

Bases, Bases, Everywhere ... Except in the Pentagon's Report

These installations exist somewhere between light and shadow, writes Nick Turse. While acknowledged as foreign military outposts, they are excluded from the official inventory.

By Nick Turse

TomDispatch



Within hours of President Trump's announcement of a withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria, equipment at that base was already being inventoried for removal. And just like that, arguably the most important American garrison in Syria was ([maybe](#)) being struck from the Pentagon's books – except, as it happens, al-Tanf was never actually on the Pentagon's books. [Opened in 2015](#) and, until recently, home to hundreds of U.S. troops, it was one of the many military bases that exist somewhere between light and shadow, an acknowledged foreign outpost that somehow never actually made it onto the Pentagon's official inventory of bases.

Officially, the Department of Defense maintains 4,775 “sites,” spread across all 50 states, eight U.S. territories, and 45 foreign countries. A total of 514 of these outposts are located overseas, according to the Pentagon's [worldwide property portfolio](#). Just to start down a long list, these include bases on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa, as well as in Peru and Portugal, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom. But the most recent version of that

portfolio, issued in early 2018 and known as the Base Structure Report (BSR), doesn't include any mention of al-Tanf. Or, for that matter, any other base in Syria. Or Iraq. Or Afghanistan. Or Niger. Or Tunisia. Or Cameroon. Or Somalia. Or any number of locales where such military outposts are known to exist and even, unlike in Syria, to be expanding.

According to David Vine, author of "Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World," there could be hundreds of similar off-the-books bases around the world. "The missing sites are a reflection of the lack of transparency involved in the system of what I still estimate to be around 800 U.S. bases outside the 50 states and Washington, D.C., that have been encircling the globe since World War II," says Vine, who is also a founding member of the recently established Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition, a group of military analysts from across the ideological spectrum who advocate shrinking the U.S. military's global "footprint."

Such off-the-books bases are off the books for a reason. The Pentagon doesn't want to talk about them. "I spoke to the press officer who is responsible for the Base Structure Report and she has nothing to add and no one available to discuss further at this time," Pentagon spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Michelle Baldanza told *TomDispatch* when asked about the Defense Department's many mystery bases.

"Undocumented bases are immune to oversight by the public and often even Congress," Vine explains. "Bases are a physical manifestation of U.S. foreign and military policy, so off-the-books bases mean the military and executive

branch are deciding such policy without public debate, frequently spending hundreds of millions or billions of dollars and potentially getting the U.S. involved in wars and conflicts about which most of the country knows nothing.”

Where Are They?

The Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition notes that the United States possesses up to 95 percent of the world’s foreign military bases, while countries like France, Russia, and the United Kingdom have perhaps 10-20 foreign outposts each. China has just one.

The Department of Defense even boasts that its “locations” include 164 countries. Put another way, it has a military presence of some sort in approximately 84 percent of the nations on this planet – or at least the DoD briefly claimed this. After *TomDispatch* inquired about the number on a new webpage designed to tell the Pentagon’s “story” to the general public, it was quickly changed. “We appreciate your diligence in getting to the bottom of this,” said Lieutenant Colonel Baldanza. “Thanks to your observations, we have updated defense.gov to say ‘more than 160.’”

What the Pentagon still doesn’t say is how it defines a “location.” The number 164 does roughly track with the Department of Defense’s current manpower statistics, which show personnel deployments of varying sizes in 166 “overseas” locales – including some nations with token numbers of U.S. military personnel and others, like Iraq and Syria, where the size of the force was obviously far larger, even if unlisted at the time of the assessment. (The

Pentagon recently claimed that there were 5,200 troops in Iraq and at least 2,000 troops in Syria although that number should now markedly shrink.) The Defense Department's "overseas" tally, however, also lists troops in U.S. territories like American Samoa, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Wake Island. Dozens of soldiers, according to the Pentagon, are also deployed to the country of "Akrotiri" (which is actually a village on the island of Santorini in Greece) and thousands more are based in "unknown" locations.

In the latest report, the number of those "unknown" troops exceeds 44,000.

The annual cost of deploying U.S. military personnel overseas, as well as maintaining and running those foreign bases, tops out at an estimated \$150 billion annually, according to the Overseas Bases Realignment and Closure Coalition. The price tag for the outposts alone adds up to about one-third of that total. "U.S. bases abroad cost upwards of \$50 billion per year to build and maintain, which is money that could be used to address pressing needs at home in education, health care, housing, and infrastructure," Vine points out.

Perhaps you won't be surprised to learn that the Pentagon is also somewhat fuzzy about just where its troops are stationed. The new Defense Department website, for instance, offered a count of "4,800+ defense sites" around the world. After *TomDispatch* inquired about this total and how it related to the official count of 4,775 sites listed in the BSR, the website was changed to read "approximately 4,800 Defense Sites."

“Thank you for pointing out the discrepancy. As we transition to the new site, we are working on updating information,” wrote Lieutenant Colonel Baldanza. “Please refer to the Base Structure Report which has the latest numbers.”

In the most literal sense, the Base Structure Report does indeed have the latest numbers – but their accuracy is another matter. “The number of bases listed in the BSR has long borne little relation to the actual number of U.S. bases outside the United States,” says Vine. “Many, many well-known and secretive bases have long been left off the list.”

One prime example is the constellation of outposts that the U.S. has built across Africa. The official BSR inventory lists only a handful of sites there – on Ascension Island as well as in Djibouti, Egypt, and Kenya. In reality, though, there are many more outposts in many more African countries.

A recent investigation by the *Intercept*, based on documents obtained from U.S. Africa Command via the Freedom of Information Act, revealed a network of 34 bases heavily clustered in the north and west of that continent as well as in the Horn of Africa. AFRICOM’s “strategic posture” consists of larger “enduring” outposts, including two forward operating sites (FOSes), 12 cooperative security locations (CSLs), and 20 more austere sites known as contingency locations (CLs).

The Pentagon’s official inventory does include the two FOSes: Ascension Island and the crown jewel of Washington’s African bases, Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti,

which expanded from 88 acres in the early 2000s to nearly 600 acres today. The Base Structure Report is, however, missing a CSL in that same country, Chabelley Airfield, a lower-profile outpost located about 10 kilometers away that has served as a drone hub for operations in Africa and the Middle East.

The official Pentagon tally also mentions a site that goes by the confusing moniker of “NSA Bahrain-Kenya.” AFRICOM had previously described it as a collection of warehouses built in the 1980s at the airport and seaport of Mombasa, Kenya, but it now appears on that command’s 2018 list as a CSL. Missing, however, is another Kenyan base, Camp Simba, mentioned in a 2013 internal Pentagon study of secret drone operations in Somalia and Yemen. At least two manned surveillance aircraft were based there at the time. Simba, a longtime Navy-run facility, is currently operated by the Air Force’s 475th Expeditionary Air Base Squadron, part of the 435th Air Expeditionary Wing.

Personnel from that same air wing can be found at yet another outpost that doesn’t appear in the Base Structure Report, this one on the opposite side of the continent. The BSR states that it doesn’t list specific information on “non-U.S. locations” not at least 10 acres in size or worth at least \$10 million. However, the base in question – Air Base 201 in Agadez, Niger – already has a \$100 million construction price tag, a sum soon to be eclipsed by the cost of operating the facility: about \$30 million a year. By 2024, when the present 10-year agreement for use of the base ends, its construction and operating costs will have reached about \$280 million.

Also missing from the BSR are outposts in nearby Cameroon, including a longtime base in [Douala](#), a drone airfield in the remote town of [Garoua](#), and a facility known as Salak. That site, according to a [2017 investigation](#) by the *Intercept*, the research firm [Forensic Architecture](#), and [Amnesty International](#), has been used by U.S. personnel and private contractors for drone surveillance and training missions and by allied Cameroonian forces for illegal imprisonment and torture.

According to Vine, keeping America's African bases secret is advantageous to Washington. It protects allies on that continent from possible domestic opposition to the presence of American troops, he points out, while helping to ensure that there will be no domestic debate in the U.S. over such spending and the military commitments involved. "It's important for U.S. citizens to know where their troops are based in Africa and elsewhere around the world," he told *TomDispatch*, "because that troop presence costs the U.S. billions of dollars every year and because the U.S. is involved, or potentially involved, in wars and conflicts that could spiral out of control."

Those Missing Bases

Africa is hardly the only place where the Pentagon's official list doesn't match up well with reality. For close to two decades, the Base Structure Report has ignored bases of all sorts in America's active war zones. At the height of the American occupation of Iraq, for instance, the United States had 505 bases there, ranging from small outposts to mega-sized facilities. None appeared on the Pentagon's official rolls.

In Afghanistan, the numbers were even higher. As *TomDispatch* reported in 2012, the U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force had about 550 bases in that country. If you had added ISAF checkpoints – small baselets used to secure roads and villages – to the count of mega-bases, forward operating bases, combat outposts, and patrol bases, the number reached an astounding 750. And counting all foreign military installations of every type – including logistical, administrative, and support facilities – hiked ISAF Joint Command's official count to 1,500 sites. America's significant share of them was, however, also mysteriously absent from the Defense Department's official tally.

There are now far fewer such facilities in Afghanistan – and the numbers may drop further in the months ahead as troop levels decrease. But the existence of Camp Morehead, Forward Operating Base Fenty, Tarin Kowt Airfield, Camp Dahlke West, and Bost Airfield, as well as Camp Shorab, a small installation occupying what was once the site of much larger twin bases known as Camp Leatherneck and Camp Bastion, is indisputable. Yet none of them has ever appeared in the Base Structure Report.

