

MH-17: Two Years of Anti-Russian Propaganda

Exclusive: Two years ago, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot out of the sky over eastern Ukraine killing 298 people and opening an inviting path for a propaganda campaign toward a new Cold War with Russia, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Perhaps it's only fitting that as we reach the second anniversary of the horrific shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flights 17, The New York Times would mark the occasion by once more using the tragedy as a propaganda club to advance the neocon goal of a new, costly and very dangerous Cold War with Russia.

On Saturday, the Times again demonstrated its disdain for normal journalistic practices as it picked up an amateur assertion that the Russians had faked satellite imagery showing Ukrainian anti-aircraft missile systems in eastern Ukraine before the civilian airliner was blown out of the sky on July 17, 2014.

Since that moment, the Times and other mainstream Western publications have been determined to pin the blame for the deaths of 298 people on Russian President Vladimir Putin so the world could plunge ahead into the latest neocon scheme of destabilizing nuclear-armed Russia with the eventual aim of "regime change" in Moscow.

As revolting as it has been to watch the deaths of innocents exploited in the name of big-power geopolitics, what has been most troubling from a journalistic perspective is that the Times has cast aside any pretense of professional objectivity, much as it did during the deception of the American public over Iraq's fictitious weapons of mass destruction in 2002-2003.

In this latest burst of anti-Russian propaganda, the Times gives great weight to some bloggers who applied a computer program supposedly to show that two Russian government satellite images were manipulated. The point is to cast doubt on whether the Ukrainian military had missiles in place in eastern Ukraine that could have shot down MH-17.

What the Times leaves out is the fact that Western intelligence has already confirmed that Ukraine's military did have powerful anti-aircraft missiles in eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014. Last October, a Dutch intelligence report stated that fact based on NATO intelligence gathering, i.e., the West's own satellite and other data collection.

Indeed, the Netherlands' Military Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD)

concluded that the only anti-aircraft weapons in eastern Ukraine capable of bringing down MH-17 at 33,000 feet belonged to the Ukrainian government, not the ethnic Russian rebels.

MIVD made that assessment in the context of explaining why commercial aircraft continued to fly over the eastern Ukrainian battle zone in summer 2014. (The MH-17 flight had originated in Amsterdam and carried many Dutch citizens, explaining why the Netherlands took the lead in the investigation.)

MIVD said that based on “state secret” information, it was known that Ukraine possessed some older but “powerful anti-aircraft systems” and “a number of these systems were located in the eastern part of the country.” MIVD added that the rebels lacked that capacity:

“Prior to the crash, the MIVD knew that, in addition to light aircraft artillery, the Separatists also possessed short-range portable air defence systems (man-portable air-defence systems; MANPADS) and that they possibly possessed short-range vehicle-borne air-defence systems. Both types of systems are considered surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). Due to their limited range they do not constitute a danger to civil aviation at cruising altitude.”

Lacking Motive

In other words, the Russians would have no clear motive to doctor satellite photos since accurate ones would have shown the presence of Ukrainian Buk missile batteries in the area. You might have thought that the Times would have considered this fact relevant in evaluating claims from some amateur analysts about whether photos were manipulated or not.

Instead, reporter Andrew E. Kramer, who has been a regular contributor to the Times’ anti-Russian propaganda campaign, treats the findings by some nuclear arms control researchers at the Middlebury Institute for International Studies as definitive though there’s no reason to believe that these folks have any special expertise in applying this software whose creator says requires careful analysis.

Roger Cozien, designer of the filtering software Tungstene, has warned against rushing to judge “anomalies” in photographs as intentional falsifications when they may result from the normal process of saving an image or making innocent adjustments.

In an interview in Time magazine, Cozien said, “These filters aim at detecting anomalies. They give you any and all specific and particular information which can be found in the photograph file. And these particularities, called ‘singularities’, are sometimes only accidental: this is because the image was

not well re-saved or that the camera had specific features, for example.

“The software in itself is neutral: it does not know what is an alteration or a manipulation. So, when it notices an error, the operator needs to consider whether it is an image manipulation, or just an accident.”

As Cozien described the process, it becomes clear that the trick of detecting an intentional manipulation rather than some normal or innocuous anomaly – that might occur in transferring an image from one format to another or making contrast adjustments or adding a word box – is more art than science.

And, there is no reason to believe that the Middlebury Institute’s arms control researchers have some special expertise in photographic forensics beyond having purchased the Tungstene suite of software upon which they based their report at the “armscontrolwonk.com” Web site.

Double Standards

The report’s authors also take the Russians to task for the lack of precision of the two images. “The image files are very poor quality,” they write. “We are very disappointed that the Russian Federation, in such an important matter, would release such low quality images as evidence. ... Russian officials must know that releasing images in such a format makes it more difficult to verify the integrity of the images...”

Nevertheless, these researchers make sweeping judgments about the presence of a cloud in one photo and the allegedly sharper image of two Ukrainian Buk missile launchers in the other. Yet, why the Russians would add a cloud makes little sense. (July 17, 2014, was a partly cloudy day in eastern Ukraine, so perhaps the cloud is in the image just because the area was under a partial cloud cover.)

The researchers archly note that “UN Security Council Resolution 2166 calls on states to ‘provide any requested assistance to civil and criminal investigations.’ ... We believe Russia should provide the original, underlying images in an unaltered form to the Joint Investigative Team [which is conducting the criminal investigation into the MH-17 crash] to allow independent experts to verify their claims.”

Sure, of course, but the arms control bloggers don’t call on the U.S. government to release its satellite and other intelligence data relating to the MH-17 shoot-down.

The real filter that needs to be applied when dealing with either The New York Times or some of the “citizen journalists” who pop up to reinforce the U.S.

government's propaganda themes is their unrelenting anti-Russian bias. Can anyone recall the last time The New York Times or any mainstream U.S. news outlet has presented a favorable or even neutral story about Russia?

The U.S. 'Dog Not Barking'

Along those lines, neither the researchers' report nor the Times' article offers any criticism of the U.S. government, which has claimed to have satellite intelligence showing where the anti-aircraft missile was fired but has refused to release that important information to the public or apparently even to official MH-17 investigators.

On July 20, 2014, just three days after the disaster, Secretary of State John Kerry appeared on all five Sunday talk shows including NBC's "Meet the Press" where he cited some "social media" to implicate the ethnic Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine and added: "But even more importantly, 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, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a "Government Assessment," also citing "social media" seeming to implicate the rebels. Then, this white paper listed military equipment allegedly supplied by Russia to the rebels. But the list did not include a Buk missile battery or other high-powered anti-aircraft missiles capable of striking MH-17, which had been flying at around 33,000 feet.

The DNI also had U.S. intelligence analysts brief a few select mainstream reporters, but the analysts conveyed much less conviction than their superiors may have wished, indicating that there was still great uncertainty about who was responsible.

The Los Angeles Times article said: "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 [the designation for a Russian-made anti-aircraft Buk missile] was launched by a defector from the Ukrainian military who was trained to use similar missile systems."

That uncertainty meshed somewhat with what I had been told by a source who had been briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts shortly after the shoot-down about what they had seen in U.S. high-resolution satellite photos, which they said showed what looked like Ukrainian military personnel manning the battery which was believed to have fired the missile.

There is also an important distinction to make between the traditional

“Intelligence Assessment,” which is the U.S. intelligence community’s gold standard for evaluating an issue, complete with any disagreements among the 16 intelligence agencies, and a “Government Assessment,” like the one produced in the MH-17 case.

As former CIA analyst Ray McGovern wrote: “The key difference between the traditional ‘Intelligence Assessment’ and this relatively new creation, a ‘Government Assessment,’ is that the latter genre is put together by senior White House bureaucrats or other political appointees, not senior intelligence analysts. Another significant difference is that an ‘Intelligence Assessment’ often includes alternative views, either in the text or in footnotes, detailing disagreements among intelligence analysts, thus revealing where the case may be weak or in dispute.”

In other words, a “Government Assessment” is an invitation for political hacks to manufacture what was called a “dodgy dossier” when the British government used similar tactics to sell the phony case for war with Iraq in 2002-2003.

However, more relevant to the recent Times article is the fact that the U.S. government has withheld from the public – and even from official investigators – important information for determining the guilty parties and holding them accountable. For instance, neither the Dutch Safety Board, which headed up the initial investigation, nor the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) has been able to pinpoint the site of the missile firing.

Though Kerry insisted that the U.S. government knew that fact three days after the incident, the Dutch Safety Board said last October that it had narrowed the likely firing location only to an area of 320-square kilometers covering territory used by both the rebels and the government. The JIT has promised the families of Dutch victims that it would determine that detail later this year (now more than two years after the shoot-down).

If one wants to apply Sherlock Holmes logic to this “dog not barking” problem, you would probably conclude that the U.S. government clammed up after Kerry’s statements and the DNI’s sketchy white paper because – as more evidence was uncovered and analyzed – it was not pointing in the direction that U.S. propagandists wanted.

Lacking Balance

Yet, it is Russia, not the United States, that is taken to task for not providing its data in the most pristine fashion, even as the U.S. government provides nothing at all. And whenever the MH-17 issue is raised in the major Western news media, this strange official U.S. silence is ignored or excused

while other inconvenient facts are also left out, such as a report by Der Spiegel that the German intelligence service, BND, had found that MH-17 photos *supplied by the Ukrainian government* “have been manipulated.”

Even more egregious is the blackout that the Times and other news organizations have applied to the Dutch intelligence report regarding the presence of Ukrainian military anti-aircraft batteries in eastern Ukraine capable of bringing down a commercial airliner at 33,000 feet and the rebels lack of such a powerful weapon.

Plus, there have been official disclosures that raise serious doubts about the integrity of the JIT, which has investigators from the Netherlands, Australia, Ukraine, Belgium and Malaysia, but has fallen increasingly under the control of Ukraine’s SBU, a security and intelligence agency that is responsible for protecting Ukrainian government secrets and that has been implicated in torture and other war crimes against the ethnic Russian rebels.

Earlier this year, an interim JIT report revealed how cozy the relationship had grown between the SBU and especially the Dutch and Australian investigators who have had long stints in Kiev, getting fed “evidence” by the SBU, and depending on the Ukrainian host’s hospitality.

Though this JIT report was released publicly, its contents were ignored by the Times and other publications even amid formal complaints from the United Nations about the SBU blocking human rights investigations into alleged Ukrainian government torture centers.

The SBU’s dominance over the JIT would seem to bear on the integrity of the MH-17 investigation, but this fact also doesn’t fit the propaganda goal of pinning the deaths of 298 people on Russia. Indeed, it would put whatever the JIT does eventually conclude under the suspicion of bias and possible SBU manipulation.

An Obligatory Hat Tip

And, it seems no Times article on MH-17 would be complete without a tip of the cap to the “citizen journalism” site, Bellingcat, which has made a cottage industry out of reinforcing the West’s propaganda themes whether against the Syrian or Russian governments. Bellingcat has remained the beloved Internet site of the mainstream Western media despite a history of getting stories wrong.

In Saturday’s article, Times reporter Kramer cited Bellingcat as a way to bolster the findings of the folks at “armscontrolwonk.com” without mentioning that Bellingcat’s earlier analysis of the “cloud” photo had been criticized by forensics experts for misusing computer software to reach anti-Russian

conclusions, or as Der Spiegel reported:

“The research group Bellingcat has accused Russia of manipulating satellite images from the MH17 disaster. But German image forensics expert Jens Kriese has criticized the analysis. He says it is impossible to say with any certainty whether Moscow is lying.”

It also turns out that both Bellingcat founder Eliot Higgins and “armscontrolwonk.com” have links to the pro-NATO think tank, Atlantic Council, which has been at the forefront of promoting NATO’s new Cold War with Russia.

