

Trump Resumes Abuse of 'Terror List'

The U.S. government has long abused its "terrorism list" by including disfavored nations while leaving off "allies" implicated in 9/11 and other terror attacks, a practice President Trump has resumed, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

President Trump's placement of North Korea on the official U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism continues a manipulation, by several administrations, of this list for reasons other than terrorism. Neither an earlier removal of North Korea from this list (by the George W. Bush administration in 2008) nor Trump's return of North Korea to the list this week had anything to do with any changes in North Korea's conduct as far as terrorism is concerned.

The Bush administration's delisting was part of an unsuccessful effort to do something about Pyongyang's nuclear program. The Trump administration has seized upon relisting is supposedly another form of pressure on North Korea, with the concern again centered on nuclear weapons.

Rationales being voiced for the newest move show what a stretch it is from what are supposed to be the criteria, defined by statute, for placement on the state sponsor list. Some defenders of the move refer to North Korean actions three decades ago.

Pyongyang really was doing international terrorism in the 1980s, mainly aimed against South Korea. It was responsible for a bomb in Rangoon that killed several visiting members of the South Korean cabinet in 1983. It planted a bomb in a Korean Air civilian airliner in 1987, killing more than a hundred. But North Korea got out of international terrorism in subsequent years, with the hope of gaining some degree of international political rehabilitation. In terms of the legal standards for remaining on the state sponsor list, the delisting of North Korea in 2008 was overdue.

A more recent North Korean-perpetrated incident was the assassination in Malaysia this February of Kim Jong Nam, the estranged half-brother of North Korean ruler Kim Jong Un. This killing, being performed clandestinely on foreign soil, technically meets the definition of international terrorism. And it is yet another example of repugnant and brutal behavior by the Pyongyang regime. But it had nothing to do with any campaign of terrorism that poses a threat to anyone other than members of Kim Jong Un's own family or regime whom he perceives as a possible threat to his rule.

Past Practice

Other countries besides North Korea have been the subject of misuse of the state sponsor list. The Reagan administration took Iraq off the list as part of its tilt toward Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War. The George H.W. Bush administration returned Iraq to the list after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Neither move had to do with any change in Iraqi behavior regarding international terrorism.

Cuba remained on the list, for reasons involving anti-Castro domestic U.S. politics, long after it had ceased doing anything that could be construed as international terrorism.

Barack Obama made more of an honest effort than most other U.S. presidents to respect the legal criteria associated with the state sponsor list. The belated removal of Cuba from the list was part of this. The Obama administration reportedly considered relisting North Korea but refrained because it could not identify a sound legal rationale for doing so.

Other administrations' misuse of the state sponsor list has been a sloppy way of expressing disapproval of regimes they didn't like. The sloppiness hides how such regimes may exhibit multiple forms of objectionable conduct, each posing its own problems and each of which can be addressed through different means. Blurring everything together into a miasma of undifferentiated rogue state behavior undermines the possibility of using diplomacy and carefully crafted incentives to ameliorate any one form of objectionable conduct, be it terrorism or weapons proliferation or something else, even if we can't solve every problem we have with a regime.

Misusing the list of state sponsors of terrorism sends the message that the United States does not care all that much about terrorism itself. It undermines the credibility of efforts that really are focused on countering terrorism. Most fundamentally, it diminishes the incentive of the targeted regime to get out or stay out of international terrorism. If the North Korean regime sees that it is going to be branded a state sponsor of terrorism regardless of what it is doing terrorism-wise, it has that much less disincentive against sliding back into the reprehensible things it was doing in the 1980s.

This is one form of poor statesmanship in which Trump is not alone. His move regarding the state sponsor list does indicate a shortfall in careful and creative thinking about ways to counter the North Korean nuclear challenge.

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Denying the Imperium of Death

The tens of thousands of American deaths from drug overdoses are a measure of the hopeless desperation left behind by the soul-starving socio-economic system of late-stage capitalism, writes poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

According to a nationwide study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a greater number of U.S. Americans died (approximately 65,000) from drug overdoses last year than were killed during the course of the Vietnam War.

All part and parcel of capitalism's war against life itself. The emotional and physical pain, anxiety, and depression inflicted by the trauma inherent to a system sustained by perpetual exploitation has proven to be too much for a sizeable number of human beings to endure thus their need to self-medicate.

The root of addiction is trauma. The soul of the nation is a casualty of war. There is not an Arlington Cemetery for these fallen, no hagiographic ceremonies will be performed over their graves nor statues erected in memoriam. Their ghosts will howl through the long, dark night of national denial. Listen to their wailing. It is an imprecatory prayer. A curse and augury ... that admonishes, our fate and the fate of the nation will converge ... as the nation will stagger, keening in lament, to the abyss.

The solution: Within each of us swells a deathless song. Powerful. Resonate. Piercing. A song, miraculous of influence, plangent with the force to seize back your soul from the death-besotted spirit of the age. Let it rise from within you. Notice: how flocks of empire's death birds scatter like ashes in the wind.

Yet it will not be possible to navigate around the cultural deathscapes; we must walk through it and chronicle its serial affronts to our humanity: "You have to see that the buildings are anorexic, you have to see that the language is schizogenic, that 'normalcy' is manic, and medicine and business are paranoid."

– James Hillman

Try this: Simply stand in the isle of a corporate, Big Box chain store or in the parking lot of a strip mall that squats, hideous, on some soul-defying, U.S. Interstate highway and allow yourself to feel the emptiness and desperation extant. The tormented landscape, besieged by an ad hoc assemblage of late capitalist structures, emporiums of usurped longing, reflects the desperate, rapacious nature of late capitalist imperium.

Compounding the pathos, the forces in play impose a colonizing effect upon the mind; therefore, a large percent of the afflicted have lost the ability to detect the hyper-entropic system's ravaging effects. Stranded among the commercial come-ons and hyper-authoritarianism inherent to late stage capitalism's imperium of death, the human psyche, like the biosphere of our planet, subjected, at present, to humankind-wrought ecocide, has begun to display the terrible beauty of a nightmare.

Internal weather has grown increasingly chaotic: the earth's oceans and seas are rising; wildfires rage; drought scorches the earth. And conditions will grow increasingly inhospitable in regard to the flourishing of inner life, personal and collective thus will continue, and at accelerating rates, to be reflected in the web of phenomena we know as human culture.

The Decimated Working Class

Growing up in a working-class social milieu, as I did, I am confronted, more and more, by the news of the large number of men I grew up with who are dying in their 50s. As of late, when I contemplate the fact, I am forced to pause and seek solitude because my eyes become scalded with tears. I've known, over the years, hundreds of human beings, born into and ensnared by the crime against humanity known as poverty, broken by the culture of greed and social degradation, and blamed by the clueless and the callous for the tragic trajectory in which impersonal fate and the wounding culture, by no fault of their own, has placed them.

Thus arrive: Tears of rage; tears of outrage. Tears unloosed by passion and tempered by compassion ... fall. If poverty was not so profitable for the greed-head elite, both punitive-minded conservatives and affluence-ensconced liberals alike, the situation would be addressed and rectified. The cause of the reprehensible situation, it should go without saying, is not the fault of the poor but the poverty of spirit at the core of capitalism.

Truth is the system, a hierarchy of ghouls, is maintained by harvesting the corpses of the powerless, by means of imperial slaughter and domestic, economic exploitation. Deep down, we know it. The system's psychopathic beneficiaries, in particular, are aware of the reality. In fact, their desiccated hearts require being irrigated by blood. From the evidence of their actions, it appears they revel in the knowledge of the damage they incur. They appear to believe they will enter the golden dominion of heaven by climbing a mountain of corpses. It is time we dragged them back down to earth and subjected them to our earth-borne fury.

Or so goes my own (powerless) revelry. Of course, we the powerless, at this

point, have been left with scant little but a dreaming heart. When we allow heartless power to subdue and usurp our longings, we languish. Thus many die of a broken spirit. The world itself can appear to be depleted of mercy. In turn, all too many begin to mirror the malevolence of the upper castes thereby losing their own measure of mercy.

Hostility directed at the poor is the shopworn, demagogic sleight-of-hand trick used to distract from realities such as: Every McMansion and high-end luxury high-rise constructed creates multitudes of the homeless. Every low pay, no benefits, no future Mcjob serves to decimate an individual, heart and spirit. Moreover the beneficiaries of the system promote the lie that shame should be the exclusive dominion of those broken by their system, a system, which is, in essence, a form of government-sanctioned gangsterism, by which they, the ruthless few, and they alone, benefit.

As a result, in an age of denial and duplicity, change tends to arrive violently. Reactionary, racist soreheads, brandishing Tiki torches, construct an ambulatory klavern in the hateful night. Maledictory tweets rise and roil the imperial air like a nimbus of locust. Unmoored from their sense of humanity by lashing angst and alienation, gunmen, in acts of warped libido, raise assault rifles and kill with no more connection to the strangers they slaughter than do stateside-deployed pilots of the empire's predator drones.

A Needed Paradigm Shift

We human beings, as a species, have arrived at a profound point of demarcation: paradigm shift or perish. Yet, and the fact is mortifying in its implications, there is not a sign of the emergence, even an incipient one, of a viable resistance to the present order. Weekend marches and boutique protests might promote (ephemeral) feelings of affinity and jack the adrenal systems of participants. But the events have proven woefully inefficacious in regard to the rising and raging tides of adversity we face.

(In addition, monopolist, internet corporations, such as Google, Facebook and Twitter, at the behest of U.S. governmental forces, are further marginalizing the already almost vaporous left by means of presence-abridging algorithms of leftist websites and outright censorship of social media content. Dissenting voices are being ghosted into oblivion.)

An aura of bleakness prevails. Hope seems a fool's palliative. The victims of drug overdoses and, in general, the large and rising, without precedent, untimely deaths of middle-aged, laboring-class people should be regarded as canaries in the coal mines of the late-stage capitalist order, an augury of calamities that loom due to the exponentially increasing harm being inflicted

upon both humanity and environmental forces crucial to sustaining the continued viability of the human race.

“Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.” C.G. Jung

Although it does not have to be the case. If reality is met head-on, if empire, external and its inner analog, is renounced and challenged, then a liberation staged by the heart’s partisans can begin, thereby freeing up a great amount of acreage – a fructifying landscape – wherein both the earth’s ecosystem and the architecture of human desire can begin to co-exist and cross-pollinate thus a crucial re-visioning of oneself and the culture can begin.