Similarly, while there are no longer 500-plus U.S. bases in Iraq, in recent years, as American troops returned to that country, some garrisons have either been reconstituted or built from scratch. These include the Besmaya Range Complex, Firebase Sakheem, Firebase Um Jorais, and Al Asad Air Base, as well as Qayyarah Airfield West—a base 40 miles south of Mosul that's better known as “Q-West.” Again, you

won't find any of them listed in the Pentagon's official count.

These days, it's even difficult to obtain accurate manpower numbers for the military personnel in America's war zones, let alone the number of bases in each of them. As Vine explains, "The military keeps the figures secret to some extent to hide the base presence from its adversaries. Because it is probably not hard to spot these bases in places like Syria and Iraq, however, the secrecy is mostly to prevent domestic debate about the money, danger, and death involved, as well as to avoid diplomatic tensions and international inquiries."

If stifling domestic debate through information control is the Pentagon's aim, it's been doing a fine job for years of deflecting questions about its global posture, or what the late *TomDispatch* regular [Chalmers Johnson](#) called America's "[empire of bases.](#)"

In mid-October, *TomDispatch* asked Heather Babb, another Pentagon spokesperson, for details about the outposts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria that were absent from the Base Structure Report, as well as about those missing African bases. Among the other questions put to Babb: Could the Pentagon offer a simple count – if not a list – of all its outposts? Did it have a true count of overseas facilities, even if it hadn't been released to the public – a list, that is, which actually did what the Base Structure Report only purports to do? October and November passed without answers.

In December, in response to follow-up requests for

information, Babb responded in a fashion firmly in line with the Pentagon's well-worn policy of keeping American taxpayers in the dark about the bases they pay for – no matter the theoretical difficulty of denying the existence of outposts that stretch from Agadez in Niger to Mosul in Iraq. “I have nothing to add,” she explained, “to the information and criteria that is included in the report.”

President Trump's decision to withdraw American troops from Syria means that the 2019 Base Structure Report will likely be the most accurate in years. For the first time since 2015, the Pentagon's inventory of outposts will no longer be missing the al-Tanf garrison (or then again, [maybe it will](#)). But that still potentially leaves hundreds of off-the-books bases absent from the official rolls. Consider it one outpost down and who knows how many to go.

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The Memo That Helped Kill a Half Million People in Syria

The memo shows the advice Hillary Clinton was getting to plunge the U.S. deeper into the Syrian war. As Trump seeks to extricate the U.S. the memo has again become relevant, writes Daniel Lazare.

By [Daniel Lazare](#)

Special to Consortium News



A memo sent to Hillary Clinton that WikiLeaks made public in 2016 has not gotten the attention it deserves. Now is the time. After President Donald Trump tweeted that he was pulling American troops out of Syria, Clinton joined his vociferous critics who want more war in Syria.

“Actions have consequences, and whether we’re in Syria or not, the people who want to harm us are there & at war,” Clinton tweeted in response to Trump. “Isolationism is weakness. Empowering ISIS is dangerous. Playing into Russia & Iran’s hands is foolish. This President is putting our national security at grave risk.”

Actions indeed have consequences.

The memo shows the kind of advice Clinton was getting as secretary of state to plunge the U.S. deeper into the Syrian war. It takes us back to 2012 and the early phase of the conflict.

At that point, it was largely an internal affair, although Saudi arms shipments were playing a greater and greater role in bolstering rebel forces. But once the President Barack Obama eventually decided in favor of intervention, under pressure from Clinton, the conflict was quickly internationalized as thousands of holy warriors flooded in from as far away as western China.

The 1,200-word memo written by James P. Rubin, a senior diplomat in Bill Clinton’s State Department, to then-Secretary of State Clinton, which Clinton twice requested be printed out, begins with the subject of Iran, an important patron of Syria.

The memo dismisses any notion that nuclear talks will stop Iran “from improving the crucial part of any nuclear weapons program—the capability to enrich uranium.” If it does get the bomb, it goes on, Israel will suffer a strategic setback since it will no longer be able to “respond to provocations with conventional military strikes on Syria and Lebanon, as it can today.” Denied the ability to bomb

at will, Israel might leave off secondary targets and strike at the main enemy instead.

Consequently, the memo argues that the U.S. should topple the Assad regime so as to weaken Iran and allay the fears of Israel, which has long regarded the Islamic republic as its primary enemy. As the memo puts it:

“Bringing down Assad would not only be a massive boon to Israel’s security, it would also ease Israel’s understandable fear of losing its nuclear monopoly. Then, Israel and the United States might be able to develop a common view of when the Iranian program is so dangerous that military action could be warranted.”

This [document](#), making the case to arm Syrian rebels, may have been largely overlooked because of confusion about its dates, which appear to be inaccurate.

The time stamp on the email is “2001-01-01 03:00” even though Clinton was still a New York senator-elect at that point. That date is also out of synch [with the timeline](#) of nuclear diplomacy with Iran.

But the body of the email gives a State Department case and document number with the date of 11/30/2015. But that’s incorrect as well because Clinton resigned as secretary of state on Feb. 1, 2013.

Central to the Great Debate

Consequently, anyone stumbling across the memo in the Wikileaks archives might be confused about how it figures in the great debate about whether to use force to bring down Syrian President Bashir al-Assad. But textual clues provide an answer. The second paragraph refers to nuclear talks with Iran “that began in Istanbul this April and will continue in Baghdad in May,” [events](#) that took place in 2012. The sixth invokes an interview with CNN’s Christiane

Amanpour, Rubin's wife, conducted with then-Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak "last week." Since the interview took place on April 19, 2012, the memo can therefore be dated to the fourth week in April. (After it was sent as a memo to Clinton, Rubin published a version of it in *Foreign Policy* on June 4, 2012.)

The memo syncs with Clinton's thinking on Syria, such as calling for Assad's overthrow and continuing to push for a no-fly zone in her last debate with Donald Trump even after Gen. Joseph Dunford had testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that it could mean war with Russia.

The memo was sent to her shortly before Clinton joined forces with then-CIA Director David Petraeus to push for an aggressive program of rebel military aid.

Needless to say, the memo's skepticism about negotiating with Iran proved to be unwarranted since Iran eventually agreed to shut down its nuclear program. The memo, which Clinton twice asked to be printed out for her, underscores the conviction that Israeli security trumps all other considerations even if it means setting fire to a region that's been burned over more than once.

But the memo illustrates much else besides: a recklessness, lack of realism and an almost mystical belief that everything will fall neatly into place once the United States flexes its muscle. Overthrowing Assad would be nothing less than "transformative," the memo says.

"...Iran would be strategically isolated, unable to exert its influence in the Middle East. The resulting regime in Syria will see the United States as a friend, not an enemy. Washington would gain substantial recognition as fighting for the people in the Arab world, not the corrupt regimes. For Israel, the rationale for a bolt from the blue attack on Iran's nuclear facilities would be eased. And a new Syrian regime might well be open to early action on the frozen peace talks with Israel. Hezbollah in

Lebanon would be cut off from its Iranian sponsor since Syria would no longer be a transit point for Iranian training, assistance and missiles.”

It was “a low-cost high-payoff approach,” the memo says, that would eliminate one enemy, weaken two more, and generate such joy among ordinary Syrians that peace talks between Damascus and Tel Aviv will spring back to life. The risks appeared to be nil. Since “the Libyan operation had no long-lasting consequences for the region,” the memo supposes, referring to the overthrow of strongman [Muammer Gaddafi](#) six months earlier, the Syrian operation wouldn’t either. In a passage that may have influenced Clinton’s policy of a no-fly zone, despite Dunford’s warning, the memo says:

“Some argue that U.S. involvement risks a wider war with Russia. But the Kosovo example [in which NATO bombed Russian-ally Serbia] shows otherwise. In that case, Russia had genuine ethnic and political ties to the Serbs, which don’t exist between Russia and Syria, and even then Russia did little more than complain. Russian officials have already acknowledged they won’t stand in the way if intervention comes.”

So, there was nothing to worry about. Sixty-five years of Arab-Israeli conflict would fall by the wayside while Russia remains safely marginalized.

How it Turned Out

Needless to say, that’s not how things turned out. At that moment, Libya seemed under control. But three or four months later, it would explode as Western-backed Islamist militias blasted away at one another, imposing strict Sharia law, re-instituting slavery and rolling back decades of social progress. Once President Barack Obama approved a modified version of the Clinton-Petraeus plan, Syria would plunge into the same abyss as jihadis funded by Saudi Arabia and the other oil monarchies, many of whom came from Libya, spread sectarian violence and fear.

The memo's assumption that the U.S. could neatly and cleanly decapitate the Syrian government without having to worry about broader consequences was little short of deluded.

The notion that ordinary Syrians would fall to their knees in gratitude was ludicrous while Clinton's disregard for the intricacies of Syrian politics was astonishing.

There is also the memo's blithe suggestion that Washington "work with regional allies like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar to organize, train, and arm Syrian rebel forces."

In late 2009, Secretary of State Clinton sent another diplomatic [memo](#) made public by Wikileaks saying that "donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide." So what made her think two years later that the kingdom would not fund Syrian jihadis of precisely the same ilk?

The 2009 memo slammed Qatar for allowing Al Qaeda, the Taliban and other terrorist groups to use the sheikdom "as a fundraising locale." She was well aware then that a pro-Al Qaeda autocracy would now help Syrians "fight for their freedom," as the memo she sent puts it.

There is a remarkable continuity between the Syria policy that Clinton backed and earlier policies in Afghanistan and Libya. In the first, U.S. military aid wound up flowing to the notorious warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a religious sectarian and raging anti-western xenophobe who nonetheless was "the most efficient at killing Soviets," as Steve Coll put it in "[Ghost Wars](#)," his bestselling 2004 account of the CIA's love affair with jihad.

