

# Saudis Goad Obama to Invade Syria

**Exclusive:** Syrian rebels, including dominant jihadist elements, torpedoed Geneva peace talks by setting preconditions to come to the table. But the maneuver also renewed pressure on President Obama to commit to a “regime-change” invasion of Syria alongside Saudi and other Sunni armies, as Joe Lauria explains.

By Joe Lauria

The Russian-backed Syrian Army’s encirclement of Aleppo, the battle that could determine the outcome of the five-year-old war, has sparked a Saudi plan with allied Arab nations to hold a war maneuver next month of 150,000 men to prepare for an invasion of Syria.

Saudi Arabia’s desire to intervene (under the cover of fighting Islamic State terrorists but really aimed at ousting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad) has been welcomed by Washington but dismissed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander and some Western analysts as a ruse.

Iranian Maj. Gen. Ali Jafari told reporters in Tehran, “They claim they will send troops, but I don’t think they will dare do so. They have a classic army and history tells us such armies stand no chance in fighting irregular resistance forces.”

“The Saudi plan to send ground troops into Syria appears to be just a ruse,” wrote analyst Finian Cunningham on RT’s website. “In short, it’s a bluff aimed at pressuring Syria and Russia to accommodate ... ceasefire demands.”

But I don’t believe it is a bluff or a ruse and here’s why: It appears instead to be a challenge by the Saudis to get President Barack Obama to commit U.S. ground troops to lead the invasion. The Saudis made it clear they would only intervene as part of a U.S.-led operation.

After meeting Secretary of State John Kerry in Washington on Monday, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said: “The coalition will operate the way it has operated in the past, as an international coalition, even when there is a ground-force contingent in Syria. There would be no international coalition against ISIS [an acronym for the Islamic State] in Syria if the U.S. did not lead this effort.”

Riyadh knows better than anyone that it doesn’t have the military capability to do anything beyond pounding the poorest Arab country into dust, that would be its neighbor Yemen. And it can’t win that war either. But when Saudi Arabia’s ambitions outsize their capabilities, who do they call? The “indispensable

nation," the United States.

President Obama has so far resisted direct U.S. combat involvement in the Syrian civil war despite longstanding Saudi, Israeli and neocon pressures. They clamored for intervention after the chemical weapons fiasco in Ghouta in the summer of 2013. The attack supposedly crossed Obama's "red line," (although there is growing evidence that the sarin attack was a "false flag" provocation by the rebels to draw the U.S. military into the war on their side).

Obama came close to acceding to that pressure. On Aug. 30, 2013, he sent out a breast-beating John Kerry, playing the role normally reserved for the president, to threaten war. However, after the British parliament voted against intervention, Obama threw the issue to Congress. And before it acted, he accepted a Russian deal to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons (though Assad continued to deny any role in the sarin attack).

Investigative reporter Seymour Hersh contends Obama backed away because British intelligence informed him it was the rebels and not the Syrian government that carried out the chemical attack.

Even earlier in the conflict, Obama resisted Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's pressure to set up "a no-fly zone" inside Syria (which would have required the U.S. military destroying Syria's air defenses and much of its air force, compromising the government's ability to battle Sunni jihadist groups, including those associated with Al Qaeda).

Obama also defied the Saudis, Israelis and the neocons in pushing through the Iranian nuclear deal over their strident opposition in 2015. But Obama has not shown the same resolve against the neocons and liberal interventionists elsewhere, such as in Libya in 2011 and Ukraine in 2014.

Regarding Saudi Arabia's new offer to intervene in Syria, the Obama administration has welcomed the Saudi plan but has not committed to sending in U.S. ground troops, preferring instead to deploy some air power and a limited number of Special Forces against Islamic State targets inside Syria.

However, the Saudi plan is being discussed at a NATO defense ministers' summit in Brussels this week. In Istanbul last month, Vice President Joe Biden hinted at a possible Obama change in position when he said if U.N.-led peace talks in Geneva failed, the United States was prepared for a "military solution" in Syria. (In making that comment, Biden may have given the rebels an incentive to sink the peace talks.)

The talks collapsed last Wednesday when Syrian rebel groups set preconditions for joining the talks, which were supposed to be started without preconditions.

(However, the U.S. mainstream media has almost universally blamed Assad, the Iranians who are supporting Assad, and Russian President Vladimir Putin who has committed Russian air power to the offensive around Aleppo).

So, with the Syrian government now realistically viewing victory in the war for the first time, the panicked Saudis appear to be prodding Obama on whether he's ready to be remembered as the president who "lost" Syria to the Russians and Iranians.

Like most leaders, Obama is susceptible to his "legacy," that vain concern about how 'history will view him.' It is an attitude that can conflict with doing what's best for the country he leads and, in this case, would risk direct confrontation with Russia. Even embedding only hundreds of U.S. Special Forces with Saudi and other Arab troops inside Syria could lead to disaster if they are struck by Russian warplanes.

The Saudis are counting on U.S. domestic criticism to motivate Obama, such as this from New York Times columnist Roger Cohen: "Syria is now the Obama administration's shame, a debacle of such dimensions that it may overshadow the president's domestic achievements. Aleppo may prove to be the Sarajevo of Syria."

Emile Hokayem, a Middle East scholar at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, wrote that it's understandable for Obama to seek a negotiated settlement of the war. "But to do so while exposing the rebellion to the joint Assad-Russia-Iran onslaught and without contingency planning is simply nefarious."

It is up to Obama to resist such pressure and not commit the folly of risking a direct confrontation with Russia by committing U.S. ground forces to what would amount to an illegal invasion of Syria. It might be in Saudi Arabia's interests, but how is it in America's?

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## Hillary Clinton's Very Bad Night

**Exclusive:** The magnitude of Hillary Clinton's New Hampshire drubbing has

establishment Democrats wringing their hands as it dawns on them that no candidate in modern U.S. political history has bounced back from a 22-point loss in that first-in-the-nation primary to win the White House, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's stunning 22-point loss to Sen. Bernie Sanders in New Hampshire is even more devastating when looked at in the context of the modern history of this first-in-the-nation primary: No one has ever lost by such a margin and gone on to win the presidency.

Among Democrats, no one who lost by even half that margin in New Hampshire has recovered to win the party's nomination. In 2008, Barack Obama lost to Hillary Clinton by 2.6 percentage points; in 1992, Bill Clinton lost to Paul Tsongas by 8.4 percentage points; in 1984, Walter Mondale lost to Gary Hart by 9.4 percentage points; in 1972, George McGovern lost to Edmund Muskie by 9.3 percentage points.

In two of those cases, New Hampshire did favor neighboring politicians Sen. Tsongas from Massachusetts and Sen. Muskie from Maine but Tuesday's 22-point margin for Vermont Sen. Sanders cannot be explained simply by making the "nearby-favorite-son" argument. Sanders swept nearly every demographic group, including women, losing only to Clinton among New Hampshire's senior citizens and the state's small number of non-white voters. Sanders's margin among young voters was particularly impressive, 82 percent, roughly the same proportion as the Iowa caucuses last week.

If Hillary Clinton hopes to overcome her New Hampshire drubbing, she would have to look for encouragement from the legacy of Republican George W. Bush who lost the 2000 New Hampshire primary to Sen. John McCain by a margin of 49 percent to 30.2 percent, but even Bush's landslide loss represented a smaller margin of defeat than Clinton suffered on Tuesday.

### **A Worried Establishment**

Clinton's failure to generate momentum or much enthusiasm in her pursuit of the Democratic presidential nomination presents the Democratic Party establishment with a dilemma, since many senior party leaders fret about the risk that Sanders, a self-described "democratic socialist," might lead the Democrats to the kind of electoral disaster that Sen. George McGovern did in 1972.

Though the Democrats rebounded in 1976 with Jimmy Carter's victory amid Republican disarray over Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal, the Republicans soon

reestablished their domination over presidential politics for a dozen years with Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. For the Democrats to reclaim the White House in 1992, it took a "New Democrat," Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton, to repackage the Democratic message into one proposing "neo-liberal" (anti-regulatory, free-trade) economics, embracing Republican tough-on-crime tactics, and rejecting "Big Government."

President Clinton also emphasized "micro-policies," best illustrated by his call for "school uniforms," rather than proposing "macro-policies" for addressing poverty and other structural problems facing Americans. Though the economy performed fairly well under Clinton his success lessening pressures from liberal groups he also opened the door to Wall Street and other corporate excesses (by supporting deregulation of the financial and media industries).

At that point in the 1990s, the "neo-liberal" strategies had not been tested in the U.S. economy and thus many Americans were caught off-guard when this new anti-regulatory, free-trade fervor contributed to a hollowing out of the Great American Middle Class and a bloated Gilded Age for the top One Percent.

The full consequences of neo-liberalism became painfully apparent with the Wall Street Crash of 2008 and the resulting Great Recession. The suffering and hopelessness now affecting many Americans, including the white working class, has led to an angry political rejection of the American Establishment as reflected in the insurgent candidacies of Donald Trump and Sanders.

### **A Legacy Campaign**

Hillary Clinton (like Jeb Bush) faces the misfortune of running a legacy campaign at a time when the voters are angry about the legacies of both "ruling families," the Clintons and the Bushes. Though Sanders is a flawed candidate faulted for his muddled foreign-policy prescriptions, he (like Trump) has seized the mantle of fighting the Establishment at a time when millions of Americans are fed up with the Establishment and its self-serving policies.

In some ways, the Iowa and New Hampshire results represented the worst outcome for establishment Democrats. Clinton's razor-thin victory in Iowa and her slashing defeat in New Hampshire have left Democratic strategists uncertain as to whether they should rally behind her despite her lukewarm to freezing-cold reception from voters or try to recruit another candidate who could cut off Sanders's path to the nomination and represent a "more electable" choice in November.

If Clinton continues to stumble, there will be enormous pressure from Democratic leaders to push her aside and draw Vice President Joe Biden or perhaps Sen.

Elizabeth Warren into the race.

If that were to occur – and, granted, the Clintons are notoriously unwilling to admit defeat – the Democrats could experience a political dynamic comparable to 1968 when anti-Vietnam War Sen. Eugene McCarthy challenged the prohibitive favorite President Lyndon Johnson and came close enough in New Hampshire to prompt Sen. Robert Kennedy to jump into the race – and to convince Johnson to announce that he would not seek another term.

