

# Intel Vets Challenge 'Russia Hack' Evidence

In a memo to President Trump, a group of former U.S. intelligence officers, including NSA specialists, cite new forensic studies to challenge the claim of the key Jan. 6 "assessment" that Russia "hacked" Democratic emails last year.

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** The President

**FROM:** Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

**SUBJECT:** Was the "Russian Hack" an Inside Job?

## *Executive Summary*

Forensic studies of "Russian hacking" into Democratic National Committee computers last year reveal that on July 5, 2017, data was **leaked (not hacked)** by a person with physical access to DNC computers, and then doctored to incriminate Russia.

After examining metadata from the "Guccifer 2.0" July 5, 2016 intrusion into the DNC server, independent cyber investigators have concluded that an insider copied DNC data onto an external storage device, and that "telltale signs" implicating Russia were then inserted.

Key among the findings of the independent forensic investigations is the conclusion that the DNC data was copied onto a storage device **at a speed that far exceeds an Internet capability for a remote hack**. Of equal importance, the forensics show that the copying and doctoring were performed on the East coast of the U.S. Thus far, mainstream media have ignored the findings of these independent studies [see [here](#) and [here](#)].

Independent analyst Skip Folden, a retired IBM Program Manager for Information Technology US, who examined the recent forensic findings, is a co-author of this Memorandum. He has drafted a more detailed technical report titled "Cyber-Forensic Investigation of 'Russian Hack' and Missing Intelligence Community Disclaimers," and sent it to the offices of the Special Counsel and the Attorney General. VIPS member William Binney, a former Technical Director at the National Security Agency, and other senior NSA "alumni" in VIPS attest to the professionalism of the independent forensic findings.

The recent forensic studies fill in a critical gap. Why the FBI neglected to perform any independent forensics on the original "Guccifer 2.0" material remains a mystery – as does the lack of any sign that the "hand-picked analysts"

from the FBI, CIA, and NSA, who wrote the “Intelligence Community Assessment” dated January 6, 2017, gave any attention to forensics.

**NOTE:** There has been so much conflation of charges about hacking that we wish to make very clear the primary focus of this Memorandum. We focus specifically on the July 5, 2016 alleged Guccifer 2.0 “hack” of the DNC server. In earlier VIPS memoranda we addressed the lack of any evidence connecting the Guccifer 2.0 alleged hacks and WikiLeaks, and we asked President Obama specifically to disclose any evidence that WikiLeaks received DNC data from the Russians [see [here](#) and [here](#)].

Addressing this point at his last press conference (January 18), he described “the conclusions of the intelligence community” as “not conclusive,” even though the Intelligence Community Assessment of January 6 expressed “high confidence” that Russian intelligence “relayed material it acquired from the DNC ... to WikiLeaks.”

Obama’s admission came as no surprise to us. It has long been clear to us that the reason the U.S. government lacks conclusive evidence of a transfer of a “Russian hack” to WikiLeaks is because there was no such transfer. Based mostly on the cumulatively unique technical experience of our ex-NSA colleagues, we have been saying for almost a year that the DNC data reached WikiLeaks via a copy/leak by a DNC insider (but almost certainly not the same person who copied DNC data on July 5, 2016).

From the information available, we conclude that the same inside-DNC, copy/leak *process* was used at two different times, by two different entities, for two distinctly different purposes:

-(1) an inside leak to WikiLeaks before Julian Assange announced on June 12, 2017, that he had DNC documents and planned to publish them (which he did on July 22) – the presumed objective being to expose strong DNC bias toward the Clinton candidacy; and

-(2) a separate leak on July 5, 2016, to pre-emptively taint anything WikiLeaks might later publish by “showing” it came from a “Russian hack.”

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Mr. President:

This is our first VIPS Memorandum for you, but we have a history of letting U.S. Presidents know when we think our former intelligence colleagues have gotten something important wrong, and why. For example, our first such [memorandum](#), a same-day commentary for President George W. Bush on Colin Powell’s U.N. speech

on March 5, 2003, warned that the “unintended consequences were likely to be catastrophic,” should the U.S. attack Iraq and “justify” the war on intelligence that we retired intelligence officers could readily see as fraudulent and driven by a war agenda.

The January 6 “Intelligence Community Assessment” by “hand-picked” analysts from the FBI, CIA, and NSA seems to fit into the same agenda-driven category. It is largely based on an “assessment,” not supported by any apparent evidence, that a shadowy entity with the moniker “Guccifer 2.0” hacked the DNC on behalf of Russian intelligence and gave DNC emails to WikiLeaks.

The recent forensic findings mentioned above have put a huge dent in that assessment and cast serious doubt on the underpinnings of the extraordinarily successful campaign to blame the Russian government for hacking. The pundits and politicians who have led the charge against Russian “meddling” in the U.S. election can be expected to try to cast doubt on the forensic findings, if they ever do bubble up into the mainstream media. But the principles of physics don’t lie; and the technical limitations of today’s Internet are widely understood. We are prepared to answer any substantive challenges on their merits.

You may wish to ask CIA Director Mike Pompeo what he knows about this. Our own lengthy intelligence community experience suggests that it is possible that neither former CIA Director John Brennan, nor the cyber-warriors who worked for him, have been completely candid with their new director regarding how this all went down.

### **Copied, Not Hacked**

As indicated above, the independent forensic work just completed focused on data *copied (not hacked)* by a shadowy persona named “Guccifer 2.0.” The forensics reflect what seems to have been a desperate effort to “blame the Russians” for publishing highly embarrassing DNC emails three days before the Democratic convention last July. Since the content of the DNC emails reeked of pro-Clinton bias, her campaign saw an overriding need to divert attention from content to provenance – as in, who “hacked” those DNC emails? The campaign was enthusiastically supported by a compliant “mainstream” media; they are still on a roll.

“The Russians” were the ideal culprit. And, after WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange announced on June 12, 2016, “We have emails related to Hillary Clinton which are pending publication,” her campaign had more than a month before the convention to insert its own “forensic facts” and prime the media pump to put the blame on “Russian meddling.” Mrs. Clinton’s PR chief Jennifer Palmieri has explained how she used golf carts to make the rounds at the convention. She

wrote that her “mission was to get the press to focus on something even we found difficult to process: the prospect that Russia had not only hacked and stolen emails from the DNC, but that it had done so to help Donald Trump and hurt Hillary Clinton.”

Independent cyber-investigators have now completed the kind of forensic work that the intelligence assessment did not do. Oddly, the “hand-picked” intelligence analysts contented themselves with “assessing” this and “assessing” that. In contrast, the investigators dug deep and came up with verifiable evidence from metadata found in the record of the alleged Russian hack.

They found that the purported “hack” of the DNC by Guccifer 2.0 was not a hack, by Russia or anyone else. Rather it originated with a copy (onto an external storage device – a thumb drive, for example) by an insider. The data was leaked after being doctored with a cut-and-paste job to implicate Russia. We do not know who or what the murky Guccifer 2.0 is. You may wish to ask the FBI.

### **The Time Sequence**

**June 12, 2016:** Assange announces WikiLeaks is about to publish “emails related to Hillary Clinton.”

**June 15, 2016:** DNC contractor CrowdStrike, (with a dubious professional record and multiple conflicts of interest) announces that malware has been found on the DNC server and claims there is evidence it was injected by Russians.

**June 15, 2016:** On the same day, “Guccifer 2.0” affirms the DNC statement; claims responsibility for the “hack;” claims to be a WikiLeaks source; and posts a document that the forensics show was synthetically tainted with “Russian fingerprints.”

We do not think that the June 12 & 15 timing was pure coincidence. Rather, it suggests the start of a pre-emptive move to associate Russia with anything WikiLeaks might have been about to publish and to “show” that it came from a Russian hack.

### **The Key Event**

**July 5, 2016:** In the early evening, Eastern Daylight Time, someone working in the EDT time zone with a computer directly connected to the DNC server or DNC Local Area Network, copied 1,976 MegaBytes of data in 87 seconds onto an external storage device. ***That speed is many times faster than what is physically possible with a hack.***

It thus appears that the purported “hack” of the DNC by Guccifer 2.0 (the self-

proclaimed WikiLeaks source) was not a hack by Russia or anyone else, but was rather a copy of DNC data onto an external storage device. Moreover, the forensics performed on the metadata reveal there was a subsequent synthetic insertion – a cut-and-paste job using a Russian template, with the clear aim of attributing the data to a “Russian hack.” This was all performed in the East Coast time zone.

### **“Obfuscation & De-obfuscation”**

Mr. President, the disclosure described below may be related. Even if it is not, it is something we think you should be made aware of in this general connection. On March 7, 2017, WikiLeaks began to publish a trove of original CIA documents that WikiLeaks labeled “Vault 7.” WikiLeaks said it got the trove from a current or former CIA contractor and described it as comparable in scale and significance to the information Edward Snowden gave to reporters in 2013.

No one has challenged the authenticity of the original documents of Vault 7, which disclosed a vast array of cyber warfare tools developed, probably with help from NSA, by CIA’s Engineering Development Group. That Group was part of the sprawling CIA Directorate of Digital Innovation – a growth industry established by John Brennan in 2015.

Scarcely imaginable digital tools – that can take control of your car and make it race over 100 mph, for example, or can enable remote spying through a TV – were described and duly reported in the New York Times and other media throughout March. But the Vault 7, part 3 release on March 31 that exposed the “Marble Framework” program apparently was judged too delicate to qualify as “news fit to print” and was kept out of the Times.

The Washington Post’s Ellen Nakashima, it seems, “did not get the memo” in time. Her March 31 article bore the catching (and accurate) headline: **“WikiLeaks’ latest release of CIA cyber-tools could blow the cover on agency hacking operations.”**

The WikiLeaks release indicated that Marble was designed for flexible and easy-to-use “obfuscation,” and that Marble source code includes a “deobfuscator” to reverse CIA text obfuscation.

