

# The World Will Not Mourn the Decline of U.S. Hegemony

Commentators on both right and left bemoan the decline of American global power under Donald Trump, but is that such a bad thing? asks Paul Street in this commentary.

**By Paul Street**



There are good reasons to bemoan the presence of the childish, racist, sexist and ecocidal, right-wing plutocrat Donald Trump in the White House. One complaint about Trump that should be held at arm's-length by anyone on the left, however, is the charge that Trump is contributing to the decline of U.S. global power—to the erosion of the United States' superpower status and the emergence of a more multipolar world.

This criticism of Trump comes from different elite corners. Last October, the leading neoconservative foreign policy intellectual and former George W. Bush administration adviser Eliot Cohen wrote an Atlantic magazine essay titled “How Trump Is Ending the American Era.” Cohen recounted numerous ways in which Trump had reduced “America’s standing and ability to influence global affairs.” He worried that Trump’s presidency would leave “America’s position in the world stunted” and an “America lacking confidence” on the global stage.

But it isn’t just the right wing that writes and speaks in such terms about how Trump is contributing to the decline of U.S. hegemony. A recent Time magazine reflection by the liberal commentator Karl Vick (who wrote in strongly supportive terms about the giant January 2017 Women’s March against Trump) frets that that Trump’s “America First” and authoritarian views have the world “looking for leadership elsewhere.”

“Could this be it?” Vick asks. “Might the American Century actually clock out at just 72 years, from 1945 to 2017? No longer than Louis XIV ruled France? Only 36 months more than the Soviet Union lasted, after all that bother?”

I recently reviewed a manuscript on the rise of Trump written by a left-liberal American sociologist. Near the end of this forthcoming and mostly excellent and instructive volume, the author finds it “worrisome” that other nations see the U.S. “abdicating its role as the world’s leading policeman” under Trump—and that, “given what we have seen so far from the [Trump] administration, U.S. hegemony appears to be on shakier ground than it has been in a long time.”

I’ll leave aside the matter of whether Trump is, in fact, speeding the decline

of U.S. global power (he undoubtedly is) and how he's doing that, to focus instead on a very different question: What would be so awful about the end of "the American Era"—the seven-plus decades of U.S. global economic and related military supremacy between 1945 and the present? Why should the world mourn the "premature" end of the "American Century"?

### **What Would the Rest of the World Say?**

It would be interesting to see a reliable opinion poll on how the politically cognizant portion of the 94 percent of humanity that lives outside the U.S. would feel about the end of U.S. global dominance. My guess is that Uncle Sam's weakening would be just fine with most Earth residents who pay attention to world events.

According to a global survey of 66,000 people conducted across 68 countries by the Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research (WINMR) and Gallup International at the end of 2013, Earth's people see the United States as the leading threat to peace on the planet. The U.S. was voted top threat by a wide margin.

There is nothing surprising about that vote for anyone who honestly examines the history of "U.S. foreign affairs," to use a common elite euphemism for American imperialism. Still, by far and away world history's most extensive empire, the U.S. has at least 800 military bases spread across more than 80 foreign countries and "troops or other military personnel in about 160 foreign countries and territories." The U.S. accounts for more than 40 percent of the planet's military spending and has more than 5,500 strategic nuclear weapons, enough to blow the world up 5 to 50 times over. Last year it increased its "defense" (military empire) spending, which was already three times higher than China's, and nine times higher than Russia's.



Think it's all in place to ensure peace and democracy the world over, in accord with the standard boilerplate rhetoric of U.S. presidents, diplomats and senators?

Do you know any other good jokes?

A Pentagon study released last summer laments the emergence of a planet on which the U.S. no longer controls events. Titled "At Our Own Peril: DoD Risk

Assessment in a Post-Primary World,” the study warns that competing powers “seek a new distribution of power and authority commensurate with their emergence as legitimate rivals to U.S. dominance” in an increasingly multipolar world. China, Russia and smaller players like Iran and North Korea have dared to “engage,” the Pentagon study reports, “in a deliberate program to demonstrate the limits of U.S. authority, reach influence and impact.” What chutzpah! This is a problem, the report argues, because the endangered U.S.-managed world order was “favorable” to the interests of U.S. and allied U.S. states and U.S.-based transnational corporations.

Any serious efforts to redesign the international status quo so that it favors any other states or people is portrayed in the report as a threat to U.S. interests. To prevent any terrible drifts of the world system away from U.S. control, the report argues, the U.S. and its imperial partners (chiefly its European NATO partners) must maintain and expand “unimpeded access to the air, sea, space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum in order to underwrite their security and prosperity.” The report recommends a significant expansion of U.S. military power. The U.S. must maintain “military advantage” over all other states and actors to “preserve maximum freedom of action” and thereby “allow U.S. decision-makers the opportunity to dictate or hold significant sway over outcomes in international disputes,” with the “implied promise of unacceptable consequences” for those who defy U.S. wishes.

“America First” is an understatement here. The underlying premise is that Uncle Sam owns the world and reserves the right to bomb the hell out of anyone who doesn’t agree with that (to quote President George H.W. Bush after the first Gulf War in 1991: “What we say goes.”

### **Investment Not Democracy**

It’s nothing new. From the start, the “American Century” had nothing to do with advancing democracy. As numerous key U.S. planning documents reveal over and over, the goal of that policy was to maintain and, if necessary, install governments that “favor[ed] private investment of domestic and foreign capital, production for export, and the right to bring profits out of the country,” according to Noam Chomsky. Given the United States’ remarkable possession of half the world’s capital after World War II, Washington elites had no doubt that U.S. investors and corporations would profit the most. Internally, the basic selfish national and imperial objectives were openly and candidly discussed. As the “liberal” and “dovish” imperialist, top State Department planner, and key Cold War architect George F. Kennan explained in “Policy Planning Study 23,” a critical 1948 document:



We have about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population. ... In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. ... To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. ... We should cease to talk about vague and ... unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.

The harsh necessity of abandoning "human rights" and other "sentimental" and "unreal objectives" was especially pressing in the global South, what used to be known as the Third World. Washington assigned the vast "undeveloped" periphery of the world capitalist system—Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia and the energy-rich and thus strategically hyper-significant Middle East—a less than flattering role. It was to "fulfill its major function as a source of raw materials and a market" (actual State Department language) for the great industrial (capitalist) nations (excluding socialist Russia and its satellites, and notwithstanding the recent epic racist-fascist rampages of industrial Germany and Japan). It was to be exploited both for the benefit of U.S. corporations/investors and for the reconstruction of Europe and Japan as prosperous U.S. trading and investment partners organized on capitalist principles and hostile to the Soviet bloc.

"Democracy" was fine as a slogan and benevolent, idealistic-sounding mission statement when it came to marketing this imperialist U.S. policy at home and abroad. Since most people in the "third" or "developing" world had no interest in neocolonial subordination to the rich nations and subscribed to what U.S. intelligence officials considered the heretical "idea that government has direct responsibility for the welfare of its people" (what U.S. planners called "communism"), Washington's real-life commitment to popular governance abroad was strictly qualified, to say the least.

"Democracy" was suitable to the U.S. as long as its outcomes comported with the interests of U.S. investors/corporations and related U.S. geopolitical objectives. Democracy had to be abandoned, undermined and/or crushed when it threatened those investors/corporations and the broader imperatives of business rule to any significant degree. As President Richard Nixon's coldblooded national security adviser Henry Kissinger explained in June 1970, three years before the U.S. sponsored a bloody fascist coup that overthrew Chile's democratically elected socialist president, Salvador Allende: "I don't see why

we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist because of the irresponsibility of its own people.”

The U.S.-sponsored coup government that murdered Allende would kill tens of thousands of real and alleged leftists with Washington’s approval. The Yankee superpower sent some of its leading neoliberal economists and policy advisers to help the blood-soaked Pinochet regime turn Chile into a “free market” model and to help Chile write capitalist oligarchy into its national constitution.

“Since 1945, by deed and by example,” the great Australian author, commentator and filmmaker John Pilger wrote nearly nine years ago, “the U.S. has overthrown 50 governments, including democracies, crushed some 30 liberation movements and supported tyrannies from Egypt to Guatemala (see William Blum’s histories). Bombing is apple pie.” Along the way, Washington has crassly interfered in elections in dozens of “sovereign” nations, something curious to note in light of current liberal U.S. outrage over real or alleged Russian interference in “our” supposedly democratic electoral process in 2016. Uncle Sam also has bombed civilians in 30 countries, attempted to assassinate foreign leaders and deployed chemical and biological weapons.

If we “consider only Latin America since the 1950s,” writes the sociologist Howard Waitzkin:

[T]he United States has used direct military invasion or has supported military coups to overthrow elected governments in Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Haiti, Grenada, and Panama. In addition, the United States has intervened with military action to suppress revolutionary movements in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia. More recently ... the United States has spent tax dollars to finance and help organize opposition groups and media in Honduras, Paraguay, and Brazil, leading to congressional impeachments of democratically elected presidents. Hillary Clinton presided over these efforts as Secretary of State in the Obama administration, which pursued the same pattern of destabilization in Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia.

### **Death Count: In the Millions**

The death count resulting from “American Era” U.S. foreign policy runs well into the many millions, including possibly as many as 5 million Indochinese killed by Uncle Sam and his agents and allies between 1962 and 1975. The flat-out barbarism of the American war on Vietnam is widely documented on record. The

infamous My Lai massacre of March 16, 1968, when U.S. Army soldiers slaughtered more than 350 unarmed civilians—including terrified women holding babies in their arms—in South Vietnam was no isolated incident in the U.S. “crucifixion of Southeast Asia” (Noam Chomsky’s phrase at the time). U.S. Army Col. Oran Henderson, who was charged with covering up the massacre, candidly told reporters that “every unit of brigade size has its My Lai hidden somewhere.”

