

Congress Angered by 'Escalated' Ballistic Missile Program Amid Concern of a Saudi Nuke

Rather than preventing ballistic missile proliferation in the region, the U.S. seems more intent on seeing Saudi Arabia strengthen its military muscle against Iran, explains Giorgio Cafiero.

By **Giorgio Cafiero**

Special to Consortium News

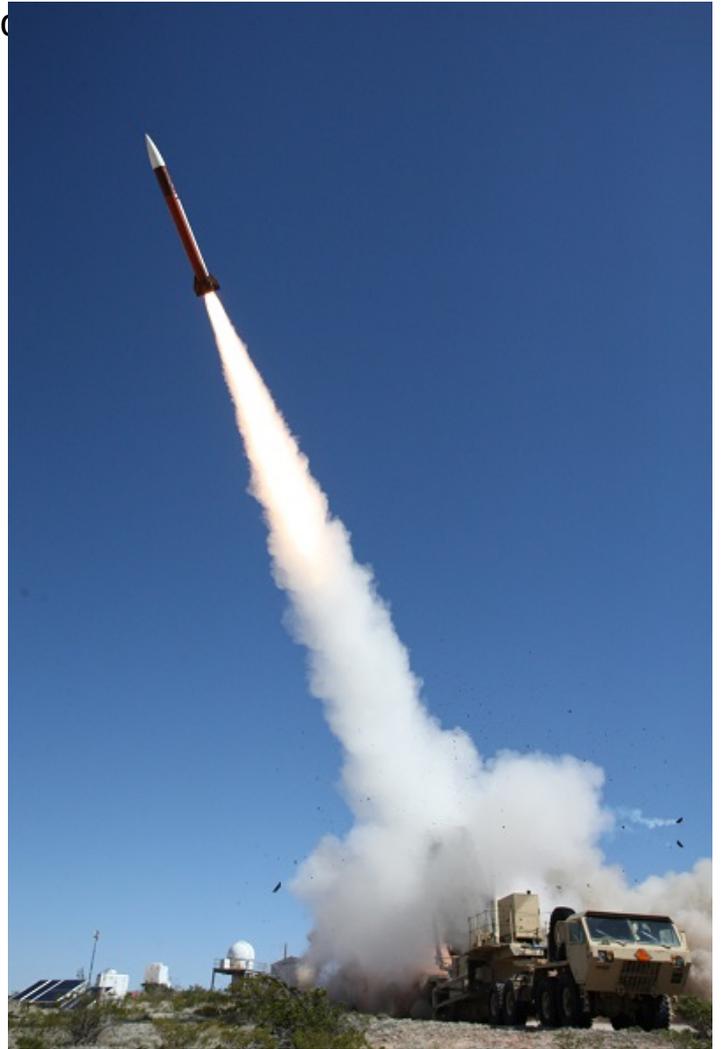


The U.S. has obtained intelligence that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia “significantly escalated” its ballistic missile program with Chinese help, CNN **reported** on Wednesday. Beijing has enabled the Saudis to expand their missile infrastructure and technology at a time of escalating tension in the Persian Gulf, CNN said, with both the Saudis and Iranians perceiving a growing threat from each other.

The previously unreported classified intelligence has led U.S. lawmakers to express concern about undermining decades-old efforts to limit the proliferation of missiles in the Middle East.

The CNN report cited two former senior U.S. intelligence officials who said it is “likely” that President Trump received this intelligence in a Presidential Daily Briefing, given the close monitoring of ballistic missile developments

and flows of material worldwide



Yet the Senate Foreign Relations Committee only acquired this intelligence from a committee staff member who learned about the ballistic missile activity in Saudi Arabia from a “foreign counterpart” while on “an unrelated trip to the Middle East.”

The news increased anger in Washington about a perceived lack of congressional oversight on foreign policy matters in the Trump era.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Bob Menendez, (D-NJ) reprimanded Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and blamed the administration for its “unacceptable” failure to initially provide the committee with the classified

information. Menendez declared that the State Department must “do a better job of engaging with us.”

Such outcry comes against the backdrop of mounting bipartisan criticism over the administration’s support for the Saudi/Emirati-led campaign in Yemen and the cover that Trump provided Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) following the CIA’s conclusion that he ordered Jamal Khashoggi’s killing.

Most recently, the administration’s decision to sell \$8.1 billion in arms to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), while overriding congressional opposition by citing a national security emergency, highlighted how Saudi-related issues are creating partisan flashpoints between lawmakers, and conflict between Congress and the White House.

The Trump administration likely avoided disclosing the intelligence because of its tacit approval of the Kingdom’s ballistic missile activity. Based on the logic that if Saudi Arabia strengthens militarily Iran will come under greater pressure, the Trump administration may view China providing ballistic missile technology to the Saudis as a positive. The 1987 Missile Technology Control Regime restricts the U.S. and other countries from providing Saudi Arabia with such technology. Notably, China is not a party to this multi-country pact.

Next Step: A Nuclear Warhead?

News of this recent intelligence must also be read within the context of U.S. -Saudi nuclear cooperation, which is another Saudi-related flashpoint pitting lawmakers against the White House. Members of Congress have been accusing the

administration of recklessly authorizing U.S. firms to provide sensitive nuclear power information to Riyadh, and in an insufficiently transparent manner in the aftermath of Khashoggi's killing.

Some analysts worry that such information transfers could help the Kingdom develop a nuclear weapon at a later point if the Saudi government makes that decision.

Saudi Arabia's ballistic missile production thus raises important questions about a potential nuclear arms race in the Middle East. As MbS articulated in March 2018, Saudi Arabia will develop nuclear weapons if Iran pursues that path.

China's Foreign Ministry responded defensively, maintaining that such cooperation between "comprehensive strategic partners" is no violation of international law, nor a threat to efforts to thwart the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Not everyone was soothed by Beijing's words.

There are concerns that the technology that China has provided Saudi Arabia could enable the Kingdom to possess ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads in the future if the Saudis become a nuclear weapons state.

Such a move would indicate Riyadh's declining trust in Washington's ability and willingness to continue serving as Saudi Arabia's security guarantor. Apparently, Saudi Arabia believes it most prudent to hedge against a perceived Iranian threat by investing in the missile program with help from Beijing. It is not clear, of course, what the Saudi end-game is.

With the U.S. no longer a signatory to the Joint

Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and Iran in reaction scaling back on its commitments under the nuclear accord, there are sharp increases in tensions between the U.S. , Saudi Arabia, and the UAE on one side and Iran on the other. Concerns about a potential nuclear arms race in the Middle East are valid.

To prevent such an escalation, the U.S. and China could use their leverage to pressure Riyadh and Tehran to hold talks and engage directly in bilateral discussions. It appears instead that China is keener to exploit the lack of Saudi trust in the U.S. and Riyadh's perceptions of a rising Iranian threat to capitalize on a new client, while making Beijing of greater strategic value to the Kingdom.

Rather than preventing ballistic missile proliferation in the Middle East, the Trump administration meanwhile seems more interested in seeing Saudi Arabia strengthen its military muscle as Tehran refuses to capitulate to U.S. demands under "maximum pressure."

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Intrigues in the Gulf Following Summits in Mecca

Saudi and UAE pressure on Qatar to embrace a tougher stance against Iran have left the Arab Gulf states divided as the U.S. builds tension with Teheran, writes Giorgio Cafiero.

By **Giorgio Cafiero**

Special to Consortium News



Expectedly, no major diplomatic breakthrough in the two-year Qatar crisis was achieved at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Arab League summits held late last month in Mecca. Yet it was widely seen as significant that Qatar sent its prime minister, who shook hands with King Salman.