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How Syrian-Nuke Evidence Was Faked

Exclusive: In joining Israel and the White House selling military intervention in Syria, the CIA and international inspectors hid key evidence that would undermine the case, says Gareth Porter in a second part of a two-part series.

By Gareth Porter

When Yousry Abushady studied the highly unusual May 2008 CIA video on a Syrian nuclear reactor that was allegedly under construction when Israeli jet destroyed it seven months earlier, the senior specialist on North Korean nuclear reactors on the International Atomic Energy Agency’s staff knew that something was very

wrong.



Abushady quickly determined that the CIA had been seriously misled by Israeli intelligence and immediately informed the two highest officials of the Vienna-based IAEA, Director General Mohamed ElBaradei and Deputy Director for Safeguards, Olli Heinonen, that the CIA's conclusions were not consistent with the most basic technical requirements for such a reactor.

But it did not take long for Abushady to realize that the top IAEA officials were not interested in drawing on his expertise in regard to the alleged Syrian reactor. In fact, the IAEA cited nonexistent evidence linking the site to a Syrian nuclear program while covering up real evidence that would have clearly refuted such a claim, according to Abushady and other former senior IAEA officials.

When Abudhsady met with Heinonen to discuss his analysis of the CIA's case in May 2008, Abushady asked to be included on the team for the anticipated inspection of the al-Kibar site because of his unique knowledge of that type reactor.

But Heinonen refused his request, citing an unwritten IAEA rule that inspectors are not allowed to carry out inspections in their countries of origin. Abushady objected, pointing out that he is Egyptian, not Syrian, to which Heinonen responded, "But you are an Arab and a Muslim!" according to Abushady. Heinonen declined a request for his comment on Abushady's account of the conversation.

A Curious Inspection

In June 2008, an IAEA team consisting of Heinonen and two other inspectors took environmental samples at the al-Kibar site. In November 2008, the IAEA issued a report saying that laboratory analysis of a number of natural uranium particles

collected at the site “indicates that the uranium is anthropogenic,” meaning that it had been processed by humans.

The implication was clearly that this was a reason to believe that the site had been connected with a nuclear program. But former IAEA officials have raised serious questions about Heinonen’s handling of the physical evidence gathered from the Syrian site as well as his characterization of the evidence in that and other IAEA reports.

Tariq Rauf who headed the IAEA’s Verification and Security Policy Coordination Office until 2011, has pointed out that one of the IAEA protocols applicable to these environmental samples is that “the results from all three or four labs to have analyzed the sample must match to give a positive or negative finding on the presence and isotopes of uranium and/or plutonium.”

However, in the Syrian case the laboratories to which the samples had been sent had found no evidence of such man-made uranium in the samples they had tested. ElBaradei himself had announced in late September, three months after the samples had originally been taken but weeks before the report was issued, “So far, we have found no indication of any nuclear material.” So the November 2008 IAEA report claiming a positive finding was not consistent with its protocols.

But the samples had been sent to yet another laboratory, which had come up with a positive test result for a sample, which had then touted as evidence that the site had held a nuclear reactor. That in itself is an indication that a fundamental IAEA protocol had been violated in the handling of the samples from Syria.

One of the inspectors involved in the IAEA inspection at al-Kibar later revealed to a fellow IAEA inspector what actually happened in the sample collection there. Former senior IAEA inspector Robert Kelley recalled in an interview that, after the last results of the samples from the al-Kibar inspection had come back from all the laboratories, the inspector, Mongolian national Orlokh Dorjkhaidav, came to see him because he was troubled by the results and wanted to tell someone he trusted.

Negative Results

Dorjkhaidav told Kelley that all the samples taken from the ground in the vicinity of the bombed building had tested negative for man-made uranium and that the only sample that had tested positive had been taken in the toilet of the support building.

Dorjkhaidav later left the IAEA and returned to Mongolia, where he died in December 2015. A video obituary for Dorjkhaidav confirmed his participation in

the inspection in Syria. Kelley revealed the former inspector's account to this writer only after Dorjkhaidav's death.

In an e-mail response to a request for his comment on Kelley's account of the Syrian environmental samples, Heinonen would neither confirm nor deny that the swipe sample described by Dorjkhaidav had been taken inside the support building. But in January 2013, David Albright, Director of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington, D.C., who has co-authored several articles with Heinonen, acknowledged in a commentary on his think tank's website that the al-Kibar uranium particles had been "found in a changing room in a building associated with the reactor."

Given the dispersal of any nuclear material around the site by the Israeli bombing, if man-made uranium was present at the site, it should not have shown up only inside the support facility but should have been present in the samples taken from the ground outside.

Former IAEA senior inspector Kelley said in an e-mail that a "very likely explanation" for this anomaly is that it was a case of "cross contamination" from the inspector's own clothing. Such cross contamination had occurred in IAEA inspections on a number of occasions, according to both Kelley and Rauf.

Kelley, who had been in charge of inspections in Iraq in the early 1990s, recalled that a set of environmental swipes taken from nuclear facilities that the United States had bombed in Iraq had appeared to show that that Iraq had enriched uranium to 90 percent. But it turned out that they had been taken with swipe paper that had been contaminated accidentally by particles from the IAEA laboratory.

But what bothered Abushady the most was that the IAEA report on Syria had remained silent on the crucial fact that none of the sample results had shown any trace of nuclear-grade graphite.

Abushady recalled that when he challenged Heinonen on the absence of any mention of the nuclear graphite issue in the draft report in a Nov. 13, 2008 meeting, Heinonen said the inspectors had found evidence of graphite but added, "We haven't confirmed that it was nuclear-grade."

Abushady retorted, "Do you know what nuclear-grade graphite is? If you found it you would know it immediately."

Heinonen was invited to comment on Abushady's account of that meeting for this article but declined to do so.

After learning that the report scheduled to be released in November would be

silent on the absence of nuclear graphite, Abushady sent a letter to ElBaradei asking him not to release the report on Syria as it was currently written. Abushady protested the report's presentation of the environmental sampling results, especially in regard to nuclear-grade graphite.

"In my technical view," Abushady wrote, "these results are the basis to confirm the contrary, that the site cannot [have been] actually a nuclear reactor."

But the report was published anyway, and a few days later, ElBaradei's Special Assistant Graham Andrew responded to Abushady's message by ordering him to "stop sending e-mails on this subject" and to "respect established lines of responsibility, management and communication."

A Clear Message

The message was clear: the agency was not interested in his information despite the fact that he knew more about the issue than anyone else in the organization.

At a briefing for Member States on the Syria reactor issue on Feb. 26, 2009, the Egyptian representative to the IAEA confronted Heinonen on the absence of nuclear-grade graphite in the environmental samples. This time, Heinonen had a different explanation for the failure to find any such graphite. He responded that it was "not known whether the graphite was in the building at the time of the destruction," according to the diplomatic cable reporting on the briefing that was later released by WikiLeaks.

But that response, too, was disingenuous, according to Abushady. "Graphite is a structural part of the reactor core in the gas-cooled reactor," he explained. "It is not something you add at the end."

The IAEA remained silent on the question of graphite in nine more reports issued over more than two years. When the IAEA finally mentioned the issue for the first time officially in a May 2011 report, it claimed that the graphite particles were "too small to permit an analysis of the purity compared to that normally required for use in a reactor."

But American nuclear engineer Behrad Nakhai, who worked at Oak National Laboratories for many years, said in an interview that the laboratories definitely have the ability to determine whether the particles were nuclear grade or not, so the claim "doesn't make sense."

News outlets have never reported on the IAEA's role in helping to cover up the false CIA claim of a North-Korean-style nuclear reactor in the desert by a misleading portrayal of the physical evidence collected in Syria and suppressing the evidence that would have made that role clear.

Heinonen, who was directly responsible for the IAEA's role in the Syria cover-up, left the IAEA in August 2010 and within a month was given a position at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. He has continued to take positions on the Iran nuclear negotiations that were indistinguishable from those of the Netanyahu government. And he is now senior adviser on science and non-proliferation at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a think tank whose positions on the Iran nuclear issues have closely followed those of the Likud governments in Israel.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and historian on U.S. national security policy and the recipient of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. His most recent book is *Manufactured Crisis: the Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*, published in 2014. [For a previous segment of this two-part series, see

<https://consortiumnews.com/2017/11/18/israels-ploy-selling-a-syrian-nuke-strike/>]

Undercounting the Civilian Dead

During the "war on terror," the U.S. government has understated the number of civilians killed (all the better to manage positive perceptions back home). But a new report underscores the truth, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Anyone willing to think carefully and critically about the use of armed force against a target such as Islamic State (ISIS) would do well to read the intensively researched piece in the *New York Times* by investigative journalist Azmat Khan and Arizona State professor Anand Gopal about civilian casualties from the air war waged by the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. The key conclusion is that those casualties are far higher – probably many times higher – than what the U.S. military acknowledges.

Such a discrepancy has been suspected for some time, based on earlier work by private organizations that comb press reports and other publicly available information from afar. Khan and Gopal went beyond that work by selecting three areas in Nineveh province as samples in which they performed an exhaustive on-the-ground investigation, interviewing hundreds of residents and sifting through the rubble of bombed structures. They compared such direct evidence, incident by incident, with what the responsible U.S. military command said it had in its

records about airstrikes it had conducted in the area and the results of those airstrikes.

The authors were given access to the operations center at a U.S. airbase in Qatar that has directed the air war, and their article includes the U.S. military's side of this story, with a description of the procedures used to select targets and assess damage, including civilian casualties. The impression left is not one of willful deception or malfeasance. Rather, the problem is partly a matter of lacking the time and personnel to do the sort of detailed after-the-fact, on-the-ground investigation for every target that Khan and Gopal did with their sample.

It is partly a matter of deficient record-keeping. It is in large part a matter of the fog of this kind of war making much faulty and woefully incomplete information almost inevitable. Although some of the civilian casualties represent collateral damage in the form of people who were in the vicinity of bona fide ISIS targets, others were in places that the targeteers mistakenly identified as having an ISIS connection.

