

# THE ANGRY ARAB: Deal of the Century? Which Century?

As'ad AbuKhalil explains why Palestinians will see through the latest U.S. illusion of a Middle East “peace process.”

By [As`ad AbuKhalil](#)

*Special to Consortium News*



There is great speculation about the “Deal of the Century” for the Middle East, about which very little is known. What is known is that the Trump administration formulated the plan basically through bilateral talks with the Israeli government, as the Palestinian Authority has refused to talk to the Trump administration since the relocation of the U.S. embassy from occupied Jaffa (Tel Aviv) to occupied Jerusalem.

The release of the plan has been delayed: first until after the Israeli election and now until sometime in the summer. None of the individuals tasked with formulating the plan have expertise in the Middle East, although in Washington, D.C., strong advocacy on behalf of the Israeli occupation often counts as a substitute.

This plan will be the latest attempt by a U.S. administration to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict – once and for all. There was the Nixon administration’s famous [Rogers’ Plan](#) (named after Secretary of State William Rogers, who later resigned after complaining about National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger’s usurpation of his authority).

Before the Nixon administration, President John F. Kennedy also tried to deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict only to be

rebuffed by strong Zionist figures within the Democratic Party.

The origins of U.S. intervention were initially clear: that the U.S. would push for a deal based on UN Security Council Resolution 242, which calls on Israel to withdraw from “territories” it occupied in the 1967 war in return for Arab recognition and acceptance of the Israeli occupation state within the 1948 occupation. But Kissinger attached a secret appendix to the Sinai II agreement in 1975 (between Egypt and Israel) in which he pledged to boycott and ostracize the PLO, which all Arabs accepted as the legitimate and sole representative of the Palestinian people. This exclusion of Palestinian political representation was consistent with UNSC 242, which did not mention the word “Palestinian” once, although it made a passing reference to the “refugee problem.”

### **Zionist Influence**

And while the management of the American-led “peace process” was, during the early decades, handled by Middle East experts (known then as “Arabists,”) strong Zionist influences in successive U.S. administrations and houses of Congress marginalized their influence and slowed down the progress of the “process” – in terms of U.S. pressure on Israel.

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But the American-led “peace process” lived on for decades, not as a testimony of U.S. interest in peace in the Middle

East, nor as evidence of American interest in solving the Palestinian problem, but as a way to provide Israeli occupation and aggression with a cloak of international legitimacy and to give Palestinians the illusion of "progress."

With the Reagan administration a change occurred in the management of the "peace process;" it was taken from the Arabists and given to ardent Zionists who had no background in the Middle East. (Dennis Ross, for example, never studied the Middle East and was in fact a Soviet expert in the 1980s, before he was put in charge of the "peace process.")

The "peace process" underwent major transformations over the years, largely to accommodate Israeli needs and preferences. The Rogers' Plan started as a response to Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's emphasis on a "comprehensive and just" peace, which clearly precluded separate deals between Israel and any Arab state. It was this which prevented King Hussein of Jordan from reaching a separate deal with Israel.

Nevertheless, President Jimmy Carter brokered the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel (which basically committed the U.S. to provide the Egyptian despot, President Anwar Sadat and his successors, with an annual large bribe to maintain peace with Israel despite the disapproval of the Egyptian people). With Camp David, the "peace process" was splintered into separate "peace" deals.

The U.S. official ban on contact with the PLO was removed in the Reagan administration when Yasser Arafat agreed to read a statement faxed to him – word-for-word – by the U.S.

Department of State. The PLO was allowed into the “peace process” but only on conditions set by Israel: that the agenda would be set by U.S. and Israel and not by any Arab party.

Initially, the U.S. worked for decades to sidestep PLO participation by anointing the Jordanian king (who is remembered by the Palestinians for the massacres of Black September in 1970) as the representative of both Jordan and the Palestinian people. But the Intifada in 1987 finally convinced the U.S. that the Palestinians are determined to insist on their self-determination. And during the George W. Bush administration the idea of a Palestinian state was finally formally advocated by the U.S. but only within boundaries set by Israel.

## **No Mystery**

The new “Deal of the Century” is not a mystery. We can read the writing on the wall and on the ground in Palestine. The U.S. is working on a formula that does not necessarily operate on the assumption that the creation of a Palestinian state is a prerequisite for peace. Furthermore, the U.S. plans to reduce the size of the Palestinian territory which would be theoretically managed by the Palestinian people. The Palestinians have historically insisted on liberating 100 percent of their homeland, i.e. historic Palestine in which the Palestinians have enjoyed a majority for many centuries, and in which the Jews – as a small minority – were considered part of the local native population.

But the Zionist forces – through terrorism and through Western indulgences – persuaded Western powers that

Palestinian rights to 1948 Palestine (what became declared by force as "Israel" in 1948) should never be acknowledged.

With that principle, Western powers worked to convince Palestinians to confine their national aspirations to no more than 45 percent (in the UN Partition plan of 1947) and then to no more than 22 percent since 1967. With the U.S. entry into direct negotiations with Palestinian representatives since the Madrid Conference of 1991 (disguised as non-PLO), the Palestinians were told that they can have a homeland over most –but not all – the West Bank and Gaza and East Jerusalem. But the American stance was not categorical because it always left it to Israel to decide on how much of the 22 percent of Palestine should the Palestinians have control over, and under which juridical conditions.

President Bill Clinton, in the famous Camp David negotiations, wanted the Palestinians to accept 91 percent of the 22 percent of Palestine, while sovereignty over the "holy sanctuary" would be shared between Israelis and Palestinians, with the Israelis having control over the land and what is underneath it (which Palestinians consider a threat to the very foundations of Al-Aqsa). Camp David fell and Clinton – typical of him – blamed the Palestinians after having promised Yasser Arafat that he would not blame the Palestinians if the talks did not bear fruits.

What will emerge out of the "Deal of the Century" is even less than what the Palestinians have been offered before – and which they rejected. The Palestinians will probably be promised Gaza and Area A (under the Oslo agreement, which basically covers areas that the Palestinians – only in

theory-control), and East Jerusalem will be part of a united capital for Israel while the Palestinians will be allowed to name areas outside of Jerusalem as their own "East Jerusalem."

The Israelis will continue, of course, to maintain control of air, land and sea over all Palestinian areas, and the Israeli occupation army will continue to decide who can enter and who can exit Palestinian areas. And Israeli settlements will be untouched by any of the terms of the "deal."

Sovereignty over those small Palestinian areas won't be considered as the U.S. and Israel both have recently reneged on previous promises of statehood. Instead, the plan will revert to what Israel's Menachem Begin called "autonomy" (under the Camp David negotiations), according to which the Palestinians will exercise limited municipal management of their areas (trash collection, postal service, sewage, etc).

But it is quite clear that the Palestinians who had rejected such plans in a previous century won't agree to them now, especially that the octogenarian Mahmoud Abbas (who is already despised and detested by his people for his corruption and fealty to the occupation) won't dare agree to what Arafat before him had rejected.

But Trump and his team assume that an infusion of foreign aid and new business in Palestinian areas would serve as a compensation to the Palestinians for the loss of their homeland. But that assumption is based on a false premise: that people live by bread alone.

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## The Buried Maidan Massacre and Its Misrepresentation by the West

The new Ukrainian government is faced with reopening an inquiry into evidence of an organized mass killing in Kiev that Poroshenko stonewalled. Ivan Katchanovski investigates.

By **Ivan Katchanovski**

*Special to Consortium News*



**F**ive years ago, the Maidan massacre in Kiev, Ukraine, of Feb. 18-20, 2014, was a watershed event, not only for the politics and history of Ukraine but also for world politics generally. This mass killing in downtown Kyiv set the stage for the violent overthrow of the pro-Russian government in Ukraine and a new Cold War between Washington and Moscow.

Therefore, it is remarkable that five years after this massacre shook the world, no one has been sentenced for any

of the Maidan killings. This was the best documented case of mass killing in history, broadcast live on TV and the internet, in presence of thousands of eyewitnesses. It was filmed by hundreds of journalists from major media in the West, Ukraine, Russia, and many other countries as well as by numerous social media users. Yet, to this day, no one has been brought to justice for this major and consequential crime.

From the start, the dominant narrative promoted by the Ukrainian and Western governments and mainstream media has placed the blame for this tragedy firmly on the Yanukovich government. It contends that forces loyal to former President Victor Yanukovich— either snipers and/or the Berkut, a special anti-riot police— massacred peaceful Maidan protesters on the direct orders of Yanukovich himself. Such charges against Yanukovich, his ministers and commanders and a special Berkut unit—whose five ex-members were tried for the murder of 48 Maidan protesters on Feb. 20, 2014 – are generally taken at face value. With some limited exceptions, challenges to this narrative are treated dismissively.

For the most part, mainstream news media in the U.S. and other Western countries ignored trial evidence, public statements by officials and politicians and scholarly studies that put the standard narrative under question. This includes non-reporting about my own academic studies of the Maidan massacre.

### **Killing Protesters and Police**

My work found that this was an organized mass killing of



both protesters and the police, with the goal of delegitimizing the Yanukovich government and its forces and seizing power in Ukraine. Oligarchic and far right elements of the Maidan movement were involved in this massacre. For this reason, the official investigation was fabricated and stonewalled. I presented studies to support this as well as several [online video appendixes](#) with various evidence at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association in [San Francisco in 2015](#) and [Boston in 2018](#), the 2017 World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities in [New York in 2017](#), and a joint conference by the Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Uppsala University and the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies in 2018, and published their summary in an [academic press volume](#).

The prosecutor general of Ukraine recently announced that the investigation of the Maidan massacre is complete. He cited reconstructions of the Maidan massacre by a New York architecture company, working with a team of Ukrainian “volunteers” to provide a 3D model, as definite evidence that the Maidan protesters were massacred by the Berkut police and that snipers did not massacre the protesters.

This model was featured by *The New York Times*, in its May 30, 2018, report [“Who Killed the Kiev Protesters?”](#) as a proof that the Berkut police massacred Maidan protesters.

However, no expert knowledge or familiarity with the Maidan massacre or Ukraine is needed to see blatant misrepresentation of elementary data in that 3D model.

The wound locations of the killed Maidan protesters in [the](#)

3D model do not match the wound locations in the forensic medical examinations of the bodies. The reports of those examinations were used in this simulation to determine the locations of the shooters. They are published in Ukrainian and English on the linked website. According to one such report, Ihor Dmytriv was shot in the “right side surface” and the “left side surface” of the torso “from the right to the left, from the top to the bottom, and a little from the front to the back” with the entry wound 20.5cm (8 inches) higher than the exit wound. However, in the simulation, his wounds have been moved to the front and the back and made nearly horizontal.