Indeed, that the Saudi monarch extended an invitation to the Emir of Qatar notwithstanding the deterioration in Riyadh-Doha relations since mid-2017 highlighted the extent to which the Saudi leadership would like to shore up Arab/Islamic unity in the face a perceived Iranian threat.

Nonetheless, shortly after the summits in Mecca it became clear just how far Saudi Arabia and Qatar are from being on the same page with respect to Iran and the state of regional affairs more broadly. On June 2, Qatar's foreign minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, **expressed** major "reservations" about the anti-Iranian statements made at the summits. He **told** *Al Jazeera* that the declarations failed to "refer to a moderate policy to speak with Tehran" while embracing the Trump administration's stance against the Islamic Republic without taking regional states' interests into consideration.

Additionally, Qatar's chief diplomat **said** that the GCC and Arab League summits ignored important Arab issues from

Palestine to Libya and Yemen, while the statements made ran contrary to Doha's interests and were made without consulting Qatar.

As illustrated by this rejection of the declarations, it is difficult to argue that much has changed in the Middle East since the summits. Unquestionably, the dynamics that fueled the crisis in Qatar's relations with its immediate neighbors remain in play. Put simply, neither side of the row appears any closer to making concessions to the other. It was unrealistic to expect photo-ops and communiques alone to alter such realities.

Healthy Qatar-Iran Ties

If the anti-Qatar bloc continues its siege, Doha will not want to fundamentally alter its highly pragmatic relationship with Tehran. Over the past two years, Iran has played a pivotal role in terms of enabling Qatar to circumvent the blockade. Across a host of domains such as food security, aviation, tourism, logistics, and energy exports, the Iranians provided stepped up cooperation when the crisis erupted in 2017 that contributed to Qatar's resilience.

To be sure, as Qatar and Iran share ownership of the world's largest natural gas reserve, officials in Doha and Tehran have long figured out how to maintain healthy relations despite having different positions on scores of regional issues such as the Syrian civil war and the Houthi rebellion in Yemen. Ever since the late 1980s and early 1990s, this has basically always been the case despite Qatar's membership in the mostly anti-Iranian GCC.

Yet the new geopolitical realities of the past two years and Doha and Tehran's increasingly shared perception of the Riyadh-Abu Dhabi axis as a grave threat have elevated Qatari-Iranian relations to new heights. Qatar now sees a far graver threat from Saudi Arabia and the UAE than from its Persian neighbor.

The leadership in Doha, which wholeheartedly and genuinely welcomed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)'s watershed passage in 2015, have been unsettled by the Trump administration's increasingly hawkish agenda vis-à-vis Tehran.

Much like their counterparts in Kuwait, Iraq, and Oman, officials in Qatar are alarmed by the growing room for misunderstanding to boil into a war between the US and Iran as a result of the sharp increase in tension between Washington and Tehran over the past several weeks.

Doubtlessly, given Qatar's increased reliance on Iran amid the blockade, devising strategies for maintaining good relations with Tehran while the White House intensifies its "maximum pressure" campaign is extremely difficult. Qatari officials understand that the stakes are high as the leadership in Doha also seeks to continue strengthening its ties with Washington.

It is a safe bet that the rejection of the Mecca summits on Qatar's part will feed into the blockading states' narratives about Doha having sided with Tehran against its traditional Arab allies. Of course, Qatar's cordial relationship with Iran—along with Doha's ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and the emirate's broadcasting of *Al Jazeera*—was

a reason for the blockade as outlined by the 13 sweeping demands for reconciliation put forth by the Saudi/Emirati-led bloc.

Riyadh and Abu Dhabi will point to Doha's rejection of the communiqués from last month's meetings as supposed evidence of Qatar's refusal to support regional action against Tehran in the aftermath of recent sabotage off the UAE's east coast, for which National Security Advisor John Bolton blames Iran, and Houthi drone attacks targeting Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline.

At a time in which tensions are escalating in the region with the US flexing its muscles, the GCC is divided between those member-states supporting Trump's approach to Iranian behavior and those which were far more welcoming of Barack Obama's push for a partial-thaw in Washington-Tehran relations. Increasingly clear is that two years into the Qatar crisis the Saudi leadership simply lacks the means to unite the Arab world against Tehran.

Yet it is Riyadh and Abu Dhabi's own policies aimed at pressuring Doha into ending its support for "terrorism" and embracing a tougher stance against the Islamic Republic that have heavily contributed to these new dynamics whereby the GCC is anything but a solid bloc.

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THE ANGRY ARAB: The UAE and the Arab Counter-Revolution

As'ad AbuKhalil looks at Gulf rulers vying to play top host to U.S. interests in the Middle East.

By **As`ad AbuKhalil**

Special to Consortium News



The political role of the United Arab Emirates has changed dramatically since the death of its founding ruler, Shaykh Zayed bin Sultan.

He was officially succeeded by his son, Khalifah bin Zayed, in 2004 but the latter has been largely distant from governmental affairs for health and other reasons. The actual reins are held by Abu Dhabi's highly ambitious Crown Prince Muhammad bin Zayed. Muhammad has been the effective ruler, along with his brothers on his mother's side, Fatimah bint Mubarak, who control all the key posts of government.

The current de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, has largely emulated Muhammad (known commonly as MbZ, while Muhammad bin Salman is commonly known as MbS).

Under Shaykh Zayed, the UAE avoided internal Arab conflicts and steered its foreign policy largely according to the pan-Arab consensus. While the country was charted by the British colonial powers it smoothly made the transition to a strong alliance with the U.S. Despite tensions with Saudi Arabia it mainly avoided open conflicts.

Shaykh Zayed was a loyal ally, or client, of the U.S. and

its interests in the region. And while generally deferring to Saudi hegemony, he paid lip service to the pro-Palestinian sentiment of the Arab population. In the early 1970s he even welcomed Leila Khalid, the famous commander of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, to the UAE and is said to have made a donation to the PFLP (a small subset of which defected after the incident and started their own small organization).

Muslim Brotherhood in Ministries

Shaykh Zayed was uneducated and was not known for speech-making. His country benefited from the educated Palestinian community. He also invited Muslim Brotherhood functionaries to fill various posts in justice and education ministries.

Zayed, for instance, invited Hasan Al-Turabi, the famous Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood leader, to help draft the UAE constitution. This was a time when both the UAE and Saudi Arabia enthusiastically welcomed Muslim Brotherhood leaders and members to combat the tide of secular Arab nationalism and leftism in the region.

In his last year, Zayed increasingly surrendered power to his sons and his last political role was in 2003 when he proposed an initiative according to which Saddam Husain would relinquish power in return for the U.S. backing away from war with Iraq (an initiative in which neither the U.S. nor Saddam showed any interest).

MbZ has taken the UAE in a very different direction. He has clearly wanted to make the UAE a sort of new Arab Israel, which could serve the interests of the U.S. MbZ was interested in military-intelligence affairs and built up his

power from that basis.

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His rule has been characterized by 1) establishment of covert, but strong relations with Israel; 2) an open war against the Muslim Brotherhood; 3) competition with Qatar and Saudi Arabia for regional dominance, especially after the demise of Saddam's regime; 4) direct involvement in Palestinian affairs through the agency of Muhammad Dahlan, the notoriously shady Palestinian intelligence figure; and 5) heavy lobbying in Washington, with disregard for Arab public opinion on all matters.

MbZ was not satisfied with being one of many loyal allies/clients of the U.S. in the Middle East. He has sought to rival Israel in serving as a strategic partner of the U.S. in the region and outdo Jordan in providing intelligence and military services. His military emphasizes special forces and hosts one of the biggest U.S. intelligence stations in the world. MbZ also invested in buying influence in Washington.

