

# Trump's Missed Debate Opportunities

Donald Trump missed chances in the first debate, including failure to exploit a U.S. intelligence report that cited U.S. support for an Islamic State forerunner, part of Hillary Clinton's scheme for Syrian "regime change," notes Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

Hillary Clinton stood calmly at her podium smirking during most of the first U.S. presidential [debate](#) as she provoked emotional reactions from Donald Trump in what appeared to be a strategy to rattle him and keep him on the defensive most of the night.

Clinton needled Trump on his plan to fight the Islamic State, on him not paying his taxes, on his treatment of women, on his denial of climate change, on his denigration of Muslims and his position on nuclear weapons – all legitimate criticisms but delivered with an intent to do personal harm. As Trump grew angrier and angrier, Clinton appeared to be laughing at him. At one point, she told him he was saying "crazy things" and living "in his own reality."

Clinton got under Trump's skin by telling him he started life with a big inheritance, while she was the daughter of a humble small businessman; that he had four (or more) times filed for bankruptcy, did not pay his workers, called women "pigs," and had been sued by the government 40 years ago for racial discrimination in a housing development he owned (and which he settled out of court).

Trump seemed uncharacteristically nervous and restrained as the first debate of three got underway, displaying a grudging respect for Clinton by calling her "Secretary," while labeling her "Crooked Hillary" on Twitter. But a series of humiliating jabs by Clinton worked to get Trump's back up leading to several gaffes, including an apparent admission that he has paid no federal taxes.

After noting that a couple of tax returns which had been released in connection with a casino application showed no federal taxes and suggesting that Trump would not release his tax returns because he may be hiding this reality for other years, Trump lost his cool and interjected that it "makes me smart" not to pay.

## **Ruthless**

It was a calculating strategy on her part, cooked up by her team of ruthless campaign operatives and her own experience of 38 debates in her political

career. This was Trump's first one-on-one debate. And it showed.

She took a week off to prepare, while Trump did not hold one mock session. She depended on a team of highly experienced opposition researchers who have dug up every scrap of dirt they could find on Trump.

At one point when Clinton accused him of calling a contestant at one of his beauty pageant "Miss Piggy," Trump feverishly responded "Where did you find this? Where did you find this?"

"He loves beauty contests, supporting them and hanging around them," Clinton said, slowly inserting the needle and twisting it slightly. "Then he called her 'Miss Housekeeping,' because she was Latina. Donald, she has a name."

"Where did you find this? Where did you find this?" Trump asked.

"Her name is Alicia Machado," Clinton calmly said.

"Where did you find this?" he repeated.

"And she has become a U.S. citizen, and you can bet..."

"Oh, really?" Trump interrupted.

"... she's going to vote this November," said Clinton.

That he wouldn't know Clinton's "oppo" researchers would come up with something like this, and then would blurt out his astonishment that they did from the podium is itself astonishing.

It showed how little he understood this dirty game of modern politics and how poorly prepared he was. His opposition research seemed to be based solely on the considerable Clinton negatives already in the public domain. He hit her hard on the emails, but she swatted it away, and Trump backed off.

Trump seemed to think he could wing it. But he ran into a political juggernaut, with master dirty tricksters like former rightwing operative David Brock conjuring up ways to rattle Trump, exposing his temper and his weak command of the facts. Meanwhile, a studied and scripted Clinton merely laughed at him, giving him the rope to hang himself.

### **Russia Did It!**

Trump did score some points, though they have been largely ignored in a corporate media analysis that scored a decisive knockout for Clinton. In one exchange, she clearly said that Russia had hacked the Democratic National Committee and Trump called her on it.

CLINTON: "There's no doubt now that Russia has used cyber attacks against all kinds of organizations in our country, and I am deeply concerned about this. I know Donald's very praiseworthy of Vladimir Putin, but Putin is playing a really ... tough, long game here. And one of the things he's done is to let loose cyber attackers to hack into government files, to hack into personal files, hack into the Democratic National Committee."

TRUMP: "I don't think anybody knows it was Russia that broke into the DNC. She's saying Russia, Russia, Russia, but I don't – maybe it was. I mean, it could be Russia, but it could also be China. It could also be lots of other people. It also could be somebody sitting on their bed that weighs 400 pounds, OK?"

TRUMP: "You don't know who broke in to DNC. But what did we learn with the DNC? We learned that Bernie Sanders was taken advantage of by your people, by Debbie Wasserman Schultz. Look what happened to her. But Bernie Sanders was taken advantage of. That's what we learned."

Trump's rhetoric on Russia (and with no political record, rhetoric is all we have) is clearly saner than Clinton's, who has an alarming record. It is simple to understand why Russia would favor Trump. He is not threatening Russia while she is. And she's left a trail of destruction behind her in Libya, Syria and Honduras making it more than mere words.

No one has come up with any evidence to back up the Clinton campaign's charge of a Trump conflict of interest because he either owes money or has business in Russia. Frankly, I hope he does have businesses there. It would make him even less likely to stir up a crisis with Moscow if he should win.

Nor has anyone come up with any evidence to prove Russia was behind the DNC hack. After the debate CNN either deviously or incompetently did a "fact-check" and said Trump was wrong about "the question that was posed, 'Who is the leading suspect in the DNC hack?'"

But Clinton didn't talk about the "leading suspect." She flat out said Russia did it.

Her continued hammering on these supposed business interests and that Russia did the hacking is suspicious. Linking Trump to Russia has done little to hurt him in the polls. In fact, he rose to a virtual tie in the weeks since the hack. So why does she keep at it? There could be something else at play, an admittedly sinister scenario, but entirely possible in the Clinton camp. (Perhaps, her "oppo" team is planning to drop another shoe regarding Trump's relationship with Russia.)

If she should lose a close election to Trump I would not be surprised if she

contested the outcome charging that Russia had hacked the electoral databases and changed the result. If she could challenge enough electors to bring him below 270 Electoral College votes needed to win, the result could be thrown to the House of Representatives (as it has three times in history) where a Republican majority, many who hate Trump, just may side with her.

With the way the American public has been relentlessly conditioned to fear and despise Russia, evidence of Moscow's alleged tampering may not be needed. With the corporate media playing along, evidence wasn't necessary for the tall tale of Russia's "invasion" of Ukraine, the dubious claim that Russia was responsible for shooting down Malaysia Airline Flight 17 in 2014, or Russia's supposed attack on a humanitarian convoy in Syria last week.

### **No Mention of Syria**

Curiously, there was absolutely no discussion of Syria in the debate, beyond an incidental mention by Clinton. The focus was on the Islamic State's threat inside the U.S. and what to do about it.

Trump accused Clinton, as secretary of state, of creating a vacuum by pulling U.S. troops out of Iraq, allowing ISIS to be established. Here Trump insisted again that he never backed the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which he correctly said caused immense instability creating the conditions for ISIS.

But Trump missed a tremendous opportunity to hit Clinton for being secretary of state when a precursor of the Islamic State was directly aided by the administration she served in when the U.S. and its Mideast allies were seeking "regime change" in Damascus and tolerating jihadists who were spearheading the effort.

And this is the tragedy of Trump. He's wrong on so many things: torture, climate change, tax breaks for the rich, increased military spending, law and order, stop and frisk, and guns. So, when he's right, such as wanting good relations with Russia to avoid catastrophe, he doesn't adequately explain his position, while being subject to a massive smear campaign.

Only on trade and rebuilding the country's infrastructure has he been right for the good of American workers, and has also amply laid out this position (spending more time on that in the debate than anything else.)

Last month, Trump caused a firestorm when he said that Obama and Clinton had "created" ISIS. He later said Obama "founded" ISIS. While that is an exaggeration, there exists a document proving the Obama administration's complicity in the rise of this group, a document Trump must be aware of, but has never made use of. The debate would have been the perfect time.

The declassified Defense Intelligence Agency [document](#) of August 2012 said the U.S., some European countries, Turkey and the Gulf Arab states were facilitating the establishment of a Salafist principality in the east of Syria to put pressure on Damascus. The document warns that likeminded jihadists on the Iraq side of the border could join with them to create an “Islamic State.” The document actually uses that name a full two years before the Islamic State was declared.

Trump must know about it because Ret. General Mike Flynn, the DIA director at the time, [told Al Jazeera](#) that the document shows the administration was not turning a blind eye to this but that it was a “willful decision” by Washington. Mike Flynn is a Trump foreign policy adviser, so it’s inconceivable that Flynn did not tell Trump about the document.

And yet Trump inexplicably has never mentioned it, even when he was under heavy fire from establishment Washington and the corporate media for his remark.

Instead of bringing it up at the debate, he merely attacked Clinton for revealing her plan to fight ISIS on her website. “I don’t think General Douglas MacArthur would like that too much,” Trump said, referring to the commanding U.S. general in the Pacific during World War II, a head-scratching reference for the vast majority of Americans born in the post-war era.

“Well, at least I have a plan to fight ISIS,” Clinton retorted.

“No, no, you’re telling the enemy everything you want to do,” Trump shot back.

Instead of mentioning the DIA document he repeated his numbskull idea that ISIS would not exist if his idea of “taking” Iraq’s oil had been followed. ‘Had we taken the oil – and we should have taken the oil – ISIS would not have been able to form either, because the oil was their primary source of income,” he said. “And now they have the oil all over the place, including the oil – a lot of the oil in Libya, which was another one of her disasters.”

Clinton cut his knees out from under him again, saying Trump “actually advocated for the actions we took in Libya and urged that Gaddafi be taken out, after actually doing some business with him one time.”

It looks like it may be a very long six weeks until Election Day for Donald Trump. And if avoiding a confrontation with Russia is the single most important issue of the day, more urgent even than climate change, the alternative, a Clinton back in the White House, could be a very chilling four years for the rest of us.

**Joe Lauria is a veteran foreign-affairs journalist based at the U.N. since 1990.**

He has written for the Boston Globe, the London Daily Telegraph, the Johannesburg Star, the Montreal Gazette, the Wall Street Journal and other newspapers. He can be reached at [joelauria@gmail.com](mailto:joelauria@gmail.com) and followed on Twitter at [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe).

---

## Clinton's Faulty New Scheme to 'Fight' ISIS

**Exclusive:** Even as Hillary Clinton pushes a new scheme for defeating ISIS, the reality is that contradictory U.S. policies in the Mideast that she helped formulate are fueling the growth of jihadi extremism, writes Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

Hillary Clinton has unveiled a two-part plan to defeat the Islamic State, and just as critics might expect, it's a doozy. One part calls for an "intelligence surge" to combat the group both at home and abroad while the other urges that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Islamic State's self-styled caliph, simply be knocked off.

Both are indicative of why the disaster in the Middle East can only get worse. The problem with an "intelligence surge" is twofold: (1) it's not clear what it's supposed to do beyond undermining civil liberties in the name of anti-terrorism and (2) whatever information it turns up will only be as good as the people who use it. Stalin had excellent sources warning him in 1941 that a German attack was imminent. But since some said the attack would occur in April, he was able to ignore them once April came and went and stick with his original conclusion that Hitler would not attack at all.

Since the U.S. is unwilling to examine how its policies have contributed to the growth of the Islamic State, stepped-up intelligence will undoubtedly do the same, i.e. confirm all of Washington's preconceived notions and allow it to continue on the same disastrous course.

