

# Remaining Peaceful Was Their Choice

Despite early efforts at peaceful protest, Yemeni civilians face the reality of another year of devastating warfare inflicted by Saudi- and U.S.-led forces, as Kathy Kelly describes.

By Kathy Kelly

People living now in Yemen's third largest city, Taiz, have endured unimaginable circumstances for the past three years. Civilians fear to go outside lest they be shot by a sniper or step on a land mine. Both sides of a worsening civil war use Howitzers, Kaytushas, mortars and other missiles to shell the city. Residents say no neighborhood is safer than another, and human rights groups report appalling violations, including torture of captives. On Dec. 26th, 2017, a Saudi-led coalition bomber killed between 20 and 50 people in a crowded marketplace.

Before the civil war developed, the city was regarded as the official cultural capital of Yemen, a place where authors and academics, artists and poets chose to live. Taiz was home to a vibrant, creative youth movement during the 2011 Arab Spring uprising. Young men and women organized massive, yet peaceful demonstrations to protest the enrichment of entrenched elites as ordinary people struggled to survive.

## **Peaceful Protest**

The young people were exposing the roots of one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world today. They were sounding an alarm about the receding water tables which made wells ever harder to dig and were crippling the agricultural economy. They were similarly distressed over unemployment. When starving farmers and shepherds moved to cities, the young people could see how the increased population would overstress already inadequate systems for sewage, sanitation and health care delivery. They protested their government's cancellation of fuel subsidies and the skyrocketing prices which resulted. They clamored for a refocus on policy away from wealthy elites and toward creation of jobs for high school and university graduates.

Despite their misery, they steadfastly opted for unarmed, nonviolent struggle.

Dr. Sheila Carapico, an historian who has closely followed Yemen's modern history, noted the slogans adopted by demonstrators in Taiz and in Sana'a, in 2011: 'Remaining Peaceful Is Our Choice,' and 'Peaceful, Peaceful, No to Civil War.'

Carapico adds that some called Taiz the epicenter of the popular uprising. "The city's relatively educated cosmopolitan student body entertained demonstration participants with music, skits, caricatures, graffiti, banners and other artistic embellishments. Throngs were photographed: men and women together; men and women separately, all unarmed."

In December of 2011, 150,000 people walked nearly 200 kilometers from Taiz to Sana'a, promoting their call for peaceful change. Among them were tribal people who worked on ranches and farms. They seldom left home without their rifles, but had chosen to set aside their weapons and join the peaceful march.

Yet, those who ruled Yemen for over thirty years, in collusion with Saudi Arabia's neighboring monarchy which fiercely opposed democratic movements anywhere near its borders, negotiated a political arrangement meant to co-opt dissent while resolutely excluding a vast majority of Yemenis from influence on policy. They ignored demands for changes that might be felt by ordinary Yemenis and facilitated instead a leadership swap, replacing the dictatorial President Ali Abdullah Saleh with Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, his vice-president, as an unelected president of Yemen.

The U.S. and neighboring petro-monarchies backed the powerful elites. At a time when Yemenis desperately needed funding to meet the needs of starving millions, they ignored the pleas of peaceful youths calling for demilitarized change, and poured funding into "security spending" – a misleading notion which referred to further military buildup, including the arming of client dictators against their own populations.

And then the nonviolent options were over, and civil war began.

### **The Nightmare of War**

Now, the nightmare of famine and disease those peaceful youths anticipated has become a horrid reality, and their city of Taiz is transformed into a battlefield.

What could we wish for Taiz? Surely, we wouldn't wish the terror plague of aerial bombardment to cause death, mutilation, destruction and multiple traumas. We wouldn't wish for shifting battle lines to stretch across the city and the rubble in its blood-marked streets. I think most people in the U.S. wouldn't wish such horror on any community and wouldn't want people in Taiz to be singled out for further suffering.

We could instead build massive campaigns demanding a U.S. call for a permanent ceasefire and an end of all weapon sales to any of the warring parties. But, if the U.S. continues to equip the Saudi-led coalition, selling bombs to Saudi

Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and refueling Saudi bombers in midair so they can continue their deadly sorties, people in Taiz and throughout Yemen will continue to suffer.

The beleaguered people in Taiz will anticipate, every day, the sickening thud, ear-splitting blast or thunderous explosion that could tear apart the body of a loved one, or a neighbor, or a neighbors' child; or turn their homes to masses of rubble, and alter their lives forever or end their lives before the day is through.

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## Trump's Seven Forbidden Words

In a homage to George Orwell's *Newspeak*, the Trump administration has compiled a list of words that are banned from use in budget requests, reports Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

There is a scene in George Orwell's famous dystopian novel *1984*, where the protagonist, Winston Smith, is having a conversation with a philologist by the name of Syme. Syme is involved in a government effort to restructure the language spoken by the novel's upper classes, those who have power or work for the ruling party. The language is called "Newspeak." Syme's job is to get rid of dangerous words. Here is how he describes his task: "We're destroying words – scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. ... The whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought. In the end we shall make thoughtcrime [having unorthodox thoughts] literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it."

Now let's shift to another scene, not a literary or fictional scene, but a probable real life one.

Sometime in the month of December 2017, somewhere in the bowels of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in Washington, D.C., a high-level appointee of the Trump administration moved to take ideological control of the agency's budget-writing process. This official presented a directive to the agency's departments, such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), listing seven words that *were not to be used* in budget preparation. If they were, they

would be flagged and the document sent back for “correction.” The seven “forbidden” words are: “vulnerable,” “entitlement,” “diversity,” “transgender,” “fetus,” “evidence-based” and “science-based.”

The higher-ups at the HHS have insisted that there is no “ban” in place. Departments like the CDC can still do research in areas to which these unwelcome key words relate. But this disclaimer is misleading. To do the research you need money, and the money comes from the budget. The “discouragement” of key words is meant to marginalize their related research agendas. If fully effective, this attempt at censorship – for that is what it is – could contribute to undermining several generations of cultural progress, and challenge the “science-based” methodology that serves as a foundation for the modern world.

We already know that President Trump has no time for facts that differ from his personal worldview. That is why the U.S. is not part of the “science-based” treaty to slow down global warming. We also already know that he does not think minorities (both racial/ethnic and sexual) deserve protection under the law. These and other prejudices, worn so publicly by the president of the United States, have let loose a revolt of religious and social reactionaries, perhaps numerically represented by the 33% of Americans who approve of Trump’s performance. These folks would take the country back to a time of discrimination, segregation, and scientific know-nothingness. And for Trump these folks are the only ones who really count. He has recently declared that unfavorable polls are “fake news.” This is Trump “making America great again.”

It appears that one way Trump and his allies think this can be done is by censoring the language used by the people in power and those who work for them. As the computer engineer and writer Jem Berkes points out in reference to 1984, “the ultimate aim of Newspeak is to enclose people in an orthodox pseudo-reality and isolate them from the real world.” Sounds a lot like what is happening at HHS.

### **Can Censorship Work?**

Can this work? It probably already has among the roughly one-third of adult Americans who are sympathetic to Mr. Trump’s ultimate aims. These include many Christian fundamentalists and various racist conservative sects, the Alt-Right and Fox TV talking heads. Among those who are of the opposite point of view, both cultural and political progressives, there is no chance that this proposed “orthodoxy” will go unchallenged. Many of this latter group are old enough to remember what the president’s “great America” once looked like – for instance, what life was like before the civil rights acts. And many of those who can see through Trump’s double-talk, of whatever age, have an instinctive preference for equality, fairness and clear thinking.

However, between these two opposing groups lies the insulated masses – the millions who pay little attention to politics and know little of the importance of science. These folks, focused on their day-to-day concerns, are essentially isolated in their localness. They have no sense of what is presently at stake, and therefore find it difficult to think critically about the Trump agenda. For this group, skewing language may well result in skewing their worldview. It is probably from the thinking of this segment of the population that Trump and his agents want to ultimately eliminate the values represented by the “seven forbidden words” and all that they mean for social policy.

Thus, the end game is to have no more thinking of society and its problems in terms of a citizen diversity, minority vulnerability, or entitlement based on proven need. For instance, citizens are not to think that sexual minorities are in need of legal protections. Indeed, the country’s LGBT population turns out to have less right to protection than an unborn fetus. In addition, citizens are to no longer pay heed to evidence-based and science-based arguments when they may call into question the practices of alleged societal customs.

### **Donald Trump’s Use of Language**

You might find the scenario laid out above farfetched. Yet it correlates well with the way Donald Trump uses language, as well as his devaluing of any objective standard for truth. Thus, President Trump’s persistent combination of gross exaggeration and “alternative facts” gives many of his public statements an Orwellian odor.

In his ghost-written book *The Art of the Deal*, Trump is quoted as stating that “if you tell people a lie three times, they will believe anything.” No doubt he has told himself this more than three times, for he now seems to live his public life by this tenet. There are fantastic and untrue self-aggrandizing claims such as, because of the changes Trump is initiating, “our children will grow up in a nation of miracles,” and “we have done more in five months than practically any president in history.”

There are also fantastic and untrue negative claims such as some 3 million votes were cast illegally in the presidential election – all of them apparently for Hillary Clinton- and “[President] Obama founded ISIS, literally.” *According to the Washington Post’s* Fact Check project, “President Trump has made 1,318 false or misleading claims over [his first] 263 days [in office]. Many of these claims are repeated over and over again – significantly more than three times.

### **Turning Back the Clock**

Forbidding specific terminology from the budget language of HHS departments

constitutes one avenue of attack against those who refuse to believe Trump's innumerable lies. You might not believe his fantasies, but you are not to use "evidence-based" counter-arguments if you operate within the executive branch bureaucracies he ultimately controls.

Of course, the implicit censorship inherent in ideology has always played a role in U.S. politics. And the ultra-conservative ideology behind the "seven forbidden words" gambit has been around for a long time. It dominated economic policy until the New Deal and social policy until the Civil Rights Movement. By modern standards it brought disaster in both realms. So why would anyone want it back? Maybe because the aims of greater economic and racial/ethnic equality make some white citizens feel disempowered and uncomfortable. One way to address that discomfort is to turn the clock back. To do this, you just restructure reality by labeling those parts that you don't like as "fake." Trump does this almost daily.

The strategy of eliminating the official use of words like "diversity," "vulnerable," "entitlement," "transgender," "evidence-based," "science-based," and "fetus" is part of this effort to turn the clock back. Maybe then, so the story goes, with no words to express these concepts, the uncritical minds of our time will be – as Syme the philologist predicts – unable to think unorthodox thoughts.

