

Libya's 'Chaos Theory' Undercuts Hillary

Exclusive: Hillary Clinton's Libyan "regime change" project remains in chaos with one U.S. official likening rival factions to rogue water "droplets" resisting a U.S.-carved rewards-and-punishment "channel" to reconciliation, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Obama administration is hoping that it can yet salvage Hillary Clinton's signature project as Secretary of State, the "regime change" in Libya, via a strategy of funneling Libya's fractious politicians and militias – referred to by one U.S. official as chaotic water "droplets" – into a U.S.-constructed "channel" built out of rewards and punishments.

However, so far, the "unity government" – brokered by U.S. and United Nations officials – has floundered as the leaders of two rival governments bristle at demands for their compliance and show little interest in being good little water "droplets" flowing through the Obama administration's "channel."

In recent days, competing militias, supporting elements of the three governments, have converged on Sirte, where the Islamic State jihadists have established a foothold, but the schisms among the various Libyan factions have prevented anything approaching a coordinated attack. Indeed, resistance to the U.S.-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) appears to be growing amid doubts about the political competence of the hand-picked prime minister, Fayed Sirraj.

Jonathan Winer, the State Department's special envoy on Libya, voiced some of the U.S. government's frustrations during a May 20 panel discussion at the Middle East Institute in Washington as he explained the U.S. strategy for reunifying Libya under the GNA.

"It's a bit like water hydraulics," Winer said. "You can't predict where an individual particle is going to go when water is flowing through something turbulent, that's the core of chaos theory, right? But if you dig a trench, you know most of the water's going to go down that trench, and if you turn it into a channel, more of the water's going in. And then after you dig the channel, you then coat the channel and put in filters and a variety of things to then get that water looking good and useful for more purposes.

"So what we're doing with the Government of National Accord is we're trying to create a channel, for national unity and reconciliation, and for building the institutions Libya needs, for building enough stability so the economy can come

back, so they can pump oil, which Libya needs for Libyans, distribute the wealth fairly, equitably, in a way that brings people in, and take advantage of Libya's natural resources to rebuild the country. ...

"Libyans overall can be quite fractious, so carving that channel in a way that's good, that they're going to say is good, is what we're trying to do, even if we can't predict where individual droplets are going to go, even if it's going to take time, which it is and it will."

Thus far, however, many Libyan political figures have been unwilling to jump into the "channel," which has led the Obama administration to both impose and threaten punishments against these rogue water "droplets," such as financial sanctions and even criminal charges.

"We've sanctioned [Aguila Saleh] the speaker of the parliament of the government in Libya we had recognized prior to the GNA after he undertook a series of activities to prevent people [in the parliament] from voting, which included substantial threats of violence and intimidation when a majority was ready to support the Government of National Accord," Winer said. "We sanctioned him."

The European Union also imposed sanctions on Saleh, whose government is known as the House of Representatives (HOR), based in Tobruk, as well as on Nouri Abusahmain and Khalifa al-Ghwell, the president and prime minister, respectively, of another rival government in Tripoli.

That government denied Sirraj and other GNA officials the right to land at the Tripoli airport in March, forcing the U.S./U.N.-backed "unity government" to arrive by sea and set up shop at a heavily defended naval base. The GNA threatened to deliver its rivals' names to Interpol and to the U.N. for "supporting terrorism."

Support from a Jihadist

Ironically, even as U.S. officials confront defiance from the rival Libyan leaders in Tripoli and Tobruk, they have won cooperation from Abdelhakim Belhadj, who was the leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, a jihadist militia whose members were once driven out of Libya by Col Muammar Gaddafi and developed close ties to Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

After the 9/11 attacks and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Belhadj was tracked by the CIA and captured in Malaysia in 2004 before being renditioned back to Libya, where he was imprisoned until 2010. In 2011, after Secretary of State Clinton convinced President Obama to join an air war against the Gaddafi regime on "humanitarian" grounds, Belhadj pulled together a jihadist force that helped spearhead the decisive attack on Tripoli.

After Gaddafi fled Tripoli and was captured in his home town of Sirte, U.S.-backed rebels sodomized him with a knife and murdered him. Upon hearing of Gaddafi's demise, Secretary of State Clinton clapped her hands in obvious glee and declared, "we came, we saw, he died."

Now, Belhadj, who has since branched off into various business ventures including an airline, is viewed as a key American ally with his militia helping to protect Sirraj and other GNA officials operating from the Tripoli naval base. (Gee, how could an Al Qaeda-connected jihadist with an airline present a problem?)

But U.S. officials have been unwilling to negotiate with some other Libyan figures, such as General Khalifa Haftar, who is commander of the Libyan forces supporting the HOR government in the east. Haftar, who has vowed to crush the Islamic State but also wants broad powers as the country's military chieftain, is viewed as a potential strongman in the mold of Gaddafi.

Sirraj, after being picked to lead the U.N.-U.S.-brokered "unity government" in January, reached out to Haftar in a face-to-face meeting that infuriated U.S. officials who preferred isolating Haftar and felt that the get-together with Sirraj would create confusion among anti-Haftar forces in Libya's west.

Rather than pursue such negotiations, the Obama administration's strategy has focused on using coercion, such as financial sanctions and threats of arrest, to force the chaotic Libyan water "droplets" into the U.S.-dug "channel."

Although the purported reason for the "channel" in this case is to promote positive goals such as political reconciliation and economic development for all Libyans, a troublesome question about the tactic is where – in reality – does the "channel" go. Some Libyans suspect that the "channel" may lead to a neoliberal end that would privatize the nation's oil wealth, rather than sharing it with the people in an equitable way.

There's also the issue of how such a strategy of financial and legal inducements can be used in other undemocratic or even imperialistic ways, benefiting outside powers or coercing the people of a country into policies that they otherwise would reject. Like any weapon, the sophisticated application of sanctions and other pressures can inflict harm in the wrong hands.

'Work in Progress'

In the case of Libya, the wielding of such "smart power" risks further deepening the country's bitter divisions and making the building of bridges between the various factions even harder. That, in turn, could leave the Libyan crisis as a sore point for Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign in which she has tried to

put the best face on the bloody mess, presenting Libya as a “work in progress.”

But “progress” has been slow when detectable at all. Sirraj and the GNA have struggled to assert their authority in the west, while the HOR government in the east continues to insist on its legitimacy.

This past week, central bank officials in the east announced that they had printed 4 billion Libyan dinars through a Russian company while bank officials in the west said they had a British company print dinars for them. The U.S.-backed GNA denounced the eastern dinars as counterfeit, but last year, the U.S.-based International Monetary Fund recognized the central bank governor in the east, Ali Salim al-Hibri, as its sole contact and ended ties to a rival bank operation in the west.

Summing up the confusing situation, The New York Times reported on June 2, “One Western official who recently visited the country said the political mood in Libya had become increasingly confrontational during recent months as the United Nations, acting under pressure from the United States and its allies, has struggled to win acceptance for the unity government.”

The ongoing violence and chaos in Libya is a far cry from what Hillary Clinton’s State Department team envisioned when the “regime change” was being accomplished in 2011 and the expectation was to announce a “Clinton Doctrine” based on the use of “smart power,” according to State Department [email exchanges](#).

Clinton and other “liberal interventionists” around Obama had pressured the President to intervene in Libya supposedly to protect Libyans from a possible slaughter at the hands of Gaddafi, who was mounting an offensive against what he described as Islamic terror groups around Benghazi. The Western bombing campaign decimated the Libyan army and cleared the way for the rebels to seize Tripoli and murder Gaddafi.

However, with Gaddafi and his largely secular regime out of the way, Islamic militants expanded their power across the country, with some proving that they indeed were terrorists, just as Gaddafi had warned. One Islamic terror group attacked the U.S. consulate in Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012, killing U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other American personnel, an incident that Clinton called the worst moment of her four-year tenure as Secretary of State.

As the violence spread, the United States and other Western countries abandoned their embassies in Tripoli. Once prosperous with many social services, Libya descended into the category of failed state with the Islamic State taking advantage of the power vacuum to seize control of Sirte and other territory. In

one grisly incident, Islamic State militants marched Coptic Christians onto a beach and beheaded them.

Now, the Obama administration is trying to re-impose order in the country via a hand-picked group of new Libyan officials and by building a “channel” to direct the flow of the nation’s politics in the direction favored by Washington. But many Libyan water “droplets” are refusing to climb in.

(Research by Assistant Editor Chelsea Gilmour.)

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Cleaning Up Hillary’s Libya Mess.”](#)]

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](#)).

Poland’s ‘Cold War II’ Repression

As the U.S. government ratchets up a new Cold War, Poland is taking hostility toward Russia to the next level, inviting in U.S. military bases and arresting an anti-NATO politician on vague “espionage” charges, writes Gilbert Doctorow.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Since Poland’s right-wing Law and Justice Party returned to power last fall, the new government has been cracking down on independent media, reshaping the judiciary, and escalating its anti-Russian (and Euroskeptic) rhetoric. Now, it has arrested a leading critic, who has challenged its aggressive posture toward Moscow, on vague “espionage” charges.