It is difficult, sometimes, to wrap one’s mind around the extent of the savagery the U.S. has unleashed on the world to advance and maintain its global supremacy. In the early 1950s, the Harry Truman administration responded to an early challenge to U.S. power in Northern Korea with a practically genocidal three-year bombing campaign that was described in soul-numbing terms by the Washington Post years ago:

The bombing was long, leisurely and merciless, even by the assessment of America’s own leaders. ‘Over a period of three years or so, we killed off—what—20 percent of the population,’ Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay, head of the Strategic Air Command during the Korean War, told the Office of Air Force History in 1984. Dean Rusk, a supporter of the war and later Secretary of State, said the United States bombed ‘everything that moved in North Korea, every brick standing on top of another.’ After running low on urban targets, U.S. bombers destroyed hydroelectric and irrigation dams in the later stages of the war, flooding farmland and destroying crops ... [T]he U.S. dropped 635,000 tons of explosives on North Korea, including 32,557 tons of napalm, an incendiary liquid that can clear forested areas and cause devastating burns to human skin.

Gee, why does North Korea fear and hate us?

This ferocious bombardment, which killed 2 million or more civilians, began five years after Truman arch-criminally and unnecessarily ordered the atom bombing of hundreds of thousands of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to warn the Soviet Union to stay out of Japan and Western Europe.

Some benevolent “world policeman.”

The ferocity of U.S. foreign policy in the “America Era” did not always require direct U.S. military intervention. Take Indonesia and Chile, for two examples from the “Golden Age” height of the “American Century.” In Indonesia, the U.S.-backed dictator Suharto killed millions of his subjects, targeting communist sympathizers, ethnic Chinese and alleged leftists. A senior CIA operations officer in the 1960s later described Suharto’s 1965-66 U.S.-assisted coup as “the model operation” for the U.S.-backed coup that eliminated the

democratically elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende, seven years later. "The CIA forged a document purporting to reveal a leftist plot to murder Chilean military leaders," the officer wrote, "[just like] what happened in Indonesia in 1965."

As Pilger noted 10 years ago, "the U.S. embassy in Jakarta supplied Suharto with a 'zap list' of Indonesian Communist party members and crossed off the names when they were killed or captured. ... The deal was that Indonesia under Suharto would offer up what Richard Nixon had called 'the richest hoard of natural resources, the greatest prize in south-east Asia.' "

"No single American action in the period after 1945," wrote the historian Gabriel Kolko, "was as bloodthirsty as its role in Indonesia, for it tried to initiate [Suharto's] massacre."

Two years and three months after the Chilean coup, Suharto received a green light from Kissinger and the Gerald Ford White House to invade the small island nation of East Timor. With Washington's approval and backing, Indonesia carried out genocidal massacres and mass rapes and killed at least 100,000 of the island's residents.

### **Mideast Savagery**

Among the countless episodes of mass-murderous U.S. savagery in the oil-rich Middle East over the last generation, few can match for the barbarous ferocity of the "Highway of Death," where the "global policeman's" forces massacred tens of thousands of surrendered Iraqi troops retreating from Kuwait on Feb. 26 and 27, 1991. Journalist Joyce Chediac testified that:

U.S. planes trapped the long convoys by disabling vehicles in the front, and at the rear, and then pounded the resulting traffic jams for hours. 'It was like shooting fish in a barrel,' said one U.S. pilot. On the sixty miles of coastal highway, Iraqi military units sit in gruesome repose, scorched skeletons of vehicles and men alike, black and awful under the sun ... for 60 miles every vehicle was strafed or bombed, every windshield is shattered, every tank is burned, every truck is riddled with shell fragments. No survivors are known or likely. ... 'Even in Vietnam I didn't see anything like this. It's pathetic,' said Major Bob Nugent, an Army intelligence officer. ... U.S. pilots took whatever bombs happened to be close to the flight deck, from cluster bombs to 500-pound bombs. ... U.S. forces continued to drop bombs on the convoys until all humans were killed. So many jets swarmed over the inland road that it created an aerial traffic jam, and combat air controllers feared midair collisions. ... The victims were not offering resistance. ... [I]t was

simply a one-sided massacre of tens of thousands of people who had no ability to fight back or defend.

The victims' crime was having been conscripted into an army controlled by a dictator perceived as a threat to U.S. control of Middle Eastern oil. President George H.W. Bush welcomed the so-called Persian Gulf War as an opportunity to demonstrate America's unrivaled power and new freedom of action in the post-Cold War world, where the Soviet Union could no longer deter Washington. Bush also heralded the "war" (really a one-sided imperial assault) as marking the end of the "Vietnam Syndrome," the reigning political culture's curious term for U.S. citizens' reluctance to commit U.S. troops to murderous imperial mayhem.

As Chomsky observed in 1992, reflecting on U.S. efforts to maximize suffering in Vietnam by blocking economic and humanitarian assistance to the nation it had devastated: "No degree of cruelty is too great for Washington sadists."

But Uncle Sam was only getting warmed up building his Iraqi body count in early 1991. Five years later, Bill Clinton's U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright told CBS News' Leslie Stahl that the death of 500,000 Iraqi children due to U.S.-led economic sanctions imposed after the first "Persian Gulf War" (a curious term for a one-sided U.S. assault) was a "price ... worth paying" for the advancement of inherently noble U.S. goals.

"The United States," Secretary Albright explained three years later, "is good. We try to do our best everywhere."

In the years following the collapse of the counter-hegemonic Soviet empire, however, American neoliberal intellectuals like Thomas Friedman—an advocate of the criminal U.S. bombing of Serbia—felt free to openly state that the real purpose of U.S. foreign policy was to underwrite the profits of U.S.-centered global capitalism. "The hidden hand of the market," Friedman famously wrote in The New York Times Magazine in March 1999, as U.S. bombs and missiles exploded in Serbia, "will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps."

In a foreign policy speech Sen. Barack Obama gave to the Chicago Council of Global Affairs on the eve of announcing his candidacy for the U.S. presidency in the fall of 2006, Obama had the audacity to say the following in support of his claim that U.S. citizens supported "victory" in Iraq: "The American people have been extraordinarily resolved. They have seen their sons and daughters killed or wounded in the streets of Fallujah."



It was a spine-chilling selection of locales. In 2004, the ill-fated city was the site of colossal U.S. war atrocities, crimes including the indiscriminate murder of thousands of civilians, the targeting even of ambulances and hospitals, and the practical leveling of an entire city by the U.S. military in April and November. By one account, "Incoherent Empire," Michael Mann wrote:

The U.S. launched two bursts of ferocious assault on the city, in April and November of 2004 ... [using] devastating firepower from a distance which minimizes U.S. casualties. In April ... military commanders claimed to have precisely targeted ... insurgent forces, yet the local hospitals reported that many or most of the casualties were civilians, often women, children, and the elderly... [reflecting an] intention to kill civilians generally. ... In November ... [U.S.] aerial assault destroyed the only hospital in insurgent territory to ensure that this time no one would be able to document civilian casualties. U.S. forces then went through the city, virtually destroying it. Afterwards, Fallujah looked like the city of Grozny in Chechnya after Putin's Russian troops had razed it to the ground.

The "global policeman's" deployment of radioactive ordnance (depleted uranium) in Fallujah created an epidemic of infant mortality, birth defects, leukemia and cancer there.

### **'Bug-Splat'**

Fallujah was just one especially graphic episode in a broader arch-criminal invasion that led to the premature deaths of at least 1 million Iraqi civilians and left Iraq as what Tom Engelhardt called "a disaster zone on a catastrophic scale hard to match in recent memory." It reflected the same callous mindset behind the Pentagon's early computer program name for ordinary Iraqis certain to be killed in the 2003 invasion: "bug-splat." America's petro-imperial occupation led to the death of as many as one million Iraqi "bugs" (human beings). According to the respected journalist Nir Rosen in December 2007, "Iraq has been killed. ... [T]he American occupation has been more disastrous than that of the Mongols who sacked Baghdad in the thirteenth century."

As the Senate is poised to confirm an alleged torturer as CIA director it is important to remember that along with death in Iraq came ruthless and racist torture. In an essay titled "I Helped Create ISIS," Vincent Emanuele, a former U.S. Marine, recalled his enlistment in an operation that gave him nightmares more than a decade later:

I think about the hundreds of prisoners we took captive and tortured in

makeshift detention facilities. ... I vividly remember the marines telling me about punching, slapping, kicking, elbowing, kneeling and head-butting Iraqis. I remember the tales of sexual torture: forcing Iraqi men to perform sexual acts on each other while marines held knives against their testicles, sometimes sodomizing them with batons. ... [T]hose of us in infantry units ... round[ed] up Iraqis during night raids, zip-tying their hands, black-bagging their heads and throwing them in the back of HUMVEEs and trucks while their wives and kids collapsed to their knees and wailed. ... Some of them would hold hands while marines would butt-stroke the prisoners in the face. ... [W]hen they were released, we would drive them from the FOB (Forward Operating Base) to the middle of the desert and release them several miles from their homes. ... After we cut their zip-ties and took the black bags off their heads, several of our more deranged marines would fire rounds from their AR-15s into their air or ground, scaring the recently released captives. Always for laughs. Most Iraqis would run, still crying from their long ordeal.

The award-winning journalist Seymour Hersh told the ACLU about the existence of classified Pentagon evidence files containing films of U.S.-“global policeman” soldiers sodomizing Iraqi boys in front of their mothers behind the walls of the notorious Abu Ghraib prison. “You haven’t begun to see [all the] ... evil, horrible things done [by U.S. soldiers] to children of women prisoners, as the cameras run,” Hersh told an audience in Chicago in the summer of 2014.