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## The Still-Missing Evidence of Russia-gate

The central groupthink around Russia-gate is the still unproven claim that Russia hacked Democratic emails in 2016 and publicized them via WikiLeaks, a crucial issue that NSA experts say should be easy to prove if true, reports Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

A changing-places moment brought about by Russia-gate is that liberals who are

usually more skeptical of U.S. intelligence agencies, especially their evidence-free claims, now question the patriotism of Americans who insist that the intelligence community supply proof to support the dangerous claims about Russian "hacking" of Democratic emails especially when some veteran U.S. government experts say the data would be easily available if the Russians indeed were guilty.

One of those experts is William Binney, a former high-level National Security Agency intelligence official who, after his 2001 retirement, blew the whistle on the extraordinary breadth of NSA surveillance programs. His outspoken criticism of the NSA during the George W. Bush administration made him the subject of FBI investigations that included a raid on his home in 2007.

Even before Edward Snowden's NSA whistleblowing, Binney publicly revealed that NSA had access to telecommunications companies' domestic and international billing records, and that since 9/11 the agency has intercepted some 15 trillion to 20 trillion communications. Snowden has said: "I have tremendous respect for Binney, who did everything he could according to the rules."

I spoke to Binney on Dec. 28 about Russia-gate and a host of topics having to do with spying and America's expanding national security state.

Dennis Bernstein: I would like you to begin by telling us a little about your background at the NSA and how you got there.

William Binney: I was in the United States Army from 1965 to 1969. They put me in the Army Security Agency, an affiliate of the NSA. They liked the work I was doing and they put me on a priority hire in 1970. I was in the NSA for 32 years, mostly working against the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. I was solving what were called "wizard puzzles," and the NSA was sometimes referred to as the "Puzzle Palace." I had to solve code systems and work on cyber systems and data systems to be able to predict in advance the "intentions and capabilities of adversaries or potential adversaries."

Bernstein: At a certain point you ran amiss of your supervisors. What did you come to understand and try to tell people that got you in dutch with your higher-ups?

Binney: By 1998-1999, the "digital issue" was basically solved. This created a problem for the upper ranks because at the time they were lobbying Congress for \$3.8 billion to continue working on what we had already accomplished. That lobby was started in 1989 for a separate program called Trailblazer, which failed miserably in 2005-2006. We had to brief Congress on how we were progressing and my information ran contrary to the efforts downtown to secure

more funding. And so this caused a problem internally.

We learned from some of our staff members in Congress that several of the corporations that were getting contracts from the NSA were downtown lobbying against our program in Congress. This is the military industrial complex in action. That lobby was supported by the NSA management because they just wanted more money to build a bigger empire.

But Dick Cheney, who was behind all of this, wanted it because he grew up under Nixon, who always wanted to know what his political enemies were thinking and doing. This kind of approach of bulk acquisition of everything was possible after you removed certain segments of our software and they used it against the entire digital world. Cheney wanted to know who his political enemies were and get updates about them at any time.

Bernstein: Your expertise was in the Soviet Union and so you must know a lot about bugging. Do you believe that Russia hacked and undermined our last election? Can Trump thank Russia for the result?

Binney: We at Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) published an article on this in July. First of all, if any of the data went anywhere across the fiber optic world, the NSA would know. Just inside the United States, the NSA has over a hundred tap points on the fiber lines, taking in everything.

Mark Klein exposed some of this at the AT&T facility in San Francisco.

This is not for foreigners, by the way, this is for targeting US citizens. If they wanted only foreigners, all they would have to do was look at the transatlantic cables where they surface on the coast of the United States. But they are not there, they are distributed among the US population.

Bernstein: So if, in fact, the Russians were tapping into DNC headquarters, the NSA would absolutely know about it.

Binney: Yes, and they would also have trace routes on where they went specifically, in Russia or anywhere else. If you remember, about three or four years ago, the Chinese hacked into somewhere in the United States and our government came out and confirmed that it was the Chinese who did it, and it came from a specific military facility in Shanghai. The NSA had these trace route programs embedded by the hundreds across the US and all around the world.

The other data that came out from Guccifer 2.0, a download from the DNC, has been a charade. It was a download and not a transfer across the Web. The Web won't manage such a high speed. It could not have gotten across the Atlantic at that high speed. You would have to have high capacity lines dedicated to that in order to do it. They have been playing games with us. There is no factual



evidence to back up any charge of hacking here.

Bernstein: So was this a leak by somebody at Democratic headquarters?

Binney: We don't know that for sure, either. All we know was that it was a local download. We can likely attribute it to a USB device that was physically passed along.

Bernstein: Let me come at this from the other side. Has the United States ever tried to hack into and undermine Russian operations in this way?

Binney: Oh, sure. We do it as much as anybody else. In the Ukraine, for example, we sponsored regime change. When someone who was pro-Soviet was elected president, we orchestrated a coup to put our man in power.

Then we invited the Ukraine into NATO. One of the agreements we made with the Russians when the Soviet Union fell apart was that the Ukraine would give them their nuclear weapons to manage and that we would not move NATO further east toward Russia. I think they made a big mistake when they asked Ukraine to join NATO. They should have asked Russia to join as well, making it all-inclusive. If you treat people as adversaries, they are going to act that way.

Bernstein: Did the US meddle in the Russian elections that brought Yeltsin to power?

Binney: I believe they did. We try to leverage our power and influence elections around the world.

Bernstein: What has your group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, been up to, and what has been the US government's response?

Binney: We have been discussing privacy and security with the European Union and with a number of European parliaments. Recently the Austrian supreme court ruled that the entire bulk acquisition system was unconstitutional. Everyone but the conservatives in the Austrian parliament voted that bill down, making Austria the first country there to do the right thing.

Bernstein: Is it your goal to defend people's privacy and their right to communicate privately?

Binney: Yes, to defend privacy but also to defend the Constitution. Right now, our government is violating the first, fourth and fifth amendments in various ways. Mueller did it, Comey did it, they were all involved in violating the Constitution.

Back in the 1990's, the idea was to make our analysts effective so that they

could see threats coming before they happened and alert people to take action so that lives would be saved. What happens now is that people go out and kill someone and then the NSA and the FBI go on a forensics mission. Intelligence is supposed to tell you in advance when a crime is coming so that you can do something to avert it. They have lost that perspective.

Bernstein: They now have access to every single one of our electronic conversations, is that right? The human mind has a hard time imagining how you could contain, move and study all that information.

Binney: Basically, it is achievable because most of the processing is done by machine so it doesn't cost human energy.

Bernstein: There seems to be a new McCarthyite operation around the Russia-gate investigation. It appears that it is an attempt to justify the idea that Clinton lost because the Russians undermined the election.

Binney: I have seen no evidence at all from anybody, including the intelligence community. If you look at the Intelligence Community Assessment (ICA) report, they state on the first page that "We have high confidence that the Russians did this." But when you get toward the end of the report, they basically confess that "our judgment does not imply that we have evidence to back it up."

Bernstein: It was initially put out that seventeen intelligence agencies found compelling evidence that the Russians hacked into our election. You're saying it was actually selected individuals from just three agencies. Is there anything to the revelations that FBI agents talked about taking action to prevent Trump from becoming president?

Binney: It certainly does seem that it is leaning that way, that is was all a frame-up. It is a sad time in our history, to see the government working against itself internally.

Bernstein: I take it you are not a big supporter of Trump.

Binney: Well, I voted for him. I couldn't vote for a warmonger like Clinton. She wanted to see our planes shooting down Russian planes in Syria. She advocated for destabilizing Libya, for getting rid of Assad in Syria, she was a strong backer of the war in Iraq.

Bernstein: What concerns do you have regarding the Russia-gate investigation and the McCarthyite tactics that are being employed?

Binney: Ultimately, my main concern is that it could lead to actual war with Russia. We should definitely not be going down that path. We need to get out

of all these wars. I am also concerned about what we are doing to our own democracy. We are trampling the fundamental principles contained in the Constitution. The only way to reverse all this is to start indicting people who are participating in and managing these activities that are clearly unconstitutional.

**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.**

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## An Apology and Explanation

**From Editor Robert Parry:** For readers who have come to see Consortiumnews as a daily news source, I would like to extend my personal apology for our spotty production in recent days. On Christmas Eve, I suffered a stroke that has affected my eyesight (especially my reading and thus my writing) although apparently not much else. The doctors have also been working to figure out exactly what happened since I have never had high blood pressure, I never smoked, and my recent physical found nothing out of the ordinary. Perhaps my personal slogan that "every day's a work day" had something to do with this.

Perhaps, too, the unrelenting ugliness that has become Official Washington and national journalism was a factor. It seems that since I arrived in Washington in 1977 as a correspondent for The Associated Press, the nastiness of American democracy and journalism has gone from bad to worse. In some ways, the Republicans escalated the vicious propaganda warfare following Watergate, refusing to accept that Richard Nixon was guilty of some extraordinary malfeasance (including the 1968 sabotage of President Johnson's Vietnam peace talks to gain an edge in the election and then the later political dirty tricks and cover-ups that came to include Watergate). Rather than accept the reality of Nixon's guilt, many Republicans simply built up their capability to wage information warfare, including the creation of ideological news organizations to protect the party and its leaders from "another Watergate."

So, when Democrat Bill Clinton defeated President George H.W. Bush in the 1992 election, the Republicans used their news media and their control of the special prosecutor apparatus (through Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Appeals Court Judge David Sentelle) to unleash a wave of investigations to challenge Clinton's legitimacy, eventually uncovering his affair with White

House intern Monica Lewinsky.

The idea had developed that the way to defeat your political opponent was not just to make a better argument or rouse popular support but to dredge up some “crime” that could be pinned on him or her. The GOP success in damaging Bill Clinton made possible George W. Bush’s disputed “victory” in 2000 in which Bush took the presidency despite losing the popular vote and almost certainly losing the key state of Florida if all ballots legal under state law were counted. Increasingly, America – even at the apex of its uni-power status – was taking on the look of a banana republic except with much higher stakes for the world.

Though I don’t like the word “weaponized,” it began to apply to how “information” was used in America. The point of Consortiumnews, which I founded in 1995, was to use the new medium of the modern Internet to allow the old principles of journalism to have a new home, i.e., a place to pursue important facts and giving everyone a fair shake. But we were just a tiny pebble in the ocean. The trend of using journalism as just another front in no-holds-barred political warfare continued – with Democrats and liberals adapting to the successful techniques pioneered mostly by Republicans and by well-heeled conservatives.

Barack Obama’s election in 2008 was another turning point as Republicans again challenged his legitimacy with bogus claims about his “Kenyan birth,” a racist slur popularized by “reality” TV star Donald Trump. Facts and logic no longer mattered. It was a case of using whatever you had to diminish and destroy your opponent.

