

Coming Attraction: Lunatic Loose in West Wing

As Uber-Hawk John Bolton prepares to take over as national security adviser on Monday, Ray McGovern looks back at when Bolton was one of the “crazies” in the George W. Bush administration.

By **Ray McGovern** *Special to Consortium News*

John Bolton’s March 22 appointment-by-tweet as President Donald Trump’s national security adviser has given “March Madness” a new and ominous meaning. There is less than a week left to batten down the hatches before Bolton makes U.S. foreign policy worse than it already is.

During a recent interview with *The Intercept*’s Jeremy Scahill (minutes 35 to 51) I mentioned that Bolton fits seamlessly into a group of take-no-prisoners zealots once widely known in Washington circles as “the crazies,” and now more commonly referred to as “neocons.”

Beginning in the 1970s, “the crazies” sobriquet was applied to Cold Warriors hell bent on bashing Russians, Chinese, Arabs – anyone who challenged U.S. “exceptionalism” (read hegemony). More to the point, I told Scahill that President (and former CIA Director) George H. W. Bush was among those using the term freely, since it seemed so apt. I have been challenged to prove it.

I don’t make stuff up. And with the appointment of the certifiable Bolton, the “the crazies” have become far more than an historical footnote. Rather, the crucible that Bush-41 and other reasonably moderate policymakers endured at their hands give the experience major relevance today. Thus, I am persuaded it would be best not to ask people simply to take my word for it when I refer to “the crazies,” their significance, and the differing attitudes the two Bushes had toward them.

George H. W. Bush and I had a longstanding professional and, later, cordial relationship. For many years after he stopped being president, we stayed in touch – mostly by letter. This is the first time I have chosen to share any of our personal correspondence. I do so not only because of the ominous importance of Bolton’s appointment, but also because I am virtually certain the elder Bush would want me to.

Scanned below is a note George H. W. Bush sent me eight weeks before his son, egged on by the same “crazies” his father knew well from earlier incarnations, launched an illegal and unnecessary war for regime change in Iraq – unleashing

chaos in the Middle East.

1-22-03

GEORGE BUSH

Dear Ray,

It is only "meet and right" that you speak out.

Thanks for your letter. Please do not worry that "crazies" have any influence on POTUS 43. I will admit that early reporting indicated that but it was not true then nor is it true now.

Shut Out of the Media

By January 2003, it was clear that Bush-43 was about to launch a war of aggression – the crime defined by the post-WWII Nuremberg Tribunal as “the supreme international crime differing from other war crimes only in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.” (Think torture, for example.) During most of 2002, several of us former intelligence analysts had been comparing notes, giving one another sanity checks, writing op-eds pointing to the flimsiness of the “intelligence” cobbled together to allege a weapons-of-mass-destruction “threat” from Iraq, and warning of the catastrophe that war on Iraq would bring.

Except for an occasional op-ed wedged into the Christian Science Monitor or the Miami Herald, for example, we were ostracized from “mainstream media.” *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* were on a feeding frenzy from the government trough and TV pundits were getting high ratings by beating the drum for war. Small wonder the entire media was allergic to what we were saying, despite our many years of experience in intelligence analysis. Warnings to slow down and think were the last thing wanted by those already profiteering from a war on the near horizon.

The challenge we faced was how to get through to President George W. Bush. It had become crystal clear that the only way to do that would be to do an end run around “the crazies” – the criminally insane advisers that his father knew so well – Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and Undersecretary of State John Bolton.

Bolton: One of the Crazies

John Bolton was Cheney’s “crazy” at the State Department. Secretary Colin Powell was pretty much window dressing. He could be counted on not to complain loudly – much less quit – even if he strongly suspected he was being had. Powell had gotten to where he was by saluting sharply and doing what superiors told him to do. As secretary of state, Powell was not crazy – just craven. He enjoyed more credibility than the rest of the gang and rather than risk being ostracized like the rest of us, he sacrificed that credibility on the altar of the “supreme international crime.”

In those days Bolton did not hesitate to run circles around – and bully – the secretary of state and many others. This must be considered a harbinger of things to come, starting on Monday, when the bully comes to the china shop in the West Wing. While longevity in office is not the

hallmark of the Trump administration, even if Bolton’s tenure turns out to be short-lived, the crucial months immediately ahead will provide Bolton with ample opportunity to wreak the kind of havoc that “the crazies” continue to see as enhancing U.S. – and not incidentally – Israeli influence in the Middle East. Bear in mind, Bolton still says the attack on Iraq was a good idea. And he is out to scuttle the landmark agreement that succeeded in preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon any time soon.

Trying to Head Off War

In August 2002, as the Bush-43 administration and U.S. media prepared the country for war on Iraq, the elder Bush’s national security advisor, Gen. Brent Scowcroft, and Secretary of State James Baker each wrote op-eds in an attempt to wean the younger Bush off the “crazies’” milk. Scowcroft’s *Wall Street Journal* op-ed of August 15 was as blunt as its title, “Don’t Attack Saddam.” The cautionary thrust of Baker’s piece in the *New York Times* ten days later, was more diplomatic but equally clear.

But these interventions, widely thought to have been approved by Bush-41, had a predictable opposite effect on the younger Bush, determined as he was to become the “first war president of the 21st Century” (his words). It is a safe bet also that Cheney and other “crazies” baited him with, “Are you going to let

Daddy, who doesn't respect ANY of us, tell you what to do?"

All attempts to insert a rod into the wheels of the juggernaut heading downhill toward war were looking hopeless, when a new idea occurred. Maybe George H. W. Bush could get through to his son. What's to lose? On January 11, 2003 I wrote a letter to the elder Bush asking him to speak "privately to your son George about the crazies advising him on Iraq," adding "I am aghast at the cavalier way in which the [Richard] Perles of the Pentagon are promoting the use of nuclear weapons as an acceptable option against Iraq."

My letter continued: "That such people have the President's ear is downright scary. I think he needs to know why you exercised such care to keep such folks at arms length. (And, as you may know, they are exerting unrelenting pressure on CIA analysts to come up with the "right" answers. You know how that goes!)"

In the letter I enclosed a handful of op-eds that I had managed to get past 2nd-tier mainstream media censors. In those writings, I was much more pointed in my criticism of the Bush/Cheney administration's approach to Iraq than Scowcroft and Baker had been in August 2002.

Initially, I was encouraged at the way the elder Bush began his January 22, 2003 note to me: "It is only 'meet and right' that you speak out." As I read on, however, I asked myself how he could let the wish be father to the thought, so to speak. (Incidentally, "POTUS" in his note is the acronym for "President of the United States;" number 43, of course, was George Jr.)

The elder Bush may not have been fully conscious of it, but he was whistling in the dark, having long since decided to leave to surrogates like Scowcroft and Baker the task of highlighting publicly the criminal folly of attacking Iraq. The father may have tried privately; who knows. It was, in my view, a tragedy that he did not speak out publicly. He would have been very well aware that this was the only thing that would have had a chance of stopping his son from committing what the Nuremberg Tribunal defined as "the supreme international crime."

It is, of course, difficult for a father to admit that his son fell under the influence – this time not alcohol or drugs, but rather the at least equally noxious demonic influence of "the crazies," which Billy Graham himself might have found beyond his power to exorcise. Maybe it is partly because I know the elder Bush personally, but it does strike me that, since we are all human, some degree of empathy might be in order. I simply cannot imagine what it must be like to be a former President with a son, also a former President, undeniably responsible for such widespread killing, injury and abject misery.

Speaking Out – Too Late

It was a dozen years too late, but George H.W. Bush finally did give voice to his doubts about the wisdom of rushing into the Iraq War. In Jon Meacham's biography, "Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush," the elder Bush puts most of the blame for Iraq on his son's "iron-ass" advisers, Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney, while at the same time admitting where the buck stops. With that Watergate-style "modified, limited hangout," and his (richly deserved) criticism of his two old nemeses, Bush-41 may be able to live more comfortably with himself, hoping to get beyond what I believe must be his lingering regret at not going public when that might have stopped "arrogant" Rumsfeld and "hardline" Cheney from

inflicting their madness on the Middle East. No doubt he is painfully aware that he was one of the very few people who might have been able to stop the chaos and carnage, had he spoken out publicly.

Bush-41's not-to-worry note to me had the opposite effect with those of us CIA alumni alarmed at the gathering storm and the unconscionable role being played by those of our former CIA colleagues still there in manufacturing pre-Iraq-war "intelligence." We could see what was going on in real time; we did not have to wait five years for the bipartisan conclusions of a five-year Senate Intelligence Committee investigation. Introducing its findings, Chairman Jay Rockefeller said: "In making the case for war, the Administration repeatedly presented intelligence as fact when in reality it was unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent."

Back to January 2003: a few days after I received President Bush's not-to-worry note of January 22, 2003, a handful of us former senior CIA officials went forward with plans to create Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPs). We had been giving one another sanity checks before finalizing draft articles about the scarcely believable things we were observing – including unmistakable signs that our profession of intelligence analysis was being prostituted. On the afternoon of February 5, 2003, after Powell misled the UN Security Council, we issued our first (of three) VIPs Memoranda for the President before the war. We graded Powell "C" for content, and warned President George W. Bush, in effect, to beware "the crazies," closing with these words:

"After watching Secretary Powell today, we are convinced that you would be well served if you widened the discussion ... beyond the circle of those advisers clearly bent on a war for which we see no compelling reason and from which we believe the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic."