More important, the CIA reportedly used Marble during 2016. In her Washington Post report, Nakashima left that out, but did include another significant point made by WikiLeaks; namely, that the obfuscation tool could be used to conduct a “forensic attribution double game” or false-flag operation because it included test samples in Chinese, Russian, Korean, Arabic and Farsi.

The CIA’s reaction was neuralgic. Director Mike Pompeo lashed out two weeks

later, calling Assange and his associates “demons,” and insisting, “It’s time to call out WikiLeaks for what it really is, a non-state hostile intelligence service, often abetted by state actors like Russia.”

Mr. President, we do not know if CIA’s Marble Framework, or tools like it, played some kind of role in the campaign to blame Russia for hacking the DNC. Nor do we know how candid the denizens of CIA’s Digital Innovation Directorate have been with you and with Director Pompeo. These are areas that might profit from early White House review.

### **Putin and the Technology**

We also do not know if you have discussed cyber issues in any detail with President Putin. In his interview with NBC’s Megyn Kelly, he seemed quite willing – perhaps even eager – to address issues related to the kind of cyber tools revealed in the Vault 7 disclosures, if only to indicate he has been briefed on them. Putin pointed out that today’s technology enables hacking to be “masked and camouflaged to an extent that no one can understand the origin” [of the hack] ... And, vice versa, it is possible to set up any entity or any individual that everyone will think that they are the exact source of that attack.”

“Hackers may be anywhere,” he said. “There may be hackers, by the way, in the United States who very craftily and professionally passed the buck to Russia. Can’t you imagine such a scenario? ... I can.”

**Full Disclosure:** Over recent decades the ethos of our intelligence profession has eroded in the public mind to the point that agenda-free analysis is deemed well nigh impossible. Thus, we add this disclaimer, which applies to everything we in VIPS say and do: We have no political agenda; our sole purpose is to spread truth around and, when necessary, hold to account our former intelligence colleagues.

We speak and write without fear or favor. Consequently, any resemblance between what we say and what presidents, politicians and pundits say is purely coincidental. The fact we find it is necessary to include that reminder speaks volumes about these highly politicized times. This is our 50<sup>th</sup> VIPS Memorandum since the afternoon of Powell’s speech at the UN. Live links to the 49 past memos can be found at <https://consortiumnews.com/vips-memos/>.

FOR THE STEERING GROUP, VETERAN INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS FOR SANITY

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## Trump's Foreign Policy Mishmash

Under fierce attack from the moment of his stunning election, President Trump has failed to pursue a coherent foreign policy as he mixes and matches old-style belligerence with an ad hoc pragmatism, explains Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

President Trump's foreign policy has been an incredible mishmash of contradictions, perhaps partly a result of unsuccessful tactical concessions to keep his political enemies forever guessing his real intentions. But the underlying reality is that many of his personnel choices have created an organizational chart that would fit the agenda of a neoconservative president.

Trump has appointed a great many advisers and administrators at odds with his America First vision, people such as National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster; Fiona Hill of the National Security Council staff; Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley; and Secretary of Defense James "Mad Dog" Mattis. None of them share Trump's overall vision of having the United States step back from day-to-day running of the world and engaging in never-ending wars, refocusing the nation on rebuilding its infrastructure and job creation.

The announcement this past week that President Trump is proceeding with the nomination of Jon Huntsman to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Russia falls entirely in line with this pattern. Though Huntsman does not speak a word of Russian, he has great talents and professional experience as a diplomat, having served as George W. Bush's ambassador to China. Yet, as the chair of the Atlantic Council, a pro-NATO/anti-Russia think tank, his world view is both clear and anti-Trump. Moreover, in his service in Beijing, Huntsman was solicitous of anti-regime forces, at times as disruptive as President Obama's Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul was in Moscow.

So, Donald Trump has assembled a foreign policy and security policy team that would give an incoming President Mike Pence the framework for a fully integrated Cold War administration if Trump were impeached or otherwise removed from office. With the possible exception of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Trump has not appointed anyone to positions requiring Senate confirmation who doesn't fit this mold. Tillerson, the former Exxon/Mobil CEO, may share some of Trump's more pragmatic goals but lacks any overriding strategic vision.

Beyond personnel, Trump has sought to show that he is no wimp by ordering a missile strike against Syria for an alleged use of chemical weapons and dropping the world's largest conventional bomb on an Islamic State target in Afghanistan. But those demonstrations have not kept his detractors at bay for long, while making a muddle of his foreign policy, which the President has compounded by taking contradictory positions from day to day, such as when he threw Poland an anti-Russia bone before making a display of friendship with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the G-20 summit in Germany.

**The 'Secret' Meeting**



This past week's supposedly sensational news about a second "secret" meeting between Trump and Putin during the G-20's festive dinner may offer a more accurate insight into Trump's approach to foreign policy. The meeting took place in the presence of all the other heads of state, but nonetheless was exceptional insofar as it defied protocol. The U.S. President sat down next to Putin for a tête-à-tête without any of the U.S. delegation present and relying solely on the Russian interpreter to facilitate the conversation.

A *Washington Post* editorial focused on this fact: "To carefully calibrate messages to world leaders, presidents usually rely on an elaborate bureaucratic machine, including the interagency process and the National Security Council staff. Mr. Trump's dinner chat showed once again his proclivity to act alone, and he undoubtedly created headaches. With no U.S. note-taker or interpreter, the U.S. national security structure was left without a record of the exchange, except for Mr. Trump's memory."

I would differ with the Post's analysis in one key respect: Trump's "proclivity to act alone" was not some ad hoc capricious act; it is the essence of his method of rule. Trump has chosen not to blend in with the status quo or to do things like other presidents have, but to run things as he did the Trump business empire, through a tiny circle of family members and trusted retainers operating outside any traditional corporate structure.

However, by rejecting past protocols and relying on non-expert friends and relations, Trump may be giving impetus to the drive to remove him from office. Policies built by Trump's hands-on style are intrinsically no better than the policies built on an established bureaucracy, even one that has perpetuated its own secrecy and lies. Neither approach fulfills the principles of a democracy in which officials should be open and accountable to the citizens.

Today's front page news that Trump accepts the latest congressional sanctions bill now before the House – directed against North Korea, Iran and Russia – is still more evidence of Trump's lack of a coherent foreign policy. The bill, if enacted, will be a major obstacle to any improved or even normalized relations with Russia. It seeks to destroy the Russian-German Nordstream II project by targeting European partners and implementers and thus has raised the alarm of the otherwise tame, if not subservient, European Commission. And it goes against the entire logic of Trump's foreign policy.

If Trump were to act like someone interested in defending the agenda that he ran on – refocusing the U.S. government on rebuilding America rather than trying to run the world – he would be rallying his supporters and reaching out to the broad public to educate them about the folly and likely harm of the sanctions bill. He would openly fight it by threatening a veto and making his position

crystal clear. Instead, he is falling into line with the Washington Consensus.

How much longer must we wait for a government that opens its plans to a meaningful public debate and then implements those plans through the proper channels of dedicated and knowledgeable public servants?

**Gilbert Doctorow is a Brussels-based political analyst. His latest book *Does Russia Have a Future?* was published in August 2015.**

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## Holding onto Nuclear Weapons

Despite longstanding promises to work toward nuclear disarmament, the nuclear states continue their hostility toward abandoning these existentially dangerous weapons, Dr. Ira Helfand tells Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

For months now there has been a frustrating hunt for “collusion” between the Trump administration and Russia, but there is one clear example of collusion – along with the other half dozen or so nuclear weapons states – in opposing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Passed on July 7 by 122 nations at the United Nations, the ban states in part that each cosigner “undertakes never under any circumstances to develop, test, produce, manufacture, or otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.”

Following the signing of the treaty at the U.N., I spoke to Dr. Ira Helfand, past president of Physicians for Social Responsibility and currently co-president of that group’s global federation, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. The group received the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize for their work in the field of nuclear disarmament.

“Two things were most notable in the overwhelming vote for this treaty,” Dr. Helfand said. “One was the urgency felt by the representatives of 122 countries who voted for it. The other was the rather crude and revealing statement put out by the ‘P3’ – the U.S., Britain and France,” said Dr. Helfand, that “they intend to maintain their policy of mutually assured destruction forever, even though they are legally required to negotiate the elimination of their nuclear arsenals under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.”

Dennis Bernstein: First of all, say something about the treaty – how important

it is, what exactly it's meant to do.

Ira Helfand: Well this treaty is an attempt by the non-nuclear weapon states around the world to tell the nuclear-armed states that they've got to stop behaving the way they have been. The nuclear-armed states are, for the most part, committed under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to undertaking good faith negotiations to eliminate their nuclear arsenals. And they're not doing it, they haven't been doing it and they don't appear to have any intention to do it. And the non-nuclear weapon states have lost patience, essentially, and have said, "Look, your nuclear weapons are posing an existential threat to our citizens as well as your own, and you need to start living up to your obligations to protect the world from the terrible consequences of nuclear weapons."

The treaty does not in and of itself create a situation where these weapons are going to be dismantled. It does provide a very strong weapon, I think, for people to use to put pressure on the nuclear-armed states to do what they're supposed to do, and to actually abolish their weapons.

DB: And it's really important that it be the possession, right?

IH: Absolutely, this is not a treaty about use. That is also included, but this goes far beyond that. This treaty says that the mere possession of nuclear weapons constitutes an existential threat to human survival and cannot be tolerated, that we need to get rid of these things, to dismantle them and make sure that they're never built again.

DB: All right, give us your assessment: how dangerous is our world today? Are we at Cuban Missile Crisis Two? How would you assess that?