It isn’t just Iraq where Washington has wreaked sheer mass murderous havoc in the Middle East, always a region of prime strategic significance to the U.S. thanks to its massive petroleum resources. In a recent Truthdig reflection on Syria, historian Dan Lazare reminds us that:

[Syrian President Assad’s] Baathist crimes pale in comparison to those of the U.S., which since the 1970s has invested trillions in militarizing the Persian Gulf and arming the ultra-reactionary petro-monarchies that are now tearing the region apart. The U.S. has provided Saudi Arabia with crucial assistance in its war on Yemen, it has cheered on the Saudi blockade of Qatar, and it has stood by while the Saudis and United Arab Emirates send in troops to crush democratic protests in neighboring Bahrain. In Syria, Washington has worked hand in glove with Riyadh to organize and finance a Wahhabist holy war that has reduced a once thriving country to ruin.

Chomsky has called Barack Obama’s targeted drone assassination program “the most extensive global terrorism campaign the world has yet seen.” The program “officially is aimed at killing people who the administration believes might

someday intend to harm the U.S. and killing anyone else who happens to be nearby." As Chomsky adds, "It is also a terrorism generating campaign—that is well understood by people in high places. When you murder somebody in a Yemen village, and maybe a couple of other people who are standing there, the chances are pretty high that others will want to take revenge."

### **The Last, Best Hope**

"We lead the world," presidential candidate Obama explained, "in battling immediate evils and promoting the ultimate good. ... America is the last, best hope of earth."

Obama elaborated in his first inaugural address. "Our security," the president said, "emanates from the justness of our cause; the force of our example; the tempering qualities of humility and restraint"—a fascinating commentary on Fallujah, Hiroshima, the U.S. crucifixion of Southeast Asia, the "Highway of Death" and more.

Within less than half a year of his inauguration and his lauded Cairo speech, Obama's rapidly accumulating record of atrocities in the Muslim world would include the bombing of the Afghan village of Bola Boluk. Ninety-three of the dead villagers torn apart by U.S. explosives in Bola Boluk were children. "In a phone call played on a loudspeaker on Wednesday to outraged members of the Afghan Parliament," *The New York Times* reported, "the governor of Farah Province ... said that as many as 130 civilians had been killed." According to one Afghan legislator and eyewitness, "the villagers brought two tractor trailers full of pieces of human bodies to his office to prove the casualties that had occurred. Everyone at the governor's cried, watching that shocking scene." The administration refused to issue an apology or to acknowledge the "global policeman's" responsibility.

By telling and sickening contrast, Obama had just offered a full apology and fired a White House official because that official had scared New Yorkers with an ill-advised Air Force One photo-shoot flyover of Manhattan that reminded people of 9/11. The disparity was extraordinary: Frightening New Yorkers led to a full presidential apology and the discharge of a White House staffer. Killing more than 100 Afghan civilians did not require any apology.

Reflecting on such atrocities the following December, an Afghan villager was moved to comment as follows: "Peace prize? He's a killer. ... Obama has only brought war to our country." The man spoke from the village of Armal, where a crowd of 100 gathered around the bodies of 12 people, one family from a single home. The 12 were killed, witnesses reported, by U.S. Special Forces during a late-night raid.

Obama was only warming up his “killer” powers. He would join with France and other NATO powers in the imperial decimation of Libya, which killed more than 25,000 civilians and unleashed mass carnage in North Africa. The U.S.-led assault on Libya was a disaster for black Africans and sparked the biggest refugee crisis since World War II.

Two years before the war on Libya, the Obama administration helped install a murderous right-wing coup regime in Honduras. Thousands of civilians and activists have been murdered by that regime.

The clumsy and stupid Trump has taken the imperial baton from the elegant and silver-tongued “imperial grandmaster” Obama, keeping the superpower’s vast global military machine set on kill. As Newsweek reported last fall, in a news item that went far below the national news radar screen in the age of the endless insane Trump clown show:

According to research from the nonprofit monitoring group Airwars ... through the first seven months of the Trump administration, coalition air strikes have killed between 2,800 and 4,500 civilians. ... Researchers also point to another stunning trend—the ‘frequent killing of entire families in likely coalition airstrikes.’ In May, for example, such actions led to the deaths of at least 57 women and 52 children in Iraq and Syria. ... In Afghanistan, the U.N. reports a 67 percent increase in civilian deaths from U.S. airstrikes in the first six months of 2017 compared to the first half of 2016.

That Trump murders with less sophistication, outward moral restraint and credible claim to embody enlightened Western values and multilateral commitment than Obama did is perhaps preferable to some degree. It is better for empire to be exposed in its full and ugly nakedness, to speed its overdue demise.

The U.S. is not just the top menace only to peace on Earth. It is also the leading threat to personal privacy (as was made clearer than ever by the Edward Snowden revelations), to democracy (the U.S. funds and equips repressive regimes around the world) and to a livable global natural environment (thanks in no small part to its role as headquarters of global greenhouse gassing and petro-capitalist climate denial).

The world can be forgiven, perhaps, if it does not join Eliot Cohen and Karl Vick in bemoaning the end of the “American Era,” whatever Trump’s contribution to that decline, which was well underway before he entered the Oval Office.

Ordinary Americans, too, can find reasons to welcome the decline of the American empire. As Chomsky noted in the late 1960s: “The costs of empire are in general

distributed over the society as a whole, while its profits revert to a few within.”

The Pentagon system functions as a great form of domestic corporate welfare for high-tech “defense” (empire) firms like Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Raytheon—this while it steals trillions of dollars that might otherwise meet social and environmental needs at home and abroad. It is a significant mode of upward wealth distribution within “the homeland.”

The biggest costs have fallen on the many millions killed and maimed by the U.S. military and allied and proxy forces in the last seven decades and before. The victims include the many U.S. military veterans who have killed themselves, many of them haunted by their own participation in sadistic attacks and torture on defenseless people at the distant command of sociopathic imperial masters determined to enforce U.S. hegemony by any and all means deemed necessary.

*This [article](#) originally appeared on TruthDig.*

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## Ecuador Hints It May Hand Over Assange

Julian Assange has remained incommunicado for more than six weeks and as his health deteriorates many of his former supporters have remained silent too, says James Cogan.

**By James Cogan**



Julian Assange is in immense danger. Remarks made this week by Ecuador’s foreign minister suggest that her government may be preparing to renege on the political asylum it granted to the WikiLeaks editor in 2012 and hand him over to British and then American authorities.

On March 28, under immense pressure from the British and U.S. governments, Ecuador imposed a complete ban on Assange having any Internet or phone contact with the outside world, and blocked his friends and supporters from physically visiting him. For 46 days, he has not been heard from.

Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Maria Fernanda Espinosa stated in a Spanish-language interview on Wednesday that her government and Britain “have the intention and the interest that this be resolved.” Moves were underway, she said, to reach a “definite agreement” on Assange.

If Assange falls into the hands of the British state, he faces being turned over to the U.S. Last year, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions stated that putting Assange on trial for espionage was a “priority.” CIA director Mike Pompeo, now secretary of state, asserted that WikiLeaks was a “non-state hostile intelligence service.”

In 2010, WikiLeaks courageously published information leaked by then Private Bradley [now Chelsea] Manning that exposed war crimes committed by American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. WikiLeaks also published, in partnership with some of the world’s major newspapers, tens of thousands of secret diplomatic cables, exposing the daily anti-democratic intrigues of U.S. imperialism and numerous other governments.

For that, Assange was relentlessly persecuted by the Obama administration. By November 2010, it had

convened a secret grand jury and had a warrant issued for his arrest on charges of espionage—charges that can carry the death sentence. The then Labor Party government in Australia headed by Prime Minister Julia Gillard threw Assange, an Australian citizen, to the wolves. It refused to provide him any defense and declared it would work with the U.S. to have him detained and put on trial.

On June 19, 2012, under conditions in which he faced extradition to Sweden to answer questions over fabricated allegations of sexual assault, and the prospect of rendition to the United States, Assange sought asylum in the Ecuador’s embassy in London.

Since that time, for nearly six years, he has been largely confined to a small room with no direct sunlight. He has been prevented from leaving, even to obtain medical treatment, by the British government’s insistence it will arrest him for breaching bail as soon as he sets foot outside the embassy.

## **Silenced**

Now, for six weeks and three days, he has been denied even the right to communicate.

Jennifer Robinson, the British-based Australian lawyer who has represented Assange since 2010, told the London *Times* in an interview this month: “His health situation is terrible. He’s had a problem with his shoulder for a very

long time. It requires an MRI [magnetic resonance imaging scan], which cannot be done within the embassy. He's got dental issues. And then there's the long-term impact of not being outside, his visual impairment. He wouldn't be able to see further than from here to the end of this hallway."

The effort to haul Assange before a U.S. court is inseparable from the broader campaign underway by the American state and allied governments to impose sweeping censorship on the Internet. Lurid allegations of "Russian meddling" in the 2016 U.S. election and denunciations of "fake news" have been used to demand that Google, Facebook and other conglomerates block users from accessing websites that publish critical commentary and exposures of the ruling class and its agencies—including WikiLeaks, Consortium News and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

WikiLeaks has been absurdly denounced as "pro-Russia" because it published leaks from the U.S. Democratic Party National Committee that revealed the anti-democratic intrigues the party's leaders carried out to undermine the campaign of Bernie Sanders in the 2016 presidential primary elections. It also published leaked speeches of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton that further exposed her intimate relations with Wall Street banks and companies.

As part of the justification for Internet censorship, U.S. intelligence agencies allege, without any evidence, that the information was hacked by Russian operatives and supplied to WikiLeaks to undermine Clinton and assist Trump—whom Moscow purportedly considered the "lesser evil."

In response to the hysterical allegations, WikiLeaks broke its own tradition of not commenting on its sources. It publicly denied that Russia was the source of the leaks. That has not prevented the campaign from continuing, with Assange even being labelled "the Kremlin's useful idiot" in pro-Democratic Party circles. WikiLeaks is blamed for Clinton's defeat, not the reality, that tens of millions of American workers were repulsed by her right-wing, pro-war campaign and refused to vote for her.

