

Fear and Loathing in Baltimore

Freddie Gray's fatally broken spine, while trundled up in a Baltimore police van and taken for a "rough ride" to hurtle him around and inflict pain, was just another case of an unarmed black man's fate in modern America, except that a prosecutor finally took a stand against police brutality, writes Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn

Once again, the nation watches as prosecutors deal with the killing of an unarmed black man.

"[The officers] failed to establish probable cause for Mr. Gray's arrest as no crime had been committed by Mr. Gray . . . Accordingly, [he was] illegally arrested," Baltimore state's attorney Marilyn Mosby declared, as she announced the filing of criminal charges against the six officers implicated in Freddie Gray's death.

Gray made "eye contact" with Officer Brian Rice. Gray then ran from Rice, and Rice began chasing Gray. It was after Gray surrendered to Officers Garrett Miller and Edward Nero that Gray was taken on his fatal "rough ride."

A "rough ride" is an unsanctioned technique that some officers use to injure arrestees without physically touching them with their hands or weapons. The driver typically takes intentionally rough or rapid turns around corners or makes sudden stops. Since the suspect is handcuffed, he is unable to brace himself so he falls forward, often bashing his head against the inside of the van.

Like so many African-American men before him in this country, Gray was guilty of nothing other than "walking while black." In his case, Baltimore's sordid history of racial and class oppression, combined with the war on drugs, made for a deadly combination.

"Probable cause was distorted by the drug war," David Simon, creator of *The Wire*, said in an interview with Bill Keller. Set in Baltimore, the award-winning HBO series portrayed the conflict between the police and African Americans in the streets, in a compelling work of historical fiction.

"[T]he drug war was as much a function of class and social control as it was of racism," Simon added. "The drug war gives everybody permission to do anything. It gives cops permission to stop anybody, to go in anyone's pockets, to manufacture any lie when they get to district court."

In short, under the guise of the war on drugs, Baltimore police have been

harassing people for years. Simon added, "My own crew members [on *The Wire*] used to get picked up trying to come from the set at night . . . Driving while black . . . Charges were non-existent, or were dismissed en masse."

Scholar Richard Rothstein, a research associate at the Economic Policy Institute, documented more than 100 years of "federal, state, and local policies to quarantine Baltimore's black population in isolated slums."

Rothstein does not think the answer lies in improving the quality of the police. He recognizes the frustration of those who engage in violent protest, as they have been denied the opportunity to become part of mainstream society.

"When disadvantaged children are concentrated in separate schools, as they are in Baltimore, their disadvantages are exacerbated." Rothstein found, "Baltimore, not at all uniquely, has experienced a century of public policy designed, consciously so, to segregate and impoverish its black population."

The Supreme Court held in *Illinois v. Wardlow* that flight in a high-crime area may constitute reasonable suspicion for an officer to briefly detain an individual and determine whether there is evidence of criminal activity.

After Miller and Nero handcuffed Gray, they put him in a prone position with his arms handcuffed behind his back. Gray said he couldn't breathe and requested an inhaler, "to no avail," according to Mosby.

The officers found a legal pocketknife in Gray's pocket. But instead of releasing Gray, they put him back on his stomach and restrained him with a "leg lace" while waiting for the police wagon to transport him.

Miller and Nero loaded Gray into the wagon, which Officer Caesar Goodson drove. At no time was Gray secured by a seatbelt, in violation of Baltimore Police Department (BPD) policy. At Baker Street, Rice, Nero and Miller placed handcuffs and leg shackles on Gray. They then placed Gray on his stomach in the wagon, head first.

"Following transport from Baker Street," Mosby said, "Mr. Gray suffered a severe and critical neck injury as a result of being handcuffed, shackled by his feet and unrestrained inside of the BPD wagon."

Goodson stopped to check on Gray but "at no point did he seek nor did he render any medical assistance for Mr. Gray." At another stop, Goodson and Officer William Porter went to the back of the wagon to check on Gray, who requested help, said he couldn't breathe, and twice requested a medic. "At no point did either [Goodson or Porter] restrain Mr. Gray per BPD general order nor did they render or request medical assistance."

"Despite Mr. Gray's obvious and recognized need for medical assistance, Officer Goodson in a grossly negligent manner chose to respond to the 1600 block of West North Avenue with Mr. Gray still unsecured by a seatbelt in the wagon without rendering to or summoning medical assistance for Mr. Gray."

During still another stop, Officer Alicia White, Porter and Goodson "observed Mr. Gray unresponsive on the floor of the wagon." White, who was "responsible for investigating two citizen complaints pertaining to Mr. Gray's illegal arrest spoke to the back of Mr. Gray's head. When he did not respond, she did nothing further despite the fact that she was advised that he needed a medic. She made no effort to look or assess or determine his condition."

"Despite Mr. Gray's seriously deteriorating medical condition, no medical assistance was rendered or summoned for Mr. Gray at that time by any officer," Mosby added.

Goodson failed to restrain Gray with a seatbelt at least five different times.

"By the time [officers] attempted to remove Mr. Gray from the wagon, Mr. Gray was no longer breathing at all." A medic, who "was finally called to the scene," determined that Gray "was now in cardiac arrest and was critically and severely injured," Mosby stated.

Gray was finally "rushed" to the hospital where he underwent surgery and died seven days later.

The Maryland Medical Examiner concluded Gray's death was a homicide, "believed to be the result of a fatal injury that occurred when Mr. Gray was unrestrained by a seatbelt in the custody of the Baltimore Police Department wagon."

Mosby described multiple stops during which Gray was never secured by a seatbelt or provided with medical care. Almost one hour passed before he received any medical attention. The state's attorney charged six Baltimore police officers as follows:

Goodson: second-degree depraved heart murder, involuntary manslaughter, second-degree negligent assault, manslaughter by vehicle by means of gross negligence, manslaughter by vehicle by means of criminal negligence, misconduct in office by failure to secure prisoner, failure to render aid.

Porter: involuntary manslaughter, second-degree assault, misconduct in office.

Rice: involuntary manslaughter, second-degree assault, misconduct in office, false imprisonment.

Nero: second-degree intentional assault, second-degree negligent assault,

misconduct in office, false imprisonment.

Miller: second-degree intentional assault, second-degree negligent assault, misconduct in office, false imprisonment.

White: involuntary manslaughter, second-degree assault, misconduct in office.

In order to secure a conviction of *second-degree depraved heart murder*, which carries a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison, the prosecutor must prove that Goodson killed Gray by acting with a conscious and extreme disregard of a very high risk to Gray's life. Taking Gray on a "rough ride" while he his arms and legs were immobilized caused his death.