We saw similar patterns with the U.S. government’s propaganda agencies developing themes to demonize foreign adversaries and then to smear Americans who questioned the facts or challenged the exaggerations as “apologists.” This approach was embraced not only by Republicans (think of President George W. Bush distorting the reality in Iraq in 2003 to justify the invasion of that country under false pretenses) but also by Democrats who pushed dubious or downright false depictions of the conflict in Syria (including blaming the Syrian government for chemical weapons attacks despite strong evidence that the events were staged by Al Qaeda and other militants who had become the tip of the spear in the neocon/liberal interventionist goal of removing the Assad dynasty and installing a new regime more acceptable to the West and to Israel).

More and more I would encounter policymakers, activists and, yes, journalists who cared less about a careful evaluation of the facts and logic and more about achieving a pre-ordained geopolitical result – and this loss of objective standards reached deeply into the most prestigious halls of American media. This perversion of principles – twisting information to fit a desired conclusion –

became the modus vivendi of American politics and journalism. And those of us who insisted on defending the journalistic principles of skepticism and evenhandedness were increasingly shunned by our colleagues, a hostility that first emerged on the Right and among neoconservatives but eventually sucked in the progressive world as well. Everything became “information warfare.”

### **The New Outcasts**

That is why many of us who exposed major government wrongdoing in the past have ended up late in our careers as outcasts and pariahs. Legendary investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, who helped expose major crimes of state from the My Lai massacre to the CIA’s abuses against American citizens, including illegal spying and LSD testing on unsuspecting subjects, has literally had to take his investigative journalism abroad because he uncovered inconvenient evidence that implicated Western-backed jihadists in staging chemical weapons attacks in Syria so the atrocities would be blamed on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The anti-Assad group think is so intense in the West that even strong evidence of staged events, such as the first patients arriving at hospitals before government planes could have delivered the sarin, was brushed aside or ignored. The Western media and the bulk of international agencies and NGOs were committed to gin up another case for “regime change” and any skeptics were decried as “Assad apologists” or “conspiracy theorists,” the actual facts be damned.

So Hersh and weapons experts such as MIT’s Theodore Postol were shoved into the gutter in favor of hip new NATO-friendly groups like Bellingcat, whose conclusions always fit neatly with the propaganda needs of the Western powers.

The demonization of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russia is just the most dangerous feature of this propaganda process – and this is where the neocons and the liberal interventionists most significantly come together. The U.S. media’s approach to Russia is now virtually 100 percent propaganda. Does any sentient human being read the New York Times’ or the Washington Post’s coverage of Russia and think that he or she is getting a neutral or unbiased treatment of the facts? For instance, the full story of the infamous Magnitsky case cannot be told in the West, nor can the objective reality of the Ukraine coup in 2014. The American people and the West in general are carefully shielded from hearing the “other side of the story.” Indeed to even suggest that there is another side to the story makes you a “Putin apologist” or “Kremlin stooge.”

Western journalists now apparently see it as their patriotic duty to hide key facts that otherwise would undermine the demonizing of Putin and Russia. Ironically, many “liberals” who cut their teeth on skepticism about the Cold War and the bogus justifications for the Vietnam War now insist that we must all accept whatever the U.S. intelligence community feeds us, even if we’re told to

accept the assertions on faith.

## **The Trump Crisis**

Which brings us to the crisis that is Donald Trump. Trump's victory over Democrat Hillary Clinton has solidified the new paradigm of "liberals" embracing every negative claim about Russia just because elements of the CIA, FBI and the National Security Agency produced a report last Jan 6 that blamed Russia for "hacking" Democratic emails and releasing them via WikiLeaks. It didn't seem to matter that these "hand-picked" analysts (as Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called them) evinced no evidence and even admitted that they weren't asserting any of this as fact.

The hatred of Trump and Putin was so intense that old-fashioned rules of journalism and fairness were brushed aside. On a personal note, I faced harsh criticism even from friends of many years for refusing to enlist in the anti-Trump "Resistance." The argument was that Trump was such a unique threat to America and the world that I should join in finding any justification for his ouster. Some people saw my insistence on the same journalistic standards that I had always employed somehow a betrayal.

Other people, including senior editors across the mainstream media, began to treat the unproven Russia-gate allegations as flat fact. No skepticism was tolerated and mentioning the obvious bias among the never-Trumpers inside the FBI, Justice Department and intelligence community was decried as an attack on the integrity of the U.S. government's institutions. Anti-Trump "progressives" were posturing as the true patriots because of their now unquestioning acceptance of the evidence-free proclamations of the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Hatred of Trump had become like some invasion of the body snatchers – or perhaps many of my journalistic colleagues had never believed in the principles of journalism that I had embraced throughout my adult life. To me, journalism wasn't just a cover for political activism; it was a commitment to the American people and the world to tell important news stories as fully and fairly as I could; not to slant the "facts" to "get" some "bad" political leader or "guide" the public in some desired direction.

I actually believed that the point of journalism in a democracy was to give the voters unbiased information and the necessary context so the voters could make up their own minds and use their ballot – as imperfect as that is – to direct the politicians to take actions on behalf of the nation. The unpleasant reality that the past year has brought home to me is that a shockingly small number of people in Official Washington and the mainstream news media actually believe in

real democracy or the goal of an informed electorate.

Whether they would admit it or not, they believe in a “guided democracy” in which “approved” opinions are elevated – regardless of their absence of factual basis – and “unapproved” evidence is brushed aside or disparaged regardless of its quality. Everything becomes “information warfare” – whether on Fox News, the Wall Street Journal editorial page, MSNBC, the New York Times or the Washington Post. Instead of information provided evenhandedly to the public, it is rationed out in morsels designed to elicit the desired emotional reactions and achieve a political outcome.

As I said earlier, much of this approach was pioneered by Republicans in their misguided desire to protect Richard Nixon, but it has now become all pervasive and has deeply corrupted Democrats, progressives and mainstream journalism. Ironically, the ugly personal characteristics of Donald Trump – his own contempt for facts and his crass personal behavior – have stripped the mask off the broader face of Official America.

What is perhaps most alarming about the past year of Donald Trump is that the mask is now gone and, in many ways, all sides of Official Washington are revealed collectively as reflections of Donald Trump, disinterested in reality, exploiting “information” for tactical purposes, eager to manipulate or con the public. While I’m sure many anti-Trumpers will be deeply offended by my comparison of esteemed Establishment figures with the grotesque Trump, there is a deeply troubling commonality between Trump’s convenient use of “facts” and what has pervaded the Russia-gate investigation.

My Christmas Eve stroke now makes it a struggle for me to read and to write. Everything takes much longer than it once did – and I don’t think that I can continue with the hectic pace that I have pursued for many years. But – as the New Year dawns – if I could change one thing about America and Western journalism, it would be that we all repudiate “information warfare” in favor of an old-fashioned respect for facts and fairness – and do whatever we can to achieve a truly informed electorate.

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

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# Reverberations from Trump's Jerusalem Move

One ironic benefit from Donald Trump's presidency is that the world is showing more independence against U.S. edicts, such as the recent rebuff of Trump's decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, as Dennis J Bernstein reports.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The U.N. General Assembly's rebuff of overt threats of economic retaliation from President Trump – in the overwhelming repudiation of his decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem – marked a rare show of independence from Washington. Despite President Trump's threats, the vote against the U.S. position was 128 to 9, with 35 abstentions.

I spoke about the significance of the vote with Professor Francis Boyle, a scholar and long-time pro-Palestinian activist, who has been deeply engaged in the Mideast peace process and various negotiations over the last 30 years. Boyle is a professor of international law at the University of Illinois' College of Law. He served as a legal advisor to the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

Dennis Bernstein: Before we jump into this, I would like people to know a little bit more about your background, because you're the perfect person to hit this subject at this time. Just say a little bit more about your work with the Palestinians.

Francis Boyle: Right. Well, starting in 1987, at [the Palestinians] request, I made a speech at the United Nations on the 20th anniversary of the Six-Day War. And, in this speech, I outlined to them an agenda for establishing their statehood, including, at some point, invoking the Uniting for Peace Resolution.

So, they liked what I had to say and asked me to write it up in a memo, which I did. You can read it in my book "Palestine, Palestinians and International Law." And they then carried out my recommendation in their Declaration of Independence of 15 November, 1988. And I was their legal advisor on all of that. My memorandum became their position paper. And I've worked with them since then.

Today, the State of Palestine is recognized du jour by 136 states, the last time I looked. And it also has U.N. observer state status now at the United Nations



along the lines that Switzerland had before it became a full-fledged U.N. member state.

[...] And certainly the Palestinians have publicly stated that they can, at some point in the future, invoke the Uniting for Peace Resolution to obtain their admission to the United Nations as a full-fledged U.N. member state. They said that's next on the agenda. I guess we have to see what happens here. I really can't say, but they said they're renewing that struggle in January [2018], after the dust settles here.

DB: Okay, now let's talk about the significance of the vote today [Dec. 21], which has a lot to do with Jerusalem. And, talk about it, if you will, in the context of the Uniting for Peace procedure because this gives it more power or more of a focus.

FB: Well, that is correct. When Uniting for Peace started out, back during the days of the Korean War, the Soviet Union proceeded to exercise a veto. And the United States under Secretary of State Dean Acheson – back in those days we controlled the General Assembly – put forward the Uniting for Peace Resolution in the General Assembly to circumvent the Soviet veto. And then [the US] used it to impose fairly terrible economic sanctions against North Korea that continue until today.

And, over the years, the Uniting for Peace procedure was approved by the International Court of Justice in the [Unclear 05:48] advisory opinion in 1962. And I did, I was the one who informed the Palestinians about the Uniting for Peace procedure and that we need to go forward and use it. And they have used it.

And [the vote on Dec. 21] was yet another example. The mainstream news media is dismissing this as nothing more than symbolic. You know, Dennis, if it were nothing more than symbolic then why did Nikki Haley get up there and threaten to break the legs of everyone in the world, if they voted for it, and likewise, Trump make his thuggish threat, as well, at his last cabinet meetings? So it's far more than symbolic.

Under Uniting for Peace the General Assembly cannot require states to do anything. But they can certainly authorize them. And what happens here with this resolution under Uniting for Peace is that it really solidified the international consensus on Jerusalem. As you note, we discussed this before, when Trump announced his new policy, and invited other states to follow moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem and recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, which it definitely is not, whether west Jerusalem or east Jerusalem.

