocket-range of Gaza while steering clear of showing much empathy for the Palestinians.

In 2012, Republican nominee Mitt Romney tried to exploit the tense Obama-Netanyahu relationship by stopping in Israel to win a tacit endorsement from Netanyahu. The 2016 campaign was no exception with both Clinton and Trump stressing their love of Israel in their appearances before AIPAC.

Money, of course, has become the lifeblood of American politics – and American supporters of Israel have been particularly strategic in how they have exploited that reality.

One of Israel's most devoted advocates, casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, has poured millions of dollars in "dark money" into political candidates and groups that support Israel's interests. Adelson, who has advocated dropping a nuclear bomb inside Iran to coerce its government, is a Trump favorite having donated a record \$5 million to Trump's inaugural celebration.

Of course, many Israel-connected political donations are much smaller but no less influential. A quarter century ago, I was told how an aide to a Democratic foreign policy chairman, who faced a surprisingly tough race after redistricting, turned to the head of AIPAC for help and, almost overnight, donations were pouring in from all over the country. The chairman was most thankful.

### **The October Surprise Mystery**

Israel's involvement in U.S. politics also can be covert. For instance, the evidence is now overwhelming that the Israeli government of right-wing Prime Minister Menachem Begin played a key role in helping Ronald Reagan's campaign in 1980 strike a deal with Iran to frustrate President Jimmy Carter's efforts to free 52 American hostages before Election Day.

Begin despised Carter for the Camp David Accords that forced Israel to give back the Sinai to Egypt. Begin also believed that Carter was too sympathetic to the Palestinians and – if he won a second term – would conspire with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to impose a two-state solution on Israel.

Begin's contempt for Carter was not even a secret. In a 1991 book, *The Last Option*, senior Israeli intelligence and foreign policy official David Kimche explained Begin's motive for dreading Carter's reelection. Kimche said Israeli officials had gotten wind of "collusion" between Carter and Sadat "to force Israel to abandon her refusal to withdraw from territories occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, and to agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state."

Kimche continued, "This plan prepared behind Israel's back and without her knowledge must rank as a unique attempt in United States's diplomatic history of short-changing a friend and ally by deceit and manipulation."

But Begin recognized that the scheme required Carter winning a second term in 1980 when, Kimche wrote, "he would be free to compel Israel to accept a settlement of the Palestinian problem on his and Egyptian terms, without having to fear the backlash of the American Jewish lobby."

In a 1992 memoir, *Profits of War*, former Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe also noted that Begin and other Likud leaders held Carter in contempt.

“Begin loathed Carter for the peace agreement forced upon him at Camp David,” Ben-Menashe wrote. “As Begin saw it, the agreement took away Sinai from Israel, did not create a comprehensive peace, and left the Palestinian issue hanging on Israel’s back.”

So, in order to buy time for Israel to “change the facts on the ground” by moving Jewish settlers into the West Bank, Begin felt Carter’s reelection had to be prevented. A different president also presumably would give Israel a freer hand to deal with problems on its northern border with Lebanon.

Ben-Menashe was among a couple of dozen government officials and intelligence operatives who described how Reagan’s campaign, mostly through future CIA Director William Casey and past CIA Director George H.W. Bush, struck a deal in 1980 with senior Iranians who got promises of arms via Israel in exchange for keeping the hostages through the election and thus humiliating Carter. (The hostages were finally released on Jan. 20, 1981, after Reagan was sworn in as President.)

### **Discrediting History**

Though the evidence of the so-called October Surprise deal is far stronger than the current case for believing that Russia colluded with the Trump campaign, Official Washington and the mainstream U.S. media have refused to accept it, deeming it a “conspiracy theory.”

One of the reasons for the hostility directed against the 1980 case was the link to Israel, which did not want its hand in manipulating the election of a U.S. president to become an accepted part of American history. So, for instance, the Israeli government went to great lengths to discredit Ben-Menashe after he began to speak with reporters and to give testimony to the U.S. Congress.

When I was a Newsweek correspondent and first interviewed Ben-Menashe in 1990, the Israeli government initially insisted that he was an impostor, that he had no connection to Israeli intelligence.