The government’s infringement on press and political freedoms brought a rebuke this week from the European Commission, which accused Warsaw of endangering the rule of law. The complaint raised the possibility of sanctions, including depriving Poland of its voting rights on passage of European Union laws. That also could mean cutting off some generous E.U. financial aid for Polish infrastructure projects.

However, even as the E.U. expresses growing concerns about the authoritarian actions of the Law and Justice Party, there has been a warming of relations with the United States, particularly in the area of military cooperation.

Poland has pleased the U.S. government by joining in the scare-mongering over supposed Russian imperial designs on the Baltic States and Eastern Europe and by helping to persuade NATO to invest men and equipment in quasi-permanent military installations on Polish soil.

The construction of an American missile defense radar center with ballistic and other missiles is proceeding apace, turning the country into a U.S. bastion and potential launch platform against Russia in possible violation of existing agreements governing intermediate-range nuclear weapons.

While it's true that the anti-Russian policies of the Law and Justice government are only marginally more aggressive than those of the Civic Platform government that it replaced, that's because both reflect the majority views of Poland's political elites. But other views do exist, including a minority opinion that NATO compromises Polish sovereignty and that good relations with Russia, as well as with the E.U., are in the country's interests.

A new twist, however, is how the new government has gone to greater lengths to suppress dissent. Mateusz Piskorski, an outstanding spokesman of the minority view and founder of the Zmiana (or Change) party, was arrested last week in Warsaw on unspecified espionage charges.

While that bald fact was picked up by Western media, little or nothing has been written about the context of the arrest, namely its connection with the forthcoming NATO summit in Poland in July. Still less has been said about how the expanding U.S. influence – with Poland eagerly enlisting in the cause of the new Cold War – is putting Polish freedoms in jeopardy.

During a visit to the European Parliament on May 30 to participate in a closed conference, Zmiana National Board Member Janusz Niedzwiecki cast light on these chilling developments in a speech, which I cite in full below:

Poland's Political Repression and Militarization

By Janusz Niedzwiecki, National Board Member, International Cooperation, Zmiana

I would like to begin by quoting a famous poem written by Pastor Martin Niemöller, the German anti-Nazi theologian:

“First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out–

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.”

Although it might seem overstated, the situation described in Niemoller’s poem is beginning to take shape in Poland. A country which was considered for many years as a symbol of the fight against totalitarianism and pioneer of democratic reforms in Central and Eastern Europe is today quickly being transformed into a tyrannical satrapy where civil liberties are curtailed and repression is applied to people with different ideological views than the prevailing political narrative.

On the morning of May 18, 2016, officers of the Polish Internal Security Agency (ABW) searched apartments of members of the national leadership of the Zmiana (Change) Party, demanding that they hand over hard-disks, memory sticks, documents etc. The search took place in three different cities at the same time, and in some cases (as in our Warsaw office) with a serious violation of legal procedures.

Besides seizing computers, telephones and hard drives, ABW officers took all our books, leaflets, posters, the sound system we used during a demonstration, banners our party flags and even Polish national flags – to prevent and complicate any political actions and protests in the future. Some members of our party who did not want to participate in the unlawful activities of the Internal Security Agency were intimidated.

This type of action is an obvious form of a political repression against those who hold different visions of Poland’s foreign, domestic and socio-economic policies than those of the Polish neoconservative and pro-NATO authorities.

Arrest of an Anti-NATO Dissident

The leader of Zmiana, Mateusz Piskorski, affiliated organizations and independent groups were acting in conformity with Polish law in spite of harassment from state institutions, such as prolonged registration procedures of the party. The action of the ABW was a significant breach of law and order which is not acceptable in a democratic state that declares respect for the freedom of

speech.



Mateusz Piskorski is one of the most important anti-NATO activists in Poland, a political expert and a co-founder of the Polish think-tank, the European Center for Geopolitical Analysis. He was a Member of the Polish Parliament from 2005-2007 and for many years he has spoken out in favor European-continental cooperation and against the NATO and American policy towards Europe and the Middle East.

Mateusz Piskorski was arrested and is being held for three months of preliminary custody on charges of “spying for a foreign country,” with various media sources hysterically spreading the “unconfirmed reports” that he was employed by the intelligence services of Russia, China “and/or” Iraq.

Specific charges are unknown, the whole case is being kept secret, thereby preventing anyone related to Mateusz Piskorski from preparing a defense. Instead, the government-controlled media have made a spectacle of hatred and slander, spinning irrational speculation, not only about the detainee but also about so-called “agents of the influence” – a term that de facto covers everyone who proclaims views other than those set down by the Polish authorities.

The wide-scale coordinated action against the Zmiana political party comes on the heels of an increasingly tense political situation in Poland. Several weeks ago, activists from the Communist Party of Poland and the Grunwald Patriotic Workers’ Union (both organizations are fully legal) were sentenced to “restricted liberty,” including community service, fines, and travel bans for “promoting totalitarianism.”

Following these events and just two days before his arrest, Piskorski warned that the Polish government will attempt to “pacify” opposition organizations and individuals in the run-up to the NATO summit to be held in Warsaw on July 8th-9th.

Pikorski’s Warning

Let us quote this text from Mateusz Piskorski which turned out to be prophetic:

“Predictions concerning the upcoming NATO summit in July in Warsaw are beginning to clearly indicate that today the alliance’s goal is first and foremost preventing the emergence of social movements demanding the liberation of Europe from the tutelage of the United States. As can be seen, *The Financial Times*’ inadvertent mention of the words of one of the Polish Army’s senior commanders show just what decisions can be expected this summer.

“These are decisions which completely undermine not only the sovereignty of Warsaw in the field of foreign policy, but also clearly speak to the fact that from this moment on NATO is supposed to be a police force ready to participate in the pacification of eventual social protests or intervene in the affairs of domestic Polish politics.

“The actual intentions of the alliance’s latest decisions were revealed honestly and in a frankly military way by Brigadier General Krzysztof Krol, the commander of the Multinational Corps Northeast. The issue under consideration was the concept of the so-called NATO spearhead advocated for years by the Americans and longed for by the Polish politicians of both the former and current government.

“Let us give the floor to the general: ‘The VJTF (Very High Readiness Joint Task Force) is to deal with Article 4 situations [of the North-Atlantic Treaty] and that is our intention with it.’ “Article 4 speaks of cooperation and consultation between member states which cannot be described as in article 5 as experiencing armed aggression against any of them, but rather subjective feelings of para-military threats.

“What kind of situations are we dealing with here? General Krol leaves no doubt: ‘The plan was developed to react to hybrid threats in our area of operation. Our plans are scalable to the situation,’ he told *The Financial Times*.

Repression Excuse: ‘Hybrid War’

“The concept of ‘hybrid war’ or hybrid actions has blossomed as a definition of the activities of Russia following the Ukrainian revolution of 2014. But what is interesting is that to this day it has not attained any unambiguous academic interpretation and various authors and experts define its scope in different ways. In *The Financial Times*, however, we read that the NATO spearhead has the right to take action in case of the destabilization of the international situation in the country triggered by, for example, public protests.

“What does this mean in practice? Any internal disturbance could be treated and presented by native as well as American ‘spearheadologists’ as part of the activities vaguely defined as ‘hybrid war.’ This might lead to a case in which

protests against the effects of the TTIP Agreement supported by the Polish state could be treated as 'hybrid activities.' Poles' protests against crimes committed by US Army soldiers stationed in Poland could also turn out to be 'hybrid war.'

"Antoni Macierewicz's sick imagination could suggest dozens of different theories. After all, the current Defense Minister is so divorced from common sense that he believes that Radosław Sikorski, another pro-American hawk, is actually working for Moscow.

"Social unrest, protests, strikes, attempts to form information resources independent from the establishment, demanding transparency in the defense and foreign policies of the Polish authorities – all of these could become pretexts for one or another swing into action of advisors from NATO (mainly from the USA), who would provide 'fraternal aid' to the Polish units and services subordinated to them.

"In this situation, all that is left is to hope that officers and officials will not want to stay in an 'oral relationship' (the colorful expression of Sikorski) with their American overlords, will remind themselves of the dignity of the Polish uniform, and send all those representatives of foreign interests 'concerned about our security' far back across the Atlantic Ocean.

"Meanwhile, we have been left with one thing: to loudly protest and by all law-abiding means block the realization of NATO's plans which it will announce in July in Warsaw. It is also worth organizing a social movement for Poland's exit from this pact as a condition of regaining elementary statehood." **[End of Piskorski's comments.]**

Pre-War Prep

So what is actually going on in Poland, and how could it be connected with the pre-war preparations?

First of all, our biggest concern should be to highlight the fact that in parallel with the political repressions inspired by pro-NATO circles (unprecedented since the fall of the Berlin Wall), there is a huge wave of militarization and Russophobia, pro-war rhetoric.

Polish neoconservative authorities have not only significantly increased military spending and created new types of troops and paramilitaries, but also begged for the presence in Poland of U.S. troops and military installations.

After Antoni Macierewicz (who was previously head of the para-committee ineffectually trying to reject the official version of the Smolensk disaster, so

that they could blame for the incident on Vladimir Putin) was appointed as a Minister of Defense, not only was decision taken to allow the creation of a US base for ballistic missiles (an element of the so called “anti missile shield”), but also to create six U.S. military bases. To calm public opinion in the media they are called “warehouses of military equipment”.