### **Silence of Former Supporters**

Under conditions in which the Ecuadorian government has capitulated to great power pressure and is collaborating with British and U.S. agencies to break Assange, there is an almost universal and reprehensible silence on the part of dozens of organizations and hundreds of individuals who once claimed to defend him and WikiLeaks.

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which in February 2016 condemned Assange's persecution as "a form of arbitrary detention" and called

for his release, has issued no statement on his current situation.

In Britain, the Labour Party and its leader Jeremy Corbyn have said nothing on the actions by Ecuador. Nor have they opposed the determination of the Conservative government to arrest Assange if he leaves the embassy.

In Australia, the current Liberal-National government and Labor leadership are just as complicit. The Greens, which claimed to oppose the persecution of Assange, have not made any statement in Parliament or issued a press release, let alone called for public protests. Hundreds of editors, journalists, academics, artists and lawyers across the country who publicly defended WikiLeaks in 2010 and 2011 are now mute.

A parallel situation prevails across Europe and in the U.S.. The so-called parties of the “left” and the trade unions are all tacitly endorsing the vicious drive against Assange.

Around the world, pseudo-left organizations, anxious not to disrupt their sordid relations with the parties of the political establishment and the trade union apparatuses, are likewise silent.

If Assange is imprisoned or worse, and WikiLeaks shut down, it will be a serious blow to the democratic rights of the entire international working class.

*A version of this [article](#) originally appeared on WSW.*

**James Cogan is the national secretary of the [Socialist Equality Party Australia](#).**

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## The EU Will Not Stand by Iran

While European leaders have made noises that they will defy Donald Trump’s reneging on the Iran nuclear deal and resist U.S. sanctions, in the end the Europeans will give in to U.S., argues Alexander Mercouris in this commentary.

**By Alexander Mercouris**



Ever since Donald Trump’s announcement that the U.S. would pull out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (“JCPOA”) with Iran and would unilaterally impose across-the-board sanctions on that country, a procession of European leaders including the leaders of the U.S.’s most powerful European allies – Britain, France and Germany – have publicly declared their intention to stand by the JCPOA.



There is also brave talk of the EU creating safeguards for European companies which in defiance of the U.S. continue to trade or do business with Iran.

President Rouhani of Iran – who has a big personal stake in the JCPOA, which he personally negotiated – has for his part said that Iran will for the time being abide by the terms of the JCPOA whilst it waits to see how Europe will react.

In the meantime the talk of the EU standing up to the U.S. over the JCPOA has increased talk – or hope – that a corner in U.S.-EU relations has been turned, and that the EU will henceforth increasingly defy the U.S., making Donald Trump's decision to pull out of the JCPOA a further step in the decline of U.S. power. These words of Craig Murray's may stand as a good example:

“We are yet to see the detail, but by all precedent Trump's Iran sanctions will also sanction third country companies which trade with Iran, at the least through attacking their transactions through U.S. financial institutions and by sanctioning their U.S. affiliates.

But at a time when U.S. share of the world economy and world trade is steadily shrinking, this encouragement to European and Asian companies to firewall and minimise contact with the U.S. is most unlikely to be long term beneficial to the U.S. In particular, in a period where it is already obvious that the years of the U.S. dollar's undisputed dominance as the world currency of reference are drawing to a close, the incentive to employ non-U.S. linked means of financial transaction will add to an already highly significant global trend.

In short, if the U.S. fails to prevent Europe and Asia's burgeoning trade with Iran – and I think they will fail – this moment will be seen by historians as a key marker in U.S. decline as a world power.”

I do not share these expectations or these hopes.

Whilst there is no doubt European leaders are deeply shocked by Trump's announcement of a pullout from an international agreement in negotiating which the EU played a large part, I strongly doubt that they will find the courage or the willpower to defy the U.S. by in effect encouraging their companies to continue to do business with Iran.

### **Market Size Matters**

It should be said that even with such active encouragement it is unlikely in my opinion that big European companies like Daimler or Airbus will risk U.S. fines by continuing to do business with Iran. Even if European governments were to guarantee them against any losses caused by such fines, they would worry about

losing access to the U.S. market, which utterly dwarfs Iran's.

Given the head of steam that has built up inside the Trump administration against Iran, only if the EU were to threaten publicly to impose reciprocal sanctions on U.S. businesses doing business in the European Single Market might there be a real possibility of the US being deterred from imposing penalties on European companies which continue to do business with Iran.

Frankly I think there is no prospect of that happening because there is no unanimity within the EU behind it (Poland and the Baltic States would certainly oppose it) whilst I am sure that even the big EU states – Britain, Germany, France, and Italy – would in the end be unwilling to risk an all out rupture with the U.S. on such an issue.

Quite simply, though the Europeans are anxious to trade with Iran and to do business with Iran, Iran is not big enough, and trade with Iran is not important enough, to make the risk of an all-out rupture with the U.S. worthwhile.

I am sure that the Europeans – angry though they certainly are – will therefore in the end knuckle down, and do as the U.S. tells them to do.

That almost certainly means that the JCPOA is doomed. The Iranians have made clear that they will not stick with it if there are no economic benefits to them from doing so. I expect within a few weeks – as it becomes increasingly clear that the EU is not prepared to defy the U.S. – that the Iranian nuclear programme will resume with a vengeance.

At that point the danger of a U.S., Israeli and Saudi attack on Iran will grow.

In fact this episode has been a profoundly humiliating one for Europe, exposing the extent of its powerlessness.

Not only did Trump ignore pleas to stand by the JCPOA from the U.S.'s closest European allies – Merkel, Macron and May – but he apparently did not even inform them in advance of the sweeping sanctions on Iran which he had decided to impose.

The European leader who has come out worst from this affair is France's vain and foolish President Emmanuel Macron.

Macron appears to have genuinely believed that he had forged some sort of personal relationship with Trump, and that France's contribution to the U.S.'s recent strike on Syria had made this bond even stronger.

In reality what Macron's recent trip to Washington has done is simply expose the extent to which Trump and the U.S. take neither him nor France seriously. All

his pleas were ignored, whilst his fawning behaviour towards Trump apparently went down badly back home.

As for Angela Merkel, she at least avoided in her trip to Washington the disastrous optics of Macron's visit. She is far too skilled and experienced a politician to be caught out in that way.

However no-one should be in any doubt that it is Merkel's disastrous leadership of Germany and of Europe which has brought Europe to this pass.

### **Merkel, Macron and May, Not Maggie**

Ever since she became German Chancellor she has repeatedly sacrificed European and German interests in order to avoid rocking the boat with the U.S.

In July 2014 she took the fateful step of supporting the U.S.'s demand for sectoral sanctions against Russia even though these were contrary to German economic interests, in effect legitimising the U.S. practice of imposing unilateral sanctions without the agreement of the UN Security Council. That makes it all but impossible to see how she can realistically oppose such sanctions now.

The contrast with Margaret Thatcher – who in the 1980s vigorously opposed unilateral U.S. sanctions intended to block Russian pipeline projects – is instructive.

In fact European behaviour over the JCPOA has been a textbook case of appeasement.

Instead of telling Donald Trump that a unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA would be contrary to international law – which it is – and that Europe would strongly oppose US withdrawal from an international agreement which was not only working but with which Iran is abiding, European leaders like Merkel, Macron and May instead told Trump that they agreed with him that the JCPOA was in some way “imperfect” and would have to be “improved”.

Needless to say that not only failed to persuade Donald Trump to stick with the JCPOA; it almost certainly emboldened him, convincing him that he is right to pull out of it.

Trump's decision to pull out of the JCPOA and to impose sweeping unilateral sanctions on Iran will undoubtedly embitter European opinion against the U.S. It is also likely to make Europe more resistant to any further U.S. pressure to ramp up sanctions against Russia. Unlike trade with Iran, European and especially German trade with Russia is indispensable for the European and German

economies, which explains why constant U.S. pressure on Germany to pull out of the Nord Stream 2 project has been resisted.

In the longer term this episode probably will harden further the anti-U.S. trend in voting on the part of European electorates, though it is worth pointing out that some of the right wing 'populist' European politicians who have benefitted from this process are not friends of Iran's.

However in the immediate term Iran's economic salvation as it finds itself under renewed sanctions pressure will come not from Europe but from Russia and China and the other Eurasian states.

*This commentary originally appeared on [The Duran](#).*

**Alexander Mercouris is a political commentator and the editor-in-chief of [The Duran](#).**

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## Trump's War Against Iran

An apparent coordination between Trump leaving the Iran deal and Israeli attacks on Iranian targets in Syria portend an attack on Iran itself, says Eric S. Margolis.

**By Eric S. Margolis**



Israel attacked alleged Iranian military positions in Syria on Tuesday, just [one hour](#) after Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the nuclear deal with Tehran. Are these big steps forward in the plan by Israel's leader Benjamin Netanyahu and his ally Trump to provoke a major war with Iran?

The U.S., Saudi Arabia and Israel all recently suffered a stinging defeat in Syria. Their campaign to overthrow the Assad government in Damascus by using the rag-tag ISIS movement, and other jihadist wild men, was defeated by the Syrian Army, backed by Russian air power, Lebanon's Hezbollah and some Iranian militia groups and army advisors.

The alleged Iranian rocket barrage, supposedly in response to Tuesday's attack, was directed at the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights that were illegally annexed and occupied after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and are still held, legally, as part of Syria. Israel is very nervous about having world attention drawn to its continued occupation of the strategic Golan Heights from which Israeli heavy

artillery can reach Damascus.

Israel now claims to have wiped out more than a score of Iranian positions in Syria. As far as we can tell, these were minor logistics or communications facilities, not the backbone of a supposed Iranian offensive against Israel. Iran is in Syria at the invitation of the Syrian government.

### **Neocon Takeover Complete**

But now that the Trump administration has fallen fully under the influence of the pro-war neocons, an attempt to overthrow the Iranian government appears highly likely, using both military intervention and intensified economic warfare.