The conditions in which civilians were living when under ISIS control worked against accurate analysis by the military of potential targets, which relied heavily on aerial observation. The observing of people going in and out of buildings in what looked like normal everyday activity was taken as a sign either that the building itself was a normal civilian structure or that there were too many innocent people in the immediate vicinity to hit it.

The absence of such innocent-looking activity tended to be taken as confirmation of any other reason to suspect that malevolent ISIS operations were going on inside. But in the so-called caliphate of ISIS, many people who otherwise would have been moving around freely tended instead to stay indoors at home. They in effect had the choice of increasing their exposure to the vagaries and brutality of ISIS or of raising suspicion at that airbase in Qatar that their home had something to do with ISIS.

Khan and Gopal are unable to extrapolate from their data, being only a sample, to any comprehensive number of innocent civilians killed and wounded in this air war. They note, however, that the concentration of civilian casualties is likely to be even higher in some areas, such as the western part of Mosul, where ISIS held out longer against coalition bombardment than it did in the areas that the authors investigated.

Values and Morality

These findings provide disturbing food for thought in at least three

respects. One concerns the values and morality involved in a U.S. military operation in which so many innocents suffer so much. The human faces that Khan and Gopal attach to some of the specific cases of suffering they have investigated underscore the fundamental wrongness of what has been occurring.

A second concerns the counterproductive aspects of an offensive that is supposed to be a combating of terrorism. The Donald Rumsfeld question – are we creating more terrorists than we are killing? – is still quite pertinent. The unsurprising resentment against the United States that results from U.S. aircraft killing and maiming innocent people, or destroying their homes, tends to create more terrorists. At a minimum, it fosters the sort of sentiment that existing terrorists exploit and win them support.

A third implication involves the ability of the American public and political class to assess adequately what is going on with a military campaign of this sort. The biggest problem as always is an unwillingness to pay adequate attention to information at our disposal.

But in this case there is the added problem of bum information. Khan and Gopal write that the huge disparity between official numbers and probable actual figures of civilian casualties means this aerial offensive “may be the least transparent war in recent American history.”

There are important policy decisions ahead about a continued U.S. military role, if any, in the areas where the ISIS caliphate once stood. Civilian casualties, and the importance of having an accurate sense of the extent of casualties that our own forces cause, need to be part of any debate about those decisions. But probably the lessons of the anti-ISIS air war apply at least as much to other states and regions where the United States has assumed the role of aerial gendarme, using either manned or unmanned means, against groups such as ISIS or al-Qaeda.

One thinks in particular of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but in the absence of any geographically defined Congressional authorization for such use of force, there is no limit to where the United States will bombard from the sky and where, given the intrinsic difficulties in assembling accurate targeting information against such shadowy adversaries, more innocent civilians will die. This is one of the continuing dark sides of a “war on terror” that has been militarized to the extent that ill-chosen metaphor implies.

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.)

Signs of U.K. Misconduct in Assange Case

The world's most prominent freedom-of-the-press case remains the legal pressure on WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange, still in Ecuador's London embassy amid signs of U.K. prosecutorial misconduct, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

A British court proceeding on a freedom of information request regarding how the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) dealt with the case of WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange has revealed that CPS deleted relevant emails from the account of a now-retired CPS lawyer, Paul Close.

However, one email that wasn't destroyed shows the CPS lawyer advising Swedish prosecutor Marianne Ny not to interview Assange in London, a decision that has helped keep Assange stuck for more than five years in Ecuador's London embassy where he had been granted asylum. Finally, in late 2016, after Swedish prosecutors did question Assange at the embassy, they dropped sex abuse allegations against him, but he still faces possible arrest in the U.K. as well as potential extradition to the U.S., where officials have denounced him for releasing classified material.

Italian journalist Stefania Maurizi, who has worked on WikiLeaks disclosures as a media partner since 2009, has made freedom of information requests in several countries regarding the Assange case. On Monday, I spoke with Estelle Dehon, a lawyer for Maurizi.

Dennis Bernstein: You represented Stefania Maurizi in court today. Give us the background, what got you into court today?

Estelle Dehon: It has to do with access to information. In the United States there is legislation which can allow individuals to have access to official information held by public authorities. We have the same type of system in the United Kingdom.

My client, the extraordinary Italian investigative journalist Stefania Maurizi, made a freedom of information request to the Crown Prosecution Service for information about Julian Assange. In particular, she was asking for copies of correspondence between the Crown Prosecution Service and the Swedish prosecution authorities and any correspondence with the US State Department, the Department of Justice, or the state of Ecuador. Obviously, this all relates to the situation that has occurred with Mr. Assange being arbitrarily detained in the Ecuadorian embassy.

Dennis Bernstein: There were revelations just a week or two ago that some of the key information you are seeking has been destroyed.

Estelle Dehon: Information has been coming out piecemeal. Initially, the Crown Prosecution Service refused to provide anything. As the appeal has been going forward before the tribunal, they started to release information. Just last week we were informed that the email account of the main lawyer in the case who was corresponding with the Swedish Prosecution Authority was deleted when he retired from the Crown Prosecution Service in 2014. One of the things we were asking today was how that could possibly have taken place. We had been told that the extradition matter had come to an end when the Supreme Court in 2012 upheld the arrest warrant for Mr. Assange.

So on the one hand the Crown Prosecution Service is saying that at that point the extradition matter we were dealing with came to an end. But on the other hand, they are saying, as a way of resisting full disclosure, that the extradition matter is ongoing. So which is it? If this is a case that is closed, in which case emails can be deleted then in the public interest, as much information as possible should be released. And if this is a case that is ongoing, then what could the justification possibly be for deleting the email account of one of the key people involved?

Dennis Bernstein: Could you talk a little about the documents that have already been released and what it is you are still looking for?

Estelle Dehon: A number of pieces of correspondence between the Crown Prosecution Service and the Swedish Prosecution Authority have been released, some of them with only slight redaction and some of them very heavily redacted. One of the things they are arguing today at the tribunal is that these redactions should be removed. That correspondence really looks at the flow of information from Sweden to the Crown Prosecution Service and back again. This information revealed that the Crown Prosecution Service had advised the Swedish prosecutor not to travel to the United Kingdom to interview Mr. Assange, despite the fact that that offer had been made. That advice was provided very early on, in January 2011. One of the things we seek through the information request is to understand why that advice was given at that time and why that advice seemed to remain the same, despite the situation arising with the Ecuadorian embassy.

I must explain that we rely quite heavily on the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, who made a determination in December 2015, as the result of a complaint made by Mr. Assange, that they considered Mr. Assange was being arbitrarily detained in the Ecuadorian embassy.

We don't explicitly say as part of our case that the tribunal has to come to the

same determination. What we way is that, because this very respected United Nations body came to that conclusion, that is highly relevant to the correspondence and the advice between the Crown Prosecution Service and the Swedish authorities. We still haven't seen any indication that that UN decision changed the way the authorities were dealing with Mr. Assange, with the way they were refusing to come and question him.

One of the revelations from the court case today was that the Crown Prosecution Service certainly did not consider that the determination by the UN panel made any difference to the way in which they were treating Mr. Assange's case. But we are still persisting with the request, to see if any of the information that has been provided can be unredacted.

Dennis Bernstein: In terms of the destroyed documents, the Crown Prosecution Service is saying they don't have the slightest idea what documents were destroyed or the implications of those documents. Do you believe that?

Estelle Dehon: I think I do believe that. As I understand it, the email account has been completely destroyed. There is no way of getting it back. At a very high level we know that whatever was in the email account of that lawyer having to do with Assange's case is now gone. All that remains is the correspondence that was printed out. And we are told that we have been provided with all the emails that exist in hard copy, albeit heavily redacted. Today, however, it was revealed that, despite assurances from the Crown Prosecution Service that they had released all the relevant documents, it turns out they may have uncovered some further emails.

Dennis Bernstein: Britain has worked very closely with the United States in intelligence matters. Is there any indication that the big hand of the United States has been dictating the course of events here, for example, by preventing the Swedish ambassador from conducting the interview with Assange and possibly finding out that there wasn't any substance to the charges against him?

Estelle Dehon: There is certainly no evidence of that in the information that has been disclosed to us or in what has been presented in court. What we don't know is what the documents that have not been disclosed might show in that regard. We don't know if there has been any influence exerted by the United States.

A key part of my client, Ms. Maurizio's, request was for correspondence between the Crown Prosecution Service and the US State Department and the US Department of Justice. The response we had today was essentially a blanket "no." The Crown Prosecution Service will neither confirm nor deny whether such correspondence exists.

One of the things we will be asking the tribunal to rule on is that that is not a lawful approach for them to take. Our freedom of information law does not deal in blanket bans, it doesn't countenance that kind of secrecy. Our freedom of information law looks at the public interest and makes an objective determination about whether information should be confirmed or denied.

Dennis Bernstein: What is at the core of this case for you? What do you think this is really all about?

Estelle Dehon: First of all, I should explain that we were not before a high court today, we were before a body called an information tribunal. We may end up in the court system if we don't get the type of decision we think we should get in the tribunal system. But right now we are still at the very early stages.

In terms of what I think is at the heart of this case, I believe it is the clash between free speech and freedom of the press versus an official culture of secrecy. One of the great hopes of the information access regime which was put in place in 2000 in the United Kingdom was that it would foster a culture of openness. There wouldn't be any area where the stock response was to shut down and not to engage with the media.

Unfortunately, in certain areas such as extradition matters, it hasn't had that effect. The ethos of the freedom of information act, the important watchdog role that journalists play, simply hasn't featured on their radar.

And then, of course, Julian Assange's case is a very particular one. It is clear from the limited material we have been provided that the Crown Prosecution Service believed from the start that this was not just another extradition request. That is clearly because of the personality involved and because of the work Assange has undertaken with WikiLeaks. At the heart of this case is the clash between a very open, non-state organization taking state documents and publishing outside of what a lot of countries are familiar with, between that and a culture of secrecy.

My hope is that in some small way this information tribunal will confront the public authorities who still look to be secret first and say to them, that is not the right approach. You have to consider properly and carefully the public interest in disclosure. Our own information commissioner has acknowledged that there was a significant public interest in the information requested by Ms. Maurizi. If that is the case, you cannot just close up and refuse to provide information. That cannot be your stock response.

