

Antifa or Antiwar: Leftist Exclusionism Against the Quest for Peace

The War Party's ultra-left wing uses different arguments to arrive at the same conclusions: Syria & Russia are enemies. Instead of practical solutions to real problems, they spread suspicion, distrust & enmity, argues Diana Johnstone.

By **Diana Johnstone** *Special to Consortium News*



CounterPunch has astonished many of its old fans by its current fundraising ad portraying the site as a prime target of Russia hostility. Under the slogan, "We have all the right enemies", CP portrays itself as a brave little crew being blown off the water by an evil Russian warship out to eliminate "lefty scum."

Ha Ha Ha, it's all a joke of course. But it's a joke that plays into the dangerous, current Russophobia promoted by Clintonite media, the deep state and the War Party. This is a reminder that Russophobia finds a variant in the writing of several prominent *CounterPunch* contributors.

Yes, *CounterPunch* continues to publish many good articles, but appears also to be paying its tribute to the establishment narrative.

Put on the defensive by the "fake news" assault against independent media, CP senior editor Jeffrey St Clair seemed to be shaken by *Washington Post* allegations that he had published articles by a "Russian troll" named Alice Donovan. St Clair never publicly questioned the FBI claim that the ephemeral plagiarist worked for the Kremlin, when she could as well have been planted by the FBI itself or some other agency, precisely in order to embarrass and intimidate the independent website.

The 'Step Toward Fascism'

The anti-Russian attitude on CP is promoted mainly by the same writers who stigmatize the slightest suggestion of building a broad non-ideological antiwar movement as a step toward "fascism". This leftist exclusionism goes against the traditions of the website founded by Alexander Cockburn and St Clair, and indeed, *CounterPunch* was fiercely attacked less than three years ago for its "red-brown", or "QuerFront" tendencies.

The attack, originating on a German site, warned that leftists who publish on *CounterPunch* "are unwittingly helping to promote the agenda of the far right". This article spelled out the Antifa doctrine:

"The idea of a red-brown alliance, or *Querfront* (German for 'transversal front'), has been a recurrent motif in far-right thought over the past century. Craving the legitimacy that an alliance with progressive forces can provide, reactionaries seize on ostensibly shared positions, chief amongst them opposition to corrupt élites, to create the impression that progressives could benefit from making common cause with them.

"*Querfront* (also known as 'third position') propaganda can be highly seductive. Today's (crypto)-fascist and other hard-right suitors, for example, focus on the commonplace left themes of opposition to war and corporate globalisation, the depredations of the 'banksters', civil liberties, and Palestinian solidarity."

So, you genuine leftists, beware: if someone seems to agree with you, it may be a far righter out to ensnare you into her web.

The article gave advice on how to tell a *QuerFront* argument from a true leftist one:

"A serious left analysis, say, of US support for Israeli apartheid will start by looking at the documented record of US foreign policy as a whole", whereas the red-brown, *QuerFront* third-positions position will say: "A foreign lobby has taken over the US government and media, and is forcing the US to act against 'American interests' and 'American values', and anyone who says otherwise is a Zionist infiltrator."

So you mustn't blame Zionists for Israel, it's all Washington's fault.

CounterPunch contributors singled out as dangerous right-wingers included Ralph Nader, Alison Weir, Ron Paul, Gilad Atzmon, Israel Shamir, Paul Craig Roberts and even Alexander Cockburn himself.

In his reply to [the article](#), published on its website, St. Clair seemed to understand exactly where this was coming from.

Caity Gets Counter-Punched

Thus it was surprising when, last July, *CounterPunch* ran a whole series of articles attacking independent antiwar blogger Caitlin Johnstone (no relation) for some inconsequential remark about her willingness to join in opposing war even with male supremacist Mike Cernovich. The purists pounced on the incongruity of a hypothetical Caitlin-Cernovich alliance as an opportunity to ridicule the more general principle of a broad single-issue antiwar movement. For this minor heresy, Caitlin Johnstone was denied her right to respond on the site calling itself "the fearless voice of the left".

On July 11, 2017, Yoav Litvin opened fire in an aggressive style that may have been fortified by his service in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). Exclusion is a habit one can learn in the IDF. It's ours, you have no right to be here, get out! That goes for the occupied left territories too. They decide who can stay and who does not belong.

In an interview last year, Litvin prided himself on adopting "the positive aspect of Zionism," which is "the image of a Jew who is a fighter." As a result of Jewish experience of persecution, he said, "We can lead a fight with all our brothers and sisters in minority communities."

Fight against whom? In order to accomplish fundamental change, one needs to build majorities. Jews leading a fight of minorities will go where? Into the dead end of identity politics?

On July 28, *CounterPunch* published an even more contemptuous piece in the anti-Caitlin series: "Enough Nonsense! The Left Does Not Collaborate with Fascists", by Eric Draitser. The Draitser rhetorical pose was to claim to prefer being water-boarded rather than having to write about Caitlin's "doltish" prose, but felt obliged to do so in order to stop the advance of fascism.

Still, he does not easily tire from coming back to the subject.

As moderator of *CounterPunch* Radio, Draitser has promoted himself as the voice of CP and thus as a leading authority on what is or is not "left". His role as mentor was demonstrated on his hour-long April 19, 2018 podcast with CP editors St. Clair and Joshua Frank. Draitser set the tone by elaborately ridiculing those who profess to be afraid of World War III. As if nuclear war were anything to worry about! What nonsense, he implied, getting all three to chortle contemptuously at the mention of Caitlin Johnstone, noted for such absurd concerns.

The Hilarity of World War III

Draitser dismissed the danger of World War III with his own original "class analysis": since Russia and the United States are both ruled by Oligarchs, they have too much in common to reasonably want to throw nuclear missiles at each other. (In other words, what was precisely the Marxist view of imperialist war.) St. Clair hesitated at this, noting the prevalence of irrationality in high spheres. But Draitser dismissed this objection and forged ahead undisturbed, managing what he called a "fun conversation."

The exclusionists are less concerned about war with Russia than about the failure of "the left" to be sufficiently critical of Russia – as if a shortage

of Russophobia were a real problem these days. Shortly before the anti-Caitlin campaign, Litvin interviewed Draitser and their fellow anti-fascist watch dog, Portland State University geography instructor Alexander Reid Ross, who also publishes frequently on *CounterPunch*.

Draitser complained that: "You see a lot of leftist academics, intellectuals and activists who have in many ways abandoned a real class analysis in favor of a loosely defined politics of opposition. Within this mindset, everything that opposes the United States, Israel, the Saudis or the EU is automatically good and should be supported irrespective of its qualities."

That simplistic dismissal of the antiwar "mindset" qualifies Draitser for his future place in mainstream media.

Ross' Red-Brown Chaos

Reid Ross, went him one better. "I see a number of red-brown alliances forming today, particularly in the field of political geography. A number of far-right groups view the modern-day axis of Syria, Iran and Russia as a kind of international counterweight to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which has always been seen by fascist groups as a kind of nemesis led by the nations that defeated the Rome-Berlin axis in 1945."

This is pure delirium. The nemesis that did the most to defeat the Rome-Berlin axis in 1945 was the Red Army. By conjuring up unidentified "far right groups", Ross manages to identify Syria, Iran and Russia with the fascist Axis powers in World War II. In reality, NATO has been a magnet for attracting European fascists, from Italy, where they cooperated in clandestine "Gladio" operations to destroy the left, to Ukraine, where genuine fascists are in a "partnership for war" with NATO.

Most Americans have not been well educated in the complexities of modern history. In his Antifa hoodie, Ross can dazzle his audience with a plethora of unfamiliar facts strung together by extremely questionable analysis, unchallenged by genuine experts.

In the Litvin interview, both Draitser and Ross add their small bit to prevailing Western Russophobia by dwelling on Putin's alleged support for European right-wing groups. Both stress the danger represented by Russian ambitions to establish a Eurasian empire, based on the ideology of Alexander Dugin.

Dugin is a religious reactionary, a tendency that may alarm Jews still haunted by Tsarist pogroms. They are also alarmed by Dugin's devotion to the thought of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, an ardent believer in Nazism and party

member. This is ironic, since Heidegger has been the favorite of a whole line of post-World War II French philosophers, from Sartre to Foucault, considered to be "on the left". This merely shows that philosophy can be a source of great confusion.

In an *Intercept* [article](#) last September, Ross was quoted as saying that, "Assad is a figure that is central to a realization of Eurasionism," embodying the idea that, "Russia will lead the world out of a dark age of materialism and toward an ultranationalist rebirth of homogenous ethno-states federated under a heterogeneous spiritual empire."

It's hard to see what is so terrifying about such a vague aspiration, with so little chance of realization. But it does provide a new angle for condemning the Russian connection with Syria.

Ideological 'Iron Curtain'

Ross went so far on March 9 in his vituperations, that the Southern Poverty Law Center, which first published his [article](#) on its "Hate Watch" site, felt obliged to withdraw it. The title perfectly echoes the *QuerFront* accusation earlier leveled against *CounterPunch*: "The Multipolar Spin: how fascists operationalize left-wing resentment."

