

Blaming 'Too Much Democracy' for Trump

The latest lament of the neocon establishment is that America is suffering from too much democracy – leading to Donald Trump – but the opposite is more to the point, how elite manipulation set this stage, explains Mike Lofgren.

By Mike Lofgren

British expatriate writer Andrew Sullivan recently returned to the public eye with a piece that has aroused considerable comment, some of it reasonably on point, and some bloviatingly incoherent.

What is all the fuss about? Sullivan, in critiquing the Donald Trump phenomenon and the political factors that gave rise to it, makes a few good points, but buries them under a ridiculous premise: The culprit responsible for Trump is too much democracy, and the cure is more elite control of the political process.

Sullivan gets everything backward. It is as if a safety inspector had gone aboard *RMS Titanic*, minutely examined her watertight hatches, boiler and steam turbine, and then declared her safe because he judged that the lack of lifeboats reduced the chances of capsizing from too much top weight.

In a nutshell, Sullivan attributes Trump's nomination for the presidency by one of our two major parties to the rise of what he calls "hyperdemocracy." Accompanying this alleged excess of democracy is a mania for equality that leads to all manner of pointless leveling of social classes along with an undermining of authority.

As chief witness for the prosecution, he calls to the stand no less than Plato, who argued that the ripening of democracy births manifold horrors like gender equality, the treatment of foreigners as equals, an abatement of cruelty to animals, and the rich mingling freely with the poor.

One wonders if Sullivan could have cited a more relevant critic of the contemporary political system of a continent-sized nation with 320 million people than a metaphysician dwelling in a tiny city-state more than 2,400 years ago. And a rather implausible critic at that: the bedrock of Plato's philosophy was his belief that physical objects and events are mere shadows of their ideal forms, which exist only insofar as they crudely simulate the perfect idealizations of themselves.

This kind of patently silly epistemology may make for a great debate topic at the Oxford Union, but it's hardly a usable tool for analyzing the world around us. Sullivan might better have used the testimony of Alexis de Tocqueville, who

at least laid eyes on the political system he was critiquing. Sullivan produces as his killer quote a passage of Plato's that sounds like a half-senile Fox News viewer grumbling about kids these days.

Serious thinkers like Karl Popper, who experienced the rise of fascism up close and personal, have considered Platonism not as a model for human society, but as an absolutist philosophy that buttresses a totalitarian mindset.

Sullivan employs the arguments of a profoundly anti-democratic elitist who held that wise philosopher kings ought to rule over the riffraff. But is his specific charge true that too much democracy is responsible for Trump's Mongol devastation of the Party of Lincoln, allegedly because during the 1970s the parties adopted direct primaries as a substitute for the selection of candidates by party bosses? The evidence is wanting.

Hyperdemocracy or Elective Oligarchy?

Let us suppose our presidential nominees were still chosen for us via the smoke-filled room (a method known in Sullivan's mother country as the old-boy system). In 2016, on the Democratic side, our nominee would be Hillary Clinton. On the GOP side it would be Jeb Bush, a truly exciting prospect.

In reality, of course, we have the direct primary system, but it has hardly given rise to a mob-instigated revolution: for 28 of the last 36 years, a Bush or a Clinton has occupied the presidency or the vice presidency, and we still have in Hillary the thrilling potential for a further eight years of the same dynastic dyad.

The other institutional features of Sullivan's alleged hyperdemocracy do not strike one as particularly Jacobin. Gerrymandering has achieved such perfection that in many congressional districts it denies a large number of voters fair representation. Wherever they run state governments, Republicans have engaged in shortening voting times, closing DMV offices, requiring onerous identification procedures and other measures to suppress voting by constituencies they dislike.

The population of California is 66 times that of Wyoming, and both states elect two U.S. senators. These arrangements do not resemble the systems of highly democratic states like Finland or New Zealand, but they would fit comfortably within the Whig oligarchy of Eighteenth Century England. The Electoral College is an archaic system that inflates the power of small states. The conventional wisdom is that "it has served us well," but it has not: four times (1824, 1876, 1888 and 2000) it elected the candidate with fewer popular votes.

Sullivan might object that in any case he is not arguing in favor of

majoritarian democracy. But would he suggest that the travesty of 2000, when the philosopher kings of the Supreme Court chose a president too stupid and incurious to pay attention to an intelligence briefing warning of imminent attack on the United States, was a better outcome than obeying the will of the people?

Trading Fort Wayne for Empire

This anti-democratic tendency suffuses much of our governance. The most recent Congress completed, the 113th, saw a record number of filibusters, whereby a minority of senators was able to thwart the majority.

Important trade bills, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) are examples of oligarchical engineering at its most sophisticated. These trade pacts are negotiated in secret, with members of Congress not allowed to know what's in them; on the other hand, task forces of corporate lobbyists and lawyers are an integral part of the negotiating process.

Once the agreements are complete, representatives and senators can only view them by going to a secure room; copying or note taking is not permitted. Only when the full Congress votes to "fast track" the agreement (thereby nullifying its ability to amend the agreement) is the measure made public.

It is only through an occasional leak that we learn what our corporate overlords are up to, such as bulldozing food safety standards in TTIP, or allowing corporations to sue governments for alleged "lost profits" due to health, safety or environmental laws. These schemes undermine the very concept of democratic self-governance in favor of rule by corporations.

But so-called trade bills are deceptive in their very name: they have little to do with trade as commonly understood, or at least the promotion of exports that might help an assembly-line worker in Toledo or Muncie. They are increasingly about making politically untouchable the prerogatives of the wealthy investor class, and a vehicle for the Beltway elites' obsession with finding novel ways to protect their favorite client states.

It is not too much to say that "trade" agreements are actually our ruling class's mechanism for hanging on to *Pax Americana*: they offer allies and satellites privileged access to our domestic market in exchange for those countries' submitting to Washington's foreign policy *diktats*. If, as a consequence, Joe Lunchbucket in Fort Wayne, Indiana, takes it on the chin, it's a price our Beltway Metternichs are willing, nay, eager, to pay.

But Joe Lunchbucket has gotten a little tired of the charade, and he's told the

Republican and Democratic establishments what they can do with their trade agreements. If he is now following a charlatan like Trump, who at least makes noises pretending he is on Joe's side, is the man entirely at fault? How about Bill Clinton, or Barack Obama, or Paul Ryan, who never saw a trade bill they didn't like, or enlightened voices of the Upper West Side, like Thomas Friedman at *The New York Times*, who once said he didn't even have to know what was in a trade bill to be in favor of it? Don't they share a little of the responsibility?

Or maybe Andrew Sullivan, another bard of the comfortable classes whose Nietzschean über-heroes Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher gleefully inaugurated the cutthroat Ayn Rand economics that gutted the social position of the working classes and left them prey to mountebanks promising relief? Sullivan now affects to be horrified by the outcome, what with the blue-collared rabble supporting Trump rather than the Bush dynasty's latest pretender to the throne.

The Rule of Organized Money

These aspects of the American political system did not fall like an asteroid from outer space upon an unsuspecting country. And they are hardly the stigmata of hyperdemocracy, whatever Sullivan imagines it to be.

Some, like the Electoral College, are anti-democratic legacies handed down at our founding. But unlike slavery, female disenfranchisement or whipping at the pillory, they have not been reformed out of existence. Others, like gerrymandering and voter suppression, arise from the natural criminal instincts of political operatives when they are not kept on a short leash by a vigilant public.

The principal factor, however, is the dominance of money in politics. It has always polluted American public life, but ever since *Buckley v. Valeo* in 1976, and climaxing with the *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon* decisions of 2010 and 2014, our system has been twisted and corrupted by money.

Martin Gilens of Princeton University and Benjamin Page of Northwestern University examined almost 2,000 surveys of American opinion on public policy matters between 1981 and 2002, and discovered how those preferences correlated with policy outcomes.

"[T]he preferences of economic elites," Gilens and Page conclude, "have far more independent impact upon policy change than the preferences of average citizens do."

In an interview with *Talking Points Memo*, Gilens added, "I'd say that contrary to what decades of political science research might lead you to

believe, *ordinary citizens have virtually no influence over what their government does in the United States* (my emphasis). And economic elites and interest groups, especially those representing business, have a substantial degree of influence. Government policymaking over the last few decades reflects the preferences of those groups – economic elites and of organized interests.”

President Obama concurs: During the 2012 election campaign, he informed a group of wealthy donors that included Microsoft moguls Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer, “You now have the potential of 200 people deciding who ends up being elected president every single time.”

Contrary to Sullivan’s essay, the role of money in politics has not been a dud, some exceptions notwithstanding: In 2008, the supposed insurgent Obama turned down public financing in order to raise funds privately, and as we can see from his flattery of the tech tycoons in the quote above, he assiduously courted them.

The practical result of this dominance of money over politics is an appalling wealth inequality in the United States: The bottom 90 percent own a smaller share of the national wealth than in the 27 other countries that track such statistics. Sullivan gives a perfunctory nod to these conditions, but fails to consider that they are the logical outcome of the Reagan-Thatcher-Bush economic policies aimed at the so-called “ownership society.”

As economist Thomas Piketty has shown, the tendency of capital to accumulate faster than wage growth means that over time, the big owners of capital will acquire almost everything, including, increasingly, the political process.

Bernie Sanders is not entirely a walking refutation of the dominance of money, as Sullivan would have it, although his candidacy symbolizes the fact that many people are fed up with the status quo.

His opponent, Hillary Clinton, is a candidate with historically high negative favorability ratings. She is also a poor campaigner who cannot even state a compelling rationale for her candidacy in one sentence. Yet it appears she is about to prevail as the Democratic nominee, because oceans of money and control of the party organization have overcome both the enthusiasm of Sanders’ supporters and her own personal liabilities.

It is noteworthy that Sullivan takes a gratuitous swipe at Sanders as “the demagogue of the left,” implying a symmetry between Trump and the Vermont senator. This is the laziest sort of “both sides do it” false equivalence that the mainstream media habitually resort to, a practice that political scientists Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann have trenchantly skewered.

Now that he has sewn up the nomination, Trump has in any case already ditched one of the marquee attractions of his pseudo-populist appeal: his refusal to take money from big donors. He is now moving full-bore to buck-rake among the plutocracy, with one of his early catches being the saturnine Sheldon Adelson. The roster of his supporters also includes familiar names like Carl Icahn and T. Boone Pickens.

Calling Dr. Frankenstein

Superficially, we obtained an anomalous result from the most recent batch of presidential primaries, at least on the Republican side. Had Sullivan's desire for elite control prevailed, Republican National Committee chairman Reince Priebus and his pals, backstopped by big money boys like the brothers Koch, would have anointed Bush, Scott Walker, Marco Rubio or some other walking ATM machine for the plutocracy.

But notwithstanding the pearl-clutching by GOP mugwumps, the elevation of Trump was a natural culmination of the philosophies and tactics of the Republican Party over the last several decades. They engineered Trump the way Cold War biologists at Fort Detrick engineered a virulent, weaponized strain of anthrax. Or, more precisely, they engineered a constituency that would be enthusiastically receptive to his toxic tirades.

Going back to Nixon's Southern Strategy, the GOP has employed dog whistles and code words to condition their base, and particularly the emerging white working-class core of that base, to respond on cue to the siren song of cultural resentment: against elites (invariably defined as college professors rather than bank CEOs), against ethnic and religious minorities, against homosexuals, against pretty much any group that needed to be scapegoated as the need arose.

In the last two decades, the party has built up a formidable Conservative Media-Entertainment Complex that allows a human guinea pig to immerse himself 24/7 in a fact-free, Manichean alternate universe. Trump's bizarre performance art is merely a funhouse-mirror reflection of the propaganda construct the Republican Party had already created.

The delicious (or sick) plot twist is this: The GOP had spent more than three decades patiently explaining to its base the virtues of *laissez-faire* economics, free trade and small government (while baiting them with the standard culture wars baggage and dog whistles), only to discover that its voters didn't care a tinker's cuss about Sullivan's precious Thatcherite economics, and they certainly were not about to sacrifice their own Social Security or Medicare on the GOP's altar of entitlement reform.

The party intended the culture wars and the dog whistles purely as a sweetener, to make predatory capitalism digestible, but in an irony worthy of O. Henry, the only thing that really stuck was a gooey residue of cultural resentment, bigotry and xenophobia. That's where Trump mopped the floor with his befuddled rivals, who thought they could keep ladling free trade and corporatocracy down the gullets of the proles as if they were Strasbourg geese.

Sullivan's Travails

What really riles Andrew Sullivan in his essay is how the Trump candidacy is entwined with the crudest manifestations of popular culture. It is certainly true that American pop cult is an unedifying phenomenon. Sullivan presents as his Exhibit A an early incident in the ascent of Sarah Palin.

In 1996, according to the Anchorage Daily News, she turned out at an event to see Ivana Trump, "who, in the wake of her divorce, was touting her branded perfume. 'We want to see Ivana, because we are so desperate in Alaska for any semblance of glamour and culture.'"