Moreover, considering that U.S. authorities received advanced warnings not only about Ahmad Khan Rahami, the 28-year-old Afghan-American charged with last week's bombings in New York and New Jersey, but also about Boston Marathon bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev, "underwear bomber" Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, and Orlando shooter Omar Mateen, it would seem that what's needed is not a super-sophisticated intelligence "surge" so much as old-fashioned police work like knocking on doors and following up leads.

Instead of “big data,” the FBI needs to do a better job with “little data” in the form of a concerned father phoning up the FBI to warn that his son has developed an unhealthy fascination with jihadi music, poetry, and videos.

As for part two of Clinton’s anti-Islamic State plan – knocking Al-Baghdadi off – it’s simply a medley of her greatest hits, i.e. the murder of Muammar Gaddafi (“We came, we saw, he died”) and the assassination of Osama bin Laden (“I was one of those who recommended the President launch what was a very risky raid”). Since Clinton seems to think her ratings go up every time she kills an Arab leader, she figures it can’t hurt to kill more.

But what she ignores is that doing so only makes matters worse. The record is clear. Seventeen days after killing Bin Laden in May 2011, Barack Obama bragged about the “huge blow” that Al Qaeda had just suffered, saying: “even before his death, Al Qaeda was losing its struggle for relevance, as the overwhelming majority of people saw that the slaughter of innocents did not answer their cries for a better life. By the time we found Bin Laden, Al Qaeda’s agenda had come to be seen by the vast majority of the region as a dead end, and the people of the Middle East and North Africa had taken their future into their own hands.”

### **Taking a Break**

But as the world now knows, the mujahedeen were just taking a break. By August 2012, which is to say a scant fourteen months later, the Defense Intelligence Agency was reporting that Al Qaeda was among “the major forces driving the insurgency in Syria,” that the West, the Arab Gulf oil states and Turkey were backing such forces to the hilt, and, even more astonishingly, that the rebels were seeking to establish a “Salafist principality in eastern Syria ... and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want in order to isolate the Syrian regime.”

Al Qaeda was stronger than ever. The only thing killing Bin Laden accomplished was to remove a leader who was a bit out of touch and allow even more aggressive jihadis to take his place. Gaddafi was a bit different: rather than a holy warrior, he was an anti-mujahedeen who, in a February 2011 phone call, tried to warn Great Britain’s former Prime Minister Tony Blair that the pro-Al Qaeda forces seeking his ouster “want to control the Mediterranean and then they will attack Europe.”

Needless to say, he was ignored. The only thing killing him did, therefore, was to remove the last barrier to a Salafist offensive bought and paid for by Qatar, which the U.S. had recruited to join the anti-Gaddafi effort and which promptly paid Washington back by distributing some \$400 million to fundamentalist

forces. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Hillary Clinton's 'Entangled' Foreign Policy."]

By 2014, the former "Al Qaeda in Iraq" had spun off into the Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL and Daesh) and was claiming large swaths of Iraq and Syria, even as Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Nusra Front, was taking over other areas of Syria and bringing U.S.-backed "moderate" rebel groups under Al Qaeda's command structure.

Al Baghdadi is a bad guy whom no rational person would miss. But bumping him off will be just as ineffective as killing bin Laden. Indeed, we already have an idea of who his successor would be, and it's not pretty.

According to an article by Giorgio Cafiero in the well-informed Al-Monitor website, it's Turki al-Binali, an influential 32-year-old cleric from the island kingdom of Bahrain who is seen as a rising force within ISIS and who may have authored the bizarre fatwa allowing ISIS soldiers to take captured Yazidi women as sex slaves.

If al-Binali takes over, Cafiero says that it "would mark a major transfer of authority from the old vanguard of global jihadists to a younger and more puritanical one." The changeover would have a particularly "toxic effect" on Bahrain and other Arab Gulf states where young people are "vulnerable to the dark trap of radicalization."

Instead of radiating outwards from the Persian Gulf in other words, al-Binali's accession could conceivably cause jihadism to reverse course so that it flows back in. The upshot could be an eruption of ISIS-style terrorism right under the nose of the U.S. Fifth Fleet anchored at a \$2-billion naval base on Bahrain's Manama Harbor.

U.S. policies make this more likely than not. Bahrain is a deeply polarized society, torn between a 60-percent Shi'ite majority that has suffered some 15,000 arrests since the government called in Saudi troops in March 2011 to help crush Arab Spring protests and a Sunni minority that enjoys a virtual political monopoly under the al-Khalifa family dictatorship.

### **Making Matters Worse**

What makes matters even worse is the monarchy's policy of importing Sunnis from places like Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Pakistan – an estimated 100,000 over the last decade – granting them citizenship, and then using them to staff its security forces and bolster the Sunni population in general.

Since the "New Bahrainis" are recruited for the express purpose of bashing

Shi'ites, the effect is to strengthen Sunni militancy and drive up tensions another notch. Since the island kingdom is dependent on U.S. military protection, it has tried to ingratiate itself with Washington by sending jet fighters to bomb ISIS positions in Syria.

But when Islamic State launched a blitzkrieg across eastern Iraq in mid-2014, top officials could barely contain their glee. Finally, they said, militant Sunnis were striking back at an Iraqi government in Baghdad that, with typical sectarian paranoia, they see as an arm of the international Shi'ite conspiracy no less than the Baathist regime in Damascus, Syria.

Even while denouncing ISIS as a "deviated cult," Foreign Minister Khalid al-Khalifa therefore tweeted his suspicion that America was using the group as an excuse to attack Sunnis. Minister of Information Sameera Rajab chimed in that rather than an eruption of terrorism, the ISIS offensive represented a Sunni uprising against Shi'ite oppression.

"ISIS is a name," she said, "that is being thrown around in the media as a cover-up to silence the will of the Iraqi people for freedom and dignity." What the U.S. called terrorism was really "a revolution against the injustice and oppression that has reigned over Iraq for more than ten years."

Rhetoric like this is common in the Persian Gulf where Saudi Arabia's longtime foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, told Secretary of State John Kerry around the same time that "Daesh is our [Sunni] response to your support for the Da'wa," the pro-Shi'ite party that rose to power in Baghdad on the heels of 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. As much as Persian Gulf Sunnis dislike ISIS, they dislike Shi'ites even more and therefore can't help applauding when Islamic State deals the Shi'ites another blow.

The effect is to provide ISIS with an opening to exploit. Thanks to Bahrain's two-faced attitude, commenters on pro-ISIS websites brag that they enjoy more freedom there than anywhere else in the Gulf. The government allows Sunnis to fly ISIS flags from their cars and to wave Al Qaeda banners and pictures of Osama bin Laden at public protests, activities that would earn Shi'ites a stiff prison sentence if they tried anything similar.

Bahrain allowed Turki al-Binali to preach openly before leaving the kingdom in 2013 and permitted his writings to be sold in local bookstores. Yet when Nabeel Rajab, a leading civil-rights campaigner, tweeted, "Many #Bahrain men who joined #terrorism & #ISIS came from security institutions and those institutions were the first ideological incubator," Bahrain threw him in jail.

Rather than mollifying ISIS, the combination of war abroad and tolerance at home

drives the group to ever greater heights of fury. In September 2014, ISIS released a video showing four young men armed with assault rifles urging members of the Bahrain security forces to turn their guns on the ruling family and join Islamic State. In October 2015, a member of a Bahraini ISIS cell attacked a Shi'ite meeting place a few mile away in Saudi Arabia, killing five worshipers and injuring nine others. A few months later, ISIS issued four more videos urging supporters to kill Shi'ites in both countries.

ISIS despises the al-Khalifa family not only because the monarchy bombs their positions in Syria, but because it allows alcohol and other sinful Western practices and merely jails Shi'ite protesters rather than killing them outright. The more the regime tries to meet ISIS halfway, the angrier the group grows.

### **A Blind Eye**

The U.S. contributes to the same vicious cycle by turning a blind eye to Bahraini sectarianism. Hillary Clinton ventured a few mild criticisms at the height of the crackdown. But she welcomed Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa to the State Department a few months later and then, in May 2012, announced that the administration would go ahead with a range of weapons sales.

The tone changed even more markedly in 2014 as Bahrain leaped upon the anti-ISIS bandwagon by bombing Syria. Now it was as if a crackdown had never occurred.

As Ala'a al-Shehabi, a Bahraini dissident, noted with regard to ISIS, "The monarchy's Western allies are ... more concerned about the monstrosity growing in the bosom of the Arab world rather than the environment that bred and nourished it."

Indeed, the West not only ignores such conditions, but contributes to them by backing Sunni sectarianism to the hilt. This is the case not just in Bahrain but in Syria where Riyadh is attempting to overthrow Bashar al-Assad not because he's a dictator – as if the Saudis could care about anything so paltry – because he is an Alawite, a variant of Shi'ism. It is also the case in Yemen where at least 10,000 people have died as a result of a Saudi campaign aimed at crushing an uprising by Houthi Shi'ites.

The more the U.S. assists in such crusades, the more bigotry will grow. The more it grows, the more arch-sectarian outfits like Al Qaeda and ISIS will prosper. Thanks to her close ties to the Sunni Gulf states – Persian Gulf interests have contributed as much as \$75 million to the Clinton family foundation – Clinton's new plan is not a strategy for defeating ISIS, but a recipe for helping it grow. ISIS should send her a letter of thanks.

Daniel Lazare is the author of several books including *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace).

---

## CIA Whistleblower Kiriakou Honored for Integrity

The U.S. government gives free passes to officials who commit war crimes but imprisons whistleblowers who tell the truth, a fate that befell CIA's John Kiriakou for disclosing torture. But he was honored by some ex-intelligence officers, reports Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Former CIA official John Kiriakou, who spent two years in prison for revealing the truth about White House-sanctioned torture, became the 15<sup>th</sup> recipient of the Sam Adams Award for Integrity at a ceremony at America University.

Last year, PEN Center USA, a human rights and freedom of expression organization, honored John Kiriakou, with its "First Amendment" award. It has since become clear that while John Kiriakou sat in prison, Senate Intelligence Committee investigators were uncovering heinous details about torture by the CIA from its own original banality-of-evil cables, which showed that CIA and others had lied in claiming torture "worked."

President Barack Obama chose to add his weight to a remarkably brazen effort to cover it all up and scuttle the Senate report. To her credit, committee chair Dianne Feinstein, with support from then-Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and committee members Mark Udall and Ron Wyden (all Democrats) faced President Obama down.

This scarcely believable fact – missed somehow by the "mainstream" media – is woven into the citation presented to Kiriakou on Sunday:

**The Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence** presents its INTEGRITY AWARD for 2016 to **John Kiriakou** Know all ye by these presents that John Kiriakou is hereby honored with the traditional Sam Adams Corner-Brightener Candlestick Holder, in symbolic recognition of Mr. Kiriakou's courage in shining light into dark places.

John Kiriakou found himself atop the CIA's WANTED list when he confirmed publicly that the CIA had been carrying out a White House-approved torture program, which turned out to be using techniques virtually identical to those in

the Gestapo *Handbuch*.

Alarm bells at the CIA. Put this guy in prison before there are additional disclosures. And seduce Hollywood into seducing Americans into “seeing with their own eyes” that torture “works.” And make sure the media ignores others with impeccable credentials, like Army Intelligence chief Gen. John Kimmons, who said on September 6, 2006: “No good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. ... the empirical evidence of the last five years, hard years, tells us that.”