And, this vote today really solidifies that international consensus. So that is a positive thing, but, obviously it's going to have to be followed up by more steps by the Palestinians. Again, my advice is the next stage here is to use United for Peace to have Palestine admitted to the U.N. itself. But, that's under consideration. We'll have to see what they do.

DB: And what, exactly, did that resolution say? It was reinforcing earlier Security Council resolutions. What exactly are we talking about here?

FB: Well, the way the United States government set it up under Secretary of State Dean Acheson, was that in the event there is a matter affecting international peace and security, and at least one of the permanent members at the Security Council exercises a veto power over a resolution on that matter, when the resolution is introduced in the Security Council, the matter is then turned over to the United Nations General Assembly for action, for the General Assembly to decide what to do about it, in accordance with a two-thirds vote. So, the United States government originally introduced this. We conceived it and we applied it, regretfully, to North Korea.

And those economic sanctions are still strangling North Korea today, as we talk. And Trump is trying to escalate them. But in any event, sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. I think it's only history, sort of cosmic blowback here, that a generation later the Palestinians and most of the rest of the world are using Uniting for Peace against the United States. This is our baby, as it were, and they are sticking it back to us.

DB: Alright, now let's just talk a little bit about Jerusalem and what's at stake here. Last we spoke, one of the things you said, and it's very concerning and absolutely true, is that you were now fearing the deaths again of more Palestinians in this fight for liberation.

FB: And, it's true, Dennis, [...] in fairness, that Jews might die too.

DB: Yes. And things have been happening, clearly Palestinians have been dying. There have been attacks in the Gaza Strip. There have been some incidents from Palestinians coming at Jews, that's a fact as well. But, always, it's the Palestinians that lead the dying. And what I want you to talk about here is, because people still do not get it: What is at stake in Jerusalem here? What exactly is this about? And why will this be the line of resistance?

FB: Because, as you know, Jerusalem is the headquarters for the three great monotheistic faiths: Islam, Judaism, Christianity. And, especially, for the Muslims the Haram al-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, it's the plateau over there. And that plateau is considered to be sacred. They have on there the Al-Aqsa

Mosque, where Muslims used to direct their prayers before Mecca Medina. There is the Dome of the Rock where it is said Mohammed ascended into Heaven. And then you have the El Burka, which is the sort of “stand on the side” where Mohammed is said to have tied up his horse, when he miraculously flew from Arabia to Jerusalem, to make his ascent into Heaven.

So, on the Jewish side, you have the Wailing Wall. And, despite when everything is said, this is still Palestinian. It is protected under the Geneva Conventions, and also there’s a 1953 convention to which Israel is a party, protecting cultural religious sites in times of war. Although, I believe, that could easily be negotiated by simply setting up an easement so that Jews could go worship at the Wailing Wall. I don’t think Palestinians have any great desire to stop that, one way or the other. And then Christianity, of course, you have all the holy sites there, the Nativity, the Church of the Nativity, the Holy Sepulchre, etc.

So, it’s really the flashpoint for these three religions. Although, again, I did devise a proposal for the Palestinians that was approved by the PLO, on sharing Jerusalem as a capital between both Israel and Palestine, the two states. That would have to be subject to approval by the Security Council because Jerusalem still has a separate status under international laws of *corpus separatum*. But that would probably be approved.

And you can read that proposal that did have the approval of the PLO in my book “Palestine, Palestinians and International Law” along with the original memorandum I did for them going back to 1987. And then the Chair of the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East peace negotiations, my client and friend, the late, great Dr. Haidar Abdel-Shafi, instructed me to draw up the counter offer to Israel’s Oslo Bantustan [the Oslo Accords of 1993], which I did do. And that is published in there with Dr. Abdel-Shafi’s permission.

It was clear at the beginning that Oslo was pretty much a Bantustan, and so I advised all the Palestinians to that effect. And Abdel-Shafi then instructed me to come up with their counter offer which I did do. But that position did not prevail. Dr. Abdel-Shafi and I fought against Oslo to the bitter end. Then we lost, so there you go.

DB: Now, staying with Jerusalem, I think the statement made by Trump, even though it’s obviously a continuum of U.S. policy – Obama’s ambassador [Dan Shapiro] was no better, if not worse—but what’s going on on the ground in Jerusalem in the context of this statement, in other words, the continuing expansion of house demolitions, the attempt to put security devices, and set up a place to block Muslims from going to pray before making them go through a metal detector..that was going on in the recent past. The heat on this situation

in Jerusalem has been high before this announcement. So, this is just sort of pushing it right at the edge, isn't it?

FB: Right. Dennis, it's really emboldening Netanyahu and his religious fanatics over there, who, by the way were complicit in the assassination of Prime Minister [Yitzhak] Rabin. Who was first and, so far, the only Prime Minister they've had over there who was interested in negotiating peace with the Palestinians and Syria, which is why they murdered him.

So, yeah, this simply emboldens these people. And the real flashpoint is... Netanyahu permitting these fanatical, racist settlers to go onto Haram Al-Sharif [Temple Mount] itself, and storm Al-Aqsa Mosque. And, that is happening repeatedly. And it's extremely dangerous and highly provocative. Because, at the end of the day, these people want to destroy Al-Aqsa and build their so-called third temple. And it would be a total catastrophe if this happens, because you'd have 1.5 billion Muslims in the world rising up in unison over this.

But that's the real danger right now, I think, is the emboldenment of Netanyahu and these fanatical religious extremists, settlers that now believe they have a blank check to do whatever they want to do. And especially in Jerusalem and particularly the Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, yeah.

DB: And, I guess it should be of concern that Jared Kushner has a foundation that funds the building of settlements in the West Bank. I would think that that would be of concern to anybody thinking about any kind of negotiation, whatsoever. Not to mention the fact that Netanyahu would stay with the family at the Kushner house when he was in the U.S.

FB: Well, that's correct. Kushner is aiding and abetting, by means of his foundation, he is aiding and abetting more crimes under the Hague Regulations of 1907, to which the United States government is a party, a violation of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the four Geneva Conventions to which the United States is a party. And crimes against humanity as defined by the statute of the International Criminal Court. And the prosecutor, the International Criminal Court, is currently investigating war crimes, and crimes against humanity because of these settlements.

So, it's impossible to think that a guy like Kushner could possibly serve as some type of mediator here, and it does look now, the Palestinians have decided to turn to Russia and China, and the United Nations to serve as mediators. Although I have to point out, Dennis, that I was involved as legal advisor to the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East Peace Negotiations right from the very beginning there in Washington, D.C. in the fall of 1991, convened by President Bush, Sr., and the United States government has never served as an

honest broker. They've always supported the Israeli position.

And, indeed, I think as I mentioned it before, Bush, Sr. put three American Jews in charge of the process, [Dennis] Ross, [Aaron David] Miller and [Daniel] Kurtzer. And they basically functioned as Israel's lawyer. And, I believe, two of them were, still are, orthodox. I don't think Ross is. And here we are, all these years later, now 2017 – that was 1991 – and nothing has changed because Trump has put Kushner, [David] Friedman and [Jason] Greenblatt as the so-called negotiators.

And here all three of them are orthodox. So, this situation is completely preposterous. How do you expect any negotiations to go on here – reasonable, fair negotiations? It's not going to happen.

DB: And, I guess, that takes us back to Nikki Haley's threatening statements today sounding like a bit of a mafioso captain warning any nation that would vote – I guess they didn't have much of an impact on the vote – but clearly it's got to be frightening if you're a little nation that lives or dies based on U.S. aid and they're saying you vote for this resolution in support of the Palestinians then we're going to kill you. This is also not a good sign.

FB: Right, well without the Haley/Trump threats, I suspect the Palestinians would have also picked up the 35 abstentions, and maybe the no-shows. It appears several states just didn't show up, because of these threats. So, basically it probably would have been – what, there's 193 U.N. member states – so it probably would have been 185 to 9. But under United for Peace all they needed was two-thirds of those voting and abstentions didn't count. So, there you are.

They have the votes, and indeed, they do have the votes to be admitted as a full-fledged U.N. member state based on this vote here. And the Trump/Haley threats, it does appear to me, they've got the votes to get admitted to the U.N., hopefully starting in January [2018]. There's been a statement made that they will be submitting another resolution on their admission to the Security Council sometime in January. And, assuming the U.S. vetoes it, which it probably will under Trump, they can again invoke Uniting for Peace, and put it before the General Assembly.

Because, at the end of the day, in accordance with the terms of the United Nations charter, the Security Council only makes a recommendation on admission, not any decision. There's a big difference between recommendations and decisions. And, also, under the terms of the United Nations charter, at the end of the day, it is the General Assembly that admits a member state, not the Security Council.

I had advised the Palestinians years ago, they can do this, that they did try in 2012. And, at that point they decided just to go for observer state status. They're going one step at a time, and we'll have to see what their next step is.

I also noticed that, although I don't have a list, but [Palestinian] President Abbas just exceeded to about 22 different treaties. I still haven't gotten the names of those treaties. But that also goes back to our previous conversation on Jerusalem here on a legal intifada.

They will use their memberships in all these international organizations to further solidify and promote their statehood. And, the bottom line is, I think that's positive, one, because even [Noam] Chomsky has pointed out, if the Palestinians keep going this way, at the end of the day you'll have two states over there.

Otherwise, I'm afraid we're just going to have total chaos, and the Palestinians will be getting nothing more than a collection of little Bantustans. You remember, back in the days, Dennis, when we used to fight apartheid in South Africa. We had Transkei, Ciskei, and Bophuthatswana that weren't even connected with each other. They were little bitty plots of land. And that's pretty much what Israel has in mind here.

DB: And it is important to note those who fought that war against apartheid in South Africa are among the strongest supporters of the Palestinians. And they now say, and I pushed them on this, because I want to know if we're talking hyperbole here, and they now say that the Palestinian situation is way worse, particularly in Gaza. Way worse than they ever had it in terms of the Bantustans that you were just referring to.

FB: That's correct. And indeed, my friend, Professor John Dugard, who had been Special Rapporteur on Palestine is from South Africa. And he was one of a handful of white, international law professors over there with the courage, integrity and principles to oppose apartheid in South Africa, at risk to his life. And Dugard has said the same thing. If you want to look at... do a google on his name DUGARD.

And Dugard has said, and as you point out, other ANC leaders have said, that what the Palestinians are up against is far worse than what we were up against in the struggle against apartheid. You were involved, I was involved, many of us fought apartheid in South Africa. And we're fighting apartheid over there [Palestine] today as well. The legal principles are pretty much the same.

DB: The legal principles are the same, but the uh... sort of the history and the details, or the situation, are quite a bit different. Israel and its lobby

controls U.S. policy so they're... all those anti-apartheiders have been fairly silent, wouldn't you say?