IH: I don't think we're quite to the Cuban Missile Crisis, but we're pretty close. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has us at two and a half minutes to midnight, where midnight is the end of the world. Certainly we're at the most dangerous moment since the early 1980s. There is increasing tension between the United States and Russia, with potential flashpoints in Syria and Ukraine. There's increased tension between the United States and China, with a potential flashpoint in the South China Sea. There's the situation which everyone is following, with North Korea vs. the rest of the world. There's the ongoing fighting between India and Pakistan, which is almost daily, on their border in Kashmir. These countries now have between them some 260 nuclear warheads. So we're in a very, very dangerous moment.

And in addition to these geopolitical potential flashpoints, there's the ongoing danger of an accidental nuclear war, or a terrorist-triggered nuclear war. We

know of six or seven instances since the 1960s, where either Moscow or Washington actually began the preparation of launching nuclear weapons, in the mistaken belief that the other side had already done so. And that potential for an accident – an unintended nuclear war – remains with us today, and will, until these weapons are eliminated. So it's an extremely dangerous time, and we really need to be paying more attention to this danger than we are, frankly.

DB: Who are the nuclear powers?

IH: The United States and Russia have between them about 90-95% of the world's nuclear weapons. And then after that, France, China, the U.K., India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel. And it's not just the P3 – the U.S., France and the U.K. – that have refused to sign it – all of those countries have refused to sign it.

DB: [...] These are very frightening times. It's really troubling to see that not only do these nuclear powers reject the agreement, they do it with vigor, and some swagger, as if the other solution – mutually assured destruction – is a good one!

IH: Well I think that was what was particularly striking about the statement that the U.S., the U. K. and France – the so-called P3 – issued on Friday. In the past, the nuclear weapons states at least had the political sense to couch their opposition to this treaty in terms of, "Well, we share your vision of getting rid of nuclear weapons, but the time isn't right, and so this treaty isn't the best tactic."

In the statement that was released on Friday, the United States, Britain and France said, "We will never sign this treaty. We will never eliminate our nuclear weapons." And it was a very bald statement, which has always been the truth, but was really quite a departure from their normal diplomatic attempts to cover up what they're doing. And it was quite striking in that way.

DB: You know, people go on about Donald Trump – and there's a lot to go on about – but these western progressive nations are still talking insanely in 2017. They're as crazy as any of the politicians who are on the scene now, and this decision demonstrates it.

IH: I think that's true. You know, we've argued for a long time that nuclear weapons are so destructive, and the chance of their use is so great, that no one should ever have possession of them. I think the "Trump Factor" is a real phenomenon. This is the first time that a large arsenal of a major nuclear power has been in the control of someone who is judged by the security experts in his own party to lack the judgment, the temperament and the knowledge base to command a nuclear arsenal. And there are implications in that – not the least,

if it happens once, it can happen again.

DB: But you know what, I have to just say something about all the politicians... I'm no defender of Trump, but before that with Hillary Clinton and her policy – in terms of foreign policy – Syria was a no-fly zone. That's a road to World War 3 – that's insane!

All these politicians are willing to talk in the context of everything being on the table – you know that phrase, everything's always on the table with these folks. [...] I've never trusted the CIA. And all those folks advising Trump, they've got some serious problems. A bunch of them have been liars. They've been bugging all of us. I mean there's a lot to question across the board, and that to me is what makes nuclear weapons extremely troubling in the hands of all these folks.

IH: Oh, there's some truth to that. Nobody should have their finger on the button. The solution is not to get Donald Trump's finger off the button, it's to get rid of the button altogether. Having said that, there is something different about having Donald Trump in charge of the nuclear arsenal, and we cannot turn our backs on that fact.

DB: [...] What do you suggest? What do you think people can do about this? What are the realities in terms of what you would recommend if people are interested in standing up and making a difference?

IH: Well, a couple of intermediate steps. First of all, there's legislation before Congress introduced by Senator Markey and Congressman Lieu, that requires that Congress give prior authorization before nuclear weapons can be used. This is exactly as it should be. The Constitution says only Congress can declare war. Certainly only Congress should be able to declare a nuclear war. And this is a useful, small step in the right direction. That legislation should be passed.

Secondly, we should be demanding that the United States take its nuclear weapons off its hair-trigger alert. There's no excuse for maintaining these arsenals in a configuration where they can be launched in 15 minutes. It merely creates an increased danger that there will be an accidental or unauthorized use. It's not necessary to blow up the world in 15 minutes' time. If we decide that that's what we're going to do, we can do it in 24 hours. So the weapons should be taken off this hair-trigger alert.

But more fundamentally, we need to be demanding that the United States completely change its nuclear policy: stop insisting that we're going to maintain a nuclear arsenal as a way of protecting our security, and acknowledge that, in fact, nuclear weapons are the greatest threat to our security, and that

what we need to do is aggressively pursue, in agreement with the other nuclear weapon states, to eliminate all of these weapons.

Now, we may not be successful in this effort, we may not be able to get other countries to join with us, but we need to try. And the United States has not been trying. In fact it's been doing just the opposite: it's been planning to spend a trillion dollars to make heinous nuclear arsenals over decades to come. And that has to change.

It is urgently in the interest of U.S. national security, as well as the security of everybody on the planet, that we actively pursue the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons – not just at the rhetorical level like President Obama did, but really in our actual policy. And that we seek to begin negotiations with the other nuclear weapons states, for a treaty amongst them that provides a specific timetable, and enforcement and verification measures, so that we can, with confidence, eliminate all the nuclear weapons that are being held. And this can be done, the only thing that is lacking is the political will to do it.

DB: Before we say goodbye, can you give us maybe a doctor's perspective on this? You know, you take an oath to save lives – how do you come at this from that perspective?

IH: Well, I think Physicians for Social Responsibility views nuclear weapons as primarily a public health problem. They are the greatest threat to public health that's ever existed, and we see this as an extension of our responsibility as physicians to protect our patients. We talk to our patients about why they shouldn't drink excessively, why they shouldn't smoke at all, why they should watch their weight and so on. We also need to talk to them about other threats to their health, and this is the greatest threat of all.

And that's really been the motivation, I think, for the physicians' movement – to bring this message of grave danger to our patients, in the hopes that we'll be able to mobilize them to take the necessary political action to force our government to get rid of these weapons once and for all.

**Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at [www.flashpoints.net](http://www.flashpoints.net).**

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# How Trump Defines the Future

President Trump has defined the future as a battle between old-style nationalism and neoliberal globalism, a challenge that the West's elites mock at their own peril, as ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke describes.

By Alastair Crooke

Europe, the *Guardian* tells us, has its old "mojo" back. There is a new optimistic mood – "or even a triumphalist mood, in much of Europe." German Chancellor Angela Merkel is praised for achieving a "nuanced" final statement at the recent G20 meeting, and for "standing up" to President Trump, on behalf of the "liberal international order." Really? If this is the "mood," so be it, but even the *Guardian* op-ed writer argues that the narrative that Europe somehow "is back" – having beaten back the "populist wave" – is flawed: "the spirit of cohesion is overstated."

Actually, the Euro-élites must have had their attention fixed elsewhere. For the "Great Disrupter," as David Stockman calls President Trump, threw a hefty stone into the liberal pond: It is fine to ignore it, but what is happening is that the old division between those inside the supposedly democratic, globalist "sphere," and those of the delinquent "regimes" outside it – and lying beyond its civilized walls – is being, bit-by-bit, dissolved.

The "war" that used to be between one sphere and another is being overtaken by the insurgency within spheres. The bitterness and polarization so induced is having its effect: the "international liberal order" (as the *Guardian* terms it), may no longer work as the highly centralized, quasi-cohesive establishment that it has been for the last six decades. There is no more a "center"; no more a cohesive certainty; nor a common directionality, or purposiveness.

If Europe wants to present the G20 deliberation as the clever finessing of discordant views, that is understandable. But whereas Europe included in the declaration the commitment to "free" trade, U.S. negotiators parried this with a "right" – the right to protect against unfair trade practices, and to consider the imposition of tariffs, where appropriate (i.e. on steel products).

On climate change, the G19 stood by the Paris accord, but America, by contrast, retained its decision to *withdraw* from it. The consensus stood by carbon-reduction measures, but found this juxtaposed – uncomfortably – with an American call (rather), to use fossil fuels more cleanly. It was agreement, I would suggest, to disagree, rather than some Merkel-made synthesis.

## Trump's Biggest Rock

But the biggest rock thrown by Trump in the G20 pond, passed almost unnoticed. But potentially, it can hurt the Europeans in the spot, just where it hurts most. And this did not even occur at Hamburg. It occurred on the way there.

Conservative commentator Pat Buchanan summarizes: "Calling the Polish people 'the soul of Europe,' [Trump] related how, in the Miracle of the Vistula in 1920, Poland, reborn after 12 decades of subjugation, drove back the invading Red Army of Leon Trotsky.

[Then Trump] described the gang rape of Poland by Nazis and Soviets after the Hitler-Stalin pact. He cited the Katyn Forest massacre of the Polish officer corps by Stalin, and the rising of the Polish people against their Nazi occupiers in 1944.

"When the Polish Pope, John Paul II, celebrated his first Mass in Victory Square in 1979, said Trump, 'a million Polish men, women and children raised their voices in a single prayer ... "We want God" ...'

"What enabled the Poles to endure [all their tribulations] was an unshakable belief in and a willingness to fight for, who they were – a people of God and country, faith, families, and freedom – with the courage and will to preserve a nation built on the truths of their ancient tribe and Catholic traditions.

*" 'The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive. Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at any cost? Do we have enough respect for our citizens to protect our borders? Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it? [emphasis added].*

" 'We can have the largest economies and the most lethal weapons anywhere on Earth, but if we do not have strong families and strong values, then we will be weak and we will not survive."