A nice story, but what's Sullivan's point, exactly? That the rubes in the backwoods are gauche for conflating glamour and culture? Sarah Palin would be a footnote to history had she not been discovered by Bill Kristol, *eminence beige* among what passes for the neoconservative intelligentsia, and inflicted upon a suffering world by John McCain, son and grandson of Navy admirals and Annapolis ring-knocker, each an epitome of the neoconservative establishment that since the Reagan era has settled in on the Beltway like a permanent infestation. She became a key precursor of Trump.

It is all too easy to make sport of the Archie Bunker replicants on Staten Island or the miners in the West Virginia coalfields who cleave to Trump with dog-like devotion. Trump rallies typically do not reflect the better angels of man's nature. With all that stipulated, who created him?

In one sense, the Republican Party created him, or at a minimum, as we've seen, the ideological space for him. But Trump, the actual personality, is a construct of the so-called gatekeepers of the corporate news media, centered in Manhattan. Because of their relentless hyping, Trump was able to inflate the market value of his name, which he then licensed to be sold as an appellation for a host of tacky products.

In the same way Lehman Brothers' securities were backed by the grossly exaggerated value of subprime mortgages, the main prop to Trump's empire has always been the media-inflated collateral of the Trump moniker.

During the late 1980s, the heroic Reaganesque Age of elbows-out acquisition,

business cable channels like Financial News Network (a precursor of CNBC) drooled over The Donald's every move. Later, NBC, an institution that once upon a time maintained its own symphony orchestra conducted by Toscanini, gave Trump his own reality TV show that was beamed to the remotest hollows of eastern Kentucky.

And now, the media are giving him \$2 billion worth of free publicity. Les Moonves, chairman of CBS, once the network of Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite, has half-confessed and half-boasted that Trump's campaign has been "damn good for CBS."

When we contemplate horrors like "Duck Dynasty" or "Here Comes Honey Boo Boo" or the umpteenth sequel of some idiotic superhero franchise, it is hard not to feel sympathy with Sullivan's critique of popular culture. But there is a factor that he misses. Who creates taste?

The populations of the Scandinavian countries like Sweden or Finland have a very high readership of serious newspapers and intelligent books; tiny Iceland has highest level per capita of book publishing in the world. These countries are notably democratic and egalitarian, the furthest thing from what Plato or Matthew Arnold had in mind when they thought of culture.

Ninety years ago, H. L. Mencken asked why the trackside towns near Pittsburgh yielded the most hideous habitations known to man. People commonly thought the miners and steelworkers who inhabited them didn't know any better because they were mainly unlettered immigrants. But why, he inquired, did they build charming villages in their home countries?

There is something about the rawness of American capitalism that with an alarming lust surrenders to what Mencken called "a libido for the ugly." That capitalism is not controlled at its commanding heights by the residents of trailer parks.

Trump: a stepchild of the Deep State?

Donald Trump is a product of elite structures like the Republican establishment and our corporate media, as well as the anti-democratic tendencies that have become an increasingly prominent accompaniment to this country's wage-cutting, outsourcing, *laissez-faire* economic orthodoxy. But there is one other powerful faction with an equity stake in Trump: the national security complex.

For the past 15 years, the people who form the bipartisan elite consensus that makes up a crucial element of what I call "the Deep State" – politicians, generals, media personalities, think-tank experts – have been drumming into our heads the message that we must be very afraid of terrorism, despite the fact

that we are more likely to die slipping in the bathtub than in a terrorist attack.

It has worked. Voters in the Republican primary in South Carolina, where Trump won in a walk, declared terrorism their foremost concern, eclipsing a low-wage economy, deteriorating living standards leading to an increase in the death rate of GOP voters' core demographic, and the most expensive and least available health care in the developed world.

This fear that our elite consensus fostered has awakened the latent authoritarianism and paranoia that lurk in all too many people. This dynamic explains why Trump's candidacy took off like a moon rocket in November and December of 2015, the period of the terrorist attack in Paris and the murders in San Bernardino.

Government officials and the media whipped up a mood in the country that approached hysteria; Trump deftly exploited it. By being the only politician brazen enough to openly advocate torture – not merely to gain information (a dubious claim), but to inflict pain for its own sake – he tapped into the revenge fantasies of millions of Americans who have been fed a steady diet of fear since 9/11.

We delude ourselves in thinking that the United States could be a “normal” country while waging a seemingly endless war on terror. Sullivan, too, got swept up in the mania that prevailed in the period between 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq. He became a militant proponent of the Bush administration's “you're with us or against us” foreign policy line by condemning “the decadent Left” for being a fifth column.

He later recanted his Trumpism *avant la lettre*, principally because the Bush administration botched the invasion and resorted to torture. But criticizing the effects of the invasion, which soon became obvious to any observer, rather than the original rationale for it, was a too-easy dodge of the moral core of the issue.

The decision to make aggressive war is the father of all the crimes that flow inevitably from it. As Justice Robert H. Jackson stated at the Nuremberg tribunal in 1946, “To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime, it is the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.”

The torture and the other excesses, therefore, were logical outcomes of the decision to invade Iraq, not deviations from an initially exemplary desire to

preempt Saddam Hussein from employing terrorism against us. Just as Sullivan was stampeded by the hysteria over Saddam's fictive intentions, he now appears to lose confidence in democracy itself because of the dread apparition of Trump.

No Genteel Conservatism anymore

Like his fellow conservative David Brooks, Sullivan yearns for "elite mediation," a polite term for letting our social betters from the Ivy League run the show. But how did that work out? The 1953 overthrow of Iran's government by the CIA's Yalies led to an inexorable chain of events culminating in a smoking debris field in lower Manhattan.

The Dulles brothers of Dillon, Read & Co. staged a coup against the first democratic government in Guatemala for the greater glory of United Fruit's shareholders; in the repression that followed, hecatombs of corpses sparked a destabilization throughout Central America climaxing in the mass immigration to the United States that is the heart and soul of the Trump backlash. The best and the brightest, of course, engineered us into the quicksand of Vietnam, a disaster of almost Hegelian perfection.

For all of his occasional apostasy against the new Republican orthodoxy by being an openly gay conservative, Sullivan still has just enough emotional attachment to a patrician, largely imaginary version of "classic" conservatism as to want to protect his ideological mirage from contamination by the Trump craze. He favors some fantasy version of the conservatism espoused by his idol, the British political scientist Michael Oakeshott.

It is his delusion that there now exists a conservatism purged of its reactionary impulses that can function as an anti-ideology rather than the ideology it actually is. Contemporary conservatism, with its harping on tradition and values, is an elaborate evasion of the fundamental political question all societies face: Who gets what, and on which terms?

When Abraham Lincoln spoke of "the mystic chords of memory," he did not mean the dead hand of custom, but rather a steady confidence in popular government derived from the inalienable rights of the governed.

As with other right-of-center polemicists of late, Andrew Sullivan seeks to distract us by playing down or ignoring the role of movement conservatism in creating the ugly carnival that is Trump by waving shiny objects in front of us labeled "political correctness" (so he can blame "the Left") or popular culture (to diffuse the blame throughout society).

Sorry, Andrew: The conservative movement, and the elites who back them, built this Frankenstein monster. They own it.

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More Game-Playing on MH-17?

Exclusive: The West keeps piling the blame for the 2014 shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 on Russian President Putin although there are many holes in the case and the U.S. government still withholds its evidence, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A newly posted video showing a glimpse of a Buk missile battery rolling down a highway in eastern Ukraine has sparked a flurry of renewed accusations blaming Russia for the July 17, 2014 shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 killing 298 people. But the "dash-cam video" actually adds little to the MH-17 whodunit mystery because it could also support a narrative blaming the Ukrainian military for the disaster.

The fleeting image of the missile battery and its accompanying vehicles, presumably containing an armed escort, seems to have been taken by a car heading west on H-21 highway in the town of Makiivka, as the convoy passed by heading east, according to the private intelligence firm Stratfor and the "citizen journalism" Web site, Bellingcat.

However, even assuming that this Buk battery was the one that fired the missile that destroyed MH-17, its location in the video is to the west of both the site where Almaz-Antey, the Russian Buk manufacturer, calculated the missile was fired, around the village of Zaroshchenskoye (then under Ukrainian government control), and the 320-square-kilometer zone where the Dutch Safety Board speculated the fateful rocket originated (covering an area of mixed government and rebel control).

In other words, the question would be where the battery stopped before firing one of its missiles, assuming that this Buk system was the one that fired the missile. (The map below shows the location of Makiivka in red, Almaz-Antey's suspected launch site in yellow, and the general vicinity of the Dutch

Safety Board's 320-square-kilometer launch zone in green.)

Another curious aspect of this and the other eight or so Internet images of Buk missiles collected by Bellingcat and supposedly showing a Buk battery rumbling around Ukraine on or about July 17, 2014, is that they are all headed east toward Russia, yet there have been no images of Buks heading west from Russia into Ukraine, a logical necessity if the Russians gave a Buk system to ethnic Russian rebels or dispatched one of their own Buk military units directly into Ukraine, suspicions that Russia and the rebels have denied.

The absence of a westward-traveling Buk battery fits with the assessment from Western intelligence agencies that the several operational Buk systems in eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, were under the control of the Ukrainian military, a disclosure contained in a Dutch intelligence report released last October and implicitly confirmed by an earlier U.S. "Government Assessment" that listed weapons systems that Russia had given the rebels but didn't mention a Buk battery.

The Netherlands' Military Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) reported that the only anti-aircraft weapons in eastern Ukraine capable of bringing down MH-17 at 33,000 feet on July 17 belonged to the Ukrainian government. MIVD made that assessment in the context of explaining why commercial aircraft continued to fly over the eastern Ukrainian battle zone in summer 2014.

MIVD said that based on "state secret" information, it was known that Ukraine possessed some older but "powerful anti-aircraft systems" capable of downing a plane at that altitude and "a number of these systems were located in the eastern part of the country," whereas the MIVD said the ethnic Russian rebels had only MANPADS that could not reach the higher altitudes.

Ukrainian Offensive

On July 17, the Ukrainian military also was mounting a strong offensive against rebel positions to the north and thus the front lines were shifting rapidly, making it hard to know exactly where the borders of government and rebel control were. To the south, where the Buk missile was believed fired, the battle lines were lightly manned and hazy – because of the concentration of forces to the north – meaning that an armed Buk convoy could probably move somewhat freely.

Also, because of the offensive, the Ukrainian government feared a full-scale Russian invasion to prevent the annihilation of the rebels, explaining why Kiev was dispatching its Buk systems toward the Russian border, to defend against potential Russian air strikes.

Just a day earlier, a Ukrainian fighter flying along the border was shot down by an air-to-air missile (presumably fired by a Russian warplane), according to last October's Dutch Safety Board report. So, tensions were high on July 17, 2014, when MH-17, flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, broke apart over eastern Ukraine, believed downed by a surface-to-air missile although there have been other suggestions that the plane might have been hit by an air-to-air missile.

At the time, Ukraine also was the epicenter of an "information war" that had followed a U.S.-backed coup on Feb. 22, 2014, which ousted democratically elected President Viktor Yanukovich and replaced the Russian-friendly leader with a fiercely nationalistic and anti-Russian regime in Kiev. The violent coup, in turn, prompted Crimea to vote 96 percent in a hasty referendum to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia. Eastern Ukraine and its large ethnic Russian population also revolted against the new authorities.

The U.S. government and much of the Western media, however, denied there had been a coup in Kiev, hailed the new regime as "legitimate," and deemed Crimea's secession a "Russian invasion." The West also denounced the eastern Ukrainian resistance as "Russian aggression." So, the propaganda war was almost as hot as the military fighting, a factor that has further distorted the pursuit of truth about the MH-17 tragedy.

Immediately after the MH-17 crash, the U.S. government sought to pin the blame on Russia as part of a propaganda drive to convince the European Union to join in imposing economic sanctions on Russia for its "annexation" of Crimea and its support of eastern Ukrainians resisting the Kiev regime.

However, a source briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts told me that the analysts could find no evidence that the Russians had supplied the rebels with a sophisticated Buk system or that the Russians had introduced a Buk battery under their own command. The source said the initial intelligence suggested that an undisciplined Ukrainian military team was responsible.

Yet, on July 20, 2014, just three days after the tragedy, Secretary of State John Kerry appeared on all Sunday morning talk shows and blamed the Russian-backed rebels and implicitly Moscow. He cited some "social media" comments and – on NBC's "Meet the Press" – added: "We picked up the imagery of this launch. We know the trajectory. We know where it came from. We know the timing. And it was exactly at the time that this aircraft disappeared from the radar."

Two days later, on July 22, the Obama administration released a "Government Assessment" that tried to bolster Kerry's accusations, in part, by listing the various weapons systems that U.S. intelligence believed Russia had provided the

rebels, but a Buk battery was not among them. At background briefings for selected mainstream media reporters, U.S. intelligence analysts struggled to back up the administration's case against Russia.

For instance, the analysts suggested to a Los Angeles Times reporter that Ukrainian government soldiers manning the suspected Buk battery may have switched to the rebel side before firing the missile. The Times wrote: "U.S. intelligence agencies have so far been unable to determine the nationalities or identities of the crew that launched the missile. U.S. officials said it was possible the SA-11 [Buk anti-aircraft missile] was launched by a defector from the Ukrainian military who was trained to use similar missile systems."