Hekmatyar's cutthroats wound up with the lion's share of American arms. More or less the same thing happened in Libya once Clinton [persuaded](#) Qatar to join the anti-Gaddafi coalition. The sheikdom seized the opportunity to distribute some \$400 million to various rebel militias, [many of them extreme Islamist](#). The Obama

administration [said nothing in response.](#)

Once again, U.S. arms and materiel flowed to the most reactionary elements. The same would happen in Syria where U.S. and Saudi arms went to the local Al Qaeda affiliate, known as Jabhat al-Nusra, and even to ISIS, as a meticulous [report](#) by Conflict Armament Research, a Swiss and EU-funded study group in London, has shown. (See [“Did Obama Arm Islamic State Killers?” Consortium News](#), Dec. 21, 2017.)

Insurgency Mix

By August 2012, a secret Defense Intelligence Agency [report](#) found that Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Al Qaeda were already “the major forces driving of the insurgency” and that the U.S. and Gulf states backed them regardless. The report warned that the U.S. and some of its allies were supporting the establishment of a “Salafist principality” in eastern Syria to pressure Assad that could turn into an “Islamic State”—two years before the Islamic State was declared in 2014. Clinton was among senior Obama administration officials who had to have seen the report as it was sent to the State Department among several other agencies.

In 2016, then Secretary of State John Kerry confirmed this policy in a leaked [audio conversation](#), saying that the U.S., rather than seriously fighting the Islamic State in Syria, was ready to use the growing strength of the jihadists to pressure Assad to resign, just as outlined in the DIA document.

“We know that this was growing, we were watching, we saw that Daesh [an Arabic name for Islamic State] was growing in strength, and we thought Assad was threatened,” Kerry said. “We thought however we could probably manage that Assad might then negotiate, but instead of negotiating he got Putin to support him.”

Speechwriter Ben Rhodes summed up the problem of “moderate” rebels who were indistinguishable from Al Qaeda, in his White House memoir, “The World As It Is.” He writes:

“Al Nusra was probably the strongest fighting force within the opposition, and while there were extremist elements in the group, it was also clear that the more moderate opposition was fighting side by side with al Nusra. I argued that labeling al Nusra as terrorists would alienate the same people we want to help, while giving al Nusra less incentive to avoid extremist affiliations.”

The problem was how to separate the “good” Al Qaeda fighters from the “bad.” Rhodes later complained when Russian President Vladimir Putin said that he and his fellow Obama officials were “trying to climb a spruce tree naked without scratching our ass.” This was “smug,” Rhodes writes. But Putin was merely using a colorful expression to say that the policy made no sense; which it didn’t.

The cost of the Clinton-backed policy in Syria has been staggering. As many as 560,000 people have died, and half the population has been displaced, while the World Bank has estimated total war damage at \$226 billion, roughly six years’ income for every Syrian man, woman, and child.

A cockeyed memo thus helped unleash a real-life catastrophe that refuses to go away. It’s a nightmare from which Trump is struggling to escape by trying to withdraw U.S. troops in his confused and deluded way. And it’s a nightmare that warmongers from arch-neocon John Bolton, Trump’s national security adviser, to “liberal” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, to Hillary Clinton are determined to keep going.

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blogs about the Constitution and related matters at Daniellazare.com.

CORRECTION: The first memo discussed in this article was written by U.S. diplomat James Rubin to Hillary Clinton and not by her, as an earlier version of this article said. It has also been revised with additional information.

Elizabeth Warren Nails Economy, Muddles Foreign Policy

It's imperative to criticize presumable progressive politicians and parse their words carefully. It might open the door to actual improvements in policy, writes Sam Hussein.

By [Sam Hussein](#)

[Post Haven](#)



In her New Year's Eve announcement about forming an exploratory committee for the presidency, Sen. Elizabeth Warren [made a great point](#): "Right now, Washington works great for the wealthy and the well-connected. It's just not working for anyone else."

In case you missed that, she did not say "the economy isn't working well" or such, as we've all heard numerous politicians say countless times.

She rather said the opposite of that; repeatedly: "The way I see it right now, Washington works great for giant drug companies, but just not for people who are trying to get a prescription filled. Washington works great for for-profit

colleges and student loan outfits, but not for young people who are getting crushed by student loan debt. And you could keep going through the list. The problem we have got right now in Washington is that it works great for those who've got money to buy influence."

And in case anyone missed the point, she said it yet again: "We want a government that works not just for the rich and the powerful. We want a government that works for everyone."

It's laudatory that Warren is using her perch and analytical skills to avoid a common rhetorical trap and is articulating the truism that the political establishment largely does the bidding of the wealthy and connected when it comes to the economy.

Silent on War Profiteers

The problem is that she doesn't articulate that in the same manner when it comes to bloody wars. Quite the contrary. Her list of problems—drug companies, for-profit colleges and student loan outfits—omits those who have an interest in continuing horrific wars.

When asked on Wednesday night by Rachel Maddow about Trump's recent announcement on pulling troops from Syria, Warren said the U.S.'s wars are "not working."

She didn't say: "The wars are working great for military contractors, just not for regular people in the U.S. or Syria or anywhere else."

Warren—who is on the Senate Armed Services Committee—did not say: "The wars are great for the wealthy profiting off of them, they're just terrible for the people getting killed in

them.”

Instead, Warren actually swallowed some of the rhetoric about U.S. wars having as their alleged goals stability or humanitarianism or security. The profits of military contractors or geopolitical elites went unexamined.

She said it was “right” to pull U.S. troops out of Syria and Afghanistan, an arguably positive position, but added: “It is not working and pretending that somehow, in the future, it is going to work...it’s a form of fantasy that we simply can’t afford to continue to engage in.”

Ignoring War Mongering

But part of the fantasy is ignoring that the wars are indeed working great for some. Indeed, if Warren heard someone else say that “it is not working” about the economy, she’d likely correct them.

Warren did at least raise the question of what “success” in the perpetual wars might be, which is certainly better than most of official Washington. Advocates of perpetual war “need to explain what they think winning in those wars look like and where the metrics are,” she said.

But, like most of the U.S. political establishment, Warren doesn’t actually scrutinize the underlying motives: “When you withdraw, you got to withdraw as part of a plan, you got to know what you’re trying to accomplish throughout the Middle East and the pieces need to be coordinated,” Warren said, adding, “this is why we need allies.”

What allies? France, Britain and Turkey—the traditional colonial power in the region? Or the ever-aggressive,

oppressive Israel? Or the tyrannical Saudi Arabia?

And that's rather the point. U.S. foreign policy appears as a muddle—without any clear statement of what is supposed to be accomplished—because its stated goals obscure actual goals.

The idea that the U.S. establishment gets the country into wars for ulterior financial or geopolitical reasons should be regarded as banal. Instead, it's barely articulated at all.

Most obviously, the military contractors benefit from wars.

Weapons Versus Drugs

Indeed, the power of the euphemistically called "[defense sector](#)" would seem to be substantially larger than the drug companies Warren focuses on. According to OpenSecrets.org, the top five military contractors – Northrop Grumman, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics and Raytheon—more than doubled the top five companies in the [pharmaceutical manufacturing sector](#) (\$14.4 million vs. \$7.7 million) in their outlays to politicians. For more, see the writings of William Hartung, such as "[Corporate Patriots or War Profiteers?](#)"

Even more critically, the U.S. establishment's geopolitical aims frequently thrive on war. Dahlia Wasfi argued in 2015 in "[Battling ISIS: Iran-Iraq war redux](#)" that "Obama's unofficial strategy to fight ISIS may be that of former President Ronald Reagan's for Iran and Iraq in the 1980s: a long, drawn-out war to strengthen U.S.-Israeli hegemony in the region." Also, see Robert Naiman's "[WikiLeaks Reveals](#)

[How the U.S. Aggressively Pursued Regime Change in Syria, Igniting a Bloodbath](#)” and my own [“Is U.S. Policy to Prolong the Syrian War?”](#)

In 2015, Sen. Bernie Sanders was actually calling for more Saudi intervention in the Mideast. Said Sanders: The Saudis have “got to get their hands dirty.” He was criticized for this by [Margaret Kimberley](#), [David Swanson](#) and [myself](#).

Now, Sanders has taken the lead in Congress in criticizing the Saudi war in Yemen, opening the door to some alleviation of massive suffering. I wish he would be much better still on foreign policy, but this may be serious progress, though the [ACLU has criticized the congressional resolution](#).

It’s imperative to criticize presumable progressive politicians and parse their words carefully. It might open the door to actual improvements in policy, as in the case of Sanders. And in the case of Elizabeth Warren, it’s simply asking her to cease obscuring war as she clarifies economic issues.

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Has Trump Been Outmaneuvered on Syria Troop Withdrawal?

Trump's possible backtracking on withdrawal from Syria means he may have been once again outmaneuvered by the Deep State, says Virginia State Senator Dick Black.

Following the outcry after President Donald Trump's announcement that he was pulling U.S. troops from Syria, it appears that Trump may be succumbing to political pressure. U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) visited the White House on Dec. 30 and afterward told reporters: "We talked about Syria. He told me some things I didn't know that made me feel a lot better about where we're headed in Syria," Graham said. Trump's withdrawal plans are "slowing down in a smart way," Graham said, according to NBC News.

The Washington Post added: " 'Graham described Trump's decision as 'a pause situation' rather than a withdrawal, telling reporters, "I think the president's taking this really seriously." Graham said: "He promised to destroy ISIS. He's going to keep that promise. We're not there yet. But as I said today, we're inside the 10-yard line, and the president understands the need to finish the job."