## Ignoring the Point

Did the G20 élites miss the point? Trump is asking the Europeans whether "you [still] have *the will*, the steadfastness, the clear-sightedness and strength, by which 'to take back' your culture, your way-of-being, your values" – your nations? The message was, I believe, not directed so much at the Poles, but rather, at other Europeans. Trump implicitly targeted the part where it hurts Europe the most: the immigration issue, at diversity and politics, and at the fear of Europeans for their cultural submersion, under the wave of immigration.



(The G20 offered no solutions to this crucial question).

Did Merkel – the media-designated new “Leader of the West” – impress with her “resolute” response to mobs rioting in Germany’s second city, Buchanan asks, rather pointedly? The scenes from Hamburg, perhaps, he implied, reinforced Trump’s point.

Many in Europe may be offended by Trump’s words, perceiving them to be wholly contrary to everything for which they stand. They too, may dislike Trump, viscerally. But these feelings should not blind them to the very key point that he – rightly or wrongly – is pressing: Is diversity and identity politics our strength (as we are told), or is the possession of some sort of historical and cultural (including a spiritual) legacy, something which binds us, and gives a people its inner strength?

It is, at the very least, a valid question. And, it is the sides which are taken on this issue, which represent the new fault line that is displacing the old “good guy” globalist, versus the delinquent, “bad guy,” non-global sphere. This new insurgency is in-house. And the “center” has gone – bifurcated possibly irreparably, into two.

### **Meeting with Putin**

And so, to Trump’s final symbolic “act of disruption”: the prolonged and warm encounter with President Putin. If not on exactly the same page as Trump, Russia nonetheless, has been pursuing a parallel path of political and cultural re-sovereignty. The lengthy meeting with the Russian President disconcerted and outraged many (see [here](#), for example). But the provoking of such an (over) reaction of outrage precisely would be viewed as its main merit by many Trump [supporters](#), who value disruption of the old paradigm.

Trump was not as alone and as isolated as the mainstream media portrayed him: the élites may revile and deprecate his abdication of American global leadership, and for dangerously insisting that job losses resulting from unfair trade practices must be redressed, but there is, however, a constituency within Europe that is entirely in sympathy with his approach.

Trump’s questioning of the orthodoxy that the U.S. must retain hegemony over the global order, and his sense that the free trade system simply has lost America its manufacturing base, possesses a self-evident content for many ordinary Americans and Europeans. Trump says simply enough: “We (the U.S.), can no longer afford it. We are up to the ceiling, and out of the windows, piled high in debts, and we anyway get zilch in return from all these ingrates who shelter under our bankrupting global security umbrella. Let us not go on trying to

impose this on others; we shall rebuild ourselves, and pursue our own, culturally distinct, American way-of-being – and let them pursue theirs’. It is simple; it is plain; it has appeal.

Whether one thinks Trump is right or wrong on these issues, is beside the point. The essential point is that the key components – the Poland speech, the G20 dissidence, and the warm Putin meeting – do form a concerted, strategic whole. Too, the atmospherics were better at the G20, than at the G7 meeting in Sicily in May – President Trump seemed actually to be enjoying himself in Hamburg at dinner, (and why not). But two summits into Trump’s Presidency, it is hard to escape two conclusions:

Firstly, that things have changed – maybe permanently. Surprisingly, of all people, it was “globalist” Emmanuel Macron, who best caught this sense when he remarked: “Our world has never been so divided; centrifugal forces have never been so powerful; our common goods have never been so threatened.”

And secondly, the immediate relapse on the President’s return to Washington into the Donald Trump Jr. Russia “hysteria” over a “faux scandal” as an Op-Ed in the *Washington Post* describes it (whatever the whys and wherefores of the affair), reinforces the conclusion (as Mike Krieger notes) “that America may no longer work as the largely centralized, semi-cohesive unit it has been for our entire lives.” Maybe he puts it too mildly. To outsiders, Americans seem to be eating each other alive.

Aptly, Krieger quotes William Yeats:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre*  
*The falcon cannot hear the falconer;*  
*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;*  
*Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,*  
*The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere*  
*The ceremony of innocence is drowned;*  
*The best lack all conviction, while the worst*  
*Are full of passionate intensity.*

**Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum.**

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# The Right's Long War on Media

**Exclusive:** A danger from the mainstream media's Russia-gate obsession is that it reinforces a longstanding right-wing meme about a "liberal media" out to get conservatives, as Jonathan Marshall explains.

By Jonathan Marshall

Never in modern American history has a president so frontally gone to war with the media as Donald Trump, whose speeches and tweet storms blast critical stories as "fake news" and mainstream news outlets as "the enemy of the American people."

"Get used to being stigmatized as 'opposition,'" the head of media at Human Rights Watch warned reporters and editors shortly after the election. "[Trump's] basic idea is simple: to delegitimize accountability journalism by framing it as partisan."

So far, the Trumpian strategy seems to be working, at least with his base. A recent poll found that fewer than 10 percent of Republicans trust the media a lot, and 6 in 10 complain that the media "keep political leaders from doing their job."

Trump's critics, particularly in the media, portray his assault on the Fourth Estate as a "gift to tyrants everywhere" and as part of a radical campaign to "build an autocracy," in the words of former Republican speechwriter David Frum.

I share their concerns, even as I readily acknowledge, and have often condemned, the major media's widespread and sometimes blatant failings to report some subjects as accurately or fairly as they should.

But many of today's righteous condemners of Trump fail to see that his attacks on the media are really the culmination of a relentless campaign over the past half century by conservatives to undercut institutions that stand in the way of their grab for power.

## Leading the Charge

Although presidential attacks on the news media date back to the earliest days of the Republic, the modern conservative war on mainstream media was launched on Nov. 13, 1969, when Vice President Spiro Agnew condemned TV news broadcasters for daring to subject one of President Nixon's speeches on Vietnam policy to

“instant analysis and querulous criticism” instead of allowing him the “right to communicate directly with the people who elected him.”

Ironically, Agnew’s speech was broadcast in prime time by all three major networks. Nixon was thrilled, telling his chief of staff, Bob Haldeman, “SOBs of net[works] must have died when [they] had to carry that.”

The public response strongly favored Agnew’s charges, making the network bosses sweat. White House speechwriter Patrick Buchanan reported happily that “where the Veep is scoring is with the center and right; he has become the acknowledged spokesman of the Middle American, the Robespierre of the Great Silent Majority.”

In his speech, Agnew pointedly remarked that the big broadcasters enjoyed “a monopoly sanctioned and licensed by government,” raising the specter of federal sanctions against them. Walter Cronkite of CBS News called Agnew’s comments “as an implied threat to freedom of speech in this country.”

Cronkite didn’t know the half of it. Nixon ordered up a sustained public campaign to reinforce Agnew’s message, telling aides, “The idea that the press is militantly, viciously against [me] must be hammered home.”

Within days of Agnew’s speech, Haldeman reported that an aide “has asked our most trusted sources at the FBI to get pertinent information from their files and other available sources” on network commentators. At White House direction, 17 reporters were wiretapped on flimsy “national security” grounds. And *Washington Post* publisher Katharine Graham suspected, but could not prove, a White House role in challenging the licenses of her two Florida television stations, an act she called “the most effective” of all “threats to the company during Watergate.”

*Washington Post* columnist E. J. Dionne recalls that Agnew’s “signal political achievement was igniting a campaign that endured for more than four decades painting the mainstream media as biased, liberal and elitist. . . . Rarely has a concerted political effort been more successful. Ever since, reporters, editors and producers have incessantly looked over their right shoulders, fearing they’d be assailed as secret carriers of the liberal virus.”

### **Accuracy in Media**

One key to the “concerted political effort” that followed Agnew’s incendiary speech was the founding in 1969 of the right-wing watchdog group Accuracy in Media (AIM). Through a twice-monthly newsletter, daily radio commentary, weekly newspaper column, newspaper ads, and speakers’ bureau, AIM pounded the mainstream media relentlessly.

One of its signature successes was its hounding of *New York Times* reporter Raymond Bonner for his exposé of the El Mozote massacre of hundreds of civilians by Salvadoran troops in December 1981. Backed by senior officials in the Reagan administration, and the right-wing editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*, AIM contested his reporting and declared that Bonner was “worth a division to the communists in Central America.”

The *Times*, reeling from the criticism, reassigned Bonner to an innocuous financial desk and he eventually resigned. Later investigations by a United Nations-sponsored “truth commission” fully vindicated his courageous reporting.

A decade later, AIM trained its guns on the Clinton administration. AIM was in the vanguard of conservative muckrakers who charged the Clintons with a role in the “murder” of White House staffer Vince Foster, contrary to all official findings. The organization also “argued that the explosion of TWA Flight 800, ruled an accident, was caused by an Iranian missile, which President Clinton supposedly covered up to win re-election.”

In the Obama era, AIM and its director Cliff Kincaid – a former researcher for Oliver North’s Freedom Alliance foundation – spread right-wing conspiracy theories that President Obama was secretly a socialist Muslim, and that Marxists had taken over the Catholic Church to promote a “foreign invasion of the U.S.” by Latino immigrants. AIM also lambasted media reporting – even by Fox News – about the reality of global warming.

What makes AIM so noteworthy is not its familiar right-wing message, but the millions of dollars in funding it received over the years from major corporations to propagate that message. Its funders have reportedly included major oil and chemical companies (Chevron, Exxon, Getty, Mobil Foundation, Phillips Petroleum, Texaco Philanthropic Foundation, and Union Carbide), as well as Bethlehem Steel, Kaiser Aluminum, IBM, and right-wing foundations such as Coors, Scaife, and Smith Richardson.