Intense D.C. Courtship

The role of his D.C. ambassador, Yousef Al-Otaiba, who courted journalists, officials, and think tank experts with unprecedented intensity, has become well-known. UAE money flowed into think tanks, and the UAE received favorable coverage in Western media. It also helped that Al-Otaiba established a strong friendship with the Israeli ambassador and the Israeli lobby began to promote both Saudi and UAE

regime interests in Washington, after both regimes had abandoned a verbal commitment to the Palestinian cause.

Arab lobbies – no matter what states or interests they represent, no matter how well-funded they are – can't achieve great success without the blessings of the Israeli lobby.

The AWACs sale to Saudi Arabia during the Reagan years was an exception: a time when the Saudi regime – supported by a different Republican Party prior to the rise of the Evangelical Zionists – prevailed against the Israeli lobby.

The Saudi and UAE regime took a back seat to Qatar in 2011 and 2013. For the first few years of the Arab uprisings, Doha was in the driver's seat. The Saudi King, Abdullah, was too feeble to run the affairs of his own government, let alone the affairs of the Arab regional system. Qatari foreign ministers ran the Arab League in the first few years after the Arab uprisings and arranged for the ouster of Syria from the Arab League.

Qatar, after all, was celebrating the victory of its allies in the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia, Libya and most importantly Egypt. They also were on the ascendancy in Yemen. The Arab counter-revolution was in Doha's hands during this time: the Qatari regime was making sure that the popular protests didn't get out of hand and didn't disturb the Arab regional system.

The Qatari regime also negotiated a deal between the local Muslim Brotherhoods and the Israeli lobby in Washington, according to which the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood would not challenge the Egyptian-Israeli treaty, and the Tunisian Muslim Brotherhood would

stop an article criminalizing normalization with Israel, which was high on the protesters' agenda, from entering the new constitution.

Quietly Sponsoring a Coup in Egypt

But the UAE was not dormant during those times. It was quietly sponsoring a coup in Egypt against the Muslim Brotherhood, and preparing for an open war against it throughout the Arab world, in every country where the Brotherhood may have had a chance of electoral success.

The UAE created a front (the Egyptian youth movement, Tamarrud) and worked with Egypt's General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to oust the first freely elected president in the country's history.

It also supported the relics of the ancien regime in Tunisia, and sponsored Gen. Khalifa Haftar in Libya. In 2015, when Salman ascended the Saudi throne, MbZ became the chief counsel and advocate for Salman's son MbS in Washington.

The two seemed to agree on the need to expel Qatar from the affairs of Arab politics and to engineer together a tougher war on Iran. They both launched – with Western support – the war on Yemen assuming, wrongly, that it would be over in a few weeks.

The current era in Arab politics is largely the design of MbZ with the enthusiastic support of MbS. But the two personalities are quite different. While MbS is flashy and outspoken, MbZ keeps a low-profile. MbS likes to impress Western audiences (and he succeeded in doing that until the murder of Jamal Khashoggi last year). MbZ, by contrast, only cares about impressing the White House and his interlocutors

in Tel Aviv.

MbZ is now trying to influence events in Sudan and Algeria where he maintains close ties to the ruling militaries and wants to prevent democratic rule in both countries. Protest signs against UAE and Saudi intervention were visible in Sudanese demonstrations that led last month to the fall of President [Omar al-Bashir](#) (MbZ intelligence advisor, Muhammad Dahlan, visited Sudan the other day).

In Yemen, MbZ has been quite assertive and even clashed with the Saudi regime to promote his own clients there. The ability of MbZ to continue playing his leadership role on behalf of the U.S. and Israel may not last forever. In the meantime, however, MbZ has emerged as Israel's enforcer in the region; a role that is bound to earn him accolades in Washington, and especially on Capitol Hill.

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The US Should Get Ready for King
Mohammed bin Salman

Riyadh finds it outrageous that American lawmakers are

trying to meddle in Saudi Arabia's succession, writes Giorgio Cafiero.

By Giorgio Cafiero

Special to Consortium News



Since the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on Oct. 2, some American lawmakers have assumed the right and moral authority to dictate the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's succession line-up. In November, Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham accused Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) of being "crazy" and asserted that "he needs to go." Such rhetoric is significant given that the U.S. has not meddled in the Al Saud family's internal power struggles since the 1960s. But regardless of the preferences that some politicians in Washington may have regarding Saudi Arabia's succession, the U.S. will likely have to accept dealing with a King Mohammed.

MbS's ascendancy, which began in 2015, has transformed Saudi Arabia. Gone is Saudi Arabia's traditional model of leadership of the pre-MbS era that was based on collective decision-making and consensus building among a large group of princes. By virtue of how much power MbS possesses, it is difficult to imagine any credible challenge to his rule, or position in the succession lineup, no matter the pressure Washington might try to impose.

Even before the Khashoggi affair, MbS's power in Riyadh was so consolidated that the millennial prince faced virtually no constraints from other members of the Al Saud family. In recent months, MbS has only further consolidated his power

in the Kingdom despite all the criticisms that MbS has received from lawmakers in the U.S. following the CIA's conclusion that he ordered Khashoggi's murder. Not even the political fallout of the journalist's slaying last year has caused MbS to ease his internal crackdown, or even his targeting of Saudi dissidents overseas with efforts to lure them back to the Kingdom.

Thus, given that the Saudi security apparatus and all the dominant state institutions are under MbS's consolidated control, it is extremely difficult to imagine any successful opposition to the millennial prince from within. While many in the House of Saud dislike MbS, they lack the ability to collectively stop him.

As the Kingdom is an absolute monarchy, the decision to change the succession order can only be made by King Salman. Although Salman, since he became the Saudi monarch in January 2015, has twice dismissed/forced out two other crown princes – Prince Muqrin (in April 2015) and Prince Mohammed bin Nayef (in June 2017) – he has shown no signs of removing his son from succession.

Riyadh: Butt Out

From Riyadh's perspective, foreign powers need to butt out and stop naively pretending they can influence the process. Furthermore, outside pressure on King Salman to fire his son could backfire and give the Saudi leadership more interest in standing by MbS. As Prince Turki al-Faisal, a former chief of Saudi intelligence and a former ambassador to Washington, put it: "The more [foreign] criticism there is of the crown prince, the more popular he is in the kingdom."

Indeed, officials in Riyadh find it outrageous that American lawmakers are trying to weigh in on Saudi Arabia's succession question – a redline for the Kingdom's leadership. For Saudi Arabia's ruling family, changing the succession lineup under pressure from the U.S. government would signal weakness and subservience to the world's superpower at a time when Riyadh is working to project Saudi dominance in the Middle East and greater autonomy from the West as the world becomes more multipolar.

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Such pressure from the U.S. would likely accelerate Riyadh's eastward geopolitical pivot which has led to Saudi Arabia investing in deeper ties with China, India, Pakistan, and Russia. With the Saudi leadership questioning the long-term commitment of the U.S. to the Kingdom's security, Riyadh is attempting to diversify its global alliances and partnerships in order to gain greater geopolitical independence from Saudi Arabia's traditional Western allies. The silence from these non-Western governments on the Khashoggi file underscores such non-Western states' keenness to avoid criticizing Saudi Arabia on human rights grounds—a factor that has earned them goodwill with MbS—in order to capitalize on all that deeper ties with Riyadh can offer. In the case of both China and Russia, the Khashoggi case has provided an opportunity to drive a greater wedge between the U.S. and its main ally in the Persian Gulf.

Bilateral Risk

If Trump's successor shares Sen. Graham's view that MbS

should never become the King of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh's alliance with Washington could face an unprecedented bilateral crisis. Already, with MbS' reputation among American lawmakers and members of the DC establishment having suffered immense damage following Khashoggi's killing, the Crown Prince simply cannot make a visit to Washington. While for the time being MbS can continue working with a U.S. president whose administration has taken pains to give the crown prince the benefit of the doubt on the Khashoggi file, questions about Saudi-U.S. relations in the post-Trump era must unsettle the Saudi leadership. Given the rhetoric about Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-U.S. alliance coming from some Democratic presidential hopefuls, such as Sen. [Bernie Sanders](#) and Rep. [Tulsi Gabbard](#), such concerns cannot be dismissed by MbS.