Dennis Bernstein: Would you refer to Julian Assange as a journalist?

Estelle Dehon: We consider that he is an editor. Ms. Maurizi explained this to the tribunal today. As traditional journalists do, Assange speaks to sources and obtains information. And then he and WikiLeaks seek to validate that information. That is the editorial role. Then he works with media partners to release the information. That process, while it doesn't conform to the traditional media process, is in our view a type of journalism. We have characterized him as an editor and WikiLeaks as a journalistic organization.

Certainly Ms. Maurizi, in her role as an investigative journalist working with WikiLeaks, is a very clear example of a defender of democracy, a watchdog within the media looking to oppose corruption and shine light where it has not been shone before.

Dennis Bernstein: The courageous Israeli journalist Amira Hass once described the role of the journalist as "to monitor centers of power and report back to the people."

Estelle Dehon: Especially in an era where states exercise very significant power, and media organizations, however independent they try to be, can be influenced by that, a non-state, non-traditional actor such as WikiLeaks, which releases information not just to journalists but to the public at large is an important element of a democratic watchdog.

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

Strange Twists in the Hariri Mystery

French President Macron has invited Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri to Paris, a possible opportunity to determine whether Hariri's sudden resignation, announced in Saudi Arabia, was coerced, as Dennis J Bernstein reports.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The strange case of Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Hariri and his surprise resignation, delivered in Saudi Arabia, has developed international overtones with rumors about his possible kidnapping by the Saudis and France extending an invitation for him to come to Paris before possibly returning to Lebanon.

Because of concerns that his resignation may have been extracted by the Saudis

under duress, the Lebanese government has refused to accept it unless he tenders it in person. In an interview last Sunday, Hariri looked harried and nervous. At one point the camera caught a man holding up some kind of sign behind the interviewer, as if he was trying to direct Hariri's comments.

I spoke again to Beirut-based political activist and environmentalist Rania Masri on Nov. 13 about the Hariri case. Masri is an Arab-American academic, an expert in the workings of the Lebanese government, and has been doing regular translations of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah on Facebook.

Dennis Bernstein: Let's start with your response to the latest developments. The prime minister says he would like to return to Lebanon.

Rania Masri: Yesterday there was an interview conducted in Saudi Arabia. Saudi individuals were present during the interview. When you look at what Hariri actually said at this interview, it appears that the Saudi plan so far has not been successful. We have Hariri saying he wants to return to Lebanon, he is not sure when that will be, and that he will proceed with the resignation when he is here unless things change. So he left the door open for possibly not resigning.

As to why this is happening, you have to look at the events of the last two weeks. Saturday, [November 4], Saad Hariri read a statement that many of us believe was written by the Saudis. The Lebanese president and speaker of the house reject that statement of resignation because it was given while he was abroad. There is an almost total consensus that Hariri has been held captive since Friday.

During this time, it has become very apparent that Saudi Arabia has been in discussions with the US and Israeli governments and has been encouraging the Israeli government to attack Lebanon. The Lebanese president believes that he has gotten word that the Saudis and the Israelis are actually discussing something akin to the 1982 invasion of Lebanon. We are not talking about a war such as what occurred in 2006 but the possibility of an invasion like the one that took place in 1982.

So the political rhetoric has been escalated by the Saudis. They have basically declared war on Lebanon. The Saudi plan was to threaten Lebanon with military destruction and hope that the Lebanese would rise up against Hezbollah, leading to a civil war. That plan has completely failed.

Dennis Bernstein: What has been Hezbollah's response to these extraordinary developments?

Rania Masri: [Secretary General of Hezbollah] Hassan Nasrallah gave two talks this week concerning the resignation and the need for national unity. In the

second talk he spoke to the contents of the resignation letter and responded to these Saudi threats. Nasrallah believes that Saudi Arabia has asked Israel to attack Lebanon and is willing to support this effort with millions of dollars.

We know from statements from the Saudi ministries that the Saudi government has declared war on all of Lebanon, not just Hezbollah.

Hezbollah condemns Saudi intervention in Lebanon. They consider it an insult that the Lebanese prime minister is being held against his will and they call for his return to Lebanon. If he wants to resign, he should do so from the presidential palace. Hezbollah considers the declared resignation to be unconstitutional, illegal and illegitimate, because it was not voluntary.

Nasrallah has continued to call for de-escalation. He points out that Saudi Arabia has seen all of its actions in the region fail—whether it be in Yemen, in Bahrain, in Syria, or in Iraq. Nasrallah believes that, as a result of this, Saudi Arabia is now venting its anger against Lebanon. He also points out that if Saudi Arabia really wants to, it can find ways to punish Hezbollah directly instead of attacking the entire country.

Dennis Bernstein: What role do you see the United States playing here?

Rania Masri: I have to say that I don't know what the US position is. The Saudis recognize that they have not achieved the level of support they would like. It is not really clear what the next step will be by the United States.

What is clear is that the Israeli press is not enthusiastic about launching a war against Lebanon to fulfill Saudi aims.

Dennis Bernstein: Is all of this driven by what appears to be the profound failure of the Saudis in Syria?

Rania Masri: There are several issues at play. Historically, the Saudi government has always sought to create enemies, very much in the way the US government has. The de facto ruler in the country, Mohammed bin Salman, has proven himself to be a strategic failure. In Syria all they have managed to do is cause massive death and destruction through their support of ISIS and through their support for the destruction of Damascus and for regime change there.

We also know that there has been strong collaboration of Israel during the process. When we look at the military record of Saudi Arabia in Yemen, in Iraq, in Syria, we know that they are capable of great destruction. But they are not capable of transformation and change. I believe that this is an attempt on the part of the Saudis to vent their frustration and anger at numerous political failures and to achieve what has long been both a Saudi and Israeli goal, which is the destruction of the resistance movement in Lebanon.

Dennis Bernstein: I understand that the Saudi government has asked all of its citizens to leave Lebanon. What are your worst fears at this point?

Rania Masri: Yes, the Saudi and the Bahraini and the Kuwaiti governments have asked their citizens to leave the country. We know that they have directly intervened to force our prime minister to resign and to impose a new prime minister on Lebanon. This they have failed to do. They are also working to pressure the Gulf states and other countries to sanction Lebanon.

And there is open talk of a Saudi/Israeli attack on Lebanon. Personally, I don't think that is likely. There are other options. They could instigate terrorist acts in the country, as they did in Syria. But the stronger and more unified the country and the leadership is, the harder it will be for the Saudi government to cause disunity and civil tension.

Dennis Bernstein: Are people following all of this closely in Lebanon?

Rania Masri: We have gone through so many wars and attacks over the past twenty years that we suffer from a kind of fatigue. However, we have regular conversations among friends as to whether there will be another war and, if so, what it will look like. At the same time, many people in the country feel strengthened by the military prowess and the resolve of Hezbollah. Many feel that, if we did not have Hezbollah, the likelihood of an Israeli attack would be much higher.

It is really critical for people in the United States to understand that the Trump administration and the American Congress has continued to support this apartheid regime in Israel which has consistently issued threats against Lebanon. The US government has continued to strengthen its relationship with the Saudi Arabian government despite the ongoing war crimes the Saudis have been committing in Yemen. Regardless of what happens in Lebanon, it is necessary for the US government to reevaluate its ties with the Saudi Arabian government or, at the very least, to stop the massive arm sales.

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

Trump's Saudi Scheme Unravels

President Trump and his son-in-law bet that the young Saudi crown prince could execute a plan to reshape the Mideast, but the scheme quickly unraveled

revealing a dangerous amateur hour, writes ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

Aaron Miller and Richard Sokolsky, writing in *Foreign Policy*, suggest “that Mohammed bin Salman’s most notable success abroad may well be the wooing and capture of President Donald Trump, and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner.” Indeed, it is possible that this “success” may prove to be MbS’ only success.

“It didn’t take much convincing”, Miller and Sokolski wrote: “Above all, the new bromance reflected a timely coincidence of strategic imperatives.”

Trump, as ever, was eager to distance himself from President Obama and all his works; the Saudis, meanwhile, were determined to exploit Trump’s visceral antipathy for Iran – in order to reverse the string of recent defeats suffered by the kingdom.

So compelling seemed the prize (that MbS seemed to promise) of killing *three* birds with one stone (striking at Iran; “normalizing” Israel in the Arab world, and a Palestinian accord), that the U.S. President restricted the details to family channels alone. He thus was delivering a deliberate slight to the U.S. foreign policy and defense establishments by leaving official channels in the dark, and guessing. Trump bet heavily on MbS, and on Jared Kushner as his intermediary. But MbS’ grand plan fell apart at its first hurdle: the attempt to instigate a provocation against Hezbollah in Lebanon, to which the latter would overreact and give Israel and the “Sunni Alliance” the expected pretext to act forcefully against Hezbollah and Iran.

Stage One simply sank into soap opera with the bizarre hijacking of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri by MbS, which served only to unite the Lebanese, rather than dividing them into warring factions, as was hoped.

But the debacle in Lebanon carries a much greater import than just a mishandled soap opera. The really important fact uncovered by the recent MbS mishap is that not only did the “dog not bark in the night” – but that the Israelis have no intention “to bark” at all: which is to say, to take on the role (as veteran Israeli correspondent Ben Caspit put it), of being “the stick, with which Sunni leaders threaten their mortal enemies, the Shiites ... right now, no one in Israel, least of all Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is in any hurry to ignite the northern front. Doing so, would mean getting *sucked into the gates of hell*” (emphasis added).

The Syrian Defeat

Let us be clear, the so-called Sunni Alliance (principally Saudi Arabia and UAE, with Egypt already backing off) has just been roundly defeated in Syria. It has no capability whatsoever to “roll-back” Iran, Hezbollah or the Iraqi PMU (a Shiite militia) – *except* by using the Israeli “stick.” Israel may have the same strategic interests as the Sunni Alliance, but as Caspit notes, “the Saudis are interested in having Israel do the dirty work for them. But as it turns out, not everyone in Israel is as excited about it.”

Caspit calls a prospective clash between the Sunni Alliance and the Iranian-led front “a veritable war of Armageddon.” Those words encapsulate Israeli reservations.