Two other men from Baltimore, Jeffrey Alston and Dondi Johnson, became paralyzed after riding in police vans in two separate cases. Alston settled his lawsuit for \$6 million in 2004. Goodson should thus have been on notice of the very high risk to Gray's life from his "rough ride."

Professor Alan Dershowitz doubts that prosecutors could secure a conviction of Goodson for second-degree depraved heart murder because "Nobody wanted this guy to die, nobody set out to kill him, and nobody intentionally murdered him." If Dershowitz were to read the Maryland statute, he would learn that second-degree depraved heart murder does not require the intent to kill.

To be convicted of *involuntary manslaughter*, which carries a maximum of 10 years, Goodson, Porter, Rice and White must have unintentionally caused the death of Gray while doing a negligent act or negligently failing to perform a legal duty. Failing to secure Gray with a seatbelt and get medical assistance for him constituted negligent acts, which caused Gray's death. The officers had a legal duty to protect a prisoner in their custody.

Second-degree assault, which also carries a maximum sentence of 10 years, requires that the officers caused physical harm to Gray as the result of an intentional or reckless act. Failing to secure Gray with a seatbelt and get him medical assistance constituted acts intended to hurt him, causing physical harm (death) to Gray.

Preliminary hearings are scheduled for May 27, but prosecutors have 30 days from the date of the filing of charges to seek a grand jury indictment. There is ample evidence to support the charges against these officers. But whether they are indicted by a grand jury, and if so, ultimately convicted, remains to be seen.

Gray's family certainly has a good section 1983 civil rights lawsuit for violation of Gray's Fourth Amendment right to be free from unreasonable search

and seizure, and his Fifth Amendment right not to be deprived of his life or liberty without due process of law.

Sonja Sohn, who portrayed Detective Kima Greggs on *The Wire*, wrote in the *New York Times*, “there was a hopelessness on the streets of Baltimore that ran so deep that it seemed to have killed the spirit of the people.” She attributes the recent “violence” to a “public betrayal of trust” as well as “the culture of police brutality that was so pervasive that underserved Baltimoreans accepted it as a fact of life.”

When Mosby announced the charges against the officers who were complicit in Gray’s death, Sohn “sensed something lift. It is a break from the defeat I felt when I had to take a breather from my nonprofit [“ReWired for Change,” that served formerly incarcerated youth in Baltimore]. It’s a reprieve from the despair that I felt all those years ago, struggling to act in the reality of the Baltimore poor.”

The elation felt by hundreds of demonstrators in Baltimore was understandable. If the officers are indicted, they will be tried in a community in which the police have long enjoyed a culture of impunity. But Gray’s death took place in the context of killings of several unarmed black men, including Michael Brown and Eric Garner, by police in high-profile cases around the country.

This may give jurors pause when they consider whether the officers in Gray’s case could have committed these crimes.

Marjorie Cohn is a criminal defense attorney, professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, and past president of the National Lawyers Guild. She is co-author of *Cameras in the Courtroom: Television and the Pursuit of Justice*.

Might Israel Ever Surrender Its Nukes?

Just as apartheid South Africa once secretly possessed nuclear weapons and vowed to hold down its black majority forever, Israel is approaching a crossroads where it must decide if it will accept Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza as citizens and then what to do with its nukes, a dilemma that Joe Lauria explores.

By Joe Lauria

Israel last week sent its first observer in 20 years to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference, which is held every five years at U.N. headquarters in New York. Israel, which is not a NPT member and has never

confirmed that it possesses nuclear weapons, also has taken part in five rounds of negotiations in Geneva on establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

However, the veil fell away for the world's worst kept secret when the U.S. Defense Department recently released a document making it clear that Israel indeed has the bomb. A 1987 Pentagon document declassified in February unequivocally declares that Israel's nuclear weapons program was then at the stage the U.S. had reached between 1955 and 1960. It also says Israel had the potential to develop hydrogen weapons.

The document was released just days before Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made his highly controversial March 3 speech to a joint session of Congress in which he argued why Iran had to be stopped from getting the bomb. As the only nuclear power in the region, Israel has an unequaled strategic advantage.

There doesn't appear to be any scenario in which Israel would willingly give up its nuclear arsenal to fulfill a 1995 Security Council resolution calling for a nuclear-free Middle East. Or is there?

The only country to ever voluntarily relinquish its nuclear weapons is apartheid South Africa. President F.W. de Klerk gave written instructions to that effect in February 1991 (the same month Nelson Mandela was released from prison). When he announced in March 1993 that Pretoria's six, airplane-borne weapons had been dismantled, De Klerk said it was done to improve South Africa's international relations. (It was also the first time South Africa had ever confirmed that it had the bomb).

De Klerk's reason has not been entirely accepted by experts. Speculation has led to various theories. One was that with the Soviet Union gone, South Africa no longer needed its nuclear deterrent. Another was that it no longer needed the bomb as a means of blackmailing the U.S. to come to its defense.

One credible theory is that Pretoria saw the writing on the wall: apartheid was doomed and South Africa would soon be led by a black government. The apartheid rulers concluded that it would be better to ditch the bomb altogether rather than letting it fall into the hands of the African National Congress and possibly shared with other African governments.

A former South African diplomat was quoted as saying Pretoria was "motivated by concern that it didn't want any undeclared nuclear material or infrastructure falling into the hands of Nelson Mandela."

De Klerk had already scrapped apartheid laws and released Mandela by the time the bombs were dismantled. When he announced that the nukes had been destroyed, de Klerk said, "This country will never be able to get the nuclear device again,

to build one again, because of the absolute network of inspection and prevention which being a member of the NPT casts on any country.”

The parallels between South Africa and Israel are on the rise. After Netanyahu renounced his support for a Palestinian state in the heat of the final days of his re-election campaign (only to try to reverse it immediately afterward), both the United States and the United Nations strongly implied that the alternative would be an apartheid Israel.

“A two-state solution is the only way for the next Israeli Government to secure Israel as a Jewish and *democratic* state,” said Jen Psaki, the State Department spokeswoman, on March 18, the day after Netanyahu’s re-election. U.N. spokesman Farhan Haq said the same day that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon “firmly believes” that a two-state solution and an end to the settlements is “the only way forward for Israel to remain a *democratic* State.”

Not quite believing my ears, I asked Haq if what he meant was that the alternative was an apartheid Israel. “I’ve said what I said,” he responded.

While many critics of Israel say it is already running a de-facto apartheid system in its rule over 4 million Palestinians without rights, legal apartheid would come with annexation of the West Bank and Gaza. That appears to be the reason annexation has been resisted. But the longer a two-state solution remains a dream, the more a one-state solution becomes possible.

No less than two former Israeli prime ministers have said so. “As long as in this territory west of the Jordan River there is only one political entity called Israel it is going to be either non-Jewish, or non-democratic. If this bloc of millions of Palestinians cannot vote, that will be an apartheid state,” said Ehud Barak in 2010.