By Senator Dick Black

Virginia State Senate, 13th District



The mainstream media refuses to acknowledge that the hardest fighting against ISIS and al Qaeda has been done by Syria and its allies. Indeed, we label Iran's fight against Syrian terrorists as "malign activity," ignoring the fact that al Qaeda in Syria [al Nusra] is the progeny of the al Qaeda force that hijacked jets and flew them into the Twin Towers and Pentagon, killing 3,000 Americans on 9-11.

Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Seymour Hersh, wrote that a Defense Intelligence Agency review of Syrian policy in 2013 revealed that clandestine CIA Program Timber Sycamore, had degenerated into a program that armed all terrorists indiscriminately, specifically including ISIS and al Qaeda. I seriously doubt that this was merely a program failure. There is strong evidence that the U.S. planned to overthrow Syria in 2001; the U.S. Embassy in Damascus issued a detailed strategy to destabilize Syria in 2006—long before the so-called "Arab Spring;" and that our focus has consistently been on toppling the duly elected, constitutional and UN-recognized government of Syria.

It's sickening to hear these clowns repeatedly claim that "Assad murdered 500,000 of his people," as though the U.S.-backed terrorists have played no role in the killings. I've viewed hundreds of beheadings and crucifixions online but none committed by Syria troops—all were proudly posted by the hellish filth that we've recruited, armed and trained for the past eight years. Major war crimes, like beheading 250 Syrian soldiers after running them across the desert in their underpants, were scarcely mentioned by the MSM.

During a five-hour drive across liberated Syria this

September, I spoke with many people, from desert shepherds, to nuns and Muslim religious. There were palpable expressions of joy that the Syrian armed forces had liberated them from the terrorists. That was coupled with broad-based, unequivocal support for President Bashar al Assad and the Syrian Armed Forces.

This disastrous war would never have occurred without American planning and execution. And it would have ended years and hundreds of thousands of casualties ago had we closed our training and logistics bases in Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The Syrian War had little to do with the "Arab Spring" and much to do with clandestine actions of CIA, MI-6, Mossad, Turkish MIT, French DGSE, Saudi GID and others, working with the savage Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. We trained and recruited far more terrorists than we killed, and we will encounter those survivors again, at other times and places.

It is instructive that, despite President Donald Trump's strong directive on a rapid Syrian pull-out, apparently not one soldier or Marine has departed Syria. And the argument that they're tied up with fighting ISIS doesn't hold water. On Syria's southern border, across from Jordan, lies the U.S. base at al Tanf. ISIS is nowhere around. Al Tanf's sole purpose is to hold and defend the sovereign territory of Syria (using a 55 km no-fly zone). It denies Syria the right to restore order and provide aid to starving Syrians trapped in the American zone.

Al Tanf is the canary in the Syrian coal mine. If Trump's pullout has any credibility, the 800 or so troops and equipment assigned there could be withdrawn across the

Jordanian border within 24 hours. Their failure to do so suggests duplicity by our foreign policy shadow government. The Pentagon seems unresponsive to the Commander-in-Chief, and he has surrounded himself with advisors whose allegiance does not lie with him—or with the American people.

Republican Senator Richard H. Black represents the 13th district of Virginia, encompassing parts of both Loudoun and Prince Williams Counties in northern Virginia.

Fired School Employee Sues Over Israel Loyalty Oath

A Texas school employee has sued her school district because it fired her after she refused to sign a loyalty oath to Israel, as Marjorie Cohn reports.

By Marjorie Cohn

Truthout



In a return to the bad old days of McCarthyism, Bahia Amawi, a U.S. citizen of Palestinian descent, lost her Texas elementary school job after refusing to pledge in writing that she would not participate in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Earlier this month, Amawi sued the school district that fired her.

The BDS movement against Israel has become a hot button issue in the closing month of 2018. A bipartisan group of senators tried to attach the Israel Anti-Boycott Act to the unanimous spending bill that Trump almost signed to avoid

the current government shutdown. Meanwhile, Donorbox, a US software company, blocked the BDS fundraising account at the behest of a pro-Israel group.

“The language of the affirmation Amawi was told she must sign reads like Orwellian – or McCarthyite – self-parody, the classic political loyalty oath that every American should instinctively shudder upon reading,” Glenn Greenwald wrote at *The Intercept*.

On Dec. 12, the Council on American-Islamic Relations filed a lawsuit on Amawi’s behalf in the US District Court for the Western District of Texas against Pflugerville Independent School District, alleging that Texas’ law requiring the oath violates the First Amendment. Amawi’s complaint says the law constitutes an impermissible attempt “to impose an ideological litmus test or compel speech related to government contractors’ political beliefs, associations, and expressions.”

Amawi had contracted with the school district for nine years to work with students with autism and developmental disabilities in Austin. This fall, for the first time, Amawi was required to sign an oath that she would not boycott Israel. When she refused to sign it, she was fired.

“The point of boycotting any product that supports Israel is to put pressure on the Israeli government to change its treatment, the inhumane treatment, of the Palestinian people,” Amawi explained. “Having grown up as a Palestinian, I know firsthand the oppression and the struggle that Palestinians face on a daily basis.”

BDS

The BDS movement was launched by representatives of Palestinian civil society in 2005, calling upon “international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era ... [including] embargoes and sanctions against Israel.”

This call specified that “these non-violent punitive measures” should last until Israel fully complies with international law by (1) ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the barrier wall; (2) recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and (3) respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their land as stipulated in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.

Even though it is a nonviolent movement, Israel sees BDS as a threat to its hegemony over the Palestinians. Israel illegally occupies Palestinian territories, maintaining effective control over Gaza’s land, airspace, seaport, electricity, water, telecommunications and population registry. Israel deprives Gazans of food, medicine, fuel and basic services, and continues to build illegal Jewish-only settlements in the occupied West Bank.

“There will not be progress toward a just peace without pressure on Israel to respect Palestinian rights,” said Rebecca Vilkomerson, executive director of Jewish Voice for Peace. “Bringing about that pressure,

through a global grassroots mobilization, is exactly what BDS is about.”

After Amawi’s firing, *The New York Times* editorial board wrote,

“It’s not just Israel’s adversaries who find the [BDS] movement appealing. Many devoted supporters of Israel, including many American Jews, oppose the occupation of the West Bank and refuse to buy products of the settlements in occupied territories. Their right to protest in this way must be vigorously defended.”

Omar Barghouti, co-founder of BDS, said in an email to *The New York Times*, “Having lost many battles for hearts and minds at the grass-roots level, Israel has adopted since 2014 a new strategy to criminalize support for BDS from the top” in order to “shield Israel from accountability.”

Barghouti called Shurat HaDin, the group behind the Donorbox action blocking the BDS account, a “repressive organization with clear connections to the far-right Israeli government” that is “engaging in McCarthyite ... tactics ... in a desperate attempt to undermine our ability to challenge Israel’s regime of apartheid and oppression.”

Twenty-six U.S. states have anti-BDS laws and 13 others are pending. The Israel Anti-Boycott Act, which would have to be reintroduced when the new Congress convenes in January, was supported by Senate Republican Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Democratic Minority Leader Chuck Schumer. Senators Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) and Dianne Feinstein (D-California) opposed the bill.

Boycotts' 1st Amendment Protection

The law that triggered Amawi's firing prohibits the State of Texas from entering into government contracts with companies, including sole proprietorships, that boycott Israel. It defines "boycott Israel" to include "refusing to deal with, terminating business activities with, or otherwise taking any action that is intended to penalize, inflict harm on, or limit commercial relations specifically with Israel, or with a person or entity doing business in Israel or in an Israeli-controlled territory."

Boycotts are a constitutionally protected form of speech, assembly and association. They have long been used to oppose injustice and urge political change. The Supreme Court has held that "speech on public issues occupies the highest rung of the hierarchy of First Amendment values, and is entitled to special protection." The high court ruled that advocating and supporting boycotts "to bring about political, social, and economic change" – like boycotts of Israel – are indisputably protected by the First Amendment.

The National Lawyers Guild, Palestine Legal and the Center for Constitutional Rights wrote in a legal memorandum challenging anti-BDS legislation in New York that such laws "harken back to the McCarthy era when the state sought to deny the right to earn a livelihood to those who express controversial political views." The memo says, "The courts long ago found such McCarthy-era legislation to be at war with the First Amendment," as they "unconstitutionally target core political speech activities and infringe on the freedom to express political beliefs."

Even staff members at the right-wing Anti-Defamation League (ADL) opposed anti-BDS laws and admitted they are unconstitutional. Although the leadership officially favors outlawing BDS, ADL staff wrote in an internal 2016 memo that anti-BDS laws divert “community resources to an ineffective, unworkable, and unconstitutional endeavor.”

Greenwald cited the grave danger anti-BDS laws pose to freedom of speech, tweeting, “The proliferation of these laws – where US citizens are barred from work or contracts unless they vow not to boycott Israel – is the single greatest free speech threat in the US.”

Demonstrating the incongruity of allowing Amawi to boycott any entity but Israel, Greenwald noted, “In order to continue to work, Amawi would be perfectly free to engage in any political activism against her own country, participate in an economic boycott of any state or city within the US, or work against the policies of any other government in the world – except Israel.”

The US government remains Israel’s lap dog on the world stage. On December 5 the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling for an end to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories. The United States opposed the resolution.

Meanwhile, the BDS movement continues to achieve victories. After more than 24,000 people complained to HSBC, the banking giant pulled out its investments in Israeli arms company Elbit Systems. Elbit sells military equipment, including drones, aircraft, artillery and weapon control systems to the Israeli army, US Air Force and British Royal

Air Force. It also provides surveillance equipment to the US Customs and Border Protection agency.

On the legal front, the ACLU has mounted successful court [challenges](#) to anti-BDS laws in Kansas and Arizona and has filed litigation in Arkansas and Texas.