A Maidan lawyer visually confirmed at the Maidan massacre trial that these wounds locations of were in the right and left sides. In the video of their examination of Dmytriv right after his shooting, Maidan medics also indicate such locations of his wounds with no wounds visible in the front area, contrary to the 3D model. The forensic medical reports also state that Dmytriv was wounded in his right shoulder from bottom to top direction, with this entry wound 5 cm lower, but the 3D animation also misrepresents this direction.

The wound locations of the other two victims have been similarly altered. The 3D model moved the exit wound location from around the middle line of the back of Andriy Dyhdalovych’s body in forensic medical and clothing examinations significantly to the right. It also changed a similar large vertical angle from a top and bottom direction and 17 cm difference in height of entry and exit wounds to nearly horizontal level.

In the case of Yuriy Parashchuk, forensic medical examinations found that his entry and exit wounds were in the back of his head on the left side. But the 3D analysis moved the entry wound location to the front area and changed its somewhat top-to-bottom direction to nearly horizontal. Frames from a video by a French photographer shows a large bullet hole in the back of Parashchuk's red helmet. How can he be shot in the back of his head by the Berkut police on a nearly similar horizontal level?

Changing the wound locations invalidates the entire reconstruction and, therefore, the conclusions of the SITU analysis and *The New York Times* article, that these and other Maidan protesters were shot from the Berkut positions.

One does not need to be a ballistic expert to see that locations of wounds in the back and on the sides and top-to-bottom directions of wounds specified in forensic medical reports and positions of these three killed protesters facing the Berkut in the videos cannot physically match with Berkut police positions located on a similar horizontal level on the ground in front of them. The forensic medical examinations conducted for the government investigation and made public at the Maidan massacre trial revealed that the absolute majority of the protesters were shot not in front and not from horizontal or near horizontal directions that are consistent with police positions. Rather, they were shot from a top-to-bottom direction and in sides or the back that are consistent with shooting from the Maidan-controlled buildings.

## **Government Investigation**

The government investigation, conducted after the Maidan government came to power after this massacre, and which charged the Berkut police behind the barricades with killing these three protesters, raises the same concerns.

The complex medical examinations, which were published on the SITU website and which are presented by the government investigation in Ukraine as a key evidence that the Berkut police massacred the protesters, showed the same bullet trajectories as the 3D model. The text of these examinations, which are available in Ukrainian and in English translations, shows that these bullet trajectories were determined not by ballistic experts but by medical experts without any calculations or explanations.

Synchronized videos, which were used by the SITU to determine that the Berkut police behind a truck barricade killed Parashchuk, actually show that he and other protesters were in a blind spot below the line of police fire from behind a truck. It was physically impossible for the police behind the wide and tall truck to shoot at him below over the top of this truck. Dozens of other Maidan protesters who were killed and wounded around the same spot were in the same situation.

The locations of the forces of the Yanukovych government during the massacre are well known, and they are identified in my studies, the government investigation charges, numerous videos, and in the SITU 3D model.

At the time of the killings of these three protesters, Berkut policemen were behind the barricades on Instytutska Street on the government side, while the protesters who were

killed were in between Berkut and the Hotel Ukraina.

Forensic examinations of bullet holes by government experts described numerous bullet holes on the second, third, and higher floors and the roof of the Hotel Ukraina on the side that faced the government forces. But they did not identify a single bullet hole on the first floor on the Berkut facing side of the hotel behind these protesters. Simple positioning of the bullet hole locations described in these forensic reports clearly shows that almost all bullets from the Berkut and other positions flew above the heads of the protesters there or targeted poles, trees, and a flower box. This is also shown in vide and photos – including some I took there after the massacre – and in videos and reports of shooting at journalists in the hotel with a Google Street View image from the first Berkut barricade.

This confirms my study findings that the special Berkut police unit and the Omega unit of snipers of Internal Troops were shooting at snipers in the Hotel Ukraina.

After five long years, the failure by the Poroshenko government's investigation to determine bullet trajectories by ballistic experts or conduct on-site investigative experiments for the same purpose – even after the Maidan massacre trial judges ordered them two years ago to do so – is therefore hardly surprising. It is impossible to bend physical reality. In a literal cover-up, large fences were recently erected on the crime scene for the construction of the Maidan massacre memorial, which would completely alter the landscape. The fences and the memorial would make it impossible to determine bullet trajectories on-site, which still has not been done by the investigation for five years

after this mass killing.

The SITU reconstruction also missed bullet holes that appeared in Dmytriv's shield and in a shield of another protester in front of Dyhdalovych in videos of their shooting that were used in the reconstruction. The locations of these bullet holes are inconsistent with shooting from the Berkut barricades.

But these shields with clear locations of the bullet holes, like the helmet of Parashchuk and almost all the shields and helmets of protesters who were killed or wounded, mysteriously disappeared after the massacre, along with a lot of other crucial evidence, such as bullets and security-camera footage.

Similarly, crucial testimonies of Maidan protesters, who witnessed the killings of Dyhdalovych and Dmytriv, are ignored by the *Times'* report, SITU and the official Ukrainian investigation. Dyhdalovych's wife stated in her Ukrainian media interview that another protester told her that he saw that Dyhdalovych was killed by a sniper on the roof of the Bank Arkada. This protester was filmed following Dyhdalovych when they both went to evacuate Dmytriv after he was shot. The Bank Arkada is a tall green building in the front and to the right of both Dyhdalovych and Dmytriv, and it appears to match the apparent directions of their wounds. My Maidan massacre studies video appendices showed that it was in the Maidan-controlled area and that snipers on its roof during the massacre were reported by both numerous Maidan protesters, including many wounded who spoke at the Maidan massacre trial and investigation, and by Security Service of Ukraine commanders and snipers.

A female Maidan medic during the massacre was pointing to the top of this green building and shouting about snipers. But her words were translated in [a BBC report](#) as referring to six protesters killed by the snipers in that area. A [Maidan protester](#) and another [Maidan medic](#), who were wounded near the same spot where these two protesters were killed, both testified at the Maidan massacre trial that they were shot from this building. Government ballistic experts confirmed this during on-site investigative experiments.

### **Western Press Silence**

These revelations were not reported by any Western media. This includes *The New York Times*, which on April 5, 2014, [profiled](#) this wounded protester against the backdrop of an unquestioned report by the acting government in Kiev that blaming “former President Viktor F. Yanukovich, his riot police and their suspected Russian assistants for the violence that killed more than 100 people in Kiev in February.”

It also includes CNN, which [filmed](#) the shooting of this medic and attributed it to the government forces.

The government investigation simply denies that there were any snipers there and in other Maidan-controlled buildings, and refuses to investigate them. This is done despite [videos](#) of such snipers and testimonies of the absolute majority of wounded protesters at the trial and investigation and more than 150 other witnesses about snipers in these locations.

The assumption in the 3D model that Dmytriv was shot by the single bullet is also contradicted by [testimony](#) of another protester who saw that Dmytriv was shot by “a sniper” from

the Hotel Ukraina. My Maidan massacre studies and their video appendices showed that this hotel was then controlled by the Maidan forces.

*The New York Times* article described collaboration of the New York architecture firm with a Ukrainian “volunteer” in creating the 3D model. It did not report 2017 [admissions](#) by the prosecutor general of Ukraine on *Facebook* that his government agency funded the work of a group of anonymous “volunteers,” including this Ukrainian graduate student, in compiling and synchronizing various videos of the Maidan massacre in collaboration with a People’s Front party outlet.

Some of the People’s Front party leaders were accused by various Ukrainian politicians and Maidan activists, such as [Nadia Savchenko](#), and by five ex-Georgian ex-military members in [Italian](#) and [Israeli](#) TV documentaries, of direct involvement in this massacre. Meanwhile, the *Times* lauds the Ukrainian government’s investigation and Maidan lawyers for drawing on such analyses by these “citizen investigators” and treats a New York architect firm as providing key evidence in the Maidan massacre trial.

Brad Samuels is a founding partner of Situ Research, the New York architecture company that produced the 3D model of the killing of three protesters, which was presented by the *Times* as proof that such snipers did not exist and that 49 protesters were massacred by the Berkut police.

Samuels [said](#) in a video [start at 55:16] that “...eventually, there is a consensus that there was a third party acting. It is clear from forensic evidence that people were shot in the



back. Somebody was shooting from rooftops.” His striking observation was not included anywhere in the SITU 3D model report that he produced. Nor was it reported by the *Times*.

Cases of protesters, who were shot in the back, were omitted from the SITU model. But even in the deliberately selected cases of the three protesters, who were presented by this simulation as shot in front, their actual wound locations suggest that they were also shot from a Maidan-controlled building, which was located in front and to the right of them.

There was not a single report in English-language media concerning [testimonies](#) at the Maidan massacre trial where 25 wounded Maidan protesters, with whose shootings Berkut policemen are charged, who stated that they were shot from Maidan-controlled buildings or areas.

Major outlets likewise neglected to cover the testimonies by 30 wounded protesters who said they witnessed snipers in those locations or were told about them by other protesters. This is stunning since these testimonies are publicly available in live online recordings of the Maidan massacre trial and they are compiled with English-language subtitles into an [online video appendix](#) to my study. These testimonies represent the majority of wounded protesters with whose shooting Berkut was charged. They are consistent with video testimonies by about 100 witnesses in the [media and social media](#) and at the [trial and the investigation](#). But the official investigation in Ukraine simply denies that there were any such snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings, even though the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine previously [stated](#) that snipers massacred many protesters from the Hotel

Ukraina and other buildings.

Similarly, not a single media outlet reported segments of the *Belgian VRT News* video that showed Maidan protesters shouting during the massacre that they saw snipers in the Maidan-controlled Hotel Ukraina shooting Maidan protesters, pointing towards them, and asking them not to shoot. These segments were only shown to a small number of people at the Maidan massacre trial and are included in my [online video appendix](#) on *YouTube*. Other segments from this same video, however, were broadcast to some several hundred million viewers by major television networks in the U.S., U.K., Canada, Germany, France, Poland, Italy, and Ukraine, and many other countries as evidence that the government forces massacred the Maidan protesters.

With the notable exception of an [Associated Press story quoting](#) the charismatic politician Nadia Savchenko, news agencies have ignored the [public remarks](#) of several Maidan politicians and activists who said that they witnessed the involvement of specific top Maidan leaders in the massacre.

Testimonies by five Georgian ex-military members in [Italian](#), [Israeli](#), Macedonian and Russian media and their published depositions to Berkut lawyers for the Maidan massacre trial have also been ignored. They stated that their groups received weapons, payments, and orders to massacre both police and protesters from specific Maidan and Georgian politicians.