Many idealistic Democrats who had backed McCarthy in his seemingly quixotic fight against Johnson were furious against “Bobby-come-lately,” setting up a battle between two anti-war factions of the Democratic Party. Of course, the history of the 1968 campaign was marred by the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and then Robert Kennedy, followed by the chaotic Chicago convention, which handed the nomination to Johnson’s Vice President Hubert Humphrey.

Then, after Republican Richard Nixon secretly sabotaged Johnson’s Vietnam peace talks, Nixon managed to eke out a victory over Humphrey.

While Campaign 2016 reflects a very different America and the key Democratic issue is “income inequality,” not the Vietnam War some parallels could become obvious if the presumptive nominee (Johnson in 1968 and Clinton in 2016) is pushed out or chooses to step aside.

Then, the Democratic choice would be plunging ahead with a back-bench candidate (McCarthy in 1968 and Sanders in 2016) or looking for a higher-profile and more mainstream alternative, such as Biden who (like Humphrey) would offer continuity with the sitting president or Warren who shares many of Sanders’s positions (like Robert Kennedy did with McCarthy) but who might be more acceptable to “party regulars.”

A Warren candidacy also might lessen the disappointment of women who wanted to see Hillary Clinton as the first female president. At the moment, however, the question is: Did New Hampshire deal a death blow to Hillary Clinton’s campaign or can she become the first candidate in modern U.S. political history to bounce back from a 22-point loss in the first-in-the-nation primary?

**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).**

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# Inventing the Right's 'Metanarrative'

For decades, the Koch Brothers have funded a massive propaganda operation to disparage what democracy can do when a society pulls together and to glorify a "greed is good" narrative promising great benefits if capitalism reigns free. But the results have been good only for a privileged few, as Michael Winship describes.

By Michael Winship

Gather round for the word of the day: metanarrative. Definitions vary but let's say it's one big narrative that connects the meaning of events to a belief thought to be an essential truth, the storytelling equivalent of the unified field theory in physics.

Now use it to define what's being done to America today – our Big Story. Journalist and activist Naomi Klein did just that a couple of weeks ago when she and I talked at Finger Lakes Community College in upstate New York about the Koch brothers' resistance to the reality of climate change.

"The Charles Koch metanarrative, and he's said it explicitly, is that he is challenging collectivism, he is challenging the idea that when people get together they can do good," she said. "And he is putting forward the worldview that we're all very familiar with that if you free the individual to pursue their self-interest that will actually benefit the majority. So you need to attack everything that is collective, whether it's labor rights or whether it's public health care or whether it's regulatory action. All of this falls under the metanarrative of an attack on collectivism."

In other words, Koch and his brother David and the extraordinary machine they have built in cahoots with fellow billionaires and others, have spent hundreds and hundreds of millions to get their way, "the great wealth grab" in the words of Richard Eskow, all part of one long story told in pursuit of a specific end: to make the needs of the very, very few our nation's top priority and to thwart or destroy any group effort among the poor and middle class to do or say otherwise.

The Kochs have spun their tale with a singular, laser-like focus, carefully taking their time to make sure they get it right. Jane Mayer, author of *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*, recently wrote in Politico Magazine that "Charles Koch might claim that his entry into politics is new, but from its secrecy to its methods of courting

donors and recruiting students, the blueprint for the vast and powerful Koch donor network that we see today was drafted four decades ago.”

Mayer reviewed papers, including one written by Charles Koch himself, presented at a Koch-sponsored Center for Libertarian Studies conference in 1976 and concludes, “It’s not hard to recognize the Koch political movement we see today, a vast and complex network of donors, think tanks and academic programs largely cloaked in secrecy and presented as philanthropy, leaving almost no money trail that the public can trace.

“And it’s these techniques Charles first championed decades ago that helped build his political faction, one so powerful that it turned fringe ideas William F. Buckley once dismissed as ‘Anarcho-Totalitarianism’ into a private political machine that grew to rival the Republican Party itself.”

And so we see their creation of ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council posing as a non-profit while entertaining state legislators and plying them with templates for laws that favor restrictions on voter eligibility, public sector unions and the minimum wage while supporting freedom for the gun lobby and deregulation.

The Kochs shower cash on candidates and elected officials who do the bidding of the Right, fund programs at historically black colleges and universities that preach free-market economics and deregulation, bankroll the Libre Initiative that hands out holiday turkeys and Easter baskets to Latino families while, in its own words, “informing the U.S. Hispanic community about the benefits of a constitutionally limited government, property rights, rule of law, sound money supply and free enterprise through a variety of community events, research and policy initiatives that protect our economic freedom.”

As Naomi Klein said during our conversation, “The Koch brothers set out to change the values, to change the core ideas that people believed in. And there is no progressive equivalent of taking ideas seriously.”

She then asked, “So what is the progressive metanarrative? Who funds it? Who is working on changing ideas that can say, ‘Actually, when we pool our resources, when we work together, we can do more and better than when we only act as individuals.’ I don’t think we value that.”

In fact, there *is* a progressive metanarrative, one that needs to be valued and not obscured by arguments over who is or is not sufficiently progressive or who did what to whom and when. The metanarrative’s lead has been buried in divisiveness, by trolling from every side and by despicable, old-fashioned redbaiting. What’s more, goals and purposes have been diffused with a



scattershot approach when we should be vectoring in on what really counts.

The progressive metanarrative is the opposite of the fight against collectivism: it's the struggle against inequality.

The Harvard Gazette reports, "Though the wealthiest 20 percent earned nearly half of all wages in 2014, they have more than 80 percent of the wealth. The wealth of the poorest 20 percent, as measured by net worth, is actually negative. If they sell all they own, they'll still be in debt."

Labor organizer and Harvard Kennedy School lecturer Marshall Ganz tells the *Gazette*, "I think the galloping inequality in this country results from poor political choices. There was nothing inevitable, nothing global. We made a series of political choices that set us on this path."

He continues, "Inequality, it's not just about wealth, it's about power. It isn't just that somebody has some yachts, it's the effect on democracy I think we're in a really scary place."

But it's not a place from which escape is impossible. To make our metanarrative come true, we must embrace both community and government that effectively can protect and provide for all.

In a 2014 article at the [ideas.ted.com](http://ideas.ted.com) website, philosopher T.M. Scanlon wrote, "No one has reason to accept a scheme of cooperation that places their lives under the control of others, that deprives them of meaningful political participation, that deprives their children of the opportunity to qualify for better jobs, and that deprives them of a share of the wealth they help to produce

"The holdings of the rich are not legitimate if they are acquired through competition from which others are excluded, and made possible by laws that are shaped by the rich for the benefit of the rich. In these ways, economic inequality can undermine the conditions of its own legitimacy."

And so it can, if progressives work together, mobilize, dare to take risks and keep the faith in the face of cynicism and weary resignation. Such a metanarrative could have a different, and happy, ending.

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# Rightists Sell Anti-Government Message

Since Ronald Reagan, the Republicans have rallied many Americans around the notion that “government is the problem.” And, despite disasters for the middle and working classes, right-wing intellectuals like Charles Krauthammer continue to sell the same message, as Lawrence Davidson describes.

By Lawrence Davidson

Charles Krauthammer is the most celebrated contemporary conservative thinker in the United States. But let it be known that he is not just a theorist. He is man of political action who wants a conservative in the White House to line up with those already in control of Congress.

He wants to win. Thus he supports Republican candidates such Marco Rubio and Chris Christie (Ted Cruz, while a “genuine conservative,” is too “radical,” and Jeb Bush isn’t mentioned at all) as potential presidents who “would give conservatism its best opportunity since Reagan to become the country’s governing philosophy.” Those are the words of an unapologetic ideologue: what is good for the country is the Krauthammer philosophy of conservatism in control of the government.

What does this mean? For Krauthammer, as for so many other conservative thinkers who have never really evolved away from Nineteenth Century capitalist economic theory, conservatism in power means the “reform” of big government, or as he still describes it, “the Twentieth Century welfare state.” Reform essentially means significant downsizing of government in the name of individual “freedom,” primarily in the marketplace, and, of course, a corresponding cut in taxes for the business class.

There are several things dangerously wrong about Krauthammer’s simplistic approach to “conservative governing.” One is that, in a country like the U.S. with approximately 320 million people (a considerable number of them getting steadily poorer), doing away with welfare state services and regulations seriously risks further impoverishment, increased economic exploitation in the workplace, an erosion of state and local infrastructures, and an explosion in business corruption.

While Krauthammer would never agree, it is simply historically untrue that capitalism, without widespread government regulation and significant financial support for basic services, has ever brought prosperity to the majority of any population.

The second thing wrong with Krauthammer's thinking is his apparent inability to understand the difference between inefficiency and government size. Big government is necessary for the social and economic health of big societies. But increased size does not automatically translate into government inefficiency.

The need to monitor the efficiency of all bureaucracies so that they perform their jobs in a smooth and timely fashion is one thing. Downsizing to the point of near dismantlement of necessary government bureaus based on the conservative ideological assumption that they are chronically inefficient and overly expensive dead weight is quite another. The former will make things better. The latter will risk societal collapse.

### **Populism and Socialism**

Nonetheless, it is this downsizing "reform" of the welfare state that Krauthammer tells us is the answer to the "deep anxiety stemming from the secular (sic) stagnation of wages and living standards that has squeezed the middle and working classes for a generation." He juxtaposes this ideologically dictated answer against those he believes come from Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders.

The former offers "ethnonationalist populism." Krauthammer tells us what is already obvious, that Trump blames the nation's problems "on foreigners, most prominently those cunning Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, and Saudis who have been taking merciless advantage of us." (How anyone can put the Mexicans in with the Saudis is beyond me.)

However, while debunking Trump's xenophobia, Krauthammer fails to mention that it is those conservative ideologues of his own camp who have pushed hardest for the sort of free trade agreements that have allowed Donald Trump to focus on outsiders.

Then there is the phenomenon of Bernie Sanders. As far as Krauthammer's understanding goes, Sanders is preaching socialism, and the apparent positive response to this baffles him.

"It is hard to believe that the U.S., having resisted the siren song of socialism during its entire 20th century heyday should suddenly succumb to its charms a decade after its intellectual demise," Krauthammer writes.