Higgins is now listed as a “nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council’s Future Europe Initiative” and armscontrolwonk.com describes one of its writers, Aaron Stein, as a nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council’s Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East.

Stein’s work on the Syrian conflict would intersect with Higgins’s attempts to reinforce Western propaganda blaming the Syrian government for the devastating sarin gas attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013, which proved to be one of Bellingcat’s reporting errors.

On the second anniversary of the MH-17 atrocity, it is sadly not surprising that the Times would continue to grab onto any dubious claim – and present it without meaningful context – as long as the material helps agitate the newspaper’s readers into wanting war with Russia.

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 Long-Hidden Saudi-9/11 Trail

The U.S. government and mainstream media are playing down the long-hidden 9/11 chapter on official Saudi connections to Al Qaeda’s hijackers, hoping most Americans won’t read it themselves, as 9/11 widow Kristen Breitweiser observes.

By Kristen Breitweiser

First and foremost, here is what you need to know when you hear any member of our government say the newly released 29-page chapter from the congressional 9/11 report contains no smoking gun – THEY ARE LYING.

Our government's relationship to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is no different than an addict's relationship to heroin. Much like a heroin addict who will lie, cheat and steal to feed his vice, certain members of our government will lie, cheat and steal to continue their dysfunctional and deadly relationship with the KSA – a relationship that is rotting this nation and its leaders from the inside out.

When CIA Director John Brennan states that he believes the 29 pages prove that the government of Saudi Arabia had no involvement in the 9/11 attacks, recognize that John Brennan is not a man living in reality – he is delusional by design, feeding and protecting his Saudi vice.

When Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Anne W. Patterson, testifies – under oath – that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an ally that does everything they can to help us fight against Islamic terrorism, recognize that her deep, steep Saudi pandering serves and protects only her Saudi vice.

Read the 29 pages yourself and know the facts. Do not let any person in our government deny the damning reality of the 29 pages. And as you read the 29 pages remember that they were written during 2002 and 2003. President George W. Bush did not want the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia investigated.

President Bush has deep ties to the KSA and its royal family and only wanted to protect the Kingdom. President Bush wanted to go to war in Iraq – not Saudi Arabia. So, a 29-page chapter that said “Saudi” and “Bandar” instead of “Hussein” and “Iraq” was a huge problem for President Bush. (The solution was to hide the information for 13 years.)

It is well documented that the Joint Inquiry received enormous push-back against its investigation into the Saudis. In fact, former FBI Director Robert Mueller acknowledged that much of the information implicating the Saudis that the Inquiry investigators uncovered was unknown to him. Why does Mueller say this? Mostly because Mueller and other FBI officials had purposely tried to keep any incriminating information specifically surrounding the Saudis out of the Inquiry's investigative hands.

To repeat, there was a concerted effort by the FBI and the Bush Administration to keep incriminating Saudi evidence out of the Inquiry's investigation. And for the exception of the 29 pages, they succeeded in their effort.

The Central Saudi Role

Notwithstanding the lack of cooperation from the FBI and the pressure from the Bush Administration to thwart any investigation of the Saudis, the Joint Inquiry was still able to write 29 pages regarding Saudi complicity in the 9/11 attacks.

No other nation is given such singular prominence in the Joint Inquiry's Final Report. Not Iraq. Not Iran. Not Syria. Not Sudan. Not even Afghanistan or Pakistan.

The 29 pages have been kept secret and suppressed from the American public for more than 13 years – not for matters of genuine national security – but for matters of convenience, embarrassment and cover-up. Executive Order 13526 makes that a crime.

Neither Director of National Intelligence James Clapper nor President Barack Obama wants to release a statement about *that*. The only thing Clapper and Obama are willing to say about the delayed release of the 29 pages is that they stand by the subsequent investigation of the 9/11 Commission.

This punt by President Obama is repulsive. His deference to the 9/11 Commission – which admitted that it was unable to fully investigate the Saudi role in the 9/11 attacks – reveals Obama's utter lack of interest, engagement or support of the 9/11 families.

Frankly, this behavior re-victimizes the 9/11 families by not acknowledging the truth, blocking our path to justice, and the very vital assignment of accountability to those who should be held responsible.

Most alarmingly, Obama's silence keeps us unsafe because instead of calling for an emergency session of Congress to immediately name the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a State Sponsor of Terrorism, President Obama continues to downplay, belittle and ignore the truth leaving us vulnerable to terrorist attacks that are still to this very day being funded by our "ally" – the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

To be clear, the 9/11 Commission did NOT fully investigate the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Staff Director Philip Zelikow blocked any investigation into the Saudis. Zelikow even went so far as to fire an investigator who had been brought over from the Joint Inquiry to specifically follow up on the Saudi leads and information uncovered in the Joint Inquiry. I will repeat – the investigator was fired.

In addition, Zelikow re-wrote the 9/11 Commission's entire section regarding the Saudis and their connection to the 9/11 attacks. Former 9/11 Commissioners John Lehman, Bob Kerrey and Tim Roemer have all acknowledged that the Saudis were not adequately investigated by the 9/11 Commission. Thus, for any government official to hang his or her hat on the 9/11 Commission's Final Report when Commissioners themselves have admitted that the Saudis were not fully investigated is absurd and disgraceful.

Ignored Evidence

For example, one glaring piece of information not mentioned in either the 9/11 Commission or the Joint Inquiry's 29 pages is the information regarding Fahad Thumairy and Khallad bin Attash found in both an FBI report and a CIA report that are now declassified.

Both reports indicate that Fahad Thumairy – a Saudi Consulate official – helped bring Khallad bin Attash into the United States in June of 2000 so he could meet with two of the 9/11 hijackers, Khalid al Mihdhar and Nawaf al Hazmi. Thumairy escorted bin Attash – a known Al Qaeda operative – through INS and Customs at Los Angeles International Airport evading security and any possible alarm bells. Again, this information is found in both a CIA and FBI report.

Four months after Khallad bin Attash met with the two 9/11 hijackers in Los Angeles, the USS Cole was bombed and 17 U.S. sailors were killed. Khallad bin Attash, Khalid al Mihdhar and Nawaf al Hazmi were all named as co-conspirators in the bombing of the USS Cole. Where is the information regarding bin Attash and Thumairy? Has it ever been investigated?

Had our intelligence agencies capitalized on the known connection between Thumairy and bin Attash, they would have been able to thwart the bombing of the USS Cole. In addition, they would have had access and the ability to weave together nearly all the pieces of the 9/11 attacks – more than nine months before the 9/11 attacks happened. But as history shows, Saudi Consulate official Fahad Thumairy was not investigated and 17 sailors in addition to 3,000 others were killed.

I'm sure that Barack Obama, John Brennan, Anne Patterson, and Philip Zelikow would all consider Thumairy's operational and financial support of Attash, Mihdhar and Hazmi as within the threshold of being an "ally" of the United States. I, and the rest of America, would not.

I know summer is a busy time. I know that next week is the Republican Convention. I know that Congress is out of session for two months. And I know that ISIS attacks continue in Nice, Orlando, San Bernardino, Belgium, Paris and more. Just like I know that Donald Trump picked Mike Pence as his running mate and that there was a coup in Turkey.

For an Administration looking to dump some insanely incriminating evidence and have nobody take notice – doing it on Friday when Congress was leaving for their two-month summer recess was probably the best day anyone could have imagined.

The Long Stonewall

But the world is an unstable, crazy place. And, while I used to think I was safe because my government was looking out for me and making decisions that were in

my best interests and that of other citizens, I now know better. For 15 long years, I have fought to get information regarding the killing of my husband from the U.S. government.

I have fought, pleaded and begged for the truth, transparency, justice and accountability because my husband and 3,000 others were brutally slaughtered in broad daylight. And our government has done nothing but block, thwart, impede and obstruct that path to truth, transparency, accountability and justice.

Even going so far as to gaslight us to this very day by denying the plain truth written on the plain paper of the 29 pages. Please read the 29 pages. Look at the facts and evidence. And then watch the venal way various members of our government and media play spin-master on those facts – telling you to deny the very harsh, sobering reality found within those 29 pages. I hope their gaslighting disgusts you as much as it disgusts me.

Note that these 29 pages merely detail the Saudi connection to the 9/11 attacks *in San Diego*. They briefly touch on the Phoenix information, as well. Though more notably, the 29 pages do not include information found in the more than 80,000 documents that are currently being reviewed by a federal judge in Florida – 80,000 documents that not the 9/11 Commission, not the Joint Inquiry, not the White House (from Clinton to Bush to Obama), and not the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia want us to know about.

More than anything, please know this: **The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provided operational and financial support to the 9/11 hijackers. That is a fact. And, the U.S. government has been covering up that fact for 15 years – even to this very day. And that is a crime.**

Corruption, greed, and vice, specifically as it pertains to protecting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is not a one-party problem. It spans both Democratic and Republican administrations. Blame President Bill Clinton, President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama – as well as, all of their officials and appointees.

They are ALL to blame – before and after the fact – for failing to prevent the 9/11 attacks, helping to facilitate the 9/11 attacks through their own abject negligence, using the 9/11 attacks to further ill-begotten gains and goals, and covering-up the 9/11 attacks by not coming clean with the American public for 15 years.

Kristen Breitweiser is a 9/11 widow and activist who – working with other 9/11 widows known collectively as the “Jersey Girls” – pressured the U.S. government to conduct a formal investigation into the terror attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

Follow Kristen Breitweiser on Twitter: www.twitter.com/kdbreitweiser. [This article originally appeared as a blog post at HuffingtonPost. 9/11 widows Monica Gabrielle, Mindy Kleinberg, Lorie Van Auken, and Patty Casazza also sign their names to this blog.]

The New Cold War's Frontline in Crimea

The mainstream U.S. reporting on the Ukraine crisis has been as biased and imbalanced as any in recent memory, leaving many Americans confused about what the on-the-ground reality is, as retired Col. Ann Wright discovered.

By Ann Wright

Most Americans don't have a clue what has happened in a place called Crimea or why it is on the frontlines of what is becoming a new Cold War. In fact, few even know where it is. But Crimea's location has made it one of the most frequent battlegrounds of empires – and today is no exception.

Some Americans may remember Crimea through Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem "Charge of the Light Brigade" about the slaughter of a British cavalry unit as it charged into a devastating crossfire from Russian artillery and riflemen during the 1854 Crimean War, a disastrous attack immortalized in some of the most infamous words of war...

"Theirs not to reason why,

Theirs but to do and die.

Into the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred...

Into the jaws of Death,

Into the mouth of hell

Rode the six hundred."

However, fewer Americans probably remember that in 1941, the Nazis mounted a 250-day siege of the Crimean city of Sevastopol, in which the Soviet forces suffered some 26,000 soldiers killed and 95,000 taken prisoner, including about two-thirds wounded. The Germans and their Axis allies also suffered heavy casualties and the delay in capturing Sevastopol contributed to Germany's

decisive defeat at Stalingrad in 1943.

As the Nazis were forced into a westward retreat, the Soviet Union regained control of Crimea. With the Nazi occupation ended, Soviet leader Josef Stalin deported about 230,000 inhabitants of Crimea to Central Asia. The mass deportation removed about one-fifth of the total population, mostly Tatars, as a collective punishment for alleged Nazi collaboration. Over the ensuing years, Crimea was repopulated by ethnic Russians.

In 1954, the Soviet government assigned Crimea to Ukraine, one of the Soviet republics, and Crimea remained part of Ukraine when it became a separate country following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. But the population was resistant to being politically absorbed into Ukraine. A 1991 referendum favored making Crimea an autonomous zone and a 1994 referendum sought greater autonomy from Ukraine.

Coup Plotting

Crimea regained the world's attention in 2014 after a U.S.-backed coup against the elected government of Ukraine. In the weeks before the coup, U.S. involvement was exposed in an intercepted phone call between Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and Geoffrey Pyatt, U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine.