Gen. Kimmons had an institution at his back, not nipping at his heels. Enter the U.S. Senate, another institution that faced into its constitutional responsibility. While John sat in prison, Senate Intelligence Committee investigators pored through original CIA cables and concluded unambiguously that Kimmons and Kiriakou were right, and the CIA (and Hollywood) were dead wrong.

Briefed on those findings, President Obama in August 2014 trivialized torture with a dismissive comment, “We tortured some folks.” Then he joined the CIA in a concerted attempt to squelch the Senate report. But Sen. Dianne Feinstein thwarted that joint campaign and in December 2014 published an executive summary – redacted, but still gruesome beyond imagination.

John Kiriakou’s integrity – and the reality that he sat in prison while the torturers were covering up their actions and their lies – made Sen. Feinstein’s intrepid investigators even more determined to make sure Americans got to know the truth about what was done in their name. As for John, it is a sure thing that he will continue to give no quarter in his passion for spreading truth around, no matter the systemic hurdles he may still have to surmount.

Presented this 25th day of September 2016 in Washington, DC, by admirers of the example set by the late CIA analyst, Sam Adams.

+++++

Sam Adams’s painstaking analysis in 1966/1967 revealed there were twice as many Vietnamese Communists under arms in South Vietnam as Gen. William Westmoreland would admit to. The issue became a David-v-Goliath bureaucratic struggle, with CIA analysts unable to prevail against the Army (and the White House). Adams continued to press for honesty and accountability but stayed “inside channels” – and failed. He died at 55 of a sudden heart attack, with profound remorse. He could not rid himself of the belief that, had he not let himself be diddled – had he, in other words, gone to the media – hundreds of thousands of lives might have been saved. His story is told in *War of Numbers*, published posthumously.

Previous recipients of the Sam Adams Award are:

**Coleen Rowley (FBI)**, Katharine Gun (UK-GCHQ), Sibel Edmonds (FBI), **Amb. Craig Murray (UK Foreign Office)**, Frank Grevil (Major, Danish Military Intelligence)\*\*, Sam Provance (Sgt. US Army, Abu Ghraib), **Larry Wilkerson (Col. US Army, Chief of Staff to Secretary of State)**, Julian Assange (WikiLeaks)\*\* Jesselyn Radack (Department of Justice), **Thomas Drake (NSA)**, Thomasingar (Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence), Edward Snowden (NSA)\*\* Chelsea (Bradley) Manning (PFC, US Army)\*\* William Binney (NSA), **John Kiriakou (CIA)\*\***

\* **In bold** = Names of former awardees who spoke at Kiriakou award ceremony

\*\* = Earlier awardees imprisoned, confined, exiled for speaking truth

Ray McGovern, like Sam Adams, began a career as a CIA analyst under President Kennedy; working on Vietnam, they became close associates. Sam was too straight-arrow to go to the media about the unconscionable fraud regarding the number of Communist forces. Ray knew that and rationalized not doing so himself. So, while a close associate of Sam Adams years ago, Ray fell short of the standard set by the above awardees, who deserved to be honored by Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence.

---

## America's Deceptive Model for Aggression

Since NATO's 1999 war on Serbia, U.S. officials have followed a script demonizing targeted foreign leaders, calling ultimatums "diplomacy," lying about "war as a last resort" and selling aggression as humanitarianism, says Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

Across the political spectrum, U.S. leaders insist that they will only go to war "as a last resort." They want us to believe that they will try every peaceful means to resolve differences with other countries before resorting to war. But if those "peaceful means" mean only ultimatums that are unacceptable to the target country, then U.S. leaders are simply going through a diplomatic charade before going to war.

In such a case, "war as a last resort" refers only to the means of achieving a goal, not to the rights or wrongs of the goal itself. If the underlying purpose is to impose the will of the U.S. government on another country or society, then "war as a last resort" amounts to an illegal threat of war to compel a country to submit to U.S. demands, not a commitment to peace or to the rule of law.

As I wrote last February, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton uses the term “diplomacy” to mean precisely this kind of brinksmanship, which creates a pretext for war if the other side won’t back down and is quite different from diplomacy to resolve international disputes peacefully, as required by the United Nations Charter and customary international law.

When Clinton told a televised “national security” forum that she “view(s) force as a last resort, not a first choice,” she was echoing what she and Sen. Bernie Sanders both said in Democratic Party debates. But in Clinton’s case, using the phrase “last resort” in this way is a clever way to reassure her listeners without actually modifying her hawkish and coercive approach to international relations. By contrast, Sanders was on firmer ground since he voted against two wars on Iraq (in 1990 and 2002), but did vote for war on Yugoslavia in 1999, a vote he still defends.

In negotiations at Rambouillet, France, in 1999, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright gave Yugoslavia only a devil’s choice between agreeing to a NATO military occupation (of all its remaining territory, not just Kosovo) and a NATO assault. When President Slobodan Milosevic refused these impossible terms, the West blamed him for triggering a U.S.-led war that was neither a war of self-defense nor a U.N.-backed collective security operation. In other words, it was a war of aggression by the U.S. and NATO against a largely defenseless nation.

But Milosevic had been so thoroughly demonized that few Americans seriously considered Yugoslavia’s position. Today, even fewer Americans know that the man our leaders tagged as a “new Hitler” and the “Butcher of the Balkans” was eventually exonerated by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), ten years after he died of a heart attack in a prison cell at The Hague.

Few also remember that the 1,380-member-strong Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was withdrawn six days before NATO began its aerial bombardment.

Pascal Neuffer, a Swiss member of the KVM, said, “The situation on the ground on the eve of the bombing did not justify a military intervention. We could certainly have continued our work. And the explanations given in the press, saying the mission was compromised by Serb threats, did not correspond to what I saw. Let’s say rather that we were evacuated because NATO had decided to bomb.”

The political stage was set for NATO’s assault on Yugoslavia by a battle in a village called Racak two months earlier. Yugoslav forces attacked CIA-backed Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) fighters who had terrorized the area and ambushed police patrols. The head of the KVM, former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador

William Walker, arrived in Racak the next day and misreported the battle to uncritical Western media as a massacre of civilians by Serb forces.

But autopsies conducted by Yugoslav, Belarusian and Finnish medical examiners contradicted Walker's account. The dead did not appear to be victims of summary execution. They died from a variety of gunshot wounds, as in any firefight; only one of 40 corpses examined was shot at close range; and there were only one woman and one teenage boy among the otherwise adult male bodies.

While the Western media largely parroted Walker's false account, and the confirmation of the autopsy results by the Finnish medical examiners was only partially made public in a journal article two years later, two French reporters in Kosovo immediately challenged Walker's narrative based on Associated Press video footage of the battle and other anomalies.

### **Questioning a Massacre**

Christophe Chatelet's article in *Le Monde* was headlined, "Were the dead in Racak really massacred in cold blood?" Describing how the KLA who reoccupied the village the evening after the battle appeared to have staged the scene to look like the result of a massacre, *Le Figaro's* veteran Yugoslavia correspondent Renaud Girard presciently concluded his story on Racak with a rhetorical question, "did the KLA seek to transform a military defeat into a political victory?"

Racak was the "atrocities" needed by President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Albright to rally the media, the public and otherwise progressive Members of Congress like Bernie Sanders to support a war of aggression. The U.S. and its allies then dropped 23,000 bombs and missiles on civilian as well as military targets across Yugoslavia, killing thousands of civilians and striking hospitals, schools, power stations, private homes, a TV station and the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade.

Kosovo was annexed as a NATO protectorate, and Hashim Thaci, the KLA leader and organized crime figure whom Albright had chosen over Kosovo's political leaders to head its delegation at Rambouillet, is now the president of a new nation that has struggled for stability and international recognition.

But Thaci's days in the sun may be numbered – Le Figaro reported in March that an international court is preparing new charges against him. One shocking charge, already well documented by former ICTY prosecutor Carla Del Ponte and an investigation by the Council of Europe, is that Thaci was the head of a criminal gang that exploited the chaos of Kosovo under NATO bombing to murder up to 500 Serbian and Roma prisoners so that they could harvest their internal organs to

sell on the international transplant market.

But the Kosovo Model has served Western warmongers well. The exaggeration or fabrication of atrocities by U.S. enemies and the blind eye turned to atrocities by U.S. allies are now standard fare whenever our leaders promote some new military intervention, and the subservient Western mainstream media remains reliable allies in these deceptions. If a foreign leader has been sufficiently demonized by Western propaganda, even baseless predictions of unlikely atrocities can serve as a *casus belli*, as was the case in Libya in 2011.

The U.K. parliament's foreign affairs committee recently concluded an inquiry into the Western destruction of Libya. One of its key findings was that the British government "failed to identify that the threat to civilians was overstated," because it "selectively took elements of Gaddafi's rhetoric at face value."

Of course, it was Western governments themselves who "overstated" the threat to civilians in Benghazi from Libyan government forces. The cherry-picking of Colonel Gaddafi's statements ignored his offer of amnesty to rebels who laid down their arms. There were also no massacres in other towns recaptured by Libyan government forces.

The committee also concluded that the emergence of "militant extremist groups" among the NATO-backed rebels was entirely predictable; and that the U.K. "drifted into an opportunistic policy of regime change" that "was not underpinned by a strategy to support and shape post-Gaddafi Libya."

Yet, just last April in a Democratic presidential debate, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was still repeating the same propaganda line, justifying the U.S.-supported "regime change" on the grounds that Gaddafi was a "genocidal" dictator.

If only the world had been presented with an honest account of our country's international crimes against Yugoslavia in 1999, the worldwide civil society resistance to Western aggression against Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya would have been strengthened by broader awareness of the dangers of U.S. militarism and the deceptive role of Western propaganda in setting the stage for war.

We'll never know for sure, but that might just have tipped the balance in favor of those who insisted that only the guilty should be punished for the crimes of 9/11, not millions of innocent people in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries.

## **Massive Military Spending**

Politicians and candidates keep telling us that the key to our safety and security lies in the strength of the U.S. military, which must therefore always be two or three times larger and more expensive than those of all its potential enemies combined. The U.S. today spends more on its military than the sum of our nine closest military competitors (most of whom are U.S. allies in any case) and more than the total military spending of 182 less militarized countries combined.

Despite the chaos unleashed by decades of military adventurism, U.S. leaders seem blissfully unaware that this lop-sided military imbalance is undermining global security and stability instead of improving it. After President George W. Bush oversaw the most expensive unilateral arms build-up in history, President Obama has achieved what would have seemed impossible to most Americans in 2008 – he has actually outspent Bush.

The reason that this imbalance is so dangerous lies in the very nature of military force. Weapons of war are designed to wound, maim or kill people, not to help them in any way. Bombs and missiles do not rebuild buildings, cities or societies – they only damage or destroy them.

The term “regime change” is a misnomer. Overwhelming military force does not “change” regimes – it just destroys them. We should understand by now that when our leaders threaten to “change” a regime by military force, that will replace it only with rubble, graveyards, chaos, corruption and poverty.

But this huge imbalance in military forces and expenditures creates the dangerous illusion that our leaders can threaten or use military force to reshape the world as they see fit, to solve any problem or achieve any geostrategic goal. Corporate media, from Hollywood to the *New York Times*, spin this military madness into a full-fledged fantasy in which a country that doesn't even provide its own people with basic human rights like healthcare, housing or a subsistence living, and instead manages poverty with aggressive, militarized policing and mass incarceration, is cast as a global warrior for democracy and human rights.