### **The Powell Memorandum**

Their support reflected a clarion call to arms in August 1971 by Lewis Powell, a prominent corporate lawyer who was nominated later that year to the Supreme Court by President Nixon. In an influential memo to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Powell warned that the “American free enterprise system” was under “broad attack” by “Communists, New Leftists and other revolutionaries who would destroy the entire system, both political and economic.”

Saving the system, he warned, would require “careful long-range planning” and political power that could only be achieved with the “united action” and the

full financial backing of corporate America. Powell advocated a multi-decade strategy to target the media, colleges and universities, textbooks, advertising, newsstands, and political financing to reshape attitudes and political power in America.

Among other steps, he recommended, "The national television networks should be monitored in the same way that textbooks should be kept under constant surveillance. This applies not merely to so-called educational programs . . . but to the daily 'news analysis' which so often includes the most insidious type of criticism of the enterprise system. . .

"This monitoring, to be effective, would require constant examination of the texts of adequate samples of programs. Complaints – to the media and to the Federal Communications Commission – should be made promptly and strongly when programs are unfair or inaccurate."

In short, he urged major corporate funding for the very mission AIM was pioneering. AIM now lives in the shadow of other more prominent conservative media organizations that pump out conspiracy theories and even fake news to counter mainstream media narratives. Thus Trump didn't start the conservatives' war on the media; he is the result of their longstanding and destructive campaign, as some in their ranks now admit.

"Over the years, we've effectively brainwashed the core of our audience to distrust anything that they disagree with," acknowledged conservative radio host John Zeiger. "And now it's gone too far. Because the gatekeepers have lost all credibility in the minds of consumers, I don't see how you reverse it."

Rebuilding trust in the media – and in the truth – will likely require as many decades and as much collective effort as it took conservatives to tear down that trust in the first place. The job will require constant self-examination by the media to attain higher standards of truth and fairness. It will require new financial models to sustain careful and courageous reporting through challenging political times. And, not least, it will require a degree of sympathy toward the media from progressives, even as they continue offering constructive criticism to keep the media honest.

**Jonathan Marshall is a regular contributor to Consortiumnews.com.**

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# NYC: Front Line of Income Inequality

New York City faced a crisis four decades ago with a massive electrical failure and fear of crime. Now, it confronts another challenge, a vast gap between the super-rich and the rest, writes Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

Forty years ago this summer, the lights went out. It was July 13, 1977, a hot, muggy night here in Manhattan. Lightning strikes set off a cascade of mechanical failures at Con Edison that plunged virtually the entire city into darkness.

Nine million people were without power. Thousands had to be rescued from the subway tunnels. And there was looting – lots of looting. A thousand fires were set, 1,600 stores were ransacked and 3,400 were arrested. The total economic damage was estimated at more than \$300 million – well over a billion in 2017 dollars.

I was having dinner at my then-girlfriend's apartment when the lights went out. We tuned in a small, battery-powered radio and listened as news began spreading of trouble and violence around the city. The two of us stayed where we were and the next morning I walked back to my place a few blocks away. West 57<sup>th</sup> Street was almost empty; small groups of people gathered in front of their buildings talking about what had happened.

The power remained out and I climbed the 11 stories to my darkened studio apartment but the water was still pumping and I could shower and change. I worked at our public television station, WNET/Channel Thirteen, and the offices were closed. But their electricity already was back, so I went up to the local news department to see whether anyone was around. I was put to work writing news copy about the events of the night and advisories about closings that would be read on the air when the transmitter was up and running again.

That was one bizarre, long hot summer, 1977, and not simply because of the massive blackout. The city still was trying to pull itself from near-bankruptcy, just two years after the *New York Daily News* had reported the federal government's refusal to help with the front page headline, "FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD." (Not long after, Congress begrudgingly enacted and President Ford signed legislation that loaned the city \$2.3 billion with interest.)

New York's budget was taken over by an Emergency Financial Control Board, administered by the state. Police layoffs contributed to a rise in crime. The ruins of buildings in the South Bronx became a symbol of urban decay and new

structures abandoned in mid-construction littered the skyline like so many rotten teeth. The subway system was falling apart, the cars smeared with graffiti; in just a year, ridership had dropped by 25 million passengers.

## **A Political Challenge**

So roiled was the political scene in 1977 that incumbent Democratic Mayor Abe Beame, accused of gross incompetence, was challenged in his party's primary by five other candidates, including Ed Koch, Mario Cuomo and Bella Abzug. Eventually, Koch won the mayoralty and served for three terms.

And throughout that summer there was a serial killer whose brutality seemed a metaphor for what was happening to New York. The self-named Son of Sam killed six and wounded eight, targeting young women in particular. The murders had begun the summer before and for months the '70s version of trolls and creeps searched the phone directory for the names of single women and called in the middle of the night, "I'm the Son of Sam. You're next."

In August, less than a month after the big blackout, and following a massive manhunt, police arrested David Berkowitz, a mail sorter for the postal service. To this day, he is serving six consecutive life sentences, one for each of those he murdered.

As hard as many of us would like to try, 1977 was a summer that's not so easy to forget, a fraught time here in the city that in some similar ways seems to afflict the entire nation today. Yet New York City, a haven for finance and banking's cynical buccaneers and mountebanks, rebounded from its '70s fiscal crisis. Of all the cities in the world, it is second only to Tokyo in gross domestic product (GDP). We're in the midst of a \$43 billion construction boom that just keeps growing.

But the transit system is falling apart again. The state of its infrastructure is dire. Subway service is starting to seem as bad as it was 40 years ago – without the graffiti. Local and state government say that overcrowding on the trains is wearing down the tracks and rolling stock. Major, commuter-disrupting repairs are taking place on rotting railroad lines leading in and out of Penn Station – the head of Amtrak euphemistically calls it "the summer of renewal."

## **Homelessness and Mansions**

Homelessness in the city is higher than it has been since the Great Depression. Rents have risen 22 percent since 1990 and 20.6 percent of New Yorkers live in poverty. Income inequality in the city continues to be an outrage. According to the last census, it's the worst in the United States.



Debipriya Chatterjee, an economist with the city's Independent Budget Office reports that, "At the very top, it's the top 0.1 percent who own 24 percent of the city's income," She told the website Gothamist, "We all know that the city is very unequal. What I did not anticipate seeing in the data is that the share of the bottom 50 percent has actually fallen."

In other words, in this city of millions, 3,700 people raked in about 23 percent of the city's income – \$63.7 billion. As blogger Ofo Ezeugwu wrote, "Basically, while most of us find ourselves embroiled in this rat race, a small chunk of folks finds themselves watching us run it."

Case in point: the gentrification of my West Village neighborhood, once a center of bohemia, radical thought and modest rents, continues to run amok. Three years ago, a couple of blocks away, a four-story building was sold for \$45 million and is being turned into a single-family mansion.

As per the website 6sqft, which got a look at the architect's plans, "[T]he mansion will have six bedrooms, two kitchens, its own elevator, a dressing room and walk-in closet larger than most apartments, a 50-foot lap pool, and more than 4,000 square feet of outdoor space that will include a rooftop terrace."

Ironically, the building had been a headquarters for the foster and child-care agency The New York Foundling, which since 1869 has fought the devastating effect of poverty and lack of opportunity for destitute children and families. And the buyer? He and his brother run a health care hedge fund. Of course they do.

In fairness, the millions made from the sale of the former orphanage will go to new programs for those families, so you might be thinking it's a decent exchange. But the constant conversion of properties into luxury vanity homes, especially buildings once used for the public good, seems wrong at a time and in a place where affordable housing for those in desperate need is increasingly nonexistent.

We are New Yorkers and we will carry on; it's what we do. But like that hot muggy July night 40 years ago, we feel increasingly powerless.

**Michael Winship is the Emmy Award-winning senior writer of *Moyers & Company* and *BillMoyers.com*. Follow him on Twitter: [@MichaelWinship](https://twitter.com/MichaelWinship). [This article originally appeared at <http://billmoyers.com/story/turning-off-lights-taking-away-power/>]**

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# The Price for Criticizing Israel

Israel is well-known for having a potent U.S. lobby that not only influences Congress and the mainstream media but intimidates Americans who dare criticize its policies toward the Palestinians, as Dennis J Bernstein describes.

By Dennis J Bernstein

There are very few journalist in the U.S. or Europe who have the courage to report fairly on Israel's seemingly endless illegal occupation of Palestinian lands. Personally, as a Jewish-American, and the grandson of a revered Rabbi, I have been roundly denounced by pro-Israeli representatives and their Zionist lobbyists in the U.S.

I've stopped counting the number of vicious personal attacks that have labeled me a self-hating Jewish anti-Semite. Here's one that got my attention and the attention of journalist Robert Fisk of the Independent of London, who I introduced one night for a lecture in Berkeley, California, and who then wrote an article about the plight of Jewish journalists and activists in the U.S. who dare to write or speak honestly about Israel's brutal and illegal occupation of the Palestinians:

"You mother-fucking-asshole-self-hating Jewish piece of shit. Hitler killed the wrong Jews. He should have killed your parents, so a piece of Jewish shit like you would not have been born. God willing, Arab terrorists will cut you to pieces Daniel Pearl-style, AMEN!!!" The latter reference to the late Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, who was kidnapped and decapitated in Pakistan.

And at another level, the Israeli consulate in San Francisco has complained to my managers at KPFA/ Pacifica Radio repeatedly about my "pro-Palestinian terrorist" and "anti-semitic" reporting, and my apparent "hatred" for the Jewish State.

Emmy award-winning filmmaker and investigative reporter John Pilger is one of the rare exceptions who has plowed head-first into this crucial story of our time. Pilger has made two documentaries 25 years apart about Palestine, with almost the same name, *Palestine is the Issue* and then *Palestine is Still the Issue*.