However, after that July 22 briefing – as U.S. intelligence analysts continued to pore over satellite imagery, telephonic intercepts and other data to refine their understanding of the tragedy – the U.S. government went curiously silent, refusing to make any updates or adjustments to its initial rush to judgment, a silence that has continued ever since.

Staying Silent

Meanwhile, the source who continued receiving briefings from the U.S. intelligence analysts told me that the reason for going quiet was that the more detailed evidence pointed toward a rogue element of the Ukrainian military connected to a hardline Ukrainian oligarch, with the possible motive the shooting down of President Vladimir Putin's plane returning from a state visit to South America.

In that scenario, a Ukrainian fighter jet in the vicinity (as reported by several eyewitnesses on the ground) was there primarily as a spotter, seeking to identify the target. But Putin's plane, with similar markings to MH-17, took a more northerly route and landed safely in Moscow.

Though I was unable to determine whether the source's analysts represented a dissenting or consensus opinion inside the U.S. intelligence community, some of the now public evidence could fit with that narrative, including why the suspected Buk system was pushing eastward as close to or even into "rebel" territory on July 17.

If Putin was the target, the attackers would need to spread immediate confusion about who was responsible to avoid massive retaliation by Moscow. A perfect cover story would be that Putin's plane was shot down accidentally by his ethnic Russian allies or even his own troops, the ultimate case of being hoisted on his own petard.

Such a risky operation also would prepare disinformation for release after the

attack to create more of a smokescreen and to gain control of the narrative, including planting material on the Internet to be disseminated by friendly or credulous media outlets.

The Ukrainian government has denied having a fighter jet in the air at the time of the MH-17 shoot-down and has denied that any of its Buk or other anti-aircraft systems were involved.

Yet, whatever the truth, U.S. intelligence clearly knows a great deal more than it has been willing to share with the public or even with the Dutch-led investigations. Last October, more than a year after the shoot-down, the Dutch Safety Board was unable to say who was responsible and could only approximate the location of the missile firing inside a 320-square-kilometer area, whereas Kerry had claimed three days after the crash that the U.S. government knew the launch point.

Earlier this year, Fred Westerbeke, the chief prosecutor of the Dutch-led Joint Investigative Team [JIT], provided a partial update to the Dutch family members of MH-17 victims, explaining that he hoped to have a more precise fix on the firing site by the second half of 2016, i.e., possibly more than two years after the tragedy.

Westerbeke's letter acknowledged that the investigators lacked "primary raw radar images" which could have revealed a missile or a military aircraft in the vicinity of MH-17. That apparently was because Ukrainian authorities had shut down their primary radar facilities supposedly for maintenance, leaving only secondary radar which would show commercial aircraft but not military planes or rockets.

Russian officials have said their radar data suggest that a Ukrainian warplane might have fired on MH-17 with an air-to-air missile, a possibility that is difficult to rule out without examining primary radar which has so far not been available. Primary radar data also might have picked up a ground-fired missile, Westerbeke wrote.

"Raw primary radar data could provide information on the rocket trajectory," Westerbeke wrote. "The JIT does not have that information yet. JIT has questioned a member of the Ukrainian air traffic control and a Ukrainian radar specialist. They explained why no primary radar images were saved in Ukraine." Westerbeke said investigators are also asking Russia about its data.

Westerbeke added that the JIT had "no video or film of the launch or the trajectory of the rocket." Nor, he said, do the investigators have satellite photos of the rocket launch.

“The clouds on the part of the day of the downing of MH17 prevented usable pictures of the launch site from being available,” he wrote. “There are pictures from just before and just after July 17th and they are an asset in the investigation.”

Though Westerbeke provided no details, the Russian military released a number of satellite images purporting to show Ukrainian government Buk missile systems north of the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk before the attack, including two batteries that purportedly were shifted 50 kilometers south of Donetsk on July 17, the day of the crash, and then removed by July 18.

Russian Lt. Gen. Andrey Kartoplov called on the Ukrainian government to explain the movements of its Buk systems and why Kiev’s Kupol-M19S18 radars, which coordinate the flight of Buk missiles, showed increased activity leading up to the July 17 shoot-down.

Necessary Secrets?

Part of the reason that the MH-17 mystery has remained unsolved is that the U.S. government insists that its satellite surveillance, which includes infrared detection of heat sources as well as highly precise photographic imagery, remains a “state secret” that cannot be made public.

However, in similar past incidents, the U.S. government has declassified sensitive information. For instance, after a Soviet pilot accidentally shot down Korean Airlines Flight 007 over Russian territory in 1983, the Reagan administration revealed the U.S. capability to intercept Soviet ground-to-air military communications in order to make the Soviets look even worse by selectively editing the intercepts to present the destruction of the civilian aircraft as willful.

In that case, too, the U.S. government let its propaganda needs overwhelm any commitment to the truth, as Alvin A. Snyder, who in 1983 was director of the U.S. Information Agency’s television and film division, wrote in his 1995 book, *Warriors of Disinformation*.

After KAL-007 was shot down, “the Reagan administration’s spin machine began cranking up,” Snyder wrote. “The objective, quite simply, was to heap as much abuse on the Soviet Union as possible. ... The American media swallowed the U.S. government line without reservation.”

On Sept. 6, 1983, the Reagan administration went so far as to present a doctored transcript of the intercepts to the United Nations Security Council. “The perception we wanted to convey was that the Soviet Union had cold-bloodedly carried out a barbaric act,” Snyder wrote.

Only a decade later, when Snyder saw the complete transcripts – including the portions that the Reagan administration had excised – would he fully realize how many of the central elements of the U.S. presentation were lies.

Snyder concluded, “The moral of the story is that all governments, including our own, lie when it suits their purposes. The key is to lie first.” [For more details on the KAL-007 deception and the history of U.S. trickery, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“A Dodgy Dossier on Syrian War.”](#)]

In the MH-17 case, the Obama administration let Kerry present the rush to judgment fingering the Russians and the rebels but then kept all the evidence secret even though the U.S. government’s satellite capabilities are well-known. By refusing to declassify any information for the MH-17 investigation, Washington has succeeded in maintaining the widespread impression that Moscow was responsible for the tragedy without having to prove it.

The source who was briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts told me that the Obama administration considered “coming clean” about the MH-17 case in March, when Thomas Schansman, the Dutch father of the only American victim, [was pleading](#) for the U.S. government’s cooperation, but administration officials ultimately decided to keep quiet because to do otherwise would have “reversed the narrative.”

In the meantime, outfits such as Bellingcat have been free to reinforce the impression of Russian guilt, even as some of those claims have proved false. For instance, Bellingcat directed a news crew from Australia’s “60 Minutes” to a location outside Luhansk (near the Russian border) that the group had identified as the site for the “getaway video” showing a Buk battery with one missile missing.

The “60 Minutes” crew went to the spot and pretended to be at the place shown in the video, but none of the landmarks matched up, which became obvious when screen grabs of the video were placed next to the scene of the Australian crew’s stand-upper. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Fake Evidence Blaming Russia for MH-17.”](#)]

Yet, reflecting the deep-seated mainstream media bias on the MH-17 case, the Australian program reacted angrily to my pointing out the obvious discrepancies. In a follow-up, the show denounced me but could only cite a utility pole in its footage that looked similar to a utility pole in the video.

While it’s true that utility poles tend to look alike, in this case none of the surroundings did, including the placement of the foliage and a house shown in the video that isn’t present in the Australian program’s shot. [For details, see

Consortiumnews.com's "[A Reckless Stand-upper on MH-17.](#)"]

But the impact of the nearly two years of one-sided coverage of the MH-17 case in the mainstream Western media has been considerable. In the last few days, a lawyer for the families of Australian victims [announced](#) the filing of a lawsuit against Russia and Putin in the European court for human rights seeking compensation of \$10 million per passenger. Many of the West's news articles on the lawsuit assume Russia's guilt.

In other words, whatever the truth about the MH-17 shoot-down, the tragedy has proven to be worth its weight in propaganda gold against Russia and Putin, even as the U.S. government hides the actual proof that might show exactly who was responsible.

(Research by Assistant Editor Chelsea Gilmour.)

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

Intel Vets Urge Fast Report on Clinton's Emails

A group of U.S. intelligence veterans is calling on President Obama to expedite the FBI review of former Secretary of State Clinton's alleged email security violations so the public can assess this issue in a timely fashion.

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

SUBJECT: Those "Damn Emails" – "Really a Concern"

Introduction

Last Wednesday Robert Gates, CIA Director under President Bush-41 and Defense Secretary under President Bush-43, publicly commented that Secretary Hillary Clinton's "whole email thing ... is really a concern in terms of her judgment," adding, "I don't know what originally prompted her to think that was a good idea."

What originally prompted her does not matter. As your Secretary of State and your subordinate, she willfully violated laws designed to protect classified information from unauthorized disclosure. It may be somewhat difficult for those not as immersed in national security matters as we have been to appreciate the seriousness of the offense, including the harm done in compromising some of the most sensitive U.S. programs and activities. This is why we write.

Pundits and others are playing down the harm. A charitable interpretation is that they have no way to gauge what it means to expose so much to so many. We do know, and our overriding concern is to protect the national security of our country from further harm. It would be a huge help toward this end, if you would order Attorney General Loretta Lynch to instruct the FBI to stop slow-walking the email investigation and release its findings promptly.

If you choose, instead, to give precedence to politics over national security, the American people will be deprived of timely appreciation of the gravity of the harm done; national security officials who do follow the rules will be scandalized; FBI investigators will conclude that that their job is more political than professional; and the noxious impression will grow that powerful people cannot be held accountable when they break the law. Worse: if the results of the FBI investigation remain under lock and key, dangerous pressures are likely to be exerted on the most senior U.S. officials by those who have the key – as we explain below.

* * *

We the undersigned Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPs) have spent 400 years working with classified information – up to and including TOP SECRET, Codeword, and Special Access Programs (SAP). Given that experience, we believe that much of the commentary on the former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton email controversy has been misplaced, focusing on extraneous issues having little or nothing to do with the overriding imperative to protect classified information.

As intelligence, military, and foreign service professionals, we are highly aware not only of that compelling need, but also of the accompanying necessity to hold accountable those whose actions compromise – whether for reasons of convenience or espionage – sensitive operations, programs and persons. In addition, we know that successful mutual cooperation with foreign intelligence services depends largely on what they see as our ability to keep secrets secret.

Background

Last August, Secretary Clinton handed over her private email server to the FBI,

five months after she acknowledged she had used it for work-related emails as Secretary of State. She admitted to having deleted about 31,000 emails she described as personal. Media reports last fall, however, indicated that the FBI was able to recover the personal emails, and was reviewing them, as well as the 30,000 others she had described as work-related.

In January, the Department of State announced that, of the 30,000 work-related emails, at least 1,340 contained classified material. The Department retroactively classified 22 of those TOP SECRET and prevented their release. Among the 22 were some that, according to media reports, included information on highly sensitive Special Access Programs (SAP).

The White House has said it will do nothing to impede the FBI investigation and possible filing of charges against Clinton, if the facts should warrant that kind of action. Inasmuch as the outcome of the investigation is bound to have major political consequences, such White House assurances stretch credulity.

By all indications, the FBI is slow-walking the investigation and mainstream media are soft-pedaling the issue. As things now stand, most Americans remain unaware of the import of this industrial-scale compromise of very sensitive national security information in Secretary Clinton's emails.

Our concern mounted in January when the Inspector General of the intelligence community wrote to the chairs of the congressional intelligence committees that he had received from one of the intelligence agencies two "sworn declarations" asserting that Secretary Clinton's emails contained not only CONFIDENTIAL and SECRET information, but also information at the TOP SECRET/SAP level.

In 2009, you signed an Executive Order regarding SAP (Special Access Programs), so we assume you were briefed on their extremely high sensitivity and the consequent need to sharply limit the number of people allowed to be "read-in" on them. The mishandling of SAP information can neutralize intelligence programs costing billions of dollars, wreck liaison relationships assiduously cultivated for decades, and get a lot of people killed.

'It Wasn't That Bad'

All those directly or peripherally involved in the investigation of the Clinton email issue know very well that it could have a direct impact on who is likely to become the next President of the United States, and they will be making decisions with that reality in mind. They know that it is with you that "the buck stops," and they are sensitive to signs of your preferences. Those were not difficult to discern in your commencement address at Howard University on May 7, in which you strongly advocated the same basic policy approaches as those

espoused by one Democratic presidential candidate – Hillary Clinton.

Your White House has also made excuses for deliberate security violations by Secretary Clinton that would have gotten senior officials like us fired and probably indicted. We look with suspicion at what we see as contrasting and totally inappropriate attempts by the administration and media to play down the importance of Secretary Clinton's deliberate disregard of basic security instructions and procedures.

It appears that the option chosen by the White House is using the declared need for "thoroughness" to soft-pedal and delay completion of the investigation for several more months, while the corporate media sleeps on. Four months have already gone by since the smoking-gun-type revelations in the intelligence community Inspector General's letter to Congress, and it has been well over a year since Secretary Clinton first acknowledged using an insecure email server for official business.