U.S. leaders saw the collapse of the Soviet Union as an ideological victory that opened doors to expand the U.S.-based capitalist economic system to the four corners of the world. They have bullied and bribed compliant governments to join U.S.-led trade and investment schemes that prioritize concentration of wealth and power over people and the environment.

Countries that resist integration into this neoliberal system or try to develop alternative models are subject to withering propaganda, crippling sanctions, U.S.-backed coups and, in the “last resort,” to the threat and catastrophic use

of military force.

This strategy and the role of the U.S. military in enforcing it have now been explicitly detailed in U.S. policy documents for 25 years, beginning with the original version of the Pentagon's "Defense Planning Guidance" that was leaked to the *New York Times* in 1992. This U.S. policy of illegal, unilateral use of force to "protect vital U.S. interests," explicitly defined to include "uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies and strategic resources," was formally unveiled to the world in the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review and the 2002 National Security Strategy.

The late Sen. Edward Kennedy condemned the latter as "a call for 21st century American imperialism that no other country can or should accept." But there is no hint that the spiral of violence and chaos our leaders have unleashed across the world has led them to rethink their commitment to the illegal threat and use of military force as an instrument of U.S. policy.

What we need from our political leaders and candidates is not the threat of more "last resort" wars on the Kosovo model, but a new commitment to peace and international law, most importantly to the U.N. Charter's prohibition on the threat or use of military force.

Until then, we should interpret deceptive formulations like "force as a last resort" as meaning that our leaders remain committed to an endless state of war that they have no idea how to contain or control. If humanity and civilization are to survive, we must force them to consider a very different "last resort": peace, disarmament and a rule of law that governs the rich and powerful as well as the poor and downtrodden.

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

---

## New Cold War Spins Out of Control

U.S. enthusiasts for the New Cold War with Russia appear to be ignoring less-belligerent orders from President Obama and pushing for a dangerous escalation of tensions, reports ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

In the aftermath of the U.S. attack on the Syrian army positions overlooking and commanding the Dier A-Zor airfield – the airfield, whose daily “Berlin air-bridge” style flights, are the sole lifeline to a city long besieged by ISIS – the Russian U.N. Ambassador asked a pertinent rhetorical question at the United Nations Security Council: Who is running U.S. policy: Is it the Pentagon or the White House?

There was no official response, of course, but one was not necessary: the *New York Times* editorial board gave us the answer in its verdict of Sept. 15: Praising the U.S. Secretary of State for his energetic, but “quixotic” diplomacy, the “Board” wrote:

“The [Syria ceasefire] agreement also has powerful critics inside the Obama administration, including Defense Secretary Ashton Carter. On Tuesday, Pentagon officials refused to say whether they would comply with their part of the deal, which calls on the United States to share information with the Russians on Islamic State targets in Syria if the cease-fire holds for seven days. This would be an unusual and possibly risky collaboration with a Russian regime that has become increasingly adversarial and could profit from learning American military secrets.”

What is so surprising here is the *non-surprise* evinced by the editorial writers of the *New York Times*. The Board blandly states that the Defense Secretary and the Pentagon might not *comply*. Not a hint of surprise is evident at the constitutional implications of this open defiance of Presidential authority.

No, rather the Board seems to view it as quite natural and commendable that Carter should refuse to comply with this “unusual and risky” proposition. But this was not some “proposition for collaboration.” This was an agreed formal accord between the United States and another state – reached after lengthy negotiations, and done with Presidential mandate.

In brief, President Obama’s authority is no more – if it runs against the settled opinion of the Pentagon, the CIA, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and of the Democratic Party’s Presidential candidate. It is not unreasonable therefore to assume that Obama’s grudging détente with a Russian President that he personally, viscerally dislikes, is now no more than diplomatic chatter.

Professor Stephen Cohen, the eminent Russia scholar, has pointed to the parallel when U.S. hardliners in the national security bureaucracy sank presidential attempts at détente with Russia. One such case was the CIA sending Gary Powers in his U2 spy plane over Russia, contrary to President Dwight Eisenhower’s agreement with Russia (subsequently only to be shot down by the Russians).

## Challenging Obama's Authority

Cross-accusations are flying over who did what in Syria these last days, but what comes through is that Obama is facing likely insurmountable dissidence, even open disobedience, within his own Administration.

This Syrian "ceasefire" will not be recovered – not just for the bitter exchange of recriminations, which have irreversibly crossed certain unstated boundaries – but because, separately, we have a detailed and compelling account (from an American military insider) on *How US Forces Sabotage White House Policy, Gone Disastrously Wrong with Covert Ops in Syria*.

It is clear from this account that – what has long been suspected – is true: that the U.S. does not, and cannot, control the jihadi monster it has created, owing to warring disparate factions within the U.S. "“security state,” turning a very blind eye to the nature and true intent of those it has been training, financing and arming.

In other words, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter and CIA Director John Brennan cannot deliver on the ceasefire, which may go to some way to explain the turmoil swirling around Washington. Did the White House fully comprehend how much the various U.S. "special" services were working at cross-purposes, and thereby undermining any real prospect of U.S. control, cutting away his negotiating stand?

The other aspect to this may be the nagging suspicion that Donald Trump has been given the space now to intervene with his "I told you so" – in terms of who "created" the jihadi "monster" – if he so chooses.

The "image" of concerted, wide, international *will* to resolve the Syrian conflict has been shattered – leaving only the splintered interests of diverse insurgent movements in Syria, and the polarized rhetoric of states outside. The Syria conflict most likely will enter a new, troubling phase – and with it too, Ukraine will probably become more intractable, as the two civil conflicts seem to be paired.

Noticeably, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, who is playing "on-off-on" with the Europeans, will be in New York meeting with Hillary Clinton, whereas Donald Trump has declined to meet him. Are the Democrats planning to double-down with Poroshenko?

So where next? Well, the Russian Duma elections have come and gone. They offered no surprises, but that does not mean that that they were without significance. With hindsight, we may conclude that they were more than just routine.

The party of the ruling authority, United Russia, won – albeit on a low turnout, but then Duma elections do not particularly stir imaginations among Russians. Putin is not strictly a member of U.R., but the party is directly associated with him. It is tied to him – and it won essentially on Putin’s popular coat-tails – and despite its poor economic record.

What was significant were two things: firstly, U.R. passed the 300-seat threshold. With 343 seats in the 450-seat parliament, UR now has a “super majority.” It can now change the Russian constitution – and that *is* important. Secondly, the three pro-Western, liberal parties contesting the elections achieved only *a combined total of 4 percent of votes cast*. Individually, they achieved but only 1 to 2 percent. And the threshold for entry by any one party into parliament is 5 percent. As Professor Cohen notes uncharacteristically bluntly: “The pro-western, liberal, political movement in Russia is dead – and was killed by Washington.”

### **Russian Election Empowers Putin**

In short, the economic sanctions and consequent belt-tightening resulting for Russians have not harmed Putin one jot. Russians blame the West (but still heartily dislike Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev’s economic team). That is now clear to all.

So, President Putin is now in a position – with a Duma “super-majority” – to make changes. The rumors are that big changes indeed are in prospect. One well-known Russia commentator, suggests wryly that Putin’s real opposition lies not in the Duma, but in the “party of power” itself:

“The truth is, the real opposition to Putin is precisely that [of] the economic-financial ministers of the Medvedev government and all the factions which they represent: bankers, IMF-drones, corrupt businessmen from the 1990s who hate Putin because he does not allow them to steal like in the past, all the ex-Nomenklatura and their kids who made a killing in the 1990s and whose heart is in the West, the Atlantic Integrationists à la Kudrin who are basically ‘Washington consensus types’ and who hate the Russian people for voting for Putin.

“That is the real opposition; and that opposition is far more dangerous than the US and NATO combined. And for that opposition the result of the [Duma] elections is a crushing defeat. Why? Because besides the hyper-official ‘power party’ United Russia, all the other parties in the Duma are far more anti-capitalist and anti-American than Putin. For the Empire, ‘United Russia’ is as good as it will ever get. Any alternative will be far, far worse.” So writes *the Saker*.

And here is the point: the situation in Syria for the coming months seems set to aggravate, but not to the point of a strategic defeat for Russia. Russia's military intervention, and the shift by Turkey – though still not certain – makes it unlikely that the U.S. can achieve its sought-after “regime change.” In Ukraine, the “cards” are largely in Russian hands – and the Europeans understand this.

But in parallel to rising tensions in Syria and Ukraine and NATO build-up in the Baltics, the latest G20, by contrast, signalled the rising geo-strategic co-operation between Russia and China – and now the Duma elections promise Putin the possibility of making strategic shifts within Russia itself. Shifts in economic policy – almost certainly – but also Putin may feel more confident in his posture vis-à-vis the West.

This is not to say that Putin wishes to escalate tension versus the West. There is no evidence for that at all (as the deputy head of NATO has confirmed). But the Russian President no longer has to look over his shoulder – either. He can afford to wait out the West's own economic and political crises.

**Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum, which advocates for engagement between political Islam and the West.**

---

## How Libyan ‘Regime Change’ Lies Echo in Syria

**Exclusive:** The mainstream U.S. media has largely ignored a U.K. report on the West's lies used to justify the Libyan “regime change,” all the better to protect the ongoing falsehoods used in Syria, as James W Carden explains.

By James W Carden

Earlier this month, a select committee of British parliamentarians released a report which condemned the U.K. government under David Cameron for its role in the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya. The report makes plain that the principal basis on which the intervention was predicated – that then-Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi was on the verge of committing a wholesale slaughter of the rebel stronghold Benghazi – was a lie propagated by Western and Gulf State media outlets.

It also shows the extent to which the crisis was driven by Libyan exiles who – perhaps quite understandably – had an axe to grind with the Gaddafi regime. In this – and in other ways, as we shall see – the Libyan crisis shares a number of similarities with the Syrian crisis. Indeed, it would be fair to view the debacle in Libya as a dress rehearsal for the war outside powers have been waging against the sovereign government of Syria for the past five years.

The U.K. report documents the extent to which the narrative of impending genocide was driven by the delusions of Libyan exiles: “Libyan exiles based in France were influential in raising fears about a possible massacre in Benghazi. Visiting Professor at King’s College London, Professor George Joffé, told us that ‘the decisions of President Sarkozy and his Administration were driven by Libyan exiles getting allies within the French intellectual establishment who were anxious to push for a real change in Libya.’”

Indeed, the U.K. Select Committee was told that “émigrés opposed to Muammar Gaddafi exploited unrest in Libya by overstating the threat to civilians and encouraging Western powers to intervene.”

The narrative crafted by Libyan exiles was swallowed hook, line and sinker by a willingly credulous Western press. Similarly dynamics were at play during the initial phase of the crisis in Syria.

Professor Tim Anderson of the University of Sydney notes that Syrian clerics in exile in Saudi Arabia, like Sheikh Adnan Arour “called for a holy war against the liberal Allawi muslims” who dominated the Assad government.

The journalist Eva Bartlett, who has been on the ground in Syria, has written that the problem with many of the Western media accounts of the Syrian crisis is that “Many talking heads draw from one sole source, UK-based Syrian Rami Abdulrahman of the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR).”