Three years earlier, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said, “If the day comes when the two-state solution collapses, and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights (also for the Palestinians in the territories), then, as soon as that happens, the State of Israel is finished.”

A former Israeli Ambassador to South Africa, Alon Liel, put it even more bluntly. “In the situation that exists today, until a Palestinian state is created, we are actually one state. This joint state, in the hope that the status quo is temporary, is an apartheid state.”

Without full Palestinian suffrage, Israel is increasingly facing a hostile international reaction. Israel fears the budding boycott, divestment and sanctions movement could grow to the scale of sanctions that pressed Pretoria to end apartheid.

A one-state solution, in which all Palestinians would have a vote, would almost certainly mean the election of a Palestinian government to rule both Arabs and Israelis, much as a black South African government rules blacks and whites. Despite its violent past, South Africa has shown how the communities could coexist.

It seems nearly inconceivable today that Israel would become a single state with a Palestinian Arab government. But it was once inconceivable that South Africa would be led by a black government. If that day of a peaceful transition to a single, democratic state to replace Israel should come, is it conceivable that Israeli leaders would allow their nuclear arsenal to be controlled by an Arab government?

Joe Lauria is a veteran foreign-affairs journalist based at the U.N. since 1990. He has written for the Boston Globe, the London Daily Telegraph, the Johannesburg Star, the Montreal Gazette, the Wall Street Journal and other newspapers. He can be reached at tjoelauria@gmail.com and followed on Twitter at [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe). [A version of this story originally appeared at Middle East Eye.]

Why Iran Must Be America's Enemy

Though Iran is arguably the major regional bulwark against Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, the Saudi-Israeli alliance insists that Iran is the Mideast's *bête noire*, so the Obama administration falls in line with that narrative even as it seeks a peaceful nuclear deal, as Gareth Porter explains.

By Gareth Porter

Since the start of the U.S. nuclear negotiations with Iran, both Israeli and Saudi officials have indulged in highly publicized handwringing over their belief that such a nuclear deal would represent a fundamental strategic shift in U.S. policy towards the region at the expense of its traditional alliances with Israel and Saudi Arabia.

But the Obama administration is no more likely to lurch into a new relationship with Iran than were previous U.S. administrations. The reason is very simple: The U.S. national security state, which has the power to block any such initiative, has fundamental long-term interests in the continuation of the policy of treating Iran as an enemy.

Some in the Israeli camp have spun elaborate theories about how the Obama administration's negotiations with Iran represent a strategic vision of

partnership with the Iranian regime. Typical of the genre is former Bush administration official Michael Doran's speculation in February that President Barack Obama based his policy of outreach to Tehran on the assumption that Tehran and Washington are "natural allies".

The Saudi response to the negotiations has been, if anything, even more extreme. Prince Turki al-Faisal, the former head of Saudi intelligence, who speaks more candidly in public than any other Saudi public figure, told an audience at London's Chatham House last month, "The Americans and Iranians have been flirting with each other. Now it seems each side is anxious to get over the flirtation and get to the consummation."

Behind the sexual metaphor lie Saudi fears of a "grand bargain" under which Iran would forgo nuclear weapons in return for ratification of Iranian hegemony over Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gulf. But these Israeli and Saudi imaginings are divorced from the reality of the Obama administration's actual Iran policy.

Far from the Nixon-like fundamental strategic revision, as the Netanyahu camp and the Saudis have suggested, the Obama administration's diplomatic engagement with Iran over its nuclear program represents a culmination of a series of improvised policy adjustments within an overall framework of coercive diplomacy towards Iran.

Despite Obama's embrace of diplomatic engagement with Iran as a campaign issue in 2008, when he entered the White House his real Iran policy was quite different. In fact, Obama's aim during his first term was to induce Iran to accept an end to its uranium enrichment program.

'Unconditional Talks'

Even as Obama was offering "unconditional talks" with Iran in a letter to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in 2009, he was already pursuing a strategy of multiple pressures on Iran to agree to that U.S. demand.

Obama's strategy of coercive diplomacy involved plans for more intrusive and punishing economic sanctions, a secret NSA program of cyber-attacks against the Natanz enrichment facility and political/diplomatic exploitation of the threat of an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities by the Netanyahu government in Israel.

Obama made no serious effort to negotiate with Iran until 2012, when he believed the new sanctions that were about to take effect would force Iran to agree to suspend enrichment indefinitely. He dropped that demand in 2013, only because Iran had increased the number of centrifuges in operation from 4,000 to 10,000

and had begun enriching to 20 percent.

Since the beginning of the negotiations, moreover, senior administration officials have repeatedly affirmed the policy of treating Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism and a “troublemaker” and destabilizing factor in the Middle East.

In his April 7 interview with National Public Radio, Obama said, “I’ve been very forceful in saying that our differences with Iran don’t change if we make sure that they don’t have a nuclear weapon – they’re still going to be financing Hezbollah, they’re still supporting Assad dropping barrel bombs on children, they are still sending arms to the Houthis in Yemen that have helped destabilize the country.”

At a deeper level, the most important factor in determining the policy of the U.S. towards Iran is domestic electoral and bureaucratic politics – not Obama’s personal geopolitical vision of the Middle East. The power of the Israeli lobby obviously will severely limit policy flexibility towards Iran for many years. And the interests of the most powerful institutions in the U.S. national security state remain tied to a continuation of the policy of treating Iran as the premier enemy of the U.S.

Bigger Bonanza

Since 2002 the U.S. Defense Department has spent roughly \$100 billion on missile defense, most of which goes directly to its major military contractor allies. That bonanza depends largely on the idea that Iran is intent on threatening the U.S. and its allies with ballistic missiles.

But an even bigger bonanza for the U.S. arms industry is at stake. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf regimes in the anti-Iran alliance have been pouring big money into Pentagon arms contractor coffers for years. A deal with Saudi Arabia for fighter planes and missile defense technology first announced in 2010 was expected to yield \$100 billion to \$150 billion in procurement and service contracts over two decades. And that tsunami of money from the Gulf depends on identifying Iran as a military threat to the entire region.

These sales are now integral to the health of the leading U.S. military contractors. Lockheed, for example, now depends on foreign sales for as much as 25 to 33 percent of its revenue, according to the Times story.

So the Israeli and Saudi fear of a supposed Obama shift in alliances doesn’t reflect fundamental domestic U.S. political realities that are not likely to change for the foreseeable future.

Gareth Porter is an investigative journalist and historian specializing in US national security policy. [This article first appeared at Aljazeera.com.]