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Local Forces Who Defeated ISIS in Syria Defend Their Territory

The outcry against Trump's decision to withdraw troops from Syria reveals an appetite for regional hegemony, writes As'ad AbuKhalil. It also minimizes the capacity of native militia to defend territory for which they fought and died.

A Wise and Rare Decision

By [As`ad AbuKhalil](#)

Special to Consortium News



President Donald Trump's announcement that he will withdraw 2000 U.S. troops from Syria has caused great alarm in elite circles. [The New York Times](#) and [The Washington Post](#) both warned it would leave Israel "abandoned" and "isolated" and would embolden enemies of the U.S. Martin Indyk, a former Mideast envoy for Democratic administrations, [complained](#) that Trump did not factor in the national security interests of Israel.

Hillary Clinton, the former secretary of state who lost the presidency to Trump, tweeted: "Actions have consequences, and whether we're in Syria or not, the people who want to harm us are there & at war. Isolationism is weakness. Empowering ISIS is dangerous. Playing into Russia & Iran's hands is foolish. This President is putting our national security at grave risk."

Hollywood celebrities have also [jumped into](#) the act.

The strong reaction to Trump's decision (which fulfills a campaign promise to disengage militarily from the Middle East) highlights his gap with a mainstream media and foreign policy establishment that supports a more aggressive U.S. military intervention in the Middle East. The only time these detractors ever strongly supported Trump was when he ordered the bombing of Syria. Establishment spokesman Farid Zakaria, a favored CNN host and pundit, said Trump had finally become "presidential." The only reservation was that the bombing should have been more massive.

The latest [civilian death toll in Syria](#) is over 107,000. The

media has, by and large, disregarded the extent to which U.S. bombs have contributed to this enormous loss of life. When the history of the Syrian war is written, it is very likely that the destruction of Raqqa will be categorized as a U.S. war crime—to be added to the many war crimes committed by all sides in the protracted war.

Exaggerations of US Role

The outcry against Trump's withdrawal announcement include exaggerations of the role that 2000 U.S. troops played in defeating ISIS (which exclude personnel involved in covert actions).

[In a Tweet](#), Rukmini Callimachi of *The New York Times* oddly attributed the loss of 99 percent of ISIS territory in Syria and Iraq to the work of the U.S.-led "coalition" (so broadly defined to include Sweden and Bahrain among others). This estimate typically ignores the contributions and sacrifices of native Syrian, Lebanese and Iraqi fighters, many of whom are foes of the U.S.

While it can't be determined mathematically the extent to which the U.S. and others contributed to the demise of ISIS, it is certain that the bulk of the fighting against ISIS—and the dying—was done by locals, the majority of whom opposed the U.S.

This was the case in Lebanon, where the fight against ISIS and al-Qaida, over the last two years, was carried out almost single-handedly by Hizbullah, which the U.S. State Department designates a terrorist organization. Similarly, Russia and its allies in Syria did most of the fighting against ISIS despite the contributions of pro-U.S. Kurdish

militias and some rebel groups.

The economic power of ISIS—in terms of the oil trade—was largely destroyed by Russian, not U.S., bombing. In Iraq, the virtual collapse of the U.S.-trained Iraqi Army in June 2014, when Mosul was overrun, was a major factor in the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and beyond.

In Iraq, the process of mobilization and recruitment against ISIS began with the formation of Hashd, or “mass,” militias formed at the behest of Ayatollah Sistani, the senior Iranian Shia cleric based in Iraq. Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards became directly involved. While these natives fought back and destroyed ISIS in Iraq the U.S. provided air cover. Locals did the fighting and the dying.

Trump’s agenda poses a danger to the U.S. and the world. But the global agenda of the Democratic and Republican (establishment) is even more dangerous. It would expand wars in the Middle East and beyond. It would intensify U.S. enmities to places such as Russia, China, North Korea and Iran and abort any attempts at reconciliation. It would prevent the U.S. from leaving a military occupation. It would challenge the enemies of the U.S. and Israel with direct U.S. military projection of force throughout the Middle East.

Presidents Obey the Military

Trump’s fault, in the eyes of those who criticize his decision to withdraw troops from Syria, is that he did not follow the advice of his military. The notion that a president must follow military orders is entirely

undemocratic. But since Sept. 11, 2001, it has been established—especially by Democrats—that the commander in chief should do just that. Thus, President Barack Obama went against his own views and agreed to expand the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan.

Due to its strong popular support, the U.S. military often operates outside the reach of congressional supervision or public accountability. By occasionally challenging the generals, as with this decision to withdraw troops from Syria and Afghanistan, Trump has proven more politically courageous than Obama, who was afraid to defy the brass. (While Obama resisted his own foreign policy advisors' pressures to intervene more deeply in Syria, the U.S. military at that time was less enthusiastic about intervention.)

Israel was clearly unhappy with Trump's announcement of troop withdrawal from Syria, although Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was one of the few world leaders briefed by Trump before announcing his decision. (Is there a matter of any significance over which the U.S. president—whether Bush or Obama or Trump—does not brief Netanyahu?)

To satisfy Israel, the U.S. must deploy troops in all Arab countries and to join Israel in its unending wars against the whole Arab world. (Paradoxically, Israel is loathed by the Arab people while cruel Arab despots in the Gulf—such as those leading Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar—race to establish relations with Israel and often try to ingratiate themselves with the U.S. president and Congress.)

Israel, through its powerful lobby, has been agitating for

the U.S. to wage war on Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and the Palestinian territories. And Western media—no matter how much Israel accumulates by way of its massive arsenal of WMDs, and no matter how much Israeli gives itself the right to bomb at will in Syria and Palestine—still treats Israel as a vulnerable entity in need of permanent U.S. military protection.

All of this explains why Clinton is more popular than Trump. She had promised more military hegemony in the Middle East. And she was just as enthusiastic as Trump about propping up Middle East despots. For instance, as secretary of state, Clinton supported Egyptian dictator Husni Mubarak at all costs. When Mubarak fell she wanted the head of the secret police, Omar Suleiman, to be his successor.

The underlying causes for U.S. withdrawals from Syria can't be known and some wager it won't pan out. But it is unlikely that it's part of a large geo-strategic scheme on Trump's part. Nor is the move likely to predict a U.S. strike on Iran. After two years in office, Trump is showing more self-confidence in his foreign policy decisions than when he started. It is likely that he will follow his original isolationist instincts. Those instincts are at odds with the bipartisan consensus in D.C., which has heaped an avalanche of criticism upon one of the rare wise decisions of an often rash president.

ISIS is indeed on the run, and it has lost the bulk of its territorial base. It retains some fighters in its remnants in Eastern Syria, but its ability to expand is drastically limited. The major enemies of ISIS—those who drove ISIS from most of its territory—remain on the ground in Syria, Iraq

and Lebanon. While overlooked by Western reporters and columnists, they are ready to go to war again to fight back an ISIS offensive.

As'ad AbuKhalil is a Lebanese-American professor of political science at California State University, Stanislaus. He is the author of the "Historical Dictionary of Lebanon" (1998), "Bin Laden, Islam and America's New War on Terrorism (2002), and "The Battle for Saudi Arabia" (2004). He tweets as [@asadabukhalil](#)

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Critics of Syria Withdrawal Fueled Rise of ISIS

Too many of those protesting the removal of U.S. forces are authors of the catastrophe that tore Syria to pieces, reports Max Blumenthal for **Consortium News**.

[By Max Blumenthal](#)

Special to Consortium News



President Donald Trump's announcement of an imminent withdrawal of US troops from northeastern Syria summoned a predictable paroxysm of outrage from Washington's foreign policy establishment. Former secretary of state and self-described "hair icon" Hillary Clinton perfectly distilled the bipartisan freakout into a single tweet, accusing Trump of "isolationism" and "playing into Russia and Iran's hands."

Michelle Flournoy, the DC apparatchik who would have been Hillary's secretary of defense, slammed the pull-out as "foreign policy malpractice," while Hillary's successor at the State Department, John Kerry, threw bits of red meat to the Russiagate-crazed Democratic base by branding Trump's decision "a Christmas gift to Putin." From the halls of Congress to the K Street corridors of Gulf-funded think tanks, a chorus of protest proclaimed that removing U.S. troops from Syria would simultaneously abet Iran and bring ISIS back from the grave.

Yet few of those thundering condemnations of the president's move seemed able to explain just why a few thousand U.S. troops had been deployed to the Syrian hinterlands in the first place. If the mission was to destroy ISIS, then why did ISIS rise in the first place? And why was the jihadist organization still festering right in the midst of the U.S. military occupation?

Too many critics of withdrawal had played central roles in the Syrian crisis to answer these questions honestly. They had either served as media cheerleaders for intervention, or

crafted the policies aimed at collapsing Syria's government that fueled the rise of ISIS. The Syrian catastrophe was their legacy, and they were out to defend it at any cost.

Birth of ISIS From the Womb of Regime Change

During the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, Clinton, Kerry, and the rest of the Beltway blob lined up reflexively behind George W. Bush. The insurgency that followed the violent removal of Iraq's Ba'athist government set the stage for the declaration of the first Islamic State by Abu Musab Zarqawi in 2006.

Five years later, with near-total consent from Congress, Hillary enthusiastically presided over NATO's assault on Libya, cackling with glee when she learned that the country's longtime leader, Moammar Gaddafi, had been sodomized with a bayonet and shot to death by Islamist insurgents – "We came, we saw, he died!" It was not long before an Islamist Emirate was established in Gaddafi's hometown of Sirte, while 31 flavors of jihadi militias festered in Tripoli and Benghazi.

While still defending her vote on Iraq, Hillary made the case for arming the anti-Assad opposition in Syria. "In a conflict like this," she said, "the hard men with the guns are going to be the more likely actors in any political transition than those on the outside just talking."