They also said that they received instructions from a far-right linked ex-U.S. Army sniper and then saw Georgian, Baltic States, and Right Sector-linked snipers shooting from

specific Maidan-controlled buildings.

Western media silence also greeted a recent [statement](#) by Anatolii Hrytsenko, one of the top Ukrainian presidential candidates, who was also a Maidan politician and minister of defense, that the investigation of the massacre has been stonewalled because of the involvement of someone from the current leadership of Ukraine in this mass killing.

In contrast, there were no such testimonies admitting involvement in the massacre or knowledge of such involvement by the Berkut policemen, ex-police and security services commanders; nor by ex-Yanukovych government officials. No specific evidence of orders by then-president Yanukovych or his ministers and commanders to massacre unarmed protesters has been revealed by the trials, investigations or news reporting. Nonetheless, the Western mainstream media report existence of such orders as a matter of a fact.

Not a single major Western media reported that a [forensic ballistic examination](#), conducted by government institute experts on the prosecution request with use of an automatic computer-based IBIS-TAIS system, determined that bullets extracted from killed protesters did not match a police database of bullet samples from Kalashnikov assault rifles of members of the entire Kyiv Berkut regiment. The latter included the special Berkut company charged with the massacre of the protesters. The same concerns the forensic examination findings that many protesters were killed with hunting bullets and pellets.

There are no Western media reports, at least in English, concerning the investigation by the Prosecutor General

Office of Ukraine. This investigation determined, based on protester's testimonies and investigative experiments, that almost half of the protesters (77 out of 157) were wounded on Feb. 20 from other sectors than the Berkut police and that no one was charged with their shooting.

A female Maidan medic, whose wounding on the Maidan was highly publicized by Western and Ukrainian media and politicians and attributed to government snipers, is one of them. Since the official investigation determined that government snipers did not massacre the Maidan protesters, with a single implausible exception announced recently, this implies that these protesters were wounded from the Maidan-controlled buildings and areas.

There was Western media silence, including from the *BBC*, about revelations by the Prosecutor General Office that one of the leaders of far right party Svoboda, who was also a member of the Ukrainian parliament at the time of the massacre, occupied a Hotel Ukraina room from which a sniper in Maidan-style green helmet was filmed by the *BBC* shooting in the direction of the Maidan protesters and the *BBC's* own journalists.

Similarly, there are no mainstream media reports of the visual examinations of bullet holes and their impact points by the government investigators that determined that one German ARD television room at the Hotel Ukraina was shot from the direction of the Main Post Office, which was at the time the headquarters of the Right Sector. The latter far-right group included radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations and football ultras. This bullet just narrowly missed a German *ARD TV* female producer. The government

investigators also determined that another *ARD* room in the same hotel was shot at from the Music Conservatory building, which was then the headquarters of the Right-Sector-linked special armed Maidan Self-Defense company.

Likewise, nothing was reported about a forensic ballistic examination made public at the trial that revealed that an [ABC News](#) producer was shot in his Hotel Ukraina room by a Winchester caliber hunting soft-point bullet that did not match a caliber of Berkut Kalashnikovs.

Misrepresentation of the Maidan massacre and its investigation by Western media and governments is puzzling.

American independence leader John Adams once defended the British soldiers charged with the Boston massacre in 1770. He regarded this defense as important for the rule of law to prevail over politics. He famously [stated](#) at the Boston massacre trial that “facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.” He not only won this politically charged case of a crucial massacre in U.S. politics and history but became U.S. president afterwards. The question is why this dictum is not heeded almost 250 years later in the case of the Maidan massacre in Ukraine.

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## UK Blurring Two Very Different Extradition Claims

The Swedish and U.S. claims are vastly different, writes Jonathan Cook. But the public conversation in the U.K. is simply about which has first dibs on Assange.

By **JonathanCook**

[Jonathan-Cook.net](http://Jonathan-Cook.net)



**I**n a previous blog post, I warned that the media and political class would continue with their long-running deceptions about Julian Assange now that he has been dragged from the Ecuadorian embassy. They have wasted no time in proving me right.

The first thrust in their campaign of deceit was set out on *The Guardian's* front page on Friday, April 12, the day after Assange was imprisoned.

There should have been wall-to-wall outrage from public figures in the U.K. at the United States creating a new crime of “doing journalism” and a new means of arrest for those committing this “crime” overseas, what I have termed “media rendition.”

Remember that all of the information contained in the U.S. charge sheet against Assange – the supposed grounds for his

extradition – were known to the previous Obama administration as far back as 2010. But President Barack Obama never dared approve the current charges against Assange because legally there was no way to stop them being turned against “respectable” journalists, like those at *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian*.

This was the same Obama administration that had the worst record on prosecuting whistleblowers. Obama was no friend to investigative journalism but he understood that it would be unwise to so overtly subvert the notion of a free western press.

That the Trump administration has cast all this aside to get Assange behind bars should have every journalist in the world quaking in their boots, and loudly decrying what the U.S. is seeking to do.

And yet the reaction has been either quiet acceptance of the U.S. extradition request as a simple law enforcement measure or gentle mockery of Assange – that the scruffy outlaw dragged from the embassy was looking even scruffier after seven years of extreme house arrest and “arbitrary detention.” What a laugh!

### **Narrative Collusion**

Now we can see how the media is going to collude in a narrative crafted by the political class to legitimize what the Trump administration is doing.

Rather than focus on the gross violation of Assange’s fundamental human rights, the wider assault on press freedoms and the attack on Americans’ First Amendment

Rights, U.K. politicians are “debating” whether the U.S. extradition claim on Assange should take priority over earlier Swedish extradition proceedings for a sexual-assault investigation that was publicly dropped back in 2017.

In other words, the public conversation in the U.K., sympathetically reported by *The Guardian*, supposedly Britain’s only major liberal news outlet, is going to be about who has first dibs on Assange.

Here’s the first paragraph of *The Guardian*’s [front-page article](#):

“Political pressure is mounting on [Home Secretary] Sajid Javid to prioritise action that would allow Julian Assange to be extradited to Sweden, amid concerns that US charges relating to Wikileaks’ activities risked overshadowing longstanding allegations of rape.”

So, the concern is not that Assange is facing rendition to the U.S. It is that the U.S. claim might “overshadow” an outstanding legal case in Sweden.

The 70 MPs who signed the letter to Javid hope to kill two birds with one stone.

First, they are legitimizing the discourse of the Trump administration. This is no longer about an illegitimate U.S. extradition request on Assange we should all be loudly protesting. It is a competition between two legal claims, and a debate about which one should find legal remedy first.

It weighs a woman’s sexual assault allegation against Assange and *WikiLeaks*’ exposure of war crimes committed by



the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan. It suggests that both are in the same category, that they are similar potential crimes.

## Unequivocal Response



But there should only be one response to the U.S. extradition claim on Assange: It is entirely illegitimate. No debate. Anything less, any equivocation is to collude in the Trump administration's narrative.

The Swedish claim, if it is revived, is an entirely separate matter.

That *The Guardian* and the MPs are connecting the two should come as no surprise.

In another article on Assange last Friday, the *The Guardian*—echoing a common media refrain — reported as fact a demonstrably false claim: “Assange initially took refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden.”

Assange and *WikiLeaks* always said that he entered the embassy to claim *political* asylum so as to avoid extradition to the U.S.

There could be no possible reason for its reporters to make this elementary mistake other than that *The Guardian* is still waging its long-running campaign against Assange, the

information revolution he represents and the challenge he poses to the corporate media of which *The Guardian* is a key part.

## **Seven Years of Derision**

For seven years the political and media establishments have been deriding the suggestion that Assange faced any threat from the U.S., despite the mounting private and public evidence that he did. Assange again has been proved conclusively right by current events, and they decisively wrong.

*The Guardian* knows that Assange did not need political asylum to avoid a sex case. So reporting this not as a *claim* by his detractors but as an indisputable *fact* is simple, Trump-supporting propaganda meant to discredit Assange – propaganda that happily treats any damage to the cause of journalism as collateral damage.

Second, the only major politicians prepared to highlight the threats to Assange's personal rights and wider press freedoms posed by the U.S. extradition request are opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his ally, Diane Abbott, the Labour shadow home secretary. They have rightly noted that the U.S. is using the extradition demand to silence Assange and intimidate any other journalists who might think about digging up evidence of the crimes committed by the U.S. national security state.

Abbott commented last Friday that Assange's current arrest was not about "the rape charges, serious as they are, it is about *WikiLeaks* and all of that embarrassing information about the activities of the American military and security

services that was made public.”

Abbott has faced a storm of criticism for her statement, accused of not giving enough weight to the Swedish case. In fact, her only mistake was to give it more weight than it currently deserves. She spoke of “rape charges,” but there are in fact no such charges. (Additionally, although the case is classed broadly as a rape allegation in Sweden, in the U.K. it would be classed at most as sexual assault. Forgotten too is that the evidence was considered too weak by the original prosecutor to bring any charges, Assange was allowed to leave Sweden and the investigation was dropped.)

### **Assange Did Not Flee Questioning**

Rather, Assange was previously wanted for questioning, and has never been charged with anything. If the Swedish extradition request is revived, it will be so that he can be questioned about those allegations. I should also point out, as almost no one else is, that Assange did not “flee” questioning. He offered Swedish prosecutors to question him at the embassy.

Even though questioning overseas in extradition cases is common – Sweden has done it dozens of times – Sweden repeatedly refused in Assange’s case, leading the Swedish appeal court to criticize the prosecutors. When he was finally questioned after four years of delays, Swedish prosecutors violated his rights by refusing access to his Swedish lawyer.

Further, the MPs and media getting exercised that Assange “took refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy to avoid extradition

to Sweden” are forgetting that he did not object to extradition as long as he received a promise that he would not then be extradited on to the U.S. Sweden refused to offer such assurances. We can now see only too clearly that Assange had every reason to insist on such assurances.

I don't have space here to analyze the Swedish case on this occasion (that's maybe for another time), though it is worth briefly noting that most of the problematic details of the case have been disappeared down the memory hole.

Given that the political and media class are still speaking in terms of “charges,” rather than questions about allegations, we should recall that there were glaring problems with the evidence in the Swedish case. Not least, the key piece of evidence against Assange – a torn condom produced by the woman – was found to contain not a trace of DNA from either Assange or from her.

Those at the forefront of the attacks on Abbott and Corbyn, echoed by *The Guardian*, are the same Blairite Labour MPs who have been trying to oust Corbyn as Labour party leader, despite his twice being elected overwhelmingly by the membership.