However, when I obtained documentary evidence of Ben-Menashe’s work for a military intelligence unit, the Israelis admitted that they had lied but then insisted that he was just a low-level translator, a claim that was further contradicted by other documents showing that he had traveled widely around the world on missions to obtain weapons for the Israel-to-Iran arms pipeline.

Nevertheless, the Israeli government along with sympathetic American reporters and members of the U.S. Congress managed to shut down any serious investigation into the 1980 operation, which was, in effect, the prequel to Reagan’s Iran-Contra arms-for-hostages scandal of 1984-86. Thus, U.S. history was miswritten.

[For more details, see Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative; Secrecy & Privilege*; and *Trick or Treason*.]

Looking back over the history of U.S.-Israeli relations, it is clear that Israel exercised significant influence over U.S. presidents since its founding in 1948, but the rise of Israel's right-wing Likud Party in the 1970s – led by former Jewish terrorists Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir – marked a time when Israel shed any inhibitions about interfering directly in U.S. politics.

Much as Begin and Shamir engaged in terror attacks on British officials and Palestinian civilians during Israel's founding era, the Likudniks who held power in 1980 believed that the Zionist cause trumped normal restraints on their actions. In other words, the ends justified the means.

In the 1980s, Israel also mounted spying operations aimed at the U.S. government, including those of intelligence analyst Jonathan Pollard, who fed highly sensitive documents to Israel and – after being caught and spending almost three decades in prison – was paroled and welcomed as a hero inside Israel.

### **A History of Interference**

But it is true that foreign interference in U.S. politics is as old as the American Republic. In the 1790s, French agents – working with the Jeffersonians – tried to rally Americans behind France's cause in its conflict with Great Britain. In part to frustrate the French operation, the Federalists passed the Alien and Sedition Acts.

In the Twentieth Century, Great Britain undertook covert influence operations to ensure U.S. support in its conflicts with Germany, while German agents unsuccessfully sought the opposite.

So, the attempts by erstwhile allies and sometimes adversaries to move U.S. foreign policy in one direction or another is nothing new, and the U.S. government engages in similar operations in countries all over the world, both overtly and covertly.

It was the CIA's job for decades to use propaganda and dirty tricks to ensure that pro-U.S. politicians were elected or put in power in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa, pretty much everywhere the U.S. government perceived some interest. After the U.S. intelligence scandals of the 1970s, however, some of that responsibility was passed to other organizations, such as the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

NED, USAID and various “non-governmental organizations” (NGOs) finance activists, journalists and other operatives to undermine political leaders who are deemed to be obstacles to U.S. foreign policy desires.

In particular, NED has been at the center of efforts to flip elections to U.S.-backed candidates, such as in Nicaragua in 1990, or to sponsor “color revolutions,” which typically organize around some color as the symbol for mass demonstrations. Ukraine – on Russia’s border – has been the target of two such operations, the Orange Revolution in 2004, which helped install anti-Russian President Viktor Yushchenko, and the Maidan ouster of elected pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014.

NED president Carl Gershman, a neoconservative who has run NED since its founding in 1983, openly declared that Ukraine was “the biggest prize” in September 2013 – just months before the Maidan protests – as well as calling it an important step toward ousting Russian President Vladimir Putin. In 2016, Gershman called directly for regime change in Russia.

### **The Neoconservatives**

Another key issue related to Israeli influence inside the United States is the role of the neocons, a political movement that emerged in the 1970s as a number of hawkish Democrats migrated to the Republican Party as a home for more aggressive policies to protect Israel and take on the Soviet Union and Arab states.

In some European circles, the neocons are described as “Israel’s American agents,” which may somewhat overstate the direct linkage between Israel and the neocons although a central tenet of neocon thinking is that there must be no daylight between the U.S. and Israel. The neocons say U.S. politicians must stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel even if that means the Americans sidling up to the Israelis rather than any movement the other way.

Since the mid-1990s, American neocons have worked closely with Benjamin Netanyahu. Several prominent neocons (including former Assistant Defense Secretary Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David Wurmser, Meyrav Wurmser and Robert Loewenberg) advised Netanyahu’s 1996 campaign and urged a new strategy for “securing the realm.” Essentially, the idea was to replace negotiations with the Palestinians and Arab states with “regime change” for governments that were viewed as troublesome to Israel, including Iraq and Syria.