In 2012, the CIA initiated a one billion dollar arm-and-equip operation to fund the so-called "moderate rebels" united under the banner of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). A classified Defense Intelligence Agency memo distributed across Obama administration channels in August of that year

warned that jihadist forces emanating from Iraq aimed to exploit the security vacuum opened up by the US-backed proxy war to establish a “Salafist principality in eastern Syria” – an “Islamic State,” in the exact words of the memo.

Referring to Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia’s Syrian affiliate by its name, Jabhat al-Nusra, before Western media ever had, the DIA emphasized the close ties the group had fostered with Syria’s “moderate rebels”: “AQI supported the Syrian opposition from the beginning, both ideologically and through the media. AQI declared its opposition to Assad’s regime from the beginning because it considered it a sectarian regime targeting Sunnis.”

The memo was authored under the watch of then-Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, who was convicted this year of failing to register as a foreign agent of Turkey – an extremely ironic development considering Turkey’s role in fueling the Syrian insurgency. Predictably, the document was ignored across the board by the Obama administration. Meanwhile, heavy weapons were flowing out of the U.S. Incirlik air base in Turkey and into the hands of anyone who could grab them across the Syrian border.

As early as February 2013, a United Nations independent inquiry report concluded, “The FSA has remained a brand name only.” The UN further issued a damning assessment of the role of the United States, UK and their Gulf allies in fueling extremism across Syria. “The intervention of external sponsors has contributed to the radicalization of the insurgency as it has favoured Salafi armed groups such as the al-Nusra Front, and even encouraged mainstream insurgents to join them owing to their superior logistical

and operational capabilities,” the report stated.

US Arms, ISIS Caliphate

How ISIS overran large swaths of territory in northeastern Syria and established its de facto capital Raqqa is scarcely understood, let alone discussed by Western media. That is partly because the real story is so inconvenient to the established narrative of the Syrian conflict, which blames Assad for every atrocity that has ever occurred in his country, and for some horrors that may not have ever taken place. Echoing the Bush administration’s discredited attempts to link Saddam Hussein to Al Qaeda, some neoconservative pundits hatched a conspiracy theory that accused Assad of covertly orchestrating the rise of ISIS in order to curry support from the West. But the documented evidence firmly established the success of ISIS as a byproduct of the semi-covert American program to arm Assad’s supposedly moderate opposition.

Back in March 2013, a coalition of Syrian rebel forces representing the CIA-backed FSA, the Turkish and Qatari proxy, Ahrar al-Sham, and the Al Qaeda affiliate, al-Nusra, overwhelmed the Syrian army in Raqqa. Opposition activists declared the city the “icon of the revolution” and celebrated in Raqqa’s town center, waving the tricolor flags of the FSA alongside the black banners of ISIS and al-Nusra, which set up its headquarters in the city’s town hall.

But disorder quickly spread throughout the city as its residents attempted to order their affairs through local councils. Meanwhile, the US-backed FSA had ceded the city to al-Nusra, taking the fight to the front lines against

government forces further afield. The chaos stirred by the insurgents and their foreign backers had created the perfect petri dish for jihadism to fester.

A month after Raqqa was taken, the Iraqi zealot and ISIS commander Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi revealed that al-Nusra had been a Trojan horse for his organization, referring to its commander, Mohammed Jolani, as “our son.” Jolani, in turn, admitted that he had entered Syria from Iraq as a soldier of the Islamic State, [declaring](#), “We accompanied the jihad in Iraq as military escorts from its beginning until our return [to Syria] after the Syrian revolution.”

By August, Baghdadi completed his coup, announcing control over the city. According to the anti-Assad website, [Syria Untold](#), the U.S.-backed FSA had “balked in the face of ISIS and avoided any military confrontation with it.” Many of its fighters quickly jumped ship to either the Islamic State or al-Nusra.

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“The [FSA] battalions are scared to become the weakest link, that they will be swallowed by ISIS,” a media activist named Ahmed [al-Asmeh told the journalist Alison Meuse](#). “A number joined ISIS, and those who were with the people joined Jabhat al-Nusra.”

Backing “Territorial ISIS”

As the insurgency advanced towards Syria’s coast, leaving piles of corpses in its wake and propelling a refugee crisis of unprecedented proportions, the U.S. stepped up its arm-

and-equip program. By 2015, the CIA was pouring anti-tank missiles into the ranks of Nourredine Al-Zinki, an extremist militia that eventually forged a coalition with bands of fanatics that made no attempt to disguise their ideology. Among the new opposition umbrella group was one outfit called, "The Bin Laden Front."

Despite all its war on terror bluster, the U.S. was treating ISIS as an asset in its bid to topple Assad. Then Secretary of State Kerry copped to the strategy in a leaked private meeting with Syrian opposition activists in Sept. 2016: "We were watching," Kerry revealed. "We saw that Daesh [ISIS] was growing in strength and we thought Assad was threatened. We thought, however, we could probably manage, you know, that Assad might negotiate and instead of negotiating, you got Assad, ah, you got Putin supporting him."

When Russia directly intervened in Syria in 2015, the Obama administration's most outspoken interventionists railed against its campaign to roll back the presence of Al Qaeda and its allies, comparing it to the Rwandan genocide. These same officials were curiously quiet, however, when Russia combined forces with the Syrian military to drive ISIS from the city of Palmyra, to save the home of the world's most treasured antiquities from destruction.

At a March 24, 2016, press briefing, a reporter asked U.S. State Department spokesman Mark Toner, "Do you want to see the [Syrian] regime retake Palmyra, or would you prefer that it stays in Daesh's [ISIS] hands?"

Toner strung together empty platitudes for a full minute.

"You're not answering my question," the reporter protested.

Toner emitted a nervous laugh and conceded, “I know I’m not.”

About a year later, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman openly called for the U.S. to use ISIS as a strategic tool, reiterating the cynical logic for the strategy that was already in place. “We could simply back off fighting territorial ISIS in Syria and make it entirely a problem for Iran, Russia, Hezbollah and Assad,” Friedman proposed. “After all, they’re the ones overextended in Syria, not us. Make them fight a two-front war—the moderate rebels on one side and ISIS on the other.”

Giving ISIS ‘Breathing Space’



When the U.S. finally decided to make a move against ISIS in 2017, it was gripped with anxiety about the Syrian government restoring control over the oil-rich areas ISIS controlled across the northeast.

With help from Russia, and against opposition from the U.S., Syria had already liberated the city of Deir Ezzor from a years-long siege by the Islamic State. Fearing that ISIS-occupied Raqqa could be next to be returned to government hands, the U.S. unleashed a brutal bombing campaign while its allies in the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (a rebranded offshoot of the People’s Protection Units or YPG) assaulted the city by ground.

The U.S.-led campaign reduced much of Raqqa to rubble. In contrast to Aleppo, where rebuilding was underway and refugees were returning, Raqqa and outlying towns under U.S. control were cut off from basic government services and plunged into darkness.

The U.S. proceeded to occupy the city and its outlying areas, insisting that the Syrian government and its allies were too weak to prevent the resurgence of ISIS on their own. But almost as soon as U.S. boots hit the ground, ISIS began to gather strength. In fact, a report this August by the UN Security Council's Sanctions Monitoring Team found that in areas under direct American control, ISIS had suddenly found "breathing space to prepare for the next phase of its evolution into a global covert network."

This October, when Iran launched missile strikes against ISIS, nearly killing the ISIS emir, Baghdadi, the Pentagon complained that the missiles had struck only three kilometers from U.S. positions. The protest raised uncomfortable questions about what the top honchos of the Islamic State were doing in such close proximity to the American military, and why the U.S. was unwilling to do what Iran just had done and attack them. No answers from the Pentagon have arrived so far.

Target: Iran

With the appointment this August of James Jeffrey, a self-described "Never Trumper" from the pro-Israel Washington Institute for Near East Policy, as Trump's special representative for Syria engagement, it became clear that the mission to eradicate ISIS was of secondary importance. In testimony before Congress this December, Jeffrey laid out an agenda that focused heavily on what he called "Iran's malign influence in the region," "countering Iran in Syria," and "remov[ing] all Iranian-commanded forces and proxy forces from the entirety of Syria." In all, Jeffrey made 30 mentions of Iran, all of them hostile, while referring only

23 times to ISIS. It was clear he had regime change in Tehran on the brain.

Trump, for his part, had been mulling a removal of U.S. forces from northern Syria since at least last Spring, when he put forward a vision for an all-Arab military force funded by Saudi Arabia to replace them. But when Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi was sawed apart inside his country's embassy in Istanbul this October, Trump's plan went to pieces as well. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan exploited the Khashoggi saga to perfection, helping to transform Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman from the darling of America's elite into persona non grata in Washington. As a result, he arranged a front line position for Turkey in the wake of any U.S. withdrawal.

There are now real reasons to fear that a Turkish advance will ignite a resurgence of ISIS. Turkey was not only a source of aid and oil sales to the jihadist group, it currently oversees a mercenary force of Salafi militiamen that includes droves of former Islamic State fighters. If the Turkish onslaught proves destabilizing, Iran and its allied Shia militias could ramp up their deployment in Syria, which would trigger a harsh reaction from Israel and its Beltway cut-outs.

Then again, the Kurdish YPG is in high level negotiations with Damascus and may team up with the Syrian military to fill the void. From an anti-ISIS standpoint, this is clearly the best option. It is therefore the least popular one in Washington.

Whatever happens in Syria, those who presided over U.S.

policy towards the country over the past seven years are in no position to criticize. They set the stage for the entire crisis, propelling the rise of ISIS in a bid to decapitate another insufficiently pliant state. And though they may never face the accountability they deserve, the impending withdrawal of American troops is a long overdue and richly satisfying rebuke.

Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and the author of books including best-selling [Republican Gomorrah: Inside the Movement That Shattered the Party](#), [Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel](#), [The Fifty One Day War: Ruin and Resistance in Gaza](#), and the forthcoming [The Management of Savagery](#), which will be published by Verso. He has also produced numerous print articles for an array of publications, many video reports and several documentaries including [Je Ne Suis Pas Charlie](#) and the newly released [Killing Gaza](#). Blumenthal founded the [GrayzoneProject.com](#) in 2015 and serves as its editor.

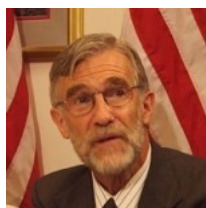
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COMMENTARY: Send the Mad Dog to the Corporate Kennel

“Mad Dog” Mattis was famous for [quipping](#), “It’s fun to shoot some people.” It remains a supreme irony that Mattis was widely considered the only “adult in the room” in the Trump administration, argues Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News



Outgoing Defense Secretary Gen. James “Mad Dog” Mattis was famous for quipping, “It’s fun to shoot some people.” It remains a supreme irony that Mattis was widely considered the only “adult in the room” in the Trump administration. Compared to whom? John Bolton, the rabid neocon serving as national security adviser? That would be the epitome of “condemning with faint praise.”

With his ramrod-straight image, not to mention his warrior/scholar reputation extolled in the media, Mattis was able to disguise the reality that he was, as Col. Andrew Bacevich put it on Democracy Now! this morning, “totally unimaginative.” Meaning that Mattis was simply incapable of acknowledging the self-destructive, mindless nature of U.S. “endless war” in the Middle East, which candidate-Trump had correctly called “stupid.” In his resignation letter, Mattis also peddled the usual cant about the indispensable nation’s aggression being good for the world.

Mattis was an obstacle to Trump’s desire to pull troops out of Syria and Afghanistan (and remains in position to spike Trump’s orders). Granted, the abrupt way Trump announced his apparently one-man decision was equally stupid. But withdrawal of ground troops is supremely sane, and Mattis was and is a large problem. And, for good or ill, Trump – not Mattis – was elected president.

Marine Wisdom

Historically, Marines are the last place to turn for sound advice. Marine Gen. Smedley Butler (1881-1940), twice winner of the Medal of Honor, was brutally candid about this, after he paused long enough to realize, and write, "War is a Racket":

"I suspected I was just part of a racket at the time. Now I am sure of it. Like all members of the military profession I never had an original thought until I left the service. My mental faculties remained in suspended animation while I obeyed the orders of the higher- ups. ..."

Shortly after another Marine general, former CENTCOM commander Anthony Zinni, retired, he stood by silently as he personally watched then-Vice President Dick Cheney give his most important speech ever (on August 26, 2002). Cheney blatantly lied about Iraq's (non-existent) WMD, in order to grease the skids for the war of aggression against Iraq. Zinni had kept his clearances and was "back on contract." He was well read-in on Iraq, and knew immediately that Cheney was lying.

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A few years later, Zinni admitted that he decided that his lips would be sealed. Far be it for a Marine to play skunk at the picnic. And, after all, he was being honored that day at the same Veterans of Foreign Wars convention where Cheney spoke. As seems clear now, Zinni was also lusting after the lucrative spoils of war given to erstwhile generals who offer themselves for membership on the

corporate Boards of the arms makers/merchants that profiteer on war.

(For an earlier critique of senior Marines, see: ["Attacking Syria: Thumbing Noses at Constitution and Law."](#))

Marine officer, now Sen. Pat Roberts, R, Kansas, merits "dishonorable mention" in this connection. He never rose to general, but did become Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee at an auspicious time for Cheney and Bush. Roberts kowtowed, like a "good Marine," to their crass deceit, when a dollop of honesty on his part could have prevented the 2003 attack on Iraq and the killing, maiming, destruction, and chaos that continues to this day. Roberts knew all about the fraudulent intelligence, and covered it up – together with other lies – for as long as he remained Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman

Scott Ritter on Pat Roberts

Roberts's unconscionable dereliction of duty enraged one honest Marine, Maj. Scott Ritter, who believes "Semper Fi" includes an obligation to tell the truth on matters of war and peace. Ritter, former UN chief weapons inspector for Iraq, wrote in April 2005 "Semper Fraud, Senator Roberts," based partly on his own [experience](#) with that complicit Marine.

Needless to say, higher ranking, more malleable Marines aped Zinni in impersonating Uncle Remus's Tar Baby – not saying nuttin'.

It is conceivable that yet another sharply-saluting Marine, departing Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joseph

Dunford, may be tapped by Trump to take Mattis's job. If that happens, it will add to President Trump's bizarre penchant for picking advisers hell bent on frustrating the objectives he espoused when he was running for office, some of which – it is becoming quite clear – he genuinely wants to achieve.

Trump ought to unleash Mattis now, and make sure Mattis keeps his distance from the Pentagon and the Military-Industrial Complex, before he is asked to lead an insurrection against a highly vulnerable president – as Gen. Smedley Butler was asked to do back in the day. Butler said no.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was an Army Infantry/Intelligence officer before working as a CIA analyst for the next 27 years. Ray admits to a modicum of bias against Marine officers, but not those with whom he worked back in the day. He is co-creator of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, which includes Marines who remember what Semper Fi means.

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The Great Saudi Muddle

Two U.S. Senate resolutions last week have resulted in a ball of confusion, one that tries to distance the U.S. from a murderous Saudi prince while at the same time demanding closer relations with the government he heads.

By Daniel Lazare

Special to Consortium News



Does the Senate want Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman to own up to the murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi? Is it really seeking an end to Saudi Arabia's war of aggression against Yemen? The answer to both questions is: kind of, sort of, not really.

That's the takeaway from a couple of resolutions the chamber approved amid great fanfare last week. The first, sponsored by Senator Bernie Sanders, calls on Trump "to remove United States Armed Forces from hostilities in or affecting the Republic of Yemen" by, among other things, putting an end to in-flight refueling of Saudi and the United Arab Emirate war planes. The resolution, which passed 56 to 41, was a small step toward ending a war of aggression that has claimed as many as 80,000 lives – although it would have been stronger and less self-serving if it had also called for cutting off arms sales that have allowed US weapons manufacturers to reap vast profits off human misery.

But the second resolution, which passed on a unanimous voice vote, was a muddle that shows just how self-defeating US policy has become. Sponsored by Republican Senator Bob Corker, it began by holding the crown prince responsible for Khashoggi's murder in an Istanbul consulate on Oct. 2, an act, it said, that has "undermined trust and confidence in the longstanding friendship between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."

This generated excited headlines to the effect that the U.S. might at last be breaking with MbS, as Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman is universally known. But news outlets failed to mention what the resolution said next. It declared, for instance, that the U.S.-Saudi relationship is "an essential element of regional security." While saying nothing about arms shipments to Saudi allies, it condemned Iran for supplying rebel forces with "advanced lethal weapons." It blamed the Houthis "for egregious human rights

abuses, including torture, use of human shields, and interference with, and diversion of, humanitarian aid shipments” – this while remaining silent about Saudi-UAE atrocities, which reportedly include a string of torture chambers in which political opponents are roasted over open fires, among other horrors.

Most bizarrely of all, the resolution warned the Saudis that “increasing purchases of military equipment from, and cooperation with, the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China challenges the strength and integrity of the long-standing military-to-military relationship” between Washington and Riyadh. The Senate is thus angry with MBS not only because he sent a seventeen-member hit squad to knock off a US resident in the middle of a European capital, but because he’s consorting with America’s business rivals. The resolution further warns that such purchases “may introduce significant national security and economic risks to both parties,” language that is every bit as threatening as it sounds.

The result is a ball of confusion, one that tries to distance the US from a murderous Saudi prince while at the same time demanding closer relations with the government he heads. It calls on the Saudis to behave more nicely to their neighbors, wind down the war in Yemen, and cease murdering people in broad daylight so that the clock can be turned back a few years and the process starts all over again. To quote Giuseppe de Lampedusa’s famous line in his novel, *The Leopard*, it wants everything to change so that everything can remain the same.

Incoherence

This is as incoherent as anything Trump has come up with, including his notorious Nov. 20 statement with regard to MbS’s guilt or innocence that “maybe he did and maybe he didn’t.” Trump can’t let go of his Saudi ties. But, then, the Senate can’t let go and *not* let go at the same time.

No one knows what to do, which is why the resolution tried to play both sides of the net. In [describing](#) MbS as “a wrecking ball,” one whom it is “very difficult to be able to do business” with, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham was essentially calling on the crown prince to step down.

He could be replaced, under U.S. pressure, perhaps with the former crown prince he replaced, Muhammad bin Nayef, said to be favored by the CIA, which publicly blamed MbS for Khashoggi’s murder.

But it could also mean a destabilizing factional feud within the ruling clan leading to a messy regime change, which, as Washington foreign-policy experts have learned all too painfully since the Arab Spring, could well lead to chaos.

To be sure, there is always the hope that a senior member of the Al-Saud will step in once MbS is removed and re-establish order. Indeed, Saudi experts already have a candidate for the job in mind: King Salman’s younger brother Ahmed bin Abdulaziz, who, while living in self-imposed exile in London, startled Saudi watchers by [telling](#) a small group of hecklers not to blame the Al-Saud for the Yemen war, only the king and crown prince. “They are responsible for crimes in Yemen,” he said. “Tell Mohammed bin Salman to stop the war.”

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Since public criticism of this sort is unprecedented, it was assumed that when Prince Ahmed flew back to Riyadh a few weeks after the Khashoggi murder under [a US-UK promise of protection](#), it was with the goal of putting the Al-Saud on a new footing.