Iran has been under siege by the U.S. since the American/British installed shah was overthrown by a popular revolution in 1979. The CIA and Britain's MI6 have mounted numerous attempts to oust the Islamic Republic and re-install a client ruler.

Ironically, the 'democratic' western powers – the U.S., Britain and France – rely on medieval monarchs and dictators to control the Mideast while democratic politicians and movements are ignored, suppressed or overthrown. Iran, in spite of its many rigidities and failings, remains one of the region's more democratic states. Ask our Saudi or Kuwaiti allies when was the last time they held a real election?

The failure of Western intelligence services to provoke serious uprisings in Iran (or Russia), means that the military option is increasingly tempting. This probably means provoking military clashes with Iran in the Gulf leading to full-scale attacks on its nuclear infrastructure and industry. U.S. warplanes and warships are actively probing Iran's borders. In addition, U.S. forces are getting ever more deeply involved in the Yemen War.

When the U.S. last considered a major attack on Iran during the Bush years, the

Pentagon (which opposed the idea) estimated it would need 2,800 air strikes against Iran on Day One alone.

Many of the same war party crowd that engineered the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq are now running the Trump administration. Their goal is to cripple Iran and leave the Mideast to joint Saudi-Egyptian-Israeli control.

Recall President George W. Bush's assertion that once he had crushed Iraq the next targets of U.S. military intervention would be Lebanon, Syria, Iran and then Pakistan.

### **No Cake Walk**

America controls the skies from Morocco to Afghanistan. Iran is vulnerable to raids and small incursions but subjugating this large, mountainous nation of 80 million would be very difficult.

In fact, as an Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander once told me, 'let the Americans invade. They will break their teeth on Iran.' Over-confidence, of course, but he had a point. Fighting on the defensive in urban areas, Iran could offer fierce resistance.

America's imperial machine, like its British Imperial predecessor, likes small, easy wars against small, backwards nations. Iran would be very different.

As we have just seen with North Korea, Iran's best survival strategy, short of security guarantees by Russia and China, would be to race to produce a small number of nuclear weapons to deter attacks by the U.S. and Israel. Europe, which co-sponsored the Iran nuclear act and is now humiliated by Trump reneging on the deal, is too weak and disorganized to guarantee the pact and stand up to Washington. This is too bad. Now would have been a fine time for the EU to assert its independence from U.S. hegemony and begin building its own independent European military forces.

*A version of this article first appeared on [CommonDreams](#). Copyright Eric S. Margolis 2018*

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for Afghanistan and Asia” and “American Raj, How the U.S. Rules the Mideast”.

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## Trump’s Iran Debacle: What Will Germany and Russia Do?

It falls to Germany to save the Iran nuclear deal and try to prevent a devastating new Middle East War, argues Daniel Lazare.

By **Daniel Lazare** *Special to Consortium News*



In the wake of Donald Trump’s thoroughly unsurprising decision to scuttle the Iran nuclear accord, two countries that may be most in the hot seat are Germany and Russia. The big question now is whether their mutual discomfort leads them to find common cause.

Angela Merkel’s plight is especially painful. Not only are Germany’s extensive business links with Iran at risk thanks to Trump’s decision to re-apply sanctions, but the German chancellor’s political fortunes have taken a beating thanks to years of American incompetence in the Middle East.

In Libya, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton devoted two weeks during the 2011 Arab Spring to persuading Qatar to join the anti-Gaddafi coalition, only to stand by and watch as the oil-rich emirate seized the opportunity to distribute some \$400 million to murderous Salafist rebels spreading anarchy from one end of the country to the other. The result was a failed state that soon turned into a jumping-off point for hundreds of thousands of desperate refugees making their way to Germany and other parts of the European Union.

Remarkably, Clinton did the same thing a few months later in Syria by teaming up with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other Arab gulf states to fund what would soon become a full-scale Islamist invasion. The upshot: more murder and mayhem, more refugees, and more terrorism when ISIS – funded by the Saudis and Qataris according to no less an authority than Clinton herself – decided to extend its jihad to Paris, Brussels, Nice, Manchester, Barcelona, and Berlin starting in November 2015. As if that weren’t enough, Washington irritated its German partners by opposing the Nord Stream II natural gas pipeline, a Russo-German project headed by ex-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and then, under Trump, by pulling out of the Paris climate accords last June.

## Untutored Ambassador

A bruised and battered Merkel thus saw her share of the vote shrink by more than twenty percent in last September's German federal

election while the anti-immigrant Alternative für Deutschland saw its portion more than double. Now, Trump's decision to dump the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as the Iran nuclear agreement is formally known, is making matters much, much worse. First, Israel took advantage of the move to launch its biggest attack on Syria since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, raising prospects that Middle East chaos may be poised for yet another upsurge. Then US Ambassador Richard Grenell showed what America really thinks of its German partners by tweeting: "As @realDonaldTrump said, US sanctions will target critical sectors of Iran's economy. German companies doing business in Iran should wind down operations immediately."

Grenell, a former Fox News commentator, sounded like an all-too-typical American boss barking an order at an unpaid intern. Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn described the tweet as an "impertinence" while Andrea Nahles, leader of the center-left German Social Democrats, said: "It's not my task to teach people about the fine art of diplomacy, especially not the US ambassador. But he does appear to need some tutoring."

Quite right. But Germany is not the only one feeling the pain – Russia is too. It is allied with Iran in support of Syria's embattled president Bashar al-Assad, yet has somehow managed to maintain good relations with Israel. This is why Putin invited Benjamin Netanyahu to be his personal guest at this week's May 9 Victory Day celebrations in Moscow where the Israeli prime minister joined Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic in laying a wreath on the Soviet Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. When Putin paid tribute to the Soviet troops "who saved Europe and the world from slavery, from the horrors of the Holocaust," by defeating Nazi Germany (quote begins at 2:00), there was no doubt as to whom he was addressing.

But the celebration also featured a traditional Red Square military parade featuring not only unmanned robo-tanks and Sukhoi Su-57 stealth fighters, but mobile batteries of anti-aircraft missiles. Less than twelve hours later, Netanyahu showed his thanks by destroying at least five Russian-made anti-aircraft batteries as part of the assault on Syria. According to the Israeli military, Israel notified Russia of the impending attack via "deconfliction" procedures in place since September 2015 – which means that Russia more or less assented to the destruction of its own defense systems.

## It's Up to Germany



This can't go on, especially with Israel intervening ever more heavily on the side of pro-Al Qaeda rebels whom Russia, Iran, and Syria are trying to repel. The more the battle intensifies, the more impossible Putin's position will become.

The man needs back-up, but from where? The answer lies in the other signatories to the JCPOA – China, the UK, France, and Germany. But the first is preoccupied with events in the Far East, the second is in political disarray, while the third is a joke thanks to the preening and arrogant Emmanuel Macron. That leaves Germany. If it provided Russia with even a modicum of support, the upshot could be a major shift in the way the deadly game of Middle East politics is played.

Germany has real clout with regard to the Jewish state. It is Israel's biggest trading partner in Europe and, after the US, its second largest trading partner overall. It is an important cultural and scientific partner, while Berlin, in one of history's more delectable ironies, is now home to one of Israel's largest expatriate communities, some 15,000 Jews and Arabs who find life in the German capital freer and more vibrant than back home and, as a consequence, have peppered it with Hebrew-language kindergartens, a Hebrew library, a Hebrew literary magazine, a Hanukkah market, and Iranian-Israeli techno parties.

The same goes for Germany and Iran. As Gary Leupp recently pointed out in *Counterpunch*, Germany comprises sixty percent of EU investment in the Islamic state where it sells machinery, metals, chemicals, and agricultural products. With Daimler recently signing an agreement with Iranian Khodro to produce Mercedes-Benz motor vehicles, its investments are currently increasing at a rate of around about twenty-five percent per year.

Amid inflation, a currency crisis, and a growing strike wave, Iran is grateful for such business and desperate for more. So when Germany talks, it listens. Syria, much of which resembles postwar Berlin after a half-dozen years of imperialist assault, would listen as well if Germany gave it half a chance. Indeed, it would be so grateful for the slightest olive branch that Damascenes would no doubt take to the streets in celebration.

### **Walking on *Eierschalen***

So a joint Russo-German diplomatic offensive could provide the basis for a genuine realignment. Needless to say, there are a thousand and one reasons why this won't occur. Germany walks on eggshells when it comes to Israel for obvious historical reasons and is therefore reluctant to do anything that might anger the Jewish state. It routinely defers to the US, which midwived the German Federal Republic in 1949 and provided it with a veneer of political

legitimacy in the ensuing decades. Public intellectuals like Jürgen Habermas have made careers out of arguing that Germany's future lies in deeper and deeper integration with the liberal west, while NATO and the EU insure a deepening western orientation as well.

If Germany were to turn in the other direction, the protests would be deafening not only in Washington, Paris, and London, but in Berlin. They would be even more so in Poland, the Ukraine, and the Baltics where local nationalists, many leaning in an increasingly fascist direction, have come to rely on unbroken western support.

It would be a dangerous leap into the unknown on the part of a country that couldn't be more risk averse. But Germany may have no choice. Trump is nuts, American power is receding more rapidly than anyone would have thought possible two or three years ago, while western liberalism is crumbling as well. Hardliners are in control in Washington where Republicans and Democrats compete to see who can be more obsequious to Israel and more hostile to all things Russian. The same goes for Tel Aviv and Tehran where, thanks to Trump, the hardliners are equally in the saddle.

If there are two countries that know what can happen when the crazies are in control, it's Russia and Germany. But now that history has placed them in the same boat as it approaches the cataracts, Putin, for one, is rowing madly. Will Merkel lend a hand with the oars?

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## Iran Deal Partners Mull How to Confront 'Renegade' U.S.

With the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear deal and with Americans ordering Europeans to stop dealing with Tehran, the remaining signatories are trying to figure out how to confront the U.S., says Enrico Carisch.