These MPs, who dominate the Labour parliamentary party, have spent the past four years focusing on smears that Labour is “institutionally anti-Semitic” in an obvious effort to terminally wound Corbyn. Now they have found another possible route to achieve the same end.

They are suggesting that Corbyn and Abbott are disregarding the Swedish woman's right to justice. The clear subtext of their arguments is that the pair are rape apologists.

As I have pointed out, Abbott has actually overstated the current status of the Swedish case, not sidelined it at all.

But what Corbyn and Abbott have done is to make a clear political, legal and moral demarcation between the Swedish case, which must be resolved according to accepted legal principles, and the U.S. extradition, which has no legal or moral merit whatsoever.

What these U.K. MPs and *The Guardian* have done in this front-page story is muddy the waters yet further, with enthusiastic disregard for the damage it might do to Assange's rights, to Corbyn's leadership and to the future of truth-telling journalism.

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## Behind the Omar Outrage: Suppressed History of 9/11

Trump's demagogic ploy with the freshman lawmaker raises the more serious question of who and what led to the "Day of Planes," writes Max Blumenthal.

By **[Max Blumenthal](#)**

*Special to Consortium News*



**A**s Donald Trump sharpens his re-election messaging, he has sought to make a foil out of freshman Democrat Rep. Ilhan Omar, homing in on her identity as a black Muslim immigrant and her

brazen defiance of what was once a bipartisan pro-Israel consensus. Trump's most recent attack was the most inflammatory to date, implying through a characteristically dishonest Twitter video that Omar had played some role in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Trump was referencing comments Omar made this month during a banquet of the Los Angeles chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR): "CAIR was founded after 9/11, because they recognized that some people did something and that all of us were starting to lose access to our civil liberties," Omar said during a 20-minute-long denunciation of public bullying and violent attacks against Muslims living in the West. (CAIR was founded in 1994, contrary to Omar's claim).

As innocuous as Omar's comments might have seemed, they were easily spun by a right-wing bigot-sphere seeking to portray her as not merely insensitive to the deep wound Americans suffered on 9/11, but as a possible terror-sympathizer. As Bernard Kerik, the disgraced former NYPD commissioner and convicted felon, said of Omar on Fox News, "she's infatuated with Al Qaeda, with Hamas, with Hezbollah."

For Trump, the manufactured outrage offered yet another opportunity to advance his rebranded version of the Southern Strategy, painting Omar as the face of a Democratic Party overrun by socialists, Muslims, MS13 and trans radicals – as a clear and present danger to the reactionary white exurbanites commonly referred to in mainstream media as "swing voters."

Amid an onslaught of menacing condemnations and online death

threats triggered by Trump's tweet, prominent Democrats mobilized to defend Omar. However, many were too timid to mention her by name, apparently fearing that doing so would play into Trump's cynical strategy. Some refused to defend her at all. And among those willing to speak up, most felt compelled to lead their defense by reinforcing the quasi-theological understanding of 9/11 that leaves anti-Muslim narratives unchallenged. "The memory of 9/11 is sacred ground, and any discussion of it must be done with reverence," insisted House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

In Washington, 9/11 is understood as an act of inexplicable evil that materialized out of a clear blue sky. "They hate us because we're free," Americans are still told in a semi-official drone, conveniently excising the attacks that took place on 9/11 from their historical context. This ruthlessly enforced interpretation has had the effect of displacing blame from those who bear direct or indirect responsibility for the attacks onto much more convenient scapegoats like the Islamic faith and its diverse mass of adherents.

In my new book, "The Management of Savagery," I explain which people did what things to lay the groundwork for the worst terror attack on U.S. soil. Not all of those people were Muslim, and few have faced the kind of scrutiny Omar has for her seemingly benign comment about 9/11. As I illustrate, many of them maintained lustrous reputations well after the ash was cleared from Ground Zero. Today, some of their names – Zbigniew Brzezinski, Ronald Reagan, H.W. Bush – are prominently engraved on airports, federal offices, and library halls around the country. Others became the subject of rowdy bestsellers such as "Charlie Wilson's

War,” or saw their exploits dramatized in Cold War kitsch productions like “Rambo III.” And then there were those who waged America’s dirty wars from the shadows, and whose names will scarcely ever be known.

While these figures lay claim to the mantle of “national security,” their true legacy was the callous abandonment of that concept in order to advance imperial objectives. During the Cold War, they forged partnerships with theocratic monarchies and armed Islamist militants, even distributing jihadist textbooks to children in the name of defeating the Soviet scourge. Today, as Rep. Tulsi Gabbard – the lone foreign policy dissenter within the Democratic presidential field – pointed out, they are doing it all over again through their protection of the world’s largest Al Qaeda franchise in Syria’s Idlib province, which came into being thanks in large part to U.S. intervention in the country.

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To effectively puncture Trump’s demagogic ploys, the discussion of 9/11 must move beyond a superficial defense of Omar and into an exploration of a critical history that has been suppressed. This history begins at least 20 years before the attacks occurred, when “some people did something.” Many of those people served at the highest levels of U.S. government, and the things they did led to the establishment of Al Qaeda as an international network – and ultimately, to 9/11 itself.

**Taliban ‘Unimportant’**



Back in 1979, some people initiated a multi-billion-dollar covert operation to trap the Red Army in Afghanistan and bleed the Soviet Union at its soft underbelly. They put heavy weapons in the hands of Islamist warlords such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, dispatched Salafi clerics such as "Blind Sheikh" Omar Abdel Rahman to the battlefield, and printed millions of dollars worth of textbooks for Afghan children that contained math equations encouraging them to commit acts of violent martyrdom against Soviet soldiers. They did anything they could to wreak havoc on the Soviet-backed government in Kabul.

These people were so hellbent on smashing the Soviet Union that they made common cause with the Islamist dictatorship of Pakistan's Zia-ul-Haq and the House of Saud. With direct assistance from the intelligence services of these U.S. allies, Osama bin Laden, the scion of Saudi wealth, set up his Services Bureau on the Afghan border as a waystation for foreign Islamist fighters.

These people even channeled funding to bin Laden so he could build training camps along the Afghan-Pakistan border for the so-called freedom fighters of the mujahideen. And they kept watch over a ratline that shepherded young Muslim men from the West to the front lines of the Afghan proxy war, using them as cannon fodder for a cold-blooded, imperial operation marketed by the Wahhabi clergy in Saudi Arabia as a holy obligation.

These people were in the CIA, USAID, and the National Security Council. Others, with names like Charlie Wilson, Jesse Helms, Jack Murtha, and Joe Biden, held seats on both sides of the aisle in Congress.

When they finally got what they wanted, dislodging a secular government that had provided Afghan women with unprecedented access to education, their proxies plunged Afghanistan into a war of the warlords that saw half of Kabul turned to rubble, paving the way for the rise of the Taliban. And these people remained totally unrepentant about the monster they had created.

“Can you imagine what the world would be like today if there was still a Soviet Union?” remarked Zbigniew Bzezinski, the former NSC director who sold President Jimmy Carter on the Afghan proxy war. “So yes, compared to the Soviet Union, and to its collapse, the Taliban were unimportant.”

To some in Washington, the Taliban were a historical footnote. To others, they were allies of convenience. As a top State Department diplomat commented to journalist Ahmed Rashid in February 1997, “The Taliban will probably develop like Saudi Arabia. There be [the Saudi-owned oil company] Aramco, pipelines, an emir, no parliament and lots of Sharia law. We can live with that.”

### **CIA Cover-ups and Blowback**

Back in the U.S., some people fueled the blowback from the Afghan proxy war. The Blind Sheikh was given a special entry visa by the CIA as payback for the services he provided in Afghanistan, allowing him to take over the al-Kifah Center in New York City, which had functioned as the de facto U.S. arm of Al Qaeda's Services Bureau. Under his watch and with help from bin Laden, some people and lots of aid were shuttled to the front lines of U.S. proxy wars in Bosnia and Chechnya while the Clinton administration generally looked

the other way.

Though the Blind Sheikh was eventually convicted in a terror plot contrived by a paid informant for the FBI, some people in federal law enforcement had been reluctant to indict him. "There was a whole issue about [Abdel-Rahman] being given a visa to come into this country and what the circumstances were around that," one of his defense lawyers, Abdeed Jabara told me. "The issue related to how much the government was involved with the jihadist enterprise when it suited their purposes in Afghanistan and whether or not they were afraid there would be exposure of that. Because there's no question that the jihadists were using the Americans and the Americans were using the jihadists. There's a symbiotic relationship."

During the 1995 trial of members of the Blind Sheikh's New York-based cell, another defense lawyer, Roger Stavis, referred to his clients before the jury as "Team America," emphasizing the role they had played as proxy fighters for the U.S. in Afghanistan. When Stavis attempted to summon to the witness stand a jihadist operative named Ali Abdelsauod Mohammed who had trained his clients in firearms and combat, some people ordered Mohammed to refuse his subpoena. Those people, according to journalist Peter Lance, were federal prosecutors Andrew McCarthy and Patrick Fitzgerald.

The government lawyers were apparently fretting that Mohammed would be exposed as an active asset of both the CIA and FBI, and as a former Army sergeant who had spirited training manuals out of Fort Bragg while stationed there during the 1980s. So Mohammed remained a free man, helping Al Qaeda plan attacks on American consular facilities in

Tanzania and Kenya while the "Day of the Planes" plot began to take form.

In early 2000, some people gathered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to prepare the most daring Al Qaeda operation to date. Two figures at the meeting, Saudi citizens named Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Midhar, were on their way to the United States. While in Kuala Lumpur, the duo's hotel room was broken into by CIA agents, their passports were photographed, and their communications were recorded. And yet the pair of Al Qaeda operatives was able to travel together with multiple-entry visas on a direct flight from Kuala Lumpur to Los Angeles. That's because for some reason, some people from the CIA failed to notify any people at the FBI about the terror summit that had just taken place. The "Day of Planes" plot was moving forward without a kink.

In Los Angeles, some people met Hazmi and Midhar at the airport, provided the two non-English speakers with a personal caretaker and rented them apartments, where neighbors said they were routinely visited each night by unknown figures in expensive cars with darkened windows. Those people were Saudi Arabian intelligence agents named Omar Bayoumi and Khaled al-Thumairy.

### **Crawford, Texas**

It was not until August 2001 that Midhar was placed on a terrorist watch list. That month, some people met at a ranch in Crawford, Texas, and reviewed a classified document headlined, "Bin Laden Determined to Strike Inside the US." The bulletin was a page-and-a-half long, with detailed intelligence on the "Day of Planes" plot provided by Ali

Mohammed, the Al Qaeda-FBI-CIA triple agent now registered as "John Doe" and disappeared somewhere in the federal prison system. Those people reviewed the document for a few minutes before their boss, President George W. Bush, moved on to other matters.