WPost Blames Obama for Syrian Mess

Exclusive: As Al-Qaeda forces advance in Syria with the help of the Saudi-Israeli alliance American neocons are shielding themselves from the blame if Damascus falls to the jihadists by preemptively faulting President Obama for not intervening for “regime change” earlier, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

For the past two decades, American neocons and Israeli hard-liners have targeted Syria for “regime change,” a dream that may be finally coming true, albeit with the nightmarish ending of Al-Qaeda or maybe the Islamic State emerging as the likely winners.

Such an outcome would be disastrous for the millions of Syrian Shiites, Alawites, secular Sunnis and Christians, including descendants of survivors of Turkey’s Armenian genocide a century ago. They would all face harsh repression or, possibly, mass decapitations. An Al-Qaeda/Islamic State victory also would be a major problem for the United States and the West, which would have to choose between a terror central in the center of the Middle East or a military invasion.

So, what we’re now seeing in Official Washington is the beginning of a neocon finger-pointing narrative that promotes the theme that if President Barack Obama had only armed and trained “moderate” rebels and bombed the Syrian military (to create “safe zones” or to punish the government for its alleged use of sarin gas), everything would have worked out just fine.

The reality is far different. Indeed, the neocon baiting of Obama to engage more deeply in Syria was much like the incremental steps that preceded U.S. “regime changes” in Iraq and Libya. First comes the “humanitarian” propaganda portraying the opposition as entirely noble, then there are increasingly coercive demands of the sitting government, followed by military threats and clashes over “no-fly zones,” setting the stage for a violent “regime change” and the murder of the leaders, before the countries descend into bloody chaos as brutal jihadists seize large swaths of territory.

Obama chose not to go down that path in Syria, but he accepted the neocon

narrative about the white-hatted “moderate” rebels and black-hatted “evil” government, putting him in a position of calling for “regime change” while dragging his feet on the military component. The reality, as Obama explained to New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman in August 2014, was that the idea that a “moderate” rebel force could achieve much was “always a fantasy.”

The only rational course in Syria and, indeed, in Iraq and Libya would have been to promote realistic negotiations between the existing regime and its political opposition, not simply demands for the government’s capitulation and the leaders, in effect, to sign a suicide pact. Genuine efforts to achieve power-sharing or at least a more diverse governing structure would be imperfect but potentially the most reasonable solution to a fractured society.

While neocons and their “liberal interventionist” allies would surely find such an alternative unacceptable, even laughable, these same political actors are selective in their moral outrage. They never seem to seek “regime change” in the corrupt Persian Gulf monarchies, such as Saudi Arabia, nor do they press very hard for Israel to stop the oppression of Palestinians.

But today’s immediate concern for the neocons is to create a framework for the “who lost Syria” blame-game that would surely follow the collapse of the secular government of Bashar al-Assad and its replacement by a coalition of Sunni jihadists led by Al-Qaeda’s affiliate Nusra Front. Since the neocons still dominate the opinion circles of Official Washington, it’s important to get everyone into a “group think” that blames Obama for not intervening militarily earlier.

Making the Case

Thus, The Washington Post, which has become the neocons’ media flagship, launched this narrative shaping on Sunday with a lead editorial that cheered on the rebel advances, which were made possible by new supplies of advanced U.S. weaponry from Saudi Arabia and other hard-line Sunni states. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Climbing into Bed with Al-Qaeda.”]

While excited about the prospects for the neocons’ long-desired “regime change,” the Post noted “it could also lead to disaster, if the crumbling regime is replaced by the jihadist forces of the Islamic State or al-Qaeda, as already occurred in eastern Syria.”

The Post then lashed out at President Obama for his failure to do more on the “regime change” front. “Though it is sponsoring military training for a few thousand Syrians, the Pentagon won’t commit to defending them if they are attacked by the Assad forces. Mr. Obama continues to turn aside proposals for a

safe zone in northern Syria where moderate political forces could organize; he ignores the Assad regime's renewed usage of chemical weapons such as chlorine gas."

Not that the Post would ever think of showing journalistic fairness by including a denial from the Syrian government, but the regime does deny using chlorine gas and the charge is curious since the cited incidents reveal the allegedly crude chlorine bombs to be largely ineffective in killing enemy combatants. Why the Syrian regime after surrendering its entire chemical weapons arsenal would invite international condemnation for the militarily insignificant use of chlorine is hard to explain, but it has become a top neocon propaganda point.

The Post continues with its blame-Obama editorial: "One consequence of this fecklessness has been the defection of Syrian fighters to jihadist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra, which is affiliated with al-Qaeda. Another has been the apparent decision by Saudi Arabia's new leadership to join with Turkey in providing new support to rebel groups, rather than continuing to wait for U.S. leadership.

"The rebel advances in northern Syria have been made by a coalition including Jabhat al-Nusra and more moderate factions. Though the Islamists say they will not impose their rule on the captured provincial capital, Idlib, they offer a unpalatable political alternative for the majority of Syrians and for the West. it's clear that a moderate and credible alternative is desperately needed.

"One big reason previous U.S. efforts to foster one have failed is that it has been impossible for civilian opposition leaders to base themselves and organize inside the country. That's why a U.S.-backed safe zone, along with an expanded military training program, is needed: not to intervene in the civil war but to make an acceptable solution to it possible. A continued refusal by Mr. Obama to act will only increase the chance that as the Assad regime loses ground, that held by terrorists will expand."

What the Post leaves out is that to establish a rebel "safe zone" or a "no-fly zone" would require a significant U.S. military intervention to first destroy the Syrian air defenses and then the government's air force. That, in turn, would allow new offensives by Sunni jihadists, who are the most effective and motivated rebel fighters. They have also subsumed many of the "moderate" rebels who have received U.S. military training and weapons.

The real flaw in Obama's strategy was his unwillingness to engage in give-and-take negotiations with the Assad regime and its Iranian allies. In the last round of talks a year ago, neocon pressure in Washington forced Secretary of State John Kerry to exclude Iran and transformed the "negotiations" into another

round of demands that Assad and his supporters capitulate.

With Saudi Arabia and other Sunni hard-line states now supplying Al-Qaeda fighters with highly accurate TOW missiles and other advanced U.S. military equipment, the prospects for a political resolution of the Syrian civil war appear even dimmer. Even if the Assad regime and the so-called “moderates” could reach an agreement, why would the well-armed and well-funded Sunni extremists accept it?

And with Israel indicating that its primary goal is to overthrow Assad and thus hit back at Iran even if that means a victory by Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State the U.S. political/media opinion circles will continue to push the “Assad must go” theme. But what Official Washington seems most concerned about right now is to make sure that – if Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State wins – Obama gets the blame.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s “[Did Money Seal Israeli-Saudi Alliance?](#)”]

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

Letting Scientific Knowledge into Religion

Ancient religions used myths to explain the mysteries of the universe to primitive people, making up stories that modern humans know to be imaginative but false. The problem, however, is that many people still anchor their world views in these old fables, as Rev. Howard Bess describes.