In this gem of guilt by association, Ross applied the "six degrees of separation" theory to show that people have been seen with the wrong people and thus must be red-brown. The long list of untouchables included Ray McGovern, Brian Becker, *Global Research*, Margaret Kimberly of *Black Agenda Report*, Daniel McAdams, "conspiracy theorist" Vanessa Beeley, and special focus on Max Blumenthal, guilty of having spoken favorably of a "multipolar world."

The main problem with "multipolarism", according to Ross, "may be that it supports not the emergence of Russia as a world power but the rise of the Kremlin's authoritarian conservative political ideology."

So, we may conclude, we need an ideological Iron Curtain to protect the "liberal leftist" West from Russian "authoritarian" conservatism.

Westernizes vs. Slavophiles

Russian relations with the West have historically been marked by ideological rivalry between Westernizers and Slavophiles. It is obvious that Dugin is no more than the latest prophet of Slavophilia, the idea that Christian Russia is a beacon of virtue to the world.

Historically, Westernizers in Russia have repeatedly gained influence and then

lost out, because their overtures to the West were rebuffed on one pretext or another. (The British geopolitical tradition, based on the timeless dictum *divide et impera*, has traditionally favored policies to keep the continent divided) This merges easily with the Brzezinski doctrine of maintaining separation between Western Europe as a whole and Russia to maintain U.S. global hegemony.

Western rejection of Russia naturally favors a rise of the Slavophiles. It also obliges Russia to look to Eurasia rather than Western Europe. This is happening again.

Vladimir Putin is clearly in the Westernizing tradition. Not an ignorant buffoon like Yeltsin, ready to give away the shop to get a pat on the back from Bill. But rather someone who, as an intelligence agent (yes, KGB people learn a lot) lived in the West, spoke fluent German, and wanted Russia to have a dignified place in Europe – which was the dream of Gorbachev.

But this aspiration has been rudely rebuffed by the United States. Russians who yearned to be part of Europe have been disappointed, humiliated, and finally, angered. All their efforts at friendship have been met with increasingly outlandish portrayals of Russia as “the enemy”.

And yet despite everything, Putin persists in demonstrating his desire to work with Western partners, both by cutting back on military spending and again proposing to keep the pro-Western Dmitry Medvedev as Prime Minister.

If the West were really worried about Duginism, the remedy has always been obvious: improve relations with Putin.

Even Stalin did not really consider it Moscow’s job to convert Western Europe to communism, and it is certain that Putin has no illusion about converting his Western neighbors to Duginism. Russia is not out to change the West, but to make peace and do business, with whoever is willing.

The Russophobic exclusionists really constitute the ultra-left wing of the War Party, which uses different arguments to arrive at the same conclusions: Syria and Russia are enemies. They offer no practical solutions to any real problem, but spread suspicion, distrust and enmity. They discredit the very idea of joining with Russia in peaceful mediation between Israel and Iran, for example. The real thrust of this odd campaign is to minimize the danger of war with Iran, or of direct confrontation with Russia, as Netanyahu continues to drag the United States and its European sidekicks deeper into Middle East wars on behalf of Israel’s regional ambitions.

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and Western foreign policy. She received a Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota and was active in the movement against the Vietnam War. Johnstone was European editor of the U.S. weekly *In These Times* from 1979 to 1990, and continues to be a correspondent for the publication. She was press officer of the Green group in the European Parliament from 1990 to 1996. Her books include *Queen of Chaos: The Misadventures of Hillary Clinton*, CounterPunch Books (2016) and *Fools' Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions*, Pluto Press (2002).

U.S. Media Whitewashes Gaza Massacre

As Israel killed more than 50 Palestinians in cold blood protesting the American embassy move on Monday, U.S. corporate media failed to accurately report what happened in Gaza, once again meekly protecting the government line, argues Joe Lauria.

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



Typical of the mindset of corporate media reporting on what happened in Gaza on Monday as Israeli soldiers killed more than 50 protesting Palestinians, is this tweet from CNN. It says: “Death toll rises to at least 52 people during clashes along the border fence between Israel and Gaza, Palestinian officials say. More than 2,400 people have been injured.” CNN’s new slogan is “#FactsFirst.”

Adam Johnson, who writes for the media watchdog Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, responded to CNN with a tweet of his own:

“This one’s got it all:

- ‘death toll rises’ – no one was killed and no one specific party did the killing, the death toll just mysteriously ‘rises’
- ‘clashes’ – launders all power asymmetry
- ‘2,400 people have been injured’ – all 2,400 are Palestinian but lets go with ‘people’.”

Craig Murray, a former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, said on his [blog](#) that he did a Google News search for the word “massacre” and found not one reference

to Gaza.

A *New York Times* headline on Monday said: “Dozens of Palestinians have died in protests as the U.S. prepares to open its Jerusalem Embassy.” Journalist Glenn Greenwald responded: “Most western media outlets have become quite skilled – through years of practice – at writing headlines and describing Israeli massacres using the passive tense so as to hide the culprit. But the all-time champion has long been, and remains, the *New York Times*. #HaveDied.”

[Perhaps because of pressure from Greenwald and others, the *Times* on Monday night changed its headline to “Israel Kills Dozens at Gaza Border as U.S. Embassy Opens in Jerusalem.”]

Yet another CNN headline simply read: “Dozens die in Gaza.” Journalist Max Blumenthal responded: “Maybe they were old. Perhaps they were very sick. They just up and died! Who will solve the mystery behind these deaths?”

Blumenthal later offered a possible solution to the mystery: “According to the White House, Khhamas launched 41 protesters into unsuspecting Israeli bullets.”

Projecting

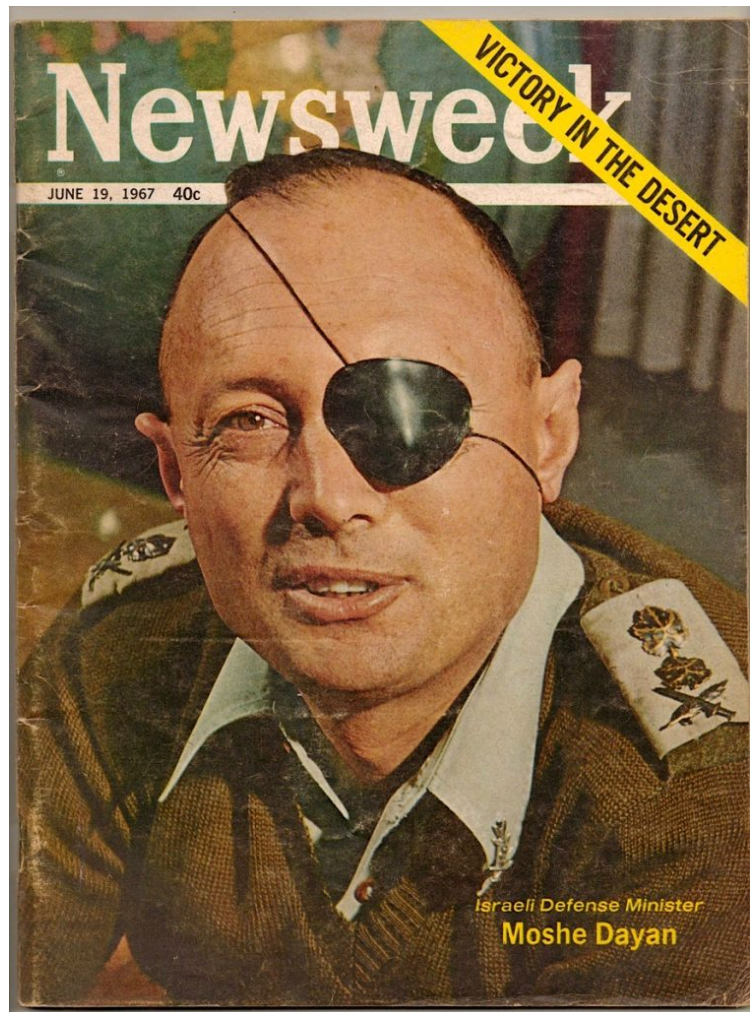
Deflecting blame from Israel is one thing. But projecting it onto the victim is quite another. Israel’s UN Ambassador Danny Danon on Monday called for the U.N. Security Council to, “Condemn Hamas for their war crimes,” because “every casualty on the border is a direct victim of Hamas.”

He said in a statement released by Israel’s U.N. mission:

“Condemn Hamas for the war crimes they commit. Not only does Hamas incite tens of thousands of Palestinians to breach the border and hurt Israeli civilians, but Hamas also deliberately endangers Palestinian civilians. The murder of Israeli civilians or deaths of the people of Gaza – each one of them is a desirable outcome for Hamas. Every casualty on the border is a victim of Hamas’ war crimes, every death is a result of Hamas’ terror activity, and these casualties are solely Hamas’ responsibility.”