FB: Well, we have the BDS campaign...

DB: Well, yes... no, no, this is the silver lining but I mean all those politicians, and all those civil rights activists, and all those folks... and you know I can go down the list, do not see... if you even bring that up, either the subject disappears or you're considered an idiot, or a conspiracy theorist, over the top, whatever. When you make that parallel structure. I haven't heard it on NPR, have you?

FB: You mean National Propaganda Radio, Dennis? But, look, I set up the Israeli divestment/disinvestment campaign, in November of 2000, because of my involvement in the divestment/disinvestment campaign here against apartheid South Africa, that was called for by a black lawyer who was ahead of me at Harvard Law School, Randal Robinson.

And looking into the situation, I concluded that the legal principles are the same. And, when I did this, I remember the president of Harvard, Larry Summers, condemned me, because I was involved in the Harvard divestment/disinvestment campaign, and accused me of being anti-semitic.

And WBUR, which is the NPR affiliate out there in Boston asked me to debate Summers and I said I would. And Summers did not have the courage, integrity or principles to debate me. As you know, eventually Harvard fired him because he publicly stated women are dumber than men when it comes to math and science. So, fine.

So I debated Alan Dershowitz on this, as far back as 2002. And, we had a debate and I won that debate. I clobbered Dershowitz. And in 2005 then-Palestinian civil society leaders contacted me and said "We really want to set up a BDS campaign, modeled on what the world did against apartheid South Africa. Boycott, divestment and sanctions, would you go in with us?" I said, "Sure." So, I sort of surrendered the initiative to them.

But we've made an enormous amount of progress in these years. And, yes, the forces against us are substantial, and I guess more substantial than in apartheid South Africa.

Although thereto, as you note, the United States government fully supported apartheid South Africa, except during President Jimmy Carter. But all the rest of them supported it, up through and including Reagan, and the collapse of apartheid. So, when I set this thing up in 2000 I knew the forces against us would be formidable.

But the only progressive ... change we've ever seen in this country, Dennis, in my lifetime, going back to the struggle for civil rights for black people, which I also supported, has come from the people, and grassroots movement. It has never come from Washington, D.C. And it certainly hasn't come from the judiciary. It hasn't come from Congress. It hasn't come from the executive branch.

So, I think we've done a pretty good job in the BDS campaign, not just in this country, but worldwide. And it's going to take more time. Israel is fighting it tooth and nail, as you know. They even set up a separate ministry over there, to counteract BDS. [Sheldon] Adelson is putting millions of dollars into the campaign.

But I think everyone who looks at it realizes they are losing, because we have truth and justice on our side. So we're just going to have to keep plucking away, Dennis. People want to have peace with justice there for both Palestinians and Jews. It can be done. But we have a lot more work to do.

DB: Beautiful. Alright, well, Professor Boyle, as always we appreciate the good information, and the discussion about an issue that is really at the core, whether there's going to be peace in this world.

FB: I do want to make one more point here which I think is very important. Back in 1991, I was advising both the Palestinian delegation and the Syrian delegation. And the Jordanians were prepared for peace but they couldn't go first. And at that time Lebanon was occupied by Syria, so they basically did whatever the Syrians told them. So I was advising, at the same time, the two key actors here.

And I can assure you that if Israel had wanted peace back in 1991, with the Palestinians and with the Syrians, we could have had it. Because I knew the Palestinian bottom line, and I knew the Syrian bottom line, and I was drafting their documents. And, regretfully, they started under [former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak] Shamir, whose strategy was stall and delay. Then came Rabin, and he negotiated a comprehensive peace plan, agreement with Syria, full peace for full withdrawal. And he also did the Oslo Accord with the Palestinians. And then he was murdered.

DB: He was murdered by settlers. Let's remind people. He was murdered by crazy....

FB: Extremist settlers. And Netanyahu came to power and there's been no peace, peace process to speak of, since then. Now that's 1995. And here we are today. But I can say, based on my inside personal knowledge that peace was at hand, back at that point, at this early point. And, regretfully, we're pretty far from



it today.

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](http://www.flashpoints.net).

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## Trump’s Continuation of US Interventionism

Criticizing his predecessors for misguided foreign wars, President Trump promised a break in that approach, but his National Security Strategy report indicates a shift more in rhetoric than substance, reports Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

President Trump’s recent report on National Security Strategy supposedly reflected his America First “realism” but his approach seems more like old wine in a new bottle, particularly his continued strong support for Saudi Arabia and Israel in the Middle East combined with an even more aggressive U.S. policy in Asia aimed at containing China as well as confronting North Korea.

For more background on Trump’s foreign policy, I spoke to Matthew Hoh. In 2009, Hoh resigned his position with the State Department in Afghanistan in protest of the escalation of the Afghan War by the Obama administration. He previously had been in Iraq with a State Department team and with the U.S. Marines. He is a senior fellow with the Center of International Policy. Hoh is also a member of the advisory boards of Expose Facts, Veterans For Peace and World Beyond War.

Dennis Bernstein: Before we get into Trump’s recent major speech on foreign policy, let’s take a look at Afghanistan, where you were posted by the State Department until you resigned in protest. Your thoughts after over 16 years of a US-waged war there?

Matthew Hoh: For the people of Afghanistan, this war has been going on since the 1970’s, much of it propelled by and supported by outside involvement. It has been eight years now since I resigned. If you had told me back then that this level of tragedy would still be continuing eight years on, there is no way I would have believed you.

It was just revealed by the Pentagon that in the last six months, American and Afghan commandos have conducted more than 2,000 raids in Afghanistan. Americans are still there kicking in doors, raiding people's homes in the middle of the night, killing them, taking prisoners. This has happened over 2,000 times in Afghanistan in the last six months! In addition to that, we have seen an escalation in air strikes, both from drones and from manned aircraft, in Afghanistan and throughout the Muslim world.

These poor suffering people are no closer to seeing an end to this horrific violence. Money continues to pour in to support the war, people continue to get rich off the war, the opium trade continues to expand.

Bernstein: It's interesting, there are two major things that Trump has done when it comes to Afghanistan. One was to test out "the mother of all bombs" there and the other was to state that we are not going to make any commitment to withdraw by a certain date.

Hoh: Dropping the mother of all bombs was really the first indication of what war policy was going to look like under Trump. Under Obama and under Bush, there was a political victory sought. As immoral and misguided as the military aims were, there was a political end stated. They encouraged elections, they assisted in development, they were involved in a process of reconciliation.

Under the Trump administration, there is no political end state. People who were concerned about there being so many generals in the White House were concerned for a reason. We have General Kelly as Chief of Staff, Mattis as Secretary of Defense and General McMaster as National Security Advisor. You have military operations now conducted simply for military purposes. This new bomb is a great example of that.

They lied that it was used to go after a tunnel complex. It was above ground and turns the entire area into one huge flash. It is useless against tunnels. The dropping of this bomb was meant to punish the people there because, a week prior, an American service member had been killed in that area.

This policy of terror and punishment is in common with other wars which America is leading in the region. In Iraq, the US-led forces have demolished Sunni cities in the Euphrates and Tigris River Valleys. Look at what the Saudis and the United Arab Emirates have been doing in Yemen, what the Kurdish forces along with the American Air Force have done to Raqqa as well as other cities in eastern Syria. And in Afghanistan we are seeing an increase in air strikes, in artillery operations and in these night raids into people's homes.

Our policy has become to terrorize people into subjugation. And this ties into

what Trump said on the campaign trail. Trump said a number of times that he was going to “take the gloves off,” that our wars were too politically correct, that we should be killing the families of terrorists and destroying their homes, etc.

Bernstein: President Trump gave his big speech yesterday [Monday, Dec. 18] on US foreign policy. What is your take on what was said?

Hoh: As has been pointed out by a number of commentators, Trump’s speech yesterday was really a public relations speech, affirming his status as the leader of the Make America Great Again campaign. The first thing he talked about, as he was addressing the national security interests of the United States, was how thirteen months prior the American people elected him to be a “glorious new hope.” The target of the speech was not China or Russia or the Islamic State. Its purpose was to reaffirm to his domestic political base that he is the man to lead a policy of American exceptionalism. This is the belief that American moral superiority is needed to keep the world in order.

If you wanted details, you weren’t going to get them in this speech. I always tell people, if you want the details, go to the budget. Just as in previous administrations, there is a preoccupation with China. We are building ten new aircraft carriers that will cost \$13 billion apiece. That is meant for an adversary like China. The Air Force refuses to even reveal the price tag of its new nuclear bomber. Our nuclear weapons program will get a trillion dollar shot in the arm to modernize over the next thirty years. These types of weapons are meant to intimidate our “competitors,” as Trump likes to call them, who might rival our power.

Bernstein: The Obama administration had a very aggressive policy in the so-called Pacific Pivot, drawing a ring around China to undermine it while at the same time asking for China’s support in dealing with North Korea. Is it more dangerous now because Trump is a little more volatile and dangerous and might want to create a distraction from his troubles at home?

Hoh: For those of us on the left, we should not lose sight of what took place during Obama’s eight years which allowed this to happen. The previous administration did nothing to hold the torturers accountable. This makes it easier for a Donald Trump to proclaim that torture is back.

In the case of the Pacific Pivot, we are ringing China with military bases, strike aircraft and naval ships that would demolish anything that China has, despite the fact that they have expanded their military forces over the last couple decades. A modern conventional war with China would last a week at the outside. Obama did a lot to heighten those tensions.

For centuries, the Chinese have had to deal with colonization and the imperialist ambitions of various powers. A hundred years ago, the American Navy was present on Chinese rivers! What we are seeing now is really an extension of gunboat diplomacy. So when, today, the Chinese hear of American plans to build new aircraft carriers and bombers and nuclear cruise missiles, and know that this is geared toward them, it is not difficult to predict how they are going to react.

I think Trump truly believes that, through our weapon superiority and our violence, we can be a great nation again. And also, as you mentioned, there's the "wag the dog" phenomenon. What if his son does get indicted (which is probably what he deserves)? Will he do something to distract from that?

Clinton did something similar to distract attention from the Monica Lewinsky affair. It is not uncommon for politicians to get the media and the public to focus elsewhere.

But the fact that Trump has these generals on his cabinet who are driven by their military mindset and tend not to have the political concerns that civilians have, makes this administration more dangerous than the previous two.

Bernstein: I'd like to hear your thoughts on Russiagate.

Hoh: First of all, if the Russian intelligence services were not trying to hack into the DNC and RNC computers in order to understand our election system, as well as everything else about us, then the head of Russian intelligence should be fired. This is what intelligence services do. We've known about hacking for decades now. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that they did hack into these systems. However, evidence of this has not been presented to the American public, other than assertions from the intelligence community, whose chief function is to lie.