**By Enrico Carisch**



What can the five remaining signatories to the Iran nuclear deal do now that the Trump administration has trampled on Security Council Resolution 2231 and its 13 binding decisions, adopted under Article 41 of the United Nations Charter, which codified the Iran nuclear deal into international law? Sooner or later, the other 14 members of the Security Council, especially Britain, China, France and Russia, must decide how to confront their renegade permanent member, the United States.

Otherwise, the Council may lose its unique authority to prevent and resolve conflicts.

Specifically, the question they may soon have to confront will be how they can protect the resolution and the companies that comply with it when doing business with Iranians, given that Iran is subject once again to new U.S. sanctions.

The first broadside against the companies of U.S. allies that are doing business with Iran came minutes after President Donald Trump announced his withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, on May 8. Richard Grenell, his ambassador to Germany (and spokesman for the U.S. at the UN from 2001-2008), tweeted, “German companies doing business in Iran should wind down operations immediately.”

The reaction was immediate, but it was outrage, not compliance, that German diplomatic and business leaders expressed.

“We have no understanding for the American call that German enterprises are expected to immediately drive down their business in Iran,” said Dieter Kempf, president of the Association of German Industry, a trade group. “German industry criticizes the application of extraterritorial sanctions that violate international law.”

French leaders lost no time in discussing countermeasures. Patrick Pouyanné, chief executive of the petroleum producer Total, is seeking European Union protection against likely American penalties for Total holding on to its 50.1 percent investment, worth close to \$4 billion, in Iran’s South Pars natural gas project.

For international companies caught between respecting Resolution 2231 and new U.S. sanctions, the easiest solution would be to obtain exemptions from the U.S. Treasury’s Office for Foreign Asset Control. But the office has signaled that there will be little leeway once it would “begin the process of implementing 90-day and 180-day wind-down periods” for activities that were – until now – permitted under the JCPOA.

## Hardliners Will Gain

Reuters has also reported that Steven Mnuchin, the U.S. treasury secretary, is throwing cold water on hopes that waivers or exemptions will be granted.

Regarding the huge 200-passenger aircraft deal that Iran signed with Boeing, the American company; and other deals with Airbus, the European aviation consortium, and ATR, a French-Italian company, Mnuchin said, "The Boeing and Airbus licenses will be revoked."

The Office for Foreign Asset Control has the ability to not only interfere with Boeing's sales but also the European manufacturers' dealings with Iran because "under the original deal, there were waivers for commercial aircraft, parts and services."

While exemptions may save some foreign companies' investments in Iran, those of strategic value to the country's development and military strength will likely become the battlefield between U.S. sanctions and the UN sanctions relief that were mandated in Resolution 2231.

The result of weak protection from U.S. sanctions on Iran will be Iranians' continued economic suffering. The sanctions-stunted commerce and development of their industries will almost certainly mean that President Hassan Rouhani will lose control of the government to hard-line conservatives.

In a repeat of the 2005 resurgence of Iran's conservatives, which is already fermenting, the country could turn into everything that Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel, have been deceptively claiming all along: that Iranians are aggressive nuclear proliferators and a threat to the regional Sunni hierarchy.

France, Germany, Britain and other European powers are united in trying to prevent a newly radicalized Iran from resuming enrichment of fissile material, which could trigger a new Middle East war. In a statement released immediately after Trump's announcement on May 8, Prime Minister Theresa May, Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Emmanuel Macron declared, "We, the E3, will remain parties to the JCPOA."

But Trump threatened in his speech from the White House, "Any nation that helps Iran in its quest for nuclear weapons could also be strongly sanctioned by the United States."

Nevertheless, the three European heads of state pledged, "Our governments remain committed to ensuring the agreement is upheld, and will work with all the remaining parties to the deal to ensure this remains the case including through

ensuring the continuing economic benefits to the Iranian people that are linked to the agreement.”

### The U.S. Military Threat

Regional stability is, however, an issue that the U.S. apparently intends to deal with militarily, according to a presidential memorandum released on May 8 by the White House. Under the heading “Preparing for Regional Contingencies,” Trump instructed the secretary of defense and heads of any other relevant agencies to “prepare to meet, swiftly and decisively, all possible modes of Iranian aggression against the United States, our allies, and our partners.

The Department of Defense shall ensure that the United States develops and retains the means to stop Iran from developing or acquiring a nuclear weapon and related delivery systems.”



Did this chilling directive mean that the U.S. was preparing preventive strikes against Iran’s ballistic missile development facilities? The answer came quicker than most

people would have expected.

Alleging a failed barrage of 20 Iranian missiles striking the Golan Heights, Israel’s defense forces (IDF) struck back at dozens of Hezbollah and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps positions based in Syria. However, neither the IDF website nor its spokesperson provided evidence for the alleged missiles attack. They also did not provide evidence, if the attacks did occur, that the missiles were fired by Iranian and not Syrian armed forces.

Citing Arab news channels, the Iranian news agency FARS reported only the Syrian army’s response. *Al Mayadeen* news channel, a media site based in Beirut, claimed

“that 50 rockets were fired at 4 Israeli military complex centers in occupied Golan,” whereas the Syrian Al-Alam news channel reported the firing of 68 missiles.

Failing to explain why Iran’s forces should suddenly launch a small, unsuccessful attack on Israel, IDF noted merely that “this is the first time that Iranian forces have directly fired at Israeli troops.” *The Guardian* said the “analysis of who is to blame for this outbreak of hostilities demands even more than usual skepticism and careful un-packaging.”

## **Stopping Trump**

So what can the Europeans do with China and Russia to stop the escalating violence between Israel and Iran and to blunt Trump’s undiplomatic – and possible military – assault on Iran and the tenuous state of Middle East peace?

Taking the matter to the Security Council makes little sense, as the 10 elected members have noted.

“Any attempts to discuss a new formula of the JCPOA minus U.S.A would be blocked,” explained several European and Asian representatives of the Council’s elected members, after Trump’s announcement. They assume that the U.S. ambassador, Nikki Hailey, is almost certainly under instructions to prevent further discussions about the Iran deal.

In addition, any proposed resolution asserting the primacy of Resolution 2231 over unilateral policies would, of course, be smacked down with a veto, as is the usual case with attempts to discuss Israeli threats – or provocations – to peace and security.

All of which now leaves the Security Council irrationally outmaneuvered.

It is one reason that Javad Zarif, Iran’s foreign minister, signaled his government’s commitment to continue collaborating with the rest of the world after the Trump announcement by offering to “spearhead a diplomatic effort to examine whether remaining JCPOA participants can ensure its full benefits for Iran.”

The signals from the remaining nuclear-deal signatories is that the strongest rebuke of Trump’s destructive move is to keep the deal’s formula, minus the U.S. participation, if they can do it.

*This article originally appeared on PassBlue.*

**Enrico Carisch has worked for the Security Council as an investigator on sanctions violations and was an investigative reporter for print and TV for 25**

years. He is co-author of the just-released book “The Evolution of UN Sanctions: From a Tool of Warfare to a Tool of Peace, Security and Human Rights.” He is also a co-founder and partner of Compliance and Capacity Skills International (CCSI), a New York-based group specializing in all aspects of sanctions regimes (<http://comcapint.com>).

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## The Coming War Against Iran

We’ve been through this before: the trumped-up threat from Iraq based on false evidence in 2003 is the harrowingly similar model to what is emerging for Iran in 2018, argues John Kiriakou.

By **John Kiriakou**



I spent nearly 15 years in the CIA. I like to think that I learned something there. I learned how the federal bureaucracy works. I learned that cowboys in government – in the CIA and elsewhere around government – can have incredible power over the creation of policy.

I learned that the CIA will push the envelope of legality until somebody in a position of authority pushes back. I learned that the CIA can wage war without any thought whatsoever as to how things will work out in the end. There’s never an exit strategy.

I learned all of that firsthand in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq. In the spring of 2002, I was in Pakistan working against al-Qaeda. I returned to CIA headquarters in May of that year and was told that several months earlier a decision had been made at the White House to invade Iraq. I was dumbfounded, and when told of the war plans could only muster, “But we haven’t caught bin Laden yet.” “The decision has already been made,” my supervisor told me. He continued, “Next year, in February, we’re going to invade Iraq, overthrow Saddam Hussein, and open the world’s largest air force base in southern Iraq.” He went on, “We’re going to go to the United Nations and pretend that we want a Security Council Resolution. But the truth is that the decision has already been made.”

Soon after, Secretary of State Colin Powell began traveling around Europe and the Middle East to cultivate support for the invasion. Sure enough, he also went to the United Nations and argued that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, necessitating an invasion and overthrow because that country posed an imminent threat to the United States.

But the whole case was built on a lie. A decision was made and then the “facts”

were created around the decision to support it. I think the same thing is happening now.

## **Iraq Redux**

First, Donald Trump said repeatedly during the 2016 campaign that he would pull out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) (which he did on Tuesday), also known as the Iran sanctions deal. The JCPOA allows for international inspectors to examine all of Iran's nuclear sites to ensure that the country is not enriching uranium and is not building a weapons program. In exchange, Western countries have lifted sanctions on Iran, allowing them to buy spare parts, medicines, and other things that they had been unable to acquire. Despite the protestations of conservatives in Congress and elsewhere, the JCPOA works. Indeed, the inspection regime is exactly the same one that the United Nations imposed on Iraq in the last two decades.

Trump has kept up his anti-Iran rhetoric since becoming president. More importantly, he has appointed Iran hawks to the two most important positions in foreign policy: former CIA Director Mike Pompeo as secretary of state and former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton as national security advisor. The two have made clear that their preferred policy toward Iran is "regime change," a policy that is actually prohibited by international law.