The definition of “hybrid war” was extended to the limits, so that any action differing from the line drawn by the official propaganda may be regarded as hostile in not only political but also military terms. Thus the proclamation of ideas contrary to the official propaganda is openly called by government run media as “inspired by foreign intelligence services.”

Another important issue is the fact that Poland was one of the few countries in Europe to officially support the aggressive version of TTiP advocated by the U.S. government. This can be read as a direct involvement of the Polish authorities in sabotaging a competitive project – the New Silk Road – run by China.

As if all this were not enough, Polish President Andrzej Duda a few days ago signed a law which equates the rights of American troops stationed in Poland with the rights of the Polish Army. They can thus move freely around the country without having to consult the government about their current activities. It is worth mentioning that such privileges were not available even to Soviet troops formerly stationed in Poland, who were forced to remain in their bases at all times.

Overall, the situation in Poland is tense and in many ways resembles the changes that have occurred in Turkey during the rule of Erdogan. This combination of authoritarianism, militarism and political repression has to be worrisome, because it is a typical mix of measures taken by authorities that are preparing for war. Taking into account the geopolitical conditions of Poland under every possible scenario such a war has to end tragically. **[End of Niedzwiecki’s speech.]**

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America Excels in Business of Death

America may lag behind the developed world in many categories, but it is No. 1

in the “merchant of death” business, experiencing a boom in the commerce of boom, especially in areas destabilized by U.S. invasions, notes JP Sottile.

By JP Sottile

Who says nothing is made in the USA anymore? Certainly not the well-heeled denizens of the State Department’s diplomatic corps. And they should know. That’s because they’re stationed on the frontlines of the ongoing battle to preserve Uncle Sam’s dominant market share of the global weapons trade.

Luckily for the Military-Industrial Complex, it turns out that “Made in the USA” inspires a lot of brand loyalty, even if *actual* loyalty is often a harder sell (paging Saudi Arabia). To wit, not only was America the world’s leading arms dealer in 2014 with \$36.2 billion in sales, but it topped that 35 percent surge in sales over 2013 with yet another profitable spike to \$46.6 billion in 2015.

As Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) determined in its recent report on the global arms trade, the United States maintains a commanding “33% share of total arms exports” and is the world’s top seller for five years running. And its customer base includes “at least” 96 countries, which is nearly half of the world’s nations.

A robust 40 percent of those exports end up in the Middle East. Perhaps that’s why the State Department is so darn bullish on the prospects of Uncle Sam’s booming business of selling things that go “boom!”

That’s the takeaway from a recent report in Defense News highlighting the marketing push by “Commercial Officers” stationed at the U.S. embassy in Jordan. They worked the crowd at the kingdom’s eleventh bi-annual Special Operations Forces Exhibition and Conference (SOFEX). Like many of the nearly 100 military-themed “trade shows” held around the world **this year alone**, SOFEX offered the profiteers of doom an opportunity to display their merchandise and to cut deals with bellicose browsers ready to pull the trigger on a deadly impulse buy.

Some of the bigger, “glitzy” trade shows – like the International Defence Exposition and Conference (IDEX) held yearly in Abu Dhabi – are full-on one-stop-shopping destinations for the up-and-coming military power on the move, the newly-minted pro-Western junta eager to armor-up, and the forward-thinking “Coalition Partner” looking for the latest in “kinetic warfare.”

If nothing else, trade shows offer defense contractors a chance to give out “promotional tchotchkes” to potential future customers who might be swayed to double-back by a branded camouflage carryall or a Digi Camo Military Bert Stress Reliever. No doubt it’s a tedious affair, but the presenters toiling behind the displays are not alone on the battlefield of commerce.

That certainly was the case at SOFEX, where the U.S. Embassy deployed Senior Commercial Officer Geoffrey Bogart and Regional Safety and Security chief Cherine Maher to act as sale-force multipliers for America's military moneymakers.

The Mideast Arms Bazaar

As Jen Judson detailed, Bogart and Maher tracked down sales leads throughout a region gripped by chaos since America wantonly destroyed a bystander nation under false pretenses (a.k.a. Iraq). Here are Judson's highlights from Bogart and Maher's magical misery tour of the profitable market forces currently shaping America's recently reshaped Middle East:

JORDAN: "We are very high on the safety and security market in Jordan," Geoffrey Bogart, a commercial officer at the U.S. Embassy said. Bogart said there is an abundance of market prospects for U.S. companies to do business in Jordan, including in border security, cyber security, command and control centers, telecommunications equipment, military vehicles, artillery, tactical equipment, bomb and metal detectors, and closed circuit television (CCTV) and access control.

EGYPT: "Egypt is facing a lot of challenges especially in terms of border control and whether it's from the West or the East or the North or the South, so the main project that is going on is border and perimeter control," Maher said, which means the country really wants bomb detection, jammers and improvised explosive device diffusers.

LIBYA: The current instability in Libya has led to challenges for U.S. firms, according to Maher; however, U.S. companies' products are in high demand there. "The trick is how to enter the market, who to sell to, and making sure of export license," she said, adding some products that had been permitted to be sold to Libya now have restrictions.

TUNISIA: There is continuous growth in Tunisia's defense market, Maher said. Tunisia plussed up its security forces budget in 2016 due to growing terrorist threats in the region. The country wants to build up its force capacity to deter regional threats, strengthen defensive capabilities and support counterterrorism operations.

LEBANON: Lebanon is interested in border security; however, it's particularly interested in securing public buildings and providing for civilian protection due to ongoing insecurity in some towns and cities near Beirut, Maher said.

IRAQ: Maher said Iraq has a particularly "dynamic" market valued in 2014 at about \$7.6 billion, which is about 3.44 percent of its GDP. With the ongoing war

against the Islamic State group, it is anticipated that Iraq will soon spend around \$19 billion, which would make up about 18 to 20 percent of its GDP. Like all the other countries in the region, Iraq is investing heavily in safety and security equipment, and also wants personal protective gear and security systems for residential and commercial buildings, according to Maher.

Kicking Back a Share

A “dynamic” market is right ... that is, if you’re General Dynamics. Or Lockheed Martin. Or Boeing. Or any of the big six defense contractors who together took home \$90.29 billion of the over \$175 billion worth of taxpayer dollars doled out last year to the top 100 military contractors. Not coincidentally, seven of the top eight U.S. Government contractors are defense companies, with only health care services provider McKesson making it past a phalanx of defense wheelers and dealers.

It’s a rarified world greased last year by \$127.39 million of lobbying largesse and another \$32.66 million spent so far this year, according to OpenSecrets.org. Of course, lobbying offers a great bang for the buck when it comes to stoking sales. A MapLight analysis earlier this year found that “major U.S. government contractors have received \$1,171 in taxpayer money for every \$1 invested in lobbying and political action committee contributions during the last decade.”

Now that’s some serious ROI! Still, nothing quite compares to the breeder reactor effect that comes from using expensive military hardware to destroy regimes in a never-ending global war against a tactic. Regime change touched off civil war in Iraq. That spread to Syria which, in turn, sent over 660,000 refugees into Jordan and over one million refugees into Lebanon ... all of which explains why Bogart and Maher are so bullish on the sale of security-related products to those two nations and why the entire region is in the midst of a military buying spree.

Then there is the chaotic aftermath of regime change in Libya, which threatens to spill over to two more booming markets – Tunisia and Egypt. Of course, Egypt had its own U.S.-endorsed internal regime change at the hands of a loyal customer and longtime recipient of American “aid” – the Egyptian military. It was really a “coup,” but U.S. law would’ve prevented selling Egypt’s military junta tear gas canisters marked “Made in USA” (among other things) if it was officially a coup d’etat, so the Obama Administration simply didn’t call it a coup.

Now, according to Ms. Maher, Egypt’s military is in the market for yet more military hardware that, according to a new GAO report detailed by The Intercept, is not being properly or legally vetted by the State Department. Those purchases

are easily funded by the \$6.4 billion in U.S. aid since the coup in 2011. And (go figure) Egypt's wish list is justified, in part, by the sudden need to ward off interlopers from regime-changed Libya, which, according to the aforementioned Ms. Maher, is still a red-hot market for U.S. arms dealers ... if they can get the export licenses.

A Circular Business Model

And so the dynamic market churns onward – with tax dollars paying the salaries of State Department “Commercial Officers” who work for the heavily-subsidized U.S. defense industry as salespeople in overseas markets destabilized by taxpayer-funded wars fought by taxpayer-supported American soldiers armed with weaponry purchased from that self-same defense industry with – you guessed it – more tax dollars.

The “diplomats” in the State Department act as important go-betweens in the process, helping “customers” navigate the military-industrial complexities of end-user certificates, export licenses, and human rights restrictions so they can spend taxpayer-funded U.S. “aid” that invariably ends up back in the coffers of Lockheed, Boeing, Raytheon, and so on.

Once the money makes it back home to the defense industry, those companies invest some of their windfalls into lobbying, into SuperPACS, into both political parties, and directly into campaigns of the Congressional cronies who dutifully rubber-stamp the defense budget that enriches the defense industry. So far this year, they've poured over \$17 million into those efforts and, in turn, they've provided the fuel to run the “dynamic” perpetual machine in which the State Department is a vital cog.