Only from behind the walls of Krauthammer's conservative ideology can socialism be considered "intellectually dead." It is certainly alive and politically competitive in western and northern Europe.

Of course, despite Krauthammer's failure to make the distinction, Sanders is

nowhere near the kind of socialist found in the Soviet bloc during the Cold War. In truth Sanders is closer to the prevailing social democrats of Western Europe or even the liberal wing of the Democratic Party prior to the coming to power of the Bill Clinton crowd.

And, it can be argued, the success of Sanders's message is in direct proportion to the failure of Krauthammer's conservatism to bring lasting economic prosperity and secure social services to the people of the United States. Nonetheless, Krauthammer cannot see this relationship. For him, Sanders's ultimate success is unimaginable.

"The Dems would be risking a November electoral disaster of historic dimensions" if they nominated Sanders, he says. Actually this might be so, but not because of any real socialist program on Sanders's part. Rather, disaster would be the product of relentless Republican red-baiting, to the point that the reality of Sanders's policy proposals becomes irrelevant. Indeed, Krauthammer's characterization of Sanders may well be the first shot in such a red-baiting campaign.

Charles Krauthammer's conservative ideological outlook is every bit as destructive as Trump's "ethnonationalist populism." The reality is that Krauthammer's conservatism has been the guiding light of the U.S. economy since its inception and produced a history of continual booms and busts, the latter coming as ever deeper and prolonged depressions.

This went on throughout the late Eighteenth and Nineteenth and into the Twentieth Century, culminating in the Great Depression of 1929. So disastrous was that crash, along with the fact of competition from the young Soviet Union, that there was finally some soul-searching on the part of the smarter capitalists, who then made the effort to rationalize their system.

In the U.S., this came in the form of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Roosevelt brought the necessary regulation and government expansion to semi-stabilize the economy and bring a modicum of security to the common citizen. Depressions were held down to periodic recessions while Social Security, unemployment insurance and other commonsense social programs made their debut.

It is a mark of the ahistorical nature of their ideological worldview that Krauthammer conservatives have been complaining about big government ever since, while apparently forgetting all about capitalism's original sins. Just to juice up their argument, they throw in talk of "individual freedom" in the marketplace while disparaging other freedoms and rights, such as those relating to healthcare, education, equal opportunity, and gender equality and the like as if they were not part of the mix that should make up a modern civilization.

There is something truly inhumane in the Krauthammer perspective. But that does not mean that those politicians such as Marco Rubio and Chris Christie who espouse such bankrupt ideas are incapable of winning local, state and national elections. Never underestimate the ignorance and gullibility of conservative-minded voters.

For them there will always be the siren song of a Charles Krauthammer. One is reminded of the description of a British conservative politician given by the English philosopher Gilbert Ryle, one that fits America's celebrated conservative thinker pretty well: "He stood like a light out to sea, firmly beckoning ships on to the rocks."

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## A Look at Ukraine's Dark Side

**Exclusive:** Americans have been carefully shielded from the ugly underbelly of Ukraine's Maidan uprising in 2014 that overthrew the elected president and installed a U.S.-backed, fiercely anti-Russian regime which has unleashed armed neo-Nazis. But a French documentary has dared to expose this grim reality, as Gilbert Doctorow describes.

By Gilbert Doctorow

A new French documentary depicts a long-denied truth that Ukraine is in the grip of extreme right-wing nationalists who seek to impose what the British scholar Richard Sakwa has called a monist view of nationhood, one which does not accept minorities or heterogeneity. Rainbow politics is not what the Maidan uprising was all about.

Like the Communism which held power in Ukraine before 1992, this new extreme nationalism can impose its will only by violence or the threat of violence. It is by definition the antithesis of European values of tolerance and multiculturalism.

This intimidation is what Paul Moreira's Canal+ documentary, "Ukraine: The Masks of Revolution," shows us graphically, frame by frame. That this repression happens to take place under an ideology that incorporates elements of fascism if

not Nazism is incidental but not decisive to the power of the documentary. [Click [here](#) for the documentary in French; [here](#) for a segment with English subtitles.]

But what Moreira shows as surprising as the contents may be to a Western audience actually represents very basic journalism, reporting on events that are quite well known inside Ukraine even as this dark underbelly of the Maidan “revolution” has been hidden from most Europeans and Americans.

Moreira is a professional documentary filmmaker, not an area specialist. He has done films in many countries including Iraq, Israel, Burma and Argentina. He says at the start of this Canal+ documentary that he was drawn to the subject of Ukraine’s Maidan uprising because he “felt sympathy for these people who demonstrated day after day on the streets in winter conditions.

“They wanted to join Europe, to move away from Russia. They wanted the corrupt President [Viktor] Yanukovich to leave. They hoped for more justice, fewer inequalities. But I was struck by one thing the images of the American diplomat [Victoria] Nuland on Maidan distributing bread. The Free World, its cameras, sided with the insurgents.”

There were also the discordant images of neo-Nazi symbols and flags. To assess the post-Maidan Ukraine, Moreira decided to go see for himself.

The documentary draws upon his interviews with leaders of the rightist paramilitary groups and extreme nationalist politicians as well as other Ukrainians on both sides of the conflict. He shows the attacks on police by Maidan street fighters before Yanukovich’s overthrow on Feb. 22, 2014, and the May 2, 2014 massacre in Odessa of 46 Russian-speaking demonstrators who opposed the new regime.

He shows a violent protest by nationalist extremists outside the parliament in Kiev and the recent blockade by the Right Sektor militias stopping food and other goods crossing into Crimea, which voted overwhelmingly after the 2014 putsch to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia. The Crimean blockade was in violation of Ukrainian government policy but was not stopped by the Kiev authorities.

### **Secretary Nuland’s Cookies**

During the course of the film, Moreira intersperses footage of the controlling hand of U.S. officials both before and after the February 2014 coup. Twice we see Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Nuland handing out cookies on the Maidan to encourage the demonstrators in December 2013. We see U.S. politicians including Sen. John McCain with neo-Nazi Svoboda party leader Oleh Tyahnybok on a podium in Maidan.

In another scene, Nuland testifies before Congress in May 2014 and is asked by Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-California, if she knew there were neo-Nazis in the street violence that led to Yanukovych's removal. When Nuland was evasive, Rohrabacher asked whether besides the popular Maidan images of mothers and grandmothers with flowers there were very dangerous street fighters and neo-Nazi groups.

Nuland responded, "Almost every color of Ukraine was represented including some ugly colors." Rohrabacher said he took that as a "yes."

In September 2015, Moreira covered the annual Yalta European Strategy Meeting in Kiev and tried to get impromptu interviews with prominent Americans, such as Nuland and former CIA boss General David Petraeus, the author of the 2007 "surge" in Iraq and currently a strong advocate for sending offensive weapons to Ukraine.

Moreira succeeded only in getting a sound bite from retired Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who said the task of the day was to improve the militias and strengthen their ties to the Ukrainian government. Moreira asked McChrystal if he knew that the paramilitaries had attacked the Verhovna Rada (Ukraine's parliament) the week before. With a dismissive smile before he made his getaway, McChrystal responded, "That's a problem"

Though Moreira's documentary presented material that was undeniably true much from the public record it was revelatory for many Westerners familiar only with the pro-Maidan images and commentary carried by the West's mainstream news media. Because the documentary clashed with this "conventional wisdom," it immediately became "controversial."

On Jan. 31, one day before the documentary appeared on Canal+, Le Monde issued a stern rebuke under the title "Paul Moreira gives us a distorted vision of the Ukrainian conflict."

Benoit Vitkine, the newspaper's reporter for Ukraine, wrote that the extreme nationalists were only one part of the armed uprising and accused Moreira of focusing too much on their role in the Maidan and its aftermath. Vitkine noted that the Right's "electoral results are laughable" and denied that they are "the new masters of the Ukrainian streets."

### **Key Nazi Role**

But there is little doubt that the neo-Nazis and other extreme nationalists played a key role in escalating the Maidan protests into the violent uprising that drove Yanukovych from office. For instance, Andriy Parubiy, the commandant of the Maidan "self-defense forces," was a well-known neo-Nazi, who founded the

Social-National Party of Ukraine in 1991. The party blended radical Ukrainian nationalism with neo-Nazi symbols. Parubiy also formed a paramilitary spinoff, the Patriots of Ukraine, and defended the awarding of the title, "Hero of Ukraine," to World War II Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, whose own paramilitary forces exterminated thousands of Jews and Poles in pursuit of a racially pure Ukraine.

After the Feb. 22 coup, Parubiy was one of four far-right Ukrainian nationalists given control of a ministry, in his case, national security, and he integrated many of the right-wing militias into the National Guard, sending neo-Nazi units such as the Azov Battalion into eastern Ukraine to crush ethnic Russians who resisted the new order in Kiev.

Moreira's documentary also shows footage of right-wing paramilitaries demonstrating aggressively in the streets outside the parliament and scenes of their illegal blockade at the Crimean border, where they literally did control the streets and roads.

Le Monde's other argument about how poorly the rightists have fared in elections misses the point about the significance of the Right's large-scale disruptions and violent attacks thus intimidating the parliament and the government. But that reality is downplayed in the West.

Vitkine also accuses Moreira of omitting "the Russian aggression" against Ukraine, which Vitkine says explains the radicalization of part of the Ukrainian population and the decision of Kiev to arm the battalions of right-wing volunteers. But the neo-Nazi role in the Maidan protests predated any Russian intervention in support of the embattled ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Russian President Vladimir Putin held a key strategy session on how to respond to the Maidan putsch on Feb. 23, 2014, the day after the coup. Putin and Russia were responding to what they saw as a U.S.-backed overthrow of a democratically elected government on their border; they didn't instigate the crisis.

Similarly Vitkine rejects Moreira's charge of U.S. complicity in the rise of the neo-Nazis and Moreira's acceptance of the Crimean referendum in which 96 percent of the voters favored leaving Ukraine and rejoining Russia. But the results of that referendum have been supported by polls both before and after the referendum, including public opinion samples organized by the U.S. government. There can be no serious doubt that the vast majority of Crimeans wanted out of Ukraine and saw practical benefits in rejoining Russia. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Crimeans Keep Saying No to Ukraine.](#)"]

## **Bolstering Propaganda**



In other words, Le Monde's key reporter on Ukraine is attacking Moreira from the standpoint of a narrative written in Washington that is more propaganda than reality. In this sense, the French center left as reflected by Le Monde is no less under the spell of neoconservative ideology than many Democrats in the United States.