Team B

When Gerald Ford assumed the presidency in August 1974, the White House was a center of intrigue. Serving as Chief of Staff for President Ford, Donald Rumsfeld (1974-75), with help from Dick Cheney (1975-76), engineered Bush's nomination to become CIA Director. This was widely seen as a cynical move to take Bush out of contention for the Republican ticket in 1976 and possibly beyond, since the post of CIA director was regarded as a dead-end job and, ideally, would keep you out of politics. (Alas, this did not turn out the way Rumsfeld expected – damn those “unknown unknowns.”)

If, at the same time, Rumsfeld and Cheney could brand GHW Bush soft on communism and brighten the future for the Military-Industrial Complex, that would put icing on the cake. Rumsfeld had been making evidence-impooverished speeches at the time, arguing that the Soviets were ignoring

the AMB Treaty and other arms control arrangements and were secretly building up to attack the United States. He and the equally relentless Paul Wolfowitz were doing all they could to create a much more alarming picture of the Soviet Union, its intentions, and its views about fighting and winning a nuclear war. Sound familiar?

Bush arrived at CIA after U.S.-Soviet detente had begun to flourish. The cornerstone Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty was almost four years old and had introduced the somewhat mad but stabilizing reality of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). Crazies and neocons alike lived in desperate fear of losing their favorite enemy, the USSR. Sound familiar?

Bush was CIA Director for the year January 1976 to January 1977, during which I worked directly for him. At the time, I was Acting National Intelligence Officer for Western Europe where post-WWII certainties were unravelling and it was my job to get intelligence community-wide assessments to the White House – often on fast breaking events. We almost wore out what was then the latest technology – the “LDX” (for Long Distance Xerography) machine – sending an unprecedentedly high number of “Alert Memoranda” from CIA Headquarters to the White House. (“LDX,” of course, is now fax; there was no Internet.)

As ANIO, I also chaired National Intelligence Estimates on Italy and Spain. As far as I could observe from that senior post, Director Bush honored his incoming pledge not to put any political gloss on the judgments of intelligence analysts.

Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, of course, had made no such pledge. They persuaded President Ford to set up a “Team B” analysis, contending that CIA and intelligence community analyses and estimates were naively rosy. Bush's predecessor as CIA director, William Colby, had turned the proposal down flat, but he had no political ambitions. I suspect Bush, though, saw a Rumsfeld trap

to color him soft on the USSR. In any case, against the advice of virtually all intelligence professionals, Bush succumbed to the political pressure and acquiesced in the establishment of a Team B to do alternative analyses. No one was surprised that these painted a much more threatening and inaccurate picture of Soviet strategic intentions.

Paul Warnke, a senior official of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency at the time of Team B, put it this way:

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“Whatever might be said for evaluation of strategic capabilities by a group of outside experts, the impracticality of achieving useful results by ‘independent’ analysis of strategic objectives should have been self-evident. Moreover, the futility of the Team B enterprise was assured by the selection of the panel’s members. Rather than including a diversity of views ... the Strategic Objectives Panel was composed entirely of individuals who made careers of viewing the Soviet menace with alarm.”

The fact that Team B’s conclusions were widely regarded as inaccurate did not deter Rumsfeld. He went about promoting them as valid and succeeded in undermining arms control efforts for the next several years. Two days before Jimmy Carter’s inauguration Rumsfeld fired his parting shot, saying, “No doubt exists about the capabilities of the Soviet armed forces” and that those capabilities “indicate a tendency toward war fighting ... rather than the more modish Western models of deterrence through mutual vulnerability.”

GHW Bush in the White House

When George H. W. Bush came into town as vice president, he got President Reagan’s permission to be briefed with “The President’s Daily Brief” and I became a daily briefer from 1981 to 1985. That job was purely substantive. Even so, my colleagues and I have been very careful to regard those conversations as sacrosanct, for obvious reasons. By the time he became president in 1989, he had come to know, all too well, “the crazies” and what they were capable of. Bush’s main political nemesis, Donald Rumsfeld, could be kept at bay, and other “crazies” kept out of the most senior posts – until Bush the younger put them in positions in which they could do serious damage. John Bolton had been *enfant terrible* on arms control, persuading Bush-43 to ditch the ABM Treaty. On Monday, he can be expected to arrive at the West Wing with his wrecking ball.

Even Jimmy Carter Speaks Out

Given how difficult Rumsfeld and other hardliners made it for President Carter to work with the Russians on arms control, and the fact that Bolton

has been playing that role more recently, Jimmy Carter's comments on Bolton – while unusually sharp – do not come as a complete surprise. Besides, experience has certainly shown how fo

olish it can be to dismiss out of hand what former presidents say about their successors' appointments to key national security positions. This goes in spades in the case of John Bolton.

Just three days after Bolton's appointment, the normally soft-spoken Jimmy Carter became plain-spoken/outspoken Jimmy Carter, telling USA Today that the selection of Bolton "is a disaster for our country." When asked what advice he would give Trump on North Korea, for example, Carter said his "first advice" would be to fire Bolton.

In sum, if you asked Bush-41, Carter's successor as president, how he would describe John Bolton, I am confident he would lump Bolton together with those he called "the crazies" back in the day, referring to headstrong ideologues adept at blowing things up – things like arms agreements negotiated with painstaking care, giving appropriate consideration to the strategic views of adversaries and friends alike. Sadly, "crazy" seems to have become the new normal in Washington, with warmongers and regime-changers like Bolton in charge, people who have not served a day in uniform and have no direct experience of war other than starting them.

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Trump Finds Fellow Bully in Bolton

President Donald Trump's appointment of John Bolton as his national security adviser is his most dangerous move yet, argues Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn

Nothing Donald Trump has done since his inauguration 14 months ago is more dangerous – to the United States, and indeed, to the world – than his selection of John Bolton for National Security Adviser. It is not surprising the president would feel most comfortable receiving advice from a fellow bully.

Trump bullies people on a nearly daily basis, directing his ire at immigrants, Muslims, women, LGBTQ people, the poor and the environment. He hurls Twitter attacks at those who disagree with him.

The president has encouraged police brutality, suggesting in a Long Island speech that law enforcement officers bang suspects' heads against police car doors. "Please don't be too nice" when arresting people, Trump advised. "Like when you guys put somebody in the car, and you're protecting their head, you know, the way you put your hand over" their head, "I said, 'You can take the hand away, OK?'"

After being told someone might throw tomatoes at him at a campaign rally, Trump urged his supporters to "knock the crap out of them ... I promise you, I will pay for the legal fees." He stated on Fox News that a Black Lives Matter activist who was attacked at a Trump rally "should have been roughed up."

Trump's fellow bully Bolton also engages in abusive behavior. Melody Townsel, working on a USAID project in Kyrgyzstan, became the object of Bolton's wrath in 1994. Townsel had complained about incompetence, poor contract performance and inadequate funding of the project by a contractor Bolton represented.

In a letter to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Townsel wrote that Bolton "proceeded to chase me through the halls of a Russian hotel throwing things at me, shoving threatening letters under my door, and generally behaving like a madman." Townsel claimed Bolton threatened employees and contractors who refused to cooperate with him. She maintained Bolton's behavior "wasn't just unforgivable, it was pathological."

Carl W. Ford, former Assistant Secretary for Intelligence and Research, and a conservative Republican, called Bolton a "kiss-up, kick-down sort of guy" who "abuses his authority with little people," characterizing him as a "serial abuser." Bolton chairs the Gatestone Institute, which publishes hateful, racist anti-Muslim rhetoric, calling refugees rapists and hosts of infectious diseases.

Bolton was such a lightning rod that in 2005, even the GOP-controlled Senate refused to confirm him as US ambassador to the United Nations. To avoid the need for Senate confirmation, George W. Bush named Bolton to the post in a recess appointment.

But Bolton doesn't just bully individuals. He pushed for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, advocates military attacks on North Korea and Iran, favors Israel's annexation of the Palestinian West Bank, and falsely claimed that Cuba had biological weapons.

As undersecretary of state for Arms Control and International Security in the

Bush administration, Bolton was instrumental in withdrawing the United States from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which heightened the risk of nuclear war with Russia.

Anthony J. Blinken, deputy secretary of state in the Obama administration, wrote in The New York Times, "Mr. Bolton had a habit of twisting intelligence to back his bellicosity and sought to remove anyone who objected."

Colin Kahl and Jon Wolf, writing in Foreign Policy, described Bolton's "pattern of warping and misusing intelligence to build the case for war with rogue states; a disdain for allies and multilateral institutions; a blind faith in US military power and the benefits of regime change; and a tendency to see the ends as justifying the means, however horrific."

When he left his position at USAID in the late 1980s, Bolton's colleagues presented him with a bronzed hand grenade.

Bolton Eschews Diplomacy and Slams the UN

Bolton sees every international situation as an opportunity to make war, notwithstanding the United Nations Charter that mandates the peaceful resolution of disputes and forbids military force except in self-defense.

After two world wars claimed millions of lives, countries around the globe – including the United States – came together and established the United Nations system, "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."

Yet in 1994, Bolton famously claimed, "there is no such thing as the United Nations." He stated caustically, "If the UN Secretariat building in New York lost 10 stories, it wouldn't make a bit of difference."

When Bolton officially withdrew the US signature from the International Criminal Court treaty, he declared it "the happiest moment of my government service."