And this is why the folks at the State Department know full-well that, in fact, America still actually makes something – it is the world's leading manufacturer of war.

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theAntiMedia.org. Anti-Media Radio airs weeknights at 11 pm Eastern/8 pm Pacific.]

Letting 'Wall Street' Walk

Legal double standards are the norm in the U.S. – no jail for law-flouting Wall Street bankers but mass incarceration for average citizens, especially minorities, who get caught up in the prison-industrial-complex, as Michael Brenner describes.

By Michael Brenner

Illicit financial behavior has been decriminalized in the United States – for all practical purposes. Despite the revelations of massive misconduct by banks and other financial services businesses, criminal investigations are rare, indictments exceptional and guilty judgments extraordinary.

Most potentially culpable actions are overlooked by authorities, slighted, reduced from criminal to civil status when pursued, individuals evade penalties much less punishment, and the appeals courts take extreme liberties in exonerating culprits when and if the odd conviction reaches them.

The last mentioned are establishing new frontiers in the formulation of ingeniously sophistic arguments to justify letting financial malefactors off the hook. *As some wit suggests, all 32 or so judicial inventions should be assembled in a legal code called the Goldman Variations.*

Our elected officials, our regulators, our politicians and the media have come to accept this as the natural order of things. Business Sections of newspapers, like *The New York Times*, read like the gazette for the world of organized crime in its heyday when the five Mafia families were on top of their game. (substitute Goldman Sachs, Chase Morgan, Bank of America, CITI, Wells Fargo). As for the *Wall Street Journal* and the legion of business magazines, they blend features of *VARIETY* and *Osservatore Romano*.

The reasons for this phenomenon are multiple: the rule of money in our politics; the neutering of regulatory bodies by the appointment of business friendly officers in symbiotic relationships with former or prospective employers; a wider culture in which the cult of wealth pervades all; and the timidity of a political class that defers to the power centers who enjoy rank, status and respect.

Obama's appointment of Mary Jo White, from the white gloves law firm Debevoise & Plimpton which specialized in advising and representing Wall Street during the financial crisis (where she was head of litigation), to head the Security Exchange Commission is roughly analogous to appointing Dominick "Quiet Dom" Cirillo, consigliere of the Vito Genovese Mafia family, to run the FBI's

Organized Crime Task Force in Manhattan.

In White's case, her earlier experience as United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York (the financial district) made her an exceptionally valuable acquisition when she switched sides in 2003 – 2013. Her record at the SEC since 2013 confirms her adherence to the Holder philosophy of leniency toward financial misdeeds – and confirms where her loyalties lie.

Appointments to senior positions dealing with financial matters have been primarily "parachutists." Several of them are more egregious than the White case. So too was former Attorney-General Eric Holder. Within days of leaving the Justice Department, he was back at his former corporate law firm – albeit as a "counselor" for the one-year stipulated transition period.

During his years in private practice, Holder represented the Swiss private bank UBS. Because of this, he recused himself from participating in the Department of Justice investigation of UBS's abetting of tax evasion by U.S. account-holders.

Such is the privileged status of our largest financial institutions that the Obama administration has amended, *de facto*, the Constitution to accommodate their claim to being above the law. Former Attorney General Holder is the author of the doctrine that posits the principle of "too-big-to-prosecute."

Fearing Economic Damage

Holder's publicly stated view is that he, the Justice Department and the Executive Branch generally have a right to exempt financial institutions from criminal prosecution when they believe that doing so would cause "unacceptable" damage to the national economy. It first took shape during Bill Clinton's administration.

Holder presented the full-blown doctrine in a startling confession during testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee on March 5, 2011. "I am concerned that the size of some of these institutions becomes so large that it does become difficult for us to prosecute them when we are hit with indications that if you do prosecute, if you do bring a criminal charge, it will have a negative impact on the national economy, perhaps even the world economy," Holder said, according to *The Hill* newspaper.

Holder's comments didn't come as a total surprise. His underlings had already made similar confessions to *The New York Times* the previous year, after they declined to prosecute HSBC for flagrant, years-long violations of money-laundering laws, out of fear that doing so would hurt the global economy.

Lanny Breuer, formerly in charge of doling out the Justice Department's wrist slaps to banks, told *Frontline* as much in the documentary "The Untouchables" which aired in January 2011.

Of course, President Obama and Attorney-General Holder had taken oaths to uphold the laws of the land. That pledge does not allow them personal discretion as to whom it applies. Yet, they have acted as if the Justice Department and the Executive Branch generally have a right to exempt financial institutions from criminal prosecution when they believe that doing so would cause "unacceptable" damage to the national economy.

Let us be clear; Holder is not referring to the interpretation and application of any legal standard. He is referring to a purely subjective standard that has nothing to do with the law. In a similar vein, it is reported that the Obama administration has instructed the Department of Justice and the FBI to make mortgage fraud its lowest priority and, indeed, to dismiss hundreds of cases without any investigation whatsoever. (Report of the Inspector General, Department of Justice March 11, 2014).

The administration also improperly has diverted funds appropriated for this specific purpose to other areas. This arbitrary exclusion from investigation of the largest category of financial crime has been made in the face of a well-publicized and solemn undertaking by both President Obama and Attorney General Holder to take bold and expeditious action in this area.

"Equal protection of the laws" is a principle enshrined in the Constitution. There is no allowance for the President or the Attorney General, who serves at the President's pleasure, to establish special classes of persons who are exempt from the laws' stipulations – either to make them immune or to deny them due process. Yet, that is what they explicitly have done.

In a commencement address at NYU in 2014, Holder stated bluntly: "Responsibility remains so diffuse, and top executives so insulated, that any misconduct could again be considered more a symptom of the institution's culture than a result of the willful actions of any single individual."

The Holder-Obama doctrine concentrates heavily on the disruptive effects on the nation's (and the world's) financial system were any of the too-big-to-fail banks brought low by a combination of criminal convictions and financial penalties that were greater than the profits made from systematically skirting the law – as currently done.

Addressing the Problem

That is a highly debatable proposition on purely technical grounds. Whatever the

appraisal one makes, there are two straightforward solutions to the problem as stated.

First, one should break them up so that were they to “fail,” the systemic consequences would be manageable. Second, risk is increased rather than lowered by following a legal *cum* political strategy that has the effect of encouraging the managers of mega-financial institutions to play fast-and-loose in their financial maneuverings.

To return to the analogy of the five Mafia families, a law enforcement strategy that favored civil action over criminal prosecution, that entailed fines rather than prison time, and that kept those fines at a level where they could be calculated as a cost of doing a very lucrative business would result in a flourishing of criminal organizations – at great cost to society.

Moreover, were there a practice of Mafia bosses and police commissioners/district attorneys parachuting from one sphere to another, the collateral damage inflicted on all law enforcement would be enormous.

The Holder claim for corporate immunity is unsustainable by any reasonable legal standard and reading of the Constitution. Such reasonableness, though, no longer prevails. Witness the widespread passive acceptance of this novel revolutionary doctrine when it was pronounced – and its only slight rhetorical qualification since.

The radical idea that nominally criminal acts should be understood contextually and that judgment as well as punishment should be administered accordingly opens up a wide of questions about the conduct of our judicial system.

There is no reason why it could not be applied generally to the entire range of criminal conduct and proceedings. Following the Holder-Obama logic, this should be done at every stage of jurisprudence: indictment, trial, judgment and punishment. A recent case in New York City illustrates what the implications might be.

In that instance, a woman was arrested at Kennedy airport for possession of 500 grams of cocaine. She was detained, indicted and convicted of a felony. All that followed the well-trod legal path. It was the sentencing that broke the mold.

Judge Frederick Block placed the woman on probation rather than throwing her into the slammer. His main argument, developed in a closely reasoned 46-page opinion, concentrated on the “collateral consequences” of her conviction. Those consequences were deemed adequate punishment to meet the requirements of the law, society and the felon’s long-term integration into the community. The

addition of prison time would have made the punishment disproportionate to the crime. It would have exceeded – not fit – the crime.

What the judge pointed out is that so many legal disabilities attach to anyone convicted of a felony as to deny the person a reasonable chance of pursuing a normal life upon release. Those disabilities include disqualification for all kinds of access to government assistance programs which cover education, housing and employment. The net result would be a high likelihood of recidivism. From society's perspective, that translates into a higher likelihood of costs associated with welfare, medical care, and possible re-institutionalization. In addition, there are the tangible and intangible costs for possible maintenance of any children she might bear.

The woman in question lives with her mother in New Haven where she was enrolled in college and was working part time as a nail technician. For her, the collateral consequences could be expected to be particularly high. The underlying logic, though, applies generally.

Setting Examples

What about the “systemic consequences?” Isn't punishment for the commission of a crime supposed to act on a deterrent for others? Yes – in principle. That consideration, however, did not figure in the Holder-Obama doctrine as applied to financial misdeeds whose perpetrators are in a more visible position to set an example.