Another claim emanating from your White House is that Clinton was careless in managing her emails and has admitted as much, but that she has not damaged American national security. She has called it a "mistake," but security officials of the National Security Agency explicitly forewarned her against violating basic laws and regulations designed to prevent the compromise of classified information.

NSA, FBI Have Enough Evidence

Surely, enough time has passed, and enough material has been reviewed, to permit a preliminary damage assessment. The NSA has the necessary information and should, by now, have shared that information with the FBI. Secretary Clinton's server in her house in Chappaqua, New York, was not a secured device. Her email address incorporated her initials, "hdr" (apparently for her maiden name, Hillary Diane Rodham). It also included the "clinton" server identity, so it was easy for a hacker to spot.

Anyone with the proper equipment, knowledge and motivation might have been able to obtain access. That is what hackers are able to do, with considerable success, against government servers that are far better protected than the private email server located in her New York State home.

In fact, there have been reports that Secretary Clinton's emails were, indeed, hacked successfully by foreigners. The Romanian hacker who goes by the name Guccifer claimed earlier this month that he had repeatedly hacked her email server. He described the server as "like an open orchid on the Internet" and that "it was easy ... easy for me, for everybody." Guccifer has been extradited

from Romania and is now in jail in Alexandria, Virginia, where the FBI is said to be questioning him on the emails. There have also been credible claims that Russian intelligence and other foreign services were able to hack the Secretary's server.

Another argument being surfaced, in a transparent attempt to defend Secretary Clinton, has to do with intent. It is said that she did not intend to have classified information on her computer in New York and had no intention of handling secret material in a way that would be accessible to foreign intelligence or others lacking the proper security clearances and the need-to-know.

But while intent might be relevant in terms of punishment, it does not change the fact that as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, then Senator Clinton had clearances for classified information for years before becoming Secretary of State. She knew the rules and yet as Secretary she handled classified information carelessly after a deliberate decision to circumvent normal procedures for its safeguarding, thus making it vulnerable to foreign intelligence, as well as to criminal hackers.

Anyone who has ever handled classified material knows that there are a number of things that you do not do. You do not take it home with you, you do not copy it and share it with anyone who does not have a clearance and a need-to-know, you do not strip off the classification marks and treat it as unclassified, and you do not transfer it to another email account that is not protected by a government server.

If you have a secured government computer operating off of a secure server that means that what is on the computer stays on the computer. This is not a matter of debate or subject to interpretation. It is how one safeguards classified information, even if one believes that the material should not be classified, which is another argument that has been made in Clinton's defense. Whether or not the classification is unnecessary is not your decision to make.

Apart from the guidelines for proper handling of classified information, outlined in Executive Order 13526 and 18 U.S.C Sec. 793(f) of the federal code, there is some evidence of a cover-up regarding what was compromised. This itself would be a violation of the 2009 Federal Records Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

Numerous messages both in New York and in Washington have reportedly been erased or simply cannot be found. In addition, the law cited above explicitly makes it a felony to cut and paste classified information removing its classification designation. Retaining such information on a private email system is also a

felony. In one of Secretary Clinton's emails, she instructed her staff simply to remove a classification and send the information to her on her server.

So the question is not whether Secretary Clinton broke the law. She did. If the laws are to be equally applied, she should face the same kind of consequences as others who have been found, often on the basis of much less convincing evidence, guilty of similar behavior.

Some More Equal Than Others

Secretary Clinton's case invites comparison with what happened to former CIA case officer Jeffrey Sterling, now serving a three-and-a-half-year prison term for allegedly leaking information to *New York Times* journalist James Risen. Sterling first came to the media's attention when in 2003 he blew the whistle on a botched CIA operation called Operation Merlin, telling the Senate Intelligence Committee staff that the operation had ended up revealing nuclear secrets to Iran. When in 2006 James Risen published a book that discussed, *inter alia*, this amateurish cowboy operation, the Department of Justice focused on Sterling as the suspected source.

In court, the federal prosecutors relied almost entirely on Risen's phone and email logs, which reportedly demonstrated that the two men had been in contact up until 2005. But the prosecutors did not provide the content of those communications even though the FBI was listening in on some of them. Risen has claimed that he had multiple sources on Operation Merlin, and Sterling has always denied being involved.

Jeffrey Sterling was not permitted to testify in the trial on his own behalf because he would have had to discuss Operation Merlin, which was and is still classified. He could not mention any details about it even if they were already publicly known through the Risen book. No evidence was ever produced in court demonstrating that any classified information ever passed between the two men, but Sterling, an African American, was nevertheless convicted by an all-white jury in Virginia based on "suspicion" and the presumption that "it had to be him."

The contrast between the copious evidence – some of it self-admitted – of Secretary Clinton's demonstrable infractions, on the one hand, and the very sketchy, circumstantial evidence used to convict and imprison Jeffrey Sterling, on the other, lend weight to the suspicion that there is one law for the rich and powerful in the United States and another for the rest of us.

Failing to take steps against a politically powerful presidential candidate and letting her off unscathed for crimes of her own making, while an institutionally

unprotected Jeffrey Sterling sits in prison would be a travesty of justice not dissimilar to the gentle wrist-slap given Gen. David Petraeus for giving his mistress extremely sensitive information and then lying to the FBI about it.

Your order to then-Attorney General Eric Holder to let Gen. David Petraeus off easy created a noxious – and demoralizing – precedent in the national security community indicating that, whatever the pains taken at lower levels to prevent compromise of duly classified information, top officials are almost never held accountable for disregarding well-established rules. These are some of the reasons we are so concerned that this is precisely the direction in which you seem to be leaning on the Clinton email issue.

In our view, the sole legitimate reason for disclosing classified information springs from the only “oath” we all took – “to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic.” When, for example, Edward Snowden saw the U.S. government grossly violating our Fourth Amendment right to be “secure” against warrantless “searches and seizures,” he gave more weight to that oath (ethicists call it a supervening value) than to the promise he had made not to disclose information that could harm U.S. national security.

Possibly Still Worse Ahead

You might give some thought, Mr. President, to a potentially messy side of this. What is already known about NSA’s collect-it-all electronic practices over the past several years strongly suggests that NSA, and perhaps the FBI, already know chapter and verse. It is virtually certain they know what was in Secretary Clinton’s emails – including the ones she thought she had deleted. It is likely that they have also been able to determine which foreign intelligence agencies and other hackers were able to access the emails.

One ignores this at one’s peril. Secretary Clinton’s security violations can have impact not only on whether she becomes your successor, but also on whether she would, in that case, be beholden to those who know what lies hidden from the rest of us – perhaps even from you.

Intelligence professionals (in contrast to the occasional political functionary) take the compromise of classified information with utmost seriousness. More important: this is for us a quintessentially nonpartisan issue. It has to do, first and foremost, with the national security of the United States.

We are all too familiar with what harm can come from blithe disregard of basic procedures designed to protect sensitive intelligence and other national security information. Yes, the lamentable unevenness in how such infractions are

handled is also an important issue – but that is not our main focus in the present context.

The Truth Will Out

Not all workers at the NSA or the FBI are likely to keep their heads in the sand, as they watch very senior officials and politicians with their own agendas disregard laws to safeguard the nation's security. We know what it is like to do the difficult, disciplined work of protecting information from being compromised by strictly abiding by what often seem to be cumbersome rules and regulations. We've been there; done that.

If you encourage the Department of Justice and the FBI to continue slow-walking the investigation, there is a good chance the truth will come out anyway. As you are aware, the Justice Department, the FBI, and NSA have all yielded recent patriots who, in such circumstances, decided that whistleblowing – rather than silence – was the only way to honor the oath we all swore – to support and defend the Constitution.

To sum up our concern regarding how all this plays out, if you order the Justice Department and FBI to pursue the investigation with “all deliberate speed,” so to speak, and Secretary Clinton becomes president, the juicy email secrets in the hidden hands of the NSA and FBI are likely to give those already powerful institutions a capacity for blackmail that would make J. Edgar Hoover's mouth water. In addition, information hacked by foreign intelligence services or Guccifer-like hackers can also provide useful grist for leverage or blackmail.

Taking Care the Laws Are Faithfully Executed

We strongly urge you to order Attorney General Loretta Lynch to instruct FBI Director James Comey to wind up a preliminary investigation and tell the country *now* what they have learned. By now they – and U.S. intelligence agencies – have had enough time to do an early assessment of what classified data, programs and people have been compromised. Realistically speaking, a lengthier, comprehensive post-mortem-type evaluation – however interesting it might be, might never see the light of day under a new president.

We believe the American people are entitled to prompt and full disclosure, and respectfully suggest that you ensure that enforcement of laws protecting our national security does not play stepchild to political considerations on this key issue.

On April 10, you assured Chris Wallace, “I guarantee that there is no political influence in any investigation conducted by the Justice Department, or the FBI – not just in this [Clinton email] case, but in any case. Full stop. Period.”

We urge you to abide by that promise, and let the chips fall where they may.
Full stop. Period.

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

William Binney, Technical Director, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

Thomas Drake, Senior Executive, NSA (former)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Former Sen. Mike Gravel, D, Alaska; earlier, Adjutant, top secret control officer, Communications Intelligence Service, special agent the Counter Intelligence Corps.

Matthew Hoh, former Capt., USMC, Iraq & Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan (associate VIPS)

Larry C. Johnson, CIA & State Department (ret.)

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF Intelligence Agency (ret.), ex-Master SERE Instructor

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Middle East, CIA (ret.)

Todd Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Scott Ritter, former MAJ, USMC, former UN Weapon Inspector, Iraq

Diane Roark, DOE, DOD, NSC, & professional staff, House Intelligence Committee (ret.)

Robert David Steele, former CIA Operations Officer

Peter Van Buren, U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA, (ret.)

Ann Wright, U.S. Army Reserve Colonel (ret) and former U.S. Diplomat

Trump's Five Questions on US Foreign Policy

Along with his self-congratulatory bombast, Donald Trump has offered a rare critique of Official Washington's "group think" about foreign policy, including the wisdom of NATO expansion and the value of endless war, notes John V. Walsh.

By John V. Walsh

"Only Donald Trump (among the Presidential candidates) has said anything meaningful and critical of U.S. foreign policy." No, that is not Reince Priebus, chair of the RNC, speaking up in favor of the presumptive Republican nominee. It is Stephen F. Cohen, Emeritus Professor of Russian History at Princeton and NYU, a contributing editor for *The Nation*, that most liberal of political journals.

Cohen tells us [here](#) that: "Trump's questions are fundamental and urgent, but instead of engaging them, his opponents (including President Obama) and the media dismiss the issues he raises about foreign policy as ignorant and dangerous. Some even charge that his statements are like 'Christmas in the Kremlin' and that he is 'the Kremlin's Candidate' – thereby, further shutting off the debate we so urgently need." (Cohen's comment about the lack of a meaningful critique of U.S. foreign policy also covers the statements of Sen. Bernie Sanders.)

Cohen first enunciated Trump's five questions during one of his weekly discussions on relations between Russia and the West on [The John Batchelor Show](#), on WABC-AM (also on [podcasts](#)).

On the [April 6 broadcast](#), Cohen said: "Let me just rattle off the five questions he [Trump] has asked. [First] why must the United States lead the world everywhere on the globe and play the role of the world's policeman, now for example, he says, in Ukraine? It's a question. It's worth a discussion.

"Secondly, [Trump] said, NATO was founded 67 years ago to deter the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union ended 25 years ago. What is NATO's mission? Is it obsolete? Is it fighting terrorism? No, to the last question, it's not. Should we discuss NATO's mission?

"Thirdly, [Trump] asks, why does the United States always pursue regime changes? Iraq, Libya, Ukraine, and now it wants a regime change in Syria, Damascus. When

the result is, to use Donald Trump's favorite word, the result is always "disaster." But it's a reasonable question.

"Fourthly, why do we treat Russia and Putin as an enemy when he should be a partner?

"Fifth, Trump asks, about nuclear weapons – and this is interesting. You remember he was asked, would he rule out using nuclear weapons – an existential question. He thought for a while and then he said, 'No, I take nothing off the table.' And everybody said he wants to use nuclear weapons! In fact, it is the official American nuclear doctrine policy that we do not take first use off the table. We do not have a no first use of nuclear weapons doctrine. So all Trump did was state in his own way what has been official American nuclear policy for, I guess, 40 or 50 years. ...

"It seems to me that these five questions, which are not being discussed by the other presidential candidates, are essential."

Batchelor then turned the discussion to the question of NATO. Cohen replied: "When we say NATO, what are we talking about? We are not talking only about the weapons and soldiers on land and sea. We're talking about a vast political bureaucracy with hundreds of thousands of employees and appointees, that is located in Brussels. It's a political empire. It's an institution. It's almost on a par with our Department of Defense, though it gets its money from the Department of Defense, mainly, as Trump points out ...

"But it has many propaganda organs. If you look at the bylines of people who write op-ed pieces in many American papers, they are listed as working for the public relations department of NATO or they formerly did so. No, I would say along with the Kremlin and Washington, NATO is probably the third largest propagator of information, in this information war, in the world.