This refusal to “bark” (in the famous Conan Doyle account of Sherlock Holmes) somehow knocks the blocks out from under Kushner’s “grand plan” because if Israel is opting out, what is there left to talk about? Israel precisely was the “stick” in Trump’s plan too. No stick: no Sunni Alliance roll-back of Iran; no further Saudi normalization with Israel; no Israeli-Palestinian initiative. MbS’ clumsiness (“reckless[ness]” a US official has called it) has pulled the rug out from under U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Why did Trump gamble so heavily on the inexperienced Kushner and the impulsive MbS? Well, of course, if such a “grand plan” had indeed worked out, it would have been a major foreign policy coup – and one done over the heads of the professional foreign policy and defense echelon who were excluded from it. Trump then would have felt himself freer to ascend above the Establishment tentacles: to attain a certain elevated independence and freedom from his “minders.” He would have achieved his coup through family channels, rather than be officially advised.

But, if it sinks into farce, and MbS becomes regarded in the U.S. as a maverick, rather than a Machiavelli, the (slighted) “system” will exact its revenge: presidential judgments will stand devalued – and ever more in need of justification and “minding.”

MbS (and Kushner) may have hurt President Trump in a much wider way therefore: the failed bet on the untried MbS may leach into other spheres – such as, in consequence, U.S. allies’ openly questioning the soundness of Trump’s North Korea judgments. In short, the U.S. President’s credibility will bear the consequences for his falling for MbS’ spin.

Wishful Thinking

There is, to be fair, much that is fanciful (even sycophantic) in the Western treatment of Saudi Arabia (President Trump is not alone in his thrall of things

Saudi): the very notion of Saudi Arabia transforming itself into some muscular, “modern” regional powerhouse that can stare down Iran, in itself, would seem a tad unrealistic, yet this is widely accepted among U.S. commentators. Yes, the kingdom has little alternative but to transform as its oil dividend approaches expiry, and that may well mean, in theory, wrenching the kingdom onto a new course.

But defining exactly how the kingdom can re-invent itself, without tearing itself apart, is likely to be much more complex than advocating some superficial embrace of “Western modernity,” or that of combatting “corruption.” These are red herrings: the family *is* the state; and the state (and its oil wealth) is the family’s. There is no boundary, or demarcated frontier, between state and family. The latter enjoy the *privileges and perquisites* of birth (depending on proximity, or distance, from the throne). And perquisites awarded or appropriated, reflect only the monarch’s power-needs that serve to sustain his absolutism. There is no “damned merit” or equity in this system, nor was it ever intended.

What then can the term “corruption” mean in such a system? Saudi Arabia does not even pretend to a level, rules-based playing field. The law (and the rules) simply are what the king says, or signs, day-to-day.

What “corruption” used to mean, when Europe earlier “enjoyed” such a similar absolutist system, was clear enough: you had got in the king’s way, that is all that “corruption” implied. So, if the outside world thinks that MbS is moving Saudi Arabia towards a *Western modernity*, then they must mean either that MbS is planning the jettisoning of “the family” (the 15,000 princes of the blood royal), or he’s moving towards some constitutional monarchial set-up, and a rules-based society of citizens, rather than subjects.

Nothing in MbS’ *actions* suggest that he is moving in that direction. Rather, his actions suggest that he wants to recover and restore the *absolutist aspect* to the monarchy. And the modernity that he is seeking is of the type that you *buy*, virtually ready-made, ready to be assembled from its box. In short, the plan is to *buy* an industrial base, “in a box,” off the shelf, to make up for depleting oil revenues.

Vision 2030 tells us that this well-packaged, high-tech, “industrial base” is supposed to yield \$1 trillion’s profit per annum, if all goes well ... eventually. That is to say, it is intended as replacement source of income: precisely to support “the family” – and not displace it. It is not therefore “reformist” in the Western notion of modernity being “equality before the law” and of protected

rights.

Unrealistic Hopes

Well, this type of non-organic, high-speed industrialization is not so easy to graft into society (if you are not Josef Stalin). It is expensive and, as history also tells us, is socially and culturally disruptive. It will cost a lot more than the reported \$800 billion which MbS hopes to “recover” from his detainees (through physical coercion – some 17 have been already been hospitalized, in consequence of their treatment in detention).

But, if it is not to Westernize the economy, why then are so many senior family members needing to be “got out of the way”? This part of the “grand plan” relates perhaps, to the reason why MbS wanted, so much, to “woo and capture” President Trump (as Miller and Solkosky put it). MbS is frank about this: he has been telling President Trump that he wants to restore the kingdom’s former grandeur; to be again the leader of the Sunni world, and the guardian of Islam. And to do that, upstart Iran and the Shi’i revival must be knocked back down into subordination to Saudi leadership.

The difficulty is that some in the family would have opposed such adventurism against Iran. MbS seems to be pursuing a notion similar to that adopted by the neocons: i.e. the Kristolian argument that you can’t make (or restore) a “benevolent hegemony” omelet without breaking a few eggs. And as Miller and Sokolsky noted, Trump “didn’t take much convincing” – MbS’ vision intersected precisely with his own imperatives (and animus towards Iran). Trump duly tweeted his endorsement for the Saudi “corruption” crack-down.

And here lay the third leg to the “grand plan”: Israel would be “the stick” for the Saudi-UAE-U.S. alliance against Iran (Hezbollah was to be to be its peg for action). Saudi Arabia then, in return, would move to recognize the Jewish State, and Israel would give the Palestinians “something”: a “something” that might be called a state, even if it was much less than a state. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia would co-ordinate in pressuring the Palestinians to accept the U.S. proposals for a “settlement.”

Why did it go so wrong? Exaggerated expectations of that which each other party could realistically *implement*. Believing each other’s rhetoric. America’s love affair with Saudi royalty. Kushner’s family ties to Netanyahu. Wishful thinking on the part of Kushner and Trump that MbS could be the instrument to restore not just the Saudi kingdom as America’s “policeman” in the Islamic world, but even the American-led order in the Middle East, too.

Maybe Jared Kushner believed Bibi Netanyahu when he hinted that “normalization”

of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel would witness reciprocation in Israeli concessions to the Palestinians (when in fact, the Israeli security cabinet has already vetoed the concessions – well short of a state – that were being discussed in this connection)?

Maybe Jared believed MbS when he suggested that he could mobilize the Sunni world against Iran – if America and Israel backed him (when even Egypt opposed destabilizing Lebanon)?

Maybe MbS believed that Trump spoke for America when he offered to support him (when in fact, he spoke only for the White House)?

Maybe MbS thought that Trump would rally Europe against Hezbollah in Lebanon (in fact, the Europeans have prioritized Lebanese stability)?

And, maybe MbS and Kushner thought Netanyahu spoke for Israel when he promised to be a partner in the front against Hezbollah and Iran? Was it the “grand plan” that was affirmed between Netanyahu and Trump on the day before the latter launched his United Nations broadside at Iran in September? When in fact, while any Israeli Prime Minister can wage war against the Palestinians with a relatively free hand, the same is not true where the state of Israel itself is being put at stake. No Israeli P.M. can commit to a possibly existential conflict (for Israel), without having broad support from the Israeli political and security establishment. And the Israel Establishment will only contemplate war when it is plainly in the Israeli interest, and not merely to please MbS or Mr Trump.

Ben Caspit (and other Israeli commentators) confirm that the Israeli establishment does not see war with Hezbollah, and the risk of a wider conflict, to be in the Israeli interest.

The fallout from this episode is highly significant. It has exposed that Israel presently is deterred from contemplating a war in the region (as Caspit explains). It too has underlined the hollowness of MbS ambitions to mount a “Sunni Alliance” against Iran; and it has undercut President Trump’s containment policy for Iran. For now, at least, we may expect Iran and Russia to consolidate the state in Syria, and to stabilize the northern tier. Caspit’s “war of Armageddon” may yet arrive – but not for now, perhaps.

Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum.

America's Renegade Warfare

Exclusive: Claiming the right to launch preemptive wars and fighting an ill-defined "global war on terror," the U.S. government has slaughtered vast numbers of civilians in defiance of international law, says Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

Seventy-seven million people in North and South Korea find themselves directly in the line of fire from the threat of a Second Korean War. The rest of the world is recoiling in horror from the scale of civilian casualties such a war would cause and the unthinkable prospect that either side might actually use nuclear weapons.

Since the first Korean War killed at least 20 percent of North Korea's population and left the country in ruins, the U.S. has repeatedly failed to follow through on diplomacy to establish a lasting peace in Korea and has instead kept reverting to illegal and terrifying threats of war. Most significantly, the U.S. has waged a relentless propaganda campaign to discount North Korea's legitimate defense concerns as it confronts the threat of a U.S. war machine that has only grown more dangerous since the last time it destroyed North Korea.

The North has lived under this threat for 65 years and has watched Iraq and Libya destroyed after they gave up their nuclear weapons programs. When North Korea discovered a U.S. plan for a Second Korean War on South Korea's military computer network in September 2016, its leaders quite rationally concluded that a viable nuclear deterrent is the only way to guarantee their country's safety.

What does it say about the role the U.S. is playing in the world that the only way North Korea's leaders believe they can keep their own people safe is to develop weapons that could kill millions of Americans?

The Changing Face of War

The Second World War was the deadliest war ever fought, with at least 75 million people killed, about five times as many as in the First World War. When the slaughter ended in 1945, world leaders signed the United Nations Charter to try to ensure that that scale of mass killing and destruction would never happen again. The U.N. Charter is still in force, and it explicitly prohibits the threat or use of military force by any nation.

It was not just the scale of the slaughter that shocked the world's leaders into

that brief moment of sanity in 1945. It was also the identities of the dead. Two-thirds of the people killed in the Second World War were civilians, a drastic change from the First World War, only a few decades earlier, when an estimated 86 percent of the people killed were uniformed combatants. The use of nuclear weapons by the United States raised the specter that future wars could kill an exponentially greater numbers of civilians, or even end human civilization altogether.

War had become "total war," no longer fought only on battlefields between soldiers, but between entire societies with ordinary people, their homes and their lives now on the front line. In the Second World War:

–Fleets of warplanes deliberately bombed cities to "dehouse" civilian populations, as British officials described their own bombing of Germany. "As I write this," George Orwell wrote from London in 1941, "Highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me."