That being said, Vitkine does toss one bouquet to Moreira for his treatment of the May 2, 2014 "events" in Odessa, the slaughter of anti-Maidan protesters who sought safety inside the Trade Union Building, which was then set ablaze:

"Even if he overestimates the role of Pravy [Right] Sektor and assigns responsibility for this drama too peremptorily, the film performs a salutary piece of work by dwelling at length on this episode from the post-Maidan days that is often neglected."

But Vitkine condescendingly mocks Moreira's self-presentation as "the white knight who is exposing past truths that have been passed over in silence [which] just doesn't work. This experienced documentary filmmaker has taken up a real subject. He has chosen to 'see for himself,' as he tells us. But he only saw what he wanted to see."

Moreira's response to Le Monde and two other critics appeared in French on the site [blogs.mediapart.fr](http://blogs.mediapart.fr) and in English translation on the website of [newcoldwar.org](http://newcoldwar.org). He cited the pressure from the Ukrainian authorities for Canal+ not to air the documentary.

He also reasserted his thesis that the right-wing paramilitaries are a great threat to Ukrainian democracy and that to deny their existence and the danger they pose simply to avoid playing "into Russian propaganda is to become a propagandist oneself." Moreira accused Vitkine of "unusually violent writing."

After the airing of the documentary, an "Open Letter to Paul Moreira" was published on the website of the French weekly *Nouvel Observateur*, which has been described as "the French intellectuals' parish magazine."

Seven of the 17 journalists who signed the Open Letter work for French state media France 24 and Radio France International. The letter starts and ends with stinging reproaches to Moreira, but the contents in the middle are muddled.

For instance, the letter acknowledges the reality of the central issue raised by Moreira's documentary: that there is a problem with paramilitaries in Ukraine. However, like Vitkine, the authors wanted to shift the discussion from that reality and find excuses in the war that rendered these paramilitaries heavily armed and a danger to the country's future, i.e., blaming "Russian aggression."

## Rejecting a Referendum

Like Vitkine, the authors reject the results of the Crimean referendum, pointing to the presence of Russian troops on the peninsula. But they themselves ignore the repeated polls and news reporting by disinterested third parties in the past year validating the results of the 2014 referendum.

They acknowledge that the right-wing paramilitaries were a problem but claim they were brought under control during 2015. This is a dubious assertion given the continuing political instability in Kiev and the apparent extremist influence on the parliament, frustrating the government's efforts to implement the terms of the Minsk II accords. The authors are silent about Moreira's footage of the rightists' blockade at the Crimean-Ukrainian border.

Most emphatically, the authors reject the "theory of overthrow of the government in February 2014 by the paramilitary groups of the extreme right." In doing so, these journalists claiming expert knowledge of the recent history willfully ignore the substantial evidence indicating that the Maidan snipers who escalated the violence on Feb. 20, 2014, were rightist false-flag provocateurs intent on enraging both the demonstrators and the government's Berkut police, some of whom were also targeted and killed.

The letter writers also overlook the critical role of right-wing leader Dmitry Yarosh and his forces in shredding the European Union's Feb. 21, 2014 agreement with Yanukovych in which the embattled president agreed to reduced powers and new elections.

They do salute Moreira's coverage of the Odessa massacre, but say vaguely it was not the only incident in Ukraine that has not been adequately investigated. And they say that the French and international press has covered extensively the atrocities in Ukraine, which is not a credible claim.

We might conclude that these 17 journalists have written their Open Letter to safeguard their jobs with the French state media and their continued travel rights to Ukraine, which is essential to their careers. But the story does not end there.

One of the 17 signatories, Gulliver Cragg, who works for the France24 television channel, also published a very curious article on the Moreira documentary in other venues. His side essay was written for the Kyiv Post and put online by the still more dubious stopfake.org, a website devoted to the "struggle against fake information about events in Ukraine," especially any evidence that puts the U.S.-backed regime in a negative light.

Cragg's essay opens and closes with harsh words for Moreira. However, in the

middle, he has harsh words for the Ukrainian authorities, whom he blames for creating their own public relations disasters by misguided policies, such as: “by naming a suspected neo-Nazi, Vadim Troyan, to be police chief in Kyiv region in Autumn 2014. Or appointing the Right Sector leader Dmytro Yarosh an official Defence Ministry adviser.

“Or allowing the Azov battalion, now integrated into the National Guard, to use the Wolfsangel [neo-Nazi] symbol on their logo. Or failing, as Moreira points out in his documentary, to punish any Ukrainian nationalists for their role in the Odessa tragedy.”

Cragg acknowledges that this might lead outsiders to conclude that the far right has too much influence in Ukraine. Moreover, he blames directly President Petro Poroshenko and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk for simply not understanding all of this and for not changing their behavior and appointments.

And while Cragg comes back to his conclusion that Moreira is blowing things out of proportion, he agrees that far-right groups in Ukraine wield influence and that their weapons are cause for concern, “a legitimate topic for foreign reporters.”

### **Some Criticism of Ukraine**

Cragg continues: “Ukraine’s leaders and media should engage with this issue and encourage a national debate. How do we define far-right? Where does patriotism end and bigotry begin? Where do we draw the line between activist and extremist? Politicians should be addressing these questions and speaking out against those whose views are not compatible with the European values Ukraine claims to espouse. And, crucially, they should be heard doing so on foreign media.”

And so, grudgingly, even some of Moreira’s critics have come out of their crouches and put forward constructive suggestions. By prompting this, Moreira has performed a praiseworthy service.

Yet, while the French mainstream journalists found the need to chastise one of their own for breaking with the pro-Maidan “group think,” the U.S. mainstream media simply continues to ignore Ukraine’s ugly realities, all the better to fit with the State Department’s prescribed narrative.

Nothing like Moreira’s documentary has appeared on U.S. television or in mainstream U.S. newspapers. The dark side of the Maidan and in particular the role of neo-Nazi groups and other violent extremists in fomenting and achieving the coup d’etat have been discussed almost exclusively at alternative and independent outlets, mostly on the Internet.

The editorial boards of the country's newspapers of record The Washington Post, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal ensured that newspaper columns and op-ed pages set out almost exclusively Official Washington's narrative day after day. Opposing views were increasingly choked off, finally getting no space whatsoever in mainstream outlets.

One of the few exceptions in print media was The Nation, where contributing editor and Professor of Russian History emeritus at Princeton and New York University Stephen Cohen delivered detailed critiques of the factual and interpretational errors of the mainstream narrative.

Otherwise heterodox views became accessible only to determined truth seekers exploring the alternative media portals. I name here in particular one devastating critique of the one-sided mainstream narrative that Jim Naureckas published at the media criticism site, Fair.

Needless to say, critical views of the Maidan and its neo-Nazi components got almost no attention in American broadcast media. No American channel so far has shown the civic courage of a Canal+.

### **Ukraine's Diversity**

Much as I admire the courage and dedication of Paul Moreira to produce such a valuable documentary focusing on very troubling aspects of the post-Maidan political realities in Ukraine, he is an outsider to the subject matter who has missed some very relevant facts about Ukrainian society before his eyes. His critics have missed the same points due to their ideological persuasions or lacking analytical skills.

The fact is that the population of Ukraine is very diverse. The major split between native Ukrainian speakers in the West of the country and native Russian speakers in the East of the country remains unchanged. It is more than ironic that four of the five leaders of extremist Ukrainian nationalists whom Moreira interviewed or otherwise featured in the documentary were speaking native Russian. Such was the intermix of family traditions and ethnicity in Ukraine until recently. Add to this the very many minorities of other nationalities, including Hungarians and Romanians who are especially numerous in territorial pockets.

The ambition of the post-Maidan government in Kiev and of the nationalist extremists who are maintaining pressure on it through intimidation by their paramilitaries is to forge a monist national identity. This suppression of non-Ukrainian-ethnic minorities can be achieved only by violence and threats of violence.

In this sense, the paramilitaries are only the tip of the iceberg. Violence and intimidation today permeates Ukrainian society across the whole geography of the country. It takes the form of murder of journalist and newspaper editors. Meanwhile, there have been changes in the status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate as well as to street and city names. Further demonstrating hostility toward ethnic and political diversity, Ukraine has witnessed forcible destruction of war memorials to the “wrong” heroes to erase the shared Russian-Ukrainian traditions and to impose a new politically correct consciousness on a hitherto diverse country. Had Moreira sought to document this, he would have needed another one-hour segment or more.

Instead, Moreira focused on the existence of the aggressive nationalist and neo-Nazi armed movements in present-day Ukraine, a reality that his critics in France don't deny even as they try to forgive it by alluding to “Russian aggression” and the war in the Donbass.

Their insistence that these extremists are just a small part of the paramilitary battalions, not to mention the general population, as revealed by electoral results, is intentionally misleading. That point would have relevance if Ukraine were a functioning democracy. But the ability of these nationalist extremists to intimidate parliament and operate illegal blockades as they do at the Crimean border proves that Ukraine is not a functioning democracy.

Those are the essential points which emerge from the Canal+ documentary and its aftermath. For this we must express our deep appreciation to Mr. Moreira and the management of the television channel.

**Doctorow is the European Coordinator, American Committee for East West Accord, Ltd. His latest book Does Russia Have a Future? (August 2015) is available in paperback and e-book from Amazon.com and affiliated websites. For donations to support the European activities of ACEWA, write to [eastwestaccord@gmail.com](mailto:eastwestaccord@gmail.com). © Gilbert Doctorow, 2015**

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## How Fox News Undercut Trump

The Republican Establishment, led by powerful media boss Fox News' Roger Ailes, undercut Donald Trump's anti-Establishment campaign with some last-minute maneuvers in Iowa, including baiting Trump to boycott a Fox debate, as JP Sottile explains.

By JP Sottile

Something really strange happened on the way to the Iowa Caucus.

The strange thing is not that Duck Dynasty devotee and much-despised Establishment nemesis Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, leapfrogged Donald Trump to take the top spot. Ted's excellent adventure, which includes winning *in spite of* his stance against ethanol, was far more likely than it might have seemed.