I spoke recently with Pilger about Palestine and the brutality of the continuing occupation, and also about the responsibility for empowering and sustaining the occupation that falls at the feet of the Western press, based on its misreporting and, in some cases, not reporting at all the brutal realities of

Israel's iron-fisted occupation of Palestinians, which many critics, as well as several UN officials, have labeled as a form of ethnic cleansing that borders on genocide.

I also spoke with Pilger about the recent G-20 meetings in Germany, where President Trump held his first meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin amid the Russia-gate frenzy. John Pilger's latest film is *The Coming War on China*. He recently gave a moving talk at the Palestine Expo in London on the ongoing battle for the liberation of Palestine, excerpts of which have been published by Consortiumnews.

Dennis Bernstein: Let's start with some current events. We just had the G20 meeting in Europe with a big deal made about the meeting between Trump and Putin and a lot of action in the streets. Your thoughts on what happened there and some of the goings-on?

John Pilger: I think it was very interesting on two levels. First of all, it was a clear demonstration of the continuing rebellion against remote governments, governments often justifiably referred to as oligarchic. The number of people in the streets of Hamburg accurately represented that rebellion.

The interesting thing about the G20 itself was that Germany clearly set out to determine the agenda. Merkel wanted to put her country forward as the undisputed leader now of Europe. Some would say it has been for quite a while and with Britain on the way out the opportunity does exist. But that didn't happen.

The discussion was appropriated by the meeting between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. Putting aside all the grotesque, cartoon qualities of Trump, the one thing that he has been consistent about is doing some deal with Russia. This has gotten him in a lot of trouble because the Democratic Party and, in fact most of the beltway institutions in Washington, don't want this to happen. They would like Russia to remain a perennial enemy.

Without Moscow there as the demon, it is very difficult to justify a lot of the infrastructure of power in the United States, particularly the massive armament and military industries. Trump openly challenged this, virtually from the beginning. Although he seemed to have to prove himself to the pillars of power in Washington by firing missiles at Syria, this element in his presidency has remained pretty much constant.

This was of course the first meeting between Trump and Putin. They spoke for two hours and twenty minutes and, by all accounts, some kind of rapport was developed. In previous times that would be good news. It used to be called "detente." These days this is not good news, either in the US political

establishment and corporate media or, to a large degree, here in Britain.

The ridiculous allegations that the Russians helped to elect Trump by directly interfering in the great American democratic process have converged with the news that Trump and Putin may well have struck some kind of deal. Whether Trump is allowed to pursue whatever arrangements he has made toward normalizing relations with Russia, given the institutions of power in the United States, is rather doubtful.

DB: Of course, the corporate press is not at all interested in detente in Syria. Their main story ever since Trump's meeting with Putin has been that his son may be guilty of treason.

JP: I've never heard something so absurd in my life, especially as the United States has intervened so aggressively in post-Soviet Russia. All through the 1990's the open and quite successful intervention was blatant. And for these powerful forces in the United States to obsess with Russian meddling in our election process demonstrates a kind of double standard that is difficult to comprehend.

DB: In light of your new film, *The Coming War on China*, this is a time when detente at all levels is crucial because the dangers of staying the course are so huge. It is interesting to see that right-wing hawks in Washington are helping to foster a new relationship between Russia and China. But detente is the only answer at this point, isn't it?

JP: Yes, it is. What's needed is a diplomatic settlement. Unfortunately, the United States doesn't do that anymore. It doesn't have "diplomats" in the real sense of the word. To now see the presidents of two of the major nuclear-armed powers in the world seemingly forging some kind of political arrangement—agreeing, apparently, that they shouldn't go to war with nuclear weapons. This is a throwback to a time before George W. Bush abolished the START treaties and others that were put together so painstakingly over so many years between the Soviet Union and the United States. It demonstrates how far the world—at the level of its political elite—has regressed. The United States is a very frightening vision for most of us because nuclear weapons are in the background all the time. The chance of a mistaken launch of nuclear weapons is high.

Consider the case of Korea, where the United States has installed its very aggressive THAAD so-called "defense" system which threatens China. No one believes for a minute that these missiles are pointed at North Korea, which could be dealt with in many other ways by the United States. The long-term strategy of an ascendant Pentagon is the balkanization of the Russian Federation

and the intimidation of China. And if there is any glint of some kind of pullback from that position, as there might have been in the meeting between Trump and Putin, then that is good news.

DB: And of course it is so bizarre that you have America talking about the role that China should be playing and how we are so disappointed that they are not doing all they can to facilitate THAAD, which is part of a strategy to surround their country in what we know is shaping up to be “the Chinese century.”

John, I’d like you to talk about how you first began to report on Palestine and then I’d like to fast forward to current issues.

JP: I first went to Palestine in the 1960’s and stayed on a kibbutz. I probably came with the popular assumption that Israel’s myths about itself were true, that Israel was a good idea. I conflated the horror of the Holocaust with the new Jewish state. The people on the kibbutz regarded themselves as both socialists and Zionists.

I came to understand the doublespeak or the contemporary amnesia that is so pervasive in Israel. We had some very lively discussions but rarely mentioned the majority people. I saw them one evening and they were referred to as “them,” as silhouettes beyond the limits of the kibbutz. I asked about them and was told, well, they’re the Arabs. One man called them nomads. By just asking the question I was crossing a line, and a disturbed silence followed. I was with good people on the kibbutz, they had principles, many had memories of the horrors in Europe. They knew, of course, that they were on stolen land.

The word “Palestinian” was almost never used, rather echoing Golda Meir’s later remark that “there’s no such thing as Palestinians.” Because once the term “Palestinian” was recognized, the state of Palestine had to be recognized. For me it was a very interesting introduction to the extraordinary situation in Palestine. I learned a lot from a wonderful photographer named Dan Hidani who lost all his family in Germany during the War. We talked out this subject of the so-called Arabs and I learned a lot from him about the guilt of the colonizers that can never quite be covered up. These early experiences really alerted me to the huge injustice the Palestinians were suffering and of course still suffer today.

DB: Could I ask you to tell the story of the novelist Liana Badr, because it really does speak to what has happened to many Palestinians and the way they have been treated?

JP: In 2002, when Ariel Sharon was prime minister and several times sent the Israeli army and tanks into the West Bank, I arrived in Ramallah just when the

Israeli army was withdrawing. Ramallah was devastated and one of the places I visited was the Palestinian Cultural Center. There I met the center's director, the renowned Palestinian novelist Liana Badr, who teaches at Columbia University now. Her manuscripts were torn and scattered across the floor. The hard drive containing her fiction and a whole library of plays and poetry had been stolen by the Israeli soldiers. Not a single book had survived. Master tapes of one of the best collections of Palestinian cinema were lost.

This was an assault on a people's culture. The soldiers had urinated and defecated on the floors and on the desks and smeared feces on children's paintings. It was the most vivid and telling symbol of what a colonial power does to the people whose country it occupies.

It was an attempt to dehumanize, that is what this assault on the Palestinian Cultural Center represented. What struck me, as well, was the determination of the Palestinians in this situation not to comply with what was expected of them as victims. That is the most astonishing thing about the Palestinians. As you walk through the rubble of Gaza, where the Israelis have attacked so many times, all of a sudden you see in the distance a group of school girls beautifully turned out in their starched and pressed uniforms and their hair done. It is a vision of defiance and determination to keep going. So the occupation may have worked physically but it hasn't worked spiritually. And perhaps in the near future it may not work politically.

Jaffa oranges are famous around the world. Actually, Jaffa is a Palestinian town taken by Israel. Jaffa oranges form part of the mythical history of modern Israel, the idea that the desert of Palestine would be made green by the arriving Jews, who would make the desert bloom. But the oranges and grapes were in fact grown by Palestinian farmers and the oranges had been exported to Europe since the eighteenth century. At one time, a rather melancholy name for the town of Jaffa used by its former inhabitants was "the place of sad oranges."

DB: I want to talk to you about Palestine and journalism. Maybe we could compare and contrast Mohammed Omer, on the one hand—who is dodging bombs and trying to get food for his family as the drones are flying past his window, trying to get as best he can the truth from the ground—compare Mohammed Omer with the people at CNBC and the BBC.

JP: Well, we know that most of mainstream journalism is simply an extension of the state. We've talked about the extraordinary McCarthy-like propaganda campaign that wants to blame everything including the weather on Russia. That happens because the media is the propaganda wing of the institutions that form power in the West.

The one that produces the most refined propaganda is the BBC. CNN and the others are just cruder versions. Any truth about Israel/Palestine or, more generally, the Middle East is not going to come from the mainstream media. Those of us who know this should rather stop beating our heads against a brick wall, asking why they don't tell the truth. That's not what they're there for.

Fortunately, there are now many independent sources, such as your program. You mentioned Mohammed Omer. We saw how brilliant and objective his reporting was from Gaza during the last terrible attack in 2014. His own family was under attack, they had very little food and water and so on, but every day he would produce these concise reports of no more than maybe 800 words, together with his photographs that would tell you what was happening as he witnessed it. It was about how people were still leading their lives in the most extraordinary ways, despite all the grief and suffering.

In other words, he did what the official media in the West rarely does: He put faces and names on people, he described their lives. He has collected those pieces together in a book. And there have been other journalists, particularly Palestinian photographers and camera people, who have done similar work. They make me proud to be a journalist.

DB: I only bring up the corporate journalists because they sustain these kinds of conditions by not reporting them or misreporting them.

JP: From my own point of view, I find it unwatchable, unless I am either monitoring it or deconstructing it. It is their censorship by omission, by distortion, by demonology. General Petraeus once said he spent most of his time with the media because that mattered more than trying to defeat the Taliban.

The good news is that a lot of people don't believe it anymore. One of the elements in the rebellion rolling across Western societies is an anger with the media. This is certainly true in Britain. I've never known the media to be so popular a subject for debate. And it's being discussed with a great deal of resentment. Reporters find themselves now having to account for their actions. That's a new development.