By 1998, the Project for the New American Century (led by neocons William Kristol and Robert Kagan) was pressuring President Bill Clinton to invade Iraq, a plan that was finally put in motion in 2003 under President George W. Bush.



But the follow-on plans to go after Syria and Iran were delayed because the Iraq War turned into a bloody mess, killing some 4,500 American soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. Bush could not turn to phase two until near the end of his presidency and then was frustrated by a U.S. intelligence estimate concluding that Iran was not working on a nuclear bomb (which was to be the pretext for a bombing campaign).

Bush also could pursue “regime change” in Syria only as a proxy effort of subversion, rather than a full-scale U.S. invasion. President Barack Obama escalated the Syrian proxy war in 2011 with the support of Israel and its strange-bedfellow allies in Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni-ruled Gulf States, which hated Syria’s government because it was allied with Shiite-ruled Iran – and Sunnis and Shiites have been enemies since the Seventh Century. Israel insists that the U.S. take the Sunni side, even if that puts the U.S. in bed with Al Qaeda.

But Obama dragged his heels on a larger U.S. military intervention in Syria and angered Netanyahu further by negotiating with Iran over its nuclear program rather than bomb-bomb-bombing Iran.

### **Showing the Love**

Obama’s perceived half-hearted commitment to Israeli interests explained Romney’s campaign 2012 trip to seek Netanyahu’s blessings. Even after winning a second term, Obama sought to appease Netanyahu by undertaking a three-day trip to Israel in 2013 to show his love.

Still, in 2015, when Obama pressed ahead with the Iran nuclear agreement, Netanyahu went over the President’s head directly to Congress where he was warmly received, although the Israeli prime minister ultimately failed to sink the Iran deal.

In Campaign 2016, both Clinton and Trump wore their love for Israel on their sleeves, Clinton promising to take the relationship to “the next level” (a phrase that young couples often use when deciding to go from heavy petting to intercourse). Trump reminded AIPAC that he had a Jewish grandchild and vowed to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Both also bristled with hatred toward Iran, repeating the popular falsehood that “Iran is the principal source of terrorism” when it is Saudi Arabia and other Sunni sheikdoms that have been the financial and military supporters of Al Qaeda and Islamic State, the terror groups most threatening to Europe and the United States.

By contrast to Israel’s long history of playing games with U.S. politics, the

Russian government stands accused of trying to undermine the U.S. political process recently by hacking into emails of the Democratic National Committee – revealing the DNC’s improper opposition to Sen. Bernie Sanders’s campaign – and of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta – disclosing the contents of Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street and pay-to-play aspects of the Clinton Foundation – and sharing that information with the American people via WikiLeaks.

Although WikiLeaks denies getting the two batches of emails from the Russians, the U.S. intelligence community says it has high confidence in its conclusions about Russian meddling and the mainstream U.S. media treats the allegations as flat-fact.

The U.S. intelligence community also has accused the Russian government of raising doubts in the minds of Americans about their political system by having RT, the Russian-sponsored news network, hold debates for third-party candidates (who were excluded from the two-party Republican-Democratic debates) and by having RT report on protests such as Occupy Wall Street and issues such as “fracking.”

The major U.S. news media and Congress seem to agree that the only remaining question is whether evidence can be adduced showing that the Trump campaign colluded in this Russian operation. For that purpose, a number of people associated with the Trump campaign are to be hauled before Congress and made to testify on whether or not they are Russian agents.

Meanwhile, The Washington Post, The New York Times and other establishment-approved outlets are working with major technology companies on how to marginalize independent news sources and to purge “Russian propaganda” (often conflated with “fake news”) from the Internet.

It seems that no extreme is too extreme to protect the American people from the insidious Russians and their Russia-gate schemes to sow doubt about the U.S. political process. But God forbid if anyone were to suggest an investigation of Israel-gate.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in print here or as an e-book (from Amazon and barnesandnoble.com).**

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# Russia-Bashing Helps Wall Street Democrats

National Democrats have used hyperbolic Russia-bashing to shield themselves from blame for Hillary Clinton's defeat and to block progressives from pulling the party away from Wall Street, writes Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

After Hillary Clinton's devastating loss nearly six months ago, her most powerful Democratic allies feared losing control of the party. Efforts to lip-synch economic populism while remaining closely tied to Wall Street had led to a catastrophic defeat. In the aftermath, the party's progressive base – personified by Bernie Sanders – was in position to start flipping over the corporate game board.