–Submarines sank hundreds of merchant ships in an effort to starve their enemies into submission. General Carter Clarke, who was in charge of interpreting Japanese intelligence for President Truman, said in a 1959 interview that Japan surrendered because it faced mass starvation due to the sinking of its merchant shipping, not because of the gratuitous U.S. nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was estimated that 7 million more civilians would die of starvation if Japan fought on until 1946.

–Genocidal mass extermination campaigns killed civilians based only on their political affiliation or ethnicity. Under cross-examination by a young American prosecutor, Benjamin Ferencz, SS Gruppenfuhrer Dr. Otto Ohlendorf explained patiently to a courtroom in Nuremberg why he found it necessary for the "preemptive defense" of Germany to order the killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians. He explained that even children had to be killed to prevent them too becoming enemies of Germany when they grew up and found out what happened to their parents.

Despite the U.N. Charter and international efforts to prevent war, people in countries afflicted by war today still face the kind of total war that horrified world leaders in 1945. The main victims of total war in our "modern" world have been civilians in countries far removed from the safe havens of power and privilege where their fates are debated and decided: Yugoslavia; Afghanistan; Iraq; Somalia; Pakistan; Yemen; Libya; Syria; Ukraine. There has been no legal or political accountability for the mass destruction of their cities, their homes or their lives. Total war has not been prevented, or even punished, just externalized.

But thanks to billions of dollars invested in military propaganda and public relations and the corrupt nature of for-profit media systems, citizens of the countries responsible for the killing of millions of their fellow human beings live in near-total ignorance of the mass killing carried out in their name in these “red zones” around the world.

People in ever-spreading war zones are living under the very conditions of total war that the world recoiled from at the end of the Second World War. Like Orwell in London in 1941, they hear highly civilized human beings flying overhead trying to kill them, human beings who know nothing about them beyond the name of the city where they live and its strategic value in wars that offer them, the victims, nothing but death or destitution.

In the case of drones, the human beings trying to kill them from the other side of the world are so highly civilized that they can hop into cars and drive home to have dinner with their families at the end of their shifts, while another “team member” efficiently takes over the “joy-stick” and carries on killing.

People in Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Libya have been subjected to hunger and starvation under sieges and naval blockades that are as brutally effective as German and American submarines were in World War Two. Millions of people in Yemen face an imminent danger of starvation under the U.S.-backed naval blockade and Saudi and Emirati bombing of Yemeni ports.

In retaliation for one missile fired at Riyadh, the Saudi capital, last week, the U.S.-backed coalition completely closed all Yemen’s ports, tightening the blockade on millions of starving people. The requirements of necessity and proportionality, which have been basic principles of customary international law since the Nineteenth Century, lie buried in the graveyards of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Is the U.S. Guilty of Genocide?

The U.S. military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq quickly adopted “divide and rule” strategies that targeted Pashtuns in Afghanistan and Sunni Arabs in Iraq. When I pointed this out to a friend who teaches military history in 2005, he asked only, “How else can you do it?” I reminded him that “you” don’t have to “do it” at all.

U.S. and allied forces in Iraq have killed at least 10-15 percent of Iraq’s Sunni Arabs and displaced about half of them. Sunni Arabs have been relentlessly targeted for detention, torture and summary execution since 2004, when ex-Drug Enforcement Administration intelligence chief Steven Casteel, retired Colonel James Steele and a CIA team reportedly based on the eighth floor of

the Iraqi Interior Ministry recruited, trained and equipped "Special Police" death squads to conduct a reign of terror that tortured and killed tens of thousands of men and boys in Baghdad and elsewhere.

After training by James Steele's Special Police Training Teams, each Iraqi Special Police unit worked closely with a U.S. Special Police Transition Team (SPTT), and their operations were commanded and controlled from a high-tech command center staffed by U.S. and Iraqi personnel. An SPTT assigned to the notorious Wolf Brigade in Baghdad was from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, the "Nightstalkers," who usually provide helicopter transport for U.S. special operations but in this case appear to have used their helicopters mainly to fly detainees to their deaths.

After the exposure of their Al Jadiriyah torture prison in November 2005, the Special Police were rebranded as the National Police (and the Wolf Brigade, incongruously, as the Freedom Brigade). But their torture and killing raged on, under cover of an official narrative of "sectarian violence" which scrupulously ignored the command and control of these forces by the Iraqi Interior Ministry, the CIA and the U.S. military.

At the peak of this campaign in July-October 2006, supported by the U.S. Operations Together Forward I & II, National Police death squads flooded the main morgue in Baghdad with up to 1,600 bodies per month. Thousands more Iraqis were killed and buried elsewhere or just disappeared, while 2 million people were displaced inside Iraq and another 2 million fled the country.

This ethnic cleansing campaign has continued under the U.S.-backed Shiite government and has kept driving Sunni Arab Iraqis into armed resistance groups, of which Islamic State is only the latest, creating pretexts for endless violence against them. Kurdish military intelligence reports have estimated that 40,000 civilians were killed in the recent U.S.-led assault on Mosul, by tens of thousands of bombs and missiles dropped by U.S. and "coalition" warplanes, U.S. Marine 220-lb HiMARS rockets and U.S., French and Iraqi heavy artillery. This is still only an estimate, and the true number of civilians killed in Mosul was probably higher.

From 2004 on, the ethnic cleansing of Iraq's Sunni Arabs has been a deliberate, calculated element of the U.S.'s "divide and rule" policy in Iraq, with the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." That is the legal definition of genocide in Article II of the 1948 Genocide Convention. The working title of my book about the U.S. invasion and destruction of Iraq was *From Aggression to Genocide*.

As for the killing of "enemy" children, President Obama justified the murder of

16-year-old American Abdulrahman al-Awlaki in Yemen in October 2011, two weeks after the assassination of his father, the Yemeni-American preacher Anwar al-Awlaki. In one of Donald Trump's first acts as president, he authorized a U.S. special operations attack that killed Abdulrahman's 8-year old sister Nawar and other family members in January 2017 – after Trump, on the campaign trail, had vowed to kill the families of suspected terrorists.

Benjamin Ferencz, the by then 81-year-old American lawyer who prosecuted SS Gruppenfuhrer Ohlendorf and his accomplices at Nuremberg, was interviewed by NPR eight days after the mass murders of Sept. 11, 2001.

"It is never a legitimate response to punish people who are not responsible for the wrong done," Ferencz insisted. "We must make a distinction between punishing the guilty and punishing others. If you simply retaliate en masse by bombing Afghanistan, let us say, or the Taliban, you will kill many people who don't approve of what has happened... I say to the skeptics, 'Follow your procedure and you will see what happens.' ... We will have more fanatics and more zealots deciding to come and kill the evil, the United States."

But in the courtroom of American politics, hopelessly corrupted by the CIA's politicized intelligence and manufactured crises and the "unwarranted influence" of the Military Industrial Complex, our leaders chose Ohlendorf's logic over Ferencz's. Neither the millions of people killed in 16 years of war, nor its legacy of ruin and chaos in country after country, nor the utter failure of the "war on terror" on its own terms have led to any change in this illegitimate, criminal and, in the case of Sunni Arabs in Iraq, genocidal U.S. policy.

The Geneva Conventions

As well as the unfulfilled promise of peace in the U.N. Charter, the post-World War II effort to prevent the future mass slaughter of civilians led to a major revision of the Geneva Conventions in 1949. That included a brand new convention, the Fourth Geneva Convention, dedicated entirely to the protection of civilians in wartime or under military occupation.

Two additional protocols were added to the Geneva Conventions in 1977, to adapt them to the changing nature of war and to provide even greater protections to civilians. The First Additional Protocol has been signed and ratified by 174 countries and the Second by 168 countries. The United States has not ratified either of the Additional Protocols, but it is legally bound by them because treaties that have been ratified by large majorities of countries automatically become part of customary international law, which is universally binding.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the 1949 Conventions in 1999, the International

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) conducted a survey of 17,000 people in 17 countries to see how well people around the world understood “the rules and limits of what is permissible in war” under the Geneva Conventions. The study was titled *People on War – Civilians in the Line of Fire*.

The 17 countries surveyed included 12 where wars had recently been fought, four of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, and Switzerland, where the ICRC is based. The introduction to the *People on War* report noted that 90 percent of the people killed in recent wars were civilians and that, in today’s world, “war is war on civilians.” But the report went on:

“...the more these conflicts have degenerated into wars on civilians, the more people have reacted by reaffirming the norms, traditions, conventions and rules that seek to create a barrier between those who carry arms into battle and the civilian population... Large majorities in every war-torn country reject attacks on civilians in general and a wide range of actions that by design or default could harm the innocent.”

People interviewed in Switzerland and the four Security Council permanent member countries were asked to choose between a firm statement that armed forces “must attack only other combatants and leave civilians alone,” and a weaker statement that, “combatants should avoid civilians as much as possible.” About three-quarters of respondents in the U.K., Russia, France and Switzerland chose the first statement, which correctly summarizes the rules of the Fourth Geneva Convention, while 26 percent in the U.K. and 16-17 percent in Russia, France and Switzerland chose the weaker one.

When it came to the United States, though, a very different pattern emerged. Only 52 percent of Americans understood that attacking civilians is strictly prohibited, while 42 percent chose the weaker option, twice as many as in the other four countries. The ICRC report noted that, “Across a wide range of questions, in fact, American attitudes towards attacks on civilians were much more lax.”

The survey also asked whether it is lawful to attack “enemy combatants in populated villages or towns in order to weaken the enemy, knowing that many civilians would be killed.” Once again, while only 20-29 percent of people in the other four countries thought this was allowed, that increased to 38 percent among Americans. Since 1999, this question has arisen again and again across America’s war zones, most recently in the U.S.-led massacres of Iraqi and Syrian civilians in Mosul and Raqqa.

During the U.S. occupation of Iraq, U.N. human rights reports repeatedly reminded U.S. officials of their duty as an occupying power to protect

civilians, and notified them that U.S. military operations in civilian areas were routinely violating international humanitarian law. John Pace, who headed the U.N. Assistance Mission to Iraq during the U.S. occupation, compared U.S. efforts to police Iraq by military force to “trying to swat a fly with a bomb,” a fitting metaphor for the entire “war on terror.”