That’s one way to wash the Israeli government’s (blood-soaked) hands of the matter. Especially if you fear Israel will be accused of war crimes itself for its actions on Monday. Danon mentioned “breaching the border.” But it is virtually impossible to get in or out of Gaza without Israeli permission. Burning kites lofted over the barrier that pens in nearly two million Gazans subject to an internationally unrecognized economic blockade, supposedly constitutes “breaching,” in Danon’s mind.

He would do well to consider the words of Moshe Dayan, one of the Israel's Founding Fathers, who said in 1956:



“What cause have we to complain about their fierce hatred to us? For eight years now, they sit in their refugee camps in Gaza, and before their eyes we turn into our homestead the land and villages in which they and their forefathers have lived.” He went on: “We are a generation of settlers, and without the steel helmet and gun barrel, we shall not be able to plant a tree or build a house. . . . Let us not be afraid to see the hatred that accompanies and consumes the lives of hundreds of thousands of Arabs who sit all around us and wait for the moment when their hands will be able to reach our blood.”

So on the day, 61 years later, when the United States declared Jerusalem/Al Quds as the capital of Israel by moving its embassy there, rather than leaving its status to negotiation, people still trapped in Gaza protested at the gate fencing them in while Israeli military snipers picked off more than 50 of them and wounded thousands more for protesting their entrapment.

U.S. Parrots Israel, Media Parrots U.S.

Danon's position was callously promoted by the White House on Monday. Deputy Press Secretary Raj Shah was asked several times to condemn Israel's military response. "We believe Hamas is responsible for these tragic deaths," he said. "Their rather cynical exploitation of the situation is what's leading to these deaths and we want it stopped." He later blamed Hamas for a "gruesome and unfortunate propaganda attempt."

Unsurprisingly, Congress also lined up behind the Jewish State, mostly ignoring what went on in Gaza.

At the ceremony opening the embassy, Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, called Monday "a monumental day in United States-Israel relations." Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, who was among four senators and 10 members of the House of Representatives present, incredulously said moving the embassy "furthers the chances of peace in the Middle East by demonstrating that America's support for Israel is unconditional and will not be bullied by global media opinion."

Back in Washington, Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, proclaimed: "Every nation should have the right to choose its capital. I sponsored legislation to do this two decades ago, and I applaud President Trump for doing it."

Ajamu Baraka, the Green Party vice presidential candidate in 2016, tweeted: "Where are the democrats condemning the slaughter in Gaza? If this was Assad they would be joining the republicans calling for military action pretending like they cared for Arab life."

Handful of Democrats Speak Out

Bernie Sanders of Vermont mildly criticized Israel's murderous response. "Hamas violence does not justify Israel firing on unarmed protesters," he said. "The United States must play an aggressive role in bringing Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and the international community together to address Gaza's humanitarian crisis and stop this escalating violence."

Senator Dianne Feinstein, a Democrat from California, was more critical: "It's just heartbreaking. The humanitarian situation in Gaza is desperate. Instead of cutting aid, the Trump administration must restore our leadership role and do what it can to alleviate the Palestinians' suffering. The location of the embassy is a final-status issue that should have been resolved as part of peace negotiations where both sides benefit, not just one side. Israel will only know true security when it is at peace with its neighbors."

Representative Betty McCollum, a Democrat from Minnesota, tweeted: "Today's

@USEmbassyIsrael opening in Jerusalem & killing of dozens of Gaza protesters advances @netanyahu agenda of occupation & oppression of Palestinians. @realDonaldTrump policies are fueling conflict, abandoning diplomatic efforts to achieve peace.”

Pressure to support Israel on The Hill is infamously intense. But what is the media’s excuse for being afraid to simply report facts, such as that Israeli soldiers “killed” Palestinians on Monday. They didn’t just simply die.

Just because U.S. government figures are apologists for Israel, does not mean the media must be too. But that would require the U.S. having an independent mainstream media.

When control of powerful mainstream communications breeds self-aggrandizement and adherence to a line pushed for so long because it got you where you are in the pecking order of media culture, it seems virtually impossible to shift gears and take another look at what you are reporting.

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Israelis Continue to Open Fire on Gaza Protestors: An Eyewitness Account

An Interview with Gaza-based Palestinian Journalist, Wafa Al-Udaini

By Dennis J Bernstein



According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), the Palestinian death toll since March 30, 2018 “has risen to 33, including 4 children and 1 photojournalist, and the number of those wounded has risen to 2,436, including 410 children, 66 women, 22 journalists and 9 paramedics.”

There have been no Israeli casualties.

According to PCHR, on Friday, April 20th, Israeli snipers “killed 4 Palestinian civilians, including a child, and wounded 274 others, including 41 children, 6 women and 1 journalist, in addition to hundreds suffering tear gas inhalation,

including PCHR's fieldworkers who were documenting the Israeli forces' suppression of the entirely peaceful demonstrations near the border fence with Israel, east of the Gaza Strip."

PCHR maintains that "for the fourth week in a row and upon a decision by the Israeli highest military and political echelons, the Israeli forces used lethal force against the peaceful protesters, who did not pose any threat to the soldiers' life." There is a cell phone camera recording now being widely distributed that appears to show Israeli snipers and soldiers cheering as they gun down unarmed Palestinians fleeing in the distance.

On April 17th, I spoke with Gaza-based Palestinian Journalist Wafa Al-Udaini who has been an eyewitness to all the Gaza protests in the ongoing anti-occupation, Right to Return protests since late March. Al-Udaini's friend and colleague, Yaser Murtaja, a photojournalist and camera person for a Gaza-based media production company was shot on April 6th by Israeli sharpshooters and died the next day of his wounds.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, "Pictures posted on social media by local journalists and witness testimony from local journalists show that Murtaja was wearing a bulletproof vest and helmet that were both clearly marked with the words "PRESS" when he was hit."

Today I interview ths little brave man.He said,he went2 protest peacefully 2get back occupied lands#GreatReturnMarch pic.twitter.com/5RMUc9eGNg

– Wafa A Al-Udaini (@wafa_Gaza) [April 18, 2018](#)

In the following interview, Al-Udaini offers an eye-witness recounting of the initial protest in Gaza on March 30th, in which at least 18 protesters were killed by Israeli snipers and well over a thousand people were wounded.

Dennis Bernstein: We are going to hear now some eyewitness accounts, some very troubling testimony of the way in which Israeli snipers, from a long distance away, behind a fence and across a field, began to gun down hundreds of people, wounding over a thousand protesters and killing at least 18 Palestinians on the first day. It was truly horrifying.

Some people were protesting, some were praying, and others, like Wafa Al-Udaini, were sitting down for a meal during the long day of anti-occupation protests, when Israeli snipers opened fire and began to gun down unarmed Palestinians.

Wafa Al-Udaini, tell us a bit of your background and then tell us what you

witnessed on March 30th and the other protest days that you were an eye-witness to.

Wafa Al-Udaini: I live here in the Gaza Strip. My grandparents were expelled from Beersheba by Israeli gangs in 1948. Now I live as a Palestinian refugee in the Gaza Strip. I work as a journalist for different websites and on radio. I am also an activist, the leader of a youth group here composed of students and journalists who work to present Palestinian issues to the world.

We were so excited about the Great March of Return protests, which began on the 13th of March. It was a peaceful and secular march, where all Palestinians, male and female, elderly and children, came to the border fence to resist peacefully. I took my family with me and we brought along something to eat and drink. We sat together and shared our food. We were asserting our right to demonstrate and reminding the world of our right to return to the land we occupied before we were driven from our homes. I brought my camera and intended to livestream the event. We were about 700 meters from the Israeli side.

DB: Could you talk about when you realized that the soldiers were opening fire on civilians? Were people around you being shot?

WAU: At the moment, I was interviewing people around me about what life was like before 1948, stories they had heard from their grandparents. Then suddenly I heard shots and I saw people running. I asked what was happening and they told me that the Israelis were opening fire. A man fleeing with his children told me some had been murdered. The Israelis began throwing teargas and they gunned down people who were fleeing.

DB: Let me explain to people that there is the border fence, which is electrified, and then there is a major piece of land between the fence and where the protest was happening. My understanding is that the soldiers were sharpshooters and they were picking people off from the other side of the fence.

WAU: Exactly. It had nothing to do with "defense," because of the distance and because we were unarmed. They fired on women holding the Palestinian flag. This was their crime. Claims of self defense are just ludicrous.

DB: A friend of yours, a journalist, Yaser Murtaja, was gunned down on April 6th. I understand he was wearing his press vest, that clearly marked him as a journalist. He was gunned down and killed by Israeli snipers. Do you think he might have been shot *because* he was wearing his press vest, and the Israelis weren't crazy about their killing fields being broadcast around the world?

WAU: Yes. The Israelis are realizing that they can't continue to fool people

indefinitely. This camera footage of all of this flies in the face of any claims that the Israeli army is acting in self defense. These on-the-ground images show Israeli propaganda for what it is.