Of course, there is a potential scenario whereby MbS is targeted internally, possibly meeting the same fate as Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian president who was assassinated. This would prevent the crown prince from becoming custodian of the two holy mosques (the Saudi king's official title since 1986). But such a scenario appears unlikely. What is far more probable is that MbS will become Saudi Arabia's next king, even if this fuels rage in the U.S. Senate. As much as many officials in Washington take major issue with MbS, accepting the unacceptable will likely be necessary. The U.S. will have to contend, one way or another, with a King Mohammed ruling Washington's most important Arab ally and the country that leads globally in oil production and exports.

Doubtless, the implications of MbS becoming the next Saudi

king will be felt across the greater MENA region and beyond. As evidenced by the war in Yemen, the blockade of Qatar, the Saudi-Canadian diplomatic spat of August 2018, the Ritz Carlton arrests and Saad Hariri saga of 2017, the millennial prince has made foreign policy decisions that reflect his brashness and impulsive thinking. If MbS has already created such crises for Saudi Arabia and its relationship with Washington over the course of the past four years, it is truly mind boggling to think about what he, as the next king of Saudi Arabia, could do to change the Kingdom and the greater Middle East during the upcoming four or five decades if he rules until his natural death.

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Behind the Omar Outrage: Suppressed History of 9/11

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

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

Special to Consortium News



As Donald Trump sharpens his re-election messaging, he has sought to make a foil out of freshman Democrat Rep. Ilhan Omar, homing in on her identity as a black Muslim immigrant and her brazen defiance of what was once a bipartisan pro-Israel consensus. Trump's most recent attack was the most inflammatory to date, implying through a characteristically dishonest Twitter video that Omar had played some role in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

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

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

For Trump, the manufactured outrage offered yet another opportunity to advance his rebranded version of the Southern Strategy, painting Omar as the face of a Democratic Party overrun by socialists, Muslims, MS13 and trans radicals – as a clear and present danger to the reactionary white

exurbanites commonly referred to in mainstream media as “swing voters.”

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

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

In my new book, “The Management of Savagery,” I explain which people did what things to lay the groundwork for the worst terror attack on U.S. soil. Not all of those people were Muslim, and few have faced the kind of scrutiny Omar has for her seemingly benign comment about 9/11. As I illustrate, many of them maintained lustrous reputations well after the ash was cleared from Ground Zero. Today, some of their names – Zbigniew Brzezinski, Ronald Reagan, H.W.

Bush – are prominently engraved on airports, federal offices, and library halls around the country. Others became the subject of rowdy bestsellers such as “Charlie Wilson’s War,” or saw their exploits dramatized in Cold War kitsch productions like “Rambo III.” And then there were those who waged America’s dirty wars from the shadows, and whose names will scarcely ever be known.

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

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

and ultimately, to 9/11 itself.

Taliban 'Unimportant'

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

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

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

These people were in the CIA, USAID, and the National

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

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

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

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

CIA Cover-ups and Blowback

Back in the U.S., some people fueled the blowback from the Afghan proxy war. The Blind Sheikh was given a special entry visa by the CIA as payback for the services he provided in Afghanistan, allowing him to take over the al-Kifah Center in New York City, which had functioned as the de facto U.S. arm of Al Qaeda's Services Bureau. Under his watch and with

help from bin Laden, some people and lots of aid were shuttled to the front lines of U.S. proxy wars in Bosnia and Chechnya while the Clinton administration generally looked the other way.

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

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

The government lawyers were apparently fretting that Mohammed would be exposed as an active asset of both the CIA and FBI, and as a former Army sergeant who had spirited

training manuals out of Fort Bragg while stationed there during the 1980s. So Mohammed remained a free man, helping Al Qaeda plan attacks on American consular facilities in Tanzania and Kenya while the "Day of the Planes" plot began to take form.

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

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

Crawford, Texas

It was not until August 2001 that Midhar was placed on a terrorist watch list. That month, some people met at a ranch in Crawford, Texas, and reviewed a classified document

headlined, "Bin Laden Determined to Strike Inside the US." The bulletin was a page-and-a-half long, with detailed intelligence on the "Day of Planes" plot provided by Ali Mohammed, the Al Qaeda-FBI-CIA triple agent now registered as "John Doe" and disappeared somewhere in the federal prison system. Those people reviewed the document for a few minutes before their boss, President George W. Bush, moved on to other matters.

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

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

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

In the days after 9/11, the FBI organized several flights to

evacuate prominent Saudi families from the U.S., including relatives of Osama bin Laden. Meanwhile, Islamophobia erupted across the country, with even mainstream personalities such as TV news anchor Dan Rather taking to the airwaves to claim without evidence that Arab-Americans had celebrated the 9/11 attacks.

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

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

In Syria, the CIA armed an outfit of supposedly “moderate rebels” called the Free Syrian Army that turned out to be nothing more than a political front and weapons farm for an array of extremist insurgent factions including Al Qaeda’s local affiliate and the Islamic State. The latter two groups

were, of course, products of the sectarian chaos of Iraq, which had been ruled by a secular government until the U.S. came knocking after 9/11.

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

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

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

Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and the author of books including best-selling ["Republican Gomorrah,"](#) ["Goliath,"](#) ["The Fifty One Day War"](#) and ["The Management of Savagery,"](#) published in March 2019 by Verso. He has also produced numerous print articles for an array of publications, many video reports and several documentaries

including [“Killing Gaza”](#) and [“Je Ne Suis Pas Charlie.”](#) Blumenthal founded the [Grayzone](#) in 2015 to shine a journalistic light on America’s state of perpetual war and its dangerous domestic repercussions.

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ANGRY ARAB: Memories and Omissions of the Iraq Wars

The Iraq wars and their consequences have been callous, bipartisan campaigns that have profoundly altered Arabs’ views of the United States, says As’ad AbuKhalil.

By [As`ad AbuKhalil](#)

Special to Consortium News



It has been sixteen years since the U.S. invasion of Iraq of 2003. The event barely gets a mention in the U.S. press or is any longer part of American consciousness. Iraq remains a faraway land for most Americans and the remembrance of the Iraq war is only discussed from the standpoint of U.S. strategic blunders. Little attention is paid to the suffering and humiliation of the Iraqi people by the American war apparatus. Wars for Americans are measured in U.S. dollars and American blood: suffering of the natives is not registered in war metrics.

The Iraq calamity is not an issue that can be dismissively blamed on George W. Bush alone. For most Democrats, it is too easy to blame the war on that one man. In reality, the Iraq war and its consequences have been a callous bipartisan campaign which had begun in the administration of George HW Bush and Bill Clinton

after him. The war and the tight, inhumane sanctions established a record of punishment of civilians, or the use of civilians as tools of U.S. pressure on foreign governments, which became a staple of U.S. foreign policy.

The U.S. government under Ronald Reagan resisted pressures to impose sanctions on South Africa under the pretext that sanctions would "hurt the people that we want to help"—this at a time when the blacks of South Africa were calling on the world to impose sanctions to bring down the apartheid regime. This was the last time that the U.S. resisted the imposition of sanctions on a country.

For the Arab people, the successive wars on Iraq—and the sanctions should be counted as part of the cruel war effort of the U.S. and its allies—changed forever the structure of the Middle East regional system. The wars established a direct U.S. occupation of Arab lands and it reversed the trend since WWII whereby the U.S. settled for control and hegemony, but without the direct occupation. (The U.S. only left the Philippines because Japan had awarded independence to the country during the war, long after the U.S. failed to deliver on promises of independence).