"But look, here's the reality. And Trump came to this late. When they were discussing expanding NATO in the 1990s in the Clinton administration, it was George Kennan, who was then the most venerable American diplomat scholar on relations with Russia, who said: Don't do it; it will be a disaster; it will lead to a new Cold War.

"Since George spoke his words – and I knew him well when I taught at Princeton where he lived – we have taken in virtually all of the countries between Berlin and Russia. NATO now has 28 membership states. But if you sit in the Kremlin and you see NATO coming at you over 20 years, country by country like PAC-man, gobbling up countries that used to be your allies, who appears to be the aggressor?

“So – the expansion of NATO has been a catastrophe. And that has been, in some ways, apart from fighting the war in Afghanistan – from which I believe it has now withdrawn, it is now solely American (I may be wrong about that) – and in addition taking on the American project of missile defense, expanding toward Russia has been NATO’s only mission since the end of the Soviet Union.

“So people can ask themselves, if they ask calmly and apart from the information war, ... do we have less security risks, less conflict, today after this expansion to Russia’s borders, bearing in mind that the Ukrainian crisis is a direct result of trying to bring Ukraine into NATO as was the Georgian war, the proxy war with Russia in 2008. Are we, as [President] Reagan would say, are we better off today? We are not! So easily at a minimum, we have to rethink what it is NATO is doing.”

So get thee to the website for the [American Committee on East West Accord](#) and listen to the weekly Batchelor-Cohen podcasts. They are an ideal antidote to the avalanche of Russia-bashing and Putin-demonizing that we must endure. While you are at it, check out the other leading members of ACEWA, a superb and badly needed organization – and make a contribution.

John V. Walsh is a frequent contributor to CounterPunch.com, Antiwar.com, LewRockwell.com and DissidentVoice.org. He is a founding member of “Come Home America.” Until recently he was Professor of Physiology and Neuroscience at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He can be reached at john.endwar@gmail.com.

Hillary Clinton’s ‘House of Cards’

Special Report: In promoting Hillary Clinton for President, the Democratic Party is betting that American voters are ready to venture back into the Clintons’ “House of Cards,” a structure long defined by scandals and self-interest, writes Greg Maybury.

By Greg Maybury

For “[House of Cards](#)” fans who can’t get enough of fictional President Frank Underwood and his First Lady Claire, it must be tempting to view Bill and Hillary Clinton as their real-life political doppelgangers. Certainly there’s fertile ground for those seeking parallels between the main protagonists of this quintessential political soap opera, and our more flesh and blood “heroes.” Like

their imaginary foils, the Clintons' moral compass is functionally impaired, so much so one suspects the HoC scriptwriters modeled their lead characters on the Democratic Party's resident "royal couple."

To be sure, a critical assessment of Hillary Clinton's fitness for the Oval Office can't be undertaken absent some reference to the respective roles she and her husband have played in each other's professional lives. Many folks will recall their indelible slogan from Bill Clinton's successful tilt at the top job in 1992, where the campaign pitch to voters was, *"Two for the price of one."*

Again, one not unlike the mantra the Underwoods might concoct for voters. One wonders why the Clintons have not retooled that hoary old refrain for 2016, and here I'm thinking, *"Buy one, get one free"* might fit the bill.

The Clintons then (cue Frank and Claire again) are the consummate political "chancers" (British slang for "opportunists"), with style overwhelming substance, ruthlessness eclipsing truthfulness, and political expediency supplanting personal integrity. Occupying their own "house of cards" is a long, yet not so illustrious history of deception, malice, corruption, duplicity, careerism, avarice, turpitude, warmongering, hubris, incompetence, arrogance, media manipulation, venality, hypocrisy, influence touting, and everything in between that the ugly, sleazy side of politics has on offer.

This reality was first underscored most notably when – in what must be the modern American narrative's most indelible "stand by your man" moment – the then "Tammy Wynette" of U.S. politics vigorously defended her husband against allegations of unbridled lechery and sexual predation. These allegations, along with many others in her view, were invented by what she later defined as a "vast right-wing conspiracy," one that was unscrupulously trying to take them down and out.

But irrespective of whether this much touted "conspiracy" was actually a reality (the Clintons surely had powerful and well-heeled enemies), a product of Mrs. Clinton's penchant for self-aggrandizing delusion, or simply dirty politics (the perfect tautology if there is one), it is now safe to say it was going to take much more than a "vast right-wing conspiracy" to stop the Clinton juggernaut in its tracks.

Powerful Juggernaut

That this "juggernaut" shows few signs of losing steam is evident; at the same time it continues to showcase all that's wrong about Establishment politics – Republican or Democrat. And whilst we can say now the accusations against her husband contained more than a grain of truth (at least those related to

womanizing and self-aggrandizement), both Bill and Hillary were in for the long haul. That she tendered her impassioned denials in the full knowledge that many were true is difficult to refute, and if nothing else, says much about the candidate's capacity to deny reality in the service of a larger ambition.

And without placing too fine a point on it, this is one area where given the prevailing zeitgeist in Washington – in both neoliberal and neoconservative circles – Hillary Clinton is most definitely qualified as both the preferred candidate of Democratic insiders and the Establishment's choice for president (including a number of erstwhile Republicans).

In any event, the Clintons themselves are no slouches when it comes to playing "dirty politics," for whom we might say all's fair in love, war *and* their chosen vocation. They embody moreover, raw political ambition at its hard-core finest, steeled by narcissistic megalomania, all of it unencumbered by accountability, transparency, humility, ethics, honesty, scruples or altruism. Her seemingly inevitable selection as the 2016 Democratic flag-bearer – and from there most likely the presidency – is ample indication of that "long haul" ambition.

To their credit as political survivors, they've been effectively dodging political snipers ever since they parachuted into public consciousness during the 1992 campaign. And if the current contest is any guide, the Clintons have not lost their innate talent in this regard. As for Hillary Clinton, one suspects even her most zealous detractors could not help but admire – if begrudgingly – the mix of chutzpah and resilience that have been key to her longevity, with her not always subtle campaign "trump" cards: "It's my turn!" Even without playing the "elect me as your first woman president" card, the palpable sense of quasi-regal entitlement becomes icing on the Clinton cake!

We might argue that given the weight of mounting evidence *against* her fitness for office – a modicum of which would deep-six most politicians' career ambitions – they have become ever more adept at keeping their political ducks flying in a row, and well out of the range of the shooters. Not that they've achieved this all on their own.

In this the Clintons have been ably served by the mainstream media (MSM), who've generally eschewed the forensic analysis – whether political, policy or personal – vital to objectively evaluating her fitness as the Democratic nominee (and therefore president).

Mistress of Malevolent Mayhem

The prospect then of another Clinton presidency should make all right-thinking Americans increasingly concerned – even afraid – about the direction in which

their country is heading. I know *I* am, and I'm not even an American!

Like many of America's key allies over recent years, our country Australia is no different in that more and more Aussies are harboring anxious – one might say *existential* – fears about the respective agendas of the U.S. neoconservative and neoliberal establishments. And notwithstanding her blandly reassuring campaign rhetoric on both counts, Clinton hasn't just aligned herself with these agendas; it's increasingly clear she's the preferred standard bearer of the authors.

With this in mind, outside of her aforementioned Tammy Wynette moment, we should explore a little more of the aspiring president's résumé. In an excellent book, aptly titled *Queen of Chaos: The Misadventures of Hillary Clinton*, Diana Johnstone does just this. The author chronicles in a clear-eyed manner her subject's back story in excruciating detail. What makes Johnstone's tome all the more remarkable and essential is the depth and breadth of her narrative, one that goes way beyond the outwardly narrow focus suggested by the book's title.

For Johnstone, Clinton's "misadventures" aren't simply a reflection of the warmongering misadventures of the country she aspires to lead and whose dubious "virtues" Clinton obsequiously and glibly extols at every turn. In Johnstone's studied analysis of the candidate, Hillary Clinton embraces all the vices that distinguish the prevailing Washington "group think" on foreign, national security and military policy. Indeed, Clinton does so as promiscuously as her philandering spouse did in pursuing his own personal vices.

Moreover, along with being attendant to her husband's career, the back story of Hillary Clinton's political ascendancy is inextricably woven into the larger narrative of America's preeminence as the "indispensable" empire *du jour* in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, itself coinciding more or less with Bill Clinton's election to the presidency in 1992.

As Johnstone notes, in her youth, the then Hillary Rodham, a former Republican and "Goldwater girl," "grew up with the viewpoint of a rich and dominant America obliged to maintain its position on top of an envious and resentful world. This was the standard attitude."

It should be noted that it was her husband's foreign and national security policies that in so many ways facilitated the rise of the "full-spectrum dominance" mindset that prevails in Washington to this day. In fact, Bill Clinton's track record as POTUS is a singular pointer to how a Hillary Clinton presidency will shape up on the critical economic and financial, as well as the geopolitical and national security fronts.

Though we may never know the full extent of Hillary Clinton's influence on her

husband's foreign and national security policies during his tenure, we can safely assume it was never less than substantive. In this we might point to her well-documented encouragement of Bill Clinton to bomb Yugoslavia, as just one example.

Bringing in Bubba

And now with her husband as a key fundraiser, campaign strategist and arguably her closest political confidant, it's a safe bet that once Hillary Clinton is ensconced in the White House, "Bubba" Clinton will almost certainly reign behind the throne as her indispensable *consigliere*. In fact, we can't rule out his appointment as a key player in the next administration.

As it is, such a prospect was announced just this past week when the candidate said she is likely to appoint her husband to a senior economic advisory position, purportedly to "revitalize" the economy. "You know, he knows how to do it," she declared.

On the foreign policy front, the aptly designated "War Party" – the cabal of neoconservatives and liberal interventionists who are the flag-bearers of America's hegemonic ambition – are now more entrenched than in Bill Clinton's heyday and key leaders are backing Hillary Clinton. This being the case, the die one imagines is already cast – America's future preordained. There can be only one outcome from a Hillary Clinton presidency – more wars.

In an interview with Joan Brunwasser on OpEdNews, Johnstone explained there were two things [that] inspired her to write *Queen of Chaos*. The first was the Libyan intervention and accompanying "regime change" gambit. Johnstone described the war that eventually destroyed Libya as "totally unjustified" – a familiar refrain in the decades-long history of America's war for the Greater Middle East. The author added that most people are "totally unaware [of] how much falsification was used to justify that war."

It was Clinton as Secretary of State, Johnstone says, who cajoled President Obama into that war and is "quite ready to use it as model for further regime change in countries whose leaders she doesn't like." Clinton's sniggering, grandiose exultation – "we came, we saw, he died" – upon hearing of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's grisly demise at the hands of Western-aided anti-government rebels was clear evidence of this.

Her close pal (and now presumably, aspiring "presidential whisperer") Henry Kissinger – himself a past master of malevolent mayhem and Machiavellian mischief – doubtless would've been mightily impressed with the way the Libyan debacle unfolded, although "Hank" one expects may have had the decorum not to

gloat about it in public, if only for appearances' sake.

As for her second reason, Johnstone points out it was, "the totally disproportionate hostility aroused against Vladimir Putin and Russia as a result of the Ukrainian crisis ... [itself] incited largely by Washington and the European Union. That hostility was already brewing, and Hillary has kept it stirring. These events are part of a trend toward a much greater war than people today think possible."

In a recent article at *Counterpunch*, Johnstone declared that she had hoped the occasion of the campaign might be seized upon not only to "expose the lies of Hillary Clinton," but, also to "seek freedom from America's seven decades of subjugation to the military-industrial complex and its organic intellectuals who never cease conjuring up threats and enemies to justify the war economy. This entire policy needs to be exposed, denounced and rejected."

The Regressive Progressive

Andrew Levine from the Institute for Policy Studies singled out so-called "progressive liberals" for their unstinting support of Hillary Clinton. In his view, no notable people within this nebulous constituency (one of her unabashed admirers Paul Krugman comes to mind here) have been able to come up with examples of "anything progressive or worthwhile that Hillary has accomplished."

Levine notes, somewhat acerbically, as First Lady Clinton, "set the cause of health care reform back a generation, laying the groundwork for all that is wrong with Obamacare; as a Senator, she did nothing noteworthy at all; and, worst of all, as Secretary of State, all she has been good for is facilitating world-endangering disasters."

And on the neoliberal front, more people are now viewing secretive faux trade agreements like the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) as Trojan Horses concocted to enhance corporate power and influence, allowing the transnationals to further enrich themselves at the expense of the national sovereignty, economic prosperity and self-determination of the countries who sign off on them. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Neocons and Neolibs: How Dead Ideas Kill."]

In Australia, our all but obligatory commitment to this agreement has many Australians doubtful not just about the alleged benefits of the pact itself, but our "no questions asked" vassal-status alliance with America in general. That few if any of these agreements do what their advocates claim they do is evident to all but the most myopic or deluded of observers of the political economy.

Bill Clinton's own 1994 NAFTA agreement might be Exhibit A here. And Hillary Clinton's flip-flopping on this issue is not a good "look" in the eyes of those

increasingly opposed to these “trade” regimes.