According to *The Washington Post*, Bush exhibited an "expansive mood" that day, taking in a round of golf. "We are going to be struck soon, many Americans are going to die, and it could be in the U.S.," CIA counterterrorism chief Cofer Black warned days later. Bush did not meet with his cabinet heads again to discuss terrorism until Sept. 4.

A week later, on Sept. 11, some people did something.

They hijacked four civilian airliners and changed the course of American history with little more than box cutter blades in their hands. Fifteen of those 19 people, including Hazmi and Midhar, were citizens of Saudi Arabia. They were products of a Wahhabi school system and a politically stultifying society that had thrived under the protection of a special relationship with the U.S. Indeed, the U.S. had showered theocratic allies like Saudi Arabia with aid and weapons while threatening secular Arab states that resisted its hegemony with sanctions and invasion. The Saudis were the favorite Muslims of America's national security elite not because they were moderate, which they absolutely were not, but because they were useful.

In the days after 9/11, the FBI organized several flights to evacuate prominent Saudi families from the U.S., including relatives of Osama bin Laden. Meanwhile, Islamophobia erupted across the country, with even mainstream

personalities such as TV news anchor Dan Rather taking to the airwaves to claim without evidence that Arab-Americans had celebrated the 9/11 attacks.

Unable to find a single operational Al Qaeda cell in the country, the FBI turned to an army of paid snitches to haul in mentally unstable Muslims, dupes and idlers like the Lackawanna 6 in manufactured plots. Desperate for a high-profile bust to reinforce the “war on terror” narrative, the bureau hounded Palestinian Muslim activists and persecuted prominent Islamic charities like the Holy Land Foundation, sending its directors to prison for decades for the crime of sending aid to NGOs in the occupied Gaza Strip.

As America’s national security state cracked down on Muslim civil society at home, it turned to fanatical Islamist proxies abroad to bring down secular and politically independent Arab states. In Libya, the U.S. and UK helped arm the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, a longtime affiliate of Al Qaeda, using it as a proxy to depose and murder Muammar Gaddafi. As that country transformed from a stable, prosperous state into an Afghanistan-style playground for rival militias, including a chapter of the Islamic State, the Obama administration moved to do the same to Damascus.

In Syria, the CIA armed an outfit of supposedly “moderate rebels” called the Free Syrian Army that turned out to be nothing more than a political front and weapons farm for an array of extremist insurgent factions including Al Qaeda’s local affiliate and the Islamic State. The latter two groups were, of course, products of the sectarian chaos of Iraq, which had been ruled by a secular government until the U.S. came knocking after 9/11.

The blowback from Iraq, Libya and Syria arrived in the form of the worst refugee crises the world has experienced since World War II. And then came the bloodiest terror attack to hit the UK in history – in Manchester. There, the son of a Libyan Islamic Fighting Group member, who traveled to Libya and Syria on an MI6 ratline, slaughtered concert-goers with a nail bomb.

Cataclysmic social disruptions like these were like steroids for right-wing Islamophobes, electrifying Trump's victorious 2016 presidential campaign, a wing of the Brexit "Leave" campaign in the UK, and far-right parties across Europe. But as I explain in "The Management of Savagery," these terrifying trends were byproducts of decisions undertaken by national security elites more closely aligned with the political center – figures who today attempt to position themselves as leaders of the anti-Trump resistance.

Which people did which things to drag us into the political nightmare we're living through? For those willing to cut through the campaign season bluster, Ilhan Omar's comments dare us to name names.

**Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and the author of books including best-selling "[Republican Gomorrah](#)," "[Goliath](#)," "[The Fifty One Day War](#)" and "[The Management of Savagery](#)," published in March 2019 by Verso. He has also produced numerous print articles for an array of publications, many video reports and several documentaries including "[Killing Gaza](#)" and "[Je Ne Suis Pas Charlie](#)." Blumenthal founded the [Grayzone](#) in 2015 to shine a journalistic light on America's state of perpetual war and its dangerous domestic repercussions.**

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## PATRICK LAWRENCE: Trump & the Bolton-Pompeo Axis

Patrick Lawrence eyes the U.S. president's difficulties with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton as he tries to resume peace talks with Pyongyang.

By Patrick Lawrence

*Special to Consortium News*



Moon Jae-in's Oval Office meeting with President Donald Trump last Thursday marked an important step forward for both leaders. The South Korean president appears to have drawn Trump away from the all-or-nothing "big deal" he proposed when he last met Kim Jong-un – an offer we now know was intended to precipitate the North Korean leader's rejection. Trump won, too: The encounter with Moon has effectively put the Dealmaker back on his feet after the calamitous collapse of the second Trump–Kim summit in Hanoi two months ago. A top-down agreement on the North's denuclearization is once again within reach.

The importance of the Moon–Trump summit, while eclipsed by news of Julian Assange's arrest in London the same day, is not be underestimated. Even before receiving Moon, Trump announced for the first time that he is willing to summit



with Kim for a third time. While still stressing the North's complete denuclearization as the U.S. objective, Trump also said he is open to the incremental diplomacy he precluded with his everything-at-once offer in Hanoi.

"There are various smaller deals that maybe could happen," Trump said before he and Moon withdrew to the Oval Office. "Things could happen. You can work out step-by-step pieces, but at this moment we are still talking about the big deal."

### **New Stance**

This new stance is a big deal in itself. Moon and Kim – with Chinese and Russian support – have advocated talks based on gradualist reciprocity from the first. "Action for action," Moon calls it. This strategy is widely accepted at the other end of the Pacific as the only plausible path to a sustainable denuclearization agreement. The U.S. has been the only nation engaged on the Korean question to argue otherwise.

In addition, Trump appeared to signal that Moon may get something he dearly wanted when he arrived in Washington: dispensation to proceed with inter-Korean economic projects – including transport links, an industrial park, and a joint-venture resort in the North – that are now blocked by a plethora of U.S. and UN-imposed sanctions. Moon views these as essential confidence-builders and the first steps toward integrating the North into a Northeast Asian economic hub that will also include South Korea, China, and the Russian Far East.

In Pyongyang, Kim responded to the events in Washington when he addressed the Supreme People's Assembly last Friday. The

speech was carefully balanced between optimism and caution, the latter reflecting Kim's view that he was betrayed in Hanoi when Trump marshaled an offer he could not possibly embrace. "I am willing to accept if the United States proposes a third North Korea – United States summit," Kim told North's legislative body, "on condition that it has a right attitude and seeks a solution that we can share."

Kim had other things to add. "We don't like – and we are not interested in – the United States' way of dialogue, in which it tries to unilaterally push through its demands," he said. "We don't welcome – and we have no intention of repeating—the kind of summit meetings like the one held in Hanoi." The North Korean leader went on to set a year-end deadline "for the United States to make a bold decision."

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While Washington and Pyongyang had sharply conflicting versions of what transpired in Hanoi – each blaming the other for the summit's failure – there is now little question that the U.S. side was at fault. A post-Hanoi Reuters exclusive reports that, prior to their famously canceled lunch, Trump handed Kim a sheet of paper listing, in English and Korean, extensive U.S. conditions that began with "a blunt call for the transfer of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and bomb fuel to the United States," according to the piece filed by Leslie Broughton and David Brunnstrom.

The English-language version of the letter, the *Reuters* team reports, went on to demand "fully dismantling North Korea's

nuclear infrastructure, chemical and biological warfare program and related dual-use capabilities; and ballistic missiles, launchers, and associated facilities.”

### **The Libya Model**

In simple terms, this was a kitchen-sink proposition – effectively a demand for unilateral disarmament – that was intended to prompt Kim to walk away. The *Reuters* reporters suggest that the fatal gambit was the work of John Bolton, Trump’s hyper-hawkish national security advisor. They quote North Korean officials as also implicating Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, another administration hawk, in what amounts to an act of diplomatic sabotage. The device used was Bolton’s “Libya model,” a laden reference if ever there was one. When Muammar Gaddafi gave up his chemical and nuclear weapons programs in 2003, he did so by sending Libya’s nuclear materials and equipment to the U.S. Eight years later, of course, he was assassinated in the wake of a NATO bombing campaign led by the U.S.

“The document appeared to represent Bolton’s long-held and hardline ‘Libya model’ of denuclearization that North Korea has rejected repeatedly,” Broughton and Brunnstrom report. “It probably would have been seen by Kim as insulting and provocative, analysts said.” One of those analysts was Jenny Town, a North Korea specialist at the Stimson Center in Washington. “‘This is what Bolton wanted from the beginning and it clearly wasn’t going to work,’” *Reuters* quotes Town as observing. “‘If the U.S. was really serious about negotiations, they would have learned already that this wasn’t an approach they could take.’”

## Formidable Challenges

As this record of the Hanoi proceedings makes plain, Trump and Moon will assume formidable challenges to the extent they agree to work together toward a resolution of the Korea question on new terms. It is not clear why Trump – who went to Hanoi eager to cut his “big deal” with Kim – accepted the Bolton-inspired design and handed it on to the North Korean leader. But he has now set himself up for another in what appears to be a long line of conflicts with his foreign policy minders, Bolton and Pompeo chief among them.

The outlook in this connection is mixed at best. Trump was able to overrule new sanctions against North Korea that were announced several weeks after the Hanoi debacle. It is a matter of interpretation, but he effectively lost a battle with the Bolton–Pompeo axis when the administration designated the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist organization earlier this month. That move is understood widely to have pushed renewed negotiations with Tehran, for which Trump had been hoping, well beyond the point of no return.

For Moon, the challenges ahead are two. Most immediately, he must keep both Trump and Kim seated at the chess table between now and the end of the year. If no third summit is set by then, Kim has already signaled, he will consider this chapter in the long history of U.S.–North Korean negotiations closed – another story of failure. In such a case, the question facing Moon could hardly be more daunting: Can a South Korean leader determined to end nearly seven decades of enmity between the Koreas decisively wrest control of the diplomatic process from the U.S.?

That would amount to an unprecedented showdown between Seoul and Washington. Despite Moon's admirable dedication, this is unlikely to materialize – not in the near term, in any case. Moon has formidable allies in Beijing and Moscow; Kim is plainly eager to break North Korea out of its isolation. But the U.S., perfectly satisfied to act as "spoiler" in Northeast Asia (as elsewhere), remains too powerful an obstacle despite the many signs that it is in the sunset phase of its global preeminence.