DB: It appears they are willing to wipe out peaceful protesters while the rest of the world is watching, while the US government continues to provide them with arms, and while the Western corporate press works to bury the real story.

Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of *Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom*. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net. You can get in touch with the author at dbernstein@igc.org.

On the Criminal Referral of Comey, Clinton et al: Will the Constitution Hold and the Media Continue to Suppress the Story?

Ray McGovern reports on a major development in the Russia-gate story that has been ignored by corporate media: a criminal referral to the DOJ against Hillary Clinton, James Comey and others, exposing yet again how established media suppresses news it doesn't like—about as egregious an example of unethical journalism as there is.

By Ray McGovern *Special to Consortium News*



Wednesday's criminal referral by 11 House Republicans of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as well as several former and serving top FBI and Department of Justice (DOJ) officials is a giant step toward a Constitutional crisis.

Named in the referral to the DOJ for possible violations of federal law are: Clinton, former FBI Director James Comey; former Attorney General Loretta Lynch; former Acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe; FBI Agent Peter Strzok; FBI Counsel Lisa Page; and those DOJ and FBI personnel "connected to" work on the "Steele Dossier," including former Acting Attorney General Sally Yates and former Acting Deputy Attorney General Dana Boente.

With no attention from corporate media, the referral was sent to Attorney

General Jeff Sessions, FBI Director Christopher Wray, and U.S. Attorney for the District of Utah John Huber. Sessions appointed Huber months ago to assist DOJ Inspector General (IG) Michael Horowitz. By most accounts, Horowitz is doing a thoroughly professional job. As IG, however, Horowitz lacks the authority to prosecute; he needs a U.S. Attorney for that. And this has to be disturbing to the alleged perps.

This is no law-school case-study exercise, no arcane disputation over the fine points of this or that law. Rather, as we say in the inner-city, "It has now hit the fan." Criminal referrals can lead to serious jail time. Granted, the upper-crust luminaries criminally "referred" enjoy very powerful support. And that will come especially from the mainstream media, which will find it hard to retool and switch from Russia-gate to the much more delicate and much less welcome "FBI-gate."

As of this writing, a full day has gone by since the

letter/referral was reported, with total silence so far from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and other big media as they grapple with how to spin this major development. News of the criminal referral also slipped by Amy Goodman's non-mainstream *DemocracyNow!*, as well as many alternative websites.

The 11 House members chose to include the following egalitarian observation in the first paragraph of the letter conveying the criminal referral: "Because we believe that those in positions of high authority should be treated the same as every other American, we want to be sure that the potential violations of law outlined below are vetted appropriately." If this uncommon attitude is allowed to prevail at DOJ, it would, in effect, revoke the *de facto* "David Petraeus exemption" for the be-riboned, be-medaled, and well-heeled.

Stonewalling

Meanwhile, the patience of the chairmen of House committees investigating abuses at DOJ and the FBI is wearing thin at the slow-rolling they are encountering in response to requests for key documents from the FBI. This in-your-face intransigence is all the more odd, since several committee members have already had access to the documents in question, and are hardly likely to forget the content of those they know about. (Moreover, there seems to be a good chance that a patriotic whistleblower or two will tip them off to key documents being withheld.)

The DOJ IG, whose purview includes the FBI, has been cooperative in responding to committee requests for information, but those requests can hardly include documents of which the committees are unaware.

Putting aside his partisan motivations, House Intelligence Committee Chair Devin Nunes (R-CA) was unusually blunt two months ago in warning of legal consequences for officials who misled the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court in order to enable surveillance on Trump and his associates. Nunes's words are likely to have sent chills down the spine of those with lots to hide: "If they need to be put on trial, we will put them on trial," he said. "The reason Congress exists is to oversee these agencies that we created."

Whether the House will succeed in overcoming the resistance of those criminally referred and their many accomplices and will prove able to exercise its Constitutional prerogative of oversight is, of course, another matter – a matter that matters.

And Nothing Matters More Than the Media

The media will be key to whether this Constitutional issue is resolved. Largely because of Trump's own well earned reputation for lying, most Americans are susceptible to slanted headlines like this recent one – "Trump escalates attacks on FBI ..." – from an article in *The Washington Post*, commiserating with the treatment accorded fired-before-retired prevaricator McCabe and the FBI he (dis)served.

Nor is the *Post* above issuing transparently clever warnings – like this one in a lead article on March 17: "Some Trump allies say they worry he is playing with fire by taunting the FBI. 'This is open, all-out war. And guess what? The FBI's going to win,' said one ally, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to be candid. 'You can't fight the FBI. They're going to torch him.'" [sic]

Mind-Boggling Criminal Activity

What motivated the characters now criminally "referred" is clear enough from a wide variety of sources, including the text messages exchange between Strzok and Page. Many, however, have been unable to understand how these law enforcement officials thought they could get away with taking such major liberties with the law.

None of the leaking, unmasking, surveillance, "opposition research," or other activities directed against the Trump campaign can be properly understood, if one does not bear in mind that it was considered a sure thing that Secretary Clinton would become President, at which point illegal and extralegal activities undertaken to help her win would garner praise, not prison. The activities were hardly considered high-risk, because candidate Clinton was sure to win.

But she lost.

Comey himself gives this away in the embarrassingly puerile book he has been hawking, "A Higher Loyalty" – which

amounts to a pre-emptive move motivated mostly by loyalty-to-self, in order to obtain a Stay-Out-of-Jail card. Hat tip to Matt Taibbi of Rolling Stone for a key observation, in his recent [article](https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/features/james-comey-j-edgar-hoover-w519214), "James Comey, the Would-Be J. Edgar Hoover," about what Taibbi deems the book's most damning passage, where Comey discusses his decision to make public the re-opening of the Hillary Clinton email investigation.

Comey admits, "It is entirely possible that, because I was making decisions in an environment where Hillary Clinton was sure to be the next president, my concern about making her an illegitimate president by concealing the re-started investigation bore greater weight than it would have if the election appeared closer or if Donald Trump were ahead in the polls."

The key point is not Comey's tortured reasoning, but rather that Clinton was "sure to be the next president." This would, of course, confer automatic immunity on those now criminally referred to the Department of Justice. Ah, the best laid plans of mice and men – even very tall men. One wag claimed that the "Higher" in "A Higher Loyalty" refers simply to the very tall body that houses an outsized ego.

I think it can be said that readers of Consortiumnews.com may be unusually well equipped to understand the anatomy of FBI-gate as well as Russia-gate. Listed below chronologically are several links that might be viewed as a kind of "whiteboard" to refresh memories. You may wish to refer them to any friends who may still be confused.

2017

[Russia-gate's Mythical 'Heroes' June 6, 2017](#)

[What Did Hillary Clinton Know? Oct. 25, 2017](#)

[The Democratic Money Behind Russia-gate Oct. 29, 2017](#)

[The Foundering Russia-gate 'Scandal' Dec. 13, 2017](#)

2018

[The FBI Hand Behind Russia-gate Jan. 11, 2018](#)

[Will Congress Face Down the Deep State? Jan. 30, 2018](#)

Nunes Memo Reports Crimes at Top of FBI and DOJ Feb. 2, 2018

'This is Nuts': Liberals Launch 'Largest Mobilization in History' in Defense of Russiagate Probe Feb. 9, 2018

Nunes: FBI and DOJ Perps Could Be Put on Trial Feb. 19, 2018

'Progressive' Journalists Jump the Shark on Russia-gate March 7, 2018

Intel Committee Rejects Basic Underpinning of Russiagate March 14, 2018

McCabe: A War on (or in) the FBI? March 18, 2018

Former CIA Chief Brennan Running Scared March 19, 2018

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served as an Army Infantry/Intelligence officer and then a CIA analyst for a total of 30 years. In retirement, he co-created Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Instead of a Pulitzer, He was Fired

Don North, veteran TV reporter, looks back on his days with the late Consortium News founder and editor Bob Parry, beginning in Central America during Reagan's wars.

By Don North



I first met Bob back in the early 80's in El Salvador. We bonded immediately over our mutual revulsion for US President Ronald Reagan and his dirty wars in Central America.

I was trying to film and produce documentaries and spent three months in the mountains with FMLN guerrillas trying to tell their story. Bob was with the Associated Press and later *Newsweek* and *The Nation*. But we both had the same problem – few mainstream media organizations wanted to go up against what Reagan was promoting. On a meagre budget I produced a half-hour program “*Guazapa: The*

Face of War in El Salvador.”

It got a few showings in church basements and colleges but no network would run it and even PBS, supposedly a haven for independent journalism said, “Show us something supporting the Salvador government and we might consider it.”

Bob uncovered the Iran-Contra scandal, but instead of a Pulitzer he was fired by the AP and later Newsweek and Bloomberg. So Bob took the advice of renowned media critic A.J. Liebling: “Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one.”

With the help of sons Sam and Nat, Bob started a magazine called I.F. Stone Magazine and a newsletter called The Consortium, which soon morphed into ConsortiumNews.com on the Internet, blazing the way for a generation of news bloggers.