By the Rev. Howard Bess

The writers of the Bible material had a very primitive understanding of the world and the universe. They did not grasp that the world circled the sun and was spinning constantly. They had no understanding of a universe that was a part of a much larger galaxy that was only one of millions of galaxies.

Writers of Bible material observed the earth and the heavens and were understandably in awe. However, we now know that what they saw was completely beyond their understanding. These special writers had no idea at what they were looking. They came to conclusions about the God of all things based on primitive and incorrect understandings of nature.

Scientific research has pushed far ahead of ancient misunderstandings. Our present scientific knowledge of the expanses of space has left the earth a tiny dot that hosts humbled human beings, who at one time thought the "heavens and the earth" were a commentary about the God who created all things and who continues to have significant control over all things.

This "natural" theology took its place alongside "special" revelations that came through great prophets such as Moses, Abraham, Isaiah and finally Jesus, the common man's rabbi from Nazareth. Science has brought us new understandings and conclusions about this planet on which we live and the universe that hosts our world.

Unfortunately, many Christians refuse to acknowledge this radical new kid in our intellectual neighborhood.

Does modern science have room for a personal God who loves and cares for us all? If so, are scientific discoveries a reliable commentary on the God of all things? In my ponderings about my Christian faith, I have not been able to sidestep these questions. I firmly believe science and Christian faith can walk hand in hand, though that requires science and Christian faith to listen to one another. I have made a commitment to listen to what scientists are saying.

Scientists have reached two tentative conclusions that impact our conversation. The first is that "nothing is fixed." All things are in motion; all things are evolving, including human beings. Human beings are not the product of a single creative act by an all-powerful God, rather human beings are always becoming, always arriving. What human beings have become is the result of a long process, which is continuing.

The work of Charles Darwin on biological evolution forced a discussion in Christian theology that will not go away. Alfred North Whitehead took evolution into the world of philosophy. Charles Hartshorne moved the discussion to theology, writing: "Everything, including God, is ceaselessly changing in a dynamic process of creative advance that will never end."

John Cobb Jr. took up the mantle of Hartshorne and taught for many years at the Claremont School of Theology, which has embraced the exploration of "process" theology more than any other Christian seminary. He forced the subject of

process into the curriculum of almost every U.S. seminary. Christianity in an educated world cannot long avoid the scientific adventure with process.

The second conclusion of science is that there is no beginning and there will be no end. I was first faced with the folly of THE beginning by Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish existential theologian. To Kierkegaard a beginning was not relevant. Only the moment was important. He mused, "Beware of the person who says he has found the beginning. He has not found the beginning. He got tired."

Scientists are now describing the outer limits of space in terms of millions of light years and still expanding at accelerating speeds. Thus, beginnings and endings are no longer relevant concepts. Yet, the Bible writings have a lot of materials about beginnings and endings, and Christian theology offers a widely accepted framework in linear time that has a beginning and an end.

Beyond God creating the heavens and earth in seven days, some Christian churches are filled with "end times" theology. This kind of thinking is terribly outdated and irrelevant in the light of modern science.

What kind of theology can relate to science that embraces life that is never static and always in process? How does theology relate to life that has no beginning and no ending? Science continues to have a great void that scientists can never fill.

What is the meaning of the enormous volumes of facts that are being gathered? The scientist has a desperate need to make sense of their discoveries, and my own Christianity has a desperate need for an honest environment in which to find the full and meaningful life.

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment he responded with two laws that are begging for embrace. Love God and love neighbor. I find no conflict with our faith's fundamentals and our search for understanding our living context. I suspect that science is in its infancy. Theology and faith need to be seen as an ongoing, every day joyful experience.

Life is fun and rich when we get religious people and scientists on the same dance floor.

The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska. His email address is hdbss@mtaonline.net.

How Saudi-Israel Alliance Helps Al-Qaeda

Neither the U.S. political system nor the mainstream media can come to grips with the new reality in the Middle East as the Saudi-Israeli alliance effectively sides with Al-Qaeda-connected jihadists and seeks to entangle the U.S. government on the Sunni side of an ancient conflict with Shiites, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

At least since 2001, a prime goal of the U.S. national interest has been reducing the influence and power of “terrorist” groups which have shown themselves willing and capable of attacking U.S. territory and nationals. Among these groups are al-Qaeda and its derivatives, al-Nusra, and ISIS (the so-called Islamic State).

How to properly achieve this goal is open to debate (for instance, the use of drones to kill their leaders almost certainly makes the U.S. more enemies than it eliminates), but one sure way of *not* addressing this national interest is adopting policies that benefit the very groups that are your sworn foes, or turning a blind eye to alleged “allies” who aid them.

This might sound like common sense, however in practice U.S. government’s policies in the region have for decades been counterproductive and plagued by special interest intervention. In other words, U.S. politicians and bureaucrats have pushed policies that have actually aided America’s foes.

Before 2001, the U.S. had long pursued policies that supported a range of unpopular Middle East dictatorships. The spectrum ran from the Saudi Monarchy with its fanatical fundamentalist worldview to more secular dictatorships such as the one in Egypt. This practice identified us in the popular mind with bad people and bad governments and made us the enemy of those seeking liberty and democracy.

In addition, we supported the Israeli oppression of the Palestinians and that made us unpopular with, among others, almost every Muslim on the planet. None of this was in the America’s genuine national interest but it certainly was in the interest of special interests such as Zionists, oil companies and arms manufacturers.

That there was (and remains) a difference between special interests and national interests should have been crystal clear when the pursuit of lobby-driven policies earned the U.S. the 9/11 attacks. One can make a disgusted face and assert that this assessment “blames the victim,” but that is just burying one’s

head in the sand. The outrages of 9/11 were not in response to Islamic teachings, they were in response to Washington's awful policy choices.

Then, instead of responding to those attacks with a policy review, U.S. leaders quickly compounded the problem by adopting a policy of regime change which resulted in the invasion of Iraq – a country that had nothing to do with bringing down the World Trade Center towers, but was on the Israeli and neoconservative hit list. Washington's attack on Iraq created a gigantic power vacuum in the heartland of the Middle East, which, in turn, allowed the growth of such present-day threats as ISIS and al-Nusra.

These groups are extremist in character and are inspired by the conquests of the 18th-century religious fanatic Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, founder of the religious sect adhered to by the Saudis. That is why ISIS and others like it are going after anyone who is not a practitioner of the Wahhabi brand of Sunni Islam – including the Syrians and their government, the Iraqi Shiites and their government, the Kurds, and a good number of the Lebanese.