Abdulrahman, who runs the oft-quoted SOHR out of his home in Coventry, England, “hasn’t,” according to Bartlett, “been to Syria for 15 years.” What is more, Abdulrahman’s operation is reliant on the reports of opposition figures. This, as Bartlett notes, is no impartial source.

Other exile groups, like the Syrian National Council, has received millions of dollars in funding from the declared enemies of the Assad regime like Qatar and UAE. Meanwhile, regime change groups like the Aleppo Media Centre (AMC), the Washington-based Syrian Expatriates Organization (SEO) have, according to Anderson, received “hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations from un-named sources.”

Professor Anderson tells us that “Like many other U.S.-created front groups (The

Syrian Campaign, the White Helmets) the SEO is committed to the overthrow of the Syrian Government. That also happens to be the aim of the U.S. Government.”

Machiavelli was perhaps righter than he knew when he wrote: “how dangerous a thing it is to believe those who have been driven out of their country ... such is the extreme desire in them to return home, that they naturally believe many things that are false and add many others by art.”

## **No Angels**

And then there is the role Western media has played in ginning up the twin crises. The U.K. report on Libya – citing Amnesty International – notes that, “Western media coverage has from the outset presented a very one-sided view of the logic of events, portraying the protest movement as entirely peaceful and repeatedly suggesting that the regime’s security forces were unaccountably massacring unarmed demonstrators who presented no security challenge.”

In fact, the opposite was the case: security forces in both Libya and Syria came under attack by Islamist radicals from the very start: these were hardly the “peaceful” protests as portrayed by the Western media. As the U.K. report points out, “It is now clear that militant Islamist militias played a critical role in the rebellion from February 2011 onwards.”

What is more: “The possibility that militant extremist groups would attempt to benefit from the rebellion should not have been the preserve of hindsight. Libyan connections with transnational militant extremist groups were known before 2011, because many Libyans had participated in the Iraq insurgency and in Afghanistan with al-Qaeda.”

Likewise, the dominant myth surrounding the Syrian crisis is that “millions” of peaceful Syrians took to the streets as part of the liberalizing wave which roiled the Arab world in the spring of 2011. Human Rights Watch declared that the Syrian protesters “only used violence against the security forces” as a “last resort.”

Indeed, all of the violence which soon unfolded was said to be the fault of Assad’s police state and Assad’s subsequent refusal to step down – so the story goes – is one of the main causes of the growth in strength and numbers of radical Islamists terrorists.

As recently as last summer, none other than former Prime Minister David Cameron called Assad a “recruiting sergeant for ISIS.” And while this claim is as nonsensical as it is disingenuous, it is a line which has been dutifully echoed by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who in April told CNN that “ISIS was primarily the result of the vacuum in Syria caused by Assad first and

foremost.”

From the very start, the opposition to Assad included sectarian extremists who chanted: “Christians to Beirut, Alawis to the grave.” And the first documented incidents of violence in Daraa were against, not by, the Syrian security forces.

Professor Anderson cites an Israel National News report from March 21, 2011, which told of “Seven police officers and at least four demonstrators in Syria have been killed.” Anderson notes, “The armed forces came to Daraa precisely *because* police had been killed by snipers.” [emphasis mine]

The journalist and analyst John Rosenthal translated a Jan. 12, 2012 report from Homs by a Dutch Jesuit, Father Frans van der Lugt, who was later murdered, likely by al-Nusra militants, in April 2014.

The Jesuit missionary observed that: “Most of the citizens of Syria do not support the opposition. ... you also cannot say that this is a popular uprising. The majority of people are not part of the rebellion and certainly not part of the armed rebellion. What is occurring is, above all, a struggle between the army and armed Sunni groups that aim to overturn the Alawite regime and take power.

“From the start the protest movements were not purely peaceful. From the start I saw armed demonstrators marching along in the protests, who began to shoot at the police first. Very often the violence of the security forces has been a reaction to the brutal violence of the armed rebels.”

Also inconvenient to the dominant narrative is the fact that even after the large scale anti-government protests and escalation in violence, 55 percent of Syrians polled in 2012 wanted Assad to remain in power.

With all of this in mind we would do well to treat reports from the likes of CNN’s Clarissa Ward with a healthy amount of skepticism, not least because the *fact* that Islamists were involved from the very start of both the Libyan and Syrian uprisings have been relentlessly excised out of the dominant, acceptable mainstream narratives like hers.

### **Lost Alternatives**

When one considers the policy alternatives which were rudely shunted aside in favor of violence, the twin catastrophes in Libya and Syria appear all the worse in retrospect. Instead of strictly adhering to the UN-mandated arms embargo in Libya, the U.K. Select Committee reports that:

“we were told that the international community turned a blind eye to the supply

of weapons to the rebels. Lord Richards [UK Defence Chief of Staff] highlighted “the degree to which the Emiratis and the Qataris ... played a major role in the success of the ground operation.”

Likewise, the Syrian arms embargo was only selectively and fitfully enforced. From May 2011 to June 2013, the E.U. imposed an arms embargo on Syria but, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, by April 2013 “the EU decided to allow the supply of certain equipment to Syrian opposition forces.”

In the ensuing years the U.S. aided and abetted the supply of weapons (laundered through Jordan) to radical opposition groups while Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia were the principal suppliers of weapons to ISIS.

As Meredith Tax of the think tank, Centre for Secular Space, recently pointed out in *The Nation*, the U.S. continues to turn a blind eye toward the actions of NATO-member Turkey which is supporting jihadi gains by attacking Kurdish forces in northern Syria. The media, as Tax correctly observes, has “failed to look hard at the Erdogan government’s support of jihadis, or to ask what they have in common.”

Meanwhile, diplomatic alternatives were never seriously pursued in Libya or in Syria – though it is true that the peaceful Russian alternative to Obama’s “red line” policy was pursued with regard to dismantling Syria’s stockpile of chemical weapons.

But a peaceful path in Libya was, it seems, never taken seriously. Saif Gaddafi’s attempts to broker a settlement with the Clinton State Department and with the U.K. through his intermediary, former Prime Minister Tony Blair, were never taken seriously by NATO principals.

As the U.K. report tartly notes: “Political options were available if the UK Government had adhered to the spirit of Resolution 1973, implemented its original campaign plan and influenced its coalition allies to pause military action when Benghazi was secured in March 2011. Political engagement might have delivered civilian protection, regime change and reform at lesser cost to the UK and to Libya.”

And given the behavior of both Gaddafi and Assad in the years following 9/11 the sovereignty of both countries should have – at a minimum – been respected; after all, Gaddafi had only just begun to accede to Western prerogatives, as when he abandoned his WMD program in 2003, while Assad had cooperated with the Bush administration in its so-called Global War on Terror. It is worth noting that in doing so, he earned the enmity of the religious fanatics who run Turkey, Qatar

and Saudi Arabia.

As thanks for his cooperation, the U.S., ever at the beck and call of the Gulf State autocracies who are our *actual* enemies, Assad has become the target of regime change enthusiasts in the U.S. and Europe. Their designs have wrecked large swathes of Syria, resulted in an unprecedented migrant crisis, destroyed the lives of many millions, gave rise to ISIS and strengthened the very same Islamist radicals who attacked us on 9/11 and who remain the sworn enemies of the West.

**James W Carden is a contributing writer for The Nation and editor of The American Committee for East-West Accord's eastwestaccord.com. He previously served as an advisor on Russia to the Special Representative for Global Inter-governmental Affairs at the US State Department.**

---

## Another Kerry Rush to Judgment on Syria

**Exclusive:** The U.N. withdrew its claim that an airstrike hit its Syrian relief convoy but Secretary of State Kerry relied on the outdated claim in lashing out at Russia in a repeat of his earlier rushes to judgment, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Secretary of State John Kerry has engaged in another rush to judgment blaming the Russians for an attack on a United Nations relief convoy in Syria before any thorough investigation could be conducted and thus prejudicing whatever might follow, as he did with the Syrian sarin case in 2013 and the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in 2014.

Eager to go on the propaganda offensive – especially after a U.S. military airstrike last Saturday killed scores of Syrian soldiers who were battling the Islamic State in eastern Syria – Kerry pounced on an initial report that the attack on the convoy on Monday was an airstrike and then insisted that the Russians must have been responsible because one of their jets was supposedly in the area.

But the United Nations – and I'm told CIA analysts – have not ruled out the possibility that the convoy was instead hit by a surface-to-surface missile. On Friday, a source briefed by U.S. intelligence said one fear is that the jihadist group, Ahrar al-Sham, which has fought alongside Al Qaeda's Nusra Front but is deemed to be part of the "moderate" opposition, may have used a U.S.-supplied TOW missile in the attack.

Ahrar al-Sham, like some other jihadist groups seeking to overthrow the Syrian government, has objected to limited cease-fires arranged by the Russians and the Americans, which still allowed attacks on its ally, the recently rebranded Nusra Front. Ahrar al-Sham thus had a motive for destroying the aid convoy, an act which indeed has upended efforts to negotiate an end to the five-year-old conflict and led to bloody new attacks inside the embattled city of Aleppo on Friday.

Another possibility was that a Syrian government warplane was targeting a rebel artillery piece traveling alongside the convoy and struck the convoy by accident. But the assignment of blame required additional investigation, as other international officials acknowledged.

On Tuesday, a day before Kerry's outburst, the U.N. revised its initial statement citing an airstrike, with Jens Laerke, a humanitarian affairs representative for the U.N., saying: "We are not in a position to determine whether these were in fact airstrikes. We are in a position to say that the convoy was attacked." He called the earlier reference to an airstrike a drafting error.

Nevertheless, on Wednesday, Kerry made his high-profile denunciation of the Russians at the U.N. Security Council, the same venue where Secretary of State Colin Powell in 2003 presented a false case against Iraq for possessing hidden stockpiles of WMD. In fiery comments, Kerry accused Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov of living "in a parallel universe" in denying Russian responsibility.

"The eyewitnesses will tell you what happened," Kerry said. "The place turned into hell and fighter jets were in the sky."

Yet, the two points don't necessarily connect. Just because there are jets in the sky doesn't mean they fired the rocket that struck the convoy. They might have, but to determine that – and if so, who was flying the jet that fired the missile – requires more thorough study.

Kerry also sought to excuse the U.S. airstrike near Deir ez-Zor last Saturday that killed some 62 Syrian soldiers, saying: "We did it, a terrible accident. And within moments of it happening, we acknowledged it. ... But I got to tell you, people running around with guns on the ground, from the air, is a very different thing from trucks in a convoy with big U.N. markings all over them."

But what Kerry ignored was the fact that the United States has no legal authority to be conducting military operations inside Syria, attacks supposedly targeting the terrorist Islamic State but lacking the approval of the Syrian

government. In other words, under international law, any such U.S. attacks are acts of aggression and thus war crimes.

The mainstream U.S. news media, however, has little regard for international law, at least when the U.S. government is violating it, nor particular care for factual details. Despite the U.N.'s uncertainty about what struck the convoy, The New York Times continued to report the airstrike as a flat fact.

On Thursday, the Times wrote, "a convoy of trucks taking aid to the besieged of Aleppo was destroyed in a deadly airstrike." Strangely, later in the article, the Times does note that "the United Nations has not confirmed what struck its trucks."