Perhaps the most troubling development, however, is the apparent de facto alliance against Iran by Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent "presentation" on what he called a clandestine Iranian nuclear weapons program was embarrassingly similar to Powell's heavily scripted speech before the UN Security Council 15 years earlier telling the world that Iraq had a program. That, too, was a lie.

## **Another Hyped Threat**

Saudi crown prince Muhammad bin Salman, the godfather of the Saudi war in Yemen, which in turn is a proxy war against Iran, recently made a grand tour of the United States and France talking about "the Iranian threat" at every turn. The rhetoric coming out of the UAE and Bahrain is at least as hostile as what has been spewed by the Saudis.

Meanwhile, there's silence on Capitol Hill. Just like there was in 2002.

I can tell you from firsthand experience, that I've seen this before. Our government is laying the groundwork for yet another war. Be on the lookout for several things. First, Trump is going to begin shouting about the "threat" from Iran. It will become a daily mantra. He'll argue that Iran is actively hostile and poses an immediate danger to the United States. Next Pompeo will head back



to the Middle East and Europe to garner support for military action. Then US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley will scream in front of the UN Security Council that the US has no choice but to protect itself and its allies from Iran. The final shoe to drop – a clear indication of war – will be if naval carrier battle groups are deployed to the eastern Mediterranean, the Arabian Sea, or the Persian Gulf. Sure, there's always one in the region anyway. But more than one is a provocation.

We have to be diligent in opposing this run into another war of choice. We can't be tricked or taken by surprise. Not again.

*This piece originally appeared at [RSN](#).*

**John Kiriakou is a former CIA counterterrorism officer and a former senior investigator with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. John became the sixth whistleblower indicted by the Obama administration under the Espionage Act – a law designed to punish spies. He served 23 months in prison as a result of his attempts to oppose the Bush administration's torture program.**

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## War Clouds Gather Around Iran

With Israel and Iran exchanging direct fire, Trump pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal and John Bolton promoting regime change in Tehran, Inder Comar offers four reasons why the US may be close to attacking the Islamic Republic.

**By Inder Comar**



In 1953, the United States' Central Intelligence Agency, with the help of the British government, orchestrated a coup against Iran's democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq.

Mossadeq had nationalized the Iranian oil industry, including the British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. This was unacceptable to the United Kingdom. A request to the United States for assistance led to "[Operation Ajax](#)," and the overthrow of Mossadeq.

Mossadeq's political successor was the Shah of Iran, who ruled with the support of the U.S. and the U.K. until 1979, when he was himself overthrown by a popular revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini.

None of this is secret. The CIA openly admitted that it was behind the coup in 2013.

While the coup is not a secret, it remains ancient history in the United States. Maybe even forgotten history.

But while the U.S. has forgotten, the rest of the world remembers. Iran certainly remembers.

And this history adds a weighty and grim perspective to the U.S. decision to walk away from the multi-party agreement with Iran related to nuclear development.

The fact of the matter is that the United States has already successfully sponsored regime change in Iran. And even more recently, the United States invaded Iran's neighbor, Iraq, under false pretenses to overthrow its government. The United States promised democracy, but instead, Iraqis were subjected to years of death and destruction, torture and ISIS.

The past is prologue. In the wake of the invasion of Iraq, the bombing of Libya, the support of rebel groups against Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and the support of a Saudi-led war of aggression in Yemen, the question on everyone's mind at this time is a terrible one: has the United States now committed itself to violent regime change in Iran?

Here are four reasons that point towards a potential attack against Iran in the near future.

**(1) President Trump is now openly committed to regime change.** This, according to the President's personal lawyer, former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

Trump thus joins in the opinion of his Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, who has been openly advocating for regime change since 2016.

Trump additionally joins his national security advisor, John Bolton, who also supports regime change. Bolton gave a speech in 2017 in which he promised members of an Iranian exile group, known as the Mujahedeen Khalq (MEK) that the Iranian regime would be toppled by 2019 – next year. Bolton was an early member and supporter of the Project for the New American Century, a now infamous non-profit that provided the intellectual framework for the invasion of Iraq.

**(2) The United States does not care about its international law obligations.** In any other nation, a political party that openly advocated for war and regime change in another country would be a scandal.

But in the United States, it is common place, an every-day affair.

In the Middle East (and elsewhere), the United States has blatantly disregarded its international legal obligations to maintain collective peace and security. The United States committed the crime of aggression against Iraq, and illegally sponsored armed militias in Syria as a means of overthrowing the Syrian government.

There are very clear international norms regarding the use of violence internationally—norms that are designed to keep global peace.

But time and time again, the United States has ignored them, and violated them.

These international rules might stop another country. But they will not pose any barrier to a U.S.-led invasion of or attack against Iran.

**(3) There is already a brewing conflict in Syria between Iran and Israel.** One of the biggest proponents of a U.S. walkaway from the

Iran deal was Benjamin Netanyahu, who gave a televised address in English on April 30, claiming that Iran could not be trusted.

In hindsight, the speech was nakedly aimed at convincing Trump to walk away from the deal. It worked. And just an hour after Trump's decision to tear up the deal, Israel was already bombing targets in Syria, trying it seems to provoke an Iranian response. Iran did respond with an ineffective rocket attack on the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, which on Thursday unleashed a full Israeli response on Iranian targets in Syria.

There is a real potential for a grave flashpoint in the coming weeks that could lead to a major war.

**(4) Imperialism and militarism, now dominant as cultural values in the United States, will make another war seem attractive to many Americans.** It is a sad, awful truth, but it is one that honest people have to confront: militarism is an accepted and glorified value in the United States.

The U.S. is a country where nearly two-thirds of the population support torture against suspect terrorists, and where more than forty percent of Americans think it was the "right decision" to invade Iraq in 2003—a war that has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands, produced millions of refugees, led to the rise of ISIS, and was done in blatant violation of international law.

The painful reality is that imperial values are ascendant in the United States.

A lonely, alienated mass of consumers, too spiritless to question the dominant narrative, will simply look the other way as their government targets another society for annihilation.

Democratic norms are lost even as a vast surveillance and killing machine is deployed abroad. Precious and inalienable freedoms are swiftly traded for the false glory of foreign wars and domination.

Spiritual decay sets in, violence ever more glorified, hierarchy and dictatorship seen as positive forces.

America is desperately in need of a cultural and spiritual change. But the good that America and Americans could do will never flower so long as war and aggression are accepted and celebrated.

*This article was originally published on Inder Comar's [blog](#).*

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## Haspel Says CIA Won't Torture Again as Ray McGovern is Dragged Out of Hearing

2nd UPDATE: After refusing to directly answer questions about her history as an alleged torturer, Ray McGovern decided to ask Gina Haspel a question or two of his own and he wound up in jail for it, reports Joe Lauria.

*Updated with news that McGovern returned home and details of him being charged with Unlawful Disruption of Congress and Resisting Arrest.*

**By Joe Lauria** *Special to Consortium News*



Instead of facing a judge to defend herself against prosecution for violating U.S. law prohibiting torture, 33-year CIA veteran Gina Haspel on Wednesday faced the Senate Intelligence Committee in a hearing to confirm her as director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Haspel does not look like someone who would be associated with torture. Instead she would not be out of place as your next door neighbor or as a kindly grade-school teacher. "I think you will find me to be a typical middle-class

American," she said in her opening statement.

Haspel is the face of America. She not only looks harmless, but looks like she wants to help: perhaps to recommend a good gardener to hire or to spread democracy around the globe while upholding human rights wherever they are violated.

But this perfectly typical middle class American personally supervised a black site in Thailand where terrorism suspects were waterboarded. It remains unclear whether she had a direct role in the torture. The CIA said she arrived at the black site after the waterboarding of senior al-Qaeda operative Abu Zubaydah had taken place. Some CIA officials disputed that to *The New York Times*. The newspaper also reported last year that Haspel ran the CIA Thai prison in 2002 when another suspect, Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, was waterboarded.

Even if she did not have a direct hand in overseeing the torture, she certainly acquiesced to it. And if that were not bad enough, Haspel

urged the destruction of 92 videotaped CIA "enhanced interrogations," conducted at the prison in Thailand, eliminating evidence in a clear-cut obstruction of justice to cover-up her own possible crimes.

At her public hearing Haspel refused to say that the torture was immoral. Instead she tried to romanticize her nefarious past in adolescent language about the spy trade, about going to secret meetings on "dark, moonless nights," in the "dusty back alleys of Third World capitals."

Haspel claimed to have a "strong moral compass." We really can't know because we only found out about what she did in Thailand in 2002 because of press reports. Just about everything else she did during her three decades at the agency remains shrouded in secrecy because she refused to declassify almost all of her record for the committee.

"Bloody Gina," as some CIA colleagues called her, told the hearing she would not re-institute the "enhanced interrogation" program if she became director. One wonders if the US were attacked again like on 9/11 if she would keep her vow, especially as she admitted nothing wrong with "enhanced interrogation" the first time.

Haspel testified that the U.S. has a new legal framework that governs detentions and interrogations forbidding what she refused to call torture. But the U.S. already had a law on the books against it when the Senate ratified the international Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment on October 21, 1994. Every time the U.S. "tortured some folks" after that, as Barack Obama put it, it broke U.S. law.

In speaking about it in a folksy way, Obama was minimizing the enormity of the crime and justifying his decision to not prosecute any American who may have taken part in it. That includes Haspel. So instead of facing the law she's facing a career promotion to one of the most powerful positions in the United States, if not the world.

### **McGovern Speaks Out**

Haspel tried to wiggle out of relentless questioning about whether she thought torture was immoral, let alone illegal. Completely ignoring U.S. ratification of the Convention Against Torture, Haspel clung to the new Army Field Manual, which contains a loophole in an annex added after 9/11 that justifies cruel punishment, but not specifically torture.

Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), who was tortured in Vietnam, had no doubts about Haspel. After the hearing he issued a statement saying, "Ms. Haspel's role in overseeing the use of torture by Americans is disturbing. Her refusal to acknowledge torture's immorality is disqualifying."