There is just one added piece of information that readers should know. The activities of these very bloody religious dogmatists are now being aided by an alliance of Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The Saudis are giving these fanatics lots of money because they are religiously kindred and can be used as vehicles for spreading Wahhabi dogma throughout the Middle East while weakening (usually by mass slaughter) non-Sunni populations. Israel (the nation that, according to Prime Minister Netanyahu, is leading the fight against al-Qaeda in the Middle East) is aiding these same groups because it sees them as preferable to the Assad government in Syria, Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and the Shiite governments of Iraq and Iran.

This is a big mistake on the part of the Israelis, who are essentially inviting Wahhabi radicals to be their northern neighbor, but no one has ever accused the Zionists of clear-sighted, long-range planning.

Changing Alliances

As a consequence of this situation, there has been a major shift of alliances that has stunned and paralyzed the Obama administration. The enemy has certainly remained the same: the fanatics whose lineage can be traced back to Osama bin Laden and the 9/11 attacks of 2001. However, who is now allied with these "bad guys" and who is allied against them has radically altered. For anyone with the ability to look at the situation objectively, that change should have profound implications for U.S. foreign policy.

If the enemy is real and persistent, then those opposing it should warrant U.S.

assistance. Who are these enemies of America's enemies? They are now the Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad, whose government is under attack by al-Nusra and other al-Qaeda-like forces; Hezbollah, which has come to the aid of al-Assad; the Shiite government of Iraq, which, along with the Kurds, is under attack by ISIS; and the Shiite government of Iran, which has come to the aid of Iraq.

It is doubtful that many Americans know of this line-up of forces because they have often been misled by their own media. For instance, a recent CNN program entitled "Who Is Doing What in the Coalition Battle Against ISIS" lists such countries as Australia, Canada and even Belgium and Iceland but never mentions Syria, Iraq (except for the Kurds) or Iran. Either the folks at CNN are being disingenuous or they are living on another planet.

Likewise, those now aiding America's enemies should not warrant the kind of relationship that has bound Washington to them in the past. Who are these countries who are now friends of America's enemies? They are Saudi Arabia, Israel and most of the Gulf Arabs.

But how would Americans know this to be the case? Saudi Arabia, whose citizens are major funders of ISIS, is listed by CNN as fighting against the Islamic State. How about Israel's tawdry role in this affair? Except for a few isolated stories in a limited number of newspapers you won't find any attention being paid to the growing connection between the Zionist state and these enemies of the U.S.

Are there people in the U.S. government who understand this new turn of events? Of course there are. However, my guess is that most of them reside in the middle echelons of the State Department, where they have little or no impact on policy.

How about those in the upper echelons of the foreign policy bureaucracy or the various foreign policy committees of the Congress? No enlightenment there. Traditionally these people can't think their way out of the paper bag put over their heads by special interests.

What this means is that the chance that U.S. foreign policy will adjust to this new and important situation in the Middle East is low. Those in Congress who are financially or ideologically tied to the Zionists, as well as neoconservative dogmatists, are too set in their ways to understand that the landscape has changed. President Obama and some in his administration may well be aware of the situation but are, apparently, immobilized by the political risks of actually acting on their knowledge what is really in the national interest.

Ideally, the U.S. government should alter policy to fit reality. So, what would a new, more realistic policy look like? Well, we have to keep in mind that no

one except the Zionists, the neocons and some of the really unintelligent Republican candidates for president wants to send in more American troops to fight in the Middle East.

Given that fact, the best policy is to materially support those who are fighting al-Qaeda and its derivatives, and diplomatically pressure those aiding the “bad guys” to stop doing so.

That means supporting the secular regime of Bashar al-Assad in Damascus. But it is a dictatorship! Well, that should be no problem for Washington, which already supports dictatorships much worse than the one in Syria. But the al-Assad government is hostile to Israel! So what? By aiding groups like al-Nusra, the Israelis have forfeited any claim on American sympathy (unless, of course, you’re a U.S. politician who has been captured by the Zionist lobby).

That said, I suggest the U.S. begin the process of support by giving Damascus surface-to-air missiles so they can shoot down the Israeli warplanes that are now giving air support to al-Qaeda forces in Syria.

Washington should also support the military effort of Iran, Hezbollah and the Kurds to fight al-Nusra and ISIS. After all we are already aiding the Iraqi government in the exact same endeavor. It makes no strategic sense to restrict assistance to just Baghdad.

In Washington, however, the folks in Congress and the political parties with input to foreign policy, as well as the political appointees at the head of the foreign policy bureaucracy, are out of the reality-loop. The only thing those people know of the Middle East is what they read in APAC-provided briefing books.

One of the lessons of history is that both people and nations who fail to adapt to new circumstances are doomed to eventually decline. So, America, if the shoe fits..

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America’s National Interest*; *America’s Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.

Understanding Baltimore’s Violence

As much as the United States thinks it’s made lots of progress on racial

equality we have a black president, you know the on-the-street reality has, in many ways, gotten worse with the “war on drugs,” police violence and other repressive policies devastating black communities – and finally provoking a violent response, says Daniel Patrick Welch.

By Daniel Patrick Welch

First of all, spare me any #notallwhites vitriol because **you** haven't personally lynched any black people today. If that is your initial reaction, you have already missed the points I haven't even made yet. You might want to stop reading here (though you in particular should probably read the whole thing).

It is a thing of sheer beauty – terrible, evil beauty to be sure. But beauty nonetheless in the way that a near perfect, almost poetic conflation of hubris, hyperbole and hypocrisy can be admired for its boldness and bluster: Resistance to oppression is required to be polite, and to conform to standards of politeness set by the very oppressors themselves and their allies, witting or un-.

FUCK YOU. The youth of Baltimore are rising and expressing a pent up rage that is centuries in the making. It is not for me to tut-tut and impose my idea of political organization. The Left needs to watch, and learn. Look at who is protecting whom, who is threatening whom, who is siding with whom. Judge the media. Judge the police state. Judge a white supremacist society in all of its tentacles that shape our perception and experience in so many fields. This is the lens through which to understand what's going on.

As one friend sardonically observed, “White people care more about white property than black lives, which is ironic, considering black lives used to be white property. Through memes and social media, friends probe the irony of white people rushing to defend the property rights of a megacorporation whose greed for profit has destroyed more local businesses in Baltimore than “looters” ever could, spawning the hashtag #jesuiscvs and “White people be like #AllStoresMatter.”

The rising body count from what seems to be unchecked police violence is old news to those raising black and brown children in this society. These tips of the iceberg that gain national attention are a window into the daily worries of our communities, shedding light on what a challenging and scary proposition it is – some of the dangers and fears parents of white children rarely have to confront.

This is probably why outside observers completely miss the significance of the now viral footage of the black mother beating her son in public in Baltimore.