I continued making documentaries nobody wanted to buy, mostly about wars that nobody gave a damn about, but it turned out that along the way I would often stumble onto stories that interested Bob for Consortium News.

Alas, I wasn't a natural fit...A Canadian immigrant who spelled in

strange Canadian Franco-English and coming from a broadcast background I didn't care how I spelled things as long as I could pronounce them. But Bob, as you know, was a patient editor and diligent fact and spell checker and often from his encyclopaedic brain offered a sentence here or a paragraph there that somehow made my story make sense and flow.

There was only one time in 23 years that I can remember Bob and I not being able to agree on a story. I was in northern Iraq, in the city of Irbil teaching a journalism class, but the Kurds were holding an election and I jumped in to cover convoluted Kurdish politics. I'd spent some time on it and tried to figure out what it all meant and would lead to. Bob didn't like it and gave me probably the worst appraisal he used.

...“Don, it just reads like something I already read in the New York Times”... in other words he thought it was lousy journalism. A few weeks ago I happened to find that article in old files...and you know...Bob was right.

Over 23 years Bob published an amazing variety of stories that others shied away from ... a long row of candles that shone light in dark places. As Winston Churchill once said, “The longer you look back, the farther you can look forward.” And they are still all there in the Consortium archives and make very good reading today. I skimmed over it the other day to recall some of my favorite contributions.

As you would suspect Bob and I were drawn to a lot of stories about embattled journalists. And when after 9/11 the mainstream media were beating the drums for George Bush's Iraq invasion Consortium News published tough questions.

Liebling, one of Bob's favorite journalists, had it right. He wrote "I take a grave view of the Press. It is the weak slat under the bed of democracy."

After the disastrous war it turned out Bob's posts were right...Liebling was right. Veteran journalist Bill Moyers picked up on Liebling's words in one of my favourite quotes: "After the invasion of Iraq, the slat broke and some strange bedfellows fell to the floor; establishment journalists, neo-conservative polemicists, beltway pundits, right wing warmongers flying the skull and bones of the 'balanced and fair brigade,' and administration flacks whose classified leaks were manufactured lies—all romping on the same mattress in the foreplay to disaster. Thousands of casualties and billions of dollars later, most of the media co-conspirators caught in *flagrante delicto* are still prominent, still celebrated, and still holding forth with no more contrition than a weather-caster who made the wrong prediction as to the next day's temperature."

In 2015 Bob won the coveted I.F. Stone Medal from the Nieman Foundation...I suspect largely because he was such a devoted disciple of Izzy Stone whose advice..."Never believe anything until its been officially denied"...became a golden rule for Bob.

Another journalist/philosopher Bob followed was of course George Orwell. A few months ago I followed Orwell's trail around Barcelona, Spain to write "Homage to Barcelona" for Consortium. Orwell wrote a rule for journalists which is especially true for these times now as we hurtle toward a new cold war. "During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act."

Sadly, Bob is gone and the world weighs less. But WOW, what an impression he left...as well as the inspiration, and I hope the courage for all of us to carry on in his tradition.

Don North, a veteran war correspondent who covered the Vietnam War and many other conflicts around the world, is the author of Inappropriate Conduct, the story of a WW II correspondent whose career was crushed by the intrigue he uncovered.

It Started Over Lunch and Led to the Exposure of One of the Greatest Scandals in U.S. History

The following are remarks at the memorial for Bob Parry delivered on Saturday by Brian Barger, who shared many bylines with Bob (and a drink or two) at the Associated Press, uncovering the Iran-Contra scandal, and provoking the ire of AP editors, nervous about what the two friends were finding out.

By Brian Barger



I remember it was a pleasure to meet Bob in 1984. The CIA was ramping up its covert war in Nicaragua. News reports from the region documented atrocities committed by President Reagan's "freedom fighters" and their CIA handlers. Congress was starting to take notice, and was threatening to cut off US aid.

I got a call from Betsy Cohn, a Latin America scholar from Georgetown University, saying I should meet this guy from the AP. Over lunch we shared notes. I'd done much of my reporting from Central America and Miami, and Bob from Washington. We agreed there was a lot of low-hanging fruit on this story, and we talked about why there was such reluctance to cover it, particularly among the Washington press corps. We agreed that this could be a good reporting partnership.

And it was in these early days that I learned some important lessons about journalism from Bob.

It started over that lunch, when Bob politely reminded me that I'd buried the lede in a recent story that should have received wide attention – but didn't. This was Bob Parry journalism lesson number one: Don't bury the lede.

The story was about a blue, cloth-covered manual produced by the CIA and distributed to contra commanders in Honduras. Bob wanted a copy. So, Bob Parry journalism lesson Number Two: Be persistent. I gave it to him, and Bob produced a deeply reported piece on what thereafter was known as the CIA assassination manual. Lesson number three: Make those ten extra phone calls before calling it a day.

This was the beginning of an enduring friendship that lasted 35 years. It was also the beginning of an enduring work relationship. Over the next two years, we

peeled back the story about White House aide Oliver North and the White House role orchestrating a secret war in Nicaragua.

As we dove deeper, the story got nuttier. North and the CIA had recruited Cuban Americans who moved on from the failed Bay of Pigs invasion to more lucrative endeavors such as drug trafficking. Soon, contra airstrips in Central America were being used for cocaine shipments. The North network recruited mercenaries from Alabama. They recruited pilots who flew guns down and drugs back. They recruited a DEA official in Costa Rica to fend off probing FBI agents. And they recruited a US Attorney in Miami to prevent a federal drugs-and-guns prosecution from moving forward.

And lots of people began to talk, inside and outside the North network.

So, Bob continually wondered, why wasn't the mainstream press jumping on this? That question would frame most of Bob's subsequent career. I think this story stripped away whatever naïveté Bob may have had left about U.S. journalism, and inspired him to see the government – and the press in a new light.

The Illusion of Winning

Bob followed the bread crumbs. He discovered the hand of a senior CIA official, the longtime head of psychological operations, a guy named Walt Raymond. He was moved to the National Security Council to institutionalize what they called black propaganda against the American people. Formerly benign public affairs offices were transformed into "offices of public diplomacy." One of Raymond's urgent tasks, Bob reported, was to "paint white hats on the contras and black hats on the Sandinistas." Another was to systematically discredit journalists who failed to adhere to Washington's talking points on Central America.

If they couldn't win on the battlefield, they would at least create the illusion of winning. They called it perception management.

At the National Security Council, Bob was labelled an avowed liberal with close contacts inside the Democratic Party. It was the new red-baiting. I remember one afternoon Bob got off the phone with a State Department public diplomacy officer who had warned him that I might be a Bulgarian intelligence agent who was sleeping with Sandinista operatives. Two days after Bob insisted on evidence to back up such a wild accusation, a thick package arrived containing copies of stories I'd written over the past few years.

But as it turned out, this sort of tactic was enough to dissuade many career-minded journalists from touching the story.

The Story Was Sent Back

During the time Bob and I worked together at the Associated Press in the mid-1980s, we met a wall of resistance to our stories that didn't make much sense. We turned in one story about the Oliver North network, citing more than two dozen sources, among them aides to North, contra leaders, and U.S. law enforcement officials. The story was sent back. "Can't you get North to just confess?" the AP bureau chief asked.

We turned in another story, nine months in the works, about contras involved in drug smuggling. The editing was excruciating, and even after our bureau chief edited out any references to CIA involvement, the story was killed. It was only published by accident on the Spanish-language wire before AP executives decided they couldn't hold it any longer.

It was about this time that we learned that our bureau chief was meeting regularly with North; they each were point-persons in efforts to free AP reporter Terry Anderson, being held hostage in Lebanon.

As sympathetic as Bob was to Terry Anderson's plight, he thought there might be a conflict of interest, since our bureau chief had insisted on personally editing out stories about North.

After Bob and I left the AP, we continued informally working together for many years.

A Plane Goes Down

In early October 1986, I remember coming out of an interview with a drug pilot at Miami Correctional Center and called Bob to go over what I'd learned. Bob interrupted and asked whether I'd heard the news: A U.S. plane ferrying weapons to the contras had been shot down, and there was a survivor.

That afternoon Bob and I were on a flight to Managua, where we spent the night pouring over boxes of documents, IDs and flight logs that mapped out an elaborate air resupply operation flown out of El Salvador's Ilopango air base. The operation was run by two CIA operatives: Felix Rodriguez, a close friend of CIA veteran Donald Gregg, then the chief of staff to Vice President George Bush, and Luis Posada Carriles, another CIA operative and veteran bomb-maker who had just escaped, with the help of the CIA and Rodriguez, from a Venezuelan prison where he was serving time for bombing a commercial airliner.

Fast forward to 2018, in one of our last conversations, Bob told me what he'd found in another of his visits to the Reagan library: More documents about Walt Raymond and his efforts to use disinformation as a standard-issue weapon in taming the press.