Washington succeeded in the political arrangement designed by the Bush-Baker team to create an unannounced alliance between the Israeli occupation state and the reactionary Arab regime system, which included the Syrian regime, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Gulf states in the same sphere. This arrangement served to oppress the Arab population and to prevent political protests from disrupting U.S. military and political plans, and to ensure the survival of the oppressive regimes who are willing to cooperate with the U.S. The Syrian regime, which cooperated with Washington in the 1991 Iraq war was even rewarded with control of Lebanon.

But the war on Iraq altered the regional structure of regimes. They were no more split into progressive and reactionary. Syria in the past was associated with the "rejectionist stance," even though the

Syrian regime never joined the "Rejectionist Front" of the 1970s led by Saddam Hussein, the arch enemy of Syrian leader Hafidh Al-Asad.

It was no coincidence that the U.S. invaded Iraq and expelled Saddam's army from Kuwait in the wake of the end of the Soviet Union. The U.S. wanted to assert the new rules just as it asserted the new rules of Middle East politics after WWII when it signaled to Britain in 1956 in Suez that it is the U.S. and not Europe which now controls the Middle East region. Similarly, the Iraq war of 1991 was an opportunity for the U.S. to impose its hegemony directly and without fears of escalation in super power conflict.

The U.S. did not need direct control or colonization after after WWII, with the exception of oil-rich Gulf region. (Historian Daniel Immerwahr makes that argument persuasively in his brand new book, "How to Hide and Empire: A History of the Greater United States.") After the 1973 oil embargo on Western countries because of U.S. support for Israel in that year's war, the U.S. military had plans on the books for the seizure of Gulf Arab oil fields. But the significance of oil has diminished over the decade especially as fracking has allowed the U.S. to export more oil than it imports.

Indelible Memory

Furthermore, the previous reluctance of Gulf leaders to host U.S. troops evaporated with the 1991 war.

But the memory of that first Iraq war remains deep in the Arab memory. Here was a flagrant direct military intervention which relied for its promotion on a mix of lies and fabrications. The U.S. wanted to oppose dictatorship while its intervention relied on the assistance of brutal dictators and its whole campaign was to—in name at least—to restore a polygamous Emir to his throne.

The U.S. also bought about official Arab League abandonment of Israel's boycott, which had been in place since the founding of the state of Israel. As a reward for U.S. convening of the Madrid

conference in 1991, Arab despots abandoned the boycott in the hope that Washington would settle the Palestinian problem one way or another. Yet, the precedent of deploying massive U.S. troops in the region was established and the U.S. quickly made it clear that it was not leaving the region anytime soon. Regimes that wanted U.S. protection were more than eager to pay for large-scale U.S. military bases to host U.S. troops and intelligence services. But that war in 1991 was not the only Iraq war; in fact, Washington was also complicit in the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war, when it did its best to prolong the conflict, resulting in the deaths of some half million Iraqis and Iranians.

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was not about finishing an unfinished business by son toward his father. It certainly was not about finding and destroying WMDs. And no one believed that this was about democracy or freedom. The quick victory in the war of Afghanistan created wild delusions for the U.S. war machine. Bush and his lieutenants were under the impression that wars in the region could be fought and won quickly and on the cheap. The rhetoric of "the axis-of-evil" was a message from the U.S. to all its enemies that the U.S. would dominate the region and would overthrow the few regimes which are not in its camp. The quick "victory" in Kabul was illusory about what had just happened in Afghanistan. Seventeen years later the U.S. is now begging the Taliban—which it had gone to war to overthrow—to return to power to end the agony for U.S. troops and for U.S. puppets in the country who are terrified of the prospect of a country free of U.S. occupation.

Iraq created new images of the U.S.: from Abu Ghraib to the wanton shooting at civilians by U.S. troops or by contractors, to the installation of a puppet government and the issuance of capitalistic decrees and laws to prevent the Iraqi government from ever filing war crime charges against the occupiers. Arabs and Muslims developed new reasons to detest the U.S.: it is not only about Israel anymore but about the U.S. sponsorship of a corrupt

and despotic regional order. It is also about Arabs witnessing first hand the callous and reckless forms of U.S. warfare in the region. Policy makers, think tank experts, and journalists in DC may debate the technical aspects of the war and the cost incurred by the U.S.. But for the natives, counting the dead and holding the killers responsible remains the priority. And the carnage caused by ISIS and its affiliates in several Arab countries is also blamed—and rightly so—on U.S. military intervention in the Middle East.

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Anti-Semitism and Double Standards

Criticizing Israel is considered bad form, writes Daniel Lazare, but keeping mum about Saudi crimes is fine as long as the donations continue to flow.

By [Daniel Lazare](#)

Special to Consortium News



In a week when the GOP flaunted its [legislative attacks on](#) anti-Semitism at the annual meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, and brought AIPAC loyalties [into the 2020 campaign](#), let’s remember that plenty of people in the liberal

establishment play the same two-faced game. While pretending to oppose bigotry, they are in bed with the most anti-Semitic governments on Earth.

Tony Blair, British prime minister from 1997 to 2007, is a prime example. Blair may be gone, but his Labour Party followers are leading the charge against such targets as the party's current leader, Jeremy Corbyn, and Afro-Jewish socialist [Jackie Walker](#). Margaret Hodge, a Labour member of parliament who reportedly [called](#) Corbyn "a fucking anti-Semite and a racist" in a closed-door meeting, was an early Blair [backer who supported](#) his decision to invade Iraq in 2003. Luciana Berger, who said last year that "anti-Semitism is very real and alive in the Labour Party," is another Blairite with [a hawkish foreign-policy record](#). Labour's Deputy Leader Tom Watson, who has defended Berger, also backed the Iraq invasion. Ditto Ann Coffey, who has assailed the ["Corbyn culture of antisemitism"](#) and began her political ascent as Blair's parliamentary private secretary, a kind of junior whip, in the late 1990s.

All want voters to think Labour is now riddled with anti-Semitism and that criticism of Israel should be circumspect at best lest it open the door to western society's oldest hatred. Evidently, they miss the Blair days, when Labor was high-minded and decent.

But these Blairites are silent on their hero's partnership with PetroSaudi. This company, which described itself as a "vehicle of the Saudi royal family," put Blair's now-defunct firm, [Tony Blair Associates](#), on a [\\$65,000-a-month retainer](#) to help it drum up business in China. Although Tony Blair Associates [closed amid controversy](#), the connections

apparently lived on. Last September, *The Financial Times* reported that Blair's personal foundation, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, has benefited from Saudi largesse in the form of a £9 million donation – about \$12 million – from the Saudi Research & Marketing Group, a company controlled by Prince Badr bin Abdullah, the kingdom's minister of culture.

Beholden to Saudis

Thus, Blair's new "global change institute" – on a self-proclaimed mission to "make globalization work for the many, not the few" – is beholden to a kingdom that is a byword for torture, autocracy and extreme religious intolerance. Saudi Arabia bans all faiths other than Islam and persecutes Muslims who fail to adhere to the official brand of Sunni fundamentalism known as Wahhabism (after an 18th-century mullah named Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab). Saudi police in 2011 arrested 35 Ethiopian Christians, mainly women, for the "crime" of participating in an underground prayer meeting. Shi'ites in the kingdom's oil-rich Eastern Province suffer "pervasive discrimination" according to Human Rights Watch.

Saudi textbooks distributed widely throughout the *Dar al Islam* teach that judgment day "will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Muslims will kill them," according to a U.S. government study. One 10th-grade text declares: "Feelings of arrogance and superiority inhabit the Jews. They claim they are the chosen people even though God himself has denied that, humiliated them, misled them, and made them into swine and apes."