Further, despite her earnest proclamations about reining in Wall Street, Clinton is not likely to do so. The Clintons’ respective presidential campaigns – indeed their political ascendancy, and by some accounts, their personal financial rehabilitation after Bill Clinton left office – were funded in large part and via various means by the “gangbanksters” of “grab-it-all” street.

These massive payments – essentially pay-to-play “payola” dressed-up as speaking fees, charitable donations or campaign contributions – could be viewed as Wall Street’s protection money guaranteeing that a President Hillary Clinton will use her office as the bulwark between the financial criminals and the folks with the pitchforks.

Pepe Escobar has noted that “Wall Street’s Golden Girl” likes to portray herself at least for public consumption as a dedicated disciple of the “No Bank Is Too Big To Fail” ethos and “fully committed” to financial industry reform. But she is “the reigning Queen of Turbo-Charged Casino Neoliberalism ... the evidence insists to suggest that her actions do not exactly match her rhetoric.”

It seems then that few presidential aspirants have campaigned for office schlepping so much *obvious* “baggage” with them. In fact, it is a testament to the Clintons’ formidable, perpetual motion political machine that much of HRC’s “baggage” is either hidden from public view or is rarely subjected to the rigorous scrutiny that should accompany any candidate aspiring to the highest office in the land.

Paradoxically, this applies even more so now despite more informed folks having the Clintons’ political and personal measure. But as indicated, the MSM has dutifully shoved her dirty linen down the political laundry chute and welded the doors shut at both ends so the smell doesn’t offend the nostrils of the voting public.

In at least one case, the MSM appears to have been joined in pulling punches by some in alternative, independent media (AIM) circles. Fellow Australian, renowned filmmaker and journalist John Pilger noted recently, in reference to an article he published on *Counterpunch* concerning Clinton’s fitness for the White House, another well known and generally respected AIM outlet *Truthout*, refused to republish it in full until he excised some of what they viewed as his more contentious statements regarding the Woman who Would be President. Pilger said this was the first time he’d ever been asked to undertake such self-censorship. He was, as might be expected, less than impressed, saying “like all censorship, this was unacceptable.”

Pilger added that Truthout said “my unwillingness to submit my work to a ‘process of revision’ meant [they] had to take it off their ‘publication docket’. Such is the gatekeeper’s way with words. At the root of this episode is an enduring unsayable. This is the need, the compulsion, of many liberals to embrace a leader from within a system that is demonstrably imperial and violent. Like Obama’s ‘hope’, Clinton’s gender is no more than a suitable facade.”

In this case, it was a news outlet positioning itself as a credible alternative to the glorified stenographers and perception managers populating the newsrooms and editorial boards within and across the NYT/WPost/LAT axis.

For Pilger and other like-minded observers, the broader challenge for those wishing to expose the leading candidate’s “dirty linen” to greater scrutiny when it is needed most is made more difficult as a result of her status as the anointed candidate amongst the Washington power elites.

Now that Clinton has fashioned herself as the “women’s candidate” and “champion of American liberalism” in its “heroic struggle” with those mostly unelected folks who dictate U.S. economic, foreign, military and national security policy, it is increasingly difficult given the existing political climate to counter this cockamamie narrative.

Or as Pilger put it: “This is drivel, of course; Hillary Clinton leaves a trail of blood and suffering around the world and a clear record of exploitation and greed in her own country. To say so, however, is becoming intolerable in the land of free speech.”

Surviving President Clinton-45?

What should be especially troubling for Americans contemplating their next commander in chief, Clinton clearly views herself amongst those elites whose position, profile, public persona and self-importance license them to see themselves being above the law. Of course, this phenomena is nothing new, but it is becoming increasingly obvious to ordinary Americans that those in power and/or those with influence aren’t routinely – without fear or favor – subject to the same rules and penalties as *they* would be, all things equal.

Given her legally suspect track record on so many issues, this alone should disqualify Clinton from consideration as President. Her arrogant, contemptuous dismissal of the very idea that she might face prosecution from her careless handling of sensitive information in the so-called “Server-gate” scandal – “it’s simply not going to happen” – is ample evidence that she sees herself as a member of the exclusive but expanding “Too Big to Jail” Club.

As former CIA intelligence analyst Ray McGovern sees it, with the FBI

investigation into the matter about to wrap up, it's anyone's guess at this stage as to whether the U.S. Justice Department will find against her for using a private email account and server to conduct official, classified and/or top secret State Department business while Secretary of State, and from there prosecute her to the full extent of the law.

But McGovern goes on to add the following: "if there is something incriminating – or at least politically damaging – in Clinton's emails, it's a safe bet that at least the NSA and maybe the FBI, as well, knows. And that could make life difficult for a Clinton-45 presidency. The whole thing needs to be cleaned up before the choices for the next President are locked in."

In a recent piece – querulously titled "Would The World Survive President Hillary?" – Paul Craig Roberts noted that the Clintons represent everything that is deeply flawed about the way Washington works as they serve as the "poster couple" for the corrosive graft, corruption, political perversion and criminal sleaze that infects the Beltway milieu.

Roberts writes: "government has been privatized. Office holders use their positions in order to make themselves wealthy, not in order to serve the public interest. Bill and Hillary Clinton epitomize the use of public office in behalf of the office holder's interest. For the Clintons, government means using public office to be rewarded for doing favors for private interests."

Part of the reason HRC's fitness for the Oval Office has not been subjected to the sort of scrutiny we all should expect was the reluctance of her Democratic rival Bernie Sanders to go for the jugular throughout the primary campaign. Hillary Clinton might own the most vulnerable "jugular" in this battle, but she's been extraordinarily adept at ensuring hers is a constantly moving, hard-to-hit target.

Yet even if Sanders had conducted a more aggressive campaign against Clinton based on her dubious record, it's arguable the MSM would not have accorded such efforts that much attention, no matter how on the money Sanders was or how well such tactics might have played with voters. Insofar as the MSM is concerned, the nomination of Clinton as the Democratic – indeed, *Establishment* – candidate, was a foregone conclusion from the get-go. The MSM's job is to make it a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Neglecting Sanders

All this was underscored by the amount of MSM ink lavished on the respective campaigns, with Sanders receiving a fraction compared to Clinton (or certainly Donald Trump). Even then, the coverage of Sanders was often begrudging and

dismissive (focused recently on why he won't just concede the nomination and stop "hurting" Clinton).

Plus, there were the reports of vote rigging in various primary contests and Democratic campaign funding anomalies, all of which have been ignored or played down in MSM circles. For its part, the MSM have long since abrogated any and all responsibility for guiding voters towards the selection of a president who might begin to reverse the course America seems hell bent on pursuing, whether in the broad economic, financial, social, military, national security or geopolitical spheres. It wasn't going to change gear this time around.

Last but not least is the aforementioned Clinton machine itself, whose principal drivers are doubtless leaving nothing to chance in their relentless, ruthless drive towards the "inevitable" nomination of their standard bearer and ultimately the presidency. This, coupled with the Democratic National Committee's (DNC) own "out of the starting gate" anointment of HRC as the presumptive nominee along with the crucial backing (above *and* below board) that accompanied said "anointment," translated to Sanders having to work much harder to gain sufficient traction, and from there position himself as the more qualified, suitable candidate for nomination.

That he continues working harder as of this writing is both a testament to Sanders's own determination and the undeniable level of grassroots support for him. It is also an indictment of the Democratic Party itself which seems determined to stop him – along with those among the "opinionocracy" equally determined to write him off – even if this means risking destruction of the party as a viable political entity.

In an interview with talk show host Ed Schultz, Sanders said "super-delegates" – party insiders who get to vote on the nominee without being elected as a regular delegate – had to "do some hard thinking" before deciding who to support at the convention.

The Vermont senator had this to say about the state of play: "'Take a look at the polls, take a look at the nature of the campaigns. And I think if you do that, you'll find that the energy, the enthusiasm, the voter turnout will be with us. We are the strongest campaign to defeat Hillary Clinton – to defeat Donald Trump, and hopefully Hillary Clinton as well here, and if that's the case, I would hope they support us.'"

Clinton's Fitness

And though it may be too little, too late, some people within the AIM ranks are still calling into question Clinton's suitability, qualification and fitness for

the White House. To this end, in a recent article journalist Robert Parry of Consortiumnews posed a simple but seemingly vexed question about HRC – is she qualified to be president, not just based on her résumé but on her actual performance in office?

Parry wrote that Clinton “seemed incapable of learning from her costly errors – or perhaps she just understands that the politically safest course is to do what Washington’s neocon-dominated foreign policy establishment wants. ...

“That way you get hailed as a serious thinker in The Washington Post and at think-tank conferences. Virtually all major columnists and big-name pundits praised Clinton’s hawkish tendencies as Secretary of State, from her escalating tensions with Iran to tipping the balance of the debate in favor of ‘regime change’ in Libya to urging direct U.S. military intervention in Syria in pursuit of another ‘regime change’ there.”

Such fitness for office should be a fundamental consideration for selecting a U.S. president, along with an equally crucial question: What kind of individual is the best person to reverse the course America seems intent on pursuing at the expense of everything it purports to stand for? At one stage Obama held out this promise to America, and more recently for some, Sanders.

Hillary Clinton is, indeed, the “Queen of Chaos” inhabiting her own real-life “House of Cards,” one that’s been erected by a fawning, uncritical mainstream media, bankrolled by wealthy elites and the denizens of Wall Street and the military-industrial-security complex with its perimeter secured by the neoconservatives and their fellow travelers, the (not-so) liberal interventionists. In other words, the power enclaves that constitute the existentially toxic Washington political firmament.

All things considered, simply being “afraid” somehow just doesn’t cut it. When it comes to the Clintons, one imagines we’d all be safer and more secure with the conniving Frank Underwood as President and his calculating wife Claire as Vice President, or perhaps vice versa. Now, there’s a thought!

Greg Maybury is a freelance writer based in Perth, Western Australia.

Sanders Takes Case to California

Despite calls from many pundits and pols for him to quit, Sen. Bernie Sanders continues to rally thousands of Americans to a program of profound social and economic change, reports Rick Sterling.

By Rick Sterling

Vallejo is geographically close but economically far from more affluent San Francisco Bay Area cities to the south. In 2008, the city of Vallejo filed for bankruptcy. On Wednesday, the Bernie Sanders campaign came to Vallejo.

The gathering was held in a huge grassy area alongside the water estuary. The area was enclosed with security fencing so that audience members all had to pass through metal detectors. Ninety minutes before Sanders' speech, the line to go through the security screening was half a mile long. Yet spirits were high with a buzz in the air.

The audience of 8,000 to 10,000 was mostly young, students or working class and ethnically diverse. Many had only learned Sanders was coming via Facebook that day or the day before. I chatted with people patiently waiting as the line slowly advanced. I asked two young African-American women why they supported Sanders.

The answer: "He seems real; he seems consistent; and because the others will take us to hell!"

I asked three Latino young adults why they support Sanders. The answer: "Bernie will help the working class. Because we need affordable education." I noticed he said "working class," not "middle class." A young Hispanic couple responded simply "Why support Bernie? The future." Other answers were "climate change," "criminal justice," "education" and "he's got vision."

As the event began, an African-American organizer from Oakland spoke, then the Filipina President of California Nurses Association, then San Francisco Supervisor Jane Kim followed by organizers from the Bernie team advising the audience about voting in the California primary on June 7. Cenk Uygur of The Young Turks revved up the crowd then Sanders took the stage.

Toward the front, the crowd was packed together with shorter people unable to see beyond their neighbors. let alone the stage. The sun was starting to set and a breeze came off the water. It had been an unusually hot day. Sanders spoke for nearly an hour. He recalled how the pundits had dismissed his campaign from the start, saying his ideas were "too bold and radical." Sanders said he has won 46 percent of the pledged delegates to date, with six states remaining including the largest in the country.

Sanders delivered his speech saying:

-the campaign finance system is corrupt and undermining democracy

- the economy is "rigged" with the rich taking it all
- the infrastructure is collapsing with school children in Flint, Michigan, poisoned by tap water
- corporations have taken away good jobs by moving manufacturing outside the USA
- the criminal justice system is broken, with the government spending \$80 billion locking up 2.2 million people
- police departments have been militarized
- graduating students are saddled with monstrous debts
- why does the government always have money for wars but not to rebuild inner cities?
- we are destroying the planet – what kind of legacy is that?
- healthcare should be a right not a privilege – we need Medicare for all
- workers need a living wage which is \$15 per hour minimum
- we need immigration reform and end to deportations

Sanders spoke of the need to "Stand up and fight back. ... With unity of black, brown, gay, straight, male, female ... There is nothing we cannot accomplish. ... We are going to the convention to win the nomination."

Not Conciliatory

It did not sound like a conciliation or "let's make up" speech to the Democratic Party establishment. Sanders said his message to the Democratic Convention is "We are the campaign to defeat Donald Trump."

Six months ago I was skeptical of Bernie Sanders campaign. Not anymore. He has been tremendously successful in showing the world there are huge numbers of Americans, especially youth, who want major changes in society and government policy. He has raised the consciousness of millions, sharply contrasting Wall Street's wealth at the expense of working people.