Bob was not an ideologue. His zeal was in pursuing the truth. There was a lot he didn't like about the political right, and he didn't have much patience for the left.

Uncensored Reporting

Since the late 1980s, Bob saw the interventionist neoconservative movement as the biggest threat to US democracy and to stability in the world. And he saw Consortium News as a vehicle for uncensored reporting and an avenue to pursue the kind of historical narrative rare in American journalism today.

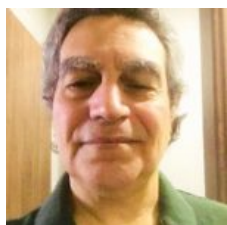
Of course, there was also the humorous side of Bob, who kept me laughing many long hours, often at Larry's, Bob's favorite gay bar around the corner from my house.

And that reminds me of at least one project Bob and I hadn't gotten to before he died. We'd come up with this brilliant idea of cashing in on everything we'd learned. We would launch a PR firm. We'd call it Psy-Ops Inc. And to prove our worth, we would select the most unlikely characters we could find, and turn them into winning candidates, using Walt Raymond's playbook. It sounded like a great idea, but then we had the Tea Party. And then, well, the rest is history.

Bob Parry: Holding Government and Media to Account

A memorial was held on Saturday for Robert Parry, the late founder and editor of this web site. Among the speakers paying tribute to Bob was Joe Lauria, the new editor of Consortium News.

By Joe Lauria



If you watch Bob's various talks available on YouTube you'll see that he was often asked why he started Consortium News. Bob says, essentially, that he got fed up with the resistance he faced from editors who put obstacles in the way of his stories, often of great national significance. One editor at *Newsweek* told him they were suppressing a story for "the good for the country." The facts he'd unearthed went too far in exposing the dark side of American power. His editor was speaking, of course, about what was for the good of the rulers of the country, not the rest of us. As we just heard from John Pilger, Bob created a consortium for journalists who ran up against similar obstruction from their

editors: a place for them to publish what they could not get published in the mainstream.

Sixteen years after Bob launched Consortium News with Sam and Nat I became one of those journalists. I'd had similar experiences. When I covered the diplomacy at the U.N. leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq for a Canadian chain that published the *Montreal Gazette*, *Ottawa Citizen*, and other papers, I gave equal weight in my stories to the German, French and Russian opposition on the Security Council to the invasion. So the chain's foreign editor called me up one day from Ottawa to berate me for not supporting the war effort in my reporting.

He told me his son was a marine. I told him I was certain he was proud of him, but my job was not to support the war but to report objectively on what was happening at the Security Council. The Bush administration never got their resolution. But they invaded anyway. It was illegal under international law as Kofi Annan finally said after being pressured by a BBC interviewer. Annan was then hounded to the point of a near nervous breakdown by the likes of then UN Ambassador John Bolton, who, unfortunately, has since gotten a promotion. I, on the other hand, on the day of the invasion was fired.

Later, while covering the U.N. for *The Wall Street Journal*, I found that several of my stories were suppressed or inconvenient facts were getting edited out. One was a story I twice had rejected on a declassified Defense Intelligence Agency document that predicted the rise of ISIS back in 2012 but was ignored in Washington. It said the U.S. and its allies in Europe, Turkey and the Gulf were supporting a Salafist principality in eastern Syria that could turn into an Islamic State. Such a story would undermine the government's war on terrorism.

In another instance, my editors repeatedly removed from my stories, on the UN vote on Palestine's observer status, a line indicating that 130 nations had already recognized Palestine. At that point I realized the Journal had an agenda—not to neutrally report complex international events from multiple sides, but to promote US interests abroad. So I turned to Bob and he accepted a piece from me on that Palestine issue in late 2011, the first of many of my articles that he eventually published.

Bob was without doubt the best editor I've ever had. He was the only one who really understood—or accepted—what I was writing about.

Bob was a supreme skeptic, but he never descended to cynicism. His legacy, which I am committed to carry on, was of a principled, non-partisan approach to journalism. He took a neutral stance reporting on international issues, which some wrongly saw as anti-American. Bob knew never to take a government official's word for it, especially an intelligence official. He knew people in

all governments lie. But there are two other parties involved: the press and the public. He understood that the press had to act as a filter, to verify and challenge government assertions, before they are passed on to the public. Bob became distraught, and in his last piece poignantly said so, about the state of American journalism, where careerism and vanity had aligned the profession with those in power, a power through which too many reporters seem to live vicariously.

The press' power is distinct from the government's, it is the power to hold government accountable on behalf of the public. Bob understood that the mainstream media's greatest sin was the sin of omission: leaving out of a story, or marginalizing, points of view at odds with a U.S. agenda, but vital for the reader to comprehend a frighteningly complex world.

The viewpoints of Iranians, Palestinians, Russians, North Koreans, Syrians and others are never fully reported in the Western media, though the supposed mission of journalism is to tell all sides of a story. It's impossible to understand an international crisis without those voices being heard. Routinely or systematically shutting them out also dehumanizes people in those countries, making it easier to gain popular support in the U.S. to go to war against them.

The omission of such news day after day in newspapers and on television adds up over the decades to what Bob called the Lost History of post-war America. It is a dark side of American history—coups overthrowing democratically-elected leaders, electoral interference, assassinations and invasions. Omitting that history, as it continues to unfold nearly everyday, gives the American people a distorted view of their country, an almost cartoonish sense of America's supposed morality in international affairs, rather than it just pursuing its interests, too often violently, as all great powers do.

These things aren't normally mentioned in polite society. But Bob Parry built his extraordinary career telling those truths. And I'm going to do my damndest to continue, and honor, his legacy.

Thank you.

'A Very Different Journalist': John Pilger's Tribute to Bob Parry

A memorial for the late founder and editor of Consortium News, Bob Parry, was held on Saturday in Arlington, Virginia. A video of the event will be posted.

Among the many tributes made to Bob was this sent by the legendary journalist and filmmaker John Pilger, who was in Australia and was unable to attend.

By John Pilger



I would like to thank Diane and Bob's family for this honour of paying tribute to Bob. I am on the other side of the world but I am with you in spirit.

I first heard of Bob Parry in the wake of Iran-Contra. The unique element about this scandal was its revelation of the criminal nature that exists at the heart of great power.

Bob's support for Gary Webb, for Sy Hersh's extraordinary work, and other courageous journalists who dared to step outside the mainstream was expressed in his own journalism – which seemed to grow even more passionate and incisive as the years went on.

His founding of Consortiumnews was a landmark. He was saying, in effect: We must not lie down in the face of the media monoliths: the Murdochs, the liberal pretenders: the censors and collaborators. In Consortium, he offered a refuge to those of us cleansed from a system that now embraced extremism.

Last June, in London, I had the privilege of presenting Bob with the 2017 Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism – given in honor of the great American reporter Martha Gellhorn and open to journalists anywhere in the world, writing in English. It took the judges several months to read and assess the entries; there were so many, and the standard was remarkable.

Bob Parry was the clearest winner we've ever had.

Why? Because of his insistence that journalism was the voice of facts and truthfulness, not a form of public relations: not the propaganda of power.

These qualities stood out in Bob Parry's work.

All of us at the prize-giving dinner were stunned by the address Bob gave, off the cuff, in which he demystified and laid bare the rise of rapacious, criminal power in Washington. His original thought, his eloquence, wit and grace and his acute

historical understanding so distinguished this very different journalist.

It's hardly surprising that perhaps the greatest award he wore, like a reporter's badge of honor, was the fear and loathing of the kind of people in power today.

Even his valedictory piece – written after he suffered the first stroke in December – lacked none of his incisiveness and passion as he described, in both sorrow and anger, the decline of journalism: a craft he clearly loved.

In today's media landscape of distortion and collusion – which, as Bob pointed out in his last piece, is undermining what's left of democracy – Bob Parry was a beacon.

I salute him, and I suggest we make his memory a beacon, too.

Thank you.

John Pilger is an Australian-British journalist based in London. Pilger's Web site is: www.johnpilger.com. His new film, "The Coming War on China," is available in the U.S. from www.bullfrogfilms.com

Do U.S. Oligarchs Exist? Not in Mainstream Media

We hear incessantly about Russian oligarchs. But do they also exist in the United States? You wouldn't know it by watching cable news, says Jeff Cohen.

By Jeff Cohen



TV news shows are good at getting viewers riled up. Day and night, I hear the anchors on CNN and MSNBC getting us in a frenzy about the schemes of this or that "Russian oligarch with links to the Kremlin." I've heard that phrase incessantly in recent weeks

Plenty of others have heard the "Russian oligarch" phrase. Merriam-Webster.com reported that "oligarch" was one of its most searched-for words on April 5 "following reports that Robert Mueller had questioned Russian businessmen to whom this descriptor applies."

Webster's defines oligarchy as a "government in which a small group exercises

control especially for corrupt and selfish purposes.” Dictionary.com calls it “a form of government in which all power is vested in a few persons or in a dominant class or clique; government by the few.” So an oligarch is not just a rich person but one who has influence or control over government, rather than directly ruling, as in a plutocracy.