Nuland castigated the European Union's hesitancy to support demonstrators in the Maidan Square who were spearheading the ouster of elected President Viktor Yanukovich. "Fuck the E.U.," Nuland declared as she and Pyatt discussed who should become Ukraine's new leaders. "Yats is the guy," Nuland said in reference to Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who would emerge as prime minister after the coup.

The coup on Feb. 22, 2014, brought to power a right-wing Ukrainian nationalist government hostile to the country's ethnic Russian minority with the parliament voting to remove Russian as an official language. Amid the post-coup chaos and violence, the leaders of Crimea called for a referendum to decide whether Crimea should secede from Ukraine and reunite with Russia.

On March 16, 2014, more than 80 percent of the voters participated and some 96 percent favored rejoining Russia, a decision that the Russian government accepted. The Russian Federation formally annexed Crimea six days after the vote. Because Russia's southern naval fleet is located in Crimea at Sevastopol, Russia gave as its rationale for annexing Crimea – beyond the overwhelming result of the referendum – the national security necessity of protecting the port and fleet from anti-Russian forces.

However, the United States and its Western allies denounced Crimea's referendum, called the annexation a violation of international law, and imposed sanctions on

Russia and Crimea. The E.U. sanctions prohibited investment in Crimea, infrastructure, assistance to Russian oil and gas exploration in the Black Sea, and certain tourist activities in Crimea. The U.S. sanctions prohibited new investments in Crimea; the import and export of goods, technology and services from or to Crimea; and the purchase of real estate in Crimea and blocked certain individuals from coming to the U.S.

A Firsthand Examination

Despite those restrictions and a U.S. government travel advisory against visiting Crimea, I took part in a 20-person delegation (19 Americans and one Singaporean) who went to see for ourselves what had happened there and to speak with as many residents as we could. Ours was the first international delegation to visit Crimea from the United States in over two years.

Organized through the Center for Citizen Initiatives, our delegation met with government officials, business people, veterans of World War II and the Soviet-Afghan war, students and Crimean Tatars. We spoke with people who voted for reunification with Russia and some who did not.

The sanctions have been successful in destroying the tourism business in Crimea. Most visitors had arrived in Crimea by cruise ships from Turkey and Greece through the Bosphorus Straits into the Black Sea to the Crimean ports of Yalta or Sevastopol. Annually, over 260 cruise ships dock in Crimea, but for the past two years none have arrived, thereby decimating the international tourist industry. However, travel by Russian citizens to Crimea has increased.

Before the referendum, international visitors could fly to Crimea directly from Europe. However, under the E.U. sanctions, European airlines no longer fly into Crimea. International visitors can fly into Crimea only from Russian cities.

Sanctions on use of international credit cards and on cell-phone technologies had the most striking impact on daily life in Crimea. Now, two years later, some international credit cards will work in Crimea, but cell-phone service is spotty. Travel for citizens of Crimea is more difficult as they must obtain a Russian Federation passport. Individuals said it is harder to travel with a Russian passport and particularly from Crimea.

After the referendum, the interim Ukrainian government cut off electrical power to Crimea and, more recently, several electric transmission stations were blown up by right-wing Ukrainian nationalists forcing Crimean businesses and families to get generators. Russia eventually provided a massive electric power grid bringing electricity into Crimea from Russia.

Russia is also constructing a \$3.2 billion, 19-kilometer (11.8 miles) bridge

that will connect Crimea directly with Russia.

Collective Punishment

For its part, the U.S. government canceled programs that were available to people in Crimea when it was a part of the Ukraine. Peace Corps volunteers were removed and school construction projects by U.S. military units ended. U.S.-funded professional exchange programs stopped as did U.S. agricultural and law enforcement projects.

Some with the Crimeans with whom we spoke regretted the loss of contact with the United States and its programs, particularly its exchange programs. One educator lamented the difficulty in finding exchange programs for high school and college students in the Crimea to live and learn in the United States. Graduates of universities in Crimea are finding that some educational institutions outside of Russia are no longer recognizing their diplomas and certificates because of the sanctions.

Educators said they do not want to be isolated from the world. They asked that our delegation assist in finding professional and educational exchanges with educational institutions and civic organizations in the United States.

One local official expressed great concern about the negative reaction of the international community to the decision by Crimeans to reunite with Russia, compared with the lack of criticism for the overthrow of Ukraine's elected government in 2014. She believed that without the coup there never would have been a referendum in Crimea and a subsequent annexation by Russia.

She asked, "Why isn't the international community focusing on the overthrow?"

Crimeans noted that many of the sanctions were not aimed at Russia itself, but just Crimea – to teach the citizens of Crimea a lesson, they told us.

Ann Wright served 29 years in the U.S. Army/Army Reserves and retired as a Colonel. She was a U.S. diplomat for 16 years and served in U.S. Embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned from the U.S. government in March 2003 in opposition to the war on Iraq. She is the co-author of *Dissent: Voices of Conscience*.

Western Propaganda for a New Cold War

Western propaganda portrays Russia as the aggressor and NATO as the victim, but the reality looks almost opposite from the ground level, Rick Sterling found on a recent fact-finding trip.

By Rick Sterling

Recently I went on a 15-day visit to Russia organized by the Center for Citizen Initiatives. The group visited Moscow, the Crimean peninsula, Krasnodar (southern Russia) and St. Petersburg. In each location we met many locals and heard diverse viewpoints.

CCI has a long history promoting friendship and trying to overcome false assumptions between citizens of the USA and Russia. The founder Sharon Tennison has focused on making people-to-people connections including the business community, Rotary clubs, etc. This delegation was organized because of concern about escalating international tensions and the danger of a drift toward world threatening military conflict.

We were in Russia in late June as Russians were commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. They call it the Great Patriotic War where 27 million Soviet citizens died. In Russia it's a very sober occasion in which they pay tribute to the fallen, acknowledge the heroes and underscore the horrors of war. Virtually everyone in Russia lost family members in World War Two and there seems to be a deep understanding of what war and invasion mean.

It is alarming to see the constant drumbeat in Western media that Russia is "aggressive," that Russia "invaded" Crimea, Russia is "a threat." Hardly a day goes by that The New York Times does not have an editorial or news story with the assertion or insinuation that Russia is "aggressive".

Thursday's op-ed by Andrew Foxall is an example. A director of the neocon Henry Jackson Society think tank, Foxall bemoans the British departure from the European Union and suggests, without evidence, that Russian President Putin may be behind it:

"Mr. Putin has spent the past 16 years trying to destabilize the West. ... After Brexit, the union has lost not only one of its most capable members, but also one of its two nuclear powers and one of its two seats at the United Nations Security Council. ... Mr. Putin checked the European Union's expansion when he invaded Ukraine in 2014. The Continent's security order is now in a perilous plight: If Mr. Putin senses weakness, he will be tempted into further aggression."

It is now common to hear the claim that Russia "invaded" Ukraine and is

“occupying” Crimea. The U.S. and its European allies have imposed sanctions on Russia because of Crimea’s decision – supported by a referendum with nearly 90 percent participation and a 96 percent favorable vote – to separate from Ukraine and rejoin Russia.

Because of the sanctions, tourist cruise ships no longer stop at Crimean ports and international airlines are prohibited from flying directly to the international airport at the Crimean capital, Simferopol. Students from Crimean universities cannot transfer their academic credits to universities internationally.

Despite the sanctions and problems, Crimea appears to be doing reasonably well. In the past two years, the airport has been rebuilt and modernized. The streets of Balaclava, Sevastopol, Simferopol and Yalta are busy and bright. No doubt things could be much better and residents want the sanctions lifted, but there were no evident signs of shortages or poverty.

On the contrary, kids were enjoying ice cream, parks were full and streets busy late into the night. The famous Artek Youth Camp near Yalta is being refurbished with new dormitories, state of the art swimming pool and gymnasium. Right now they are handling 3,000 youth in the camp at one time with 30,000 kids from all over Russia this year.

A 12-mile bridge connecting Crimea to southern Russia is now half complete. A impressive video showing the design is here.

What Provoked Crimea?

After 22 years as part of independent Ukraine following the breakup of the Soviet Union, what drove the people of Crimea to overwhelmingly support a referendum calling for “re-unification” with Russia? Was this the result of intimidation or an “occupation” by Russia?

We received a very strong sense from talking with many different people in Crimea that they are happy with their decision. The impetus was not aggression from Russia; the impetus came from the violence and ultra-nationalism of the foreign-backed coup in Ukraine overthrowing the democratically elected President Viktor Yanukovich, who was strongly supported by Crimea’s voters.

U.S.-supported protests against Ukraine’s Yanukovich government began in November 2013 in the “Maidan” (central square) in Kiev. Protesters included right-wing nationalist and Nazi sympathizers hostile to the Yanukovich government. A significant faction in the Maidan glorified the Ukrainian Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera.

The U.S. was deeply involved in promoting the “Maidan” protests and strategizing how to bring a new government to power. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland demanded the Yanukovich government do nothing to stop or prevent the increasing vandalism, attacks and intimidation. With thugs in the street increasingly clashing with police, U.S. officials pressed the Ukrainian government to break economic ties with Russia as a condition for closer relations with Europe and loans from the International Monetary Fund.

On the surface, the U.S. was encouraging Ukraine to strengthen ties with the European Union but in reality Nuland’s goals were about expanding NATO and undermining Russia. This was dramatically revealed in a secretly recorded phone call between Nuland and the U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt.

Nuland and Pyatt discussed who should and should not be in the coup government two weeks before the coup happened. As they conspired over the phone, Nuland expressed her displeasure with the European Union’s reluctance to push the coup. “Fuck the E.U.,” Nuland said.

When the audio recording of Nuland and Pyatt discussing how to “midwife” the Kiev coup was revealed, the State Department’s spokesperson was grilled about it. She responded “That’s what diplomats do.”

Six weeks before the phone call – at a conference of U.S.-Ukrainian business leaders sponsored by Chevron – Nuland spoke glowingly of Ukraine’s “European aspirations” and the U.S. investment in promoting “democracy” in Ukraine.

In that Dec. 13, 2013 speech, Nuland said “Since Ukraine’s independence in 1991 the United States has supported Ukrainians as they build democratic skills and institutions, as they promote civic participation and good governance, all of which are preconditions for Ukraine to achieve its European aspirations. We have invested over \$5 billion to assist Ukraine in these and other goals.” (approximately 7:30 into the recording of the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation conference).

In mid-December 2013, hundreds of Crimeans traveled to Kiev in buses to join peaceful protests in opposition to the Maidan protests seen on television. They stayed in Kiev through January and into February until the violence exploded on Feb. 18, 2014. Altogether, 82 persons were killed including 13 police and 1,100 injured.

At that point, the Crimeans decided peaceful protest was useless and to return home. The bus caravan departed Kiev on Feb 20 but was stopped at night near the town of Korsun. The buses were torched and the Crimean travelers brutalized, beaten and seven killed. When news of this reached Crimea, it was yet another

cause for alarm.

A video titled “The Crimes of Euromaidan Nazis” documents the events and includes interviews with numerous passengers. These atrocities against unarmed Crimeans were committed on a public highway with no intervention from local Ukrainian police.

Rejecting Compromise

On Feb 21, the Yanukovich reached a compromise brokered by three European governments, calling for reduced presidential powers and early elections so Ukrainians would have the opportunity to elect a new leader. But those concessions did not appease the most violent Maidan protesters or their supporters. A parliamentarian was beaten in broad daylight and threats issued.

President Yanukovich fled for his life and a new government, led by Victoria Nuland’s choice Arseniy Yatsenyuk, took charge. The U.S. and its Western allies quickly recognized the new government as “legitimate” while Russia objected to it as an illegal coup. In the first days of the new government, a bill was passed to make Ukrainian the sole official language of the country despite the fact that many Ukrainians speak Russian.