ISIS used Saudi textbooks in schools it controlled in Syria

and Iraq back when it still had a caliphate, while Saudi texts have cropped up in weekend school programs in the United Kingdom and Belgium. Training manuals in Brussels's Grand Mosque – until recently Saudi-funded and controlled – teach that Jews are “traitors, infidels, and impostors ... obscene and vulgar ... cruel and insensible ... greedy, avid, and avaricious” and “use violence, power, and terror to control the world.”

This goes back centuries. In 1810, a French explorer named Louis Alexandre Olivier de Corncez wrote that Wahhabists display “the cruelest intolerance towards Christians and Jews,” as Simon Ross Valentine recounts in his book, “Force and Fanaticism: Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and Beyond.”

Robert Vitalis, in his “America’s Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier,” gives the more recent example of an American Airline executive describing a meeting, in the late 1940s, with Deputy Foreign Minister Yusuf Yassin: “As for Jews, a Jew is a Jew in the eyes of the Saudis, regardless of what passport he may be carrying. As Yusuf explained to us in no uncertain terms, Saudi Arabia is a holy Moslem country and no Jew is going to be allowed to pass through it and to contaminate it. They realize such an attitude is tough on international carriers but they just don’t care – they don’t want any Jews setting foot on Saudi Arabian soil, ‘period!’”

This is the history and present-day culture with which Tony Blair aligns.

Longing for Clinton Days

The same goes for Clintonites on the other side of the

pond. The three Democrats who led the charge last month against U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar for her alleged anti-Semitism were Representatives Nita Lowey, Eliot Engel and Jerrold Nadler, all from New York and all early backers of fellow New Yorker Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential bid. The implicit assumption in their attack was that things were better when centrist Democrats held sway and rambunctious upstarts like Omar were still stuck in Minneapolis.

What goes unmentioned is that Hillary and her former-president husband have partnered with the Saudis in a way that Blair can only envy. Since 1997, the Clinton Foundation has raked in between \$10 million and \$25 million from the Saudi government, according to the foundation's [website](#) (which only gives ranges of contribution) while individual Saudi businessmen have donated between \$8 million and \$25 million. Five other Persian Gulf petro-monarchies have donated between \$9 million and \$30 million. And the Saudi royal family has given [\\$10 million](#) to Bill Clinton's presidential library in Little Rock, Arkansas. All told, it's a dazzling sum that, had Hillary become president, would undoubtedly have served to steer Mideast policy in an even more pro-Saudi direction. When Saudi King Abdullah died in early 2015, Bill and Hillary [praised](#) his peacemaking activities and "personal friendship and kindness toward our family."

But they didn't mention less-savory aspects of his reign. These include not only bigoted textbooks but terrorism. As Hillary confided a year earlier in a 2014 [email](#), "the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia ... are providing clandestine financial support to ISIL and other radical

Sunni groups in the region.”

Other atrocities, also unmentioned, include South Asian servants sentenced to death on flimsy, trumped-up charges (examples [here](#) and [here](#)), a gay man sentenced to [450 lashes](#) in 2014 for using Twitter to arrange dates, a young woman sentenced to [200 lashes](#) for the crime of being gang raped, and the persecution of liberal blogger [Raif Badawi](#), who has been in a Saudi prison since 2012 for daring to challenge Wahhabist bigotry.

All took place under Abdullah’s reign. Just as we’re supposed to turn a blind eye to Israel’s sins, we’re expected to keep mum about Saudi crimes – as long as the donations continue to flow, that is.

Anti-Semitism, U.S.-Style

The Saudis are not alone in spreading anti-Semitism. The U.S. has failed to criticize President Petro Poroshenko for permitting neo-Nazis militias to run riot in the Ukraine, attacking feminists, gays, and Roma and holding torchlight parades in honor of World War II collaborator Stepan Bandera in which they chant [“Jews out.”](#) Washington is silent about the Baltics, where demonstrations in honor of Hitler’s SS units are now [an annual occurrence](#). Last April, 57 lawmakers signed a [letter](#) by California Democrat Ro Khanna calling on the Ukraine to “unequivocally reject Holocaust distortion and the honoring of Nazi collaborators.” Lowey and Engel were conspicuously absent among the signatories. Apparently, Omar’s tweet about “the Benjamins baby” is more offensive than thousands of fascists marching through the streets of Kiev.

And then there's Israel. It might be expected to be in the forefront of combatting anti-Semitism. The opposite is the case. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is cultivating the support of hard-right nationalists in Central Europe while hailing Hungarian strongman Viktor Orbán as a "true friend of Israel" even as Orbán wages a classic anti-Semitic campaign against Jewish philanthropist George Soros. Netanyahu's government has sold weapons to Ukraine's neo-Nazi Azov militia and has whitewashed the Polish government's efforts to "disappear" the Polish role in the Holocaust, thereby earning an unprecedented rebuke from Israel's own Yad Vashem Holocaust museum. In America, his chief allies include evangelical Christians who believe that, come the apocalypse, Jesus will institute a divine kingdom which Jews must either submit to or be killed.

While allying with Jewish neo-Nazis at home, Netanyahu draws ever closer to rightwing nationalists abroad. Even George Orwell would have been taken aback by the spectacle of Zionists embracing anti-Jewish bigots while smearing leftists, many of them Jews, as anti-Semites for standing up for Palestinian rights. War is peace, freedom is slavery, and anti-racists are racist whenever bigots like Netanyahu say so. While leveling phony charges of anti-Semitism, Blairites and Clintonites are helping to spread the real article farther and farther afield.

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

matters at Daniellazare.com.

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Royal Wedding Got Triple the Media Coverage of Yemen in 2018

That ratio is symptomatic of negative trends at the major networks, writes Jim Lobe.

By [Jim Lobe](#)

[Inter Press Service](#)



The ongoing war in Yemen, called the world's "worst humanitarian disaster" by the United Nations and independent aid agencies since early last year, received a grand combined total of 20 minutes of coverage on the ABC, NBC, and CBS weekday evening news programs in 2018.

That compared to a total of 71 minutes that the three major networks devoted to the British royal wedding and a combined total of 100 minutes dedicated to the rescue of a dozen young cave explorers from flooding in Thailand, according to the latest annual compilation by the [authoritative Tyndall Report](#).

By contrast, the brutal murder of *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in

September received a total of 116 minutes of coverage by the three networks, making it one of the very few foreign-based stories to make it into the top 20 most-covered network news events in 2018.

Although the Thai cave rescue was clearly a dramatic, emotional and easily accessible story of the kind that lends itself very well to television news, the number of lives at stake were a tiny fraction of those estimated to have been killed in Yemen (50,000-80,000 combatants and non-combatants), not to mention the deaths of well over 100,000 more civilians, including at least 80,000 children under the age of 5 who have succumbed to malnutrition or disease.

The lack of coverage of the Yemen disaster is symptomatic of negative trends regarding foreign news coverage by the major networks, which together remain the biggest single source of international news in the United States

Some 360,000 children there are currently suffering from severe acute malnutrition, while some 20 million Yemenis are unable to “reliably feed themselves or their families [and] almost 10 million are just one step away from famine,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said last week. The latter figure amounts to nearly half the population of the Arab world’s poorest nation.

Falling Foreign Coverage

Overall, the lack of coverage of the Yemen disaster is symptomatic of negative trends regarding foreign news coverage by the major networks, which together remain the biggest single source of international news in the United States. An average of more than 22 million households tune

into the nightly newscasts, or about four times the number of those that watch any of the three major cable channels—Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN—on a given evening.

Indeed, this year's Tyndall Report found that network coverage from overseas fell to the lowest point since its publisher, Andrew Tyndall, began systematically tracking and coding the three weeknight newscasts in 1988. Altogether, foreign datelines accounted for only 7.5 percent of all the news generated by those programs (1,092 minutes out of 14,354 minutes) in 2018. (Each half-hour newscast contains an average of roughly 22 minutes of news content.)