One phrase I haven’t heard from any of the purportedly progressive hosts on MSNBC is: “A U.S. oligarch with links to Washington.”

That avoidance is revealing when one considers an indisputable fact: U.S. oligarchs have done far more to undermine U.S. democracy than any Russian.

When Vladimir Putin first became Russian president in the early 2000s he made a deal with the oligarchs: he would leave them alone if they kept their noses out of politics. Hence they would revert to just being filthy rich. The oligarchs who remained are presumably loyal to Putin, or at least don’t try to dominate him, the way some powerfully rich Americans seek to influence the U.S. government away from what it might otherwise do.

A List

Here is a 2014 list compiled by the Brookings Institution of the 20

“Most Influential Billionaires Behind The Scenes of US Politics,” who could otherwise be called U.S. oligarchs. But they aren’t called that by mainstream media, and that’s telling. Rupert Murdoch, Jeff Bezos, the Koch brothers (and Donald Trump, who made the list) all have exercised undue influence on government for their own interests, and not necessarily the public’s. Let’s take a close look at one U.S. oligarch who didn’t make the list.

Brian L. Roberts – who certainly fits the Cambridge English dictionary definition of “oligarch” as “one of a small group of powerful people who control a country or an industry.” As chair and CEO of Comcast, Roberts runs the company his dad founded and has sole voting rights over one-third of the corporation’s stock. His annual compensation last year of \$28.6 million was less than what 14 other U.S. oligarchs – I mean, CEOs – “earned.” His net worth is estimated to be over \$1.65 billion.

Does this oligarch have “links to Washington”? In one recent year, Comcast devoted nearly \$19 million to lobbying, second only to military-industrial firm Northrop Grumman. Last year, it spent more than \$15 million. And oligarch Roberts has been a top D.C. power player for decades, having gotten his way with one president after another – from President Clinton’s deregulatory, anti-consumer Telecommunications Act of 1996 to President Trump’s current effort to end Net Neutrality on behalf of Comcast and other giant Internet providers.

President Bill Clinton's pro-conglomeration Telcom Act and Donald Trump's Net Neutrality assault have both undermined U.S. democracy. No Russian had a hand in it. (You may have heard that the Trump-propagandist Sinclair Broadcast Group will soon own more than 200 local TV stations; until the Telcom Act, a company could legally own no more than 12.)

You've got to hand it to U.S. oligarchs; so many of them stay on top no matter which party runs Washington. They sure have greater staying power than Russian oligarchs – who, we're constantly told, end up dead or in prison if they fall out of favor with President Putin.

Roberts certainly has the lifestyle of an oligarch. He maintains a seasonal dacha – I mean, second home – in Martha's Vineyard where he keeps his custom-built Sparkman & Stephens sloops, and where he has hosted President Obama, including at an A-list cocktail party thrown for Obama in August 2013. And Roberts reportedly just built a sprawling mansion in North Palm Beach, not far from Trump's Mar-a-lago.

But his primary residence is in Philadelphia; Obama has been a regular presence at Comcast mansions there as well. In 2013, speaking at a Democratic Party fundraiser in the Philadelphia home of Roberts' top lobbyist, President Obama commented: "I have been here so much, the only thing I haven't done in this house is have Seder dinner."

While Russian oligarchs are often passionate game-hunters, Roberts is an avid golfer, carrying an impressive 8 handicap. Obama has famously golfed with him "on the lush fairways of the Vineyard Golf Club."

There's one last factoid I need to add about Roberts. As Comcast's CEO, he is the ultimate boss of those allegedly progressive hosts on MSNBC. Which may help to explain their silence about U.S. oligarchs, since it would be difficult to bring up the topic without mentioning their boss.

I really shouldn't single out Roberts. Nor the MSNBC hosts he employs. Because the problem goes way beyond this particular oligarch and that particular corporate news outlet.

Roberts is just one of dozens of powerful U.S. oligarchs. They compose a "U.S. ruling class" and preside over a "corporate state" – a couple more phrases one virtually never hears in mainstream U.S. media. One reason these oligarchs get little critical coverage and no systemic scrutiny is because – as in Russia – oligarchs are owners or major sponsors of mainstream media.

Let me be clear, so as to not overstate things: Fox News hosts are free to tarnish certain oligarchs, Democratic ones like George Soros – and MSNBC hosts

gleefully go after Republican oligarchs like the Mercers and the Koch brothers.

But to get a more accurate and complete view of the workings of the U.S. political system (aka “U.S. oligarchy”), I have a suggestion: Disconnect from MSNBC, CNN, Fox and other corporate news sources and turn instead to high-quality, independent progressive media.

If you do, you’ll see that the problems plaguing U.S. democracy and the U.S. economy are definitely the work of oligarchs. But they don’t speak Russian.

A version of this article originally appeared on Truthdig.com

Jeff Cohen is director of the Park Center for Independent Media at Ithaca College. He co-founded the online activism group RootsAction.org in 2011 and founded the media watch group FAIR in 1986. He is the author of “Cable News Confidential: My Misadventures in Corporate Media.”

On the Silencing of Julian Assange

Legendary filmmaker and journalist John Pilger and Christine Assange, mother of Julian Assange, spoke to Dennis J. Bernstein and Randy Credico on April 5, about the latest attempt to silence the Wikileaks founder.

By Dennis J Bernstein and Randy Credico



After nearly six years in exile holed up inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in the heart of London, Wikileaks founder and publishing visionary Julian Assange has suffered another body blow; Assange, who has been absolved of all accusations, has now been rendered incommunicado inside the tiny embassy in the Knightsbridge section of London.

This latest attack on Assange, this shut down of crucial communication devices, obviously challenges Wikileaks publishing activities and undermines the crucial work of this incredibly important global news and publishing service.

Meanwhile, the US and UK governments continue their drumbeat demonization of Assange, who has become part of their Russiagate frenzy towards a new Cold War and maybe World War III. Indeed, the US and UK continue to threaten him. In the US, some senators and the current CIA director [Mike Pompeo], about to become Secretary of State, want to see Assange tried for treason and put to a public death. They threaten to arrest Assange in violation of two UN rulings and their own laws, as soon as he walks out of the embassy.

Change.org said in a statement they released, as a part of a petition in support of Assange, "It is with great concern that we learned that Julian Assange has lost access to the internet and the right to receive visitors at the Ecuadorian London Embassy. Only extraordinary pressure from the US and the Spanish governments can explain why Ecuador's authorities should have taken such appalling steps in isolating Julian. We demand that Julian Assange's isolation ends NOW!"

In the following interviews with noted journalist and filmmaker John Pilger and Christine Assange, mother of the WikiLeaks founder, we attempt to shed some light on the crucial case of Julian Assange and why he should finally be freed from further prosecution so that he can continue unfettered the great work WikiLeaks has done as one of the most significant publishers of government whistleblowers in modern history.

Dennis Bernstein: Well, there have been some changes at the [Ecuadorian] embassy. They have cut off Julian's Internet, effectively his lifeline. He has been living in that small room for so many years, and now they are trying to make it a little smaller. Could you give us your best understanding of what is going on now? Have you spoken to him?

John Pilger: No, I haven't spoken to Julian. It's not possible. They have done more than cut off the Internet, they have cut off the phone. Ecuadorian authorities have placed a blocker on all communications at the embassy. Perhaps worst of all, he is denied visitors. I know that his lawyers are meeting today and there is possibly a meeting with the Ecuadorians. Beyond that, I don't know anything.

You can appreciate the effect of these measures on someone who has been effectively imprisoned in a very small space without sunlight for going on six years now. This is tragic and it is coming from a small country that recognized the justice in the Assange case and gave him political asylum.

While I am not excusing this government's actions, we must recognize that it is under direct pressure from the United States, which is rolling back so many of the so-called progressive governments in Latin America. They cut off the

communications for Julian just a day after Ecuador welcomed a delegation from the US Southern Command, the Pentagon's arm in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The government in Ecuador has tried almost everything to bring justice to Julian. It has tried to negotiate with the British government, it has called on the British government to give Julian free passage out of the embassy. He is not even given right of passage to a hospital.

There is a particular cruelty being imposed on Julian Assange because he is the embodiment of dissent which is missing across the political spectrum in Western countries. He has become the enemy to governments in the West.

Taking away his right to communicate is an attack on freedom of speech. It is an attack on our rights as well as his. I have never met anyone as defiantly courageous as Julian. Not at all courageous are the so-called opposition, who are silent.

DB: Assange is a very special kind of publisher who has an impact on history and the way we are going to remember it. But there is a cynical chorus of corporate journalists who scoff at truth tellers. It is almost out of style to tell the truth, to do your job of reporting.

JP: That's quite correct. I have been a journalist for a long time and I always regarded journalism as involving a certain duty to find a way of telling the truth. Finding the facts out and giving them to the public. This was long before people were called investigative journalists, because all journalism should be investigative, with the object of finding out the truth.