Indeed, there was aggression and violence in Ukraine but it was not from Russia. Rather, the evidence shows that the violence was instigated by the forces that led the coup. This was revealed in an intercepted phone conversation between British representative to the European Union, Catherine Ashton, and the Estonian Foreign Minister, Urmas Paet.

Paet reported that he had been to Kiev and “there is a stronger and stronger understanding that behind snipers it was not Yanukovich, it was somebody from the new coalition.” Ashton responded, “Oh gosh ... We will need to look into that” and quickly moved on. Nearly 2½ years later, the post-coup regime in Kiev has failed to conduct a serious investigation into the sniper attacks.

While this history is largely ignored by the U.S. and Western media – The New York Times won’t even admit that there was a “coup” – the reality is well known in Crimea and other ethnic Russian areas of Ukraine. Crimeans whom we spoke with described their shock and outrage at the events that unfolded in the winter of 2013-14.

In just four months they witnessed violent Maidan protests, the overthrow of the elected government, beatings and killings of citizens returning from Kiev, and then a parliamentary vote to remove Russian as an official language.

In response, local leaders recommended a Crimea wide referendum with the option

to officially re-unite with the country that Crimea had been part of for over two centuries. A referendum was held on March 16. Turnout was 89 percent with 96 percent voting in favor of the “reunification of Crimea with Russia.”

With the violent overthrow of the Kiev government and clear proof of U.S. involvement in the coup, it seems highly inaccurate to say that Russia “invaded” or is “occupying” Crimea. (Russian troops were already stationed in Crimea as part of the lease agreement for the Sevastopol naval base.) On the contrary, it seems to be the U.S. and its allies were the “aggressive” ones.

The same reversal of reality is going on with the expansion of NATO. In recent weeks, NATO has placed armed forces in Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania while complaining about Russia engaging in threatening military deployments *inside* Russia.

NATO military expenses are already 13 times greater than that of Russia yet NATO plans to increase military spending even more. Meanwhile the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002 and is busy building and installing ABM sites in Alaska and now Eastern Europe. With a serious face, U.S. officials have previously claimed these sites are being installed because of the danger of “Iranian missiles” but only a fool could take that seriously.

There is the additional risk that the same sites could be converted from anti-ballistic missiles to contain nuclear warheads.

Are NATO and the U.S. preparing for war? The public should be asking hard questions to our political and military leaders as they waste our tax dollars and risk global conflagration. And, enough of the nonsense about Russian “aggression” when the evidence indicates it’s the U.S. and its allies that are destabilizing other countries, escalating a new arms race and promoting conflict instead of diplomacy.

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NFL’s Crazy Conspiracy Theory Prevails

Exclusive: The lesson of the absurd “Deflategate” case is that a powerful institution like the NFL can ride roughshod over almost anyone, including quarterback Tom Brady, regardless of what the facts and logic are, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

By getting a favorable ruling from a management-friendly federal appeals court in New York, the National Football League has won what may be a decisive round in its bizarre “Deflategate” campaign to brand quarterback Tom Brady a perjurer and a cheater and to hobble the New England Patriots by stripping them of two draft picks and suspending Brady for a quarter of the season.

But there is a bigger message in this long-running, silly saga, which may have come to an endpoint on Wednesday when the full U.S. Court of Appeals in New York refused to rehear arguments. The case against Brady is a microcosm of how a powerful institution can override logic, reality and fairness to punish an individual – even one with more-than-average means to defend himself – and how limited the checks and balances are in the modern United States.

Based on the NFL’s own depiction, here is the essence of its conspiracy theory: Before the AFC Championship game on Jan. 18, 2015, Brady conspired with two locker-room employees to have one of them insist to the officials that the Patriots’ game balls be set at the lower legal limit of 12.5 pounds per square inch, but then took advantage of the fact that the NFC Championship game went into overtime (forcing a delay in the start of the AFC game) so he could carry the game balls down to the field unattended, slip into a bathroom and hastily release tiny amounts of air from the Patriots’ footballs, supposedly to give Brady some advantage (although the reduced air pressure would actually make the footballs slightly slower and easier to defend).

According to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell’s ruling in the case, the AFC Championship game was the only time the Patriots’ ball boy could have carried out this scheme because officials would have accompanied him down to the field at other Patriots’ home games.

This NFL’s charge against Brady took shape a year and a half ago after the Patriots’ opponent, the Indianapolis Colts, intercepted one of Brady’s passes in the first half of the AFC Championship game and found the ball to have a PSI below the 12.5 PSI legal limit. The NFL officials then used two gauges to test all the Patriots’ game balls (and a few Colts’ balls) during halftime and found all the Patriots’ balls below 12.5 PSI (as well as the Colts balls on the gauge that was determined to be the more accurate one).

Some NFL source then leaked the fact that the Patriots balls were under-inflated and falsely claimed that the Colts’ balls were all properly inflated, touching off a classic media firestorm with a rush to judgment that Brady and the Patriots were guilty of intentionally doctoring the footballs to gain an unfair advantage.

The Brady-is-a-cheater storyline became so entrenched – and it had such a value to the other 31 NFL teams because they would get an edge over the Patriots if Brady were suspended and his team lost draft picks – that it subsequently didn't matter what the evidence actually showed or didn't show.

It later was acknowledged that none of the NFL officials who checked the footballs understood the physics involved. Since the game was played on a cold and rainy night in Foxborough, Massachusetts, the football air pressure would naturally decline by about the amounts shown on the gauges, according to the Ideal Gas Law, which has been around for nearly two centuries. Even the NFL's own hired-gun scientific firm, Exponent, concluded that all or virtually all of the PSI change could be explained by the lower temperatures alone.

Also, after the Deflategate conspiracy theory first was spun, Brady and the two locker-room employees, Jim McNally (the ball boy) and his immediate superior John Jastremski, repeatedly denied participating in any such scheme. Brady did so under oath. And the NFL presented no direct evidence to contradict their denials.

Circumstantial 'Evidence'

The best the NFL could do was argue that theoretically a little bit of the PSI decline could have come from tampering and cited some circumstantial evidence that looked suspicious. For instance, NFL lawyers noted that McNally stopped in a bathroom for one minute and 40 seconds while carrying the ball bags to the field on Jan. 18, 2015.

McNally said he was simply relieving himself because he wouldn't have another chance until halftime, but the NFL made much of him saying he used a "urinal" when there was only a "toilet" in the bathroom (although how that was relevant is hard to understand, since McNally – whether he was deflating footballs or urinating – would have seen the toilet).

Because the Patriots voluntarily turned over to the NFL the cell phone text messages between McNally and Jastremski, the league's lawyers also took a few exchanges out of context and made them seem incriminating, such as a back-and-forth discussion about how NFL officials had overinflated the footballs in an earlier game against the New York Jets.

Again, how that was relevant to an alleged scheme to under-inflate footballs was not clear. Indeed, those text messages would tend to deflate the "Deflategate" conspiracy theory because – if the deflation scheme had predated the AFC Championship game – you would have assumed that Jastremski would have chastised McNally for failing to ensure that the balls were under-inflated, rather than

allow them to be overinflated. Yet, there was no such discussion.

But the underlying absurdity of the NFL's conspiracy theory is revealed by the chronology of events on Jan. 18, 2015, which Goodell indicated was the one time when McNally took footballs unattended to the field. But Goodell didn't say why that was allowed – and therein lay the weakness of the NFL's case.

The reason that McNally was able to carry the balls without an official accompanying him was because the NFC Championship game had gone into overtime and the NFL thus postponed the start of the AFC Championship game so the entirety of both games could be shown on TV.

When the NFC game ended in a sudden-death score by the Seattle Seahawks, there was haste and confusion in the referee lounge about getting everything needed down to the Patriots' field so the AFC game could commence. McNally said he thought he was just doing his part by carrying the bags of game balls down to the field rather than waiting to be escorted.

So, while McNally's explanation made sense – as did his reason for ducking into a bathroom – the NFL's conspiracy theory rested on the notion that somehow Brady, Jastremski and McNally had anticipated the NFC game would go into overtime, realized that would cause a delay in the start of the AFC game, and knew there would be confusion among the officials once the NFC game ended so McNally could sneak the footballs into a bathroom and release very small amounts of air.

That Brady and his "co-conspirators" would have anticipated that extremely unlikely scenario makes no sense. Nor did the supposed motive for going to all that trouble to gain some hard-to-explain advantage of having the Patriots footballs made a tiny bit softer and a tiny bit slower.

The Real Conspiracy

But there does seem to be a real conspiracy in this story, just not the one that the NFL dreamt up. Rather than let the whole ridiculous matter drop or acknowledge that the evidence was too weak to judge Brady guilty, the other NFL owners saw an opportunity to hobble the Patriots and thus give their own teams a

competitive edge over a powerful rival.



While serving as the supposedly impartial arbiter hearing Brady's NFL appeal of his four-game suspension, Goodell allowed the owners of other teams to weigh in regarding how he should view the evidence of the case, according to his own admission.

In his ruling against Brady, Goodell disclosed that the Management Council, consisting of some of the league's most powerful owners, urged him to view the absence of the two locker-room employees at the appeal hearing as proof of Brady's guilt (even though the employees had testified repeatedly in other venues and had consistently denied tampering with the game balls).

It might be noted here that the Management Council controls Goodell's \$35 million salary.

Occasionally, too, this interference by the rival owners has snuck into media accounts. ESPN beat reporter Mike Reiss included one item deep inside a notebook-style report that Goodell might want to finally drop the matter except that his hands had been tied by the rival owners.

"I think Goodell would do it if that's what 31 other ownership groups wanted, but it was clear as a possible settlement was recently explored behind the scenes that the majority of owners want the full penalty for Brady and the Patriots. Goodell is following their lead," Reiss reported.

In other words, Goodell's claim that he is protecting the "integrity of the game" by punishing Brady and the Patriots is hypocritical at best. In reality, he appears to be violating the integrity of the game by using a bizarre conspiracy theory to reduce the competitiveness of one dominant team.

Though normally I cover government-related topics, one reason that I have written about this case is because I have seen this pattern repeat itself again and again. When a powerful entity wants to impose its judgment on a weaker one, the powerful entity – often relying on clever lawyers and exploiting media allies – almost always carries the day.

When there is such a power disparity, pretty much anything can be turned into anything, a process that corrupts public confidence in the system and breeds a profound cynicism among citizens who witness how evidence and logic can be twisted this way or that.

In the “Deflategate” case, the distortions have extended into the news media where, for instance, ESPN, which has a multi-billion-dollar relationship with the NFL, has essentially ignored the findings of many reputable scientists who disputed the NFL’s scientific claims.

ESPN’s “Sport Science” did do a segment showing how miniscule the effect would be from a slight reduction in pounds per square inch of a football (mostly negative by making the footballs slower and easier for defenders to reach).

But ESPN’s investigative unit “E:60” only dealt with the scientific PSI dispute earlier this year in a cute segment showing how a seventh-grader named Ben Goodell (no relation to Roger) won a science-fair prize by demonstrating that weather conditions explained the drop in the footballs’ internal pressure.

NFL Wins Ruling

However, the decision by the full federal Appeals Court in Manhattan on Wednesday not to review the case means that the substance of “Deflategate” will likely never be fully examined in a court of law. Previous hearings – by a District Court judge and a three-judge Appeals Court panel – have focused on the sweeping authority that the NFL commissioner has over disciplinary matters.

District Judge Richard Berman found in Brady’s favor but his ruling was overturned by a 2-1 vote in the Appeals Court. The full Appeals Court then declined to hear the case despite an appeal motion written by prominent attorney Theodore Olson.

The motion condemned “Goodell’s biased, agenda-driven, and self-approving ‘appeal’ ruling,” noting that Goodell had altered the reasons and logic for punishing Brady, thus denying Brady his legal rights. Olson noted, too, that the NFL officials didn’t know the physics of footballs.