First of all, predictive polling has become notoriously imprecise and that's particularly true in the case of Iowa's caucuses. As TIME pointed out, the "byzantine" nature of the caucus process makes it harder to get an accurate snapshot from a simple poll because it doesn't account for precinct-level ebbs and flows in voter turnout.

Secondly, the Iowa GOP is all about the Evangelicals and Brother Ted bore the cross like no one else could, meaning completely without shame. He also secured the endorsement of Iowa's Christian kingmaker and failed GOP gubernatorial candidate Bob Vander Plaats.

And Ted's father, Pastor Rafael, is both an outspoken preacher and a cheerleader for the Apocalypse. These assets offered a stark contrast with Trump, who doesn't know his Bible or the proper etiquette for tithing.

Ted also benefited mightily from the predictable deflation of Dr. Ben Carson's bland balloon. And it didn't hurt that "someone" in Cruz's operation spread last-minute rumors about the good doctor's sudden exit from the campaign.

Not for nothing, Carson came a close second to Cruz in displaying considerable cross-bearing prowess. Thus, there was a lot of "crossover" among their supporters.

Finally, Iowa is actually something of a "kiss of death" for Republican candidates because it is such a demographic and ideological bubble, even in the rarefied world of homeschooling duck hunters, End Times enthusiasts and good ol' fashioned fans of the old time religion.

As Mike Huckabee and Rick Santorum showed in 2008 and 2012, a win in Iowa acts more like disqualification for the general election than a momentum builder on the way to a glorious victory. And have no doubt that GOP "insiders" are just fine with the idea that Ted will wear his Iowa victory like a pair of concrete galoshes.

No, the truly strange thing is that, according to entrance polling by CBS News (yes, there is such a thing), Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Florida, got a late boost from late-deciding voters. It was a big reason why he closed the gap on Trump. And it may be why Trump didn't hold his lead with caucus-goers as they turned out in

record numbers, many for the first time, to finally render judgment and pass the baton onto the voters of New Hampshire.

The key here is that despite months upon months of campaigning, retail politicking and a staggering \$43 million spent on *just* television advertising, a significant portion of Hawkeye State Republicans made up their minds in the final week.

And the CBS poll shows that many of late-breakers broke for the Neoconservative's Boy Wonder in "the last few days" following the much-discussed FOX News debate that Donald Trump notably skipped.

Of course, correlation is not necessarily causation. But there is absolutely no doubt that the GOP Establishment has struggled mightily to find a candidate or an attack that will derail the Trump juggernaut since he quickly and efficiently steamrolled its first choice, Jeb Bush.

Really, Trump's terse dismissal of The Next Bush In Line hit the GOP right in its softest parts, the lingering fallout of its cataclysmic War on Iraq and on its deeply corrupting ties to its deep-pocketed donor class.

When Trump called Jeb a "puppet of his donors," he summarily cut the strings between post-Citizens United puppeteers and their marionette of the moment.

And when Trump hammered the stupidity of the Bush family's legacy (and therefore the GOP's legacy) in Iraq he also blew open the rift between the Neocons and the GOP's latent Libertarian cadre of anti-imperial America-Firsters.

Trump's candid attacks made him a far more problematic option than their other antagonist, the aforementioned Cruz. That's because Cruz is a heavily-stringed candidate with ties to both Wall Street and Big Oil. Trump's freedom to turn on the GOP's bevy of big donors is a really big problem.

But perhaps most shockingly, Trump also engaged in a series of skirmishes with the GOP's most important organ, its most direct conduit to "the people" and its most effective mechanism for "changing narratives" and/or refocusing "the optics" to massage the perceptions of the American people.

That's right. Trump danced on the true third rail of GOP politics. Trump took on FOX News, repeatedly.

While the initial dust-ups with Megyn Kelly, the exceptionally bright, perfectly-crafted centerpiece of the network's smorgasbord of biased bloviators and fake experts, did little to derail Trump's momentum, the last episode ended up with Trump bowing out of the final, pre-caucus debate.

He did so ostensibly on the grounds that Megyn Kelly was unfair and because Trump was, according to prevailing narratives on both the unreflective Left and on the quietly ecstatic Establishment Right, afraid to face “tough questions” from a big, bad blonde named Megyn.

On its surface, that spin is inherently sexist. It presupposes that a woman cannot be intellectually intimidating and that a man who might be intimidated by a woman is a wimp or, at least, not very masculine. It was a favorite of storyline of self-identified progressives, by the way.

More importantly, though, this narrative completely missed the even stranger thing that happened on the way to the debate, the issuance of an Onion-style faux press release that taunted Trump with bogus, supposedly tongue-in-cheek accusations about his weakness in the face of international challenges. Even more strangely, the little missive insulted his supporters, many of whom are likely to be FOX viewers.

Sources told Politico that the unprecedented “teasing” of Trump was FOX Chairman Roger Ailes’ attempt to “redirect the heat” away from the network’s rising star. But long-time observers of the mainstream media will struggle to find another instance of a major news network mocking a major candidate of a major political party with a fake press release.

With the GOP Establishment wringing its hands raw over their party’s hostile takeover by a stringless and seemingly anti-interventionist candidate, it does stand to reason that Ailes, who is, for all intents and purposes, the *de facto* chairman of the GOP, saw an opportunity to “redirect” Trump away from the debate and, perhaps, derail the head of steam Trump was building in a series of polls leading up to the Iowa Caucus.

Make no mistake Trump was moving on up in the days before the debate.

According to RealClearPolitics’ poll tracker, Trump was up between 7 percent points and 10 percentage points in three different polls and he’d hit 31 percent, 31 percent and 32 percent to take the lead away from Cruz, who stalled in the mid-twenties.

Those numbers were released on the day of the debate in question and in those polls Rubio languished at 10 percent in one poll, and sat at 14 percent and 18 percent in the others.

At the time, many speculated that Trump was pulling a fast one on the field by bowing out and letting the circular firing squad retrain its sights on his closest competition, Ted Cruz. But Trump was also very clear that his final, terminal objection to the FOX debate was not the presence of Megyn Kelly.



Instead, the final straw was that sophomoric attempt at shaming him with that ham-handed attempt at humor.

Really, it is amazing that the “journalists” at FOX News didn’t walk out of the newsroom in protest of such a decidedly unprofessional and unprecedented ploy. Well, then again it is FOX News, right?

But maybe that “it is FOX News, after all” sense of the network was all the cover Ailes needed to throw a wrench into the Trump machine, right?

Once again, correlation is not causation. Unless someone comes forward with a memo or an on-the-record admission, we may never know the machinations that led to the press release. Just like we may never fully know if Rubio’s surge of late support was a response to Trump’s glaring absence from the debate. Trump certainly thinks his absence, along with a lackluster ground-game, may have cost him the top spot.

We do know, however, that Rubio was widely seen as the clear winner of that debate and among the rest of the uninspiring field he was able to stand out like Luke Skywalker in the bar scene from Star Wars.

Megyn Kelly followed up with an effusive post-Iowa interview of the third-place “winner” and Rush Limbaugh called him a “full-throated” conservative. That “throatiness” and his humble roots, perfectly programmed oratory skills, soft-focused good looks and “just-enough” ethnic flavor make him a made-to-order alternative to the abrasive, smirking, pedantic and almost car salesman-like timbre of Ted Cruz.

Apparently, Iowa’s Republicans, at least, those who don’t make Evangelicalism the Alpha and the Omega of their political decision-making, felt the same way as the Establishment.

Whether it is the culmination of a cunning plan to stump Trump or just the outcome of buyer’s remorse in front of their peers, their late choice of Rubio gave him a spin-able third place and gave the GOP’s cadre of cavernously pocketed donors a new lease on their lives of investing in politicians.

It’s a big deal for the biggest dealmakers, 500 of whom just attended another Koch Brothers conclave and, for the most part, bemoaned the lack of viable options on the shelves in their personal supermarket of democracy.

As Leigh Ann Caldwell of NBC News reported, there is widespread discomfort with both Trump’s stringless candidacy and with the large sums of money still wadded-up in their pockets. The Kochs’ “network” of donors has an \$889 million budget for the 2016 election cycle. Thus far, reports Caldwell, “they’ve spent less

than half of it, \$400 million, in 2015” and none of that amount on presidential politics.

They want to spend. Just not yet.

And those big donors who went ahead and poured over \$100 million into Jeb’s empty vessel campaign just watched it get spent with an almost unprecedented ineffectuality. They’re ready to jump to a viable alternative.

And Rubio, who may have gotten a little bank-shot help from Roger Ailes and even from his campaign’s part in ginning up the Dr. Ben Carson rumor-mill, is certainly the guy with the demonstrated willingness to soak-up cash from billionaires and toe the neoconservative lines they want to draw in Middle Eastern sand.

And his team is adept at playing fast and loose with IRS restrictions on non-profit status to wash campaign cash through their well-developed laundry machinery.

And that’s the kind of gold coin-operated political machinery that makes the GOP Establishment feel at home and feel like giving. Some are even holding their noses to dip into their pockets and prolong the candidacy of former Trump “bromancer” and unlikely nominee Ted Cruz as he escalates his feud with the counter-attacking Trump.

It’s yet another possible bank-shot that illustrates the extent to which Trump has broken up the Grand Old Party and, thus far, nullified their grand old game of gaming the system in their favor.

As big-time donor and Rubio enthusiast Frank VanderSloot told Bryan Clark of Idaho Post Register, “I don’t even want to talk about Donald Trump. He’s a disaster.”

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## Shaking Up the Democratic Party

By demanding a “revolution” to shift power away from Wall Street, Sen. Sanders is attracting millions of young Americans who want fundamental change. He’s also upsetting the Democratic establishment which favors only incremental “reforms” acceptable to corporate interests, as Norman Solomon notes.

By Norman Solomon

Forty-eight years ago, a serious insurrection jeopardized the power structure of the national Democratic Party for the first time in memory. Propelled by the movement against the Vietnam War, that grassroots uprising cast a big electoral shadow soon after Sen. Eugene McCarthy dared to challenge the incumbent for the Democratic presidential nomination.