**Patrick Lawrence, a correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the *International Herald Tribune*, is a columnist, essayist, author, and lecturer. His most recent book is "Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century" (Yale). Follow him @thefloutist. His web site is [www.patricklawrence.us](http://www.patricklawrence.us). Support his work via [www.patreon.com/thefloutist](http://www.patreon.com/thefloutist).**

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## 7 Years of Lies About Assange Won't Stop Now

One of the few towering figures of our time was reduced to nothing more than a sex pest and scruffy bail-skipper, writes Jonathan Cook.

**By Jonathan Cook**

[Jonathan-Cook.net](http://Jonathan-Cook.net)



For seven years, from the moment Julian Assange sought refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy in London, they have been telling us we were wrong, that we were paranoid conspiracy theorists. We were told there was no real threat of Assange's extradition to the United States, that it was all in our fevered imaginations.

For seven years, we have had to listen to a chorus of journalists, politicians and "experts" telling us that Assange was nothing more than a fugitive from justice, and that the British and Swedish legal systems could be relied on to handle his case in full accordance with the law. Barely a "mainstream" voice was raised in his defense in all that time.

From the moment he sought asylum, Assange was cast as an outlaw. His work as the founder of *Wikileaks* – a digital platform that for the first time in history gave ordinary people a glimpse into the darkest recesses of the most secure vaults in the deepest of Deep States – was erased from the record.

Assange was reduced from one of the few towering figures of our time – a man who will have a central place in history books, if we as a species live long enough to write those books – to nothing more than a sex pest, and a scruffy bail-skipper.

The political and media class crafted a narrative of half-truths about the sex charges Assange was under investigation for in Sweden. They overlooked the fact that Assange had been allowed to leave Sweden by the original investigator,

who dropped the charges, only for them to be revived by another investigator with a well-documented political agenda.

They failed to mention that Assange was always willing to be questioned by Swedish prosecutors in London, as had occurred in dozens of other cases involving extradition proceedings to Sweden. It was almost as if Swedish officials did not want to test the evidence they claimed to have in their possession.

The media and political courtiers endlessly emphasized Assange's bail violation in the U.K., ignoring the fact that asylum seekers fleeing legal and political persecution don't usually honor bail conditions imposed by the very state authorities from which they are seeking asylum.

### **Ignoring Mounting Evidence**

The political and media establishment ignored the mounting evidence of a secret grand jury in Virginia formulating charges against Assange, and ridiculed *Wikileaks'* concerns that the Swedish case might be cover for a more sinister attempt by the U.S. to extradite Assange and lock him away in a high-security prison, as had happened to whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

They belittled the 2016 verdict of a panel of United Nations legal scholars that the U.K. was "arbitrarily detaining" Assange. The media were more interested in the welfare of his cat.

They ignored the fact that after Ecuador changed presidents – with the new one keen to win favor with Washington –

Assange was placed under more and more severe forms of solitary confinement. He was denied access to visitors and basic means of communications, violating both his asylum status and his human rights, and threatening his mental and physical wellbeing.

Equally, they ignored the fact that Assange had been given diplomatic status by Ecuador, as well as Ecuadorean citizenship. Britain was obligated to allow him to leave the embassy, using his diplomatic immunity, to travel unhindered to Ecuador. No “mainstream” journalist or politician thought this significant either.

They turned a blind eye to the news that, after refusing to question Assange in the U.K., Swedish prosecutors had decided to quietly drop the case against him in 2015. Sweden had kept the decision under wraps for more than two years.

It was a freedom of information request by an ally of Assange, not a media outlet, that unearthed documents showing that Swedish investigators had, in fact, wanted to drop the case against Assange back in 2013. The UK, however, insisted that they carry on with the charade so that Assange could remain locked up. A British official emailed the Swedes: “Don’t you dare get cold feet!!!”

### **Documents Destroyed**

Most of the other documents relating to these conversations were unavailable. They had been destroyed by the U.K.’s Crown Prosecution Service in violation of protocol. But no one in the political and media establishment cared, of course.



Similarly, they ignored the fact that Assange was forced to hole up for years in the embassy, under the most intense form of house arrest, even though he no longer had a case to answer in Sweden. They told us – apparently in all seriousness – that he had to be arrested for his bail infraction, something that would normally be dealt with by a fine.

And possibly most egregiously of all, most of the media refused to acknowledge that Assange was a journalist and publisher, even though by failing to do so they exposed themselves to the future use of the same draconian sanctions should they or their publications ever need to be silenced. They signed off on the right of the U.S. authorities to seize any foreign journalist, anywhere in the world, and lock him or her out of sight. They opened the door to a new, special form of rendition for journalists.

This was never about Sweden or bail violations, or even about the discredited Russia-gate narrative, as anyone who was paying the vaguest attention should have been able to work out. It was about the U.S. Deep State doing everything in its power to crush WikiLeaks and make an example of its founder.

It was about making sure there would never again be a leak like that of “Collateral Murder,” the military video released by *Wikileaks* in 2007 that showed U.S. soldiers celebrating as they murdered Iraqi civilians. It was about making sure there would never again be a dump of U.S. diplomatic cables, like those released in 2010 that revealed the secret machinations of the U.S. empire to dominate the planet whatever the cost in human rights violations.

Now the pretense is over. The British police invaded the diplomatic territory of Ecuador – invited in by Ecuador after it tore up Assange’s asylum status – to smuggle him off to jail. Two vassal states cooperating to do the bidding of the U.S. empire. The arrest was not to help two women in Sweden or to enforce a minor bail infraction.

No, the British authorities were acting on an extradition warrant from the U.S. And the charges the U.S. authorities have concocted relate to Wikileaks’ earliest work exposing the U.S. military’s war crimes in Iraq – the stuff that we all once agreed was in the public interest, that British and U.S. media clamored to publish themselves.

Still the media and political class is turning a blind eye. Where is the outrage at the lies we have been served up for these past seven years? Where is the contrition at having been gulled for so long? Where is the fury at the most basic press freedom – the right to publish – being trashed to silence Assange? Where is the willingness finally to speak up in Assange’s defense?

It’s not there. There will be no indignation at the *BBC*, or the *Guardian*, or *CNN*. Just curious, impassive – even gently mocking – reporting of Assange’s fate.

And that is because these journalists, politicians and experts never really believed anything they said. They knew all along that the U.S. wanted to silence Assange and to crush *Wikileaks*. They knew that all along and they didn’t care. In fact, they happily conspired in paving the way for today’s kidnapping of Assange.

They did so because they are not there to represent the

truth, or to stand up for ordinary people, or to protect a free press, or even to enforce the rule of law. They don't care about any of that. They are there to protect their careers, and the system that rewards them with money and influence. They don't want an upstart like Assange kicking over their applecart.

Now they will spin us a whole new set of deceptions and distractions about Assange to keep us anaesthetized, to keep us from being incensed as our rights are whittled away, and to prevent us from realizing that Assange's rights and our own are indivisible. We stand or fall together.

**Jonathan Cook is a freelance journalist based in Nazareth. He blogs at <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog/>.**

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## THE ANGRY ARAB: How Arabs Watch Israeli Elections

The view is no different from how South African blacks regarded elections of whites in apartheid South Africa, writes As'ad AbuKhalil.

By [As'ad AbuKhalil](#)

*Special to Consortium News*



**I**sraeli elections are treated by U.S. media as an American affair. It was only after I came to the U.S. in 1983 that I realized the extent to which the American political establishment invests in Israeli elections. And with every election, the U.S. media and dominant political class pretend that if only this side

wins (or that side), peace will be at hand and that a historic compromise would be achieved if only the Palestinians show some pragmatism.

U.S. administrations stay neutral toward Israeli candidates (they love them all equally) although some U.S. presidents favored some over others (Clinton favored the Labor Party and Obama favored anyone other than Benjamin Netanyahu – not that he treated Netanyahu's government with anything but the fawning and generous treatment that Israeli leaders are accustomed to receiving from U.S. presidents).

U.S. media purposefully cover Israeli elections to excess, partly to contribute to the myth that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East region (Cyprus is possibly the one country which deserves that label). Lebanon has been holding elections long before Israel was (forcibly) created but its elections are scantily covered by U.S. media.

In excessively covering Israeli elections, U.S. and Western media act out of racist preferences: Israel leaders have been exclusively European immigrants (or descendants of European immigrants) and the denigration and political marginalization of Sephardic Jews don't detract from the image of the "only democracy." That's not to mention the mistreatment of the Arab population, both inside the 1948 boundaries of the occupation state, as well as those who are in West Bank, Gaza or outside Palestine.

Israeli leaders visit Washington more than other Western leaders. The declared affinity and "shared values" myth between the two countries was invented to cover up the historical record of anti-Semitism inside the U.S., and to

conceal U.S. complicity in the Western inaction toward the Holocaust.

Arabs' views of the Israeli elections are no different from how South African blacks regarded elections of whites in apartheid South Africa. Israel made sure to establish a state in which votes of non-Jews don't count and can't make a difference. You can't expel 82 percent of the native population of a country, and then call elections democratic in that country (after you rendered the natives into a small – albeit growing – segment of the voting population). The whole idea of declaring Israel as a “Jewish state” is a juridical commitment made by the State of Israel to its Jewish supremacist origin and purpose. It basically promises Jews of Israel that the state (through its military) won't allow the number of non-Jews to ever reach a point in which they can count or make a difference. Yet, they still call that system a “democracy” in the West.

### **Treated as a Suspect Community**

The Arabs, after being expelled from their homes, and after the land was forcibly stolen from the Palestinians, were treated as a suspect community which was put under direct military rule from 1948 to 1966 (when Israel was already being referred to as “the only democracy in the Middle East.”) Arabs needed permits to travel from one village to another and most had to register with the police station for their daily survival. And not a single Arab poet who rose in the 1950s and 1960s (from Tawfiq Zayyad, Samah Al-Qasim, to Mahmoud Darwish) managed to write Palestinian nationalistic poetry without having to serve time in jail and suffered state harassment for his/her literary

production. That Israel is “the only democracy in the Middle East” was – and is – one of the most offensive Western political gimmicks in the eyes of Arabs.

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Some Arabs were drawn early on to communist groupings in the state, because Israeli communists were seen – not always justifiably – as the least racist within a fundamentally racist political spectrum. Some Arabs rose within the Israeli Communist Party but increasingly Arabs realized the fundamental limitations of a state officially founded on an apartheid doctrine. Arab voter turnout was always low, but Arabs managed in the 1970s to produce their own “Arab parties and lists” although divisions and splits marred their political emergence.

The Zionist movement from its inception sought to sow discord and divisions among the Arabs, and recently declassified Israeli documents from the Labor Party archives from the 1960s confirmed those Israeli plans. They not only speak of averting the “formation of an educated class” among the Arabs but also of creating divisions among them: “We should continue to exhaust all the possibilities [inherent in] the policy of communist divisiveness that bore fruit in the past and has succeeded in creating a barrier—even at times artificial—between certain segments of the Arab population.”