“As NFL officials later admitted, no one involved understood that environmental factors alone – such as the cold and rainy weather during the game – could cause

significant deflation,” the filing said. “Nor did any NFL official claim that the underinflated balls affected the game’s outcome, particularly since Brady’s performance in the second half of the AFC Championship Game – after the Patriots game balls were re-inflated – improved.” (The Patriots defeated the Indianapolis Colts 45-7 and then went on to win the Super Bowl.)

But Brady’s lawyers and the seventh-grader with his science project weren’t the only ones to recognize the weakness of the NFL’s grasp of physics. In support of Brady’s request for a rehearing, a legal brief was filed with the U.S. Court of Appeals by 21 professors from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; the University of California, Berkeley; University of Michigan; Stanford University; University of Southern California; University of Delaware; Purdue University; University of Pennsylvania; Boston College; and the University of Minnesota.

Noting that deflation happens naturally whenever a ball is moved from a warm to a cold environment, the scientists said, “This is not tampering. It is science. And it pervades the NFL. Games routinely are played with footballs that fall below the league’s minimum pressure requirement.” (Yet, none of those quarterbacks and teams are accused of cheating.)

But the NFL, which managed to get the case before a management-friendly court in New York, showed again that science and reason have a declining place in American life. As much as we may like Hollywood movies that end with some wrong being righted by a court or a congressional committee or a big newspaper, the reality is usually quite different.

When power and truth clash, power almost always wins.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“NFL’s War against Facts and Reason”](#); [“A Deflategate Slap-down of NFL, MSM”](#); [“The Tom Brady Railroad”](#); and [“Tom Brady and Theoretical Crime.”](#)]

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](#)).

Iraq War, an Unaccountable Crime

Britain’s Chilcot report recalled the Iraq War lies that justified an aggressive war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, but this international crime has largely been sloughed off with almost no accountability, as Eric S. Margolis

noted.

By Eric S. Margolis

Last week's Chilcot report on Britain's role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq was as polite and guarded as a proper English tea party. No direct accusations, no talk of war crimes by then Prime Minister Tony Blair or his guiding light, President George W. Bush. But still pretty damning.

Such government reports and commissions, as was wittily noted in the delightful program "Yes, Prime Minister," are designed to obscure rather than reveal the truth and bury awkward facts in mountains of paper. And beneath mountains of lies.

The biggest lie on both sides of the Atlantic was that the invasion and destruction of Iraq was the result of "faulty intelligence." The Bush and Blair camps and the U.S. and British media keep pushing this absurd line.

This writer, who had covered Iraq since 1976, was one of the first to assert that Baghdad had no so-called weapons of mass destruction, and no means of delivering them even if it did. For this I was dropped and black-listed by the leading U.S. TV cable news network and leading U.S. newspapers.

I had no love for the brutal Saddam Hussein, whose secret police threatened to hang me as a spy. But I could not abide the intense war propaganda coming from Washington and London, served up by the servile, mendacious U.S. and British media. The planned invasion of Iraq was not about nuclear weapons or democracy, as Bush claimed.

Two powerful factions in Washington were beating the war drums: ardently pro-Israel neoconservatives who yearned to see an enemy of Israel destroyed, and a cabal of conservative oil men and imperialists around Vice President Dick Cheney who sought to grab Iraq's huge oil reserves at a time they believed oil was running out. They engineered the Iraq War, as blatant and illegal an aggression as Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939.

Britain's smarmy Tony Blair tagged along with the war boosters in hopes that the U.K. could pick up the crumbs from the invasion and reassert its former economic and political power in the Arab world. Blair had long been a favorite of British neoconservatives. The silver-tongued Blair became point man for the war in preference to the tongue-twisted, stumbling George Bush. But the real warlord was VP Dick Cheney.

There was no "flawed intelligence." There were intelligence agencies bullied into reporting a fake narrative to suit their political masters. And a lot of

fake reports concocted by our Mideast allies like Israel and Kuwait.

After the even mild Chilcot report, Blair's reputation is in tatters, as it should be. How such an intelligent, worldly man could have allowed himself to be led around by the doltish, swaggering Bush is hard to fathom.

Europe's leaders and Canada refused to join the Anglo-American aggression. France, which warned Bush of the disaster he would inflict, was slandered and smeared by U.S. Republicans as "cheese-eating surrender monkeys." In the event, the real monkeys were the Bush and Blair governments.

Saddam Hussain, a former U.S. ally, was deposed and lynched. Iraq, the most advanced Arab nation, was almost totally destroyed. Up to one million Iraqis may have been killed, though the Chilcot report claimed only a risible 150,000.

As Saddam had predicted, the Bush-Blair invasion opened the gates of hell, and out came Al Qaeda and then ISIS. The U.S. and British media, supposedly the bulwark of democracy, rolled over and became an organ of government war propaganda. Blair had the august BBC purged for failing to fully support his drive for war. BBC has never recovered.

Interestingly, last week's news of the Chilcot investigation was buried deep inside The New York Times on Thursday. The Times was a key partisan of the war. So too the Wall Street Journal, Fox News, and the big TV networks. Without their shameful connivance, the Iraq War might not have happened.

Bush and Blair have the deaths of nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers on their heads, the devastation of Iraq, our \$1 trillion war, the ever-expanding mess in the Mideast, and the violence what we wrongly blame on "terrorism" and so-called "radical Islam."

The men and women responsible for this biggest disaster in our era should be brought to account. As long as Bush and Blair swan around and collect speaking fees, we have no right to lecture other nations, including Russia and China, on how to run a democracy or rule of law. Bush and Blair should be facing trial for war crime at the Hague Court.

Eric S. Margolis was a contributing editor to the [Toronto Sun](#) chain of newspapers, writing mainly about the Middle East, South Asia and Islam. He contributes to the Huffington Post and appears frequently on Canadian television broadcasts. Copyright Eric S. Margolis 2016. [Re-posted with the author's permission.]

NATO Reaffirms Its Bogus Russia Narrative

Exclusive: President Obama and NATO leaders signed on to the false narrative of a minding-its-own-business West getting sucker-punched by a bunch of Russian meanies, a storyline that suggests insanity or lies, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

It's unnerving to realize that the NATO alliance – bristling with an unprecedented array of weapons including a vast nuclear arsenal – has lost its collective mind. Perhaps it's more reassuring to think that NATO simply feels compelled to publicly embrace its deceptive "strategic communications" so gullible Western citizens will be kept believing its lies are truth.

But here were the leaders of major Western "democracies" lining up to endorse a Warsaw Summit Communiqué condemning "Russia's aggressive actions" while knowing that these claims were unsupported by their own intelligence agencies.

The leaders – at least the key ones – know that there is no credible intelligence that Russian President Vladimir Putin provoked the Ukraine crisis in 2014 or that he has any plans to invade the Baltic states, despite the fact that nearly every "important person" in Official Washington and other Western capitals declares the opposite of this to be reality.

But there have been a few moments when the truth has surfaced. For instance, in the days leading up to the just-completed NATO summit in Warsaw, General Petr Pavel, chairman of the NATO Military Committee, divulged that the deployment of NATO military battalions in the Baltic states was a political, rather than military, act.

"It is not the aim of NATO to create a military barrier against broad-scale Russian aggression, because such aggression is not on the agenda and no intelligence assessment suggests such a thing," Pavel told a news conference.

What Pavel blurted out was what I have been told by intelligence sources over the past two-plus years – that the endless drumbeat of Western media reports about "Russian aggression" results from a clever demonization campaign against Putin and a classic Washington "group think" rather than from a careful intelligence analysis.

Ironically, however, just days after the release of the British Chilcot report documenting how a similar propaganda campaign led the world into the disastrous

Iraq War – with its deadly consequences still reverberating through a destabilized Mideast and into an unnerved Europe – NATO reenacts the basic failure of that earlier catastrophe, except now upping the ante into a confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia.

The Warsaw communiqué – signed by leaders including President Barack Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and British Prime Minister David Cameron – ignores the reality of what happened in Ukraine in late 2013 and early 2014 and thus generates an inside-out narrative.

Instead of reprising the West's vacuous propaganda themes, Obama and the other leaders could have done something novel and told the truth, but that apparently is outside their operating capabilities. So they all signed on to the dangerous lie.

What Really Happened

The real narrative based on actual facts would have acknowledged that it was the West, not Russia, that instigated the Ukraine crisis by engineering the violent overthrow of elected President Viktor Yanukovich and the imposition of a new Western-oriented regime hostile to Moscow and Ukraine's ethnic Russians.

In late 2013, it was the European Union that was pushing an economic association agreement with Ukraine, which included the International Monetary Fund's demands for imposing harsh austerity on Ukraine's already suffering population. Political and propaganda support for the E.U. plan was financed, in part, by the U.S. government through such agencies as the National Endowment for Democracy and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

When Yanukovich recoiled at the IMF's terms and opted for a more generous \$15 billion aid package from Putin, the U.S. government threw its public support behind mass demonstrations aimed at overthrowing Yanukovich and replacing him with a new regime that would sign the E.U. agreement and accept the IMF's demands.

As the crisis deepened in early 2014, Putin was focused on the Sochi Winter Olympics, particularly the threat of terrorist attacks on the games. No evidence has been presented that Putin was secretly trying to foment the Ukraine crisis. Indeed, all the evidence is that Putin was trying to protect the status quo, support the elected president and avert a worse crisis.

It would be insane to suggest that Putin somehow orchestrated the E.U.'s destabilizing attempt to pull Ukraine into the association agreement, that he then stage-managed the anti-Yanukovich violence of the Maidan protests, that he collaborated with neo-Nazi and other ultra-nationalist militias to kill

Ukrainian police and chase Yanukovich from Kiev, and that he then arranged for Yanukovich to be replaced by a wildly anti-Russian regime – all while pretending to do the opposite of all these things.

In the real world, the narrative was quite different: Moscow supported Yanukovich's efforts to reach a political compromise, including a European-brokered agreement for early elections and reduced presidential powers. Yet, despite those concessions, neo-Nazi militias surged to the front of the U.S.-backed protests on Feb. 22, 2014, forcing Yanukovich and many of his officials to run for their lives. The U.S. State Department quickly recognized the coup regime as "legitimate" as did other NATO allies.

On a personal note, I am sometimes criticized by conspiracy theorists for not accepting their fact-free claims about nefarious schemes supposedly dreamed up by U.S. officials, but frankly as baseless as some of those wacky stories can be, they sound sensible when compared with the West's loony conspiracy theory about Putin choreographing the Ukraine coup.

Yet, that baseless conspiracy theory roped in supposedly serious thinkers, such as New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, who conjured up the notion that Putin stirred up this trouble so he could pull off a land grab and/or distract Russians from their economic problems.

"Delusions of easy winnings still happen," Krugman wrote in a 2014 column. "It's only a guess, but it seems likely that Vladimir Putin thought that he could overthrow Ukraine's government, or at least seize a large chunk of its territory, on the cheap, a bit of deniable aid to the rebels, and it would fall into his lap. ...

"Recently Justin Fox of the Harvard Business Review suggested that the roots of the Ukraine crisis may lie in the faltering performance of the Russian economy. As he noted, Mr. Putin's hold on power partly reflects a long run of rapid economic growth. But Russian growth has been sputtering, and you could argue that the Putin regime needed a distraction."

Midwifing This Thing

Or, rather than "a guess," Krugman could have looked at the actual facts, such as the work of neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland conspiring to organize a coup that would put her hand-picked Ukrainians in charge of Russia's neighbor. Several weeks before the putsch, Nuland was caught plotting the "regime change" in an intercepted phone call with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt.

Regarding who should replace Yanukovich, Nuland's choice was Arseniy "Yats is

the guy” Yatsenyuk. The phone call went on to muse about how they could “glue this thing” and “midwife this thing.” After the coup was glued or midwived on Feb. 22, 2014, Yatsenyuk emerged as the new prime minister and then shepherded through the IMF austerity plan.