The *People on War* survey also found large discrepancies in attitudes to the Geneva Conventions themselves. In countries that had recently experienced war, only 28 percent of people agreed with a statement that the Conventions “make no real difference” to the brutality of war. But in the U.S. (57 percent) and U.K. (55 percent), twice as many people agreed with that statement.

U.S. War Crimes

We could speculate on why Americans are so exceptionally “lax” in their attitudes toward protecting civilians in wartime. But in practice, the real-world impact of these exceptional attitudes could be overcome if Americans who joined the armed forces received serious training in their responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Tragically, they do not.

U.S. military recruits receive only a 50-minute class on the laws of war, focused mainly on the Third Geneva Convention and the rights of POWs, and a refresher of the same 50-minute class before deployment. A retired JAG officer who taught law of war classes and veterans who have sat through them have all told me that the Fourth Geneva Convention and the rights of civilians as “protected persons” were barely mentioned, if at all.

The lax attitude of Americans toward the killing of civilians and the poor training of U.S. troops in their responsibilities under the Geneva Conventions have combined to make invasion and occupation by *American* forces especially deadly, dangerous and terrifying for civilians in Afghanistan, Iraq and wherever U.S. forces are deployed.

In practice, U.S. forces operate under much lower standards than those of the Geneva Conventions, and civilians whose countries have fallen prey to U.S. aggression do not enjoy the protections guaranteed to them under the laws of war. As I wrote in an article in 2016, this is a classic case of the “normalization of deviance,” a sociological term for the way that powerful institutions like the U.S. military tend to develop weaker, looser norms of conduct than the formal or legal rules that officially apply to them.

Illegal U.S. rules of engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan have included: systematic, theater-wide use of torture; orders to “dead-check” or kill wounded enemy combatants; orders to “kill all military-age males” during

certain operations; and “weapons-free” zones that mirror Vietnam-era “free-fire” zones. A U.S. Marine corporal told a court martial prosecuting one of his men for “dead-checking” a wounded Iraqi civilian that “Marines consider all Iraqi men part of the insurgency,” nullifying the critical distinction between combatants and civilians that is the very basis of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

When junior officers or enlisted troops have been charged with war crimes against civilians, they have often been exonerated or given light sentences because courts martial have found that they were acting on orders from more senior officers. But the senior officers implicated in these crimes have been allowed to testify in secret or not to appear in court at all, and have almost never been charged.

To make matters even worse for civilians in Iraq, U.S. military and civilian officials, including Secretary of State Colin Powell, misled the troops they sent to kill and die in Iraq with lies about shadowy connections between the people of Iraq and the young Saudis who committed the crimes of September 11th. In 2006, three years into the war, a Zogby poll of U.S. troops in Iraq found that 85 percent of them still believed that their mission in Iraq was to “retaliate for Saddam’s role in the 9/11 attacks.”

A million Iraqis have paid with their lives for these American lies and the war crimes they have served to justify, while the U.S. officials involved are still walking free, and in many cases still climbing the twisted ladder of success inside the U.S. Military Industrial Complex. Colonel Jeffrey Buchanan, who headed a Special Police Transition Team in Iraq at the time of the exposure of the Al Jadiriyah torture prison in 2005, has been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General and is currently in charge of hurricane relief to Puerto Rico.

A New Body of Research

After 16 years of ever-spreading and intractable war, a significant body of research is finally emerging to clarify who exactly the U.S. is fighting in its ever-expanding war zones and what drives civilians to join armed groups like the Taliban, Al Qaeda or Islamic State.

In the looking-glass world of U.S. propaganda, U.S. forces are “fighting them there” so that we don’t have to “fight them here.” But researchers are learning that, like the Iraqis who rose up to resist the illegal U.S. invasion and occupation of their country, most of the people joining armed groups across Africa and the Middle East are only fighting at all because U.S. and allied forces are “fighting them there,” in their countries, cities, villages and homes.

Researchers have interviewed people who have joined armed resistance groups in countries across the world to ask them about what drove them to join an armed group and take part in guerrilla warfare or terrorism. In 2015, the Center for Civilians in Conflict published the results of interviews with 250 people who joined armed groups in Bosnia, Somalia, Gaza and Libya in a report titled, *The People's Perspective: Civilian Involvement in Armed Conflict*. One of its main findings was that, "The most common motivation for involvement, described by interviewees in all four case studies, was the protection of self or family."

If most of the people fighting U.S. forces and their allies across the world, from Niger to Ukraine to the Philippines, are just trying to defend themselves and their families against our "counterterrorism" operations, that turns the whole basis of the U.S. "war on terror" on its head. The most effective way to reduce violence and terrorism would obviously be to stop putting them in such an intolerable position in the first place.

Also in 2015, Lydia Wilson, a researcher for the Center for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict at Oxford University, was allowed to interview a number of captured Islamic State fighters in Kirkuk, Iraq. Wilson's fellow researchers included retired U.S. Major General Doug Stone, who managed U.S. military prisons in Iraq during the U.S. occupation and did some of the first serious Western research into the motivations of Iraqi resistance fighters.

It was hard for Wilson to find captured Islamic State fighters to interview, because Kurdish and U.S.-backed Iraqi government forces summarily execute Islamic State fighters that they capture. But the police in Kirkuk were at least putting prisoners on trial before killing them, so Wilson got permission from the police chief to talk to some prisoners who were awaiting execution.

The first prisoner Lydia Wilson interviewed was captured, tried and sentenced to death for exploding at least four car-bombs and a scooter-bomb in Kirkuk. But his interview was not exceptional – Wilson found that his account of his motivations was repeated by every other prisoner. He explained that his first loyalty was to his wife and two children, and that he joined ISIS (as Islamic State is commonly known) to support his family. He told Wilson, "We need the war to be over, we need security, we are tired of so much war... all I want is to be with my family, my children."

At the end of the interview, Wilson asked the prisoner if he had any questions. By then he knew that General Stone, one of Wilson's colleagues, was ex-U.S. military, and, instead of asking a question, he just exploded in anger at him, "The Americans came. They took away Saddam but they also took away our security. I didn't like Saddam, we were starving then, but at least we didn't have war. When you came here, the civil war started."

General Stone was not surprised. This was the same outraged speech he had heard from nearly every prisoner since he started interviewing his own prisoners in Iraq in 2007, identifying the poisonous and blood-soaked legacy of the U.S. invasion and occupation as the driving force behind their actions.

Lydia Wilson summarized what she learned about the prisoners in Kirkuk in an article for *The Nation*: “They are children of the occupation, many with missing fathers at crucial periods (through jail, death by execution or fighting in the insurgency), filled with rage against America and their own government. They are not fueled by the idea of an Islamic caliphate without borders; rather, ISIS is the first group since the crushed Al Qaeda to offer these humiliated and enraged young men a way to defend their dignity, family and tribe. This is not radicalization to the ISIS way of life, but the promise of a way out of their insecure and undignified lives; the promise of living in pride as Iraqi Sunni Arabs, which is not just a religious identity, but cultural, tribal and land-based, too.”

The recent killing of four U.S. soldiers in Niger surprised many Americans, but the U.S. has 6,000 troops in 53 countries in Africa, so we should be ready to welcome home flag-draped coffins from seemingly random countries across the continent. But before our deluded leaders reduce the entire continent of Africa to a new U.S. “battlefield,” Americans should take note of a new report published by the U.N. Development Program (UNDP), titled *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*.

This report is based on 500 interviews with militants from across Africa. As its title suggests, the interviewers questioned the militants specifically about the “tipping point” that decided each of them to actually join an armed group such as Boko Haram, Al-Shabab or Al Qaeda. By far the largest number (71 percent) said that some kind of “government action,” such as “killing of a family member or friend” or “arrest of a family member or friend,” was the final straw that pushed them over the red line from civilian life to guerrilla war. By contrast, religious ideology was generally not a decisive factor in that decision.

The report concluded, “State security-actor conduct is revealed as a prominent accelerator of recruitment, rather than the reverse.” In its section on “Policy Implications,” it added, “The *Journey to Extremism* research provides startling new evidence of just how directly counter-productive security-driven responses can be when conducted insensitively.”

Across the world, it is obvious, and now well-documented, that U.S. aggression and militarism are causing the very problems they claim to be trying to solve. By design or default, U.S. policy is confusing cause and effect to justify military operations that turn civilians into combatants, fueling an

ever-escalating, ever-spreading cycle of increasingly global violence and chaos.

As the world confronts critical problems and demands on its resources, from climate change to poverty and inequality, it can no longer afford to follow the pied piper of American “leadership” that leads only to war and chaos.

U.S. leaders often raise the specter of “appeasement” to guilt-trip reluctant allies into supporting U.S.-led wars. But maybe it is time for world leaders to recognize that the real appeasement they have been engaged in is the appeasement of the United States, by actively or tacitly encouraging it in an illegal policy of militarism and serial aggression that is spreading violence and chaos across the world.

Surely the real lesson of the 1930s and the Second World War, now reinforced by the experience of the past 20 years, is that it is not enough to simply sign treaties that prohibit aggression and war crimes. The world must be ready to actually enforce the prohibition against the threat or use of military force in customary international law, the 1928 Kellogg Brand Pact and the U.N. Charter – by uniting peacefully and diplomatically to stand up to U.S. aggression and militarism before they lead to a cataclysmic total war that will kill tens or even hundreds of millions of civilians, in Korea or somewhere else.

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Stumbling Blindly into Cold War Two

As the U.S. and its Western allies lurch into a new and dangerous confrontation with Russia, the different sides don’t even have a thorough understanding of the history behind the tensions, warns Alice Slater.

By Alice Slater

NATO’s recent provocative decision to build up its military forces across Europe – by sending four new multinational battalions to Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland – comes at a time of great turmoil and intense questioning of global security with new forces for both good and evil straining to make their mark on the course of history.

This weekend, at the Vatican, Pope Francis held an international conference to follow up on the recently negotiated treaty to prohibit the possession, use, or threat of use of nuclear weapons leading to their complete elimination which was negotiated in the United Nations General Assembly this summer by 122 nations, although none of the nine nuclear weapons states participated.

Honored at the conference were members of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which worked with friendly governments to hold nuclear weapons unlawful, and has recently been awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize for its successful efforts.