Indeed, one could argue that the sense of entitlement and expectation of having a right to act with impunity free of worry about accountability is far more pronounced among Wall Street executives than it is among inner city poor. Thereby, the positive value of criminal conviction followed by individual punishment would be commensurately greater in terms of a benefit to society.

The case cited above involves a felonious criminal act whose commission was proven in a court of law. American prisons, today, confine hundreds of thousands whose crimes are of a lesser order. Indeed, a significant percentage may not have committed any crime at all but rather are victims of police campaigns to cleanse the streets of those who allegedly have committed relatively minor misdemeanors.

Draconian enforcement of “zero tolerance” philosophies has led to widespread abuse of the police power in cities like New York. The absurd “three strikes and you're out” strategy initiated in California and promoted nationwide by President Bill Clinton, has had even more dire results in spiking the incarceration rates, for longer terms – jailing mainly marijuana and other drug

users who are a threat only to themselves rather than to society.

Much has been made of the dogmatic claim that a crackdown on misbehavior is the reason for the drastic drop in urban violent crime. This is an urban legend. In New York City, former Mayor Rudi Giuliani and his Police Commissioner Bill Bratton, have been lionized for this supposed achievement. Yet, the story is pure fiction.

The unprecedented sharp decline occurred under David Dinkins, his black predecessor who was widely criticized for being “soft on crime” and stinting in his support for the police. The truth is that violent crime was closely correlated with the crack epidemic and its recession – reinforced by other trends that registered nationwide.

For these categories of criminals and alleged criminals whose misdeeds fall in the category of misdemeanors, Judge Block’s concept of “collateral consequences” is even more compelling. The concept, in fact, should be broadened to pertain to arrest and prosecution as well as sentencing. The consequences to be taken into account properly should aggregate their weight for both the individual and society. Then, there are the intangible costs of mass criminalization and imprisonment.

Unsettling Markets

Yet, while rulings like Judge Block’s may be rare regarding “street crimes,” they have become routine regarding Wall Street crimes, which are not prosecuted in the name of the Holder doctrine concerned about the unsettling effects on investor confidence and markets from casting a dark cloud over “Wall Street.”

Again, this is dubious on technical grounds; and the logical responses obvious. Let us shift ground and think of the unsettling effects produced by legally stigmatizing a considerable slice of inner-city populations. Disruption of families, instilling widespread feelings of persecution, aggravation of relations with the police, more estranged race relations, etc. It may be difficult to place numbers on these costs, but the negative consequences for society are great.

The full extent of the decade-long police “zero tolerance” campaign, and its demoralizing impact on largely minority neighborhoods, is one of the great unreported stories of our times. Corruption was its hallmark: in its misleading justifications, in its methods that systematized entrapment and fabrication of charges (Examples: creating a public nuisance by drinking a beer from a can on the steps of your house; impeding pedestrian movement by stopping to chat while walking your dog at midnight; loitering in the hallway of your own apartment

building).

Other elements of the corruption included its degeneration into a crass quota system, its abuse of the criminal justice system that jailed hundreds of thousands of innocents who couldn't meet bail or hire a lawyer, forcing them to admit to misdemeanors that leave a permanent stain on their records in order to be released, and its exploitation by cynical politicians.

The one first-hand account that tells the tale is Matt Taibbi's deeply disturbing *DIVIDE* (Spiegel & Grau 2014). It deals with New York City, but the same phenomenon is visible across urban America.

Collateral consequences can be a valuable concept – one that has multiple meanings. But it should be applied where it serves justice not iniquity.

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Clinton's Speech: A Lost Opportunity

With the expected choice of status-quo candidate Hillary Clinton or off-the-wall Donald Trump, the U.S. has missed out on a desperately needed opportunity to examine a failed foreign policy, explains ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The easy part for Hillary Clinton and her speechwriters in constructing what was billed as a major foreign policy speech was to enumerate some of the many valid reasons that Donald Trump is unfit to lead the United States in its relations with the rest of the world.

Clinton is correct that what has passed for Trump's ideas on foreign policy "are dangerously incoherent. They're not even really ideas – just a series of bizarre rants, personal feuds, and outright lies." Trump's efforts to sound coherent have been laden with contradictions and declarations that resemble bumper stickers more than carefully thought-out policy proposals.

Some of his most specific and distinctive pronouncements belong in the realm of the fantastic, such as excluding all Muslims from the country, building a huge wall and somehow getting a neighbor to pay for it, and encouraging Saudi Arabia, Japan, and South Korea to get nuclear weapons. Just when he has seemed to have made a suggestion that sounds fresh and constructive, such as referring to

neutrality in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he suddenly veers in a much different direction.

Clinton is correct that Trump is “temperamentally unfit” for the presidency and that it is easy to imagine him “leading us into a war just because somebody got under his very thin skin.” When Trump rightly labels past military expeditions in Iraq and Libya as mistakes, he claims a past personal opposition to those interventions that is nowhere near as clear as what the record indicates.

And that record in turn reflects how Trump has so little involvement or experience in foreign affairs that he did not even have to express any opinions about such military operations at the time they were undertaken. That lack of experience points to one of the biggest and most important differences between the two presumptive presidential nominees.

Clinton is right to draw attention to that difference, and to note that “there’s no risk of people losing their lives if you blow up a golf-course deal.” Trump’s complete lack of public service – which would be unprecedented among incoming U.S. presidents—contrasts sharply with Clinton’s experience. Her service in the Obama administration is the sort of experience that the nation once appropriately valued so highly that five of the first eight U.S. presidents were former secretaries of state.

Clinton’s speech was much less than it could have been, however, by being structured around the criticisms of Trump and sounding as if she were defining herself mainly as the un-Trump. Such an approach is not going to satisfy those who sense that the United States has, through several administrations, been suffering from some fundamental misdirections.

Trump’s Appeal

Many people who have that sense, even if they would have difficulty articulating exactly what would characterize a new direction, are attracted to Trump because, amid all the rants and incoherence, he seems to stand for change, including change in foreign affairs. Clinton’s approach also is not going to satisfy those who have thought very carefully about the misdirection and have articulated the ways in which much U.S. national security policy has incurred great costs with meager results.

Clinton did, to be fair, express some policy preferences that not only are different from Trump’s but also are specific and constructive. She was right to mention as a first priority that “we need to be strong at home. That means investing in our infrastructure, education and innovation – the fundamentals of a strong economy. We need to reduce income inequality...” She was also right to

distinguish sharply her views from Trump's regarding climate change and the use of torture.

But in much of the rest of the speech she repeatedly fell back into aspects of a Washington conventional wisdom that have made for the persistence of problems rather than the solution of them. This was true, for example, in portions of her discussion of relationships with allies and adversaries.

She showed a good understanding of what diplomacy with adversaries consists of when she remarked that these are "countries that share some common interests with us amid many disagreements" and that "Donald doesn't see the complexity" involved. But she gave no acknowledgment that there also are mixtures of common interests and disagreements – indeed, not just disagreements but conflicting interests – in relations with countries commonly considered allies.

This arose, for instance, when amid her appropriate defense of the diplomacy leading to the nuclear agreement with Iran she started talking about the security of Israel – without mentioning that the Israeli government has done all it can to subvert and kill the very agreement she was defending.

Clinton's discussion of policy on ISIS reflected the usual Washington approach of just doing more, especially more militarily, in response to such problems without stepping back to ask more fundamental questions about costs, effects, and where major U.S. interests lie.

Clinton was correct in asserting that her "plan for defeating ISIS" is more specific and transparent than Trump's. But the "plan" appears to consist of current policies involving diplomacy aimed at settling the Syrian civil war while also saying that the United States should "take out their strongholds in Iraq and Syria by intensifying the air campaign and stepping up our support for Arab and Kurdish forces on the ground."

That all-too-commonly used phrase "take out" disguises a multitude of omissions of figuring out what happens next after such an adversary has been "taken out" and whether such action does anything at all on balance to reduce violence and extremism. The difference between "taking out" an adversary such as ISIS and, as Trump would put it, "bombing the s-t" out of that adversary may mainly be one of the primness or vulgarity of the expression.

More Conventional Wisdom

Clinton's overall approach is grounded in that central tenet of Washington conventional wisdom that, as she put it in the speech, "America is an exceptional country," that "we lead with purpose, and we prevail," and that "if America doesn't lead, we leave a vacuum – and that will either cause chaos, or

other countries will rush in to fill the void.”

The awful metaphor of a vacuum, with the misleading notion that in any troubled place in the world if the United States does not occupy it then bad vapors will whoosh in, has underlain thinking that has repeatedly meant costly trouble for the United States, including in some of the places where U.S. troops are found today.

The longstanding, despite being damaging, conventional wisdom central to Hillary Clinton’s thinking on foreign policy mirrors what was laid out at greater length in the recently released report from the Center for New American Security titled “Extending American Power”.

As critical readers of that report have noted, it represents a mashing of neoconservatism and liberal interventionism and a recipe for repeating many of the failures that have contributed to the very unease and wishing for change that have helped to build support for Donald Trump, notwithstanding how little he has to contribute in the way of solutions.

This election year evidently is not going to be the year for positive redirection of U.S. national security policy. The first priority needs to be to keep dangerous incoherence out of the White House, because that is where the biggest potential damage to U.S. interests lies. Staying stuck in the rut of conventional wisdom is the relatively safer choice, although it’s too bad we won’t have a chance for something better.