Normally, what is called a "national intelligence estimate" is done, which follows specific guidelines and is reviewed by all the different agencies. This is what was doctored under the Bush administration to allow for the war in Iraq.

But we also saw it with the 2007 national intelligence estimate, which said that the Iranians had not been doing anything with their nuclear weapons program since 2003.

So, within the intelligence community, they do have a process that would substantiate these claims of Russian interference in our elections but that process has not been utilized. This hand-picked group of a dozen or so men and women from a few different agencies produced a report that says, in effect, "trust us." I am very skeptical, because no real evidence has yet to be produced.

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.

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## The Israel-gate Side of Russia-gate

While unproven claims of Russian meddling in U.S. politics have whipped Official Washington into a frenzy, much less attention has been paid to real evidence of Israeli interference in U.S. politics, as Dennis J Bernstein describes.

By Dennis J Bernstein

In investigating Russia’s alleged meddling in U.S. politics, special prosecutor Robert Mueller uncovered evidence that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pressured the Trump transition team to undermine President Obama’s plans to permit the United Nations to censure Israel over its illegal settlement building on the Palestinian West Bank, a discovery referenced in the plea deal with President Trump’s first National Security Adviser Michael Flynn.

At Netanyahu’s behest, Flynn and President Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner reportedly took the lead in the lobbying to derail the U.N. resolution, which Flynn discussed in a phone call with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak (in which the Russian diplomat rebuffed Flynn’s appeal to block the resolution).

I spoke on Dec, 18 with independent journalist and blogger Richard Silverstein, who writes on national security and other issues for a number of blogs at Tikun Olam.

Dennis Bernstein: A part of Michael Flynn’s plea had to do with some actions he took before coming to power regarding Israel and the United Nations. Please explain.

Richard Silverstein: The Obama administration was negotiating in the [UN] Security Council just before he left office about a resolution that would condemn Israeli settlements. Obviously, the Israeli government did not want this resolution to be passed. Instead of going directly to the Obama administration, with which they had terrible relations, they went to Trump instead. They approached Michael Flynn and Jared Kushner became involved in this. While they were in the transition and before having any official

capacity, they negotiated with various members of the Security Council to try to quash the settlement resolution.

One of the issues here which is little known is the Logan Act, which was passed at the foundation of our republic and was designed to prevent private citizens from usurping the foreign policy prerogatives of the executive. It criminalized any private citizen who attempted to negotiate with an enemy country over any foreign policy issue.

In this case, what Flynn and Kushner were doing was going directly against US foreign policy, because Obama wanted the resolution to pass; He just didn't want to vote for it because that would cross the Israel lobby in the United States.

The US finally ended up abstaining on the resolution and it passed 14-0.

But before that happened, Flynn went to the Russians and to Egypt, both members of the Security Council, and tried to get the resolution delayed. But all of Israel's machinations to derail this resolution failed and that is what Mueller was investigating, the intervention and disruption of American foreign policy by private citizens who had no official role.

This speaks to the power of the Israel lobby and of Israel itself to disrupt our foreign policy. Very few people have ever been charged with committing an illegal act by advocating on behalf of Israel. That is one of the reasons why this is such an important development. Until now, the lobby has really ruled supreme on the issue of Israel and Palestine in US foreign policy. Now it is possible that a private citizen will actually be made to pay a price for that.

This is an important development because the lobby till now has run roughshod over our foreign policy in this area and this may act as a restraining order against blatant disruption of US foreign policy by people like this.

Bernstein: So this information is a part of Michael Flynn's plea. Anyone studying this would learn something about Michael Flynn and it would be part of the prosecution's investigation.

Silverstein: That's absolutely right. One thing to note here is that it is reporters who have raised the issue of the Logan Act, not Mueller or Flynn's people or anyone in the Trump administration. But I do think that Logan is a very important part of this plea deal, even if it is not mentioned explicitly.

Bernstein: If the special prosecutor had smoking-gun information that the Trump administration colluded with Russia, in the way they colluded with Israel before coming to power, this would be a huge revelation. But it is definitely collusion when it comes to Israel.

Silverstein: Absolutely. If this were Russia, it would be on the front page of every major newspaper in the United States and the leading story on the TV news. Because this is Israel and because we have a conflicted relationship with the Israel lobby and they have so much influence on US policy concerning Israel, it has managed to stay on the back burner. Only two or three media outlets besides mine have raised this issue of Logan and collusion. Kushner and Flynn may be the first American citizens charged under the Logan Act for interfering on behalf of Israel in our foreign policy. This is a huge issue and it has hardly been raised at all.

Bernstein: As you know, Rachel Maddow of MSNBC has made a career out of investigating the Russia-gate charges. She says that she has read all this material carefully, so she must have read about Flynn and Israel, but I haven't heard her on this issue at all.

Silverstein: Even progressive journalists, who you'd think would be going after this with a vengeance, are frightened off by the fact the lobby really bites back. So, aside from outlets like the Intercept and the Electronic Intifada, there is a lot of hesitation about going after the Israel lobby. People are afraid because they know that there is a high price to be paid. It goes from being purely journalism to being a personal and political vendetta when they get you in their sights. In fact, one of the reasons I feel my blog is so important is that what I do is challenge Israeli policy and Israeli intervention in places where it doesn't belong.

Bernstein: Jared Kushner is the point man for the Trump administration on Israel. He has talked about having a "vision for peace." Do you think it is a problem that this is someone with a long, close relationship with the prime minister of Israel and, in fact, runs a foundation that invests in the building of illegal Israeli settlements? Might this be problematic?

Silverstein: It is quite nefarious, actually. When Jared Kushner was a teenager, Netanyahu used to stay at the Kushner family home when he visited the United States. This relationship with one of the most extreme right political figures in Israel goes back decades. And it is not just Kushner himself, but all the administration personnel dealing with these so-called peace negotiations, including Jason Greenblatt and David Friedman, the ambassador. These are all orthodox Jews who tend to have very nationalist views when it comes to Israel. They all support settlements financially through foundations. These are not honest brokers.

We could talk at length about the history of US personnel who have been negotiators for Middle East peace. All of them have been favorable to Israel and answerable to the Israel lobby, including Dennis Ross and Makovsky, who

served in the last administration. These people are dyed-in-the-wool ultra-nationalist supporters of [Israeli] settlements. They have no business playing any role in negotiating a peace deal.

My prediction all along has been that these peace negotiations will come to naught, even though they seem to have bought the cooperation of Saudi Arabia, which is something new in the process. The Palestinians can never accept a deal that has been negotiated by Kushner and company because it will be far too favorable to Israel and it will totally neglect the interests of the Palestinians.

Bernstein: It has been revealed that Kushner supports the building of settlements in the West Bank. Most people don't understand the politics of what is going on there, but it appears to be part of an ethnic cleansing.

Silverstein: The settlements have always been a violation of international law, ever since Israel conquered the West Bank in 1967. The Geneva Conventions direct an occupying power to withdraw from territory that was not its own. In 1967 Israel invaded Arab states and conquered the West Bank and Gaza but this has never been recognized or accepted by any nation until now.

The fact that Kushner and his family are intimately involved in supporting settlements—as are David Friedman and Jason Greenblatt—is completely outrageous. No member of any previous US administration would have been allowed to participate with these kinds of financial investments in support of settlements. Of course, Trump doesn't understand the concept of conflict of interest because he is heavily involved in such conflicts himself. But no party in the Middle East except Israel is going to consider the US an honest broker and acceptable as a mediator.

When they announce this deal next January, no one in the Arab World is going to accept it, with the possible exception of Saudi Arabia because they have other fish to fry in terms of Iran. The next three years are going to be interesting, supposing Trump lasts out his term. My prediction is that the peace plan will fail and that it will lead to greater violence in the Middle East. It will not simply lead to a vacuum, it will lead to a deterioration in conditions there.

Bernstein: The Trump transition team was actually approached directly by the Israeli government to try to intercede at the United Nations.

Silverstein: I'm assuming it was Netanyahu who went directly to Kushner and Trump. Now, we haven't yet found out that Trump directly *knew* about this but it is very hard to believe that Trump didn't endorse this. Now that we know that Mueller has access to all of the emails of the transition team, there is little



doubt that they have been able to find their smoking gun. Flynn's plea meant that they basically had him dead to rights. It remains to be seen what will happen with Kushner but I would think that this would play some role in either the prosecution of Kushner or some plea deal.

Bernstein: The other big story, of course, is the decision by the Trump administration to move the US embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem. Was there any pre-election collusion in that regard and what are the implications?

Silverstein: Well, it's a terrible decision which goes against forty to fifty years of US foreign policy. It also breaches all international understanding. All of our allies in the European Union and elsewhere are aghast at this development. There is now a campaign in the United Nations Security Council to pass a resolution condemning the announcement, which we will veto, but the next step will be to go to the General Assembly, where such a resolution will pass easily.

The question is how much anger, violence and disruption this is going to cause around the world, especially in the Arab and Muslim world. This is a slow-burning fuse. It is not going to explode right now. The issue of Jerusalem is so vital that this is not something that is simply going to go away. This is going to be a festering sore in the Muslim world and among Palestinians. We have already seen attacks on Israeli soldiers and citizens and there will be many more.

As to collusion in all of this, since Trump always said during the campaign that this was what he was going to do, it might be difficult to treat this in the same way as the UN resolution. The UN resolution was never on anybody's radar and nobody knew the role that Trump was playing behind the scenes with that—as opposed to Trump saying right from the get-go that Jerusalem was going to be recognized as the capital of Jerusalem.

By doing that, they have completely abrogated any Palestinian interest in Jerusalem. This is a catastrophic decision that really excludes the United States from being an honest broker here and shows our true colors in terms of how pro-Israel we are.

**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](http://www.flashpoints.net).**

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# Why Loss of Net Neutrality Hurts Democracy

The principle of every person having equal access to the Internet represented a strong pillar of modern democracy – and its removal represents another victory for profit-dominated plutocracy, as Dennis J Bernstein explains.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Despite its importance to a functioning democracy in the Twenty-first Century, many people's eyes still glaze over at the uttering of the term Net Neutrality. However, whenever there is a clear explanation available, people – Republicans and Democrats alike – overwhelmingly support the concept and understand that, once again, it will be big business and corporations that will benefit greatly from the purging of the concept of Net Neutrality, and poor and working-class people and their families who will suffer from the recent decision to end it.

For an in-depth primer on the subject, I spoke with Professor Victor Pickard about the implications of the recent actions taken by the Republican-led Federal Communication Commission. Pickard is associate professor at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and author of the book *America's Battle for Media Democracy*.