### **Participation as Propaganda**

Palestinians in the diaspora and Arabs at large looked with

contempt and deep suspicion at Arab participation in Israeli elections and opposed Arab representation in the Knesset. Arab critics rightly pointed out that Arab participation, while failing to achieve any meaningful results for the Arab minority, merely provided an added layer in Israeli political legitimacy and propaganda.

Propaganda booths of the Israeli embassy in the U.S. often feature Arab members of the Knesset without explaining that all of them have been subjected to severe and discriminatory treatment by the state: many are often prevented from speaking, or expelled from the halls of the Knesset, or expelled outright from the Knesset. Furthermore, political participation by Arabs in the Knesset weakens the Arab case against the very legitimacy of the Israeli occupation state.

While residents of the refugee camps never distinguished between Labor or Likud, because the bombs kept falling on them whether the government belonged to the right, center, or left, PLO leadership often put too much stake in the results of the election.

By the 1970s and 1980s, the leadership of Yasser Arafat failed in mounting a successful armed resistance against Israel (because Arafat had such hopes in the U.S. "peace process," which excluded him from the start) and failed in ending the U.S. boycott of the PLO. In a confirmation of the bankruptcy of the leadership of the PLO, Mahmoud Abbas (who was an advisor to Arafat on Israeli affairs) persuaded Arafat that change would come from Israel provided the Labor Party stayed in power. PLO offices around the world (especially in Paris) used to open champagne bottles when Labor won over Likud. They had no other course of action

except to rely on their enemy to deliver liberation for them.

Not much will change in Israel after this election. The racism, aggressiveness and contempt for the native population are beliefs that are shared across the Israeli political spectrum. It is not that there is new racism in Israel: the new racism is the old Labor Party racism but without the camouflage and layers of concealment.

The entire political spectrum of Israel keeps moving further to the right, but occupation and apartheid were planted by the Zionist left in Israel. The notion that Israel is changing (toward racism and exclusiveness) is a myth planted by those who believed all along that there was a "peace camp" in Israel. The political debate between Netanyahu and his opponents shows that both sides competed in demonstrating hostility and aggression toward Arabs. [Gen. Benny Gantz](#), who ran against Netanyahu this time, bragged about the number of Palestinians he managed to kill in Gaza in 2014, when the overwhelming majority of the casualties were [civilians](#).

Israel will not change on its own, but will be forced to change with a change in the regional balance of forces and the steadfastness of the Palestinian population. More people are disqualified from voting in historic Palestine than those who are enfranchised (largely the Jewish population, including any Jewish person as soon as he or she comes to Israel from anywhere in the world). Palestinians who were born in 1948 Palestine and who left homes and orchards behind were shot at the border if they ever tried to return. The state that killed, displaced, and prevented



the return of the natives can't be said to be democratic, even if the majority Jewish population are permitted to select who among them should lead the apartheid state.

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## China's European Moment Has Arrived

The simplicities of the postwar order have just begun to pass into history, writes Patrick Lawrence.

**By [Patrick Lawrence](#)**

*Special to Consortium News*



It would be difficult to overstate the importance of Xi Jinping's visits to Rome, Paris and Monaco last week. In bringing his much-remarked Belt and Road Initiative to the center of Europe, the Chinese president has faced the Continent with the most fundamental question it will have to resolve in coming decades: Where does it stand as a trans-Atlantic partner with the U.S. and – as of Xi's European tour – the western flank of the Eurasian landmass? The simplicities of the postwar order, to put the point another way, have just begun to pass into history.

In Rome, the populist government of Premier Giuseppe Conte brought Italy into China's ambitious plan to connect East Asia and Western Europe via a multitude of infrastructure projects stretching from Shanghai to Lisbon and beyond. The memorandum of understanding Xi and Deputy Premier Luigi Di Maio signed calls for joint development of roads, railways, bridges, airports, seaports, energy projects and telecommunications systems. Along with the MoU, Chinese investors signed 29 agreements worth \$2.8 billion.

Italy is the first Group of 7 nation to commit to China's BRI strategy and the first among the European Union's founding members. It did so two weeks after the European Commission released "EU-China: A Strategic Outlook," an assessment of China's swift arrival in Europe that goes straight to the core of the Continent's ambivalence. Here is the operative passage in the E.C. report:

"China is, simultaneously, in different policy areas, a cooperation partner with whom the E.U. has closely aligned

objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the E.U. needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance.”

There is much in this document to chew upon. One is the mounting concern among EU members and senior officials in Brussels about China’s emergence as a global power. This is natural, providing it does not tip into a contemporary version of the last century’s Yellow Peril. At the same time, the Continent’s leaders are highly resistant to the confrontational posture toward China that Washington urges upon them. This is the wisest course they could possibly choose: It is a strong indicator that Europeans are at last seeking an independent voice in global affairs.

### **Looking for Unity**

They are also looking for a united EU front in the Continent’s relations with China. This was Emmanuel Macron’s point when Xi arrived in Paris. The French president made sure German Chancellor Angela Merkel and E.C. President Jean–Claude Juncker were there to greet Xi on his arrival at the Élysée Palace. The primary reason Italy sent shockwaves through Europe when it signed onto Xi’s signature project is because it effectively broke ranks at a highly charged moment.

But unity of the kind Macron and Merkel advocate is likely to prove elusive. For one thing, Brussels can impose only so far on the sovereignty of member states. For another, no one wants to miss, in the name of an E.U. principle, the opportunities China promises to bring Europe’s way. While

Macron insisted on EU unity, he and Xi looked on as China signed contracts with Airbus, Électricité de France, and numerous other companies worth more than \$35 billion.

There is only one way to read this: Core Europe can argue all it wants that China is unrolling a divide-and-conquer strategy, but one looks in vain for on-the-ground resistance to China's apparent preference for bilateral agreements across the Continent. On his way home, Xi stopped in Monaco, which agreed in February to allow Huawei, China's controversial telecoms company, to develop the principality's 5G phone network.

In numerous ways, Italy was fated to demonstrate the likely shape of China's arrival in Europe. The Conte government, a coalition led by the rightist Lega and the Five-Star Movement, has been a contrarian among EU members since it came to power last year: It is highly critical of Brussels and of other member states, it opposes EU austerity policies, it is fiercely jealous of its sovereignty in the EU context, and it favors better ties with Russia.

Closer to the ground, the Italian economy is weak and inward investment is paltry. Chinese manufacturers have made short work of Italian competitors in industries such as textiles and pharmaceuticals over the past couple of decades. A map, finally, tells us all we need to know about Italy's geographic position: Its ports, notably Trieste at the northern end of the Adriatic, are gateways to the heart of Europe's strongest markets.

As the westward destination of Xi's envisioned Belt and Road, Europe's economic and political relations with China were bound to reach a takeoff point. The accord with Italy, Xi's European tour and an [EU-China summit](#) scheduled to take place in Brussels on April 9 signal that this moment has arrived.

### **Shift in Relationship**

But it is not yet clear whether Europeans have grasped the strategic magnitude of last week's events. In effect, the Continent's leaders have started down a path that is almost certain to induce a shift in the longstanding trans-Atlantic relationship. In effect, Europe is starting – at last – to act more independently while repositioning itself between the Atlantic world and the dynamic nations of the East; China first among them by a long way.

No European leader has yet addressed this inevitable question.

Let us not overstate this case. Trans-Atlantic ties have been increasingly strained since Barack Obama's presidency. President Donald Trump's antagonisms, most notably over the Paris climate accord and the Iran nuclear agreement, have intensified this friction. But there is still no indication that any European leader advocates a rupture in relations with Washington.

Can U.S.–European ties evolve gradually as China's presence on the Continent grows more evident? This is the core question. Both sides will determine the outcome. The Europeans appear to be preparing for a new chapter in the trans-Atlantic story, but there is simply no telling how

Washington will respond to a reduction in its long-unchallenged influence in Western European capitals.

There is one other question the West as a whole must face. The E.C.'s "strategic outlook" terms China "a systemic rival promoting alternative forms of governance." There are two problems with this commonly sounded theme.

First, there is no evidence whatsoever that China has or ever will insist that other countries conform to its political standards in exchange for economic advantage. That may be customary practice among Western nations and at institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. It is not China's.

Second, as we advance toward a condition of parity between West and non-West – an inevitable feature of our century – it will no longer be plausible to assume that the West's parliamentary democracies set the standard by which all others can be judged. Nations have vastly varying political traditions. It is up to each to maintain or depart from them. China understands this. So should the West.

**Patrick Lawrence, a correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the *International Herald Tribune*, is a columnist, essayist, author, and lecturer. His most recent book is "Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century" (Yale). Follow him [@thefloutist](https://twitter.com/thefloutist). His web site is [www.patricklawrence.us](http://www.patricklawrence.us). Support his work via [www.patreon.com/thefloutist](https://www.patreon.com/thefloutist).**

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## Italy Looks to China

The U.S. and EU may worry about Rome joining the New Silk Road, but it's their fault, writes Andrew Spannaus.

By [Andrew Spannaus](#)

in Milan

*Special to Consortium News*



**I**taly caused a political firestorm in mid-March when it announced that it would be joining China's Belt and Road Initiative by signing a memorandum of understanding during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Rome from March 21 to 23.

As the first G-7 country to accept a formal agreement to participate in the initiative, also known as the New Silk Road, Italy found itself under instant pressure from both the United States and its allies in Europe, all of which worried that it represented an expansion of China's economic foothold in the West.

The populist government led by the Five-Star Movement and the League was caught off guard by the rapid backlash, which began with a pointed tweet from the U.S. National Security Council on March 9.



Italy is a major global economy and a great investment destination. Endorsing BRI lends legitimacy to China's predatory approach to investment and will bring no benefits to the Italian people.

– NSC (@WHNSC) March 9, 2019

Garrett Marquis, confidant of U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton and former Security Council spokesman, followed up with a threat to stop intelligence-sharing between the two countries.

Prior to the Chinese leader's arrival, Giancarlo Giorgetti, the secretary of the Council of Ministers, a post equivalent to chief of staff in the U.S., confirmed the signing of the memorandum to exploit new economic opportunities, but said important restrictions would be placed on cooperation with China, and that it was "ridiculous to speak of detachment from the United States."

The government also took practical measures immediately, expanding the scope of the "golden power," the government's ability to veto economic operations that it deems a threat to national security. This is aimed in particular at protecting the telecommunications sector and the development of the 5G mobile network, an area where the Trump Administration is putting pressure on other European countries as well.