Aligned with Clinton, the elites of the Democratic Party needed to change the subject. Clear assessments of the national ticket's failures were hazardous to the status quo within the party. So were the groundswells of opposition to unfair economic privilege. So were the grassroots pressures for the party to become a genuine force for challenging big banks, Wall Street and overall corporate power.

In short, the Democratic Party's anti-Bernie establishment needed to reframe the discourse in a hurry. And – in tandem with mass media – it did. The reframing could be summed up in two words: Blame Russia.

By early winter, the public discourse was going sideways – much to the benefit of party elites. The meme of blaming Russia and Vladimir Putin for the election of Donald Trump effectively functioned to let the Wall Street-friendly leadership of the national Democratic Party off the hook. Meanwhile, serious attempts to focus on the ways that wounds to democracy in the United States have been self-inflicted – whether via the campaign finance system or the purging of minorities from voter rolls or any number of other systemic injustices – were largely set aside.

Fading from scrutiny was the establishment that continued to dominate the Democratic Party's superstructure. At the same time, its devotion to economic elites was undiminished. As Bernie Sanders told a reporter on the last day of February: "Certainly there are some people in the Democratic Party who want to maintain the status quo. They would rather go down with the Titanic so long as they have first-class seats."

Amid great luxury and looming catastrophe, the party's current hierarchy has invested enormous political capital in depicting Vladimir Putin as an unmitigated arch villain. Relevant history was irrelevant, to be ignored or denied.

### **'An Evil Empire'**

With dutiful conformity from most Democrats in Congress, the party elites doubled, tripled and quadrupled down on the emphatic claim that Moscow is the capital of, by any other name, an evil empire. Rather than just calling for what's needed – a truly independent investigation into allegations that the Russian government interfered with the U.S. election – the party line became hyperbolic and unmoored from the available evidence.

Given their vehement political investment in demonizing Russia's President Putin, Democratic leaders are oriented to seeing the potential of detente with Russia as counterproductive in terms of their electoral strategy for 2018 and 2020. It's a calculus that boosts the risks of nuclear annihilation, given the very real dangers of escalating tensions between Washington and Moscow.

Along the way, top party officials seem bent on returning to a kind of pre-Bernie-campaign doldrums. The new chair of the Democratic National Committee, Tom Perez, can't bring himself to say that the power of Wall Street is antithetical to the interests of working people. That reality came to painful light this week during a live appearance on national television.

During a 10-minute joint interview along with Bernie Sanders on Tuesday night, Perez was a font of exactly the kind of trite empty slogans and worn-out platitudes that oiled the engines of the dismal Clinton campaign.

While Sanders was forthright, Perez was evasive. While Sanders talked about systemic injustice, Perez fixated on Trump. While Sanders pointed to a way forward for realistic and far-reaching progressive change, Perez hung onto a rhetorical formula that expressed support for victims of the economic order without acknowledging the existence of victimizers.

In an incisive article published by *The Nation* magazine, Robert Borosage wrote last week: "For all the urgent pleas for unity in the face of Trump, the party establishment has always made it clear that they mean unity under their banner. That's why they mobilized to keep the leader of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Representative Keith Ellison, from becoming head of the DNC. It's why the knives are still out for Sanders and those who supported him."

While Bernie Sanders is hardly a reliable opponent of U.S. war policies, he is significantly more critical of military intervention than the Democratic Party

leaders who often champion it. Borosage noted that the party establishment is locked into militaristic orthodoxies that favor continuing to inflict the kind of disasters that the United States has brought to Iraq, Libya and other countries: “Democrats are in the midst of a major struggle to decide what they stand for and who they represent. Part of that is the debate over a bipartisan interventionist foreign policy that has so abjectly failed.”

For the Democratic Party’s most hawkish wing – dominant from the top down and allied with Clinton’s de facto neocon approach to foreign policy – the U.S. government’s April 6 cruise missile attack on a Syrian airfield was an indication of real leverage for more war. That attack on a close ally of Russia showed that incessant Russia-baiting of Trump can get gratifying military results for the Democratic elites who are undaunted in their advocacy of regime change in Syria and elsewhere.