Police and media tout her as a model mom, implying that she was against the protests or thought her son should respect the police.

The simple fact was far less dramatic – in her own words she just didn't want her son to be another Freddie Gray – a fact immediately obvious to those in the community, but perhaps lost on those who thrill at the idea of someone **anyone** – beating down a young black man.

For our own part, we want our son to be focusing on first year finals next week, not out posing as target practice for killer cops. Parents tend to be a bit conservative when it comes to kids' lives – can you blame us? That is why we also need to watch, listen and learn.

While we were right in the middle of tweeting, texting and sharing about what police brutality's Enabler-in-chief called the “senseless violence” in Baltimore, it happened again like clockwork. Unarmed 20-year-old Terrence Kellum was shot 10 times by Immigration police (working jointly with Detroit police) in his parents' home just a few hours ago.

But please tell us again about “bad apples” and “isolated incidents,” and how “some police officers did the wrong thing.” Really, I'm all ears. My cousin was taken in by these same people a few years back. Guess we're lucky he made it out alive... What is also shocking (to some of us) is how invisible this internalized perspective is. The white jury watched **video** footage of Rodney King and just couldn't see police brutality.

When white observers see footage of a black mother running in the street with toilet paper and diapers – instead of a desperate mother trying to provide for her family at the end of a month (thanks for the cuts in food stamps, by the way) – they see a violent thug.

And in public, many whites aggressively pursue and defend this point of view. I was in a bar recently and had to try to keep my composure while a patron droned on and on about how the cop who drove into that kid at 50 mph had “no other choice.”

And all the while I'm supposed to worry more about a killer cop's twisted ankle than the survival of my own son and brothers. Are you fucking kidding me? On what planet?? This stands at the very core of white supremacist thought – even when the “thinkers” are ignorant of it. We need to amplify our collective voice and speak out – and encourage and support those kids on the front line who are speaking truth. We are up against the most sophisticated propaganda matrix the world has ever seen.

Remember Malcolm: “If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating

the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.”

Above all, we need to be careful. But not in the way politicians and handwringers like to think: My people have been killing you for centuries. But please, let me tell you how to resist. Or lead your movement – even better. The utterly depressing thing about the now ubiquitous comparisons to the “riots” of the 1960s is that, 50 years later, conditions are actually **more** hopeless.

Inequality is measurably, tangibly worse. There is no talk of a national commission or legislation to address the elephant in the room. No opposition to the status quo of the police state is tolerated from any quarter taken seriously; there is no organized dissent or political force to push back.

Moreover, and even more dangerous, the increased repression is part and parcel of a global assault on all the peoples and countries of the Global South – a worldwide Jim Crow, as it were – by an ever-more-bloodthirsty unipolar war machine. Scary, depressing shit.

This is a **global** struggle, folks. The fight to eliminate broken windows police terror at home is inextricably linked to the struggles of our global south peoples to push back against the systemic and overwhelming violence that fuels endless imperial wars.

The symbolic and real juxtaposition of Palestinian and American youth, cast in rock-throwing positions side by side, raised the tag “Baltimore Intifada.” What they use against these kids is what has been, is being, and will be trotted out to repress dissent not only against them, but any of us who try to resist.

Cartoonist Matt Lubansky penned a hilarious and pointed piece titled “Great Moments in the History of Peaceful Protest.” Example: “1791: Haitian slaves ask very nicely to be freed and are immediately liberated by all those reasonable white people.” It is a brilliant prebuttal to all the fools who can’t repress the need to preach to the next generation of revolutionaries how they would get much farther if they would just calm down and circulate a few petitions.

And vote for Hillary!

(c) 2015 Daniel Patrick Welch. Reprint permission granted with credit and link to danielpwelch.com . Political analyst, writer, linguist and activist Daniel Patrick Welch lives and writes in Salem, Massachusetts, with his wife. Together they run The Greenhouse School. Welch has also appeared in numerous television and radio interviews, and can be available for comment and analysis as his day job permits.

Mixed Signals on the Middle East

On one level the Congressional failure to authorize war on the Islamic State while seeking to sabotage the peaceful nuclear accord with Iran would seem to fit neatly with the interests of the Saudi-Israeli alliance as it presses for “regime change” in Syria and Iran, but there are other factors afoot, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The role that the U.S. Congress has assumed for itself as a player in foreign policy exhibits an odd and indefensible pattern these days. Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Connecticut, calls it a “double standard,” although that might be too mild a term.

On one hand there are vigorous efforts to insert Congress into the negotiation of an agreement on Iran’s nuclear program. The efforts extend even to attempts to interfere in the details of what is being negotiated, as reflected in a string of amendments being considered in debate in the Senate this week on a bill laying out a procedure for Congress to pass a quick judgment on the agreement. On the other hand there is inaction, with little or no prospect of any action, on an authorization for the use of military force against the so-called Islamic State.

That combination is exactly the opposite of the roles Congress should play, taking into account first principles of when and why the people’s representatives ought to weigh in on the conduct of the nation’s foreign relations.

Going to war is probably the most consequential thing the nation can do overseas. It entails substantial costs to the nation, and as recent experience should remind us, carries the risk of far greater costs, both human and material, than may have been anticipated at the outset. It is quite appropriate for such a departure not to be left solely in the hands of the executive.

The impending nuclear agreement with Iran entails none of those things. No Americans are being put in danger. There is no risk of being dragged into wider or longer commitments to pacify, occupy or do something else to land overseas. There is no drain on American taxpayers; in fact, to the extent that completion of the agreement will lead to lessening of economic sanctions on Iran, it will entail lifting of what has also been an economic burden on the United States.

As the subject of a complicated international negotiation that involves several other states and in which compromises on all sides are essential, for national legislatures to intervene in the details with specific requirements or demands is simply a recipe for failure of the negotiations. It is entirely appropriate for this agreement, like the great majority of international agreements that the United States makes, to be a matter of executive action until fulfillment of the terms of the agreement requires legislative action.

Several reasons account for the inappropriate reverse nature of where Congress is weighing in and where it isn't. Debate about the nuclear deal and about the bill bearing the name of Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tennessee, isn't really about Congressional prerogatives, especially given that the bill is not necessary for Congress to express itself however it wants about the substance of whatever agreement emerges from the negotiations.

It instead has been about whether opponents of any agreement with Iran would be able to use a procedural mechanism for increasing their chances of killing the deal. This is reflected in the current grumbling by diehard opponents of an agreement who see that the current version of the Corker bill does not give them as much of a chance for doing that as they had hoped.

The inaction on an authorization for the use of military force has a couple of explanations. The more respectable one is the inherent difficulty of crafting suitable language when the intended purpose of the military action is not as simple and straightforward as, say, defeating another nation-state.