Bolton Led the Charge to Invade Iraq

Bolton led the charge to invade Iraq and forcibly change its regime in 2003, falsely claiming that President Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In 2002, former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter affirmed that Hussein had destroyed 90-95% of its WMD; the remaining 5%, Ritter said, "doesn't even constitute a weapons program . . . just because we can't account for it doesn't mean Iraq retains it. There's no evidence Iraq retains this material."

To bolster the case for war, Bolton pushed Bush to include in his State of the Union address the false statement that Iraq was seeking uranium from Niger, over the objection of the State Department.

Before the US invaded Iraq, Mohamed ElBaradei, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said there was no evidence Hussein had any viable nuclear program. Hans Blix, chief inspector of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, verified that weapons inspectors had found no evidence of WMD.

In 2002, Bolton orchestrated the ouster of Jose Bustani, head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, to prevent him from inspecting and revealing that Hussein had no chemical weapons. When Bustani argued he should stay in the post, Bolton threatened, "You have to be ready to face the consequences, because we know where your kids live."

No WMD were found after the US invasion of Iraq. Some one million Iraqis were killed and the US-led regime change led to a vacuum of leadership that was filled by ISIS.

A 2006 report prepared under the direction of former Rep. John Conyers (D-Michigan) concluded that "members of the Bush Administration misstated, overstated, and manipulated intelligence with regards to linkages between Iraq and Al Qaeda; the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iraq; the acquisition of aluminum tubes to be used as uranium centrifuges; and the acquisition of uranium from Niger."

Those "misstatements were in contradiction of known countervailing intelligence information, and were the result of political pressure and manipulation." A key source of that pressure and manipulation was Bolton.

In spite of the horror the US military unleashed on Iraq 15 years ago, Bolton wrote in 2016 that the removal of Hussein was "a military success of stunning scope and effectiveness, achieved in just three weeks."

After the disastrous US invasion of Iraq, Bolton tried to get the Iran file removed from ElBaradei in order to lay the groundwork for an unjustified attack on Iran.

Bolton Wants to Rip Up the Iran Nuclear Agreement

Bolton favors bombing Iran and changing its regime and he opposes the Iran Nuclear Agreement. He has advocated an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear facilities and encouraged the United States to support it.

In the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran agreed to cut back its nuclear program and in return, received billions of dollars of relief from punishing sanctions. Iran has complied with its obligations under the deal, says a bipartisan group of over 100 national security veterans called the National

Coalition to Prevent Nuclear Weapons.

Under the US Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, the president must decide every 90 days whether Iran remains in compliance with the JCPOA and whether the agreement continues to serve US interests. Trump reluctantly certified Iran's compliance in April and July 2017. But in October, to the consternation of his secretary of state, secretary of defense, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Trump refused to certify Iran's compliance with the agreement. He did not, however, pull out of the deal at that time.

On May 12, Trump will decide whether or not to end US participation in the agreement. Bolton and CIA director Mike Pompeo, Trump's nominee for Secretary of State, both favor renouncing the deal. If the US breaches the agreement, Iran may well resume the unlimited production of nuclear fuel.

"Bolton is an unhinged advocate for waging World War III," according to Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council. "Bolton now represents the greatest threat to the United States," he added, stating, "Trump may have just effectively declared war on Iran."

Bolton Wants to Attack North Korea

In February, contrary to the overwhelming weight of legal authority, Bolton argued in a Wall Street Journal op-ed that mounting a first strike on North Korea would comply with international law.

Bolton stated on Fox News, "I think the only diplomatic option left is to end the regime in North Korea by effectively having the South take it over." During another Fox appearance, Bolton declared, "the way you eliminate the North Korean nuclear program is to eliminate North Korea." He maintained that North Korea having nuclear weapons was worse than the "millions" of North and South Koreans who would be killed if the US attacked North Korea.

If Trump destroys the Iran deal, it will send a dangerous message to Pyongyang that his word cannot be trusted. North and South Korea are slated to meet in April and Trump has indicated he will meet with North Korean President Kim Jong-Un. Diplomacy at this moment is critical.

Bolton has provocatively suggested a linkage between Iran and North Korea on nuclear weapons. In January, he wrote in the Wall Street Journal, "Little is known, at least publicly, about longstanding Iranian-North Korean cooperation on nuclear and ballistic-missile technology. It is foolish to play down Tehran's threat because of Pyongyang's provocations. They are two sides of the same coin."

The dangers inherent in following Bolton's favored policies in Iran and North Korea cannot be overestimated.

Bolton Falsely Claimed Cuba Had Biological Weapons

Bolton argued unsuccessfully for the inclusion of Cuba in Bush's "axis of evil" (which consisted of Iraq, Iran and North Korea). Bolton advocated a military attack on Cuba one year before Bush invaded Iraq. After Bolton falsely claimed Cuba was developing a bio-warfare capacity, a congressional investigation found no evidence to support such an allegation.

As Nicole Deller and John Burroughs from the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy have documented, Bolton is widely credited with the defeat of the Protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention, which would have created an inspection system to protect us against those deadly weapons.

Bolton Wants to Give "Pieces" of Palestine to Jordan and Egypt

Bolton's solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is to give "pieces" of Gaza to Egypt and "pieces" of the West Bank to Jordan since, he thinks, Palestine is composed of "bits and pieces" of the former Ottoman Empire.

In January, Bolton wrote in The Hill: "Once it becomes clear the two-state solution is finally dead, Jordan should again be asked to exercise control over suitably delineated portions of the West Bank and have the monarchy's religious role for holy sites like the Temple Mount reaffirmed. Accepting Jordan's sovereignty would actually benefit Palestinians, as would Egyptian sovereignty over Gaza, by tying these areas into viable, functioning states, not to the illusion of 'Palestine.'"

Neither Jordan nor Egypt supports this proposal, and Palestinians are vehemently opposed to it. Jewish Voice for Peace stated, "The appointment of Bolton is a complete disaster for the Middle East, the US, and the entire world."

Bolton's Appointment is "a Disaster for Our Country"

The National Security Adviser's job is to inform the president of the different options that affect national security, briefing him on the National Security Council's findings. Bolton is such an ideologue, he will invariably slant his advice toward waging war. Bolton is so extreme, he reportedly promised Trump he "wouldn't start any wars" if appointed, according to CNN. In light of Trump's aversion to reading daily intelligence reports, Bolton will play an even greater role in the formulation of policy.

Unfortunately, National Security Adviser is not a cabinet position, so Bolton

doesn't need Senate confirmation.

Former President Jimmy Carter said in an interview with USA Today that Bolton's appointment is "a disaster for our country," adding it may be "one of the worst mistakes" of the Trump presidency.

But as Stormy Daniels and Robert Mueller close in on Trump, the president will seek to create a major distraction. With bully Bolton egging him on, that may well be a military attack on North Korea or Iran. The consequences would prove disastrous.

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The Bolton Appointment: How Scared Should We Be?

Exclusive: Donald Trump's appointment of war hawk John Bolton is a cause for concern, Daniel Lazare writes, but what is perhaps an even bigger concern is that both major U.S. political parties are dominated by war hawks.

By Daniel Lazare

John Bolton is a hawk's hawk, a militarist who never saw a U.S. war of aggression he didn't like. The best thing one can say about his appointment as national security adviser is that Trump will probably ignore him the way he does all his other advisers and fire him six months down the road. If so, the sky won't fall right away. But make no mistake – it will soon.

Rarely has war fever in Washington been deeper and more broad-based. Everybody's jumping on board – liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats, human-rights advocates and neoconservatives. With the 2018 midterms fast approaching, it seems that the only choice voters will have is between a military conflict from column A and one from column B. Which will it be – the clash with Putin that liberals are talking themselves into? Or the showdown with Iran that Bolton has long advocated?

It's a choice between cyanide and arsenic. One moment, Trump is threatening "Little Rocket Man" Kim Jong Un with "fire and fury" while, in the next, the *New York Times* is demanding that he take off the gloves with regard to the Kremlin. The title of a *Times* editorial on Friday, March 15, said it all: "Finally, Trump Has Something Bad to Say About Russia."

It blasted the Orange-Haired One for being slow to impose sanctions in retaliation "for the Kremlin's interference in the 2016 election" – still unproven, by the way – and of holding off "for reasons that have never been made completely clear." This last point was rich considering how often the *Times* denounces Trump as a "Siberian candidate" that Russia installed in the White House to do its bidding. The editorial slammed Putin as "an authoritarian leader" who "has paid little or no price for his aggressions" in Syria and the Crimea, and it predicted that the Russian president "won't stop until he knows that the United States will stand up to him and work with its allies to impose stronger financial and diplomatic measures to rein him in."

If financial and diplomatic measures don't work, what then – military force? Five days later, Editorial Page Editor James Bennet issued another schoolyard taunt, this time an editorial entitled, "Why Is Trump So Afraid of Russia?" The occasion was a remark that ex-CIA Director John Brennan had just made on MSNBC's "Morning Joe": "I think he's afraid of the president of Russia. ... The Russians, I think, have had long experience with Mr. Trump and may have things they could expose." (Quote begins at 5:05.) The comment was an excuse for yet more Times paranoia:

"The possibility that Mr. Putin could have some hold on the American president has lurked in the background over the past year as Mr. Trump displayed a mystifying affection for the Russian leader and ignored or excused his aggressive behavior and nefarious activities, most important, his interference in the 2016 campaign, a subject of the special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation."