The politically motivated missile attack on Syria showed just how dangerous it is to keep Russia-baiting Trump, giving him political incentive to prove how tough he is on Russia after all. What’s at stake includes the imperative of preventing a military clash between the world’s two nuclear superpowers. But the corporate hawks at the top of the national Democratic Party have other priorities.

**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*.**

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## Trump Sends the World Muddled Messages

Moving from Tweets to Tomahawk missiles, President Trump enjoys sending messages with exclamation points, but those messages often are muddled and thus dangerous, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The Trump administration’s miscommunication about the whereabouts of a naval strike force that includes the aircraft carrier Carl Vinson underscores the emptiness of the administration’s tough-sounding but vague rhetoric about putting states “on notice” and ending eras of “patience.”

The episode with the Vinson – which was sailing south for an exercise with the

Australians as the administration was suggesting publicly that it was sailing north toward Korea – will lead additional foreign observers to conclude that the muscular talk is just talk. This is on top of what was already a severe international credibility problem with a president who has established a well-deserved reputation for dishonesty.

All of this is bad enough, but it obscures further problems entailed in Donald Trump's use of military force to send messages to foreign regimes. This form of messaging, as illustrated by the cruise missile strike in Syria, plays so much to Trump's inclinations that we are likely to see many more instances of it. It is an emphatic and dramatic gesture that may be grounded, as the strike in Syria evidently was, more in emotion than in any careful thought about long-term strategy. Sort of like a tweet with lots of exclamation points.

Following the embarrassment involving the Vinson, Trump's advisers may lean more than before toward favoring actual use of force, lest the empty rhetoric seem even more empty. But as long as either the advisers or the President himself are disinclined to become deeply committed in any one situation, most of the use of force will be rationalized as the sending of "messages."

Probably the message from the strike in Syria that the White House valued most was one sent to domestic audiences. The missile strike won support across a wide part of the American political spectrum. The action could be presented as a break from Barack Obama, amid a plethora of international problems that the current administration has no better ideas or options for solving than Obama did.

The missile strike was especially cheered by neoconservatives who see any use of military force against a disliked regime as one more step toward neocon recapture of control over U.S. foreign policy. But as for sending messages to foreigners and foreign states, there is no indication that the Trump White House fully understands the principles involved in making that kind of messaging effective – principles that the strategist Thomas Schelling explained half a century ago.

### **Inarticulate Bombing**

There is, first of all, the question of what exactly is the message. Bombs and missiles are not articulate things; they are incapable of explaining objectives, limits, red lines, or anything else that the users of them may want to communicate. Trump's cascade of flip-flops, and the vague nature of the rhetoric about putting people on notice and running out of patience, do not help in the communication.

The best face-value interpretation of the attack in Syria is that it had to do with punishing and deterring use of chemical weapons. But if the purpose was to enforce an international norm and international law about use of chemical weapons, persuading anyone of that was made more difficult by the lack of any effort to obtain international sanction, especially through the United Nations Security Council, before a retaliatory strike.

Moreover, other bellicose administration rhetoric about Syria has sounded much broader. And indeed, casualties from chemical weapons have been a tiny fraction of overall casualties – including civilian suffering inflicted by the regime’s military operations – in the Syrian war. So if it really was just about chemicals, how much good did any message-sending strike do? The Syrian regime evidently was not deterred from promptly attacking again the same neighborhood (with conventional weapons) that was the scene of the chemical incident. [For more on the uncertainty about what happened at Khan Sheikhoun, see Consortiumnews.com’s “[NYT Mocks Skepticism on Syria-Sarin Claims.](#)”]

### **Mixed-up Messaging**

Messages – like names, and unlike sticks and stones—don’t necessarily hurt very much. A message-sending military attack can actually help the regime or group that is targeted, by giving it an opportunity to demonstrate to its constituencies how it is surviving the attacks of, standing up to, and striking back against the American superpower.

And it does so with the added benefit of riding any popular resentment against foreign, especially U.S., intervention and resentment against any casualties inflicted by foreign military operations.

A key, per Schelling, to making a message-sending action effective is to link it in the minds of the targeted regime to the prospect of more destructive action if certain demands or standards are not met. One way of achieving such linkage is for the message-sending operation to carry, by its very nature, the risk of escalation into something bigger and more destructive.