Since the coup regime in Kiev also took provocative steps against the ethnic Russians, such as the parliament voting to ban Russian as an official language and allowing neo-Nazi extremists to slaughter anti-coup protesters, ethnic Russian resistance arose in the east and south. That shouldn’t have been much of a surprise since eastern Ukraine had been Yanukovych’s political base and stood to lose the most from Ukraine’s economic orientation toward Europe and reduced economic ties to Russia.

Yet, instead of recognizing the understandable concerns of the eastern Ukrainians, the Western media portrayed the ethnic Russians as simply Putin’s pawns with no minds of their own. The U.S.-backed regime in Kiev launched what was called an “Anti-Terrorist Operation” against them, spearheaded by the neo-Nazi militias.

In Crimea – another area heavily populated with ethnic Russians and with a long history of association with Russia – voters opted by 96 percent in a referendum to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia, a process supported by Russian troops stationed in Crimea under a prior agreement with Ukraine’s government.

There was no Russian “invasion,” as The New York Times and other mainstream U.S. news outlets claimed. The Russian troops were already in Crimea assigned to Russia’s historic Black Sea naval base at Sevastopol. Putin agreed to Crimea’s annexation partly out of fear that the naval base would otherwise fall into NATO’s hands and pose a strategic threat to Russia.

But the key point regarding the crazy Western conspiracy theory about Putin provoking the crisis so he could seize territory or distract Russians from economic troubles is that Putin only annexed Crimea because of the ouster of Yanukovych and the installation of a Russia-hating regime in Kiev. If Yanukovych had not been overthrown, there is no reason to think that Putin would have done anything regarding Crimea or Ukraine.

Yet, once the false narrative got rolling, there was no stopping it. The New York Times, The Washington Post and other leading Western publications played the same role that they did during the run-up to the Iraq invasion, accepting the U.S. government’s propaganda as fact and marginalizing the few independent journalists who dared go against the grain.

Though Obama, Merkel and other key leaders know how deceptive the Western

propaganda has been, they have become captives to their governments' own lies. For them to deviate substantially from the Official Story would open them to harsh criticism from the powerful neoconservatives and their allied media outlets.

Even a slight contradiction to NATO's "strategic communications" brought down harsh criticism on German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier after he said: "What we shouldn't do now is inflame the situation further through saber-rattling and warmongering. ... Whoever believes that a symbolic tank parade on the alliance's eastern border will bring security is mistaken."

Excoriating Russia

So, at the Warsaw conference, the false NATO narrative had to be reaffirmed – and it was. The communiqué declared, "Russia's aggressive actions, including provocative military activities in the periphery of NATO territory and its demonstrated willingness to attain political goals by the threat and use of force, are a source of regional instability, fundamentally challenge the Alliance, have damaged Euro-Atlantic security, and threaten our long-standing goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. ...

"Russia's destabilising actions and policies include: the ongoing illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, which we do not and will not recognise and which we call on Russia to reverse; the violation of sovereign borders by force; the deliberate destabilisation of eastern Ukraine; large-scale snap exercises contrary to the spirit of the Vienna Document, and provocative military activities near NATO borders, including in the Baltic and Black Sea regions and the Eastern Mediterranean; its irresponsible and aggressive nuclear rhetoric, military concept and underlying posture; and its repeated violations of NATO Allied airspace.

"In addition, Russia's military intervention, significant military presence and support for the regime in Syria, and its use of its military presence in the Black Sea to project power into the Eastern Mediterranean have posed further risks and challenges for the security of Allies and others."

In the up-is-down world that NATO and other Western agencies now inhabit, Russia's military maneuvers within its own borders in reaction to NATO maneuvers along Russia's borders are "provocative." So, too, is Russia's support for the internationally recognized government of Syria, which is under attack from Islamic terrorists and other armed rebels supported by the West's Mideast allies, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and NATO member Turkey.

In other words, it is entirely all right for NATO and its members to invade

countries at will, including Iraq, Libya and Syria, and subvert others as happened in Ukraine and is still happening in Syria. But it is impermissible for any government outside of NATO to respond or even defend itself. To do so amounts to a provocation against NATO – and such hypocrisy is accepted by the West’s mainstream news media as the way that the world was meant to be.

And those of us who dare point out the lies and double standards must be “Moscow stooges,” just as those of us who dared question the Iraq WMD tales were dismissed as “Saddam apologists” in 2003.

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](#)).

A Modest Proposal: An Irish AIPAC

Noting the remarkable success of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in influencing U.S. government policies, Daniel C. Maguire offers up this tongue-in-cheek plan for an Irish AIPAC to do the same for Ireland.

By Daniel C. Maguire

This is to announce the formation of the Irish AIPAC – American Irish Public Affairs Committee. The purpose of this Committee will be (borrowing from the Israeli AIPAC) to make sure that “there is no daylight between” Ireland’s perceived needs and American policies.

Irish Americans, all 35 million of them, should be ashamed of themselves. They sing the songs of Ireland and dance its dances but their bibulous love of Ireland has never been organized to help Ireland in its hours of need.

Poor Ireland suffered years of foreign occupation – with part of their Island-state still tied to Britain. In the artificially imposed “famine” in 1845-1852, a million Irish people died and 25 percent of the population went into exile, many dying on the way, and the remainder all suffering from malnutrition.

It was not just the potato blight: England was actually exporting food from Ireland during this pseudo-famine. This was the Irish Holocaust. And now deceptive Irish bankers have hamstrung the “Celtic tiger,” the boom went bust, and Ireland is linked to a tottering European Union. Now is the time for all Irish-Americans to come to the aid of poor Ireland.

Irish organizing skills are unfairly disparaged. One foreign diplomat said cynically that if the Dutch took over Ireland, they would turn it into a garden; if the Irish took over Holland, they would drown.

Be that as it may, help is available. The Israeli AIPAC, formed in 1954, shows the way. With only five million American Jews to work on it, Israel has become the equivalent of "the fifty-first state of the union." In fact, Israel is the luckiest of the states since it pays no taxes but has received from the U.S. Treasury at least \$130 billion since 1949.

Israel is still the prime recipient of American foreign aid, over \$10 million a day. George Ball estimated that when all aid is calculated, U.S. support of Israel comes to \$11 billion a year. So, Ireland gets only \$2 million a year in U.S. aid, while Israel gets \$10 million a day. That is a disgrace and it is the fault of Irish-Americans who must now set out to correct that by making Ireland the equivalent of the 52nd state.

Learning from the Best

Here is the Action Plan for the Irish AIPAC:

Target One: Congress:

As soon as someone is elected to Congress, he/she will immediately be visited by members of the Irish lobby. Generous monies will be promised to them (funneled through wealthy Irish-American groups to keep it looking legal). The Irish lobby, like the Israeli lobby, must not be stinting in their generosity.

The *Foreign Policy Journal* reports that in the 2015-2016 U.S. presidential race, Israeli-related monies gushed forth. Hillary Clinton reportedly got \$212,927; Sen. Ted Cruz, \$203,552; Sen. Lindsey Graham, \$74,200, and of course all of these politicians promised full and fervid support for whatever Israel says it wants along with a red carpet into the White House.

Surely big-hearted Irish groups can match this. Without saying it out loud, the Irish goal must be to make Congress the best Congress that Irish money can buy. Again, without saying it out loud, the Irish lobby must set out to make Congress Irish-occupied territory. History shows this can be done.

Of course, it also must be made clear to members of Congress that pro-Ireland monies will go to their opponents if they do not faithfully support all of Ireland's alleged needs. On an incessant basis, the Irish lobby will tell the members exactly what those needs are.

The Irish lobby can point to foolish politicians like Paul Findley, Earl

Hilliard and Cynthia McKinney who dared to resist the Israeli AIPAC. They were ousted from Congress as AIPAC arranged crucial financial support for their political opponents. The concerns of Israel trumped whatever petty concerns their American constituents had.

The ghosts of these ousted members hover over Congress whenever Israel-related votes come up. The Irish lobby must match this kind of muscular zeal. Ireland deserves no less.

Efforts will be made to get Irish loyalists appointed to all the congressional staffs so that it will be clear to members of Congress that the Irish AIPAC is watching their every move. Should the Executive Branch ever waver in its support of Ireland, Congress will be pressed to invite the Prime Minister of Ireland to address a joint session of Congress to upbraid the American president for his disloyalty to Ireland.

And when the Irish Prime Minister speaks to Congress, the Irish AIPAC will be in the galleries recording how many times various members leaped to their feet to applaud the Irish leader.

Again, the Israeli lobby shows the way: former Jewish member of the Israeli Knesset Uri Avnery said that when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks to Congress, members vie with one another to applaud “jumping up and down like yo-yos.” (This is actually good exercise for the all too sedentary members of Congress.)

When the Irish AIPAC has its annual meeting, attendance and unctuous obeisance by members of Congress and the administration will be *de rigueur*.

Countering Turbulence

Now all of this Irish political power might be resented by small-minded bigots. Such people must be sharply labeled as “anti-Irish.” They must be portrayed as the residue of ugly historical anti-Irish prejudice, as the hateful echoes of an era when signs were posted on American factories: “IRISH NEED NOT APPLY.”

The mantle of victimhood – *there is no suffering like Irish suffering* – must veil the rise of Irish power. If dissident Irish-Americans groups form – sort of an *Irish Voice For Peace* – to protest Irish abuses of power here and in Ireland, they must be labeled “self-hating Irish” and dismissed.

Target Two: The Press

Anyone who joins the editorial staff of any news media will never be lonely. Members of the Irish AIPAC will visit them before they have arranged the

furniture in their new office. They will be taken to lunch, put on Irish AIPAC mailing lists, and gently reminded of the strength of Irish influence in the zone in which they work and seek advertising.

We should be grateful to the Israeli AIPAC for showing how effective this can be in muting criticism of any mischief or criminality going on in Israel. Even the liberals at MSNBC know where not to tread when it touches on Israel. Palestinian travails are *terra incognita* for them and for the mainstream American media.

(Sadly, the Israelis have not been as successful at quelling the liberal press in Israel which dares at times to speak boldly to Zionist criminal use of power. Ironically it is easier to criticize Israeli occupation policy in Israel than it is in “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” Kudos to the Israeli AIPAC!)

The Irish AIPAC must never forget: *a subservient press is an AIPAC's best friend.*

Goal Three: ‘Wink and a Nod’ Privileges:

It has been said that all nations are brigands, sinning boldly as they pursue their tribal interests. If their sins get noticed, this could turn off the faucets of aid. Jewish writer Tony Judt called the United States “Israel’s paymaster.” Suppose the paymaster got really mad at something you are doing, like violating international law, for example, by doing a little ethnic cleansing and land theft – things like that. This is where the special relationship has to get really, really special. So special that your crimes are ignored by the donor state.

This is a case of “love means never having to say you’re sorry” raised to the level of statecraft. This is the “wink and a nod” privilege that wipes out guilt and punishment.

Now holy Ireland is a very Catholic state. The Preamble of its Constitution begins: “In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority...” It goes on to “humbly” acknowledge all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ...”

Now suppose this Catholic state decided that only Catholics are full-fledged citizens and that Jews, Muslims and Protestants are second-class citizens with very limited voting, traveling, land-purchasing and water-using rights. That would be so un-American it would surely turn off the flow of American cash and political support to Ireland – thus defeating the whole purpose of the Irish AIPAC!

Again, Israel comes to the rescue. In the warm and exonerating American embrace that Israel enjoys – and Ireland aspires to – its sins, be they scarlet, will be made white as snow. The donor looks away and the donations proceed without abatement.