Of course, it's a subject of Mueller's investigation, and it will continue to be so as long as Congress gives him carte blanche to look for dirt wherever he pleases, regardless of whether it has anything to do with Russian collusion or not. The editorial then went at Trump once again for the sin of insufficient hostility: "...it's hard to see how praising and appeasing a bully will advance American interests. That's not the approach Mr. Trump has taken with adversaries like North Korea or Iran, or, for that matter, even with some allies."

"If Mr. Trump isn't Mr. Putin's lackey," it concluded, "it's past time for him to prove it" – perhaps by threatening to incinerate Moscow the way he has

threatened Pyongyang.

The relationship between adolescent rhetoric like this and Trump's decision to bring semi-fascists like Bolton and Tea Partier Mike Pompeo on board is clear. The more the Times, not to mention the Washington Post, CNN, MSNBC, and others, taunt him as soft on Russia, the more he taunts them right back for being soft on Iran and then adopts confrontational tactics to demonstrate his own machismo.

Bolton is the latest example of where such tit-for-tat madness is leading. The former U.S. ambassador to the UN is famous as an opponent of the 2015 Iran nuclear accord and advocate of Iranian regime change. On this, he and Trump see eye to eye, which suggests that years of fist-shaking may finally give way to something more concrete, like cruise missiles and bunker-busting bombs.

With Pompeo as secretary of state, Trita Parsi, leader of the National Iranian American Council, tweets that "Trump is assembling a WAR CABINET" – and the judgment may well be on the mark. If so, Tehran will undoubtedly respond by shoring up its defenses along the "Shi'ite crescent" stretching across Iraq and Syria to Lebanon. The Arab gulf states will ratchet up their anti-Shi'ite sectarianism while Turkey and Israel may conclude that it's now open season on Syria's Bashar al-Assad and likewise send in the bombers and troops.

After a momentary lull, the effect will be to thrust the region into yet another round of war, one even bigger and more ferocious than the last. All the usual horrors will ensue – refugees, terrorism, social collapse, and renewed xenophobia in Europe and the US.

But Iran is where things get complicated. It's allied with Russia while both states are allied with Assad, whom Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, and Barack Obama spent years trying to topple. Trump opposes the 2015 Iran accord but wants to make nice with Putin, while liberals back the agreement while at the same time viewing the Russian president as the devil incarnate even though he helped negotiate it. Their neocon allies are meanwhile hostile to all three.

Chuck Schumer, leader of the glorious anti-Trump #Resistance in the Senate, voted against the Iran agreement, as did fellow New York Democrat Eliot L. Engel in the House. William Kristol, leader of the never-Trump neocons, campaigned against it along with fellow neocon Trump-basher Max Boot.

So the more Trump moves against Iran and Syria, the more divisions are likely to emerge in the anti-Trump camp between neocons who see nothing wrong with confronting Tehran and liberals who would be more comfortable with a stepped-up military response in the eastern Ukraine. Regardless of where it takes place,

war will grow more likely rather than less. Bernie Sanders may finally speak out against such spiraling levels of insanity, but it will be too little too late.

John Bolton is without doubt a dangerous man. Not only did he champion the war against Saddam Hussein, but, even before U.S. troops had set foot in Iraq, he told Israeli leaders that the next step would be to take out Syria, Iran, and North Korea, a goal he has pursued with single-minded consistency ever since. For Bolton, the aim is to create a growing cascade of Third World wars so as to propel the U.S. into a position as unchallenged military dictator of the entire globe. The more numerous the conflicts, the more he's convinced that the U.S. will come up on top.

The problem though is that Democrats have been no less bellicose. Breaking ranks with Democrats like Massachusetts Governor Mike Dukakis, Bill Clinton set the pace in 1984 by allowing the Arkansas National Guard to be transferred to Honduras in support of Ronald Reagan's regime-change efforts in neighboring Nicaragua. Democrats supported George Bush Sr.'s invasion of Panama in late 1989 and the 1990-91 Gulf War too. As president, Bill Clinton launched round-the-clock air attacks on the Balkans while Hillary championed the post-9/11 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Clinton, Obama, and John Kerry upped the ante even more after the 2011 Arab Spring by launching a bombing campaign that reduced Libya to anarchy and spending billions more to do the same to Syria.

The former has been set back generations as Al Qaeda and ISIS-linked Islamist militias battle one another in the streets, black African migrants are bought and sold as slaves, and women are subjected to draconian Saudi-like restrictions. According to the World Bank, Syria has suffered an estimated \$226 billion in war damage, a staggering sum for a country of 21 million people with a per-capita income as of 2010 of just \$1,700.

The problem with Washington is that it doesn't have one war party, but two. The more they go at one another, the more they export America's domestic chaos overseas in the form of Third World military conflict. Could it be that America is turning into the biggest failed state of them all?

Daniel Lazare is the author of *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and his articles about the Middle East, terrorism, Eastern Europe, and other topics appear regularly on such websites as Jacobin and The American Conservative.

Trump Should Withdraw Haspel Nomination, Intel Vets Say

More than two dozen former U.S. intelligence officers urge President Trump to rescind Gina Haspel's nomination to lead the CIA, citing torture that she oversaw while supervising a black site prison, as well as her role in destroying evidence.

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

SUBJECT: Request to Withdraw Nomination of Gina Haspel

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With respect, we veteran intelligence officers from CIA and other agencies urge you to withdraw the nomination of Gina Haspel for CIA director. From what is already known of her leading role in CIA torture 16 years ago, she has disqualified herself.

In 2002 Haspel supervised the first CIA "black site" for interrogation, where cruel and bizarre forms of torture were applied to suspected terrorists. And when the existence of 92 videotapes of those torture sessions was revealed, Haspel signed a cable ordering their destruction, against the advice of legal counsel at CIA and the White House.

Does Torture 'Work?'

We are confident that if you set aside some time to read the unredacted portions of the Senate Intelligence Committee report of 2014 on the torture ordered and supervised by Haspel and other CIA managers, you will change your mind about her nomination. The five-year Senate investigation was based primarily on original CIA cables and other sensitive documents.

In addition to revealing clear violations of the UN Convention Against Torture, the Senate investigation shows that claims by senior CIA officials that torture is effective are far from true. The US Army – in which many of us have served – has been aware of the ineffectiveness of torture for decades.

General John Kimmons, head of Army Intelligence, drove home that point on September 6, 2006 – approximately an hour before President George W. Bush publicly extolled the virtues of torture methods that became known as "enhanced

interrogation techniques.” Gen. Kimmons stated: “No good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years – hard years – tell us that.”

We believe that Defense Secretary James Mattis’ lack of enthusiasm for torture reflects lessons drawn from the historical experience of the Marine Corps, as well. Not to mention the twin reality that torture brutalizes the brutalizer, and that US use of torture puts our own troops in serious jeopardy when captured. Moreover, there is no more effective recruitment tool than torture to attract more terrorists.

International and Domestic Law

Please also be aware that many signatories to the UN Convention Against Torture take seriously their obligations under the principle of “universal jurisdiction,” which applies when those who authorize or practice torture are not brought to justice by authorities in their home countries.

George W. Bush experienced a precarious brush with this reality in 2011, when he had to abruptly cancel a visit to Geneva, Switzerland, after discovering that plans were in place to arrest him as soon as he stepped onto Swiss soil. [See [“America’s Stay-at-Home Ex-President”](#)] The widely respected European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights already has made no secret of its intention to proceed quickly against Haspel, should she set foot in Europe.

We believe that CIA’s activities and general focus have become severely unbalanced, with the lion’s share of funding and energy going to the paramilitary-prone operational side – where the potential for human rights abuses is not given sufficient consideration.

That trend has gone on steroids in more recent decades, and it is a safe bet that Gina Haspel would accelerate it. We would also observe that if most of the talent and funding goes to CIA paramilitary operations, then the by-products will necessarily include a tendency to engage in politically motivated – and therefore shabby – analysis. That means that senior policymakers like you will be poorly informed, particularly with respect to complex world issues – including biased perspectives on Russia and its newly re-elected president, Vladimir Putin.

* * *

We Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) are extremely concerned at the possibility that Gina Haspel might become the next Director of the CIA. Haspel actually supervised a CIA “black site” codenamed “Cat’s Eye” in Thailand where a number of suspected terrorists were tortured. She subsequently

collaborated in destroying all 92 videotapes of the torture sessions, effectively covering up what were likely serious war crimes.

There should be no question about the illegality of torture. It has been universally condemned and banned by both the Geneva Conventions and United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which was signed by President Ronald Reagan in 1988 and ratified by the Senate in 1994.

The UN Convention defines torture “as any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him, or a third person, information or a confession...” and makes clear that “no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.”

The Convention’s Article 2 requires signatories to take effective measures to prevent torture in any territory under their jurisdiction. The complete prohibition of torture is absolute. Under international law, officials cannot receive immunity in cases involving torture and governments that have signed the Convention are obligated to bring torturers to justice. US domestic law was brought in line with the Convention once the US became a signatory and ratified it.

In the wake of the Abu Ghraib revelations, torture, to include its variations that have been euphemistically described as “enhanced interrogation techniques” (EIT), is now explicitly banned by the US military in its training manuals. A number of soldiers were tried and imprisoned in the wake of Abu Ghraib, although the “upper ranks” – in civilian as well as military spheres – who approved torture managed to escape serious consequences.