He does not speak much on foreign policy, but what he does say indicates a significant improvement. In Vallejo, his only foreign policy comments were asking why we are rebuilding Afghanistan when we should be rebuilding inner cities at home. It's a good point, which matches his overall position of stopping a foreign policy of aggression and "regime change."

Will Bernie Sanders fold up his campaign, corral his supporters and cheer for the Democratic Establishment after they have made some token changes in their platform? It's possible, but I doubt it. Why? Because I think what some of the young people said is likely true: He is consistent and he does have integrity.

His campaign has been based around the needs of working people versus a corrupt Establishment which the Democratic Party is part of. Sanders has highlighted the class nature of our economic system and media. He has focused a bright light on Wall Street and Hillary Clinton's complicity. These lessons are not going to be forgotten or easily retracted.

For those on the Left who disparage Sanders, I say take another look. Listen to his words and more importantly talk with his crowds of supporters. They are the future and we should be working with them. Not preaching dogmatically, but listening. The thousands in Vallejo shouting "Bernie! Bernie!" seem to be doing so because they want the "bold and radical change" previously dismissed by pundits.

Rick Sterling has been an organizer and activist for about 45 years. He currently works with Task Force on the Americas, Mt Diablo Peace & Justice Center and Syria Solidarity Movement. The views expressed in this article are his own. He can be contacted at rsterling1@gmail.com

Up Close on Venezuela's Crisis

U.S. policymakers are pleased with the ousters of leftist governments in Argentina and Brazil with the next prospective "regime change" in Venezuela where the economy screams and people are hungry, as Catholic layworker Lisa Sullivan describes.

An open letter from Lisa Sullivan

Dear friends,

Greetings from the state of Aragua in Venezuela where we are concluding a small U.S. delegation focused on grassroots solutions to the massive food crisis here. I am reaching out to you to share my grave concerns about what is happening here in Venezuela, my home for over three decades where I worked for 21 years as a Maryknoll Catholic lay missionary, then as Latin America Coordinator for the School of the Americas Watch.

It is out of concern for the most vulnerable sectors in Venezuela, such as my neighbors, that I break my silence to write. As I watch their efforts to obtain food for their families become more desperate and more futile, and as I witness pounds dropping from their bodies, I think the time has come to do more than share from my own scarce cupboards and gardens as they share with me. These people, my friends and neighbors and family, are literally being swallowed up by massive economic and political interests.

A perfect storm of a collapse of global oil prices combined with massive internal economic errors leading to unbridled corruption on all levels of society has left these vulnerable sectors literally almost starving.

The reaction of the U.S. and other global interests seems clearly based on Venezuela's enormous oil reserves (the world's largest). Those interests are circling our nation like vultures, ready to swoop in and devour.

I have spent countless hours leading delegations to Venezuela over the past 12 years to share the enormous advances in education, health care, housing and nutrition that returned dignity to millions of Venezuelans under the Bolivarian revolution.

Throughout those years there was an almost total boycott of the international media to acknowledge these advances that led to Venezuela becoming the most equal society in the Americas, to its surge to fifth place worldwide for college enrollment and to building new homes for a fifth of its families. The achievements of the Bolivarian revolution were real, palpable and inspired a continent.

Today our reality is widespread hunger. The current government points to an economic war unleashed by wealthy business owners with international support from the U.S. that has led to hoarding and shortages of food. The U.S. points to mismanagement and poor planning on the part of the Bolivarian government that led to a nation totally renter economy dependent on food imports.

My neighbors point to their stomachs while simultaneously planting corn and beans and bananas in any tiny space, beseeching the heavens for rains that have also been in dire shortage this season.

I wish that I could share a simple message or solution with you, such as "close the SOA." [The School of the Americas or SOA is a U.S.-run military training facility for Latin America that has been blamed for widespread political repression and human rights violations.] Observing such complicity in this crisis all around me, near and far, I can offer no simple slogan.

However, having spent a decade traveling the continent witnessing the horrors

unleashed by U.S.- trained Latin American military upon their own people, I want to at least alert you to the possibility of a similar scenario here.

Unfortunately, because the Bolivarian government has already experienced this very reality of outside complicity in a military coup in 2002, they are ultra sensitive (understandably so) towards any critiques and suggestions, even within their own ranks. Unwittingly that may contribute to an eventual military or outside solution rather than allowing for an internal democratic resolution to this grave humanitarian crisis.

As the political configuration of South America quickly shifts to the right and the global alignment of power is in active play, Venezuela is in the cross-hairs. The grave humanitarian crisis in Venezuela today is real and not an invention of the press.

And the contributions to this crisis lie on multiple shoulders. And the solution to this problem needs to be determined by the Venezuelan people with support from other Latin American peoples.

Hoping that these days don't bring worse scenarios. Thanks for your support through the years.

Abrazos, Lisa

(This letter from Lisa Sullivan comes via Rick Sterling of Task Force on the Americas with Lisa's approval.)

US Media as Conduits of Propaganda

Exclusive: The "group think" about the Syrian government crossing President Obama's "red line" in a 2013 sarin attack has collapsed, but The New York Times still reports it as flat fact, an industry-wide problem, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Nothing disturbs me more about the modern mainstream U.S. news media than its failure to test what the U.S. government says against what can be determined through serious and impartial investigation to be true. And this is not just some question of my professional vanity; it can be a matter of life or death.

For instance, did Syrian President Bashar al-Assad cross President Barack Obama's supposed "red line" against using chemical weapons, specifically in the sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, or not?

Upon this question rests the possibility that a future President Hillary Clinton will invade Syria under the guise of establishing a “safe zone,” a project that would surely expand into another bloody “regime change,” as occurred in Iraq and Libya amid similar U.S. claims about protecting “human rights.”

Yet, there is substantial evidence that Assad was not responsible for the sarin attack – that is was perpetrated by jihadist rebels as a provocation to draw the U.S. military directly into the war on their side. But it remains conventional wisdom that Assad ignored Obama’s “red line” and that Obama then flinched from enforcing it.

The New York Times and other major U.S. publication cite this “group think” about the “red line” as flat fact, much as many of them reported without doubt that Iraq’s Saddam Hussein was hiding WMD, reinforcing the pretext for the U.S. invasion of that country in 2003.

On Wednesday, Times correspondent David E. Sanger wrote an article about the need for a coercive “Plan B” to force Assad from power and added that “president [Obama] has repeatedly defended his decision not to authorize a military strike against Mr. Assad after he crossed what Mr. Obama had described as a ‘red line’ against using chemical weapons.”

Note that there is no attribution to that claim about Assad crossing the “red line,” no “allegedly” or “widely believed” or any modifier. Assad is simply judged guilty by The New York Times, which – in doing so – asserts this dubious narrative as flat fact.

Yet, the Times hasn’t conducted a serious investigation into whether Assad is, in fact, guilty. Their last stab at proving Assad’s guilt in late 2013 collapsed when it turned out that the one missile found to have carried sarin had a range of only two kilometers, less than a quarter of the distance from which the Times had alleged that Assad’s military had fired the rocket.

Faced with that evidence, the Times essentially retracted its findings in a little-noticed article buried deep inside the paper during the Christmas-New Year holidays. So, even as the case collapsed, the Times maintained its phony narrative, which it reprises regularly as happened in Sanger’s article on Wednesday.

Misleading Readers

But what does that do to the Times’ readers? They are essentially being propagandized by the “paper of record,” with a questionable assertion slipped past them as an incontrovertible “fact.” How are they supposed to evaluate whether the U.S. government should launch another war in the Middle East when

they have been told that a dubious claim is now enshrined as a basic truth in the Times narrative?

We saw something similar earlier this year when Jeff Goldberg of The Atlantic wrote a lengthy article on Obama's foreign policy focusing on his 2013 decision not to launch punitive airstrikes against the Syrian military for the sarin attack.

The opus contained the remarkable disclosure that Director of National Intelligence James Clapper had told Obama that U.S. intelligence lacked "slam dunk" evidence that Assad was guilty. In other words, Obama pulled back in part because he was informed that Assad might well be innocent.

Later in the same article, however, Goldberg reverted to Official Washington's "group think" that held as a matter of faith that Assad had crossed Obama's "red line." That false certainty has proved so powerful that it defies any contrary evidence and keeps popping up as it did in Sanger's article.

Which gets me to one of my pet peeves about modern America: we almost never get to the bottom of anything, whether significant or trivial. Often there's "a conventional wisdom" about some issue but almost never is there a careful assessment of the facts and an unbiased judgment of what happened.

On the trivial side, we have the NFL accusing New England Patriot quarterback Tom Brady of participating in some scheme to deflate footballs, even though the scientific and testimonial evidence doesn't support the claim. But lots of people, including The New York Times, assume the allegations to be true even though they come from one of the most disreputable and dishonest corporations in America, the National Football League, which has recently been exposed for covering up the dangers of concussions.

On more substantive matters, we never see serious investigations into U.S. government claims especially when they're aimed at "enemies." The failure to test President George W. Bush's claims about Iraq's WMD cost hundreds of thousands of lives, including those of nearly 4,500 American soldiers, and has spread chaos through much of the region and now into Europe.

A Pattern of Neglect

We've seen similar neglect regarding Syria's sarin case and events in Ukraine, from the mysterious sniper attacks that touched off the coup in February 2014 to the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014.

Arguably, the fate of humankind rests on the events in Ukraine where U.S.

propagandists are stirring up the West to engage in a military conflict with nuclear-armed Russia.

So, shouldn't The New York Times and other major publications take special care not to feed a war fever that could exterminate life on the planet? Can't they find the time to undertake serious examinations of these issues and present the evidence without fear or favor?

But that apparently isn't how the editors of the Times or The Washington Post or any number of other major U.S. news outlets view matters. Instead of questioning the stories coming from the U.S. government's propaganda shops, the mainstream media simply amplifies them, all the better to look "patriotic."

If instead these outlets joined some independent journalists and concerned citizens in demanding that the U.S. government provide verifiable evidence to support its claims, that might force many of these "artificial secrets" out into the open.

For instance, we don't know what the current U.S. intelligence assessments are about the Syria-sarin attack or the MH-17 shoot-down. Regarding the MH-17 case, the U.S. government has refused to divulge its overhead surveillance, radar and other technical evidence about this tragedy in which 298 people were killed.

If there was some journalistic unity – refusing to simply blame the Russians and instead highlighting the lack of U.S. cooperation in the investigation – the U.S. government might feel enough heat to declassify its information and help bring whoever shot down the plane to justice.

As it stands now on these issues, why should the U.S. government reveal what it actually knows when all the major news outlets are accepting its dubious propaganda themes as flat fact?

The Times and other big media outlets could contribute to the cause of truth by simply refusing to serve as conduits for unsubstantiated claims just because they come from senior U.S. government officials. If the mainstream media did, the American people and the world public might be much better informed – and a lot safer.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

The Danger of Demonization

Exclusive: As the West is sucked deeper into the Syrian conflict and starts a new Cold War with Russia, the mainstream news media has collapsed as a vehicle for reliable information, creating a danger for the world, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Does any intelligent person look at a New York Times article about Russia or Vladimir Putin these days and expect to read an objective, balanced account? Or will it be laced with a predictable blend of contempt and ridicule? And is it any different at The Washington Post, NPR, MSNBC, CNN or almost any mainstream U.S. news outlet?

And it's not just Russia. The same trend holds true for Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Nicaragua and other countries and movements that have fallen onto the U.S. government's "enemies list." We saw the same pattern with Saddam Hussein and Iraq before the 2003 U.S. invasion; with Muammar Gaddafi and Libya before the U.S.-orchestrated bombing campaign in 2011; and with President Viktor Yanukovich and Ukraine before the U.S.-backed coup in 2014.

That is not to say that these countries and leaders don't deserve criticism; they do. But the proper role of the press corps – at least as I was taught during my early years at The Associated Press – was to treat all evidence objectively and all sides fairly. Just because you might not like someone doesn't mean your feelings should show through or the facts should be forced through a prism of bias.

In those "old days," that sort of behavior was deemed unprofessional and you would expect a senior editor to come down hard on you. Now, however, it seems that you'd only get punished if you quoted some dissident or allowed such a person onto an op-ed page or a talk show, someone who didn't share Official Washington's "group think" about the "enemy." Deviation from "group think" has become the real disqualifier.

Yet, this conformity should be shocking and unacceptable in a country that prides itself on freedom of thought and speech. Indeed, much of the criticism of "enemy" states is that they supposedly practice various forms of censorship and permit only regime-friendly propaganda to reach the public.

But when was the last time you heard anyone in the U.S. mainstream say anything positive or even nuanced about Russian President Putin. He can only be portrayed as some shirtless buffoon or the devil incarnate. Former Secretary of State

Hillary Clinton got widespread praise in 2014 when she likened him to Hitler.