But no one knows what might bubble up if he were to try. Things might return to normal after a royal shake-up – assuming one is in the works – or they may not. After all, it was assumed that Libya would return to normal once a former prime minister named [Ali](#)

Zeidan took over from deposed strongman Muammar Gaddafi. When that didn't work out, it was hoped that an ex-academic named Omar al-Hassi would have better luck. But when he fell too, it was clear that only anarchy would reign.

Hence the fear in Saudi Arabia is that something similar might occur post-MbS – that, as a source told *The New Yorker's* Robin Wright, “[s]omeone from outside the system could make it collapse,” whereupon the kingdom would succumb to “instability like elsewhere in the region.”

Homemade in Washington

If so, it's a problem entirely of Washington's own making. Democratic and Republican administrations alike have continued to build up Saudi Arabia despite repeated warnings that it was creating a monster.

In 1945, FDR granted Saudi King Ibn Saud a blanket security guarantee in return for unrestricted oil access. A few years later, Truman used the newly-established Marshall Fund to finance massive Saudi oil shipments to war-torn western Europe, thereby establishing the kingdom as the world's leading exporter. Following the epic price increases and Oil Embargo of the 1973, Washington hit upon yet another deal, this time to recycle excess petrodollars by exchanging Saudi oil profits for U.S. weaponry. A regional military colossus was thus born, one that felt free to attack whomever it pleased thanks to colossal oil wealth, vast quantities of high-tech arms, and an unlimited U.S. security guarantee and political cover.

Aggression and repression were the inevitable result. Unwilling to upset a vital strategic partner, the Obama administration said nothing when Riyadh sent troops into neighboring Bahrain to bloodily suppress democratic protests; when it flooded Syria with bloodthirsty Sunni jihadis, and when, in March 2015, it declared war on Yemen, its neighbor to the south. Indeed, the

administration felt it had no choice but to help out.

Thus, a top general [signaled his assent](#) even while admitting that he had only been given a few hours' notice while a State Department spokesman added forlornly: "We don't want this to be an open-ended military campaign." Nearly four years later, with as many as [13 million people](#) teetering on the brink of starvation, that's exactly what it's turned out to be.

Joined at the hip with the Saudis, the U.S. appears to have no idea how to go about severing an increasingly toxic relationship, as last week's incoherent Senate resolutions make clear.

The U.S. was happy to build Saudi Arabia up, but it's clueless now that Saudi Arabia is dragging it down.

Daniel Lazare is the author of *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from The Nation to Le Monde Diplomatique and blogs about the Constitution and related matters at Daniellazare.com.

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George H.W. Bush's Bitter Legacy in the Middle East

The avalanche of funeral hagiography drowned any possible discussion of what Bush did to the Middle East. As'ad AbuKhalil writes that he rallied despots against Iraq and established a new, tyrannical security order in the region.

Sequel to 'British Betrayal' of WWI

By As`ad AbuKhalil

Special to Consortium News



Any sober assessment of late President George H.W. Bush's political legacy was drowned last week by the avalanche of hagiography by the mainstream media. This served, in part, the role of catharsis. The more loudly the members of the media praised Bush, whose family has testy relations with President Donald Trump, the more it helped them vent their animosity towards the current president.

Lost in this anti-historical, fact-free binge was any possible discussion of Bush's most important legacies, one of which is certainly his great fake-out of Arab interests in the Middle East. Almost every U.S. president since Harry S. Truman has been more pro-Israel than his predecessor. The sole exception to this was George H.W. Bush. But via the war against Iraq, his administration wound up embracing Israeli interests and regional hegemony to such a degree that it left lasting damage to peace and stability in the region.

H.W. Bush was adept at changing ideologies to suit the venue. The man who emerged from the "moderate" wing of the East Coast Republican Party became the political heir of President Ronald Reagan, who wooed the Religious Right and made abortion a litmus test for all Supreme Court nominees.

While Bush did not leave a presidential memoir, (he is the first since Franklin D. Roosevelt not to do so), he did coauthor a book with Brent Scowcroft, his national security

advisor, "A World Transformed." This offers evidence of Bush's close ties with Arab Gulf despots and the deposed Egyptian strongman Husni Mubarak, who served as his chief advisor on the region.

Bush was obviously impressed by the fabulous wealth and hospitality of Arab potentates. At one point in the book, during a stay in one of King Fahd's marble guest palaces, he marvels at the chandeliers, the air conditioning and goes on at length about a lavish state dinner. "I had never seen so much—and of nearly every conceivable type of food."

Wealthy Arab Friends

Bush's ties with wealthy Arabs served him well. Lebanese businessman Najad Isam Faris and Syrian businessman Jamale Daniel helped the business career of Bush's son, Neil. With his network of Gulf associates, Bush served as a prized advisor to the Carlyle Group, the global, private equity firm based in Washington, D.C., with a specialty of investing in companies that depend on government contracts.

Bush's footprints in the region begin with his oil-business years in Texas. At that point, in the 1950s, oil companies often served as a chief lobbying force for Gulf regimes against the Israeli lobby. This was not due to any humanitarian concern for the plight of the Palestinian people. It was due to the usual financial motivation. The Israel lobby opposed closer ties between the U.S. and all Arab countries, which compelled oil businesses to defend their Gulf suppliers. Since the Israeli lobby opposed U.S. arms sales to Middle East regimes, it had other big-business opponents as well.

Later in his life, Bush also dealt with the Middle East as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and as director of the CIA. (The deputy chief of Saudi intelligence during Bush's time at the CIA, Prince Turki Al-Faisal, was one of the few foreign dignitaries invited to attend the funeral).

When the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, paid tribute last week to Bush he concealed a long history of Israeli detestation for the man.

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As Ronald Reagan's vice president, Bush—along with James Baker, the White House chief of staff, and Caspar Weinberger, the secretary of defense—had the coolest attitudes towards Israel of any in the administration, which was otherwise loaded with ardent Zionists. Bush was vilified for his 1991 remark that he was a “one lonely guy” battling “a thousand lobbyists on the Hill.”

Nonetheless Bush toed the pro-Israeli line and championed the cause of Soviet Jewish dissidents and the sponsorship of the emigration of Jews from Ethiopia, Syria and the former Soviet Union to Israel. He also recruited ardent Zionists (Jack Kemp, [Condoleezza Rice](#) and [Dennis Ross](#)) for his administration.

As president, Bush was branded an anti-Semite in 1991 for “deferring” for 120 days \$10 billion in loan guarantees to Israel. He did this to prevent Israel from putting the money toward settlements in the occupied lands of 1967. Bush was also trying to persuade Israel to join the U.S.-sponsored peace process.

Serious About Settlements

This was the only time the U.S. government treated the settlements and the Israeli role in the peace process as a serious matter. The Obama administration did voice mild protestations about the settlements, which violate international law. But after Bush, the settlements never again caused any serious irritation to U.S.-Israeli relations.

The Bush administration also, at one point, banned Ariel Sharon, the Israeli militarist and politician, from entering U.S. government buildings due to his statements against the U.S. role in the peace process. (When Jack Kemp, housing secretary at the time, wanted to meet with Sharon, James Baker instructed him to meet outside government offices).

But in Iraq, the Bush administration began the process of removing a regime that the Israel government had been complaining about for years. This was before Israel discovered the Iranian danger. It was also many years after Israel rid itself of the Egyptian danger thanks to the Camp David Accords between the despotic Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and the Israeli government under the auspices of the American human rights president, Jimmy Carter. Going forward, the U.S. bombed everything on Israel's bombing wish list in Iraq.

Bush was intent on going to war against Iraq in 1990. He sent Dick Cheney, then secretary of defense, and Colin Powell, then chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, to Riyadh to persuade the king that U.S. troops were needed on the ground in Saudi Arabia to protect the kingdom from an

Iraqi invasion (U.S. ships had moved before Cheney stepped foot on Saudi soil).

Rallying Against Iraq

The H.W.Bush administration rallied Arab despots against Iraq and established a regional tyrannical order. Even the Syrian regime rose above its previous conflicts with the U.S. and got on board. Together, they denied Saddam Hussein, Iraq's president, the one condition that he sought for withdrawal. As Bush admits in the book he coauthored, that sole condition was access to the Persian Gulf.

From 1991 on, most members of the U.S. armed forces—especially the Air Force—began to train over (or on) Arab lands. Today that means bases and military activities in Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Oman, UAE, Syria (illegally), not to mention other places where the U.S. maintains secret military and intelligence bases (it was leaked to the press a few years ago that Dubai hosts one of the largest CIA bases in the world).

Bush exploited the Gulf War to impose a security regime where the U.S.—and not the local despotic clients—called the shots. Furthermore, Bush introduced the misuse of the U.N. as “an added cloak of political cover for U.S. wars and actions,” as is described on page 416 of the book he coauthored.

In targeting Iraq, Bush begin to eliminate the biggest (albeit exaggerated) Arab military power. He also pushed Arab governments to sit face-to-face with Israel in Madrid without securing any concessions from Israel at all.

The “peace process” under Bush was just as it had been under his predecessors and successors. It amounted to empty promises of U.S. rewards for Arab participation in the war on Iraq. It was a repeat of the [“British betrayal”](#) of World War I, when, in exchange for help fighting against the Ottoman Empire, Arabs thought they would earn independence.

As’ad AbuKhalil is a Lebanese-American professor of political science at California State University, Stanislaus. He is the author of the “Historical Dictionary of Lebanon” (1998), “Bin Laden, Islam and America’s New War on Terrorism (2002), and “The Battle for Saudi Arabia” (2004). He tweets as [@asadabukhalil](#)

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