Julian Assange is being mistreated in this way because he is doing what a true journalist should do. He is finding the truth about those who seek to manipulate and control our lives, and by telling that truth, calling them to account. For that, he is being subjected to a form of torture. Being denied all contact is a form of torture. Julian needs our support more urgently than ever.

Randy Credico: Between us, we have done twenty programs on Julian Assange.

John, you kicked it off April 1 of last year. I was so optimistic then that he would be out of this jam. A few months later Sweden dropped these bogus charges against him. Where do you see things going from here?

JP: What is happening to Julian is part of a very aggressive campaign against democracy, against dissent. At the moment, that campaign is at a critical stage.

We are witnessing a massive provocation of Russia. We have the biggest military build-up since World War II on the western borders of Russia. At the same time

we have the biggest military build-up since World War II in the Pacific. The issue here is that the dominance of the United States is being challenged. That is intolerable.

That campaign to provoke the two powers of Russia and China is reaching a kind of critical mass. It is very dangerous. There is a great deal of talk about a trade war. What we should be talking about is the prospect of a shooting war. Provocations of Russia now are so extreme.

This Skripal episode in Britain has been exposed in the last couple days as a series of fabrications. Laboratory results have pulled the rug out from under the entire British security establishment in saying there is no verifiable evidence that Russia is the cause of this attack. The whole thing is an appalling fabrication. But why?

It is part of an almost inexorable campaign to reach a point with Russia where they have to respond militarily. Wars begin in this way. I think that it is more dangerous now than at any time during the first Cold War.

What we are seeing is the latest in a long campaign against WikiLeaks that seeks to criminalize journalism. A document which WikiLeaks published from 2008 made it clear that an organization within the Pentagon laid down what the plan would be as far as WikiLeaks was concerned. The strategy was to destroy trust in WikiLeaks and destroy its editor. That was the plan ten years ago and that plan is basically being carried out.

This document makes very clear that the threat was truth. WikiLeaks emerged five years after the invasion of Iraq, which was started when governments lied about weapons of mass destruction. That was the justification for the invasion of Iraq, which killed about a million people and caused the flight of some four million others from the country.

This poisoning case in Salisbury appears to be a lie of a similar nature. But we're not talking about a war this time with a Middle Eastern country. We are talking about a war with the second most powerful nuclear-armed state.

DB: Is this another Gulf of Tonkin incident?

JP: The Gulf of Tonkin sounds pretty mild compared with some of the fabrications that have led to wars since then. I am afraid that this will serve as justification not for an invasion but for a kind of war of constant intimidation.

But as Putin has made clear, the Russians have no intention of accepting this. All of this borders on collective insanity. This can only end in the most

horrific war that would devastate both sides, particularly exposed countries like Great Britain. Those who stand against all of this have to be swept aside, the most prominent being Julian Assange and WikiLeaks.

When you think back to 2016 and the leaked emails of John Podesta that revealed the direct connection between the Clinton Foundation and organized jihadism in the Middle East, that revelation tells more about the machinations of great power than anything else that has been published in years.

The same was true of the WikiLeaks revelations of collateral murder that Chelsea Manning leaked. The power of that single video informed people all over the world of how wars are conducted by their own governments. It changed or reinforced the perceptions of millions of people. A war has been declared on that kind of journalism.

RC: You can see that clip in John Pilger's classic documentary *The War You Don't See*.

JP: That film, which I made in 2013, was basically interviews with quite distinguished mainstream journalists on both sides of the Atlantic. Their collective message was that, had the media not colluded with governments in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, had they not amplified and echoed the deceptions and lies of governments, there is a great possibility that that war would never have happened, all those people would be alive today, ISIS would not exist today and there might even be the beginnings of some kind of hope in the Middle East.

We shouldn't forget this when we are thinking about the present situation, as Western governments provoke Russia and China. We have 400 military bases ringing China but you hear almost nothing of these in the press. Russia is in effect encircled. Unless people learn of these incredibly important truths, nothing will be done.

DB: This is exactly where we need the sort of structural reporting that Julian Assange does. And this is exactly why they want him out of the way.

Christine Assange

This interview with Assange's mother, Christine Assange, was part of an original WBAI Radio series produced by Randy Credico's Live on the Fly. Flashpoints on Pacifica Radio has joined forces with Live on the Fly, to continue the work and the fight to free our brother journalist, information freedom fighter, Julian Assange.

The interview with Christine Assange by Credico and Bernstein was broadcast over Pacifica National Radio on April 5th.

Dennis Bernstein: Randy and I were hoping that this would be the occasion where we would be celebrating and have Julian on the other line. Unfortunately, that is not happening. Meanwhile, could you bring us up to speed on how things stand?

Christine Assange: John Pilger mentioned that we are at a rather critical stage with Russia, because of the apparent propaganda around this [Sergei Skripal] poisoning in the UK. It has been found not to be conclusively related to Russia.

I would say that we are also at a critical stage regarding Julian's safety and freedom. The two situations are related. For example, the day before Julian's communications with the outside world were cut off, one of the members in the UK parliament asked, "Isn't it about time we took some action against the Ecuadorian embassy?" He wasn't happy about Julian tweeting about the government response to the attack in Salisbury.

Julian's doubts have since proven justified, with the lab in Porton Down now stating categorically that there is no evidence to connect Russia with the attack. At the same time, Julian was invited to give evidence on Cambridge Analytica and Facebook, so there were also these powerful interests interested in keeping him quiet.

Meanwhile, the US military was moving into Ecuador with plans to increase the pressure to hand Julian over to the US. We know this because it has been revealed by former ambassador Craig Murray that the US spent some \$87 million to bring down the presidency of Rafael Correa, who gave Julian political asylum from US threats against his life and liberty.

Now there is pressure on the new president [Lenín Moreno]. By April of 2017, the US was firmly in the position of wanting to go after Julian. They were all on board. [Mike] Pompeo, who has now been promoted to Secretary of State, wants to arrest Julian once and for all. John Bolton has just been appointed National Security Advisor and has suggested that the US government should wage a cyber war against WikiLeaks for revealing Clinton emails and the CIA hacking scandal. In 2010, Trump commented that those responsible for the WikiLeaks exposés should get the death penalty.

DB: It is no surprise that every move would be made to shut down Julian Assange in the context of this Salisbury scandal. The Clinton machine has been fanning this Russiagate flame all along and now they appear willing to risk World War III to prove that Hillary didn't lose the campaign because she was a horrifying candidate.

CA: Julian was also reporting honestly on what was going on in Catalonia

[Spain], which was absolutely disgraceful. You don't have to support either side to be against the brutal crackdown against democratic rights. The reason Ecuador gave for cutting all of Julian's communications was a single tweet about the elected president of Catalonia who has now been imprisoned. The response of the Spanish government can only be described as fascist and everyone who supports democracy should be standing up in opposition.

Randy Credico: In part because of a courageous tweet by Julian, Germans have now released [former President of Catalonia Carles] Puigdemont and they will not expedite him to Spain. I believe a number of factors have come together to account for this latest persecution of Julian. First, his reporting on Catalonia, then his questioning of the Salisbury rush to judgment and finally this attack in parliament. Within days, they had cut him off.

CA: Power aligns. The struggle for freedom throughout the world and throughout time has been the struggle against corrupt power. We are at a point now where we really need people power.

I like the Orwell quote, that if there is any hope, it lies in the proles.

Throughout history, it generally has not been the leaders who have ensured our rights. It has been the people who have stood up and demanded that their leaders act in their interests. We are at a pivotal point in history where, as John [Pilger] said, we are facing a possible global war and at the same time a war on journalism.

Three petitions have now been sent to the president of Ecuador, one from a group of former US intelligence officers supporting Julian, one from a group of world thinkers, and one from the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil. It is also important to get involved in actions, such as the internet vigil "Reconnect Julian," where truthful journalist worldwide and ordinary people have joined together to pressure the US not to lean on Ecuador to silence Julian.

RC: The last time you were on, Christine, you said that "we need WikiLeaks warriors, not Wikileaks worriers."

CA: We are working to build a global network to allow people to quickly access planned actions. We have up one Twitter handle, "Assange Actions," the "Reconnect Julian" hashtag and the "Unify for JA" hashtag. We also need to take it to the streets because that is where change starts. A good example is the historic vigil outside the Ecuadorian embassy by UK citizens, which has been going on for six years now.

There were a lot of actions in support of Julian prior to his going into the Ecuadorian embassy. Ecuador showed principles, ethics and courage in protecting

Julian. But now with the change in leadership, the Ecuadorian government is coming under extreme pressure and appears to be wavering.

RC: Do you have message you would like to send to President Moreno?

CA: Stand up for the sovereignty of your country. You have a fabulous constitution which is a template for world democracy. Don't let down Ecuador. Don't let down Julian. Don't let down the concept of a free press.

Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net. Randy Credico is an American perennial political candidate, comedian, radio host, activist and the former Director of the William Moses Kunstler Fund for Racial Justice