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The Bigger Nuclear Risk: Trump or Clinton?

Exclusive: If the U.S. election comes down to Hillary Clinton v. Donald Trump, the American people will have to decide between two candidates who could risk the future of the planet, albeit for very different reasons, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Hillary Clinton made a strong case for why handing the nuclear codes over to a

President Donald Trump would be a scary idea, but there may be equal or even greater reason to fear turning them over to her. In perhaps the most likely area where nuclear war could break out – along Russia's borders – Clinton comes across as the more belligerent of the two.

In Clinton's world view, President Vladimir Putin, who has been elected multiple times and has approval ratings around 80 percent, is nothing more than a "dictator" who is engaged in "aggression" that threatens NATO following the U.S.-backed "regime change" in Ukraine.

"Moscow has taken aggressive military action in Ukraine, right on NATO's doorstep," she declared. But stop for a second and think about what Clinton said: she sees Russia responding to an unconstitutional coup in Ukraine – which installed a virulently anti-Russian regime on Russia's border – as Moscow acting aggressively "on NATO's doorstep."

That's the same NATO, whose job it was to protect Western Europe from the Soviet Union, that – following the Soviet Union's collapse – added country after country right up to Russia's border. In other words, NATO muscled its way into Russia's face and has announced plans to incorporate Ukraine as well, but when Russia reacts, it's the one doing the provoking.

Clinton's neoconservative interpretation of what's happening in Eastern Europe is so upside-down and inside-out that it could ultimately become the flashpoint for a nuclear war between Russia and the West.

While she sees Russia as the "aggressor" against NATO, the Russians see NATO moving troops up to its borders and watch the deployment of anti-ballistic-missile systems in Romania and Poland, thus making a first-strike nuclear attack against Russia more feasible. Russia has made clear that it views these military deployments, just kilometers from major Russian cities, as an existential threat.

In response, Russia is raising its alert levels and upgrading its strategic forces. Yet, Hillary Clinton believes the Russians have no reason to fear NATO's military encirclement and no right to resist U.S.-supported coups in countries on Russia's periphery. It is just such a contradiction of viewpoints that can turn a spark into an uncontrollable inferno.

What might happen, for instance, if Ukraine's nationalist – and even neo-Nazi – militias, which wield increasing power over the corrupt and indecisive regime in Kiev, received modern weaponry from a tough-talking Clinton-45 administration and launched an offensive to exterminate ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine and to reclaim Crimea, where 96 percent of the voters opted to secede from Ukraine

and rejoin Russia?

A President Hillary Clinton would have talked herself into a position of supporting this “liberation” of “Russian-occupied territory” and her clever propagandists would surely present this “heroic struggle” as a war of good against evil, much as they justified bloody U.S. invasions of Iraq and Libya which Clinton supported as U.S. senator and Secretary of State, respectively.

What if the Ukrainian forces then fired missiles striking Russia’s naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea, killing some of the 20,000 Russian troops stationed there and inflicting damage on Russia’s Black Sea fleet? What if Kremlin hardliners finally got their way and unleashed the Russian army to launch a real invasion of Ukraine, crushing its military, rumbling through to Kiev and accomplishing their own “regime change”?

How would President Hillary Clinton respond? Would she put herself in the shoes of Russia’s leaders and search for some way to de-escalate or would she get high-and-mighty and escalate the crisis by activating NATO military forces to counter this “Russian aggression”?

Given what we know about Clinton’s tough-talking persona, the odds are good that she would opt for an escalation – and that could set the stage for nuclear war, possibly starting because the Russians would fear the imminence of a NATO first strike, made more possible by those ABM bases in Romania and Poland.

Clinton’s Non-Nuclear Wars

There are other areas in the world where a President Hillary Clinton would likely go to war albeit at a sub-nuclear level. During the campaign, she has made clear that she intends to invade Syria once she takes office, although she frames her invasions as humanitarian gestures, such as creating “safe zones” and “no-fly zones.”

In other words, although she condemns Russian “aggression,” she advocates aggressive war herself, seemingly incapable of recognizing her hypocrisies and only grudgingly acknowledging her “mistakes,” such as her support for the invasion of Iraq.

So, on Thursday, even as she made strong points about Trump’s mismatched temperament for becoming Commander-in-Chief, she flashed a harsh temperament of her own that also was unsettling, although in a different way.

Trump shoots from the lip and has a thin skin, while Clinton is tightly wound and also has a thin skin. Trump lets his emotions run wild while Clinton is excessively controlled. Trump engages in raucous give-and-take with his critics;

Clinton tries to hide her decision-making (and emails) from her critics.

It's hard to say which set of behaviors is more dangerous. One can imagine Trump having free-form or chaotic diplomatic encounters with allies and adversaries alike, while Clinton would plot and scheme, insisting on cooperation from allies and demanding capitulation from adversaries.

Clinton sprinkled her speech denouncing Trump with gratuitous insults aimed at Putin and undiplomatic slaps at Russia, such as, "If Donald gets his way, they'll be celebrating in the Kremlin. We cannot let that happen."

In short, there is reason to fear the election of either of these candidates, one because of his unpredictability and the other because of her rigidity. How, one might wonder, did the two major political parties reach this juncture, putting two arguably unfit personalities within reach of the nuclear codes?

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a Neocon](#)" and "[Would a Clinton Win Mean More Wars?](#)"]

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](#)).

Trump, Trade and War

Exclusive: Neoliberal dogma holds that "free trade" brings peace and thus Donald Trump's criticism of trade deals presages war. But that view is not only bad history but ignores valid points that Trump raises, says James W Carden.

By James W Carden

Shikha Dalmia, a fellow at the Koch brothers-funded think tank, the Reason Foundation, has castigated CATO's Doug Bandow and *The Nation's* Stephen F. Cohen for having the temerity to note that the Republican presidential nominee, Donald J. Trump, has raised several important foreign policy issues which need addressing, and soon.

Those questions include why the United States must play the role of world policeman, whether NATO's mission is obsolete, why the U.S. always pursues "regime change" when the results – in Iraq, Libya, Ukraine, Syria, etc. – are a

“disaster,” and why Russia has been made into an enemy.

Bandow has praised Trump’s independence from the “neoconservatives and militaristic interventionists who dominate the Republican Party,” while Cohen has argued that “Trump’s questions are fundamental and urgent, but instead of engaging them, his opponents (including President Obama) and the media dismiss the issues he raises about foreign policy as ignorant and dangerous.”

But Dalmia dismissed these “Trump-loving peaceniks” for “kidding themselves” because “above all, his militant protectionism will mean more war, not less.” In an article published in *The Week* on May 31, Dalmia maintained that Trump and those who see some refreshing thinking in his policy statements fail to appreciate the salubrious (and if Dalmia’s analysis is to be believed, perhaps even miraculous) effect free trade has had on international relations since the end of the Second World War.

The story, as told by Dalmia, is by-now familiar: World War II was brought about, in part, because European nations took refuge in mercantilist trade policies in the aftermath of the Great Depression. Today, it is virtually impossible imagining, say, France going to war with Germany. Why so?

According to Dalmia’s ahistoric piece of sophistry, prior to WWII “military conflict was practically *de rigueur* in Europe.” (It wasn’t. Between 1871- with the end of the Franco-Prussian war – and 1914 the peace was largely kept on the continent but for a brief Russian-Turkish war in 1877. But never mind.)

What caused this supposedly momentous change in the politics of the continent after World War II? Dalmia tell us that it wasn’t “NATO’s security guarantee” that “put an end to the great wars of dictators. Trade did. Indeed, the more countries trade and the more partners they trade with, the less likely they are to go to war.”

Trade Equals Peace?

This is what is commonly known as the theory of economic interdependence which holds that high levels of trade between countries will inexorably result in global peace and stability. It is said that countries that trade with each other have less motive to fight one another and countries will avoid costly wars that only serve to undermine their mutually beneficially trade relations.

As Dalmia puts it: “trade doesn’t just eliminate reasons for war, it generates forces of peace: Attacking your trade partner means either destroying your buyers or your supplier or both. Trade gives each side a stake in the other’s well being.” This, she worries, is lost on Mr. Trump.

This kind of thinking, such as it is, was the regnant ideology in Bill Clinton's Washington and was used with abandon to disguise aggressive geopolitical actions – such as the expansion of NATO eastwards – by couching them in the benevolent rhetoric of neo-liberalism.

In a West Point commencement address in 1997, Clinton claimed that “our security is tied to the stake other nations have in the prosperity of staying free and open and working with others.” NATO expansion would, according to Clinton's Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, help to create a Europe “increasingly united by a shared commitment to open societies and open markets.”

From the vantage point of 2016, the increasingly authoritarian nature of the governments in Poland, Hungary and Estonia, to say nothing of the war in Ukraine, have put an end to these grand ambitions.

Contrary Facts

Yet, is there any compelling reason to give credence to Dalmia's claim that “the more countries trade and the more partners they trade with, the less likely they are to go to war?” Not really.