When 1968 got underway, the news media were scoffing at McCarthy’s antiwar campaign as quixotic and doomed. But in the nation’s leadoff New Hampshire primary, McCarthy received 42 percent of the vote while President Lyndon B. Johnson couldn’t quite get to 50 percent – results that were shattering for LBJ. Suddenly emboldened, Sen. Robert Kennedy quickly entered the race. Two weeks later, Johnson announced that he wouldn’t seek re-election.

Although the nomination eventually went to Johnson’s vice president Hubert Humphrey – a supporter of the war who was the choice of Democratic power brokers – the unmasking of the party’s undemocratic process led to internal reforms that aided the Democratic Party’s second modern insurrection. It came four years later, when Sen. George McGovern won the presidential nomination, thanks to grassroots movements involving young people and activists of color. But any sense of triumph disappeared in the wake of President Nixon’s landslide re-election in November 1972.

The third major insurrection came in 1988, when Jesse Jackson led a dynamic, multiracial “rainbow” campaign for president that had major impacts on the national stage. (His previous campaign, in ’84, had been relatively weak.) The 1988 primaries and caucuses were hard-fought, state by state, with rainbow activists working shoulder-to-shoulder, whether focused on issues of class, race or gender. (Back then, Jackson was a gutsy voice for social justice, for human rights and against war – much more willing to confront the Democratic Party establishment than he is now.)

At the contentious Democratic National Convention that summer in Atlanta, where Jackson delegates were highly visible as 30 percent of the total, the old guard closed ranks behind nominee Michael Dukakis.

Now, as the delegate selection process for 2016 gets underway, we’re in the midst of the first major insurrection against the Democratic Party power

structure in 28 years. The millions of us who support the Bernie Sanders campaign – whatever our important criticisms – should aim to fully grasp the huge opportunities and obstacles that await us.

Of the three previous insurrections, only one gained the nomination, and none won the presidency. Corporate capitalism – wielding its muscular appendage, mass media – can be depended upon to take off the gloves and pummel the insurrection's candidate to the extent that the campaign has gained momentum. That happened to McCarthy, McGovern and Jackson. It's now happening to Sanders.

The last days of January brought one big-daily newspaper editorial after another after another attacking Bernie with vehemence and vitriol. The less unlikely his winning of the nomination gets, the more that mega-media assaults promoting absurdities will intensify.

Meanwhile – at least as long as her nomination is threatened from the left – Hillary Clinton will benefit from corporate biases that wallpaper the mass-media echo chambers. The Sunday *New York Times* editorial endorsing Clinton could hardly be more fanciful and hagiographic if written by her campaign.

Many of the same media outlets and overall corporate forces that denounced Eugene McCarthy in 1968, George McGovern in 1972 and Jesse Jackson in 1988 are gunning for Bernie Sanders in 2016. We shouldn't be surprised. But we should be ready, willing and able to do our own messaging – widely and intensely – in communities across the country.

At the same time, we should not confuse electoral campaigns with long-term political organizing. Campaigns for office are quite different matters than the more transformative task of building progressive infrastructure – and vibrant coalitions – that can endure and grow, year after year.

Genuinely progressive candidates can inspire and galvanize – and sometimes they can even win. But election campaigns, especially national ones, are almost always boom/bust. Sometimes they can help to fuel movement momentum, but they aren't the engine.

Election campaigns are distinct from movements even if they converge for a while, no matter what pundits and campaign spinners say. Candidates often want to harness social movements for their campaigns. But our best approach is to view electoral campaigns as – at best – subsets of movements, not the other way around.

The Bernie campaign could be a watershed for progressive organizing through the rest of this decade and beyond. That will largely depend on what activists do – in the next weeks, months and years.

Norman Solomon is the author of *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. He is the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy and co-founder of RootsAction.org.

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## Seeking More Cold War with Cuba

The neocons who dominate Official Washington speak most loudly through their flagship newspaper, The Washington Post, almost always seeking confrontation rather than cooperation in addressing the world's problems, such as Cold War-era hostility toward Cuba, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

A *Washington Post* editorial proclaims in its headline, "Failure in Cuba," with a bank head that declares, "Mr. Obama's opening is not leading to positive change." One should not expect anyone, including editorial boards, who have been opposed to a policy departure to change their own position quickly. But what the *Post* has to say about Cuba illustrates some unfortunate tendencies that have warped policy debate on other issues as well.

The biggest problem is the failure to ask, "What's the alternative?" And to ask as well, "Why should the alternative be expected to bring any better results, especially on the very criteria on which the policy at hand is being criticized?"

This failure was quite apparent in much of the opposition to the agreement to limit Iran's nuclear program, an agreement that was clearly superior to the only real alternative, which was the absence of an agreement, on most of the very topics that opponents themselves were raising, from the size of uranium stockpiles to the frequency of international inspections.

With regard to Cuba, this deficiency of the argumentation is even more glaring because the alternative to Mr. Obama's opening, i.e., a continued attempt to isolate and ostracize Cuba, has had an enormously long time to show what it can, or cannot do. In fact, it's had half a century to show that; the United States instituted a full economic embargo on Cuba in 1962.

The U.S. embargo and attempted isolation of Cuba are the archetype of a failed policy. That policy has failed to bring about hoped-for change either small (the *Post* editorial talks about rates for wi-fi service in Cuba) or large

(fundamental political change in the Castro regime) or much in between (including various human rights issues).

The inconsistency of the standards being applied in the editorial, as far as time and expectations are concerned, is ludicrously large. Evidently half a century, through ten different U.S. administrations, is deemed insufficient time to judge whether the policy of isolation can ever achieve any useful results. But the editorial criticizes President Obama's opening for not bringing about a "sea change in Cuba" during the brief time it has been in effect. The announcement of the move to restore diplomatic relations was barely more than year ago, and embassies were reopened only six months ago.

Another flaw in the argumentation that we have seen before is to pin everything on one policy change and to fail to take account of other important conditions. The big, important condition regarding U.S.-Cuban relations is that the economic embargo is still in effect. The Obama administration has been limited to changes it can make through executive action; the embargo stays in effect as long as a majority in Congress refuses to end it.

When the *Post* editorial writers complain about meager Cuban purchases of U.S. goods and little evidence of opportunities coming to the private sector in Cuba, that is properly considered an indictment of the continuing embargo rather than, as the editorial portrays it, a deficiency in the steps the administration has taken.

Repeated references in the *Post*'s piece to "unilateral concessions" made to Cuba reflects another unfortunately all-too-common tendency, which is to consider any hardship in a country with a regime we don't like to be good in its own right, and thus any lessening of economy-damaging sanctions or embargoes as a loss for the United States.

Damaging someone else's economy is of value only if helps to bring about some other desirable change in the other country's policies or behavior, which the embargo of Cuba has manifestly failed to do. The embargo has hurt ordinary Cubans most of all, and that hurt is of no positive value to the United States. Neither has it done any good for U.S. credibility worldwide, given that it is the United States, not Cuba, that has been isolated politically on the issue.

Before President Obama started to redirect it, U.S. policy toward Cuba had been (and with the embargo, still is) like an ugly and embarrassing time capsule. The embargo and attempted isolation are as antiquated as those 1950s-era American-made cars that the Cubans somehow manage to keep running.

The policy has been the political remnant of one particular generation of Cuban-

Americans who have had legitimate grievances against the Castro regime but have gotten stuck making one big gesture and never moved on to think about what works and what doesn't. The gesture lives on in the next generation most conspicuously in the person of Marco Rubio, whose stubborn defense of the embargo is inconsistent and illogical.

It would be good both for the United States and for the Cuban people if further generational change and political evolution can move this issue out of the 1960s and into the Twenty-first Century, where it belongs.

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## 'Cut-out' Anti-Drone Protest Brings Arrests

The U.S. government's lethal drone program continues to spark protests from anti-war activists, including a novel "blockade" outside upstate New York's Hancock air base where a dozen protesters arrayed life-size cut-outs of the late anti-war activist Jerry Berrigan and faced arrest.

On Jan. 28, 30 life-size cutouts of the late anti-war activist Jerry Berrigan brother of Dan and Phil Berrigan blockaded the main entrance of Hancock Air National Guard Base outside Syracuse, New York, where Jerry Berrigan lived. The cutouts of Jerry Berrigan were accompanied by 12 live nonviolent drone resisters, who were arrested after blockading for an hour and a half.

Jerry Berrigan, who died on July 26, 2015 at the age of 95, dedicated his life as did his brothers Dan and Phil Berrigan to Jesus's command to love one another. Jerry Berrigan came to the base on a bi-weekly basis whenever he was able, in his words, "to remind the base commander of our government's pledge under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, a treaty to safeguard non-combatant's well-being in any warzone in which U.S. forces are engaged in combat."

Berrigan also sought "to register horror and indignation at reports of bombing missions by drones in Afghanistan and Pakistan which resulted in the deaths of many innocent civilians; men, women and children."

Those arrested and jailed for standing with the Memorial were Beth Adams, Bev Rice, Bill Ofenloch, Brian Hynes, Charley Bowman, Ed Kinane, James Ricks, Joan Pleune, Joan Wages, Pete Perry, Steve Baggaly, and Ray McGovern. They were all charged with one misdemeanor and two violations, with the exception of Bev Rice and Joan Pleune, who were both charged with an additional misdemeanor (for allegedly violating an order of protection taken out by the base commander).

In 2008, Jerry Berrigan was asked if there was anything he would change in his life. Jerry replied, "I would have resisted more often and been arrested more often." The activists brought his image to the gates to remember that this is where he would be, speaking out and putting his body on the line to say a clear "NO" to killing. His widow was among the supporters on Thursday.

The group also remembered Mary Anne Grady Flores, who is serving a six-month sentence for violating an order of protection, taken out by the colonel at Hancock Air Base. As the protesters noted, courts in rural New York apparently believe that a colonel at this highly armed base needs protection from nonviolent citizens calling attention to the drone killings.

Evidence mounts regarding the illegality of U.S. drone policies, from the "Drone Papers" published by The Intercept, to the four drone pilots who have come forward to speak out about what this policy is doing. [See also, [http://www.democracynow.org/2015/11/20/numbing\\_horrible\\_former\\_drone\\_operator\\_brandon](http://www.democracynow.org/2015/11/20/numbing_horrible_former_drone_operator_brandon).]