Some in the Pentagon clearly took seriously allegations of torture and were willing to file criminal charges against those involved, though Department of Defense leadership never saw fit to assume responsibility for having set up a policy environment that quite clearly condoned EIT.

There is also another significant historical and legal precedent that demonstrates that the United States government has by its own actions agreed that what is today being called “enhanced interrogation” is a war crime. In 1946-1948, Japanese officers who tortured Allied soldiers – including what is now referred to as waterboarding – were tried at the Tokyo post-war tribunals for that crime, found guilty, and executed.

Heinous

More recently, the meticulously documented unclassified 528 page Executive Summary of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) report on the CIA's secret Rendition, Detention and Interrogation (RDI) program is remarkable for its candor. That five-year investigation was based on original CIA cables and other documents.

In blunt language, the Senate report describes the horrors of the black site secret prisons and the efforts that were made to get terrorist suspects to talk. It demonstrates that the interrogations were brutal – worse than anyone had been led to believe – and also that they did not produce any information that might not have been developed otherwise or, in many cases, any actionable intelligence whatsoever. The full classified text of the report – which names names of the actual torture perpetrators redacted in the summary – runs to almost 7,000 pages.

Moreover, coercive interrogation frequently produced misleading or fabricated intelligence that wasted resources by having to be meticulously checked before being used. This conclusion was also arrived at by former FBI interrogator Ali Soufan – who deplored CIA methods – as well as by a review conducted by CIA's then-Inspector General (IG), John Helgerson, in 2004. The “Helgerson Report” condemned both CIA leadership and Langley's on-the-ground management of questionable programs driven by “analytical assessments that were unsupported by credible intelligence” – programs which quickly became abusive.

It is our collective judgment that the loathsome physical abuses that included beatings, repeated waterboardings and anal violations referred to as “rectal feeding” – as well as physical threats to family members – cannot be whitewashed with the convenient euphemism of “enhanced interrogation.” All of those are acts of torture – plain and simple.

And while there are undoubtedly many good moral arguments against torture, there are practical considerations as well. Despite what the media would have Americans believe, torture does not work.

We recall the unambiguous remarks of then-commander of Army intelligence, Gen. John Kimmons, who held a Pentagon press conference on Sept. 6, 2006 – the same day President George W. Bush announced what he called “an alternative set of procedures” for interrogation (which later morphed into the term “enhanced interrogation techniques”). Anticipating that Bush would claim the EITS to be necessary and effective, Gen. Kimmons told the media: “No good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years – hard years –tells us that.”

Colin Powell Mousetrapped by ‘Intelligence’ From Torture

Worse still, intelligence officials have used information, which they knew was gained from torture, to mislead the most senior US officials on issues of war and peace. One of the signatories below was eyewitness to how CIA Director George Tenet persuaded Secretary of State Colin Powell to tell the UN of a “sinister nexus” between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda.

Tenet did not tell Powell that this “intelligence” came from a source, Abu Yahya al-Libi, who had been “rendered” to, and waterboarded by, Egyptian intelligence. The Defense Intelligence Agency had deemed this intelligence unreliable, but Tenet chose to ignore DIA and never informed Powell. Al-Libi recanted less than a year later, admitting that he fabricated the story about Saddam and al-Qaeda in order to stop his torture.

Moreover, when you wink at torture, you motivate enemies of the United States to do the same to captured US soldiers, diplomats and travelers while also providing a propaganda bonanza for terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Indeed, the only reason why CIA torturers have not been tried and sentenced to prison for the damage they have done to the nation is that an intimidated President Barack Obama – who once proclaimed that “nobody is above the law” – balked at allowing the judicial process to run its course, thereby whitewashing the Bush Administration’s many crimes related to the so-called “global war on terror.” Obama attempted to justify his inaction as looking forward rather than backward, but it is more likely that he feared opening up a Pandora’s Box of shameful government secrets that no doubt would have emerged.

Promoting Haspel in spite of her tainted record would send a message to both intelligence and military personnel that embracing practices like torture – indisputably a war crime – can be a path to promotion.

Haspel’s involvement with torture began when she accepted the assignment to go to Thailand – which she could have turned down – to run the “black site” where the interrogations were being conducted. She was, at the time, the deputy in CIA’s Counter Terrorism Center (CTC), working for Jose Rodriguez.

She was in charge of the secret Thailand base in late 2002 while Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri and possibly more suspects were being tortured in a process that included slamming victims’ heads against walls, subjecting them to painful stress positions, regularly depriving them of sleep, confining them to small, coffin-like boxes, and waterboarding.

The “confinement boxes” were of two types; one was coffin-sized, and the other was smaller and less than waist-high. Both had strong claustrophobic effects. A prisoner would be forced into the smaller box as an extreme form of stress

positioning, creating excruciating pain. To maximize psychological distress and exploit phobias, insects were sometimes placed in the pitch-black “coffin” alongside the victim.

Destroying the Evidence

In 2005, after returning to CIA headquarters at Langley, she acted on instructions from Rodriguez and drafted the order to destroy the 92 videotapes that had been made of the interrogations. It has been reported that she was a “strong advocate” for the destruction. This was contrary to instructions provided by CIA Counsel John Rizzo and the White House. Thus, her act may have constituted destruction of evidence – a felony.

Jose Rodriguez was investigated for destruction of evidence by a Special Prosecutor who eventually ruled against charging him. An aide to CIA Executive Director Kyle “Dusty” Foggo later revealed Rodriguez’s rationale for shredding the tapes, writing in an email that “the heat from destroying [them] is nothing compared with what it would be if the tapes ever got into public domain – he [Rodriguez] said that they would make us look terrible; it would be devastating to us.” Gina Haspel ensured that these tapes – important, damning evidence of US government torture – would never see the light of day.

Haspel’s defenders claim that she was not the creator of the torture program and only served as a willing executor of a government initiative that she believed to be legal. That may be true as no one has access to the CTC documents that might prove otherwise. Nevertheless, it does not provide her a free pass under international law, where it is generally referred to as the “Nuremberg Defense” – a thoroughly discredited “defense” that harkens back to the era of Nazi atrocities and those who attempted to justify them by claiming perpetrators were “just following orders.”

‘Nuremberg Defense’ Didn’t Work at Nuremberg

Several former CIA leaders have supported her, saying that she was “implementing the legal orders of the president,” but many of them may be concerned about their own reputations or questionable decisions they may have made in the name of the “war on terror.” And the UN’s International Law Commission says something quite different in its codification of the legal options surrounding torture, writing that “the fact that a person acted pursuant to an order of his government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law, provided a moral choice was in fact possible to him.”

It is also claimed that Gina Haspel was working for the CIA Chief of Station (COS) in Bangkok and acting under the COS’s orders, but those of us who have

worked in and led CIA bases would dispute that that type of tight control was common, particularly since in this case, she was reporting directly to the Counterterrorism Center at Langley. Haspel would have been the boss and would have had independence in the field in executing directives from CIA Headquarters and the Counterterrorism Center – some of which she herself had a hand in drafting.

If Haspel is confirmed and wishes to travel abroad, she may have to restrict herself to countries not party to the UN Convention Against Torture because of her widely known involvement in the “black site” in Thailand. The 42 countries that have signed and ratified the Convention include the US and most of its allies. All take on a legal obligation to enforce the prohibition against torture, based on the principle of “universal jurisdiction,” when necessary. In other words, they are empowered to act when the accused’s home country refuses to do so.

Not Too Late to Do the Right Thing

If you do not withdraw the nomination of Gina Haspel and she is confirmed, this will cast a moral stain on the vast numbers of patriotic and ethically upright Americans who serve their country in the field of national security. It will also be a continuation of the steady erosion of human rights standards and rule of law post-9/11.

Apparent widespread support for torture among the US public – enabled largely by the false message of Hollywood, the media and the Cheney family that it “works” – is deplorable. It might have been headed off by the prosecutions of Haspel, Rodriguez and others by former President Obama, together with graphic exposure of the evidence. You have an opportunity to reverse this wrong.

Withdrawing Haspel’s nomination now would be a step in the right direction. Confirming her as Director of CIA would signal that Washington embraces what then-Vice President Dick Cheney referred to as the “dark side.” Regrettably, torture was once part of US policy. Indeed, one of this Memorandum’s signatories spent nearly two years in federal prison because he revealed that. But torture cannot be relied upon to yield accurate intelligence. It remains an internationally condemned malignancy that must be excised, never to return.

* * *

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

Jean Maria Arrigo, PhD, member of 2005 American Psychological Association task force evaluating the role of psychologists in U.S. intelligence and military interrogations of detainees (associate VIPS)

William Binney, former NSA Technical Director for World Geopolitical & Military Analysis; Co-founder of NSA's Signals Intelligence Automation Research Center (ret.)

Richard H. Black, Senator of Virginia, 13th District; Colonel US Army (ret.); Former Chief, Criminal Law Division, Office of the Judge Advocate General, the Pentagon (associate VIPS)

Marshall Carter-Tripp, Foreign Service Officer (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Bogdan Dzakovic, former Team Leader of Federal Air Marshals and Red Team, FAA Security (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

George Hunsinger, Professor, Princeton Theological Seminary; Founder, National Religious Campaign Against Torture (associate VIPS)

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

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Karen Kwiatkowski, Lt. Col., USAF (ret.)