On March 25, by the time Xi Jinping had come and gone, Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini said "I think the proper balance has been reached. ... Nobody should see this as a change in course, or a change in strategy internationally. Italy remains where it is."



Nonetheless, the *China Daily* is calling it a “milestone in cooperation” and plenty of news outlets are underscoring the significance of the deal, which starts at \$2.8 billion and could expand to \$22.6 billion.

Michele Geraci, undersecretary of state at the Italian Ministry of Economic Development, who led negotiations on the deal, has insisted that despite taking into account U.S. and EU worries, Italy must make its own decisions, following an “Italy first” strategy.

But Salvini, to whom Geraci owes his position, and who is poised to have even more clout after the European elections at the end of May, has been clear that it is not the type of change in alignment the Chinese had trumpeted.

Salvini even stayed away from the state dinner with Xi; and he has vowed to use his position as interior minister to monitor national security as regards port infrastructure. The other deputy prime minister, Luigi Di Maio, who met with Bolton last Thursday in Washington, says that while Italy is simply pursuing its economic interests, it remains a key NATO ally and trade partner. This is Italy’s standard posture, which will likely be accommodated as long as the government responds to specific requests from the U.S., as it already has, for example on 5G, the new telecommunications infrastructure.

## **Larger Partnerships**

Italy is certainly not the first country in Europe to look to China for economic growth opportunities. Its larger neighbors in the European Union (EU) actually do more business with China, and have established themselves as key

partners in the BRI.

Germany exports 94 billion euros worth of goods to China, for example, while the United Kingdom and France come in at 23 billion and 21 billion, respectively. Italy's share is currently only 13 billion.

After his visit to Rome, Xi Jinping was welcomed to Paris, where he signed agreements for the purchase of tens of billions of euros of French products, from airplanes to wind power systems, despite not formally joining the BRI. And the German city of Duisburg has become a key terminal for the Chinese initiative, with the arrival of dozens of trains every week that carry goods to be distributed throughout Europe thanks to the city's central position and infrastructure connections.

Critics of these agreements point to two negative effects of Chinese expansion: cheaper products that undercut European producers, costing manufacturing jobs, and growing Chinese ownership of assets in Europe, giving the Asian giant increasing power over Western economies.

Other European countries, such as Portugal and Greece, have signed formal agreements with China regarding the New Silk Road. Italy is different because it has a much larger economy, and is a member of the G-7. Yet it shares the need to rebound from the economic collapse suffered in recent years during the Euro crisis. These have been aggravated by the neoliberal policies imposed by the European Commission and the European Central Bank, with the assistance of the International Monetary Fund.

Between 2011 until 2014, during EU-dictated austerities,

Italy's GDP declined by 7 percent, with the loss of 20 percent of the country's industrial production.

It's been a disaster from which the economy has only partially recovered. The current government is attempting to reverse the situation, with greater social spending and public investment. But lacking many allies in Europe, it's being forced to compromise with EU institutions and scale back on its plans.

So, it's no surprise that Italy would look to China to help jump-start the economy. And given that other European countries have more trade with China, it's reasonable to expect Italy to make up the gap with countries such as France and Germany, both through investment in private enterprises and the construction of public infrastructure. And the Italians are seeking more opportunities for their companies to sell products in China.

### **Larger Problem for West**

Italy's situation reflects a larger problem for the West. The neoliberal economic policies of the past 30 years have brought the outsourcing of well-paying jobs, and a reduction of the role of the state in both stimulating growth and guaranteeing the welfare state. This has weakened the middle class and widened inequalities. As this has happened, the West has lost economic and political weight, opening the door for new powers to expand. China has been the main beneficiary, considerably increasing its economic presence in areas such as Africa and Latin America, and now aiming to play a leading role in Europe as well.

This shift worries U.S. government institutions seeking to

bar China from such strategic sectors as telecommunications and to maintain close military-industrial cooperation with European allies.

The strong negative reaction from the U.S., followed by the European Commission, may have been driven by China's public relations about the deal and in part by the make-up of the Italian government.

China portrayed it as a major step, not just another agreement with one country among many in Europe. The Chinese press hailed the accord as a step forward in a "comprehensive strategic partnership," and published remarks calling it an "antidote to the rising wave of unilateralism and trade protectionism," a clear dig at the U.S.

Xi Jinping then wrote a long article published on the front page of Italy's leading daily, *Corriere della Sera*. Meanwhile, on the day of Xi's arrival, copies of the official *China Daily* were distributed free to numerous hotels around Rome.

All that contributed to the unease, and key players in the Italian institutions quickly decided they could not afford to anger the United States. The memorandum has been signed, and Italy will try to obtain as much economic benefit as possible, attempting to make up ground compared to its European competitors. However, the document, and the government's rhetoric, have been adjusted to dampen the notion of a change in Italy's strategic positioning.

Italy has the only fully populist government in Europe: the Five-Star Movement and the League came to power after elections one year ago, determined to challenge the status

quo, meaning going against EU economic orthodoxy, and also hoping to lower the tensions that have dominated relations with Russia in recent years.

The Trump administration has generally been supportive of the Italians, while other European governments have not. Thus, the desire to accelerate cooperation with China is now being tempered by the need to maintain the full support of the country's most important ally.

**Andrew Spannaus is a journalist and strategic analyst based in Milan. He was elected chairman of the Milan Foreign Press Association in March 2018. His latest book "Original Sins. Globalization, Populism, and the Six Contradictions of the European Union" is due out at the end of April.**

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## Pelosi and McConnell Crank Up NATO Madness

Norman Solomon calls for all forms of pushback against a militarized political culture welcoming a NATO chief to Congress this week.

By **Norman Solomon**

[NormanSolomon.com](http://NormanSolomon.com)



When House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell teamed up to invite NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to address a joint session of Congress, they had every reason to expect the April 3 speech to be a big hit with U.S. media and political elites. The establishment is eager to affirm the sanctity of support for the transatlantic military alliance.

Huge reverence for NATO is matched by how dangerous NATO has become. NATO's continual expansion – [all the way to Russia's borders](#) – has significantly increased the chances that the world's two nuclear superpowers will get into direct military conflict.

But in the United States, when anyone challenges the continued expansion of NATO, innuendos or outright smears are likely.

Two years ago, when the Senate debated whether to approve bringing Montenegro into NATO, the mud flew at Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky after he showed up to object. An infuriated Sen. John McCain [declared](#) on the Senate floor: "I have no idea why anyone would object to this, except that I will say – if they object, they are now carrying out the desires and ambitions of Vladimir Putin, and I do not say that lightly."

Moments later, when Paul said "I object," McCain proclaimed: "The senator from Kentucky is now working for Vladimir Putin."

With those words, McCain conveyed the common madness of reverence for NATO – and the common intolerance for anything that might approach a rational debate on whether it’s a good idea to keep expanding an American-led military alliance to, in effect, push Russia into a corner. Doing so is understandably viewed from Russia as a dire threat. (Imagine a Russian-led military alliance expanding to Canada and Mexico, complete with some of the latest missile systems on the planet.)

### **Closing in on Russia**

Ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall – and the quickly broken promises by the U.S. in 1990 that NATO would move “not one inch eastward” – NATO has been closing in on Russia’s borders while bringing one nation after another into full military membership. During the last three decades, NATO has added 13 countries – and it’s not done yet.

NATO members “have clearly stated that Georgia will become a member of NATO,” Stoltenberg asserted days ago while visiting the Georgian capital of Tbilisi. He added: “We will continue working together to prepare for Georgia’s NATO membership.” For good measure, he took to Twitter on March 25:

Delighted to observe the joint NATO-Georgia exercise with PM @BakhtadzeMamuka & honoured to meet veterans & serving soldiers. Georgia is a unique partner for #NATO & we are stepping up our cooperation. pic.twitter.com/RxlZsJaJCl

– Jens Stoltenberg (@jensstoltenberg) March 25, 2019

Very few members of Congress can be heard raising any

concerns about such [reckless expansion](#). The Senate is key, because adding a country to full NATO membership requires Senate approval.

My colleagues at [RootsAction.org](#) have just launched a [constituent email campaign](#) on this issue. In every state, people are contacting their senators with individual emails urging them to oppose NATO expansion. Such constituent pressure needs to escalate.

Lobbying is only part of what's needed. As NATO marks its 70th anniversary next week with a range of activities – including a White House welcome for Stoltenberg on Tuesday, his speech to Congress the next day and an official “celebration” on April 4 – counter-actions including [forums and protests](#) as part of a “No to NATO” week will be happening in Washington.

A [statement](#) from the campaign says:

“NATO and a just, peaceful and sustainable world are incompatible... It is an unjust, undemocratic, violent and aggressive alliance trying to shape the world for the benefit of a few.”

Such evaluations of NATO in the real world are a far cry from the adulation that will be coming from mass media next week.

President Donald Trump's decision to roll out the White House red carpet for NATO's secretary general is consistent with the administration's actions during the last two years. Media narratives that fixate on occasional warm rhetoric



from Trump about Russian President Vladimir Putin have fueled illusions that Trump isn't pursuing aggressive anti-Russian policies.

While many Democratic politicians and U.S. media outlets have portrayed Trump as soft on Russia and uncommitted to Western militarism, such claims don't hold up to facts. Trump and his top deputies have repeatedly affirmed a commitment to NATO, while his overall policies (if not always his rhetoric) have been dangerously bellicose toward Russia.

In an email message to the D.C. area encouraging participation in "No to NATO" events next week, RootsAction points out:

"Trump has evicted Russian diplomats, sanctioned Russian officials, put missiles practically on Russia's border, sent weapons into Ukraine, lobbied European nations to drop Russian energy deals, left the Iran agreement, torn up the INF Treaty, rejected Russia's offers on banning weapons in space and banning cyberwar, expanded NATO eastward, added a NATO partner in Colombia, proposed adding Brazil, demanded and successfully moved most NATO members to buy significantly more weapons, splurged on more nukes, bombed Russians in Syria, overseen the largest war rehearsals in Europe in half a century, condemned all proposals for a European military and insisted that Europe stick with NATO."

When NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg gives his speech to the assembled members of Congress next Wednesday, you can count on the House speaker and Senate majority leader to be right behind him. The bipartisan enthusiasm will be obvious

– in tribute to a militarized political culture that is vastly profitable for a few, while vastly destructive in countless ways. Only public education, activism, protests and a wide range of political organizing have the potential to disrupt and end the reflexive support for NATO in Washington.

**Norman Solomon is cofounder and national coordinator of RootsAction.org. He was a Bernie Sanders delegate from California to the 2016 Democratic National Convention and is currently a coordinator of the relaunched Bernie Delegates Network. Solomon is the author of a dozen books, including “War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.” He is the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy.**

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