Dennis Bernstein: We turn now to the issue of net neutrality and its very serious implications for Internet users everywhere. Welcome Professor Pickard. Could you start by giving us an extended definition of net neutrality? People's eyes still tend to glaze over when you raise the topic of net neutrality.

Victor Pickard: In a way, it is an unfortunate term. We can thank Timothy Wu for coining it, but I think we're stuck with it at this point. Essentially, it means an open Internet. Net neutrality is the safeguard that prevents Internet service providers such as Verizon and Comcast from interfering with your online content. It prevents them from slowing down or blocking content or offering what is known as "paid prioritization." This is where they set up slow and fast lanes and a kind of payola system where they try to shake down content creators and force them to "pay to play" in order to load and stream more quickly. This changes the underlying logic of the Internet, which was meant to be an open medium with all voices created equal.

Bernstein: And it was hoped that net neutrality would be an equalizer, making it possible for people to have a voice who hadn't had one before and be able to

access content that would not have been available before. Isn't this essentially a question of democracy?

Pickard: Yes, the Internet has always had significant democratic potential. At least in theory, it can level power hierarchies. It can be used to give the voiceless more access to the public sphere. Of course, it never quite panned out this way. There have always been barriers to entry and there is still a major digital divide in this country. Nonetheless, the channels through which we access the Internet were meant to be kept equal and open, and without net neutrality that is no longer going to be the case.

As soon as you remove the basic safeguards, Internet service providers not only have the ability, they have a perverse incentive to make more money by charging us more for access to various types of content or charging content creators more to access the Internet. Of course, large corporations like Amazon and Netflix can afford to pay up. Those who will be hurt will be the activists and journalists, the people without the resources to pay to play.

That is what is so deeply troubling about this: It is going to hurt us as consumers—it is going to hurt us economically—but more importantly, it is going to hurt us democratically.

Bernstein: It is interesting, one of the consequences of the disappearance of newspapers, particularly investigative reporting, was the emergence of various independent investigative organizations online who have been doing an incredibly good job. They will suffer from this, won't they?

Pickard: Yes, they will suffer disproportionately from this. Traditional newspapers and smaller independent news outlets depend on the Internet to reach broader audiences. They couldn't afford to do this otherwise. Without having the resources to pay up, it is going to create a stranglehold on those kinds of investigative outlets. This is especially troubling now, at this perilous political moment.

Bernstein: What is problematic about the claim of [FCC] Chairman Ajit Pai that he "would hate to side with the Democrats, but this was Bill Clinton's vision for the Internet"?

Pickard: Such a claim is disingenuous and ahistorical. While it is possible to argue that the Internet has traditionally been lightly regulated, in many cases this has simply not been true. In fact, we wouldn't even have the Internet if not for massive public subsidies and regulations.

You have to go back to 2002, when then FCC chairman Michael Powell re-categorized Internet services. Instead of considering it a telecommunications

service—which had always been heavily regulated—the category description became one of an “information service,” which is only lightly regulated. That is what really started this whole ongoing debate and policy battle. So you can’t say that this was a democratic position. That’s simply not true.

Bernstein: What did the inventors of the Internet envision as its function and how could it potentially be an important democratizer?

Pickard: Again, the Internet was created through massive public subsidies. The Pentagon’s Advanced Research Project Agency designed what was then called the Arpanet and which was based on the net neutrality principle that all online content should be treated equally. The pipes through which the Internet would flow were meant to be “dumb” in the sense that they were not discriminating against particular types of content.

Into the Seventies and Eighties, this system was developed often through research institutes, so again, public subsidies helped expand the Internet. You had various public interest regulations that maintained a common carrier status. To give one example, you might remember the bad old days of dial-up Internet. One of the reasons we had such an explosion of dial-up Internet services was that the telephone companies who owned the wires had to share those wires with competitors.

These various public service protections helped expand the Internet, which really cuts against the FCC Chairman’s narrative that the Internet is simply a creation of the free market. First of all, we haven’t really had a free market when it comes to the Internet. But to try to argue that the government is not involved in the Internet is a libertarian mythology. The government is always involved and the question should be how the government should be involved.

Bernstein: Let’s talk a little more about the politics behind the Internet. We saw the Internet play a key role in liberation movements like the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement. Is this shutting down of net neutrality an attempt to undermine such movements?

Pickard: Corporate libertarians like Chairman Pai who are opposed to even the lightest public service regulation are driven by a kind of market libertarian ideology that is really meant to accumulate more wealth within a corporation. In other words, I think this is more an economic agenda as opposed to a political agenda—not that the two can always be separated.

Nevertheless, I think that it creates the potential for political misuse. To give an example, if you had an activist group that was launching a campaign against internet service monopolies, you can imagine that Comcast would want to

shut down that website. Without net neutrality protections, they would have the power to block or “throttle” online content. We have seen cases like this before and they could very well happen again.

Bernstein: We’re seeing now that you can pay extra and get in the fast lanes of various freeways (not to push the highway analogy too far). Can that be a way for people to think about it? You pay a little more and get there faster but what’s the rush, you’re going to get there anyway?

Pickard: That sounds fairly innocuous. There are a couple other analogies we could use. For example, setting up tollbooths all along the highway. I read an even better analogy in *The Washington Post* which likened it to the hellscape of airport security lines where, if you pay up and go through some kind of process, you might get TSA clearance, but otherwise you are stuck in line and may get hassled because of how you look or the language you speak. I think the dystopian outlook is probably more apt than this idea that we are all going to get to our final destination anyway so it’s not a big deal if we have to pay a little more for faster service.

Bernstein: Will this have an impact on the way people view television and access Hollywood productions and other entertainment? Will people be paying a lot more for these services?

Pickard: Mostly likely, yes. I think it is fair to say that what will happen to the Internet without net neutrality protections is that it will become more like cable television, where consumers pay for premium content. Overall, consumers will have to pay more. When a company like Netflix has to pay more to its Internet service provider, they will then offset their increased costs to consumers.

Bernstein: People have been paying a lot of attention to this and these decisions being made now are not very popular, are they?

Pickard: Not at all. In fact, polling data is showing that even the vast majority of Republicans want to keep net neutrality protections. This has been a deeply unpopular and undemocratic position. People are engaged and they realize that without net neutrality their daily lives will be impacted.

Bernstein: Has there been a lot of money thrown around on Capitol Hill by those who stand to gain from the elimination of net neutrality? Do you think we should worry about that?

Pickard: I think we should. I mean, it is rarely very overt. People are not walking into congressional offices with hundred dollar bills in their hands. But you do see tremendous amounts being spent on lobbying, you do see campaign

contributions.

The FCC is a little more subtle because they are not elected in the same way, but you do see what is referred to as “regulatory capture,” where, over time, a regulatory agency begins to harmonize its actions with the industry it purportedly regulates. Ajit Pai’s FCC is a textbook case. Basically, he has been granting the long-standing wish lists of the industries he is supposed to be overseeing.

Bernstein: Could you talk about the potential benefits of a more neutral Internet available to everybody? How can it contribute to a better society?

Pickard: Especially in the activist realm, you see various groups who have organized and leveraged the democratic potential of the Internet to really amplify their voices. We have seen this play out with many older forms of media, such as radio. When radio first started, it was similarly used by various activist groups and was hailed as a new democratizing force that was going to revolutionize the way that we communicate with each other, the way we govern ourselves. But it quickly became captured by a handful of corporations and I am worried that this is what we are seeing with the Internet today.

Bernstein: That brings me to my last question. What are the chances of this decision being flipped, if there is support for that among the various communities across the country? Do you have any hope that this can be turned around?

Pickard: Actually, I am cautiously optimistic that in the long run net neutrality will be upheld. In the short term, there will be challenges in the courts, where there is at least a fifty-fifty chance that net neutrality will prevail. The other crucial front is going to be in Congress, where there will be pressure to pass what is known as a Congressional Review Act, enabling Congress to put forward a resolution of disapproval. It is very important for all of us to be pressuring Congress to overturn the FCC decision.

But I also think that all of this public engagement is showing that there will be continued activism around this issue. Even if we win in the courts, there is going to be an ongoing battle. But as long as the public remains engaged, I really believe that in the long term we will have net neutrality.

Bernstein: Has legal action been taken already?

Pickard: Absolutely. We have already seen a number of state attorneys general challenging this decision in court. Various activist groups like Battle for the Net.com, Fight for the Future, Free Press, and Free Disclosure will continue to focus on this issue for months and years to come.

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.

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## Trump’s Gross Hypocrisy on Yemen War

**Exclusive:** The Trump administration’s hypocrisy was on clear display when it denounced Iran over an ineffectual Yemeni missile that landed in Saudi Arabia while the U.S. aids the Saudi slaughter of Yemeni civilians, says Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

Political charlatans like Donald Trump often employ an essential trick from stage magic: misdirecting the audience. By taking the public’s eye off the real issues and channeling discussion toward made-up controversies, they can keep working their agenda in the shadows.



U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley has been quick to learn that technique from her mentor in the Oval Office. Last week, in a performance reminiscent of Secretary of State Colin Powell’s UN speech before the Iraq War, she staged a highly publicized demonstration of alleged Iranian perfidy: bits and pieces of a missile fired on Nov. 4 by Houthi rebels in Yemen toward Saudi Arabia’s King Khalid International Airport outside of Riyadh.

“When you look at this missile, this is terrifying, this is absolutely terrifying,” Haley asserted. She said the scraps included “parts made by Iran, some by Iran’s government-run defense industry. All are proof that Iran is defying the international community.” In particular, she claimed that Iran is

violating a United Nations Security Council resolution banning it from engaging in transfers of ballistic missiles – an annex to the Security Council's endorsement of the Iran nuclear deal.

Critics quickly shot holes in her case. For one thing, the Security Council's resolution actually says "Iran is *called upon* not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles *designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons . . .*" "Called upon" is not the same as a ban. Nor would any serious expert confuse Houthi rockets with nuclear-capable ballistic missiles.

In addition, the *New York Times* noted, "Defense officials said they could not say exactly when the weapons . . . were given to the Houthis, which means that they could have been transferred before the Security Council resolution was enacted."

Nor could a U.N. panel of experts even confirm that Iran had supplied the missiles; analysts at IHS Jane's raised the possibility that Houthi rebels modified foreign missiles purchased by Yemen's military before the outbreak of war. Although Haley put on display an Iranian-made component that was allegedly part of the missile, one reporter noted that the debris also contained an American-made part used to circulate liquid fuel propellant.