To see why, let's examine the years leading up to the First World War. In *The Economic Consequence of the Peace*, John Maynard Keynes opens his account of the Versailles negotiations by describing the situation on the continent as it obtained during the mostly peaceful 45-year period from 1870-1914.

“What an extraordinary episode in the economic progress of man that age was which came to an end in August 1914!” he exclaimed.

What was taking place was nothing less than what the neo-imperialist economist and historian Niall Ferguson has called “the first age of globalization.”

Keynes tells us that before the war, an illusion of permanence held sway over the middle and upper European classes, indeed, “the projects and politics of militarism and imperialism, of racial and cultural rivalries ... appeared to exercise almost no influence at all on the ordinary course of social and economic life, *the internationalization of which was nearly complete in practice.*” [emphasis mine]

Still more, according to Keynes, “the interference of frontiers and of tariffs was reduced to a minimum, and not far short of three hundred millions of people lived within the three Empires of Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary ... over this great area there was an almost absolute security of property and of person.” Keynes observed that “the statistics of economic interdependence of Germany and her neighbors are overwhelming.”

Sounds like a free trader's paradise, one which Dalima and the rest of Washington's neoliberal cheerleaders would happily approve. And yet, by August 1914, the war came. Trade was no match for the toxic brew of nationalism and populism unleashed by an assassination in Sarajevo.

Nevertheless, while the idea that free trade paves the way for peaceful interstate relations is wholly unsupported by the historical record, it remains oddly pervasive over a century after the commencement of the Great War. Even worse, it becomes the trusted panacea that prevents a critical examination of other foreign policy illusions that could be laying the groundwork for another war.

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Waiting for California and the FBI

Exclusive: Some Democratic leaders are privately scouting around for someone to replace Hillary Clinton if she stumbles again in California and/or the FBI detects a crime in her email scandal, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

For months now, poll after poll have registered the judgment of the American people that they want neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump as the next President, but the two major parties seem unable to steer away from this looming pileup, forcing voters to choose between two widely disdained politicians.

The Republicans are locked in after Trump's hostile takeover of the party's selection process, but the Democrats have one final chance to steer clear, on June 7 when they hold several primaries and caucuses including New Jersey and California. If Bernie Sanders can upset Clinton in California – and/or if Clinton's legal problems over her emails worsen – there remains a long-shot chance that the Democratic convention might nominate someone else.

As far-fetched as this might seem, some senior Democrats, including reportedly White House officials, are giving serious thought to how the party can grab the wheel at the last moment and avoid the collision of two historically unpopular political figures, a smash-up where Trump might be the one walking away, damaged but victorious.

Two Washington insiders – Democratic pollster and political adviser Douglas E. Schoen and famed Watergate investigative reporter Carl Bernstein – have described panicky meetings of top Democrats worried over Clinton’s troubled campaign, with Schoen also describing private talks about possible last-minute alternatives.

I’ve heard similar tales of hushed discussions – with the fill-in options including Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of State John Kerry or Sen. Sanders – but I still believe these fretful leaders are frozen by indecision and don’t have the nerve to pull Hillary Clinton’s hands off the steering wheel even to avoid disaster.

But at least I’m not alone hearing these frightened whispers. In a Wall Street Journal opinion piece, Schoen, who served as a political aide to President Bill Clinton in the 1990s, wrote: “There is now more than a theoretical chance that Hillary Clinton may not be the Democratic nominee for president. ...

“The inevitability behind Mrs. Clinton’s nomination will be in large measure eviscerated if she loses the June 7 California primary to Bernie Sanders. That could well happen. ... A Sanders win in California would powerfully underscore Mrs. Clinton’s weakness as a candidate in the general election.

“Democratic superdelegates – chosen by the party establishment and overwhelmingly backing Mrs. Clinton, 543-44 – would seriously question whether they should continue to stand behind her candidacy. ...

“Mrs. Clinton also faces growing legal problems. The State Department inspector general’s recent report on Mrs. Clinton’s use of a private email server while she was secretary of state made it abundantly clear that she broke rules and has been far from forthright in her public statements. The damning findings buttressed concerns within the party that Mrs. Clinton and her aides may not get through the government’s investigation without a finding of culpability somewhere.

“With Mrs. Clinton reportedly soon to be interviewed by the FBI, suggesting that the investigation is winding up, a definitive ruling by the attorney general could be issued before the July 25 Democratic convention in Philadelphia. Given the inspector general’s report, a clean bill of health from the Justice Department is unlikely.

“Finally, with Mrs. Clinton’s negative rating nearly as high as Donald Trump’s, and with voters not trusting her by a ratio of 4 to 1, Democrats face an unnerving possibility.”

Besides the lack of trust, voters simply don’t like her. On Wednesday, the Real

Clear Politics poll average of Clinton's favorable vs. unfavorable numbers were 37.6 percent to 55.8 percent, an 18.2-point net unfavorable.

Looking for a Fill-in

Schoen continued: "There are increasing rumblings within the party about how a new candidate could emerge at the convention. John Kerry, the 2004 nominee, is one possibility. But the most likely scenario is that Vice President Joe Biden – who has said that he regrets 'every day' his decision not to run – enters the race.

"Mr. Biden would be cast as the white knight rescuing the party, and the nation, from a possible Trump presidency. To win over Sanders supporters, he would likely choose as his running mate someone like Sen. Elizabeth Warren who is respected by the party's left wing. ...

"All of these remain merely possibilities. But it is easier now than ever to imagine a scenario in which Hillary Clinton – whether by dint of legal or political circumstances – is not the Democratic presidential nominee."

In [a CNN interview](#) after last week's scathing State Department Inspector General's report on Clinton's use of her home email server, Carl Bernstein said he was hearing similar speculation:

"I was in Washington this week, I spoke to a number of top Democratic officials and they're terrified, including people at the White House, that her campaign is in freefall because of this distrust factor. Indeed, Trump has a similar problem, but she's the one whose numbers are going south.

"And the great hope in the White House, as well as the Democratic leadership and people who support her, is that she can just get to this convention, get the nomination – *which they're no longer 100 percent sure of* – and get President Obama out there to help her, he's got a lot of credibility... But she needs all the help she can get because right now her campaign is in huge trouble."

On Tuesday, Clinton received a boost when California Gov. Jerry Brown endorsed her – reflecting the Democratic establishment's view that it is safer to leave Clinton at the wheel than try to wrestle it away and face the wrath of Clinton's female supporters who insist that it's "her turn" after she lost a hard-fought race to Barack Obama in 2008.

Trump also administered another self-inflicted wound with a bitterly defensive press conference about his fund-raising for veteran groups, and he suffered more bruises with the release of court evidence about high-pressure sales tactics used by the now-defunct Trump University.

Trump's black Tuesday reminded Democrats why they were so hopeful that Trump might first blow up the Republican Party and then blow up his own campaign, letting Clinton win essentially by default. But the fragility of Clinton's own position was exposed by last week's IG report, which reinforced public perceptions that she is imperious, entitled and dishonest.

Voter Uprising

Ironically, the two parties reached this collision point from opposite directions. The Republican Party's establishment wanted almost anyone but Trump but the party's favored candidates fell victim to the reality TV star's skill at exploiting their weaknesses – almost as if he were playing a high-stakes reality TV show.

In contrast, the Democratic Party's leadership tried to arrange a coronation for Hillary Clinton by discouraging other candidates from challenging the powerful Clinton machine, arguing that a virtually uncontested nomination would save money and limit the exposure of Clinton's political weaknesses.

But the unlikely candidacy of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, technically an Independent although he caucuses with the Senate Democrats, revealed both a powerful hunger for change within the Democratic Party and Clinton's political vulnerabilities amid a season of voter discontent.

Whereas Republican leaders failed to suppress their voters' uprising – as Trump torched his GOP rivals one after another – the Democratic leadership did all they could to save Clinton, virtually pushing her badly damaged bandwagon toward the finish line while shouting at Sanders to concede.

But it has now dawned on some savvy Democrats that Clinton's campaign vehicle may be damaged beyond repair, especially if more harm is inflicted by the FBI's findings about her sloppy handling of government secrets. The Democrats see themselves stuck with a status-quo, legacy candidate at a moment when the public is disgusted with government dysfunction and demanding change.

Yet, whether the Democrats have the guts to go through the pain of denying Clinton the nomination may depend on what happens in California and inside the FBI.

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](#)).

Troubles of Anti-Trump/Clinton Write-ins

Distraught over the likely choice of Trump or Clinton, many Americans are thinking about third parties or write-ins, but the process is harder than one might expect, like much else about the U.S. electoral system, notes William John Cox.

By William John Cox

With the increasingly likelihood of a presidential contest between the generally despised Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, millions of angry voters are considering protesting the lineup by either sitting out the election or writing in alternatives.

With almost one-third of all eligible voters already failing to participate in elections, a greater abdication of voting responsibility in an election between the lesser of two evils could lead to a tyranny of the minority. On the other hand, by carefully writing in the names of their true choices, voters can exercise the only power available to them. If sufficiently widespread, such a protest could have a lasting effect on the course of the nation, including the abandonment of the two major political parties and the emergence of new – more relevant – alignments.