“Foreign bureaus have never been so little used,” noted Tyndall in his latest report. “2018 marked a general abdication of the traditional role of the nightly newscasts, which used to provide a daily summary of major national and international news developments,” he told LobeLog in an email.

“Of particular note,” he added, “the top 30 foreign news stories [covered by the three networks' newscasts] contained no mention of the two major western hemisphere elections—in Brazil and Mexico—and none of the major crisis in Europe; namely Brexit.”

Moreover, he wrote in his email,

the overarching international crisis facing the globe as a whole —climate change — was little covered as such, although its symptoms such as wildfires and hurricanes were presented prominently. These symptoms were confined to their domestic occurrence, however, rather than the

manifestations of climate change on a global scale.

I am very pessimistic about the nightly newscasts reforming themselves and ever reverting to their traditional global mission.

Precisely because of its unparalleled reach and the influence of its major sponsors (compared to cable news advertisers), network news has always been designed to appeal to the greatest number of viewers. In important ways, the network news agenda – as shallow, superficial, sensationalistic, and increasingly inward as it is – reveals how Americans see and understand events and trends overseas.

What Did and Didn't Get Attention

The single most network-covered story of the year, according to Tyndall's tally, was the nomination and confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh at 426 minutes, followed by the ongoing probes into alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 election (332 minutes).

Three of the next four biggest stories involved extreme weather and its consequences – the California wildfires (242), severe winter weather (234), and Hurricane Florence in the Carolinas (203). Hurricane Michael in Florida was the 11th biggest story (134 minutes). But, as in past years, these reports, totaling over 800 minutes, were focused almost exclusively on the anticipation and immediate impact of these events rather than the possible relationship between them and climate change.

Aside from the Russian investigations, North Korean-U.S. summitry was the top foreign-policy story, clocking in at

212 minutes, making it the year's fifth-biggest story overall. The detention of migrant children (189) ranked seventh, tied with the Parkland High School mass shooting in Florida, which was followed in turn by coverage of school safety and violence prevention more generally (184). The prosecution of President Trump's lawyer, Michael Cohen, (164) ranked 10th, the winding down of the campaign against the Islamic State in Syria (133) ranked 12th, followed by coverage of the flu season (130) and accusations of partisan bias by the FBI and Khashoggi's assassination (116 minutes each). Police killings of civilians and the federal budget and deficit (112 each), followed by the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics (111), the Facebook controversy (107), and coverage of the Christmas holiday season (105), rounded out the top 20.

As for foreign stories, all things Russia-related – including the alleged election interference (332), U.S.-Russia diplomacy including the Helsinki summit (92); Russian-British diplomacy and the poisoning of the Russian ex-spy (54); and U.S.-Russian spy-related events (23) – led the pack with a total of 501 minutes, or a little over 3 percent of total nightly newscasts.

Immigration-related coverage accounted for nearly the same amount of coverage (493 minutes). It included the detention of migrant children (189), border restrictions and “the wall” (96), immigration reform more generally (75), Central American migrants and caravans (50), DACA Dreamers seeking permanent status (36), crackdowns on undocumented immigrants and deportations (27), and asylum-seekers (20).

The Koreas were the top foreign-policy story: In addition to

the 212 minutes devoted to the summit between President Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, inter-Korean diplomacy accounted for 48 minutes, and North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs for another 42 minutes, bringing the total to just over 300 minutes (or about 2 percent of total programming), not counting the 111 minutes on the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang.

The Syrian civil war and Trump's (now-modified) decision to withdraw U.S. troops were the next most-covered foreign-related stories (133), followed by Khashoggi's assassination (116), the cave rescue in Thailand (100), the royal wedding (71), ongoing fighting in Afghanistan (54), U.S.-China trade frictions (52), and steel and aluminum import tariffs (37).

The Israel-Palestinian conflict, NATO-U.S. diplomacy (notably Trump's trip to Brussels), and the Iran nuclear deal, including Washington's withdrawal from it, each earned a grand total of 29 minutes of coverage by the three networks, while the earthquake in Indonesia (26) and the eruption of the volcano in Guatemala (23) gained more than Yemen's 20 minutes in the network spotlight, one minute more than was devoted to Trump's quick visit to London and the Lion Air jet crash (19 minutes each).

Hopes among various humanitarian, human-rights, and peace groups that the media's strong focus on Khashoggi's killing would draw greater public attention to the catastrophic toll suffered by the civilian population during the 4-year-old Saudi-led campaign against Houthi rebels and their allies in Yemen seem to have been disappointed, according to Tyndall's findings. Of the total 20 minutes devoted to Yemen in 2018, 13 minutes preceded the Saudi journalist's death and only

seven minutes followed it. The relatively greater (but still pathetic) amount of attention before the September assassination came mostly as a result of dire warnings issued by the UN earlier in the spring. (Of the 20 minutes, CBS accounted for 11, while NBC and ABC split the remainder.)

The lack of media attention to Yemen post-Khashoggi, however, did not translate into congressional indifference. Motivated in major part by a campaign led by the *Post* itself (as well as other print media), Congress expressed its anger by taking up a series of resolutions that have gained momentum this year to curb U.S. support for the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen.

America's Worldview

If the network evening news provides as good a measure as any of how Americans perceive the world outside U.S. borders, it's not a great picture. As noted by Tyndall himself, South America and sub-Saharan Africa, with a combined population of nearly 2 billion, simply failed to register in the news. The rise of authoritarian movements in Europe also appeared to draw a blank, as did South and Southeast Asia (apart from the cave rescue).

And, despite the multi-trillion-dollar commitment by the United States to stabilizing and securing the Middle East region over the last two decades, there wasn't much evidence of its existence on network television besides the last throes of the campaign against the Islamic State in Syria and the Khashoggi killing. Iraq, to which Washington has sent well over a million troops since the 2003 invasion,

didn't even make the top 30 foreign stories in 2018.

Both Israel and Iran can probably take some satisfaction from their relatively small media footprint last year. The increasingly bellicose fulminations from Trump, National Security Advisor John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo against Tehran are unlikely to get much popular backing – let alone public enthusiasm for a new military conflict in the Middle East – in the absence of far more intense (and negative) coverage of the kind that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has been getting since the Khashoggi murder.

Israel, too, can be happy with its relative obscurity. Despite the hundreds of casualties inflicted by Israeli bullets on Palestinian demonstrators along the Gaza border last year, coverage of Israel-Palestine actually fell by nearly 50 percent, from the 42 minutes the networks devoted to the conflict in 2017, which was already a record low, to a mere 29, according to Tyndall's calculations over the previous 30 years.

This piece was [originally published](#) in Jim Lobe's blog on U.S. foreign policy [Lobelog.com](#)

Jim Lobe joined IPS in 1979 and opened its Washington, D.C., bureau in 1980, serving as bureau chief for most of the years since. He founded his popular blog dedicated to United States foreign policy in 2007. Jim is best known for his coverage of U.S. foreign policy for IPS, particularly the neo-conservative influence in the former George W. Bush administration. He has also written for Foreign Policy In Focus, AlterNet, The American Prospect and Tompaine.com,

among numerous other outlets.

The Unwritten Rule Between the US and Hizbullah

The two sides have long agreed to keep their hostilities covert, writes As`ad AbuKhalil, but Israel would like that to change.

By As`ad AbuKhalil

in Beirut

Special to Consortium News



David Hale, the U.S. under secretary for political affairs, went to Beirut last week to make anti-Iranian comments, to worry publicly about the destabilizing effects of Hizbollah in the region and to make it clear that, after Lebanon's elections in May, the composition of the new cabinet, which has been taking months to form, is an American matter.

His visit, in other words, made it clear that the U.S. will continue interfering in internal Lebanese affairs.