### **A History of Prejudgment**

Kerry also has a history of jumping ahead of a story and then going silent when further information is developed.

On Aug. 30, 2013, Kerry gave a thunderous speech virtually declaring war on Syria for supposedly launching a sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, that killed hundreds of people. On Aug. 31, however, President Obama pulled the rug out from under Kerry by shelving plans for a retaliatory bombing campaign, in part, because U.S. and British intelligence analysts expressed doubts that the Syrian government was responsible.

Later, evidence built up supporting a counter thesis that the sarin attack was launched by Syrian rebels trying to draw the U.S. military into the conflict on their side. In other words, Kerry almost put the U.S. government in position of aiding Al Qaeda or the Islamic State overrunning Damascus under dubious if not false pretenses. [See Consortiunews.com's "The Collapsing Syria Sarin Case."]

But U.N. investigators have remained under intense pressure to give the U.S. government something so it can keep alive the theme of Syria's government using chemical weapons, even after Syria agreed to surrender all its chemical weapons in 2013. The U.N. did so in late August in blaming the Syrian government for two thinly evidenced cases of jerry-rigged chlorine bombs, after brushing aside witness testimony that rebels were staging such attacks for propaganda purposes.

Regarding the sarin case, the U.S. government never formally recanted Kerry's rush to judgment allowing the conventional wisdom inside Official Washington (and its compliant mainstream media) to remain that Obama failed to enforce his "red line" against use of chemical weapons.

Kerry was at it again just three days after Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, insisting that the U.S. government

had radar and other conclusive evidence showing exactly where the missile was fired and making clear that Russian-backed rebels were responsible with the Russians also at fault for giving the rebels the anti-aircraft weapon.

However, after CIA and other Western intelligence analysts had more time to review what actually happened – and found that only Ukrainian government forces had anti-aircraft missiles in the area capable of shooting down a plane at 33,000 feet – the U.S. government went silent, refusing to make public its evidence but keeping alive the impression that the Russians were at fault.

With the U.S. government keeping its key evidence secret, the Dutch-led investigations into the crash have floundered. Last October, the Dutch Safety Board could only put the likely missile firing position within a 320-square-kilometer area including land held by both the rebels and the government. [See Consortiumnews.com's "The Ever Curiouser MH-17 Case."]

On Sept. 28, a Dutch-led-but-Ukrainian-dominated Joint Investigation Committee (JIT) is scheduled to release a report that is supposed to finally say where the missile was fired, more than two years after the tragedy. Given the influence of Ukraine's SBU intelligence service over JIT, the likelihood is that the report will try to keep alive the impression that the ethnic Russian rebels were responsible.

A source who's been following the investigation said the Dutch have resisted the outright falsification of the findings because many of the 298 victims were Dutch citizens and the victims' families have been pressing for all sides – the United States, Ukraine and Russia – to supply whatever evidence they can. But the Western demands for propaganda to support the New Cold War with Russia are strong.

Syria has become another battlefield in that information war with tragic events being used as propaganda clubs by the various sides to beat one another, rather than moments for careful review of the evidence and assessment of accountability.

Part of this propaganda overload results from the U.S. government and various Western non-governmental organizations funding and training activists in the art of using social media for propaganda purposes. While these activists report on some real events, they also slant their coverage to advance their agenda of "regime change" in Syria.

The problem is compounded because the Western mainstream media has taken up Syrian "regime change" as a beloved cause rather than a topic for objective reporting. The New York Times and other major news outlets rely credulously on

anti-government activists, such as the White Helmets and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, for information about what's happening on the ground with statements from the Syrian or Russian governments treated with open disdain.

The larger tragedy of exploiting these human tragedies for propaganda purposes – whether the sarin attack, the MH-17 shoot-down or now the convoy bombing – is that these deaths of innocents become just excuses to inflict more deaths and ultimately to push the world closer to a new world war.

**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](#)).**

---

## How US Propaganda Plays in Syrian War

U.S. foreign policymakers have experimented at planting propaganda in social media and then citing it as evidence to support their goals, a process now playing out in the Syrian “regime change,” as Rick Sterling explains.

By Rick Sterling

Manipulation of public perception has risen to a new level with the emergence of powerful social media. Multibillion-dollar corporate giants, such as Facebook, Twitter and Google, influence public perceptions, often via payments for “boosting” Facebook posts, paid promotion of Tweets, and biased results from search engines.

Marketing and advertising companies use social media to promote their clients, but so do U.S. foreign policy managers who hire or enlist these companies to influence public perceptions to support U.S. foreign policy goals.

For example, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described making sure that Twitter was primed for street protests in Iran following the 2009 election, ready to spread and manage news of protests following the election and the killing of a young woman, which was blamed on the Iranian government although the circumstances of her death were murky. [Hard Choices hardback, p 423]

The results of similar media manipulation can be seen in the widespread misunderstanding of the conflict in Syria, amid the demonization of the Syrian government and leadership and the skillful use of social media by anti-

government activists. Influenced by both mainstream and this alternative media, most people in the West do not know that Bashar al-Assad remains popular with many Syrians. Nor do they realize that Assad won an election two years ago.

There were three contestants in the [Syrian presidential election](#) of June 2014. Turnout was 73 percent of the registered voters, with 88 percent voting for Assad. In Beirut, the streets were clogged with tens of thousands of Syrian refugees marching through the city to vote at the Syrian Embassy. Hundreds of Syrian citizens living in the U.S. and other Western countries flew to Syria to vote because Syrian Embassies in Washington and other Western capitals were shut down.

While Secretary of State John Kerry was condemning the Syrian election as a “farce” before it had even happened, a marketing company known as The Syria Campaign waged a campaign to block knowledge of the Syrian election. Along with demonizing President Assad, the company launched a campaign which led to [Facebook censoring information](#) about the Syrian election.

### **Incubating Propaganda**

The Syria Campaign was created by a larger company named “Purpose,” which – according to its website – [“incubated”](#) The Syria Campaign. The company’s website says, “Purpose creates new movements, brands and organizations from the ground up to address complex global challenges. We apply this experience as movement creators to our work with progressive companies, nonprofits and philanthropies, helping them to put purpose and participation at the heart of what they do.”

The major achievement of The Syria Campaign has been the branding and promotion of the “White Helmets,” also known as “Syria Civil Defense,” which began with a British military contractor, James LeMesurier, giving some rescue training to Syrians in Turkey with funding provided by the U.S. and U.K. The group stole this name from the REAL Syria Civil Defense as documented in this [recent report](#) from Aleppo.

The “White Helmets” are marketed in the West as civilian volunteers doing rescue work. On Sept. 22, it was announced that the [Right Livelihood Award](#), the so-called “Alternative Nobel Prize,” is being given to the U.S./U.K.-created White Helmets “for their outstanding bravery, compassion and humanitarian engagement in rescuing civilians from the destruction of the Syrian civil war.”

But the White Helmets are largely a propaganda tool promoting Western intervention against Syria. Unlike a legitimate rescue organization such as the Red Cross or Red Crescent, the “White Helmets” only work in areas controlled by the armed opposition. As shown in [this video](#), the White Helmets pick up the

bodies of individuals executed by the terrorists; they claim to be unarmed but are not; and they falsely claim to be neutral.

Many of the videos from Al Qaeda/terrorist-dominated areas of Syria have the "White Helmets" logo because the White Helmets work in alliance with these extremist groups as primarily a media marketing tool to raise public support for continuing the support to the armed opposition as well as the demonization of the Syrian government.

The Rights Livelihood [press release](#) said the White Helmets "remain outspoken in calling for an end to hostilities in the country." But that is false, too. The White Helmets actively call for U.S./NATO military intervention through a "No Fly Zone," which would begin with attacks upon and destruction of government anti-aircraft positions and aircraft.

### **A Major Act of War**

Taking over the skies above another country is an act of war that would require a major U.S. military operation, according to senior American generals.

The [New York Times](#) reported that in 2012 General Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the White House that imposing a no-fly zone in Syria would require up to 70,000 American servicemen to destroy Syria's anti-aircraft system and then impose round-the-clock control over Syrian airspace.

General Carter Ham, former commander of the U.S. Africa Command who oversaw the aerial attacks on Libya in 2011, said on [CBS News](#) that "I worry sometimes that, when people say 'impose a no-fly zone,' there is this almost antiseptic view that this is an easily accomplished military task. It's extraordinarily difficult. ...

"It first entails – we should make no bones about it. It first entails killing a lot of people and destroying the Syrian air defenses and those people who are manning those systems. And then it entails destroying the Syrian air force, preferably on the ground, in the air if necessary. This is a violent combat action that results in lots of casualties and increased risk to our own personnel."

In other words, an appeal for a "no-fly zone" is not a call for a non-violent solution. It is seeking a bloody act of war by the United States against Syria, a nation that poses no threat to America. It also would almost surely be carried out in violation of international law since a United Nations Security Council resolution would face vetoes from Russia and probably China.

Also, the White Helmets have never criticized or called for the end of funding to extremist organizations including Nusra Front, Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate. On the contrary, White Helmets are generally embedded with this organization which is defined as "terrorist" by even the U.S., which is likely why the head of the White Helmets, Raed Saleh, was [denied entry](#) to the U.S.

The foreign and marketing company origins of the White Helmets were [exposed](#) over 1½ years ago – and since then, writer Vanessa Beeley has revealed the organization in more depth in articles such as "[Who Are the White Helmets?](#)" and "[War by Way of Deception.](#)"

Despite these exposés, understanding of the White Helmets is limited, with many liberal and progressive people uncritically accepting the propaganda and misinformation about Syria. Much of the progressive media has effectively blocked or censored critical examinations amid a flood of propaganda about "barrel bombs" dropped by the "brutal dictator" and his "regime."

In the last week, Netflix started showing a 40-minute documentary movie about the "White Helmets" that amounts to a promotional video. A substantial portion of it takes place in Turkey where we see trainees in hotel rooms making impassioned phone calls to inquire about their families in Syria.

The "family values" theme is evident throughout, a good marketing angle. The political message of the video is also clear: after a bombing attack, "It's the Russians ... they say they are fighting ISIS but they are targeting civilians."

The movie includes video previously promoted by the White Helmets such as the "Miracle Baby" rescue, an incident that may or may not have been staged. The video includes self-promoting proclamations such as "You are real heroes." While no doubt there are some real rescues in the midst of war, many of the videos purporting to show the heroes at work have an unrealistic and contrived look to them as revealed [here](#).

### **Tricking Progressives**

"Alternative media" in the West has echoed mainstream media regarding the Syria conflict. The result is that many progressive individuals and groups are confused or worse. For example, the activist group CodePink recently issued a media release [promoting](#) the Netflix White Helmets propaganda video.

The White Helmets video is produced by Grain Media and Violet Films/Ultra-Violet Consulting, which advertises itself as a [marketing corporation](#) specializing in social media management, grant writing, crowd building and campaign implementation. The only question is who paid them to produce this video.

There is growing resistance to this manipulation and deception. In response to a petition to give the Nobel Peace Prize to the White Helmets, there is a [counter petition](#) at Change.org. Following the Right Livelihood Awards' announcement, there will soon be a petition demanding retraction of the award to the White Helmets.