The missile strike in Syria did involve a danger of escalation, especially if it had killed any Russians, but there is no indication that the Trump administration wants a military clash with Russia (although the administration’s current posture toward Russia is yet another topic infected by [muddled messaging](#)).

What is most important in the end is not only the message and the risk of escalation but a belief in the minds of the leaders of the other state that our own leaders consider the issue at stake to be so important that they are willing

to fight a bigger war over it. But that is not true of the civil war in Syria. The United States simply does not have that kind of stake in its outcome, which is why the Obama administration wisely did not immerse the United States in that civil war.

With North Korea, the prospect of nuclear weapons atop long-range missiles represents high stakes, but so do all the other dimensions of that problem, including the danger of sparking a new Korean War, that have made the issue a difficult puzzle for all the U.S. administrations that have had to deal with it.

Once the *Vinson* finally gets to the vicinity of Korea, as we are told that it will, what exactly could its aircraft do that would make sense given this panoply of U.S. interests and hazards to those interests? It is hard to answer that question, and it is hard also for Kim Jong-un to answer it.

Underlying not just the Trump administration's attitudes but also a larger discourse in the United States about military message-sending is the recurrent tendency, especially among those cheering neocons, to believe that lashing out militarily anywhere in the world buys the United States some kind of leverage or influence with regard to issues anywhere else in the world. It doesn't.

That is simply not how international reputations and credibility work. What matters is the strength of interest that the United States has in any one issue, along with its ability to communicate to others how strong that interest is.

Donald Trump may not be a neocon, but he clearly is inclined toward the lashing-out-wins-points approach rather than careful issue-by-issue consideration of where U.S. interests do and do not lie. And the lashing out also satisfies whatever internal demons sustain his eruptive nature. He already had Twitter for sending out angry messages.

Now he also has cruise missiles and other military hardware for sending such messages. His use of the latter may show some of the impulsiveness he habitually shows with the former.

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is author most recently of *Why America Misunderstands the World*. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)**

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# Why Hillary Clinton Really Lost

**Exclusive:** An insider book on Campaign 2016 reveals a paranoid Hillary Clinton who spied on staff emails after losing in 2008 and carried her political dysfunction into her loss to Donald Trump, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

An early insider account of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, entitled *Shattered*, reveals a paranoid presidential candidate who couldn't articulate why she wanted to be President and who oversaw an overconfident and dysfunctional operation that failed to project a positive message or appeal to key voting groups.

Okay, I realize that people who have been watching Rachel Maddow and other MSNBC programs – as well as reading The New York Times and The Washington Post for the past four months – “know” that Clinton ran a brilliant campaign that was only derailed because of “Russian meddling.” But this insider account from reporters Jonathan Allen and Annie Parnes describes something else.

As The Wall Street Journal review notes, the book “narrates the petty bickering, foolish reasoning and sheer arrogance of a campaign that was never the sure thing that its leader and top staffers assumed. ... Mr. Allen and Ms. Parnes stress two essential failures of the campaign, the first structural, the second political. The campaign's structure, the authors write, was an ‘unholy mess, fraught with tangled lines of authority, petty jealousies, and no sense of greater purpose.’”

The book portrays Hillary Clinton as distant from her campaign staff, accessible primarily through her close aide, Huma Abedin, and thus creating warring factions within her bloated operation.

According to the Journal's review by Barton Swaim, the book's authors suggest that this chaos resulted from “the fact that Mrs. Clinton didn't know why she wanted to be president. At one point no fewer than 10 senior aides were working on her campaign announcement speech, not one had a clear understanding of why Americans should cast their vote for Mrs. Clinton and not someone else. The speech, when she finally delivered it, was a flop – aimless, boring, devoid of much beyond bromides.”

The book cites a second reason for Clinton's dismal performance – her team's reliance on analytics rather than on reaching out to real voters and their concerns.

There is also an interesting tidbit regarding Clinton's attitude toward the privacy of her staff's emails. "After losing to Mr. Obama in the protracted 2008 primary," the Journal's review says, Clinton "was convinced that she had lost because some staffers – she wasn't sure who – had been disloyal. So she 'instructed a trusted aide to access the campaign's server and download the [email] messages sent and received by top staffers.'"