Americans dependent on the *New York Times* and other mainstream media outlets know next to nothing about the drone killings, much less those who believe them to be crimes, the protesters noted.

The activists tried to deliver a letter addressed to the Hancock military personnel, stating "Under the U.S. Uniform Code of Military Justice you must not be complicit in these crimes against peace, crimes against humanity and war crimes. In fact, you are required to disobey unlawful orders from a superior."

Hancock Air Base deploys hunter/killer Reaper drones 24/7 over Afghanistan and probably elsewhere, the protesters said, calling these weaponized robotic drones instruments of terror because they perpetrate extrajudicial killings, violate due process, violate national sovereignty, and kill non-combatants and civilians.

[For more details, see [www.upstatedroneaction.org](http://www.upstatedroneaction.org)]

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# A Russian Diplomat's Take on the World

As the West's mainstream media portrays Russia as a crazy rogue state, Moscow's thoughtful critiques of world affairs are ignored, not fitting the propaganda theme. Such was the case when Foreign Minister Lavrov explained why there would be no more "business as usual" with the West, as Gilbert Doctorow describes.

By Gilbert Doctorow

On Jan. 26, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held an important year-in-review press conference before an audience of about 150 journalists, including the BBC correspondent Steve Rosenberg and many other well-known representatives of mainstream Western media. The purpose of this annual event is to look back at issues faced by his Ministry over the past year and to give his appraisal of results achieved.

Lavrov's opening remarks were concise, lasting perhaps 15 minutes, and the remaining two hours were turned over to the floor for questions. As the microphone was passed to journalists from many different countries, the discussion covered a great variety of subjects, including the likelihood of a new "re-set" with the United States, the negotiations over re-convening the Syrian peace talks in Geneva, British Prime Minister David Cameron's comments on the findings of a U.K. public inquest into the Litvinenko murder, the possibilities for reestablishing diplomatic relations with Georgia, and prospects for resolving conflicting claims over the Southern Kurile islands so as to conclude a peace treaty with Japan.

To the best of my knowledge, not a single report of the event has yet appeared on major online American, French, British and German newspaper portals or television channels. This was not for lack of substance or newsworthy sound bites, including Lavrov's headline comment that he agreed with Western leaders who said there would be "no business as usual" between Russia and the West.

As part of his opening comments, Lavrov said, "Our Western colleagues sometimes declare with passion that there can no longer be 'business as usual with Russia.' I am convinced that this is so and here we agree: there will be no more 'business as usual' when they tried to bind us with agreements which take into account above all the interests of either the European Union or the United States and they wanted to persuade us that this will do no harm to our interests. That history is over and done with. A new stage of history is dawning which can develop only on the basis of equal rights and all other principles of international law."

Regarding a similar news blackout that followed another major Russian press briefing, the sharp-tongued Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova commented, what are all these accredited Western reporters doing in Moscow if nothing gets published abroad? Do they have some other occupation?

In keeping with custom, the Russian Foreign Ministry posted the entire [video](#) recording of Lavrov's press conference on youtube.com and posted transcripts in Russian and English on the [www.mid.ru](#) site. The Russian version takes up 26 tightly spaced printed pages. This is what I have used, since I prefer to go to the source and do my own translations when I have the option. The English version probably takes 40 pages, given the normal expansion from Russian to English in the translation process.

What I noted first in the television broadcast on Russia's *Pervy Kanal* and then in the transcript was both how well prepared Lavrov was to deal with a plethora of issues and how he gave detailed answers that went on for many minutes without making reference to any notes.

Secondly, it was obvious he spoke more "freely," using fewer diplomatic euphemisms than I have ever seen before. I conclude that he was given a nod by his boss, President Vladimir Putin, not to hold back, to speak with perfect clarity. Given his experience as one of the longest-serving foreign ministers among the major powers and his innate intellect, Lavrov delivered what sounds at times like dictation for essays in proper written Russian.

For these reasons, I have decided to divide my treatment of the press conference into two parts. One will be Lavrov in his own words. And the other will be my conclusions about the international environment in the coming year given Russia's basic positions, particularly the possible lifting of sanctions on Russia by the United States and the European Union and how the next U.S. administration can best prepare for relations with Russia, assuming there is no dramatic change in the thinking of American elites.

### **Sergey Lavrov in His Own Words**

From the press briefing, I have extracted several big chunks of text that characterize the overarching views on international relations of Lavrov and the Kremlin, applying their Realpolitik prism and focused primarily on U.S.-Russian relations. This is essential if we are not to lose sight of the forest for the trees.

In questions and answers dealing with all countries but one, we hear about separate issues in various locations around the world holding interest mainly for discrete national audiences with their private concerns. With respect to one

country, the U.S., Russia's bilateral relations transcend the minister's in-basket of contingencies.

Indeed, the whole Russian foreign policy really is about relations with the U.S. as expressed in the first two of the three passages in quotation marks below. The third passage, on sanctions, would seem to be more about relations with the E.U. I selected it because the issue of lifting sanctions will surely be a key foreign policy issue facing Russia in the first six months of this year, and behind it all looms the U.S. position on the question.

Question: Is a "re-set" possible in this final year of Barack Obama's administration?

Lavrov: "The question should not be addressed to us. Our inter-state ties sank very low despite the excellent personal relations between former U.S. President George Bush and Russian President Putin. When U.S. President Barack Obama came to the White House and former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton offered a "re-set," this reflected the fact that Americans themselves finally saw the abnormality of the situation wherein Russia and the USA were not cooperating to solve those problems which could not be decided without them...

"We gave a rather constructive response to the "re-set." We said that we appreciate the decision of the new Administration to correct the errors of its predecessors. We achieved quite a lot: the New START Treaty, the entry of Russia into the WTO, an array of new agreements on various conflict situations. But somehow this quickly began to drop back to zero. Now everyone, including our American colleagues, is telling us: "Just fulfill the Minsk accords on Ukraine and immediately everything will return to normal. We will immediately cancel the sanctions and tempting prospects of cooperation will open up between Russia and the United States over much more pleasant issues, not just in the management of crises; right away a constructive partnership program will take shape."

"We are open for cooperation with everyone on an equal, mutually advantageous basis. We, of course, do not want anyone to build their policy based on the assumption that Russia and not Ukraine must fulfill the Minsk accords. It is written there who must fulfill them. I hope that this is well known to the USA. At least, my latest contacts with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, the contacts of Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland with Assistant to the Russian President Surkov indicate that the USA can sort out the essence of the Minsk accords. *Grosso modo*, everyone understands everything. ...

"I have just mentioned that people have begun to promise a new "re-set." If we fulfill the Minsk accords, then immediately everything will become fine, with splendid and tempting prospects.

“But the cooling off of relations with the Administration of U.S. President Barack Obama and the end of the period associated with ‘re-set” began long before the Ukraine. Let’s remember how this occurred. First, when we finally got the consent of our Western partners to terms of our joining the WTO which were acceptable to Russia, the Americans understood that it was not in their interests to keep the Jackson-Vanik amendment. Otherwise they would be deprived of those privileges and advantages which are linked to our participation in the WTO. They began to prepare for the removal of this amendment.

“But Americans would not be Americans if they simply abolished it and said, ‘Enough, let’s now cooperate normally.’ They dreamed up the “Magnitsky Act,” although I am certain that what happened to Magnitsky was not set up. I very much hope that the truth will become known to everyone. It is disgusting how a provocation and speculation were built up around the death of a man. Nonetheless, this was done and you know who lobbied for this “Magnitsky Act,” which immediately replaced the Jackson-Vanik amendment.”□

[The Magnitsky Act was enacted by the U.S. Congress in 2012 with the goal of punishing Russian officials believed responsible for the death of Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer who died in prison in 2009 amid accusations and counter-accusations of fraud.]

‘This all began when there was still no Ukraine [crisis], although they now try to lay the blame on violations of OSCE principles. Everything that is going on between the West and Russia is explained by the fact that Russia did not fulfill its obligations, did not respect the world order which was put together in Europe after the Helsinki Act [of 1975], etc. These are all attempts to justify and find an excuse for continuing the policy of containment. But this policy never ended.

‘After the ‘Magnitsky Act’ [in 2012], there was the completely inappropriate, overblown reaction to what happened to Edward Snowden, who found himself in Russia against our wishes [in 2013]. We did not know about this. He did not have a passport, his document was canceled while he was in flight. He could not go anywhere from Russia because of decisions taken in Washington. We could not help but give him the possibility to remain in Russia so as to stay safe, knowing which articles of the law they were threatening him with. The Americans made no secret about this. This was done simply as an elementary protection of a person’s right to life.

“U.S. President Barack Obama then canceled his visit to Russia. They made a huge scandal. Dozens of telephone calls came in from the FBI, from the CIA, the State Department. There were direct contacts with the President. They told us that if we do not give up Snowden, then relations will be broken off. The USA canceled

the visit. It did not take place but U.S. President Obama came for the G-20 Summit in St. Petersburg, where we, by the way, did something useful, we reached agreement on the principles of the removal of Syria's chemical weapons.

"Ukraine was just a pretext. The Ukrainian crisis is linked not so much with justified concern over an alleged violation by Russia of the Helsinki principles (although everything began with Kosovo, with the [1999] bombing of Yugoslavia, etc). This was an expression of irritation that the *coup d'état* did not lead to the results that were expected by those who supported it.

"I will tell you honestly that we don't hold a grudge. We have no such traditions in relations between states. We understand that life is tougher than any ideal, romantic scheme like "re-set" or similar. We also understand that this is a world in which there are harsh clashes of interests that come down to us from the age of the West's total domination and it is in the midst of a long transition period to a more durable system in which there will not be one or even two dominant poles, there will be several. The transition period is long and painful. Old habits die slowly. We all understand this.

"We understand that the USA is interested in having fewer competitors even with regards to those comparable to it in size, influence, military power, economy. We see this in the relations between the USA and China, in how the USA works with the European Union, trying to create a ring around it via the Transatlantic Partnership, and to the east of Russia, to create a Trans-Pacific Partnership which will not include Russia and China. Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke about this in detail when he analyzed the processes at work in the world economy and politics. We understand all of this.