The story of the White Helmets is principally a “feel good” hoax to manipulate public perception about the conflict in Syria and continue the drive for “regime change.” That’s why big money was paid to “Purpose” to “incubate” The Syria Campaign to brand and promote the White Helmets using Facebook, Twitter, etc. That’s why more big money was paid to create a self-promotional documentary.

The judges at Rights Livelihood were probably influenced by the documentary since critical examination of facts around Syria is so rare. It’s a sad commentary on the media. As veteran war correspondent Stephen Kinzer recently [wrote](#), “Coverage of the Syrian war will be remembered as one of the most shameful episodes in the history of the American press.”

**Rick Sterling is an investigative journalist and member of Syria Solidarity Movement**

---

## George H.W. Bush, the CIA and a Case of State Terrorism

**From the Archive:** Forty years ago, a car-bomb exploded in Washington killing Chile’s ex-Foreign Minister Orlando Letelier, an act of state terrorism that the CIA and its director George H.W. Bush tried to cover up, Robert Parry reported in 2000.

By Robert Parry (Originally published on Sept. 23, 2000)

In early fall of 1976, after a Chilean government assassin had killed a Chilean dissident and an American woman with a car bomb in Washington, D.C., George H.W. Bush’s CIA leaked a false report clearing Chile’s military dictatorship and pointing the FBI in the wrong direction.

The bogus CIA assessment, spread through *Newsweek* magazine and other U.S. media outlets, was planted despite CIA’s now admitted awareness at the time that Chile was participating in Operation Condor, a cross-border campaign targeting political dissidents, and the CIA’s own suspicions that the Chilean junta was behind the terrorist bombing in Washington.

In a 21-page report to Congress on Sept. 18, 2000, the CIA officially acknowledged for the first time that the mastermind of the terrorist attack, Chilean intelligence chief Manuel Contreras, was a paid asset of the CIA.

The CIA report was issued almost 24 years to the day after the murders of former Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and American co-worker Ronni Moffitt, who died on Sept. 21, 1976, when a remote-controlled bomb ripped apart Letelier's car as they drove down Massachusetts Avenue, a stately section of Washington known as Embassy Row.

In the report, the CIA also acknowledged publicly for the first time that it consulted Contreras in October 1976 about the Letelier assassination. The report added that the CIA was aware of the alleged Chilean government role in the murders and included that suspicion in an internal cable the same month.

"CIA's first intelligence report containing this allegation was dated 6 October 1976," a little more than two weeks after the bombing, the CIA disclosed.

Nevertheless, the CIA – then under CIA Director George H.W. Bush – leaked for public consumption an assessment clearing the Chilean government's feared intelligence service, DINA, which was then run by Contreras.

Relying on the word of Bush's CIA, *Newsweek* reported that "the Chilean secret police were not involved" in the Letelier assassination. "The [Central Intelligence] agency reached its decision because the bomb was too crude to be the work of experts and because the murder, coming while Chile's rulers were wooing U.S. support, could only damage the Santiago regime." [*Newsweek*, Oct. 11, 1976]

Bush, who later became the 41<sup>st</sup> president of the United States (and is the father of the 43<sup>rd</sup> president), has never explained his role in putting out the false cover story that diverted attention away from the real terrorists. Nor has Bush explained what he knew about the Chilean intelligence operation in the weeks before Letelier and Moffitt were killed.

### Dodging Disclosure

As a *Newsweek* correspondent in 1988, a dozen years after the Letelier bombing, when the elder Bush was running for president, I prepared a detailed story about Bush's handling of the Letelier case.

The draft story included the first account from U.S. intelligence sources that Contreras was a CIA asset in the mid-1970s. I also learned that the CIA had consulted Contreras about the Letelier assassination, information that the CIA then would not confirm.

The sources told me that the CIA sent its Santiago station chief, Wiley Gilstrap, to talk with Contreras after the bombing. Gilstrap then cabled back to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, Contreras's assurances that the Chilean government was not involved. Contreras told Gilstrap that the most likely killers were communists who wanted to make a martyr out of Letelier.

My story draft also described how Bush's CIA had been forewarned in 1976 about DINA's secret plans to send agents, including the assassin Michael Townley, into the United States on false passports.

Upon learning of this strange mission, the U.S. ambassador to Paraguay, George Landau, cabled Bush about Chile's claim that Townley and another agent were traveling to CIA headquarters for a meeting with Bush's deputy, Vernon Walters. Landau also forwarded copies of the false passports to the CIA.

Walters cabled back that he was unaware of any scheduled appointment with these Chilean agents. Landau immediately canceled the visas, but Townley simply altered his plans and continued on his way to the United States. After arriving, he enlisted some right-wing Cuban-Americans in the Letelier plot and went to Washington to plant the bomb under Letelier's car.

The CIA has never explained what action it took, if any, after receiving Landau's warning. A natural follow-up would have been to contact DINA and ask what was afoot or whether a message about the trip had been misdirected. The CIA report in 2000 made no mention of these aspects of the case.

After the assassination, Bush promised the CIA's full cooperation in tracking down the Letelier-Moffitt killers. But instead the CIA took contrary actions, such as planting the false exoneration and withholding evidence that would have implicated the Chilean junta.

"Nothing the agency gave us helped us to break this case," said federal prosecutor Eugene Propper in a 1988 interview for the story I was drafting for *Newsweek*. The CIA never volunteered Ambassador Landau's cable about the suspicious DINA mission nor copies of the fake passports that included a photo of Townley, the chief assassin. Nor did Bush's CIA divulge its knowledge of the existence of Operation Condor.

FBI agents in Washington and Latin America broke the case two years later. They discovered Operation Condor on their own and tracked the assassination back to Townley and his accomplices in the United States.

In 1988, as then-Vice President Bush was citing his CIA work as an important part of his government experience, I submitted questions to him asking about his actions in the days before and after the Letelier bombing. Bush's chief of

staff, Craig Fuller, wrote back, saying Bush “will have no comment on the specific issues raised in your letter.”

As it turned out, the Bush campaign had little to fear from my discoveries. When I submitted my story draft – with its exclusive account of Contreras’s role as a CIA asset – *Newsweek*’s editors refused to run the story. Washington bureau chief Evan Thomas told me that Editor Maynard Parker even had accused me of being “out to get Bush.”

### **The CIA’s Admission**

Twenty-four years after the Letelier assassination and 12 years after *Newsweek* killed the first account of the Contreras-CIA relationship, the CIA admitted that it had paid Contreras as an intelligence asset and consulted with him about the Letelier assassination.

Still, in the sketchy report in 2000, the spy agency sought to portray itself as more victim than accomplice. According to the report, the CIA was internally critical of Contreras’s human rights abuses and skeptical about his credibility. The CIA said its skepticism predates the spy agency’s contact with him about the Letelier-Moffitt murders.

“The relationship, while correct, was not cordial and smooth, particularly as evidence of Contreras’ role in human rights abuses emerged,” the CIA reported. “In December 1974, the CIA concluded that Contreras was not going to improve his human rights performance. ...

“By April 1975, intelligence reporting showed that Contreras was the principal obstacle to a reasonable human rights policy within the Junta, but an interagency committee [within the Ford administration] directed the CIA to continue its relationship with Contreras.”

The CIA report added that “a one-time payment was given to Contreras” in 1975, a time frame when the CIA was first hearing about Operation Condor, a cross-border program run by South America’s military dictatorships to hunt down dissidents living in other countries.

“CIA sought from Contreras information regarding evidence that emerged in 1975 of a formal Southern Cone cooperative intelligence effort – ‘Operation Condor’ – building on informal cooperation in tracking and, in at least a few cases, killing political opponents. By October 1976, there was sufficient information that the CIA decided to approach Contreras on the matter. Contreras confirmed Condor’s existence as an intelligence-sharing network but denied that it had a role in extra-judicial killings.”

Also, in October 1976, the CIA said it “worked out” how it would assist the FBI in its investigation of the Letelier assassination, which had occurred the previous month. The spy agency’s report offered no details of what it did, however. The report added only that Contreras was already a murder suspect by fall 1976.

“At that time, Contreras’ possible role in the Letelier assassination became an issue,” the CIA’s report said. “By the end of 1976, contacts with Contreras were very infrequent.”

Even though the CIA came to recognize the likelihood that DINA was behind the Letelier assassination, there never was any indication that Bush’s CIA sought to correct the false impression created by its leaks to the news media asserting DINA’s innocence.

After Bush left the CIA with Jimmy Carter’s inauguration in 1977, the spy agency distanced itself from Contreras, the new report said. “During 1977, CIA met with Contreras about half a dozen times; three of those contacts were to request information on the Letelier assassination,” the CIA report said.

“On 3 November 1977, Contreras was transferred to a function unrelated to intelligence so the CIA severed all contact with him,” the report added. “After a short struggle to retain power, Contreras resigned from the Army in 1978. In the interim, CIA gathered specific, detailed intelligence reporting concerning Contreras’ involvement in ordering the Letelier assassination.”

### Remaining Mysteries

Though the CIA report in 2000 contained the first official admission of a relationship with Contreras, it shed no light on the actions of Bush and his deputy, Walters, in the days before and after the Letelier assassination. It also offered no explanation why Bush’s CIA planted false information in the American press clearing Chile’s military dictatorship.

While providing the 21-page summary on its relationship with Chile’s military dictatorship, the CIA refused to release documents from a quarter century earlier on the grounds that the disclosures might jeopardize the CIA’s “sources and methods.” The refusal came in the face of President Bill Clinton’s specific order to release as much information as possible.

Perhaps the CIA was playing for time. With CIA headquarters officially named the George Bush Center for Intelligence and with veterans of the Reagan-Bush years still dominating the CIA’s hierarchy, the spy agency might have hoped that the election of Texas Gov. George W. Bush would free it from demands to open up records to the American people.

For his part, former President George H.W. Bush declared his intent to take a more active role in campaigning for his son's election. In Florida on Sept. 22, 2000, Bush said he was "absolutely convinced" that if his son is elected president, "we will restore the respect, honor and decency that the White House deserves."

**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](#)).**

---

## Obama's Legacy But Clinton's Judgment

**Exclusive:** President Obama calls on blacks to vote for Hillary Clinton to protect the first black president's legacy, but there are questions about Clinton's judgment and Obama's legacy that deserve answers, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Speaking at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation dinner on Saturday, President Barack Obama warned, in what has become for him a typically regal manner: "I will consider it a personal insult, an insult to my legacy, if this [African-American] community lets down its guard and fails to activate itself in this election."

After a round of applause, Obama [added](#): "You want to give me a good sendoff? Go vote."

While urging people to vote is fine, there's something troubling about how the President phrased it: that a person's decision to vote for Hillary Clinton should be determined by the need to protect his legacy. And, in the context of speaking to African-Americans, Obama was telling them that his blackness and theirs made a vote for Clinton necessary.

A similar call to identity politics troubled me, too, when Hillary Clinton sought to [play the gender card](#). I would have been equally offended if when I became old enough to vote, my Irish-American relatives told me to vote for an Irish Catholic named John F. Kennedy because of our shared ancestry or religion. I would have found it condescending – infantilizing even – if anyone warned me

that s/he would take it as a personal insult, were I *not* to vote for Kennedy.

I voted for Kennedy based on what I saw as his merits as a leader (and consider it the major tragedy of my lifetime that he may well have been killed for those merits).