### **Nixonian Paranoia**

In other words, Clinton – in some Nixonian fit of paranoia – violated the privacy of her senior advisers in her own mole hunt, a revelation that reflects on her own self-described "mistake" to funnel her emails as Secretary of State through a private server rather than a government one. As the Journal's review puts it: "she didn't want anyone reading her emails the way she was reading those of her 2008 staffers."

But there is even a greater irony in this revelation because of the current complaint from Clinton and her die-hard supporters that Russia sabotaged her campaign by releasing emails via WikiLeaks from the DNC, which described how party leaders had torpedoed the campaign of Clinton's rival for the nomination, Sen. Bernie Sanders, and other emails from her campaign chairman John Podesta, revealing the contents of Clinton's paid speeches to Wall Street banks and some pay-to-play features of the Clinton Foundation.

WikiLeaks has denied that it received the emails from Russia – and President Obama's outgoing intelligence chiefs presented no real evidence to support the allegations – but the conspiracy theory of the Trump campaign somehow colluding with the Russians to sink Clinton has become a groupthink among many Democrats as well as the mainstream U.S. media.

So, rather than conducting a serious autopsy on how Clinton and the national Democratic Party kicked away a winnable election against the buffoonish Donald Trump, national Democrats have created a Zombie explanation for their failures, blaming their stunning defeat on the Russians.

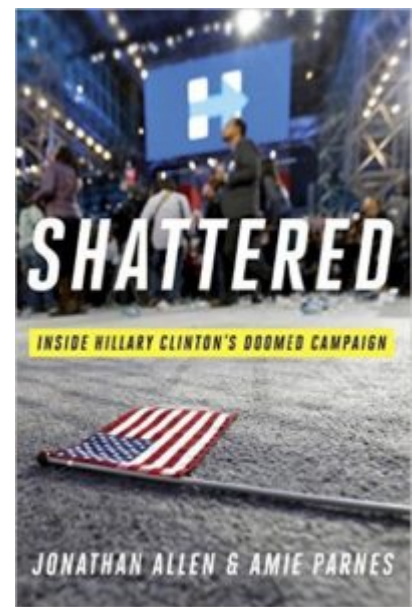
This hysteria over Russia-gate has consumed the first several months of the Trump presidency – badgering the Trump administration into a more belligerent posture toward nuclear-armed Russia – but leaving little incentive for the Democrats to assess what they need to do to appeal to working-class voters who chose Trump's empty-headed populism over Clinton's cold-hearted calculations.

The current conventional wisdom among the mainstream media, many Democrats and even some progressives is that the only way to explain the victory by pussy-grabbing Trump is to complain about an intervention by the evil Russians. Maybe

Maddow and the other Russia-did-it conspiracy theorists will now denounce *Shattered* as just one more example of “Russian disinformation.”

### **The Times’ View**

The New York Times’ [review](#) by Michiko Kakutani also notes how *Shattered* details Clinton’s dysfunction, but the newspaper inserted a phrase about “Russian meddling,” presumably to avoid a head-exploding cognitive dissonance among its readers who have been inundated over the past four months by the Times’ obsession on Russia! Russia! Russia!



However, the Times’ review still focuses on the book’s larger message: “In fact, the portrait of the Clinton campaign that emerges from these pages is that of a Titanic-like disaster: an epic fail made up of a series of perverse and often avoidable missteps by an out-of-touch candidate and her strife-ridden staff that turned ‘a winnable race’ into ‘another iceberg-seeking campaign ship.’”

“It’s the story of a wildly dysfunctional and ‘spirit-crushing’ campaign that embraced a flawed strategy (based on flawed data) and that failed, repeatedly, to correct course. A passive-aggressive campaign that neglected to act on warning flares sent up by Democratic operatives on the ground in crucial swing states, and that ignored the advice of the candidate’s husband, former President Bill Clinton, and other Democratic Party elders, who argued that the campaign needed to work harder to persuade undecided and ambivalent voters (like working-class whites and millennials), instead of focusing so insistently on turning out core supporters.”

So, perhaps this new book about how Hillary Clinton really lost Campaign 2016 will enable national Democrats to finally start charting a course correction before the party slams another Titanic-style campaign into another iceberg.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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