As Hale's boss, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, talks up the strategic relationship with Saudi Arabia, Hale may have been interested in reviving the Saudi local coalition in Lebanon. In the past that group was clustered under the March 14 Alliance, which came together in 2005 to oppose the regime in Syria and to push the Saudi-American-French agenda in Lebanon.

Despite the overwhelming support of Western governments,

Western media and Western human rights organizations, that coalition has fallen apart. And despite the usual U.S. and Saudi intervention and funding of its constituent elements in the last election, those candidates fared poorly. Some Shi`ite candidates who received Western and Saudi support drew no more than a hundred votes, and in one case, even less than that.

Hizbollah Wins Votes

Hizbullah candidates, by contrast, did very well, proving yet again that the party has the overwhelming support of the Shi`ite community.

Given the furor that Israel is raising over attack tunnels that it claims Hizbullah is building into its territory, it's safe to presume, that Hale's visit was made at the behest of Israel and aimed at bolstering a regional front against Hizbullah.

But that work is already complete. The Saudi-UAE alliance, have already declared Hizbullah a terrorist organization. The club of Gulf Arab despots is already aligned with the U.S. in its regional machinations.

Instead, the big problem that the U.S. faces in Lebanon is the dislike of the people. It's unpopular. Its anti-Hizbullah agenda – which is partly but not fully dictated by the Israeli lobby– puts it squarely on the side of Arab despots and Israel, both of which are widely despised in the region.

The U.S. has never considered its presence in Lebanon during the 1980s – on the side of Israeli militias notorious for

committing war crimes— as an occupying force. But that is how many Lebanese saw it.

However, time has passed in that regard, at least for some. Two parties – the Amal and the Progressive Socialist Party – both had militias that fought U.S. forces. And both those parties now enjoy good relations with the U.S.

In Lebanon, the main thorn in the side of the U.S. is Hizbullah, as has been the case for decades.

Hizbullah, which is both a political party and a fighting force, officially established itself in 1985 with the issuance of its manifesto to the world. But it was born a few years earlier, during the tumultuous and horrific events that surrounded the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, when the suffering of the southern Lebanese population spawned a new wave of radicalization that was sponsored and supported by the Iranian regime.

Starting Point Conflict

Its conflict with the U.S. began in that formative period, between 1982 and 1984, when U.S. troops were stationed in Lebanon to support and uphold the rule of right-wing sectarian militias aligned with Israel. It was during that time, in 1983, that the U.S. embassy in Beirut was bombed. A few months later, a U.S. Marine compound, which included French soldiers, was bombed as well.

A long-running dispute surrounds the question of who carried out the attacks. The U.S. remains convinced that Hizbullah and that one of its key leaders – Imad Mughniyyah personally—was responsible. After the attacks the U.S. and

Israel labelled Hizbullah a terrorist organization.

Hizbullah is unwavering in its declaration of the U.S. as an enemy of Lebanon and all “downtrodden people” (although the latter phrase is used less and less). But it denies attacking the barracks or embassy. It also distances itself from the Islamic Jihad Organization, which claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Despite the heated rhetoric that the two sides use against each other, the U.S. and Hizbullah have avoided direct military confrontation over the years. Instead they have fought proxy battles, from Iraq to Yemen to Syria. Even the U.S. assassination of Imad Mughniyyah in 2008 was not—from the standpoint of the U.S. government—really a violation of the unspoken rule of direct combat since the U.S. has made it clear that it held Mughniyyah responsible for the attacks on U.S. targets in Lebanon.

The U.S. has been fully supportive of Israeli wars on Hizbullah (and on Lebanon as a whole), hoping that Israel would finish off the party.

A Turning Point

In 2006, the U.S. was unconditional in its sponsorship and support for Israel. But Hizbullah held its ground better than any Arab army that Israel had faced over the decades. The outcome for Israel, was an embarrassing retreat.

Since then, the might and skill of Hizbullah in facing Israeli occupation and aggression seem only to increase with every new war and every new confrontation. Regardless of one’s assessment of Hizbullah’s intervention in Syria, its

fighters accumulated a unique battle experience there, along different fronts—which can only decrease Israeli confidence in its abilities vis-à-vis the party in the future round of war.

The U.S. does not want a military conflict with one of the most effective and popular militias in the Arab East. And Hizbullah does not want to add more conflicts to its plate. It is already actively engaged in regional conflicts and does not wish to start a global confrontation with the U.S.

But Israel, since its founding, has tried to make its enemies the enemies of the U.S. During the long years of the Cold War, the Israeli propaganda machine was desperately searching the Arabic press to find statements that could be twisted to portray Israel's enemies – whether Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser; or Ba`thist leaders, or the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat – as Soviet tools.

When Nasser and the Palestine Liberation Organization were indicating their desire for good relations with the U.S., Israeli was intent on portraying them both as the sworn enemies of the U.S.

Keeping the Fight Covert

Since its invasion of the Middle East after Sept. 11, 2001, the U.S. has preferred to keep its own fight with Hizbullah covert while supporting the direct Israeli war on Hizbullah.

Israel, however, after suffering that stunning defeat in July of 2006, has become increasingly intent on having the U.S. engage Hizbullah directly. This is something that has been made clear in the speeches of Israeli leaders and in

the unending supply of legislation sponsored by the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, targeting Hizbullah.

As the Trump administration tinkers with the idea of retreating militarily from the Middle East – despite the opposition of the war lobby – it cannot possibly welcome a war between Israel and Hizbollah that could spiral into a wider conflict and drag the U.S. into a heavier military intervention in the region.

What the U.S. wants now is to create a front to challenge Iran and its allies throughout the region. But the front could not add to what already is a long list of sanctions against Iran and Hizbullah and the placement of their names on terrorist lists and watch lists. None of that, however, is sufficient for the occupation state of Israel. After failing to dislodge Hizbullah in one of the longest wars of its history in 2006, Israel urgently wants the U.S. to take a shot on its behalf.

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

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Local Forces Who Defeated ISIS in Syria Defend Their Territory

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

A Wise and Rare Decision

By [As'ad AbuKhalil](#)

Special to Consortium News



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

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

hands is foolish. This President is putting our national security at grave risk.”

Hollywood celebrities have also jumped into the act.

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

The latest civilian death toll in Syria is over 107,000. The media has, by and large, disregarded the extent to which U.S. bombs have contributed to this enormous loss of life. When the history of the Syrian war is written, it is very likely that the destruction of Raqqa will be categorized as a U.S. war crime—to be added to the many war crimes committed by all sides in the protracted war.

Exaggerations of US Role

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

In a Tweet, Rukmini Callimachi of *The New York Times* oddly attributed the loss of 99 percent of ISIS territory in Syria and Iraq to the work of the U.S.-led “coalition” (so broadly

defined to include Sweden and Bahrain among others). This estimate typically ignores the contributions and sacrifices of native Syrian, Lebanese and Iraqi fighters, many of whom are foes of the U.S.

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

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

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

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

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

Presidents Obey the Military

Trump's fault, in the eyes of those who criticize his decision to withdraw troops from Syria, is that he did not follow the advice of his military. The notion that a president must follow military orders is entirely undemocratic. But since Sept. 11, 2001, it has been established—especially by Democrats—that the commander in chief should do just that. Thus, President Barack Obama went against his own views and agreed to expand the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan.

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

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

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

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

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

The underlying causes for U.S. withdrawals from Syria can't

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

ISIS is indeed on the run, and it has lost the bulk of its territorial base. It retains some fighters in its remnants in Eastern Syria, but its ability to expand is drastically limited. The major enemies of ISIS—those who drove ISIS from most of its territory—remain on the ground in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. While overlooked by Western reporters and columnists, they are ready to go to war again to fight back an ISIS offensive.

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