Yesterday, The Guardian ran a rather defensive front-page article about journalists being called to account by the survivors of the terrible Grenfell Tower fire here in London. Well, that was emblematic of the media being called to account over a wide range of issues. People are becoming aware, they understand now. They're no longer simply consumers of this sort of nonsense.

Certainly, the power of the media remains. But one of my favorite stories is that, on the night that Jeremy Corbyn almost won the election here, there was a

party at the Times newspaper, which of course is run by Rupert Murdoch. When the first results came in and it became clear that Labor was doing so well, Murdoch stormed out. That was a very symbolic moment because it meant that his media and the media like his no longer had the power to ensure that certain politicians were elected. Two days before the election, The Daily Mail devoted thirteen pages to an attempted character assassination of Corbyn. It had no effect whatsoever.

DB: We just had on our show Arab Barghouti, the son of Mustafa Barghouti, who hasn't touched his father for two years. Mustafa Barghouti has been in prison for fifteen years and just led a major hunger strike. Strong, articulate, he can't be silenced. Or you mentioned Dr. Mona El-Farra, a medical director on the ground who had a good part of her extended family wiped out in 2014. She is still ministering to the people and telling the truth to anyone who will listen. It's amazing.

JP: Yes, these are amazing people and it's quite inspiring to be in their company. Even amidst all the carnage in the world, they make you feel good about being human.

DB: Why do you think Nelson Mandela said Palestine is the greatest moral issue of our time?

JP: There is a lot to criticize about Mandela but one of the things that was interesting and admirable about Mandela was that he was loyal to those who had supported and given solidarity to the people in South Africa struggling for their freedom. Certainly, right through his time in prison he always stressed the importance of that solidarity. In other words, of people standing together. It was a rather old-fashioned internationalist view of struggle.

He associated the struggle of the majority people of South Africa against the apartheid regime with the plight of the Palestinians who were struggling with their own form of apartheid. In the same way, Desmond Tutu has been to the West Bank and has been very outspoken in echoing what Mandela said. Tutu is on the record as saying that he regards the structures of apartheid in Israel/Palestine as in some respects even worse than those in South Africa.

I suppose Mandela considered Palestine the greatest moral issue because it was about a people wronged. The Palestinians were not the Germans, they didn't do terrible things to the Jewish people. In fact, they had lived peacefully with the Jewish people for a very long time. They were the majority people in their country. Jews, Muslims, Christians lived together in peace, generally speaking, until the state of Israel was imposed on them.



As Mustafa Barghouti put it, "The Zionists wanted a state at the expense of the Palestinians." That's what Mandela meant. Palestine is a classic colonial injustice. [Israel] is the fourth largest military power in the world backed by the largest military power, the European Union and other Western countries, taking away the freedom and imposing oppression on the people of Palestine.

DB: And the idea of a free Palestinian people is one that is very troubling to the Arab world that is aligned with the United States. It seems nobody wants to think about the liberation of Palestine because then they have to think about their own corrupt and vicious dictatorships. Palestine really is the issue of war and peace. Whether there will ever be peace depends on whether these people will ever have a place to call their home again.

JP: Certainly, until the Palestinians have justice—in a way that they recognize it—there will be no peace in the region. In a sense, all roads of conflict in this troubled region lead back to Palestine. If the Palestine issue were resolved, that would mean that Israel would be a normal country. Not armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons and intimidating and oppressing the indigenous people, but a normal country living with equality within its own sphere. If that happened, if that were resolved, I'm not saying that peace would suddenly break out all over the Middle East, but it would be the beginning.

DB: Do you see the boycott/divestment movement as a hopeful light? Clearly, people who have supported it in the US, students and teachers, have suffered great repression. But do you see this as a viable movement? In some ways it is modeled on the South African anti-apartheid movement.

JP: All you have to do is look at the reaction in Israel. They are terrified of it. They have brought all kinds of pressure to bear on governments, particularly the British government, to stop the BDS movement having an influence. Just the other day, a court judgment found that local councils in Britain could indeed boycott, dis-invest and sanction whoever they please. The British government had told them they couldn't. Well, they can.

The BDS movement really worries the Israeli regime because it's popular. In Norway, the biggest trade union has endorsed it. Student bodies in the United States are going along with it. People have had their say and they have voted for it. It represents a kind of local democracy. It's much more widespread in the United States than people realize and it certainly is across Europe.

BDS on its own is not going to bring about freedom for the Palestinians. In South Africa, the sanctions did undoubtedly have an effect. But White South Africa managed to get around the sanctions. It was when it lost a powerful friend, when the Reagan administration decided that South Africa was causing

more trouble than it was worth and finally withdrew its support, that the system fell.

I'm afraid that that is the way power works. But there is no doubt that power is always influenced by popular movements such as BDS. Ultimately, I believe that the solution is in the United States. Without US backing in all its forms, Israel would have no choice but to become a normal country.

DB: It is interesting to see how strong the reaction has been to the boycott/divestment movement. Professors have lost their jobs, kids have been beaten up. Below the corporate media surface, it has really been reverberating out there in the grassroots.

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

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## Netanyahu Pushes Trump Toward Wider Wars

**Exclusive:** Russia-gate is empowering Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to strong-arm President Trump into escalating the Syrian war by abandoning a recent ceasefire and challenging Iran and Russia, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

A weakened, even desperate President Donald Trump must decide whether to stand up to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or to repudiate the Syrian partial ceasefire, which Trump hammered out with Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 7.

Whether intentionally or not, this crossroads is where the months of Russia-gate hysteria have led the United States, making Trump even more vulnerable to Israeli and neoconservative pressure and making any cooperation with Russia more dangerous for him politically.

After meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris on Sunday, Netanyahu declared that Israel was totally opposed to the Trump-Putin cease-fire deal in southern Syria because it perpetuates Iranian presence in Syria in support of the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad.

Netanyahu's position increases pressure on Trump to escalate U.S. military involvement in Syria and possibly move toward war against Iran and even Russia.

The American neocons, who generally move in sync with Netanyahu's wishes, already have as their list of current goals "regime changes" in Damascus, Tehran and Moscow – regardless of the dangers to the Middle East and indeed the world.

At the G-20 summit on July 7, Trump met for several hours with Putin coming away with an agreed-upon cease-fire for southwestern Syria, an accord that has proven more successful than previous efforts to reduce the violence that has torn the country apart since 2011.

But that limited peace could mean failure for the proxy war that Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other regional players helped launch six years ago with the goal of removing Assad from power and shattering the so-called "Shiite crescent" from Tehran through Damascus to Beirut. Instead, that "crescent" appears more firmly in place, with Assad's military bolstered by Shiite militia forces from Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

In other words, the "regime change" gambit against Assad's government would have backfired, with Iranian and Hezbollah forces arrayed along Israel's border with Syria. And instead of accepting that reversal and seeking some modus vivendi with Iran, Netanyahu and his Sunni-Arab allies (most notably the Saudi monarchy) have decided to go in the other direction (a wider war) and to bring President Trump along with them.

### **Neophyte Trump**

Trump – a relative neophyte in global intrigue – has been slow to comprehend how his outreach to Netanyahu and Saudi King Salman runs counter to his collaboration with Putin on efforts to defeat the Sunni jihadist groups, including Al Qaeda and Islamic State, which have served as the point of the spear in the war to overthrow Assad.

Al Qaeda and Islamic State have received direct and indirect support from Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Turkey, Israel and even the Obama administration, albeit sometimes unwittingly. To block Assad's overthrow – and the likely victory by these terror groups – Russia, Iran and Hezbollah came to Assad's defense, helping to turn the tide of the war since 2015.

In his nearly half year in office, Trump has maintained an open hostility toward Iran – sharing a position held by Washington's neocons as well as Netanyahu and Salman – but the U.S. President also has advocated cooperation with Russia to crush Islamic State and Al Qaeda inside Syria.

Collaboration with Russia – and indirectly with Iran and the Syrian military – makes sense for most U.S. interests, i.e., stabilizing Syria, reversing the refugee flow that has destabilized Europe, and denying Al Qaeda and Islamic

State a base for launching terror strikes against Western targets.

But the same collaboration would be a bitter defeat for Netanyahu and Salman who have invested heavily in this and other “regime change” projects that require major U.S. investments in terms of diplomacy, money and military manpower.

So, in last weekend’s trip to Paris, Netanyahu chose to raise the stakes on Trump at a time when Democrats and the U.S. mainstream media are pounding him daily with the Russia-gate scandal, even raising the possibility that his son, Donald Trump Jr., might be prosecuted and imprisoned for having a meeting in June 2016 with a Russian lawyer.

If Trump wants the Russia-gate pain to lessen, he will be tempted to give Netanyahu what he wants and count on the savvy Israeli leader to intervene with the influential neocons of Official Washington to pull back on the scandal-mongering.

The problem, however, would be that Netanyahu really wants the U.S. military to complete the “regime change” project in Syria – much as it did in Iraq and Libya – meaning more American dead, more American treasure expended and a likely wider war, extending to Iran and possibly nuclear-armed Russia.

That might fulfill the neocon current menu of “regime change” schemes but it runs the risk of unleashing a nuclear conflagration on the world. In that way, liberals and even some progressives – who have embraced Russia-gate as a way to remove the hated Donald Trump from office – may end up contributing to the end of human civilization as well.

**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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## The Paradox of Tolerance/Intolerance

The issue of “tolerance” can be complicated, even paradoxical, such as extending tolerance to intolerance with the possibility that the intolerance will ultimately eliminate tolerance, explains Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

In case you haven’t noticed, the United States is a country deeply divided on a

large number of basic issues: racial issues, gender issues, issues of sexual preference, the role of government in society, the role of religious views in shaping laws, and so on. Influential Institutions, such as media outlets, are being labeled as “left” or “right” depending on how they report or relate on these issues.