Linda Lewis, WMD preparedness policy analyst, USDA (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Edward Loomis, NSA Cryptologic Computer Scientist (ret.)

David MacMichael, Ph.D., former senior estimates officer, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

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

Elizabeth Murray, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East, National Intelligence Council & CIA political analyst (ret.)

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

Valerie Plame, former operations officer, CIA (associate VIPS)

Diane Roark, Republican Professional Staff, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, 1985-2002 (ret.) (associate VIPS)

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (ret.)

Greg Thielmann, former Director, Office of Strategic, Political, and Military Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, State Department; Former staff member, Senate Intelligence Committee

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

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA

Lawrence Wilkerson, Colonel, US Army (ret.), former Chief of Staff for Secretary of State; Distinguished Visiting Professor, College of William and Mary (associate VIPS)

Sarah G. Wilton, CDR, USNR, (ret.); Defense Intelligence Agency (ret.)

Robert Wing, former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)

Ann Wright, Colonel, US Army (ret.); also Foreign Service Officer who resigned in opposition to the US war on Iraq

* * *

ANNEX

MEMORANDA from VIPS to President Barack Obama Regarding Torture

1 –

US Media Ignores CIA Cover-up on Torture

September 16, 2016

MEMORANDUM FOR: Sen. Dianne Feinstein, Vice Chairman, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: U.S. Media Mum On How Your Committee Faced Down Both CIA and Obama

2 –

US Intel Vets Decry CIA's Use of Torture

September 19, 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Intelligence Veterans Challenge CIA's "Rebuttal" on Torture

3 –

Udall Urged to Disclose Full Torture Report

December 29, 2014

MEMORANDUM FOR: Senator Mark Udall

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Time to Speak Out on Floor of Congress to Stop Torture

4 –

<https://consortiumnews.com/2009/092809a.html>

September 27, 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: There Must be Accountability for Torture

5 –

<https://consortiumnews.com/2009/042909e.html>

April 29, 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Torture: An Accumulated Evil (see Nuremberg): John Brennan Publicly Defended "Extraordinary Rendition" Knowing Its Purpose Was Torture

Dems Kept Cheerleading Bush-Era Neocons – Now There's One In The White House

Dems are criticizing Trump's National Security Advisor pick, not because he's a warmonger who was one of the original members of the Project for a New American Century, but because he's allegedly too soft on Russia, Caitlin Johnstone explains.

By Caitlin Johnstone

As so many of us have been dreading, PNAC's favorite bloodthirsty child killer John Bolton has been added to the Trump administration. And as many half-jokingly predicted, Democrats seized on this opportunity to accuse Bolton of being a Kremlin agent.

That's right, John Bolton, the guy who has been trying to start a war with Russia since long before the name Vladimir Putin meant anything to the average Democrat, is being accused of colluding with Russia. Count on Democrats to oppose the most virulent neocon in Washington by accusing him of not being hawkish enough.

"John Bolton once suggested Russian hack of DNC may have been a false flag operation by Obama Admin," fretted lead Democratic Russiagater Adam Schiff, mistaking brazen partisan hackery for actual skepticism about a likely intelligence community false flag.

"Don't forget the reason for H.R. McMaster's departure: He criticized Russia," added Democratic Coalition co-founder Scott Dworkin. "McMaster said publicly that Russia needed to face serious consequences for what they've done in Syria & for the gas attack in the UK. John Bolton would never say anything like that."

"Trump has outdone himself by selecting Bolton," Democratic Rep. Ted Deutch tweeted with a link to a story about Bolton having appeared in a 2013 video for a Russian gun rights group. "In one appointment, he simultaneously increased the influence of the NRA in his Admin. & found another way to tie himself to Russia. Does he still claim he hires the best people? #TrumpRussia."

"Bolton is *pre-indictment* for many crimes against America," tweeted renowned professional intelligence LARPer Eric Garland.

Was he referring to Bolton's unforgivable war crimes? Of course not.

"He's owned by Russia," Garland explained.

There are of course many, many, many extremely legitimate reasons to criticize John Bolton, and none of them involve being too soft on Russia. Not only is he a PNAC signatory who played a major role in manufacturing the lies that led to the Iraq invasion, but he still insists that that invasion was a great idea. He's advocated for escalations and acts of military violence against every single government that is in any way oppositional to U.S. hegemony including Venezuela, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Russia and China, and account after account of his personal behavior toward people he's worked with indicate that he is in all likelihood an actual, literal psychopath.

But Democratic opposition to Bolton, even when it doesn't get sucked up into idiotic Russia conspiracy theory, appears to be receiving a relatively lukewarm response from mainstream America. It certainly isn't attracting the urgent attention it should be, and certainly isn't eliciting the level of viral interest as a new "bombshell" Russiagate revelation. And why should it? Propagandists have been pacing rank-and-file Democrats into embracing Iraq-raping Bush-era neocons for more than a year now.

In addition to Democrats being forced to spend 2016 gaslighting themselves into believing that a warmongering neocon who supported the Iraq war would make a great First Female President, they have also been manipulated by the cult of blind anti-Trumpism into accepting neoconservative death worshippers like Bill Kristol, David Frum and Max Boot into their #Resistance fold.

"One of the most amazing outcomes of the Trump administration is the number of neo-conservatives that are now my friends and I am aligned with," MSNBC pundit Joy Reid openly admitted in an interview last year. "I found myself agreeing on a panel with Bill Kristol. I agree more with Jennifer Rubin, David Frum, and Max Boot than I do with some people on the far left. I am shocked at the way that Donald Trump has brought people together."

Just as Bolton has cozied up to the Trump crowd by disguising his brazen

neoconservative globalism as libertarian-leaning nationalism, neocons like Frum, Boot and Kristol who helped decimate Iraq have been cozying up to mainstream Democrats by posing as woke progressives, and now they're in like Flynn. Dems had to stretch and compartmentalize their thinking to accommodate the other Bush-era neocons, and even Bush himself to a large extent, so why would a few experts saying "Uh seriously this Bolton guy is deeply terrifying" have any influence over them? They already had to gaslight themselves into believing the bloodshed caused by neoconservatism is fine.

So the American mainstream has been successfully manipulated on both sides of the artificial political divide into supporting vestigial Bush neocons, with #TheResistance proudly retweeting depraved death cultists like Bill Kristol while a majority of the #MAGA crowd support Trump's elevation of Bolton, and now there's no one left but us homeless nonpartisans to point and scream about where this all seems to be headed.

Partisan hack Trump supporters are worthless. Partisan hack Democrats are equally worthless. Only those who have awakened from the relentless barrage of mass media psy-ops and seen beyond the fake uni-party trap can see what's going on. It's up to us to awaken everyone else.

Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly at Medium. Follow her work on Facebook, Twitter, or her website. She has a podcast and a new book *Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers*. This article was re-published with permission.

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in February focused on the release of the so-called "Nunes Memo", the US system of perpetual warfare, and the growing risk of confrontations in Syria, North Korea and Iran.

"Outpouring of Support Honors Robert Parry" Feb. 1, 2018

"U.S. Media's Objectivity Questioned Abroad" by Andrew Spannaus, Feb. 2, 2018

"Nunes Memo Reports Crimes at Top of FBI and DOJ" by Ray McGovern, Feb. 2, 2018

"'Duck and Cover' Drills Exacerbate Fears of N. Korea War" by Ann Wright, Feb. 3, 2018

"Do We Really Want Nuclear War with Russia?" by Robert Parry, Feb. 4, 2018

“Recipe Concocted for Perpetual War is a Bitter One” by Robert Wing and Coleen Rowley, Feb. 4, 2018

“WMD Claims in Syria Raise Concerns over U.S. Escalation” by Rick Sterling, Feb. 4, 2018

“Connecticut Court Decision Highlights U.S. Educational Failures” by Dennis J. Bernstein, Feb. 5, 2018

“Understanding Russia, Un-Demonizing Putin” by Sharon Tennison, Feb. 6, 2018

“Did Al Qaeda Dupe Trump on Syrian Attack?” by Robert Parry, Feb. 6, 2018

“No Time for Complacency over Korea War Threat” by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 7, 2018

“‘This is Nuts’: Liberals Launch ‘Largest Mobilization in History’ in Defense of Russiagate Probe” by Coleen Rowley and Nat Parry, Feb. 9, 2018

“A Note to Our Readers” by Nat Parry, Feb. 10, 2018

“Donald Trump v. the Spooks” by Annie Machon, Feb.23, 2018

“How Establishment Propaganda Gaslights Us Into Submission” by Caitlin Johnstone, Feb. 12, 2018

“Budget Woes Sign of a Dysfunctional Empire” by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 13, 2018

“The Right’s Second Amendment Lies” by Robert Parry, Feb. 16, 2018

“NYT’s ‘Really Weird’ Russiagate Story” by Daniel Lazare, Feb. 16, 2018

“Russians Spooked by Nukes-Against-Cyber-Attack Policy” by Ray McGovern and William Binney, Feb. 16, 2018

“Nunes: FBI and DOJ Perps Could Be Put on Trial” by Ray McGovern, Feb. 19, 2018

“U.S. Empire Still Incoherent After All These Years” by Nicolas J.S. Davies, Feb. 20, 2018

“Time to Admit the Afghan War is ‘Nonsense’” by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 22, 2018

“Selective Outrage Undermines Human Rights in Syria” by Jonathan Marshall, Feb. 23, 2018

“The Mueller Indictments: The Day the Music Died” by Daniel Lazare, Feb. 24, 2018

“Growing Risk of U.S.-Iran Hostilities Based on False Pretexts, Intel Vets Warn”

by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Feb. 26, 2018

“Who Benefits from Russia’s ‘Peculiar’ Doping Violations?” by Rick Sterling,

Feb. 26, 2018

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Gun Rights and ‘Freedom’s’ Perversities

The concept of personal freedoms is relatively new to human history but has often, ironically, been exploited by people in power to achieve or maintain a sociopolitical goal, posits Lawrence Davidson in this analysis.