The Israeli success in this regard must be applauded. You will search history in vain to find an example of so many offenses being ignored, forgiven, and systematically and insistently forgotten. Why would the Irish Catholics worry if all they did was crack down on the civil and human rights of a few Jews and Protestants?

After all, on June 8, 1967, during the Six Days War, to prevent surveillance of their huge military land seizure, Israel attacked an American intelligence-gathering ship, the USS Liberty, killing 34 American sailors and wounding 171 of them. The record is clear: it was not, as claimed, a “mistake.” Former CIA officer Ray McGovern reports the following recorded exchange between a horrified Israeli pilot and Israeli headquarters:

Israeli pilot to ground control: “This is an American ship. Do you still want us to attack?”

Ground Control: “Yes, follow orders.”

Pilot: “But, sir, it’s an American ship; I can see the flag.”

Ground Control. “Never mind. Hit it.”

Nothing like it had happened since Pearl Harbor, but the American response was a wink and a nod to Israel’s government. As former Undersecretary of State George Ball said: “If American leaders did not have the courage to punish Israel for the blatant murder of American citizens, it seems clear that their American friends would let them get away with almost anything.”

And so indeed it has come to pass. On March 16, 2003 a 23-year old American citizen, Rachel Corrie, as part of a nonviolent group working in Gaza trying to prevent Israeli forces from destroying water wells and homes ... yes, water wells and homes. Corrie saw an American-made Israeli bulldozer moving to destroy the home of the Nasrallah family, consisting of two brothers, their wives and five children.

Corrie was wearing an orange flak jacket and speaking through a bull horn. She mounted a pile of dirt, looking right into the cabin at the two drivers of the Caterpillar bulldozer. Her companions surrounded her screaming. The Caterpillar bulldozer, with an Israeli armed car in attendance, ran over her. Twice. She died in the arms of Alice Coy, a Jewish member of her group from England.

Again, a wink and a nod from the cowed American government.

Another American citizen was murdered on the high seas on May 30, 2010, by the Israelis on an unarmed flotilla trying to bring medical aid to a Gaza under siege. Eight Turkish citizens were killed, too, and Turkey responded appropriately and vigorously. From the U.S., another wee wink and another wee nod.

So, if in this special relationship the murder of Americans does not compute morally why would Americans be upset by the Agricultural Settlement Law of 1967 that banned non-Jewish Israelis from working on Jewish National Fund lands, i.e. on over 80 percent of the land in Israel? Why take note of laws that prohibit the sale or leasing of state-owned land to non-Jews, or keeping 80 percent of drinking water for Jews in the West Bank and allowing polluted water to much of Gaza – or arresting Palestinian children to keep their parents from protesting the ongoing theft of land, called euphemistically “settlements”? To all of this, a wink and a nod and the never-ending flow of American aid.

And then, of course, there is the United Nations and its pesky Security Council Resolutions. One of the reasons cited to launch a war against Iraq was Saddam Hussein’s resistance to a Security Council resolution. Israel is the world record holder in violating Security Council Resolutions having done so nearly 40 times. No other country is close. (Two other U.S. allies – Turkey and Morocco – hold down second and third place, respectively.)

That is a bit of an embarrassment for the United States but our loyalty is made of stern stuff and so we can tut-tuttingly ignore this bad habit of our Israeli “ally.” We can also ignore the thousand Americans who volunteer to fight in the Israeli army in violation of the Neutrality Act which forbids citizens engaging in military action against nations with whom we are at peace. That also violates Article One, Section Eight of the Constitution which says only Congress can send Americans off to war. But what are such petty scruples among friends.

But, hold on! Preferential status imports still other privileges. When enemies like Saddam Hussein and ISIS pose a direct or proximate threat to Israel, the United States will send forces thousands of miles to fight and die, but will graciously allow Israel not to join the “coalition of the willing.”

Puny-minded critics call this unfair since Israel is the number one recipient of American aid, with the fourth strongest military force in the world and the sixth in nuclear power. Such carping critics are guilty of underestimating American generosity to its beneficiaries and of being naive about Israel’s need to use its military power to enforce the occupation and siege in Palestine. Occupied people are notoriously uncooperative. It’s enough to keep an army busy.

The Missing 'Irish Vote'

A question: Is it unfair and even "anti-Semitic" to say that there is a reliable pro-Israel "Jewish vote" that is the underbelly of AIPAC's political power? Some people think there is such a Jewish voting bloc. Golda Meir thought so. In 1956, Meir insisted that a planned war of expansion should occur *before* the American November election. President Eisenhower, she said, would probably do nothing "because of the Jewish vote." She was right.

Eisenhower noted that "there are 5 million Jewish voters in the U.S. and very few Arabs." He assumed those Jewish American voters would vote Israel's interests. Eisenhower thought of using force to stop the Israeli advances in Sinai but concluded, "Then I'd lose the election. There would go New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, at least." He definitely thought there was a Jewish vote firmly bonded to Israel's warring interests.

Even earlier, when President Truman was asked why he was alienating Arabs by supporting the Zionist takeover of Palestine he replied: "I am sorry, gentlemen, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents." He did not doubt there was an American Jewish vote in lock-step with the Zionist project in Palestine.

Eisenhower's Secretary of State John Foster Dulles resented Israeli pressure in Washington but succumbed to "the paid advertisements, the mass meetings, the resolutions, the demands of Zionist organizations, the veiled threat of domestic political reprisal", i.e., the American Jewish vote.

This concern over "the Jewish vote" has not evanesced in contemporary American politics. Try to get concern for the human and civil rights of occupied Palestinians into the Democratic Party Platform and you will feel its full force.

Irish-American Neglect

Here is where Irish-Americans are again in scandalous default. Irish-American voting

patterns can indeed be tracked, but, appallingly, they have nothing to do with Ireland. Irish-American voters seem distracted by American economic and political issues and are utterly indifferent to the needs of Ireland. As a result, presidents and Congress need never worry about an "Irish vote" when they discuss issues relating to Ireland.

Irish eyes should not be smiling at that lack of loyalty. The Irish AIPAC must

change all that.

Let's admit it: the Israeli AIPAC is the most effective and efficient lobby in modern political history. Never has control been extended over so many by so few. Still, it is not perfect. It is ignoring one resource that could make Israel more Jewish, more peaceful, more accepted and even admired by the world at large. That resource is Judaism, which, in my view, houses the most magnificent moral vision found in any world religion.

Early Israel sowed the seeds of modern democratic theory, envisioning a move away from one-percent Egyptian rule to the sharing society of Sinai, where there "shall be no poor among you" (Deut. 15:4) and where swords will be turned into plowshares. This thinking challenged the primacy of state kill-power. That's the Judaism to which we are all in debt.

The demonic error that grips many Jews and non-Jews as well is to conflate Judaism with Zionism. Judaism is a 3,000-year-old moral treasure. Zionism is a Nineteenth Century form of hallucinatory theology.

Yes, Zionism is theology, not political science. It holds that the deity, believed to be the creator of heaven and earth including everything from fruit flies to quasars, was also into real estate redistribution. This deity insisted that Palestine is destined for Jews only, but, unfortunately, failed to define what makes you a Jew – and that remains a vexed and open question.

Of Palestine, David Ben Gurion (a man of no known theological expertise) said: "God promised it to us." Yitzhak Baer, the German-Israeli historian, wrote: "God gave to every nation its place, and to the Jews he gave Palestine." All other residents of Palestine, even if they were there as a people for millennia, must be ousted with the remainder crushed by occupation and siege. That is Zionism. Sorry, Mr. Ben Gurion and Professor Baer; don't you dare pin that Zionist rap on "God."

Nothing could be less Jewish than Zionism. A truly Jewish Israel could be a paradigm for all nations as old Isaiah insisted it could be.

How Ireland Can Help Israel

Ireland is Catholic, right down to its Constitutional core, but it does not claim to be "a Catholic democracy" because that is as much an oxymoron as a Lutheran democracy or a Jewish democracy. Catholicism is at the center of Irish culture. It can be practiced, studied and celebrated, or rejected freely. But so too can Judaism, and Protestantism, and Islam.

Whatever frictions have occurred among religion groups – and sadly such

frictions always do occur – Catholicism is not required for full-fledged Irish citizenship with all the rights thereunto appertaining.

When Yogi Berra heard that Robert Briscoe, a Jew, was twice elected Lord Mayor of Dublin (in 1956 and again in 1961) he famously replied: “Only in America!” No, Mr. Berra. Also in Ireland. Mr. Briscoe’s Jewishness did not deprive him of first-class citizenship in Ireland and the voters in Dublin knew that. At their core, neither Catholicism nor Judaism is inimical to a pluralistic democracy.

The Irish democracy where religion does not qualify you for citizenship can speak to the Israeli identity problem. *Israel does not know what it is*. It wants to be an oxymoronic “Jewish democracy” but it can’t be and it isn’t.

The distinguished Israeli Jewish professor Shlomo Sand, in a book first published in Hebrew, states it clearly: “Israel cannot be described as a democratic state while it sees itself as the state of the ‘Jewish people.’” That leaves out all the other people.

A former Israeli Brigadier General, writing in the *Jerusalem Post* puts it this way: “Is Israel a democracy? Maybe it is an oligarchy or an aristocracy or some sort of anarchistic monarchy.” Many see it as a theocracy. No surprise, given all the Zionist God-talk.

Catholicism is part of the Irish national identity but Ireland is still a bona fide democracy. Israel could be the place where Judaism could be practiced freely, studied, and revered. Scholars from other religions could see it as the best place to study Judaism and to look for the shared moral ground of all religions.

But they could also see Israel as a perfect place to study their own religions and to practice them freely without any diminution of their rights as citizens or as visitors in Israel. That is not the Israel of today.

The Great Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel understood the Jewish impulse to find a safe place to live but he worried that Israel would become alienated from Judaism. That, I aver, is precisely what has happened. The victims have become the victimizers. Gaza is the Warsaw ghetto, the West Bank, Golan Heights and Jerusalem are subdued and occupied by a Jewish Israeli *Reich*.

The Israeli AIPAC Converted to Judaism?

Realists would say that the Israeli AIPAC is inexorably wedded to an eternal war against Palestinians seeking relief from occupation and siege. This is senseless, and in an age where there are suitcase-size atomic weapons, it is also suicidal.

What a dream it would be if the highly skilled Israeli AIPAC could be converted to a force for peace. All it would have to do is to urge Israel to stop forgetting March 2002. That is when all 22 members of the Arab League offered to recognize Israel's right to exist and have normal relations with Israel. This offer has since been repeatedly reconfirmed.

In April 2002, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which includes 57 nations, concurred with the Arab League offer, and the Iranian delegation expressed its full approval. The prerequisite was not to drive Israel into the sea. The only condition was Israel's compliance with the United Nations Resolutions 194, 242, 338 and the return to the pre-1967 borders. They conceded the right for Israel to exist. Hamas has said it will acknowledge Israel's right to live in peace within its pre-1967 borders.

Israel can have peace or expansion; it is currently choosing expansion. And that, in the words of the poet Yeats, is "a pity beyond all telling."

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Clinton's Disregard of Secrecy Laws

While admitting a "mistake," Hillary Clinton was largely unrepentant about the FBI calling her "extremely careless" in safeguarding national security data, another sign of a troubling double standard, says ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman.

By Melvin A. Goodman

There is a new poster child for the U.S. government's double standard in dealing with violations of public policy and public trust – former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who will receive no punishment for her wanton disregard of U.S. laws and national security.

Clinton merely received a blistering rebuke from FBI Director James Comey, who charged her with "extremely careless" behavior in using private email servers to send and received classified information as well as using her personal cell phone in dealing with sensitive materials while traveling outside the United

States.

Some of these communications referred to CIA operatives, which is a violation of a 1982 Intelligence Identities Protection Act to protect those individuals working overseas under cover.