Because she wasn't giving any straight answers, Ray McGovern, a CIA veteran of 27 years and frequent contributor to Consortium News, stood up in the hearing room and began asking his own questions.

Capitol police were immediately ordered by the chairman, Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), to physically remove McGovern from the room. As he continued turning towards the committee to shout his questions, four officers hauled him out. They ominously accused him of resisting arrest. Once they got him into the hallway, rather than letting him go his way, four policemen wrestled him to the ground, re-injuring his dislocated left shoulder, as they attempted to cuff him.

After spending the night in jail, McGovern, 78, was to be arraigned on Thursday.

He has not responded to several voice messages left on his mobile phone. A police officer at Central Booking told Consortium News McGovern was no longer under their control and had been sent to court. According to DC Superior Court, he has been charged with Unlawful Disruption of Congress and Resisting Arrest. Ray returned home Thursday night.

McGovern was one of several people arrested before and during the hearing for speaking out. The spectacle of citizens of this country, and in Ray's case a veteran CIA officer, having to resort to disrupting a travesty of a hearing to put an alleged torturer in charge of the most powerful spy agency in the world is a disturbing indicator of how far we have come.

### **A Different Kind of Hearing**

In 1975, Sen. Frank Church (D-ID) conducted hearings that revealed a raft of criminality committed by the CIA, the National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation over a period of thirty years from the end of the Second World War. It has been more than 40 years since that Senate investigation. After the release of the CIA Torture Report by the Senate in 2014 and the revelations about the NSA by Edward Snowden, a new Church Committee-style expansive probe into the intelligence agencies is long overdue.

A central question it should ask is whether the CIA really serves the interests of the American people or rather the interests of its rulers, which the agency has done from its founding by Wall Street elites, such as its first director, Allen Dulles.

While the Republican-controlled intelligence committee may have partisan motives to launch such a new Church-like commission to look into the agencies' shenanigans in the Russia-gate fiasco, the majority of Republicans are hawks on intelligence matters and many support torture and want Haspel to be the next CIA director. For instance, Burr told Haspel: "You are without a doubt the most qualified person the president could choose to lead the CIA and the most prepared nominee in the 70-year history of the agency. You have acted morally, ethically and legally over a distinguished 30-year career."

None of this bodes well for the nation.

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# The Meaning of Verification in Iran, Syria and North Korea

Ronald Reagan said the US must trust & verify with Moscow. Both Iran & Syria complied with verified accords, yet Trump bombed Syria & pulled out of the Iran deal. What message does this send the DPRK, asks Ted Snider.

**By Ted Snider**



Donald Trump bombed Syria for allegedly using chemical weapons last month and he has now officially pulled out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear agreement with Iran.

But Syria officially has no chemical weapons and Iran has no nuclear ones. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) verified Syria to be chemical free, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has verified Iran's consistent and continued compliance with the JCPOA. To the best of anyone's knowledge, Syria has no chemicals and Iran has no nukes: that's what verification means.

## **Iran**

In 2015, Iran, the United States, Germany and all the permanent members of the Security Council (P5+1) signed the JCPOA. Every ninety days, the president of the United States has the opportunity to certify that Iran is implementing the agreement. If Iran is in compliance, the U.S. has to continue to honor the agreement; if Iran is not in compliance, the U.S. can pull out of the agreement. Iran is in compliance. The IAEA has repeatedly verified – in eleven consecutive reports since January 2016 – that Iran is fully complying with their obligations under the agreement.

In the absence of evidence, America has turned to deception and digging up dirt. Not able to discredit the deal, Trump tried to discredit the deal makers. Trump aides hired the private Israeli intelligence agency Black Cube to "get dirt" on key people in the Obama administration who played a role in negotiating the deal. The agency tried to find anything damaging on personal relationships, involvement with Iran-friendly lobbyists or political or personal benefit to the negotiators.

When dirt presumably wasn't found, the deal killers turned to deceit. Just two weeks before Trump's most recent opportunity to decertify the deal, Israeli



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu revealed to the world “proof” that “Iran lied, big time, after signing the nuclear deal in 2015.” Netanyahu displayed binders with over 50,000 paper files and a wall of CDs that he said were packed with the proof.

But Netanyahu was more Wizard of Oz than statesman. There was nothing behind the curtain. Netanyahu’s “significant new revelations” were a greatest hits tour of old songs that didn’t sell. The binders and discs contained nothing that the IAEA hadn’t seen and dismissed the first time around. Those old attempts to discredit Iran have been carefully discredited by many experts, including Gareth Porter in his book, *Manufactured Crisis*.

That Israel tried so hard to find evidence that Iran has worked on a nuclear weapons program in any way since the signing of the JCPOA and found nothing new is perhaps the best proof that Trump needed to certify that Iran is in compliance with all of its obligations under the agreement, rather than pull out of it.

Olli Heinonen, the chief inspector of the IAEA at the time of the JCPOA negotiations – and not someone who was in

any way soft on Iran – said that the IAEA first saw the “significant new” evidence that Netanyahu revealed in 2005. Watching Netanyahu’s revelation, Heinonen could only say, “I just saw a lot of pictures I had seen before.” Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said that, based on first reports of Netanyahu’s presentation, it “has not put into question Iran’s compliance with the JCPOA.” Mogherini said that the final word had to go to the IAEA. The final word was given. The day after Netanyahu’s presentation, the IAEA said that there was “no credible indications” of Iran working on a nuclear weapons program for several years before the JCPOA.

But, as in Syria, Trump accepted the word of a biased source with a significant interest in claiming that Iran has an active clandestine nuclear weapons program over the IAEA’s verification team. Dismissing the IAEA, Trump boasted that Netanyahu’s revelation “showed that I’ve been 100 percent right.” And now, citing only Netanyahu’s presentation as evidence, he dismissed the IAEA’s weapons inspectors and verifications and betrayed an international agreement with a partner who was verified to be in full compliance with its agreements.

## **Syria**

On September 14, 2013 the United States and Russia finalized a Russian brokered agreement on the removal and destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons. On January

4, 2016, the OPCW declared the completion of the destruction of all chemical weapons in Syria.

Nonetheless, on April 14, Trump ordered the bombing of Syria because of a claimed chemical attack in Duma, near Damascus. Only days before the missile strikes, Defense Secretary James Mattis said that the U.S lacked the intelligence that Assad was responsible for the alleged chemical weapons attack. Mattis admitted that the U.S. was “still assessing the intelligence... We’re still working on it.”

Days after, however, the U.S. bombed three particular buildings that they claimed housed specific chemicals and chemical production equipment. That’s very precise, specific intelligence. Armed with that proof, why would the U.S. rush to bomb Syria? Why not take that intelligence to U.N. inspectors? Why not hand it over to the OPCW? Why not reveal the illegal Syrian clandestine chemical weapons program to the world?

Russian chemical weapons specialists who were on site found no trace of chemical weapon use. Neither did Red Crescent doctors who treated people. The OPCW inspectors might quickly have answered the question, but their access to the site was delayed by the United Nations department of Safety and Security.

The evidence for Assad’s chemical weapons attack on his own people came from rebel-affiliated and Western-financed groups like the White Helmets. The Trump administration has publicly offered nothing further as evidence despite the precise nature of their bombing.

But investigative journalist Robert Fisk has offered something further. Fisk was the first western journalist to make it to Duma. Fisk heard from no local who knew of a chemical weapons attack. He heard a different version of the story in Duma than the one put out by the White Helmets and accepted by Trump.

The video of victims of chemical attack is real, but the interpretation is false. The suffering is real, but they are not suffering from chemical exposure. They are suffering from oxygen starvation. There was heavy shelling by government forces that night. But on this particular night, there were also strong winds and huge clouds of dust choked the tunnels and basements people were hiding in. The suffering people in the video were struggling from hypoxia, or oxygen starvation. Then a White Helmet “shouted ‘Gas!’” The panic, and the propaganda begun.

When Russia brought seventeen witnesses from Duma to The Hague to testify before the OPCW, the U.S., U.K., and France not only did not listen to the evidence, they boycotted the event. The witnesses from Duma supported the story

that Fisk had heard. Each witness was either a victim of that night's events or a doctor who treated them. Some of the victim witnesses even show up in the White Helmet videos. They all said that there had been no chemical attack: they were sucking in dust, not gas.

The OPCW has verified that Syria has no chemical weapons. The United States and its allies accepted the word of a biased and unreliable source over the OPCW verification team with no additional evidence. They then bombed Syria before they gave the OPCW inspectors a chance to return to Syria. Trump invested in the word of the White Helmets – a group with a significant interest in pinning a chemical weapon attack – over the word of the OPCW, wanting the U.S. to intervene militarily on their side.

### **North Korea**

So what does North Korea understand from this? The North Koreans could learn two things. The first is to be wary of signing deals with America. Both Syria and Iran gave up their programs only to have Trump and America ignore verification of their compliance in favor of biased sources and turn on them: in Syria with bombs and in Iran with pulling out of the JCPOA. How can North Korea confidently agree to give up its only deterrence against American aggression with no assurance that the U.S. will honor a agreement?

The second lesson North Korea could draw from Iran is that, though you may not be able to trust that you can profit from signing an agreement, you can profit by holding off on signing it. In the book, *Losing an Enemy*, Trita Parsi argued that the difference between sanctions and nuclear escalation is that the former is finite and the latter is not. North Korea knows, as Iran did before, that America will eventually run out of things to sanction. But North Korea will not run out of uranium to enrich or missiles to test. North Korea can outlast the United States unless the United States is really prepared to go to war.

Trump's bombing of Syria and pulling out of the JCPOA with Iran can only reinforce North Korean anxiety that they can't trust Trump and the U.S. to honor any nuclear disarmament agreement, much as the world needs it.

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**Ted Snider has a graduate degree in philosophy and writes on analyzing patterns in U.S. foreign policy and history.**

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