"Unless someone can provide a direct smoking gun, such as a shipping manifest or other documents which clearly identify the weapons and how they were sourced, this is simply speculation to further support the administration, Saudi, and Israeli case to militarily confront Iran," said Rob Richer, former associate deputy director for operations at the CIA.

### **Diversions from Saudi War Crimes**

Haley's show was pure misdirection. No serious analyst of the region doubts that Iran has given at least some limited material support to the Houthi rebels who control a sizeable portion of Yemen, including its capital, Sanaa.

The question of whether Iran also smuggled a small number of relatively crude missiles to the Houthis should hardly weigh too heavily on anyone's moral scales when Saudi Arabia and its allies have been pounding Yemen since March 2015 with high-explosive bombs, mostly supplied by the United States and Great Britain.

As former CIA analyst and presidential adviser Bruce Riedel said of Riyadh's vocal outrage over the ineffectual Houthi missile attack, "They desperately want to change the conversation away from starving children to Iranian bad guys."

Or as Iran's foreign minister put it in a tweet, Saudi Arabia "bombs Yemen to smithereens, killing 1000s of innocents including babies, spreads cholera and



famine, but of course blames Iran.”

The Houthis fired off their missile – which killed no one – just days after a Saudi-led airstrike at a market in northern Yemen killed at least 25 civilians.

Immediately after the Houthi retaliation, the Saudi coalition bombed Yemen’s international airport and closed all the country’s other air, land, and seaports, putting in dire peril some 7 million people deemed by humanitarian agencies to be immediately at risk of famine.

The Saudi blockade also made it almost impossible for medical workers to contain the spread of cholera, which has sickened nearly a million people. The international aid group Save the Children estimated that 50,000 Yemeni children under the age of 5 could die by year’s end.

“It is very clear that if you are using starvation as a weapon you are in breach of international humanitarian law,” said Penny Mordaunt, the British government’s international development secretary.

The U.N.’s human rights office recently accused the Saudi coalition of further killing at least 136 non-combatants from Dec. 6 to 16. Targets of its bombs included a TV station, a hospital, and a wedding party. The hospital was in the Red Sea port of Hodeida, the country’s main point of entry for food. Some close observers predict an imminent attack by the Saudi coalition to oust Houthi rebels from the city – a move that one of Oxfam’s senior executives said would “breach international humanitarian law” and result in “near certain famine.”

President Trump earlier this month called on the Saudi government to permit “food, fuel, water, and medicine to reach the Yemeni people who desperately need it.” It’s hard to take his words seriously, however, after Reuters’ report that “Saudi Arabia has agreed to buy about \$7 billion worth of precision guided munitions from U.S. defense contractors . . . in a deal that was part of a \$110 billion weapons agreement that coincided with President Donald Trump’s visit to Saudi Arabia in May.”

Nonetheless, there are serious rumblings of concern in Congress, even among Republicans, over the humanitarian disaster in Yemen. Senator Todd Young of Indiana, a Republican member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, recently pressed Trump’s nominee to the State Department’s top legal office about the implications of Saudi Arabia’s blockade on international aid to Yemen.

And just last month, the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to condemn the killing of civilians in Yemen and to demand that the warring parties “increase efforts to adopt all necessary and appropriate measures to prevent civilian casualties and increase humanitarian access.”

By itself, to be sure, that was a toothless measure, but it's a sign that anti-Iran sentiment on Capitol Hill has not blinded legislators to the crimes being committed by the Saudi coalition in Yemen. So far, at least, Nikki Haley's tricks have failed to divert the world's attention.

Jonathan Marshall's articles on Yemen include ["How US Policy Helps Al Qaeda in Yemen,"](#) ["The West's Moral Hypocrisy on Yemen,"](#) ["Belated Pushback on Saudis' War on Yemen,"](#) and ["How Washington Adds to Yemen's Nightmare."](#)

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## Delusional Self-Interest in Trump's Jerusalem Move

President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital let him boast about his courage but he ignored both international law and U.S. interests in delivering this gift to the Israel Lobby, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

It is not easy to write anything new about President Trump's Dec. 6 announcement that he (and thus supposedly the U.S. as a nation) was recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. After all, plenty of very smart and attentive people have already commented on this decision. I particularly like those who pointed out that [Trump's move replicated that of Arthur Balfour.](#)

As Balfour had assumed in 1917 that he could promise Palestine to the Zionists, so Trump seems to have assumed he could legitimize Jerusalem as Israeli territory. The connection seems to support the philosopher George Santayana's observation that those who know no history are bound to repeat it.

As was the case with Balfour, neither Trump nor the U.S. Congress (whose edict the President has so eagerly carried out) has any legal authority to proceed in this fashion. In the case of Trump and the Congress, what should get in their way is international law – which, when represented in signed treaties, is incorporated into U.S. law. The [Geneva Conventions](#) are such a case. Part of these conventions (again, now made U.S. law) makes it illegal to conquer territory and then absorb it by moving your own citizens in while ethnically cleansing the original population. One can also cite the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court declaring [apartheid policies a crime against humanity.](#) This is not U.S. law but reflects international consensus. Israel is in violation of aspects of the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute, [as well](#)

as a host of United Nations resolutions.

Trump, along with the Republicans and Democrats in Congress, seems to be ignorant, or perhaps just callously unconcerned about international law – even when it has become their law. Nowhere is it referenced in Trump’s announcement. It is doubtful that he and those in Congress give it any thought at all. It is this shameless stupidity that concerns me. For, to the extent that we ignore international law, the world returns to the conditions that led to World Wars I and II, and of course, to the Holocaust.

### **“Open Eyes and Fresh Thinking”**

Trump: “When I came into office I promised to look at the world’s challenges with open eyes and very fresh thinking.”

Comment: This state of mind cannot be completely achieved because we all are shaped by culture and personal past experiences. However, it can be approximated if one is (a) conscious of one’s biases and assumptions and (b) knows enough relevant history to recognize what is indeed relatively “fresh” and original. I think it is safe to say that President Trump is nowhere near this level of consciousness. Rather than clear-headed and original, he behaves erratically and is very much in the grips of cultural prejudices and personal biases.

President Trump, though a particularly outrageous example of this impaired condition, is not the only American leader to mistake his own ignorance for clear-sightedness (George W. Bush comes to mind). It is perhaps because it is so difficult to really see the world’s problems “with open eyes and fresh thinking” that wiser men and women than Mr. Trump have laid down international laws designed to prevent nation-states from taking actions that have, beyond doubt, proven to be disastrous.

### **“Alternative Facts”**

Trump: The announcement on Jerusalem “marks the beginning of a new approach to conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.” Recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and relocating the U.S. embassy there will “advance the cause of peace.” We know this to be so because putting off this step for the past 20 years has not advanced that cause.

Comment: Trump’s reasoning here is, well, unreasonable, and historically mistaken. Previous presidents did not delay moving the U.S. embassy because they thought not doing so would help bring about Palestinian-Israeli peace. First, they promised to make this move for domestic political reasons during election campaigns – a nod to the Zionist lobby’s funding potential. Afterward, they held back because to actually take this step would only make things in the Middle

East worse, and not only for the Palestinians and the Israelis. The United States has other Muslim rulers in the region who are its "allies." Trump's predecessors, or at least their advisors, knew that the men who ruled Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and the like had populations with significant numbers of people who would be quite agitated over just the move Trump has now undertaken. These U.S. leaders feared, not without reason, that ceding Jerusalem to the Israelis would destabilize those allies and boost the threat of terrorism.

No doubt aided by an abiding ignorance, President Trump has replaced the facts, which held back the hand of his predecessors with "alternative facts." For instance, he has replaced the facts that make up the history of Jerusalem as related to both Islam and Christianity, and the millennia-old emotions that go along with it, with the reality of an illegal 50-year occupation of the entire city by Israel. Having rendered truth in this fashion, the President concludes that his decision must be in the interest of both the U.S. and peace because it is "nothing more or less than the recognition of reality."

How simple is President Trump's world! Simple as only the ignorant can see it. No wonder Secretary of State Tillerson (who is not without his own short-sightedness) called President Trump a "moron."

### **Don't Misunderstand Me**

Much of the rest of the President's speech was an attempt to assure the world that what he had just declared was not as "fresh" and new as he at first claimed.

Trump: "I want to make one point very clear .... The United States remains deeply committed to helping to facilitate a peace agreement that is acceptable to both sides." We are "not taking a position on any final status issues."

Comment: It is at this point that you have to ask just what world the President is living in. Actually, the answer is not that hard to come by. It is a personal world that is singularly egocentric. As such it has no real relevance to U.S. national interests and certainly not to Palestinian-Israeli conflict resolution. Its only reference point is Trump's own, largely unrestrained, self-serving urges and needs.

According to reports coming from inside the White House, Trump was interested in the alleged prestige of being the President who actually went through with the promise to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. "While previous presidents have made this a major campaign promise, they failed to deliver. Today I am delivering."

He sought out those who would encourage his goal – those who are hardly any more knowledgeable than he – his Christian Fundamentalist Vice President Mike Pence, and son-in-law Jared Kushner, who is a family friend of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Trump is also reported to have been encouraged to take this step by the Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, a man whose only foreign policy interest is in supporting Israel. Trump ignored the advice of his Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, and Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, both of whom thought the move ill-advised. So now we have the Zionists and Christian fundamentalists standing behind Trump, patting him on the back. The rest of the world stands in front of him, aghast. Typical of the self-serving type he is, Trump only cares about the blandishments pushing him in the direction he wants to go.

That direction is decidedly backwards. Back in the direction of no rules, no international law, not even any binding treaties to bother with. Just free rein for the whims of the leader.

### **Power and the Will**

One gets the sense that Trump feels he can simply create a new reality by the exercise of his will. I want to emphasize the word “feels” here because I do not think the President reasons out these actions. He experiences a feeling that suggests to him a way he can change things. He does not weigh this feeling against history or contemporary reality. For example, take his description of the eventual new U.S. embassy in Jerusalem as “a magnificent tribute to peace.”

This equating of what one feels or wills with what will actually be is a sign of a delusional personality – someone who can’t tell the difference between his own opinion and hard facts. To have such a person in a position of power is dangerous indeed. We know this from experience. The only things that may keep such impulsive people in check are rules – rules that are at once humane and based on historical lessons learned, and rules that are enforced.

Such rules exist. They were introduced in the form of a growing body of international law as nations confronted the consequences of modern warfare and brutality. Unfortunately, today these rules are rarely enforced – and never done so when it comes to superpowers and their close allies.

So Donald Trump, with his alleged “open eyes” and “fresh thinking,” pays no attention to the rules. Announcing his recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, he leads us all backwards toward disaster.

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