Or when has anyone in the U.S. media been allowed to suggest that Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and his supporters might actually have reason to fear what the U.S. press lovingly calls the "moderate" rebels – though they often operate under the military command of Sunni extremist groups, such as Al Qaeda's Nusra Front. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Obama's 'Moderate' Syrian Deception.](#)"]

For the first three years of the Syrian civil war, the only permissible U.S. narrative was how the brutal Assad was slaughtering peaceful "moderates," even though Defense Intelligence Agency analysts and other insiders had long been warning about the involvement of violent jihadists in the movement from the uprising's beginning in 2011.

But that story was kept from the American people until the Islamic State started chopping off the heads of Western hostages in 2014 – and since then, the mainstream U.S. media has only reported the fuller story in a half-hearted and garbled way. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Hidden Origins of Syria's Civil War.](#)"]

Reason for Conformity

The reason for this conformity among journalists is simple: If you repeat the conventional wisdom, you might find yourself with a lucrative gig as a big-shot foreign correspondent, a regular TV talking head, or a "visiting scholar" at a major think tank. However, if you don't say what's expected, your career prospects aren't very bright.

If you somehow were to find yourself in a mainstream setting and even mildly challenged the "group think," you should expect to be denounced as a fill-in-the-blank "apologist" or "stooge." A well-paid avatar of the conventional wisdom might even accuse you of being on the payroll of the despised leader. And, you wouldn't likely get invited back.

But the West's demonization of foreign "enemies" is not only an affront to free speech and meaningful democracy, it is also dangerous because it empowers unscrupulous American and European leaders to undertake violent and ill-considered actions that get lots of people killed and that spread hatred against the West.

The most obvious recent example was the Iraq War, which was justified by a barrage of false and misleading claims about Iraq which were mostly swallowed whole by a passive and complicit Western press corps.

Key to that disaster was the demonization of Saddam Hussein, who was subjected to such unrelenting propaganda that almost no one dared question the baseless

charges hurled at him about hiding WMD and collaborating with Al Qaeda. To do so would have made you a “Saddam apologist” or worse.

The few who did dare raise their voices faced accusations of treason or were subjected to character assassination. Yet, even after their skepticism was vindicated as the pre-invasion accusations collapsed, there was very little reappraisal. Most of the skeptics remained marginalized and virtually everyone who got the WMD story wrong escaped accountability.

No Accountability

For instance, Washington Post editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt, who repeatedly reported Iraq’s WMD as “flat fact,” suffered not a whit and remains in the same prestigious job, still enforcing one-sided “group thinks” about “enemies.”

An example of how Hiatt and the Post continue to play the same role as neocon propagandists was on display last year in an editorial condemning Putin’s government for shutting down Russian activities of the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy and requiring foreign-funded groups seeking to influence Russian politics to register as foreign agents.

In [the Post’s editorial](#) and [a companion op-ed](#) by NED President Carl Gershman, you were led to believe that Putin was delusional, paranoid and “power mad” in his concern that outside money funneled into non-governmental organizations was a threat to Russian sovereignty.

However, the Post and Gershman left out a few salient facts, such as the fact that NED is funded by the U.S. government and was the brainchild of Ronald Reagan’s CIA Director William J. Casey in 1983 to partially replace the CIA’s historic role in creating propaganda and political fronts inside targeted nations.

Also missing was the fact that Gershman himself announced in another Post op-ed that he saw Ukraine, prior to the 2014 coup, as “the biggest prize” and a steppingstone toward achieving Putin’s ouster in Russia. The Post also forgot to mention that the Russian law about “foreign agents” was modeled after a U.S. statute entitled the Foreign Agent Registration Act. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Why Russia Shut Down NED Fronts.”](#)]

All those points would have given the Post’s readers a fuller and fairer understanding of why Putin and Russia acted as they did, but that would have messed up the desired propaganda narrative seeking to demonize Putin. The goal was not to inform the American people but to manipulate them into a new Cold War hostility toward Russia.

We've seen a similar pattern with the U.S. government's "information warfare" around high-profile incidents. In the "old days" – at least when I arrived in Washington in the late 1970s – there was much more skepticism among journalists about the official line from the White House or State Department. Indeed, it was a point of pride among journalists not to simply accept whatever the spokesmen or officials were saying, but to check it out.

There was plenty of enough evidence – from the Tonkin Gulf lies to the Watergate cover-up – to justify a critical examination of government claims. But that tradition has been lost, too. Despite the costly deceptions before the Iraq War, the Times, the Post and other mainstream outlets simply accept whatever accusations the U.S. government hurls against "enemies." Beyond the gullibility, there is even hostility toward those of us who insist on seeing real evidence.

Examples of this continuing pattern include the acceptance of the U.S. government line on the sarin gas attack outside Damascus, Syria, on Aug. 21, 2013, and the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014. The first was blamed on Syria's Assad and the second on Russia's Putin – quite convenient even though U.S. officials refused to present any solid evidence to support their claims.

Reasons for Doubt

In both cases, there were obvious reasons to doubt the Official Story. Assad had just invited United Nations inspectors in to examine what he claimed were rebel chemical attacks, so why would he pick that time to launch a sarin attack just miles from where the inspectors were staying? Putin was trying to maintain a low profile for Russian support to Ukrainians resisting the U.S.-backed coup, but provision of a large, sophisticated and powerful anti-aircraft battery lumbering around eastern Ukraine would just have invited detection.

Further, in both cases, there was dissent among U.S. intelligence analysts, some of whom objected at least to the rushes to judgment and offered different explanations for the incidents, pointing the blame in other possible directions. The dissent caused the Obama administration to resort to a new concoction called a "Government Assessment" – essentially a propaganda document – rather than a classic "Intelligence Assessment," which would express the consensus views of the 16 intelligence agencies and include areas of disagreement.

So, there were plenty of reasons for Washington journalists to smell a rat or at least insist upon hard evidence to make the case against Assad and Putin. Instead, given the demonized views of Assad and Putin, mainstream journalists unanimously fell in line behind the Official Story. They even ignored or buried

evidence that undermined the government's tales.

Regarding the Syrian case, there was little interest in the scientific discovery that the one sarin-laden rocket (recovered by the U.N.) had a range of only about two kilometers (destroying Washington's claims about the Syrian government firing many rockets from eight or nine kilometers away). [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Was Turkey Behind Syria-Sarin Attack?](#)"]

Regarding the MH-17 case, a blind eye was turned to a Dutch intelligence report that concluded that there were several operational Buk anti-aircraft missile batteries in eastern Ukraine but they were all under the control of the Ukrainian military and that the rebels had no weapon that could reach the 33,000-foot altitude where MH-17 was flying. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Ever-Curiously MH-17 Case.](#)"]

Though both those cases remain open and one cannot rule out new evidence emerging that bolsters the U.S. government's version of events, the fact that there are substantive reasons to doubt the Official Story should be reflected in how the mainstream Western media deals with these two sensitive issues, but the inconvenient facts are instead brushed aside or ignored (much as happened with Iraq's WMD).

In short, there has been a system-wide collapse of the Western news media as a professional entity in dealing with foreign crises. So, as the world plunges deeper into crises inside Syria and on Russia's border, the West's citizens are going in almost blind without the eyes and ears of independent journalists on the ground and with major news outlets delivering incessant propaganda from Washington and other capitals.

Instead of facts, the West's mainstream media trafficks in demonization.

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The Coming Democratic Crackup

Exclusive: Though the mainstream media is focused on Republican divisions, a more important story could be the coming Democratic crackup, as anti-war Democrats resist Hillary Clinton's pro-war agenda, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

If the Democratic Party presses ahead and nominates hawkish Hillary Clinton for President, it could recreate the conditions that caused the party to splinter in the late 1960s and early 1970s when anti-war and pro-war Democrats turned on one another and opened a path for decades of Republican dominance of the White House.

This new Democratic crackup could come as early as this fall if anti-war progressives refuse to rally behind Clinton because of her neoconservative foreign policy – thus infuriating Clinton’s backers – or it could happen in four years if Clinton wins the White House and implements her militaristic agenda, including expanding the U.S. war in Syria while continuing other wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya – and challenging Russia on its borders.

Clinton’s neocon policies in a prospective first term could generate a “peace” challenge similar to the youth-driven uprising against President Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War in 1968.

Indeed, in 2020, anti-war elements of the Democratic Party might see little choice but to seek a candidate willing to challenge an incumbent President Clinton much as Sen. Eugene McCarthy took on President Johnson, leading eventually to the chaotic and bloody Chicago convention, which in turn contributed to Richard Nixon’s narrow victory that fall.

A difference between Johnson and Clinton, however, is that in 1964, LBJ ran as the “peace candidate” against the hawkish Republican Barry Goldwater (who incidentally was supported by a young Hillary Clinton), whereas in 2016, Clinton has made clear her warlike plans (albeit framing them in “humanitarian” terms).

After winning a landslide victory against Goldwater, Johnson reversed himself and plunged into the Vietnam War, fearing he otherwise might be blamed for “losing” Indochina. With Clinton, there’s no reason to expect a reversal since she’s made no secret about her plans for invading Syria under the guise of creating a “safe zone” and for confronting nuclear-armed Russia along its western borders, from Ukraine through the Baltic States. In her belligerent rhetoric, she has compared Russian President Vladimir Putin to Hitler.

Courting Bibi

Clinton also has vowed to take the U.S.-Israeli relationship to “the next level” by embracing right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who expects to convince President Hillary Clinton to end any détente with Iran and put the prospect of bombing Iran back on the table. Clinton would seem to be an easy sell.

Another feature of the LBJ-Hillary comparison is that the Democratic Party's turn against the Vietnam War in the 1968 and 1972 campaigns prompted a collection of pro-war intellectuals to bolt the Democratic Party and align themselves with the Republicans, especially around Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Those Democratic hawks became known as the neoconservatives and remained attached to the Republican Party for the next 35 years, eventually emerging as Official Washington's foreign policy establishment. However, in some prominent cases (such as Robert Kagan), neocons are now switching over to Clinton because of the rise of Donald Trump, who rejects the neocon passion for interventionism.

In other words, just as Johnson's Vietnam War escalation – and the resulting fierce opposition from anti-war Democrats – set in motion the neocons' defection from the Democrats to the Republicans, Clinton's enthusiasm for the Iraq War, her support for escalation of the Afghan War, and her scheming for "regime change" wars in Libya and Syria are bringing some neocon hawks back to their first nesting place in the Democratic Party.

But a President Clinton's transformation of the Democratic Party into "an aggressive war party," whereas under President Barack Obama it has been "a reluctant war party," would force principled anti-war Democrats to stop making excuses and to start trying to expel Clinton's neocon pro-war attitudes from the party.

Such an internecine battle over the party's soul could deeply divide the Democrats between those supporting Clinton – as "the first woman president" and because of her liberal attitudes on gay rights and other social issues – and those opposing Clinton because of her desire to continue and expand America's "perpetual wars."

The Sanders Resistance

Some of that hostility is already playing out as Clinton backers express their anger at progressives who balk at lining up for Clinton's long-delayed coronation parade. The stubborn support for Sen. Bernie Sanders, even after Clinton has seemingly locked up the Democratic nomination, is a forewarning of the nasty fight ahead.

The prospects are that the animosities will get worse if Clinton loses in November – with many anti-war Democrats defecting or staying home thus infuriating the Hillary Democrats – or if Clinton were to win and begin implementing her neocon foreign policy agenda which will involve further demonizing "enemies" to justify "regime changes."

If anti-war Democrats begin to resist, they can expect the Clinton-45

administration to stigmatize them as (fill-in-the-blank) “apologists” and “stooges” of “enemy” powers, much as happened to protesters against the Vietnam War and, more recently, to Americans who objected to such U.S. interventions as the Iraq War in 2003 and the Ukraine coup in 2014.

Yet, few Democratic strategists seem to be aware of this looming chasm between anti-war and pro-war Democrats. Many of these insiders seem to believe that the anti-war Democrats will simply fall in line behind Hillary Clinton out of fear and loathing for Donald Trump. That may be the case for many, but my conversations with anti-war activists suggest that a significant number will vote for a third party or might even go for Trump.

Meanwhile, most mainstream media commentators are focused on the divisions between the pro-Trump and anti-Trump Republicans, giving extensive TV coverage to various stop-Trump scenarios, even as many establishment Republicans begin to accommodate to Trump’s populist conquest of the party.

But it’s clear that some prominent Republicans, especially from the neocon camp, are unalterably opposed to Trump’s election in November, fearing that he will turn the GOP away from them and toward an “America First” perspective that would repudiate “regime change” interventions favored by Israel.

Thus, for many neocon Republicans, a Trump defeat is preferable to a Trump victory because his defeat would let them reclaim command of the party’s foreign policy infrastructure. They also could encourage President Clinton to pursue their neocon agenda – and watch as pro- and anti-war stresses rip apart the Democratic Party.

So, the establishment Democrats – with their grim determination to resuscitate Hillary Clinton’s nearly lifeless campaign – may be engaging in the political equivalent of whistling past the graveyard, as the ghosts of the party’s Vietnam War crackup hover over Election 2016.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s “[Neocons and Neolibs: How ‘Dead’ Ideas Kill](#)”; “[Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a Neocon](#)”; and “[Would a Clinton Win Mean More Wars?](#)”]

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