A former CIA officer, John Kiriakou, received a 30-month jail sentence in 2014 for giving a journalist the name of a CIA operative, although the name never appeared in the media. Kiriakou's sentence was praised by CIA Director David Petraeus, who faced his own charges for providing sensitive materials to his biographer, who was also his mistress.

In denying facts in that case, Petraeus lied to FBI investigators, who wanted to confront the general with felony charges. The Department of Justice reduced the matter to a single misdemeanor, and Petraeus received a modest fine that could be covered with a few of his speaking fees.

The treatment of Clinton is reminiscent of the handling of cases involving former CIA Director John Deutch and former national security adviser Samuel Berger. Deutch placed the most sensitive CIA operational materials on his home computer, which was also used to access pornographic sites. Deutch was assessed a fine of \$5,000, but received a pardon from President Bill Clinton before prosecutors could file the papers in federal court.

Berger, who served in Clinton's administration, stuffed his pants with classified documents from the National Archives, and also received a modest fine. President George W. Bush's Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez kept sensitive documents about the NSA's surveillance program at his home, but received no punishment.

Another Double Standard

There is a similar double standard in dealing with the writings of CIA officials. Critical accounts get great scrutiny; praise for CIA actions is rewarded with easy approval.

A classic case involved the memoir of Jose A. Rodriguez, Jr., who destroyed over 90 CIA torture tapes and wrote a book that denied any torture and abuse took place. The Department of Justice concluded that it would not pursue criminal charges for the destruction of the videotapes, although it was clearly an act to obstruct justice.

A senior career lawyer at CIA, John Rizzo, who took part in decision-making for torture and abuse, received clearance for a book that defended CIA interrogation at its secret prisons or "black sites."

In addition to the velvet glove approach for Rodriguez and Rizzo, the authors of the torture memoranda at the Department of Justice – John Yoo and Jay Bybee – received no punishment for providing legal cover for some but not all of the CIA’s torture techniques.

Even Yoo, now a faculty member at the University of California’s law school in Berkeley, conceded that CIA officers went beyond the letter of the authorization and should be held accountable. Meanwhile, Kiriakou, the first CIA officer to reveal the torture and abuse program, was convicted of disclosing classified information and sentenced.

A CIA colleague from the 1970s, Frank Snepp, wrote an important book on the chaotic U.S. withdrawal South Vietnam with unclassified information detailing the decisions and actions that left behind loyal Vietnamese. Snepp had to forfeit his considerable royalties because the book wasn’t submitted for the agency’s security review.

More recently, however, former CIA Director Leon Panetta presented his memoir to his publisher in 2013 without getting clearance from the CIA and only at the last minute – before the book’s distribution – did it receive a cursory review.

Former Director George Tenet received special treatment with his memoir, getting deputy director Michael Morell to intervene to reverse Publications Review Board decisions to redact sensitive classified materials from the director’s book.

All of these decisions point to a flawed and corrupt system that permits transgressions at the highest level of government, while the government pursues those at a lower level.

President Barack Obama’s legacy will include the fact that he irresponsibly used the Espionage Act of 1917 more often than all previous presidents over the past 100 years, and contributed to the demise of the Office of the Inspector General throughout the government, particularly at the CIA.

One of the key causes of the current hostility and cynicism toward politicians and the process of politics is the double standard at the highest levels of government.

Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of *Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA*, *National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism*, and the forthcoming *The Path to Dissent: A Whistleblower at CIA* (City Lights Publishers, 2015). Goodman is the national security columnist for counterpunch.org, where this story first appeared.

Europe's NATO Ambivalence

The just-completed NATO summit repeated tiresome U.S. propaganda about "Russia's aggressive actions" but some European leaders flinched at the heated rhetoric and warmongering, notes ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

Most Americans unflinchingly believe NATO generously serves the European Union's interests. Yet many Europeans don't see it that way. They fear that NATO actually undermines a balanced Europe. Is it NATO *with* the E.U.? Or NATO *versus* the E.U.?

The two organizations were created by different groups of states (albeit with significant crossover) for differing purposes and with differing goals; indeed, some might say partially *incompatible* goals.

The E.U. vision was to bring European peoples, states and countries – at bloody war among themselves for long centuries – to renounce war as an instrument to solve European problems, to find common cause, and to cooperate in a common economic endeavor. It is an exceptional aim – the first time in human history when multiple states have freely yielded up significant elements of national sovereignty in order to partake in a common project.

Yet the U.S. has always felt geopolitical ambivalence towards the E.U. Washington in principle applauded the ideal – a unified, peaceful and prosperous continent. But it also understood that the formation of the E.U. created a new counterweight that could hinder American ability to dominate politics on the European continent. For America, it was NATO that was a far more congenial and useful mechanism than the E.U.

NATO focused on Washington's primary agenda – checking the Soviet Union in a global struggle. To the extent that the E.U. strengthened that goal, fine; but to the extent that the E.U. weakened European resolve to stand against Russia, it was much less desirable. NATO was America's creature, the E.U. was not.

With the fall of the USSR, President George H.W. Bush (not "W") gave verbal assurances to Russia that the West would not seek to capitalize on the Soviet collapse. With Russia's astonishing acquiescence to the reunification of Germany, the U.S. gave assurances that there would be no NATO expansionism into former Soviet East Bloc states.

Needless to say, that promise was violated, and continues to be violated as neoconservative zealots in Washington seek to scoop up every small state on the Russian periphery and enlist them in the anti-Russian NATO cause (including Georgia, or the Ukraine, or Kyrgyzstan, or even Montenegro.)

NATO's Reason for Continuing

The peaceful collapse of the Soviet Bloc in 1991 also posed a difficult question: what would be the rationale for NATO's continued existence? All organizations seek to perpetuate their own existence and NATO became almost desperate for a new mission – a new enemy. Washington was loath to yield up its key instrument of control in European politics.

But how much do European geopolitical goals mesh with American ones? This too depends on one's geopolitical vision of the world. For Europe, war among its members is virtually unthinkable. But Washington and NATO have a vested interest in maintaining a Russian threat as the centerpiece of E.U. geopolitics.

Today the U.S., including virtually all of its mainstream media, adopt reflexive anti-Russian positions. In U.S.-sponsored parlance, Russian President Vladimir Putin now represents a "resurgent threat." Indeed, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs incredibly informs Congress that Russia represents America's number one existential threat. Aggressive NATO maneuvers at the very doorstep of Russia help make this a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The E.U. has far less desire for confrontation or gratuitous demonization of Moscow. It sees little benefit and much potential harm in it. Germany in particular, given its history, geopolitical vision, and location, certainly seeks a modus vivendi with Russia. Is such a modus vivendi against U.S. interests?

Many Europeans remain highly ambivalent about whether it is NATO, or the E.U., that better represents their own geopolitical concerns. NATO is at heart an American institution, the E.U. is not. Indeed any real back-door influence the U.S. had in the E.U. came from the ever-loyal United Kingdom (which is why Brexit is such a disaster for the U.S. in Europe.)

And of course there are a number of small insecure neighbors living next to the Russian bear who will eternally champion U.S. intervention. Life next to any great power is never easy. But herding such states into the U.S. column is an unwise foreign policy strategy.

For Washington, even as the E.U.'s future falls into question, NATO is seen as

the default, near-surrogate organization for keeping Europe together in some fashion. It can serve as both an instrument against Russia, or as an arm of U.S. global military outreach under the “multilateral cover” of NATO.

Washington is uncomfortable in watching the E.U., as an economic and political organization, work closely with Russia. Indeed Germany, given its location, history and power, will be the quintessential European interlocutor with Russia – and thus most likely the major voice of reason and balance in East-West relations.

Germany, more than any other European power, will also bear the brunt of any potential hostilities with Russia. That is why the German foreign minister himself made cautionary comments a few weeks ago that NATO’s largest ever military exercises off Poland since 1991 constituted provocative saber-rattling towards Russia.

Undermining the E.U.

In this sense, then, Washington’s geopolitical agenda has in fact served to undermine the E.U. Washington strongly urged the immediate inclusion of as many former states of the East Bloc as possible in the E.U., seeking to glue them into a hopefully more anti-Russian Western “bloc.”

But many European leaders had serious and sensible doubts about the appropriateness of E.U. membership for most of these states – and not on geopolitical grounds. Many lacked any democratic tradition, had disastrous economies, suffered serious corruption, bad governance, and were economic basket cases.

To encourage their economic development is one thing; indeed Russia acknowledges that it too can benefit from E.U. presence around Russia, as long as the E.U. was seen as an economic project and not a strategic security one.

The upshot of U.S. pressures was that E.U. membership expanded far too rapidly and prematurely; stringent conditions for admission to the E.U. were often softened in favor of American geopolitical goals.

And now, not surprisingly, many of these states now struggle to meet E.U. criteria; they import into Europe neo-fascist views, represent a net drain on the E.U., and often have little interest in adopting E.U. social and democratic values. For them war with Russia is actually quite thinkable. Especially after suffering under half a century of disastrous Soviet rule.

The E.U., sadly, could still conceivably collapse as a project. If so, it will not be because of Brexit as such. One key reason will be because E.U. expansion

brought too many diverse states into a complex union arrangement. After all, even parts of the early E.U. “south” – Greece, Portugal or Spain, are still struggling to make it under E.U. rules. (And indeed, E.U. rules may need to be re-jiggered in the face of lessons-learned.)

Counterproductive Hostility

The hard question must be posed about whether Washington itself has not been pursuing a highly confrontational and aggressive set of policies against Moscow. In this context there is an important place for an independent European geopolitical, strategic and security policy.

Europe, however, approaches these issues very differently from Washington. Russia, as a significant (and bruised) great power, is still trying to find its place in the new post-Soviet geopolitical space. Russia needs to be tightly bound into diplomatic and organizational ties with the E.U. Indeed it seeks to be a partner in discussion of common legitimate issues of stability and economics in Eastern Europe.

Putin shows signs of great willingness to do so because Russia too can gain economically. Russia is not operating as a spoiler unless the E.U. adopts a hostile position towards Moscow.

Aggressive military posturing by NATO (“maintaining NATO credibility”) is not the way to go about creating a new European space.

Europe is basically quite capable of defending itself given its wealthy economies and technical know-how that even extends to weapons production. Europe does not need to be chivied up by Washington to develop a more “robust posture” towards Russia. It is Europe’s own future and they need to chart it themselves. The U.S. cannot operate as the anxious helicopter parent ready to intervene over European foreign policies.

Now, there is quite legitimate room for serious discussion about what Russia’s policies and intentions are towards Europe. But it must include serious and frank discussion of cause-and-effect in East-West tensions.

How much did talk of bringing Ukraine into NATO – taking with it what has for centuries been Russia’s *sole warm water port* in the Black Sea – spark Putin’s decision not to allow this naval and shipping base of extreme importance from being ceded to NATO? How would the U.S. react to threatened loss of its south-eastern ports to a hostile foreign power (or even the Panama Canal)?

How much did these unwise policies towards Ukraine, and the Western-sponsored coup against the elected (but incompetent) government of Ukraine, help trigger

Putin's response in destabilizing eastern Ukraine? Such issues require honest analysis.

Yet such searching and objective analysis of the sources of recent NATO-Russian confrontation is shockingly absent in most "responsible" media in the U.S., including in the persistently biased New York Times coverage of all things Russian.

How independent does Europe and the E.U. wish to be? How much is it willing to be dragged into the U.S. global strategic agenda with Washington' preponderantly military approach to global issues?

Remarkably French President Francois Hollande remarked upon arriving at the just-completed NATO conference in Warsaw, Poland, "NATO has no role at all to be saying what Europe's relations with Russia should be. For France, Russia is not an adversary, not a threat."

It may well be time for the E.U. to consider again its own independent military force – a project to which the U.S. could contribute, but not control.

Is it not then legitimate to ask: aren't we really talking about NATO *versus* the E.U. in this new strategic era?

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