The beauty of a massive write-in protest vote is its bipartisan appeal. There may be as many “Never Trump” Republicans unwilling to hold their noses and vote for Donald Trump, as there are progressive Democrats who are proclaiming “Bernie or Bust” in their opposition to Hillary Clinton. Even those voting for Libertarian and Green Party presidential candidates, in states where they are not qualified, might consider doing so by writing in their choices.

The only problem is that – with the control of voting left up to the states by the Constitution and with tabulation taking place on the local and county level – most write-in votes would not be counted.

Under state laws, political parties must “qualify” for their candidates to be listed on the ballots and counted. The two major parties are qualified in every state, but the Libertarian Party candidates will appear on the ballots in only 33 states, the Green Party in 21, and the Constitution Party in 13.

By definition, the names of write-in candidates are not listed on ballots; however, interested candidates must still file various forms of paperwork in 35 states for their votes to be counted, and seven states do not allow write-in votes for presidential candidates. While permitted in the remaining eight

states, votes for write-in candidates may not be counted or reported by local registrars.

Even after the end of this year's political conventions and the statutory period to qualify for the ballots in individual states, steps could still be taken by alternative candidates, such as Bernie Sanders or an establishment Republican, to register a willingness to accept write-in votes in those states where they are permitted.

A Possible Amendment

All of this could change with the enactment of the U.S. Voters' Rights Amendment (USVRA), which would finally guarantee that every citizen has the right to cast effective votes in all elections. In addition, the USVRA mandates a national, hand-countable paper ballot in all federal elections, allows write-in candidates for all federal offices, and requires that all such votes be counted.

Moreover, for presidential elections, the ballots would list the 12 most critical questions facing the Nation, compelling all candidates to actually address the true issues. The People would be better informed and empowered to make their own national policy – and to elect representatives most qualified to carry out their policies.

A national policy referendum, in conjunction with presidential elections, would create broad federal guidelines, rather than binding laws. Elected representatives would be expected to carry out the policies and direction of the People, and could be held accountable if they fail to do so.

Rather than responding to billions of dollars in negative advertising about the inadequacies of opposition candidates, a barrage of slick promotional propaganda concealing those deficiencies, and misleading party platforms, voters in the 2016 election should have the power to create policy for themselves.

They should decide whether international trade pacts should be approved; the cap on Social Security withholding taxes should be eliminated; a supplemental national retirement system should be enacted; space-solar energy should be generated to energize the national highways in lieu of a reliance on polluting petroleum products; and whether the crumbling national infrastructure should be repaired and upgraded.

The People should have a direct say about whether the war on drugs should end and private prisons should be prohibited. Those most affected by domestic policies should decide whether everyone has a right to national health care; whether paid maternity leave should be provided; women should have the freedom of choice in childbearing; and everyone should have the right to marry

whomsoever they chose. Voters who are smart enough to earn a paycheck and pay taxes are certainly qualified to decide if a national minimum wage should be guaranteed; all existing student loans should be forgiven; the right to education extended through college; and whether military spending should be reduced.

Instead of an income tax disproportionately imposed on salaried workers and small business owners, the People should have the right to decide whether government initiatives are to be paid for by a tiny tax on the movement of all money in the economy, including stock and currency transactions and the financial manipulations of all banks, insurance companies, and other corporations. In doing so, the burden of taxation would be lifted from those who work the hardest and shifted to those who profit the most from our economy.

Archaic Rules

Those who founded the United States and drafted its Constitution did not trust the vast majority of its citizens to vote. They left voting questions up to the states and established the Electoral College – rather than a majority vote of the People – to elect the president and vice president.

At first, only white males owing sufficient property were permitted to vote, but slowly over the years, others have been allowed to participate. These rights are fragile and can be taken away at the whim of state legislatures – as is being done by the widespread enactment of voting suppression schemes, such as voter identification laws.

The USVRA would eliminate the Electoral College and implement a national popular vote for the offices of president and vice president. It also would establish a uniform presidential primary, limit the length of campaigns, require universal voter registration, and outlaw voter suppression. Finally, it would declare that corporations do not have constitutional rights and that campaign contributions are not the same as free speech.

If America is to continue as a representative democracy, it must transform its government into one that actually represents and cares for those who elect it – rather than the corporations and financial elites who are now paying for election campaigns and bribing the candidates.

The USVRA would provide a constitutional basis for the transformation of the United States government; however, the energy to compel its enactment must come from the incredible power of the pen literally held in the hands of the People.

William John Cox, a retired public interest lawyer, is the author of *Transforming America: A Voters' Bill of Rights*.

Trump Threatens Neocon Policies

Official Washington's neocon-dominated establishment is apoplectic about Donald Trump's "isolationist" foreign policy views including his disdain of NATO, but some of his ideas actually make sense for U.S. national interests, writes Ivan Eland.

By Ivan Eland

With his proposals for a registry of Muslims, a ban on their entry into the country, building a wall to prevent illegal immigration, and the deportation of 11 million illegal immigrants, Donald Trump, if he were elected president, might trend the country domestically toward fascism. (His election is possible but still unlikely, because the Democrats have an intrinsic advantage on the Electoral College map, and President Obama's approval rating has begun to exceed 50 percent, traditionally a key determiner for the outcome of the election of a president's successor.) But what would the world look like if Donald Trump actually became president?

Trump has threatened to pull out of the NATO alliance in Europe and withdraw troops from Japan and South Korea if these countries don't pay up, and remove the U.S. nuclear umbrella from those two nations. (If the United States withdrew from NATO, the U.S. nuclear shield would also stop protecting European NATO members.)

Instead, Trump has spoken of having better relations with the nuclear great powers of Russia and China. The Chinese don't even seem worried about his proposal to impose more than 30 percent tariffs on their exports unless they play more "fairly" in the trade realm, because pro-business Republican presidents have traditionally been friendlier to China than human rights-loving Democratic chief executives.

Moreover, Hillary Clinton is much more hawkish in foreign policy than Trump. Despite attempts by the interventionist U.S. foreign policy establishment and media to brand Trump's proposals "isolationist" crazy talk, most of his foreign policy program is long overdue.

The U.S. alliance system, built to contain a rival Soviet superpower during the Cold War, is long out of date. Despite all of his swagger and bluster, Vladimir Putin controls a Russia that is a mere shadow militarily of the old USSR. Furthermore, in the early part of the Cold War, when the United States first

sent its military forces back to Europe and opened its nuclear umbrella to protect the European nations from the Soviet Union, most of the downtrodden Western European countries were still cleaning up the rubble from World War II. In contrast, today, the wealthy European Union has a combined GDP of at least five times that of Russia. Furthermore, the British and French have their own nuclear weapons that could deter any Russian aggression on Western Europe.

Even though the European Union's combined GDP is greater than that of the United States, the U.S. accounts for 75 percent of the defense spending of the NATO alliance and has effectively promised to sacrifice U.S. cities to protect Western Europe from being overrun by a weaker Russia (even during the Cold War, as bad as any Soviet invasion of Western Europe would have been, sacrificing U.S. cities to stop it would have been worse for Americans).

In East Asia, the U.S. government is also planning to sacrifice New York and Chicago to save Tokyo or Seoul from a nuclear-armed China. These countries were shocked when Trump complained about their freeloading; they cited the host nation support (for example Japan provides about \$2 billion a year toward the housing costs of U.S. forces there) making U.S. forces cheaper to station there than in the United States. Of course, this argument is a gross distortion, because the United States, if it didn't need to defend these nations, could save much more by decommissioning these military units and many more stationed in the western United States allocated to East Asian defense.

Nowadays, U.S. friends and allies in East Asia have a combined GDP that almost equals China and could and should be the first line of defense against China. Even allowing Japan and South Korea, responsible world citizens for many decades, to get nuclear weapons to protect themselves and their East Asian friends would be better than losing U.S. cities in any nuclear war with China.

In both Europe and East Asia, the United States could return to the long-forgotten traditional foreign policy of the nation's Founders – which was to have commercial relations with all nations but to avoid permanent and entangling alliances or political intrigue with any of them – which lasted through most of the Republic's history until the Cold War began after World War II. A return to that restrained U.S. foreign policy would instantly make U.S. relations with China and Russia much better.

Unlike countries like Russia or Germany, which have poor geographical and topographical barriers to foreign invaders, the United States may be the most intrinsically secure great power in world history – with two great oceans as vast moats, weak and friendly neighbors, and the most powerful nuclear arsenal on the planet.

The only real, if low probability, threat the country currently faces is from blowback terrorist attacks from people who don't like interventionist U.S. foreign policy abroad, mainly in the Middle East. With the recent domestic oil fracking boom restoring the United States as the number one oil producer in the world, the United States now has little justification to continue meddling in the region (if it ever did).

Donald Trump hasn't gone quite this far in his less hawkish thinking, but we can only hope that he will if he actually makes it into the White House.

Ivan Eland is Senior Fellow and Director of the [Center on Peace & Liberty](#) at the Independent Institute. Dr. Eland is a graduate of Iowa State University and received an M.B.A. in applied economics and Ph.D. in national security policy from George Washington University. He spent 15 years working for Congress on national security issues, including stints as an investigator for the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Principal Defense Analyst at the Congressional Budget Office. [This article previously appeared as a blog post at HuffingtonPost.]