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said: "I look to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." But most of us know that basic article of fairness – or should know that. Neither race nor gender should be **the** touchstone in voting this year or any year. Nor should white males vote for Donald Trump because he's one of them.

Yet, on the race side, Obama came perilously close to the gender comment made in February by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Challenging young women who were showing a preference for Bernie Sanders, Albright told them: "You have to help. Hillary Clinton will always be there for you. And just remember, there's a special place in Hell for women who don't help each other."

*Au contraire*: I might argue that if there is a Hell, there's a special place for a U.S. diplomat – in the person of Albright – who argued that the sanctions against Iraq, which the United Nations calculated had claimed the lives of 500,000 Iraqi children under five, were "worth it."

Clinton – with her hawkish behavior on Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan and her similar disregard for those human costs (even while professing to care so much for the innocent civilians) – appears to share Albright's view about using geopolitical power even when it results in the deaths of children. Even the usually timid Catholic bishops branded Albright's position "unconscionable."

### **Content of Obama's Character**

As for the President and his imperious behavior, my friends and I have been debating whether Obama was always a fraud or whether he succumbed to Lord Acton's adage: "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Or was he a talented outsider who – because of his race and humble background – desperately wanted to be accepted by the Establishment and feared that even as President he would be judged harshly by important people with blue-ribbon credentials and blue-blood pedigrees? Earlier in his presidency, I even speculated that Obama was physically scared of crossing the Establishment too directly, for fear of ending up like Kennedy and King.

One could argue that aspects of Obama's behavior as President fit all these possibilities. He does not appear to have sincerely believed many of his early pronouncements, such as the value of transparency in government and the

importance of whistleblowers. He quickly morphed into one of the most secretive U.S. presidents and went after whistleblowers with a vengeance.

His war on whistleblowers also could be interpreted as a case of presidential powers going to his head. Or was he trying to prove to the Establishment that he, the son of a Kenyan student and a white mother in Hawaii, could protect the secrets even more aggressively than a white scion of the Establishment, like George W. Bush.

At times, Obama has complained about feeling trapped by the expectations of the Washington Establishment, saying in a 2016 interview with *The Atlantic* that he once challenged the Washington “playbook” that favored responding to international crises with military force by balking at demands that he bomb the Syrian military in 2013.

That the President would still be boasting about that one decision as his “liberation day” – almost three years later – says a lot about his failure to continue standing up to the pressures brought to bear by Washington’s Establishment. Even on the few occasions when he did show some nerve, such as by pressing for the Iran nuclear deal in 2014, he followed up by making major concessions to Israel and Saudi Arabia, two Mideast governments with lots of clout in Washington.

And maybe some physical fear went with his fear of personal rejection. After all, as a black man who reached extraordinary political heights, he was aware of the violence that had cut down many other blacks who dared make far more modest intrusions into the white power structure.

So, what was driving him when he expanded the war in Afghanistan (in 2009) at the bidding of his hawkish “subordinates” who were much more comfortable inside Official Washington’s hierarchy, such as Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Gen. David Petraeus and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton?

### **The Libyan Disaster**

Obama deferred to the judgment of others again in 2011 when Hillary Clinton and some fellow hawks wanted another “regime change,” this time in Libya. Obama let Clinton prevail over his more sensible advisers and undertook an invasion (under the cover of a “humanitarian” mission) that decimated Libya’s army; allowed extremists to capture, torture and murder Gaddafi; and left the country in shambles, giving the Islamic State a foothold in north Africa.

Ironically, after exaggerating and lying about the “humanitarian” crisis facing Libya in 2011, the Obama administration let the country slide into a real humanitarian catastrophe with the Islamic State chopping off the heads of Coptic

Christians and desperate people taking to the Mediterranean in fragile boats that have sent an untold number to their deaths.

According to former Secretary of State Colin Powell's "Pottery Barn" rule, if you break it, you own it. So that would mean that since Secretary Clinton was significantly responsible for breaking Libya, she should now own the catastrophe. But she not only refuses to own it, she refuses to own up to it.

Last April, Obama conceded to Fox anchor Chris Wallace that his worst mistake was "probably failing to plan for the day after ... in intervening in Libya." But the real "mistake" was invading Libya under false pretenses, as a new British parliamentary study has confirmed. It was a deception that paralleled Bush's lies about Iraq.

Further on the side of the scales judging Obama as fearful of the Establishment is his bowing to CIA covert action operatives. Obama seems to have done all he could *not* to get crosswise with the folks who – for generations – have been the world's leading king-makers and king-breakers.

Thanks to Spencer Ackerman of the *Guardian*, we now know how Obama pulled out all stops to thwart publication of the findings of an exhaustive Senate Intelligence Committee investigation, based on original CIA banality-of-evil cables, describing the most sordid and grotesque kinds of torture by the CIA under President George W. Bush.

Minimizing those crimes for which no one has been held accountable, Obama chose to "look forward, not backward" and admitted, dismissively, "We tortured some folks." This from a politician who led us to believe he was really, really against torture.

But with very meager and misleading media coverage as to whether torture "works" – and with no one prosecuted for the crimes – popular reaction has been confused, with many Americans cheering Donald Trump's promises to resume waterboarding and even more extreme types of torture.

It does not speak well for the "content of his character" that Obama decided to kowtow to those responsible for torture and head off their richly deserved disgrace. Thankfully, Obama met his match in Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California, who published a redacted-but-nonetheless-stomach-turning executive summary of the Senate report in December 2014, just before the Senate changed hands to the Republicans.

### **Hamlet on Syria**

Even as his presidency nears an end, Obama seems to remain frozen by the fear of

crossing the powers-that-be, especially if he might get portrayed as “soft” on one of America’s “enemies,” such as Syria or Russia.

Obama has allowed bureaucratic warfare to break out between Secretary of State John Kerry and Defense Secretary Ashton Carter over what to do in Syria. Kerry has pressed, successfully, for Russia’s help in putting an end to the carnage; but Carter and the military would rather not cooperate with Russia – no matter what the White House might wish.

So as Obama waffles – and the U.S.-led air war over Syria massacred scores of Syrian soldiers on Saturday – the hopes for a limited cease-fire have collapsed. Even if he summoned the courage to tell his inept national security adviser, Susan Rice, to tell Secretary Carter and the Pentagon to get in line, it probably wouldn’t help at this point.

One of Obama’s greatest fears seems to be that Israeli leaders will denounce him and whip up another political-media storm against him. Obama has been stung by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s animosity before, such as when Netanyahu embraced Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney in the run-up to Election 2012.

After Obama prevailed for reelection anyway, you might have thought the President – arguably at the height of his political power – would have given Netanyahu the cold shoulder. Instead, Obama rushed off for a three-day visit to Israel, behaving as some kind of supplicant begging forgiveness rather than the leader of the most powerful nation on earth.

Having taken a measure of Obama, Netanyahu brazenly opposed the President’s nuclear negotiation with Iran, even appearing before a joint session of Congress to call on America’s elected representatives to side with him against the U.S. president.

Obama responded by giving Israel a \$38 billion arms package, the largest ever. No matter the affront, Obama has never stopped looking over his shoulder at Israel and its powerful U.S. lobby. Indeed, one could argue that Obama’s feckless policy toward Syria has served Netanyahu’s interests very well by destroying and destabilizing another Arab nation on Israel’s borders.

Though Obama did resist pressure from Clinton and other hawks to engage in a more aggressive military operation against Syria, he secretly agreed to arm and train anti-government rebels who then joined with Al Qaeda’s affiliate. However, when Al Qaeda’s spinoff terror group, the Islamic State, began chopping off the heads of Western hostages in 2014, Obama authorized aerial bombing and Special Forces operations inside Syria against the Islamic State.

## The Israeli Motive

Though Israeli leaders and their friends in Washington sought instead the outright overthrow of Syria's government, Obama's waffling has achieved Israel's primary goal of weakening a sometimes hostile neighbor and ally of Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah militia. That, in turn, has bought Netanyahu more time to expand Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands.

In candid moments, some senior Israeli officials have admitted that their preferred outcome in Syria is "no outcome," as reported three years ago by the New York Times Jerusalem Bureau Chief, Jodi Rudoren.

"More quietly, Israelis have increasingly argued that the best outcome for Syria's two-and-a-half-year-old civil war, at least for the moment, is no outcome. ... This is a playoff situation [between Sunni and Shia] in which you need both teams to lose, but at least you don't want one to win – we'll settle for a tie," said Alon Pinkas, former Israeli consul general in New York. "Let them both bleed, hemorrhage to death: that's the strategic thinking here. As long as this lingers, there's no real threat from Syria."

Another senior Israeli, then-Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren, offered a slightly different preference, that the Assad government, with its alliance with Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah, would be overthrown even if that meant that Al Qaeda would prevail in Syria.

"The greatest danger to Israel is by the strategic arc that extends from Tehran, to Damascus to Beirut. And we saw the Assad regime as the keystone in that arc," Oren told the Jerusalem Post. "We always wanted Bashar Assad to go, we always preferred the bad guys who weren't backed by Iran to the bad guys who were backed by Iran."

But such frank assessments by Israel received little attention in the U.S. news media and Israel's stake in the Syrian chaos was quickly forgotten.

Today, some partisan Democrats argue that a clear-sighted understanding of the Syrian and Libyan messes – along with discussion of the Iraq disaster – could undercut Hillary Clinton's candidacy and that such truth-telling could contribute to the election of Donald Trump.

But what if Clinton wins without having been pressed to speak honestly about her role in these catastrophes and to say whether she has learned any lessons? As president, is she likely to compound or repeat these errors?

During the campaign, Clinton has continued to defend her advocacy for the invasion of Libya, using what the British investigation has concluded was the

exaggeration of Gaddafi's threat to civilians. Clinton still insists that Gaddafi was "genocidal" when that clearly was not the case. She also has continued to call for a more aggressive U.S. military intervention in Syria, albeit coded in words like "safe zones." And she has vowed to take the U.S.-Israeli relationship to the "next level."

Indeed, there is no sign that Clinton has changed her approach toward the Middle East in any significant way from 2002 when she voted to authorize the invasion of Iraq. She now calls that decision a "mistake" but there are serious questions about whether that was a political "death-bed conversion" because she had little choice but to disavow the vote when running for the Democratic nomination in 2008.

As Secretary of State during Obama's first term, Clinton slid back into the ranks of Democratic hawks, joining with neoconservatives and other hardliners in advocating a "surge" in Afghanistan, leading the charge for another "regime change" in Libya, pressing Obama to mount one more "regime change" intervention in Syria and taking an aggressive stance vis a vis Russia.

So, is it wise to ignore Clinton's judgments on questions of war and peace, especially since as President, there will be no one to slow her down or prevent her from starting another war? Should Americans stay silent because of the risk posed by the buffoonish Donald Trump? Is the danger of an "insult" to Obama's legacy sufficient to justify silence about issues of life and death for so many people around the world?

I believe that nothing but the truth will set us free. And that means that Americans must evaluate the "content of the character" of not only Obama but his designated successor, Hillary Clinton.

As Dr. King recognized, there is a necessity in clearing the air when it surrounds a festering sore. Or as he wrote in his *Letter From the Birmingham City Jail*:

"Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its pus-flowing ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured."

**Ray McGovern, a CIA analyst for 27 years, works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was born in the Bronx, when membership in the Democratic Party was almost conveyed at Baptism, but he has since annulled his party membership.**