By Lawrence Davidson

For much of human history, the idea of freedom had little meaning. This was because life was, as Thomas Hobbes put it, “poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” And while he thought this descriptor applied to life outside of society, for a long time it did not really matter – life within pre-modern societies often had the same limiting character. Religious belief in these same times reflected this depressing fact by asserting that there was no hope of meaningful freedom in this life. To achieve it you would have to die and go to Heaven. So, what set you free was death.

Around the end of the 18th century, progress in technology and science suggested an alternative to this “life is a vale of tears” scenario. It was at that point that different types of freedoms started to become viable goals. However, as the use of the plural implies, the idea of freedom manifested itself in discrete categories: political freedom, economic freedom (here defined as freedom from want), religious freedom, freedom of speech and press, and so forth. It really had to be this way. Total freedom produces anarchy and – here is the irony – anarchy will quickly make any particular freedom meaningless.

Thus it was that over time, as constitutions came into vogue, freedoms were written down, usually in the form of rights. Yet, not surprisingly, their translation into practice often ended up reflecting the needs and desires of the powerful and influential. This was the case whether we are considering democracies or more authoritarian forms of government. This customizing of freedoms by select groups inevitably led to less than satisfactory, and sometimes quite perverse, results.

Let's take a look at an example of such a conceptual deformity taken from the practice in the United States, "the land of the free."

Gun Rights – A Perversion of Freedom

Perhaps the most perverse American definition of freedom is the one that promotes largely unrestricted gun rights. The champion of this definition is the National Rifle Association (NRA). We are not just talking about guns used to shoot at targets or for hunting game. One can actually make an argument for ownership of the latter weapons along the same line as bows and arrows, slingshots and fishing rods. However, according to Wayne LaPierre, the NRA's executive vice president, freedom demands more. His stand is that citizens have a fundamental right to own almost any firearm, including military-style assault weapons. His position is that this right is the sine qua non of American freedom. And only by exercising it can you really ensure individual freedom.

LaPierre insists that gun ownership is enshrined in the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and the NRA has taken an out-of-context fragment of that amendment as its motto – "The Right of the People to Keep and Bear Arms Shall Not Be Infringed." The fact that this phrase is part of a comprehensive statement that ties gun ownership to the government's need to maintain "a well regulated militia" is disregarded by the NRA leadership. In truth, if we are to take the Second Amendment in its entirety as describing a discrete "freedom," Mr. LaPierre and his buddies would have to join the National Guard in order to play with guns.

So here is a case where a definition of a freedom or a right has been customized to meet the demands of a politically powerful subgroup of society, and it has had predictably disastrous results. The largely open-ended access of U.S. citizens to military-style weapons has resulted in a prolonged bloodbath. It is estimated that between 2011 and 2014, there was a mass shooting (defined as the killing or wounding of 4 or more people) in the United States every 64 days. This rate has not slowed down in the last four years. As the world now knows, the latest of these massacres came on 14 February 2018, when 17 high school students were shot dead in Parkland, Florida.

Soon after this massacre, Wayne LaPierre gave the NRA's response to those surviving students and their supporters who were demanding greater gun regulation laws. He accused them of being "socialists" who want to make "law abiding" citizens "less free." If these "leftists" manage to "seize power ... our American freedoms could be lost and our country will be changed forever."

LaPierre's answer to the bloodbaths caused by guns is to have more guns. "The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is with a good guy with a gun." In the case of the Parkland high school shooting, where, in fact, there was an armed guard present at the school, as well as with previous school shootings, LaPierre's formula translates into arming teachers as a way of "hardening the schools."

By the way, President Trump initially agreed with LaPierre. He too called for arming teachers, suggesting that if 20 percent of teachers were armed and "adept with the firearm, they could end the attack very quickly." Assuming Trump meant giving teachers a sidearm while the usual assailants continue to use military-style automatic weapons, one can only call such a suggestion naive. He also praised the NRA leadership and specifically LaPierre, saying that "they are great people and great American patriots who will do the right thing."

Subsequently, Trump suggested that the country may well need to toughen its gun laws, much to the dismay of all those "patriots" at the NRA. Twenty-four hours later he was back on track with the NRA. Perhaps his flip-flopping was a tactical maneuver. Throw out some reforms and then do nothing. Later he can then say to the general public, perhaps during a reelection campaign, that he proved more willing to sign off on gun control reform than any president in history. Trump is famous for such mendacious hyperboles.

In the end LaPierre and all the the other gun fanatics who whittle their definition of freedom down to the nearly unrestricted right to own weapons are archaic primitives whose idea of freedom harkens back to those pre-civilized times so well described by Thomas Hobbes. In a perpetually dangerous world, one that is "poor, nasty, brutish and short," the armed man is the only one with any chance of being "free." And so, he is the "real man," the man who can protect himself, his family and his country.

But that is not the way the world is, at least in the West. It is a relatively settled and safe place where the major threat is not so much crime, and certainly not socialists, but rather LaPierre's own demand – the proliferation of guns. What we are all threatened by is the perversion of this discrete freedom.

The gun rights issue is not the only perversion of freedom one can come up with.

The whole issue of economic freedom (as defined as freedom from want) is another. One can argue that, in an era of sufficient resources, this should be an undeniable right. Yet, in the United States, economic freedom is defined in such a way as to satisfy the desires and needs of a particular powerful group. Economic freedom is the freedom of the capitalist to operate within a “free market.” Unfortunately, such a definition, applied in practice, has left many people economically disadvantaged.

As is the case with the issue of gun rights, those who want to alter the definition of economic freedom so as to minimize such conditions as indebtedness and poverty are accused of being socialists and wanting to take away “our freedoms.”

So, really, just what does freedom mean? Well, it means what the powerful and the influential say it means. And, having it manifested in discrete categories makes it easy to customize. Nonetheless, part of civilizational progress is assuring that freedoms are sane and beneficial to larger and larger groups – but, obviously, progress in this sense is a real struggle.

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Italy's Choice: Shock or Stagnation

Exclusive: Italy's elections this weekend represent a choice between the status quo, with risks of further austerity and structural reforms, or a wild card of populists who may lack competence and hold anti-democratic views, explains Andrew Spannaus.

By Andrew Spannaus

Italy will hold elections on March 4, in which the essential choice for voters is to stay the course with the policies of the European Union, or to give populism a chance. The vote is the last in a year-long series of elections in major European countries, and the one where an anti-system party has the highest likelihood of breaking through.

In 2017, populist sentiment helped outsiders increase their support in Holland, France, Germany and Austria, although none of them won any elections outright. This led European elites to breath a major sigh of relief, in the hope that the nationalist and populist broadsides against neoliberal E.U. economic policies and tensions around undocumented immigration, would not force an actual change in the institutions.



Geert Wilder's Freedom Party in Holland came in a distant second, and Marine Le Pen of the National Front in France was soundly defeated in a run-off election with Emmanuel Macron. Yet the effects of the voters' revolt that emerged forcefully in the 2016 Brexit vote and the U.S. Presidential elections were subsequently felt in two more unexpected locations: Germany and Austria.

In Germany the largest two parties, the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats both lost a considerable number of votes. This drop, coupled with the rise of the anti-E.U. Alternative for Deutschland (Afd), had major repercussions, forcing Chancellor Angela Merkel to engage in months of talks for a new Grand Coalition with the Social Democrats. Before the election, almost all commentators had predicted an easy win for Merkel.

In Austria, the Christian Democrats People's party came in first due in part to the tough-on-immigration stance of its young leader Sebastian Kurz. Along with the rise of the hardline Freedom Party, a new coalition government was formed that moved the country's institutions significantly to the right.

Now it's Italy's turn. The populist revolt actually emerged here first, five years ago with the success of the Five Star Movement (M5S) founded by comedian Beppe Grillo. Based on the success of public rallies with the slogan "F.. you" to the "caste" that dominates the country's political institutions, Grillo decided to take aim at the political institutions. In 2013, while refusing to go on television or radio to campaign, the M5S got about 25% of the national vote, leading to a large presence in the Parliament.

The movement's members are generally young, "regular people" who just decided to fight against the corruption of the establishment, rather than candidates groomed to step into the country's ruling class.

Today, the M5S is positioned to be the top vote-getter in this weekend's elections, with recent polls showing its support at just under 30%. This is

despite a concerted attempt to dampen its impact so as to ensure that it could never make it into the government. There are in fact many worries about the Movement, starting with a lack of experience and at times naive or contradictory policy positions. The biggest threat, however, has been seen as the call for a referendum on the European single currency, the Euro.