The Pope issued a statement that the doctrine of nuclear deterrence in which countries threaten to wreak catastrophic nuclear devastation on their opponents should they be attacked with nuclear bombs has become ineffective against Twenty-first Century threats like terrorism asymmetrical conflicts, environmental problems and poverty. While the church once held that such an insane policy could be moral and lawful, it no longer views it as such. And there are plans for the church to examine the so-called theory of "just war" with an eye to prohibiting the very morality and legality of war itself.

In the U.S., an unprecedented examination of our hidden history has begun. People are questioning the numerous honorary statues memorializing Civil War generals from the South who fought to preserve slavery. Indigenous First Peoples are questioning the adulation given to Christopher Columbus, who "discovered" America for Spain and was responsible for enormous slaughters and bloodshed of natives in the first colonies established in the Americas. Famous and powerful men are being questioned in an avalanche of truth-telling about how they used their professional power to take sexual advantage of women who feared for their career prospects in theater, publishing, business, academia.

Need for Truth about U.S. and Russia

Unfortunately we have barely begun to tell the truth about the U.S. relationship with Russia and appear to be moving backwards in the U.S. with calls for RT, formerly *Russia Today*, the Russian equivalent of the BBC or Al Jazeera, to be registered in the U.S. as a foreign agent. This is certainly not consistent with the U.S. belief in the sanctity of a free press and will be challenged in the courts.

Indeed, there is a huge effort to misrepresent the provocations of NATO, to gloss over the history of the nuclear arms race— the refusal to take up Mikhail Gorbachev's offer to Ronald Reagan to eliminate all their nuclear weapons provided the U.S. gave up its plans to dominate and control the use of space; the expansion of NATO despite President George H.W. Bush's promises to

Gorbachev that NATO would not go any further eastward beyond a unified Germany after the wall fell; Bill Clinton's rejection of Vladimir Putin's offer to cut arsenals to 1,000 nuclear weapons each and call all the parties to the table to negotiate for their elimination provided the U.S. didn't put missiles in Eastern Europe; Clinton leading NATO into the unlawful bombing of Serbia, ignoring Russia's veto of the action in the U.N. Security Council; George W. Bush walking out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty; the blocking of consensus in the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva to start negotiations on a Russian and Chinese proposal, made in 2008 and again 2015, to ban weapons in space.

Ironically, in light of the recent NATO announcement that it will expand its cyber operations, the U.S. rejection of Russia's 2009 proposal to negotiate a Cyberwar Ban Treaty after the U.S. boasted of having destroyed Iran's uranium enrichment capacity with Israel using the Stuxnet virus in a cyber-attack seems like a gross misjudgment on the part of the U.S. not to have taken Russia up on its proposal.

Indeed, the whole nuclear arms race might have been avoided, if Harry Truman and Josef Stalin could have agreed on a satisfactory arrangement for putting this devastating weapon under U.N. control at the end of World War II. Instead, the U.S. retained control of the technology, and the Soviet Union developed its own bomb.

Now we are entering a New Cold War between the U.S. and Russia. Perhaps the only way to understand this deterioration of U.S.-Russian relationship is to remember President Eisenhower's warning in his 1961 farewell address about the military-industrial complex. The arms manufacturers, with billions of dollars at stake, have corrupted U.S. politics, media, academia and Congress.

U.S. public opinion is manipulated to support war and "blame it on Russia." Meanwhile, the so-called "War on Terror" is a recipe for more terrorism. Like throwing a rock on a hornet's nest, the U.S. sows death and destruction around the world killing innocent civilians in the name of fighting terrorism and thus invites more terror.

Russia, which lost 27 million people to the Nazi onslaught of World War II, may have a much better understanding of the horrors of war. Perhaps we need a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to reveal the causes and provocation of the historic tensions between the U.S. and Russia. After all, in other spheres, we seem to be entering a new time of truth-telling. And what could be more welcome and important than an honest presentation of the U.S.-Russian relationship over the past century to further better understanding and a peaceful resolution of our differences. With the looming environmental climate catastrophe and the possibility of destroying all life on earth with nuclear devastation, shouldn't

we give peace a chance?

Alice Slater serves on the Coordinating Committee of World Beyond War.

Trump's Debasement of Civilization

Hillary Clinton's "deplorables" comment was surely a campaign gaffe, but she wasn't wrong about Donald Trump's exploitation of white grievances and other ugly attitudes, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

There is more to being civilized than being a citizen of some political entity. This is so despite the fact that both the verb *civilize* and noun *citizen* are derived from the Latin *civitas*. To be civilized demands more than just having the language and mannerisms of the Fifth Century BCE Greeks, or the Second Century BCE Han Chinese, or the Sixteenth Century CE French. All of these groups believed that being civilized meant living and acting like them.

Today the Americans have joined the chorus. They sing to the world that theirs is the home of the brave and land of the free, and claim that they are the real model for civilization. They throw in that rather ill-defined notion of freedom as a modern customizing point.

None of these claims are very convincing. After all, each claimant has waged bloody wars of aggression, discriminated against outsiders and their own minorities, and generally sought aggrandizement by stealing other people's land.

Only recently, since the end of World War II, has there grown up an understanding that: (1) language, mannerisms, and race are so varied that they cannot be used as prerequisites for civilized status without breeding mass intolerance toward minorities and "others," and (2) aggressive war and the pursuit of conquest actually dehumanizes your nation and destroys one's civilized standing. Postwar international law has been designed to make intolerance on a large scale illegal – a crime against humanity – and the same goes for the waging of wars of aggression. It is questionable how effective such laws have been. Nonetheless, they are undeniably a step in a civilizing direction.

If you dig under the surface of ethnic- or nation-based claims to civilized standing, you often find that they rest on such things as military prowess,

technological advancement, and/or a dubious claim to be some god's favorite. Collective cultural expressions of racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, Islamophobia and other such displays of intolerance, as well as the carrying on of a "muscular" foreign policy, seem not to complicate claims to civilized status for many average citizens. *But, of course, they should.* In fact, not being or doing any of these things should be a necessary prerequisite for any group's appeal to civilized status.

Based on such a requirement, the claim of the United States to be a civilized society seems in serious trouble. For instance, no one is going to accuse Donald Trump of being a model of tolerance. Indeed, it would seem that his election as president has inaugurated a time of intolerance embracing just those prejudices that erode a nation's civilized standing.

Hillary's Greatest Gaffe

It is true that during her run for the presidency Hillary Clinton made many mistakes. She was wedded to a traditional, and very corrupt, version of U.S. politics – a version that put her in the pocket of an array of special interests that, themselves, were not very civilized (for example, the Zionists). And, as Secretary of State under President Obama, she did her part to wage aggressive war.

Yet, she was, at least in terms of her rhetoric, ready to take a stand for tolerance when it comes to social and cultural diversity within the United States. Ironically, that willingness to, in this regard, be publicly civil – and call out those who were not – led to her biggest political gaffe of the election.

The campaign faux pas came on Sept. 9, 2016, during a speech to a group of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual) supporters. Here is what she said:

"We are living in a volatile political environment. You know, to just be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right? The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic – you name it. And unfortunately there are people like that. And he [Trump] has lifted them up. He has given voice to their websites that used to only have 11,000 people – now 11 million. He tweets and retweets their offensive hateful mean-spirited rhetoric. Now, some of those folks – they are irredeemable, but thankfully they are not America."

The Trump campaign people jumped on this statement and declared that it was a sign of "her true contempt for everyday Americans." In other words, from the Trump perspective, "those folks" were the real America. Trump's supporters

proceeded to turn the term “deplorable” into something of a battle cry. I remember driving through the small Pennsylvania town of Red Lion soon after Clinton’s speech. There was a big sign declaring “Welcome to the Home of the Proud Deplorables.”

Trump the Decivilizer

Of course, Clinton was correct in her criticism of Trump and some of his supporters. In fact, they were more than just deplorable. They were downright uncivilized. And, she was right that Trump has incited and manipulated them and their prejudices during the campaign. And, he has continued to do so as president.

I think this became quite obvious at the Aug. 12 “unite the right” protest in Charlottesville, Virginia. That event signaled the fact that Trump, a wealthy, self-righteous, impulsive, one-dimensional man who, in his simplistic ignorance, cannot tell the difference between his own opinion and fact, had let loose a substantial group of racist and reactionary citizens. These people see themselves not as the uncivilized of America, but rather as saviors of an anachronistic pseudo-civilization – one based on white supremacy and mass intolerance. Regardless of how they see themselves, the behavior of both these “average Americans” and their approving President, is actually tipping America toward being unquestionably a “deplorable” and uncivilized place.

It must be kept in mind that President Trump did not originate all this prejudicial horror. It has always been there in the U.S. However, since the 1960s it has, for the most part, been kept out of the public realm. That is what the Civil Rights Movement and President Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society programs accomplished – to make it socially unacceptable, and in some cases illegal, to practice these prejudices publicly.

This was actually a great step forward in the process of civilizing the United States, and if it had been maintained for say, another five generations, the number of “deplorable” voters may have shrunk to the point that the election of a decivilizer such as Trump would have been much less likely.

However, as it was, those who harbored simmering prejudices, restless anachronistic traditions, and a fear of losing privileges in an ever more diverse society, almost immediately came together to support Donald Trump when he appeared on the political scene. And the rest of us were caught unawares.

The fact is that most people do not think about what it means to be civilized, often assuming that this status is synonymous with having an I-phone and a twitter account. Among those who do think about it, some may identify the term

with those who are snobbish and think they are better than others.

Or, perhaps they see civilization as a class thing to be identified with wealth. Those who think in these terms may develop resentment toward the concept of civilization. They may come to see it as a threat to their local culture and ways of life.

Finally, who knows how many macho males there are out there who might see too much civilization as a subversive factor – something that would make the nation effete. Too much enlightenment could undermine that “muscular” foreign policy (perhaps reviving, in the case of the United States, the dreaded Vietnam Syndrome) that has always been a mark of nation-state greatness.

Of course, this is not just an American problem. The “deplorables” are to be found in all populations – more in some and less in others – but never absent. In the U.S., Donald Trump is their leader. No doubt he also serves as a symbol of leadership for “deplorables” worldwide. As such President Trump and his following subvert our future – luring us in the direction of barbarism.

Remember Arnold Toynbee observation: “civilizations die from suicide and not by murder.”

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest; America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism. He blogs at www.tothepointanalyses.com.