Battles now rage on these topics in the halls of Congress. Finally, the Supreme Court’s legal decisions on cases that reflect these questions have been trending toward the “conservative” end of the spectrum. All of this makes it quite difficult to have a meaningful discussion or debate about such issues in the public realm. Such attempts have often led to further divisiveness instead of reconciliation – reflecting what some might describe as an ongoing culture war.

The one place where thoughtful debates are usually encouraged is on the university and colleges campuses. This is particularly so in the “humanities” and “social sciences” classrooms, where you find courses in history, English, foreign languages, sociology, anthropology, political science and the like. Such areas of study draw on diverse source material and examples. And so, running against the popular grain, so to speak, divisive issues often become legitimate aspects of study.

This process of study and discussion concerning controversial topics has been going on at U.S. campuses at least since the end of World War II. By the 1970s clear preferences as to how these issues should be thought about appeared. And, they consistently agreed with a tolerant stand that maximized the virtues of equality and social justice. It should come as no surprise that faculty in these areas are usually left of center on the political spectrum.

Thus, the campus consensus is that while an individual can privately feel as he or she likes about topics such as homosexuality or racial integration, and can choose their social circle accordingly, it is wrong to publicly act in an overtly discriminatory way. Until recently the courts have agreed with this position, but now things appear to be changing.

Such a trend in the direction of public intolerance has begun to isolate the campus environment while at the same time denigrating the tolerant position as “political correctness” – as if being correct and thus legitimate, appropriate and proper was a failing.

### **A Republican Attack on the University**

This process of isolating one of the staunchest bastions of active public tolerance has recently been highlighted by a new (July 2017) report of the Pew Research Center entitled Sharp Partisan Divisions In Views of National

## Institutions.

According to the report, there has been “a dramatic attitude shift on higher education among Republicans and people who lean Republican.” It would seem that “Republicans have soured on higher education, with more than half [a reported 58 percent of them] now saying that colleges have a negative impact on the United States.”

The more conservative the Republican respondent described him- or herself, the more likely they are to have a negative view of higher educational institutions. This compares with 72 percent of Democrats who saw the contribution of colleges on society as positive. Of course, Democrats now have problems getting elected.

There is a link between those who hold a negative view of institutions of higher learning and those who confine themselves to watching or listening to the country’s right-wing media.

As it turns out, “Virtually every day Fox News, Breitbart and other conservative outlets run critical articles about free speech disputes on college campuses, typically with coverage focused on the perceived liberal orthodoxy and political correctness in higher education.” Now consider that Fox News is the most popular news (or shall we say, alleged news) show on U.S. television.

The success of right-wing news and other media is a good example of viewers practicing, perhaps unconsciously, *confirmation bias*. The criterion for the information you seek out is not accuracy or truth, but rather its ability to confirm an outlook you already hold.

Of course, one does not have to be right-wing to play this particular game but, ultimately it makes a difference if you are among the intolerant. Intolerant worldviews are closed systems. Once you have committed to them you have put on blinkers and become one of the faithful – no more debates, no more discussions, no more broadmindedness, no more tolerance. People without your blinkers start to appear as dangerous, heretical, unpatriotic. You are now bound to a “group think” that is starkly undemocratic.

## **Poisonous Sour Grapes**

As intolerance under the leadership of Republicans and neo-Republicans (Trump, Bannon, Tea Party types, etc.) becomes more widespread, those institutions that value tolerance come under pressure. This sometimes comes from right-wing media, sometimes from special interest donors and lobbyists, and sometimes, in the case of college and universities, from pockets of students (both right and left) who have decided that some outlooks are so unacceptable that they must be silenced. Whenever reasonable this last action should be avoided.

If you don't like what campus speakers stand for or say, one's default position should not be to shut them down, but rather to use their presence as a teaching moment: here is how not to build a healthy society. However, in the midst of a culture war, the tolerant may ultimately find themselves painted into a corner.

We can legitimately ask how far the Republican Right is willing to push their campaign of intolerance against tolerant college campuses. Having lost the open campus debates on an array of divisive issues, they now react with a poisonous version of sour grapes. They declare that "colleges have a negative impact on the United States."

If they take this charge to Congress or to the courts, we may come to a point where tolerance of extreme intolerance is no longer reasonable. Given that level of threat we should all be aware of Karl Popper's description of the paradox of tolerance: "unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them."

This is the dilemma that is forced upon us when war – in this case a culture war – takes over the public mind. The space for tolerance shrinks and it is the barbarians among us who start to define the rules of social interaction.

**Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest; America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism. He blogs at [www.tothepointanalyses.com](http://www.tothepointanalyses.com).**

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## Neocons Enlist in Anti-Trump #Resistance

**Exclusive:** The neocons, who have influenced U.S. foreign policy since the 1980s, inflicting grave damage on U.S. interests and the world, are reinventing themselves as soldiers in the anti-Trump #Resistance, writes James W. Carden.

By James W. Carden

In these summer dog days of the Trump presidency, good news is hard to come by, but in late June it was reported that the successor institution to William Kristol's Project for a New American Century, the Foreign Policy Initiative (FPI), was shutting its doors for good.

FPI was founded in 2009 to give the displaced neocons who had worked for President George W. Bush a platform from which to endlessly criticize the new Democratic administration and push for a continuation of Bush's disastrous neocon foreign policy. (Some other neocons sheltered in place mostly inside the State Department and the Pentagon.)

During the Obama years, FPI gave a platform to Kristol and likeminded neocons such as Dan Senor, James Kirchick and Jamie Fly, who went on to serve as a foreign policy adviser to neocon favorite Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Florida.

FPI was generously subsidized by hedge fund manager Paul Singer. *The Washington Post* recently reported that "Those close to the organization said that in the new policy and political environment marked by the ascendancy of Donald Trump, many donors, including Singer, are reassessing where to put their funds."

But does the demise of FPI mean the neoconservatives would be, at long last, going away for a while – perhaps to take stock in the immense damage they have caused the country and the world? The answer would seem to be: not on your life. And why would they? In Donald Trump's Washington, the neocons are in high demand even though a number of high-profile neocons (such as Elliott Abrams and John Bolton) were rebuffed for senior positions inside the new administration. But neocons are finding plenty of high-profile jobs elsewhere.

In April, the *New York Times* announced that longtime climate change denier Bret Stephens was joining the paper as an op-ed columnist. Stephens, who came to the *Times* from the *Wall Street Journal*, has been aptly described by *The Nation's* Eric Alterman as a "deliberate purveyor of propaganda and misinformation." Stephens's past columns include such classics as "I Am Not Sorry the CIA Waterboarded."

For its part, the centrist Brookings Institution announced last month that it was hiring neocon smear artist James Kirchick. Kirchick, who will serve as a Brookings Visiting Fellow, has used his platform at the Internet tabloid Daily Beast to smear proponents of detente as "Putin apologists" and "anti-semites." Kirchick, an outspoken NeverTrumper, also penned a hysterical (and discredited) screed accusing prominent liberals, without evidence, of supporting Donald Trump.

### **Joining the #Resistance**

Neocons are also in demand at what had long been one of the more responsible foreign policy think tanks in Washington. The German Marshall Fund just announced the launch of the Alliance for Securing Democracy, which, according to its mission statement, "will develop comprehensive strategies to defend against,



deter, and raise the costs on Russian and other state actors' efforts to undermine democracy and democratic institutions."

"The Alliance," read the statement, "will work to publicly document and expose Vladimir Putin's ongoing efforts to subvert democracy in the United States and Europe."

The Alliance will be run by none other than former FPI executive director Jamie Fly and a former foreign policy adviser to the Clinton campaign, Laura Rosenberger. The Alliance's board of advisers is a veritable who's who of neocon royalty including the ubiquitous Bill Kristol, along with David Kramer, Michael Morell and Kori Schake.

This is not to imply that the neocons find themselves confined to the think tank world and lack representation inside the Trump administration. Far from it. Trump has appointed several neocons to key jobs, such as United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, and the new Ukraine Envoy Kurt Volker. It is also rumored that Trump will appoint hardliner, A. Mitchell Weiss, as assistant secretary of state for Europe and Eurasia, the post from which Victoria Nuland, a neocon holdover from the Bush years to the Obama administration, managed to do such lasting damage to U.S.-Russia relations.

The neocon revival has been facilitated by #Resistance-friendly media like MSNBC, which frequently features David Frum and William Kristol, two early and outspoken members of the NeverTrump movement. But perhaps what the #Resisters at MSNBC are forgetting is that the neocon-dominated NeverTrump movement was driven by the fact that, for them, Trump was *not militaristic enough*, which is why they threw their support behind the likes of Marco Rubio and Lindsey Graham in the Republican primaries and, in the cases of Robert Kagan and Max Boot, behind Hillary Clinton in the general election.

The willingness of the pro-Hillary #Resistance to make common cause with the neocon NeverTrumpers is troubling and may explain why there has been so precious little "resistance" on their part to Trump's plans to expand the wars in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Yemen. (Indeed, Trump's April 6 missile strike on Syria won praise from Hillary Clinton, who only lamented that Trump had not done more militarily in Syria.)

But perhaps all this isn't so surprising, after all, the legions of embittered Clinton supporters never really objected all that strenuously (if at all) to their candidate's record of support for endless war.

In the end, perhaps the neocons and the pro-Hillary #Resistance are not such

strange bedfellows after all. Indeed, the #Resistance's newfound enthusiasm for many prominent NeverTrumpers like Kristol and Frum helps explain the neocon revival now underway.

**James W. Carden served as an adviser on Russia policy at the US State Department. Currently a contributing writer at The Nation magazine, his work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Quartz, The American Conservative and The National Interest.**

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