If there's one thing the Eurocracy fears, it's that voters will be given a chance to actually express their opinion on European economic policy, which has been dominated by the pro-finance and harsh austerity measures that Western populations have become disgusted with in recent years. The "responsible" politicians assure everyone that stopping or even slowing European integration would be a disaster, leading to depression and possibly even war. Yet they know well that when faced with the weakening of the middle class, stagnant growth and increasing social tensions due to immigration, a large percentage of voters blame the E.U. itself, which over the past two decades has gradually become the major legislative force in Europe, supplanting individual national governments.

The anti-populist imperative among Italian institutions has led establishment politicians to explicitly embrace the notion of staying the course.

Representatives of the Democratic Party (PD) of former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi argue that things are finally getting better now, with economic growth slowly ticking up, and the country beginning to make up the ground lost in recent years.

Renzi has worn out his welcome with many Italians, though. He came to power in 2014 without being elected, through a shake-up within his own party. He subsequently spent almost three years as the head of the government, but ended up betting everything on a referendum to reform the Constitution in December 2016, which he lost badly.

Voters got tired of his personalization of politics, a mix of big talk and modest results, and naturally began to blame him for the country's problems.

The result was a sort of Grand Coalition in which the PD and the center-right parties, led by Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, have together supported the government of current Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni. Gentiloni is seen as competent and unassuming, and many would prefer him to stay on after the next elections.

Once again, though, there's the problem of the voters. The elites hope to stay the course and work gradually to improve the country's financial position and influence in Europe, but without challenging the neoliberal framework of the E.U. At this point the only way to obtain that result would be for nobody to win the election, thus allowing the centrist parties to again work together, while

keeping out the supposed extremists on both the left and the right.

There are other parties, in addition to the M5S, that present themselves as anti-system. One is the Northern League, which has become more moderate since its pro-secession days, but still takes a hard line on immigration. Although the League is once again allied with Berlusconi's Forza Italia, it is also heavily critical of the E.U.

A number of smaller parties also support anti-establishment positions, yet many won't reach the minimum threshold for entering parliament.

The key factor in these elections is the electoral system itself. The fear of the M5S led the traditional parties to re-write the country's election laws. The goal was to favor coalitions, rather than parties, avoiding the fragmentation of the vote and weakening the outsiders.

This goal may well be reached. Despite leading the polls, M5S has always gone it alone, rather than teaming up with others. Thus the center-right coalition is likely to have more overall votes, allowing the President of the Republic to task them with forming a government. This could once again result in collaboration with the Democrats, although probably with a different Prime Minister.

The result would be little change in the direction of the country. Some see this as positive, to avoid upsetting the system with radical proposals. Yet the risk here is that there will be little progress on issues such as inequality, unstable working conditions, and the perception of an out-of-touch, self-serving political class; all factors that could drive more social and political unrest in the future.

Another possibility would be a government anchored by the Five Star Movement and the League, an alliance many fear could emerge after the vote. This would be a true shock to the system, although probably less dramatic than many expect. The M5S candidate for Prime Minister, 31-year old Luigi Di Maio, has recently stepped up efforts to be considered credible, with meetings in the City of London and the announcement of unthreatening technocrats as potential government ministers. The move may calm fears in the institutions, but could cost him some support among the public.

The League is also taking pains to project a less threatening image. This includes distancing itself from extreme supporters on the right who have committed acts of violence towards immigrants, and engaged in physical clashes with anti-fascist protestors from the left.

Both parties have set out programmatic proposals that could force a reckoning

with the march towards further European integration, such as separation between commercial banks and investment banks (inspired by the Glass-Steagall Act in the U.S.), along with calls for moving back towards national sovereignty. This forms a significant contrast with the centrist parties, that especially on the left, have adopted the line of “more Europe,” counting on voters to shy away from endorsing the path of open conflict with E.U. institutions.

Thus Italy’s elections reflect a significant, but complicated choice. On the one hand voters can seek not to rock the boat, but risk further austerity and structural reforms, while hoping for gradual progress. The other possibility is the unknown of populists who on the one hand promise a serious challenge to the failed policies of recent years, but on the other raise fears of incompetence, and also undemocratic attitudes from Europe’s past.

Andrew Spannaus is a journalist and strategic analyst based in Milan, Italy. He is the founder of Transatlantico.info, that provides news and analysis to Italian institutions and businesses. He has published the books “Perché vince Trump” (Why Trump is Winning – June 2016) and “La rivolta degli elettori” (The Revolt of the Voters – July 2017).

California Dems Withhold Endorsement of Sen. Feinstein

California Democrats did not endorse longstanding Senator Dianne Feinstein for the upcoming primary election, setting the stage for a tough campaign against challengers such as California Senate President Pro Tempore Kevin de León, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

It is no secret that the second most powerful politician in the State of California, Senate President Pro Tempore Kevin de León, is gearing up for a knock-down, drag-out primary fight with California’s senior Senator, Dianne Feinstein. Many feel it’s time for a changing of the guard and time for a person of color to represent the white minority state of California.

This passed weekend, California democrats refused to endorse Senator Feinstein, in a major rebuke of California’s senior senator, opening the door wide for de León to run.

According to the Sacramento Bee, “As a child, de León spent time on both sides

of the border, in Tijuana, Baja California, and Logan Heights in San Diego and identifies strongly with Mexican culture, though he doesn't know where his grandparents are from."

Senator de León recently led a coalition to sponsor legislation "that addresses lapses in our justice and labor systems creating serious challenges for the California's immigrant community, including stronger wage theft laws, securing u-visas from law enforcement, and providing healthcare for undocumented children."

Before joining the Legislature, de León taught citizenship courses to immigrants. When he was sworn in as the 47th president pro tem of the California Senate in 2014, he became the first Latino to hold the position in more than a century.

Bernstein spoke to Kevin de León on February 14, 2018.

Dennis Bernstein: With everyone watching Washington and wondering whether humane immigration reform can be passed, what are you expecting from Congress?

Kevin de León: These are very difficult times for many of us. As a nation, we are grappling with the resurgence of ugly, hateful ideologies, including white supremacy, spewing from the highest levels of our federal government. We are confronting something we have never had to come to terms with before in our political history.

At the same time, I have never been more proud to be a Californian. In November 2016, Californians rejected the politics fueled by resentment and bigotry. The DACA issue is very dear to my heart. In California, we have the vast majority of DACA beneficiaries, the vast majority of Dreamers, and we have the vast majority of beneficiaries of the TPS [Temporary Protected Status] program, primarily from El Salvador. We are also home to the majority of immigrants in the nation, both those who became naturalized US citizens and those who have yet to normalize their status because of the dysfunction in Washington, D.C.

In this context, the DACA program is really a low-hanging fruit. Both Democrats, as well as Republicans among the national electorate, strongly support the Dreamers and DACA. Why the issue should seem so complex is beyond me, except that there is political gamesmanship being played and the DACA beneficiaries have been taken as hostages. I hope that a common sense settlement can be reached to give these young men and women the protections they deserve. We need sensible comprehensive immigration reform for the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants across the nation.

DB: What is your response then you hear that we have to do something about the

problem of “chain migration”?

KdL: For me, “chain migration” is another word for family reunification. The thesis behind the new term is quite pernicious. Quite frankly, many of my close family members would not have been eligible to enter this country had there been a so-called “chain migration” clause in the country’s immigration policy. If we’d had an immigration policy that was exclusively merit-based, I would never have become the leader of the California State Senate.

DB: In a press release toward the end of January you expressed your concern that Homeland Security was threatening to go after public officials if they continued to give their support to sanctuary cities. Do you really think ICE will be out arresting officials like you?

KdL: These are extraordinary threats meant to intimidate and silence political opponents. But threatening to weaponize federal agencies against Californians and their elected representatives will only strengthen our resolve.

DB: I’d like to change the subject for a moment. This concerns the economy and the environment. As you know, the Trumpites are gung-ho about offshore drilling. This is a huge issue in the context of global warming and is pitting California against the rest of the country.

KdL: California is blessed with an incomparably beautiful and pristine coastline and we want to keep it that way for future generations. In California we have some of the most progressive climate change policies in the entire world. By the year 2030, we will be generating half of our electricity from renewable sources: wind, solar and geothermal. We are investing in rooftop solar power in low-income communities. We are looking for ways to provide electric vehicles to communities at the lowest economic strata. We are doing this intentionally to make sure that we democratize our climate change benefits and offer relief to those communities that suffer disproportionately from the devastations of carbon dioxide and other emissions.

We are witnessing an administration that is trying to unilaterally, through executive action, unwind all of our progressive policies in a state like California. We have created 500,000 jobs in the clean energy space alone. That means there are ten times more clean energy jobs now in California than there are coal jobs in all of America! No doubt about it, there is a battle brewing between Washington and California, and not just around the issue of immigration.

DB: We are seeing now the roll-out of the recreational marijuana industry, which is looking to become a huge cash crop. What role do you see marijuana playing in the future of California?

KdL: Recreational use of cannabis is now the law of the land in California. It has the overwhelming support of the people. It is the responsibility of state and local government to roll out a regulatory framework that is responsible and fiscally prudent. But it is now the law in California, and any threats from the Department of Justice—and specifically from Jeff Sessions, who has his mind fixated on a certain era in American history—will be met with legal resistance.

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

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“Pesticide Use Threatens Health in California” by Dennis J. Bernstein, Jan. 10, 2018

“Trump Lashes Pakistan over Afghan War” by Dennis J. Bernstein, Jan. 11, 2018

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“Trump Ends Protections for El Salvador” by Dennis J. Bernstein, Jan. 18, 2018

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