"Surely every age brings with it new tendencies, frames of mind in one or another of the elites, especially in major countries which see in their own fashion the ways to fight for their interests. It would be very bad and ruinous for all of us if these processes moved outside the framework of generally accepted norms of international law.

"Then, simply put, everything would be topsy-turvy, and we would be drawn into a world of anarchy and chaos, something like what is going on in the Near East, perhaps without bloodshed. Each would act as he reckons necessary and nothing good would come out of this. It is very important to observe some kind of general rules of play.

"To answer your question, I would like for the USA to have a "re-set" with the whole world, so that the "re-set" was general, so that we could gather together and reconfirm our commitment to the UN Charter, to the principles embodied in it, including non-interference in internal affairs, respect for the sovereignty

and territorial integrity and the right of peoples to self-determination, the right of peoples to choose their own future without interference from outside.”

Question: “At the Munich Security Conference in 2007 President Putin said to the West, “you need us more than we need you.” Is that still Russia’s position?”

Lavrov: “Ideally we both need one another to face the challenges and threats. But, the reality is different. The West comes to us much more often for help than we come to the West.”□

(Lavrov said that in response to Western sanctions, Russia was striving to be self-sufficient and promoting import substitution, but not trying to cut itself off from the world and ready for cooperation based on equality.)

“We must do everything to ensure we do not depend on the whim of one or another group of countries, above all from our Western partners,” as happened when the West took offense at Russia for supporting ethnic Russians in Ukraine who did not recognize the 2014 *coup d’etat*.

“I have cited Dmitry Yarosh [leader of the radical nationalists, the Right Sector] that they wanted to destroy Russian speakers in Ukraine or deprive them of their rights. We want to insure ourselves against such situations.”

“I note that it’s not we who are running to our European colleagues and saying, “Let’s do something to remove the sanctions.” Not at all. We are focused on not depending on such zigzags in Western policy, not depending on Europe’s saluting the USA. But in our bilateral contacts our European colleagues, when they come to us or meet us in international forums, say: “Let’s think of something. Help us carry out the Minsk accords, otherwise these sanctions will do a lot of damage. We want to turn the page.”

“It turns out that in this situation we are needed more by them than they are needed by us. Including for fulfillment of the Minsk accords. Yes, we have influence in Donbass [the ethnic Russian section of eastern Ukraine] and we support them. Surely, without our help and humanitarian deliveries Donbass would be in a pitiful state. But one also has to exert influence in Kiev. We need the West to influence the Kiev authorities, but so far this is not happening.

“Or look at the question of the Iranian nuclear program. At the decisive stages of these negotiations we were literally bombarded with requests when it was necessary to solve the questions of exporting enriched uranium in exchange for natural uranium, which was the key condition for achieving agreements; when it was necessary to resolve the question about who will convert the enrichment sites at Fordu into research for production of medical isotopes, etc.

“They came with requests to us, requests which carry a significant financial burden, or at least which do not bring any material benefit. But we fulfilled our part of the work. Now everyone is calling us and our Chinese colleagues about the North Korean problem: ‘help us do something to make North Korea observe its obligations.’ Or take the case of Syria.”

“I can’t think of any requests we made to our Western colleagues recently. We don’t believe it is proper to make requests. After you sign agreements following negotiations, you now have to execute obligations, not to make requests for favors.”

Question on whether sanctions will end early.

Lavrov: “I’d say that among a large number of our partners there is the awareness that they cannot go on this way any longer, that this is harmful to them. Our justification for speaking about some possible positive changes comes down to the following: our Western partners more and more often begin to understand that they have fallen into a trap of their own making when they said that they will lift the sanctions after Russia fulfills the Minsk accords. They have now understood that, very likely, this was a ‘slip of the tongue.’”

“But in Kiev this was heard very often and was interpreted as an indulgence allowing them not to carry out the Minsk accords. Their failure to perform not only means that Kiev does not have to undertake any actions and fulfill its obligations. It also means that the West will have to keep the sanctions in place against Russia. It was necessary to prove all of this to some gentlemen who are in Kiev fanning radical attitudes.”

“The West understands the hopelessness of the present situation, when everyone pretends that Russia must fulfill the Minsk accords but Ukraine can do nothing, not change its constitution, not give a special status to the Donbass, not put through an amnesty, not organize elections in consultation with Donbass. Everyone understands that no one will resolve these things for Ukraine.

“Everyone understands that this is abnormal, something pathological which emerged in turning the Ukrainian crisis, which arose as a result of an absolutely illegal, anti-constitutional *coup d’etat*, into a measuring stick for all relations between Russia and the West. This is absolutely abnormal, an unhealthy situation, artificially fanned from countries that are far removed from Europe. Europe no longer wants to be held hostage to this situation. For me, this is obvious.”

## **General Conclusions**

In presenting these three long excerpts from Lavrov’s Jan. 26 press conference,

my intention was to give readers a feel for Lavrov's method of argumentation and his somber tone in what was delivered without notes and in response to questions from journalists in the audience.

In his prepared opening remarks, Lavrov had already set out some of the key points in the overall approach to international affairs from Russia's analytical tool of realism and national interest. The number one issue facing Russia and the world from his perspective is to arrive at a new system of managing international affairs. Russia's relations with the West are part and parcel of this broader challenge.

This wished-for new system would be one built on full equality of relations between states, respect for their interests and non-interference in internal affairs. Lavrov was repeating Vladimir Putin's call upon nations to re-dedicate themselves to the principles of the United Nations Charter that Putin issued in New York in September 2015 at the 70th anniversary gathering of the General Assembly. The new system of global governance will come about as a result of reforms to the basic international institutions whereby political and economic power is reallocated in ways that reflect changes in relative economic and military power of nations from the days when these institutions were established.

By itself, there is nothing particular new in this vision. It has been in the public domain for years and guided calls for readjusting the voting powers within the International Monetary Fund. The novel element, which will be shocking to many in Washington, was Sergey Lavrov's clear and repeated identification of the United States as the power frustrating the renewal of world governance by stubbornly defending its hegemonic control of institutions and seeking to consolidate still further its control over its allies in Europe and Asia at the expense of their national interests and in furtherance of its own interests.

Hence, Lavrov's mention of the TPP and TIPP projects. Hence, his repeated mention of forces from afar, meaning the U.S., that have imposed European sanctions on Russia against the wishes of separate E.U. member states.

At one point, in responding to a journalist from Japan, Lavrov completely abandoned veiled language. He said Russia favored in principle giving a permanent seat on the UN Security Council to Japan, but would do so only when it was clear Japan will contribute its own national views to deliberations, broadening the perspectives on the table, and not merely provide the United States with an additional voting member under its control.

It is interesting that Lavrov explicitly denied that Russia feels "offended," or



as I have written using an alternative translation, “holds a grudge” over how it has been treated by the United States in the downward spiral of relations from the high point of the 2009 “re-set” to today’s nadir.

The context for this remark is the ever-present denunciations in mainstream Western media of Vladimir Putin’s speeches on foreign affairs. Putin’s observations on how things went awry since the end of the Cold War are regularly categorized as “diatribes” and “revisionist,” by which is meant aggressive, threatening and possibly irrational.

Lavrov said Russia acknowledges it is a tough world out there and competition is harsh. That is the true sense of his headline remark that there can be no return to “business as usual” or the idealistic notions underlying the “re-set” even when the current sanctions against Russia are lifted.

Russia is nonetheless open for business on equal and mutually advantageous terms where and when possible. In this regard, Lavrov is in complete agreement with American experts like Angela Stent at Georgetown University who advise the incoming U.S. administration in 2017 against planning some new “re-set.” They come to that common conclusion from diametrically opposed premises over who is responsible for the new reality.

Lavrov speaks of our being in a long and painful transition period from a world dominated by the West, which in turn is dominated by one power, the United States, to a multipolar world with a number of key participants in global governance. But that does not exclude amelioration and he appears to share the view now spreading in Western media, that U.S. and European sanctions will be lifted in the near future.

One recent example of this expectation that generates euphoria in Western business circles appeared in Bloomberg online the day before Lavrov’s news conference: “Russian Entente Nears as Allies Hint at End of Ukraine Sanctions.”

The important message, which Sergey Lavrov delivered on Jan. 26, is that Russia has not and will not mend its ways. He told us Russia did not beg for relief from sanctions and is not trading its support for Bashar al-Assad in Syria in return for relief over Ukraine.

We may be sure that the United States and the European Union will present the lifting of sanctions as a trade-off. But the reality will be a retreat from a policy that is unsustainable because it harms Western interests far more than Russian interests. This was the sense of Lavrov’s insistence that the West needs Russia more than Russia needs the West.

The present, ongoing economic harm to European farmers and other select sectors

of the economy from Russia's tit-for-tat embargo is obvious. The harm to U.S. interests is more subtle.

It was recently highlighted in an article published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine by a research fellow of the Cato Institute entitled "Not-So Smart Sanctions." There we read that the Washington establishment is finally worried over the creation by Russia and China of alternative global financial institutions to those based in Washington.

The BRICS Bank, the Asia Infrastructure Development Bank, the introduction of bank clearing centers competing with SWIFT: all are intended to end, once and for all, America's possibilities for inflicting crippling economic pain on those falling into its latest list of enemies as was done to punish the Kremlin over annexation of Crimea and intervention in Donbass.

Lavrov spoke repeatedly about defending "national interests" as the guiding principle of foreign relations. In this connection, the shadow of Hans Morgenthau, a founder and major theorist of America's Realist School, may be said to have shared the podium with him. But Lavrov and the Russians have taken to a new level the principles set out in *Politics Among Nations*, Morgenthau's famous textbook which generations of American college students once studied in their Government 101 courses.

Lavrov's Russia is calling upon nations to shed their chains, to stop pushing their national interests to one side while listening to instructions from Washington. Nations should compete and jostle for influence in a free market of ideas and influences, while playing by generally recognized rules.

If the rules are followed, the international environment will not collapse into chaos notwithstanding sharp contradictions between nations.

**Gilbert Doctorow is the European Coordinator, American Committee for East West Accord, Ltd. His latest book *Does Russia Have a Future?* (August 2015) is available in paperback and e-book from Amazon.com and affiliated websites. For donations to support the European activities of ACEWA, write to [eastwestaccord@gmail.com](mailto:eastwestaccord@gmail.com). © Gilbert Doctorow, 2015**

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