Instead the purpose involves a terrorist phenomenon in which both the geographic and temporal extent of what needs to be done is uncertain. It is hard to come up with a legally precise formula that gives the executive the authority it needs to do something effective but also imposes meaningful limits, in terms of time and place, on the military operations. The draft resolution that the administration sent to Capitol Hill has some questionable language; fixes to it will be necessary but difficult. The difficulty is not a reason not to try.

Not trying gets to the second explanation for the inaction, which is political pusillanimity. Members of Congress realize that taking a stand on such things involves taking a risk. Some members feel burned either for opposing one Persian Gulf war that turned out to be a smashing victory or for authorizing another Persian Gulf war that turned out to be a costly mess.

It's easier for them just not to commit themselves and to stay quiet while the White House asserts executive authority and uses military force anyway. And that posture is a cop-out.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a [blog post at The National Interest's Web site](#). Reprinted with author's permission.)

The Day After Damascus Falls

Exclusive: The Saudi-Israeli alliance has gone on the offensive, ramping up a "regime change" war in Syria and, in effect, promoting a military victory for Al-Qaeda or its spinoff, the Islamic State. But the consequences of that victory could toll the final bell for the American Republic, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

If Syrian President Bashar al-Assad meets the same fate as Libya's Muammar Gaddafi or Iraq's Saddam Hussein, much of Official Washington would rush out to some chic watering hole to celebrate one more "bad guy" down, one more "regime change" notch on the belt. But the day after Damascus falls could mark the beginning of the end for the American Republic.

As Syria would descend into even bloodier chaos with an Al-Qaeda affiliate or its more violent spin-off, the Islamic State, the only real powers left the first instinct of American politicians and pundits would be to cast blame, most likely at President Barack Obama for not having intervened more aggressively earlier.

A favorite myth of Official Washington is that Syrian "moderates" would have prevailed if only Obama had bombed the Syrian military and provided sophisticated weapons to the rebels.

Though no such "moderate" rebel movement ever existed at least not in any significant numbers that reality is ignored by all the "smart people" of Washington. It is simply too good a talking point to surrender. The truth is that Obama was right when he told New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman in August 2014 that the notion of a "moderate" rebel force that could achieve much was "always a fantasy."

As much fun as the "who lost Syria" finger-pointing would be, it would soon give way to the horror of what would likely unfold in Syria with either Al-Qaeda's Nusra Front or the spin-off Islamic State in charge or possibly a coalition of the two with Al-Qaeda using its new base to plot terror attacks on the West while the Islamic State engaged in its favorite pastime, those YouTube

decapitations of infidels Alawites, Shiites, Christians, even some descendants of the survivors from Turkey's Armenian genocide a century ago who fled to Syria for safety.

Such a spectacle would be hard for the world to watch and there would be demands on President Obama or his successor to "do something." But realistic options would be few, with a shattered and scattered Syrian army no longer a viable force capable of driving the terrorists from power.

The remaining option would be to send in the American military, perhaps with some European allies, to try to dislodge Al-Qaeda and/or the Islamic State. But the prospects for success would be slim. The goal of conquering Syria and possibly re-conquering much of Iraq as well would be costly, bloody and almost certainly futile.

The further diversion of resources and manpower from America's domestic needs also would fuel the growing social discontent in major U.S. cities, like what is now playing out in Baltimore where disaffected African-American communities are rising up in anger against poverty and the police brutality that goes with it. A new war in the Middle East would accelerate America's descent into bankruptcy and a dystopian police state.

The last embers of the American Republic would fade. In its place would be endless war and a single-minded devotion to security. The National Security Agency already has in place the surveillance capabilities to ensure that any civil resistance could be thwarted.

Can This Fate Be Avoided?

But is there a way to avoid this grim fate? Is there a way to wind this scenario back to some point before this outcome becomes inevitable? Can the U.S. political/media system as corrupt and cavalier as it is find a way to avert such a devastating foreign policy disaster?

To do so would require Official Washington to throw off old dependencies, such as its obeisance to the Israel Lobby, and old habits, such as its reliance on manipulative PR to control the American people, patterns deeply engrained in the political process.

At least since the Reagan administration with its "kick the Vietnam Syndrome" fascination via "public diplomacy" and "perception management" the tendency has been to designate some foreign leader as the latest new villain and then whip up public hysteria in support of a "regime change." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Victory of Perception Management.](#)"]

In the 1980s, we saw the use of these “black hat/white hat” exaggerations in Nicaragua, where President Ronald Reagan deemed President Daniel Ortega “the dictator in designer glasses” as Reagan’s propagandists depicted Sandinista-ruled Nicaragua as a “totalitarian dungeon” and the CIA-trained Contra “freedom fighters” the “moral equal of the Founding Fathers.”

And, since Ortega and the Sandinistas were surely not the embodiment of all virtue, it was hard to put Reagan’s black-and-white depiction into the proper shades of gray. To make the effort opened you to charges of being a “Sandinista apologist.” Similarly, any negative news about the Contras such as their tendencies to rape, murder, torture and smuggle drugs was sternly suppressed with offending U.S. journalists targeted for career retaliation.

The pattern set by Reagan around Nicaragua and other Central American conflicts became the blueprint for how to carry out these post-Vietnam War propaganda operations. Afterwards came Panama’s “madman” Manuel Noriega in 1989 and Iraq’s “worse than Hitler” Saddam Hussein in 1990-91. Each American war was given its own villainous lead actor.

In 2002-03, Hussein was brought back to reprise his “worse-than-Hitler” role in a post-9/11 sequel. His new evil-doing involved sharing nuclear weapons and other WMD with Al-Qaeda so the terror group could inflict even worse havoc on the innocent United States. Anyone who questioned Official Washington’s WMD “group think” was dismissed as a “Saddam apologist.”

Amid this enforced consensus, there was great joy when the U.S.-led invasion overthrew Hussein’s government and captured him. “We got him,” U.S. proconsul Paul Bremer exulted when Hussein was pulled from a “spider hole” and was soon heading to the gallows.

However, some of the triumphal excitement wore off when the U.S. occupation forces failed to discover the promised caches of WMD. Hussein’s ouster also didn’t produce the sunny new day that America’s neocons had promised for Iraq and the Middle East. Instead, Al-Qaeda, which had not existed under Hussein’s secular regime, found fertile soil to plant its “Al-Qaeda in Iraq,” a radical Sunni movement which pioneered a particularly graphic form of terrorist violence.

That brutality, often directed at Shiites, was met with brutality in kind from Iraq’s new Shiite leadership, touching off a sectarian civil war. Meanwhile, the war against the U.S. occupation turned into a messy struggle between America’s high-tech military and Iraq’s low-tech resistance.

Lessons Unlearned

What Americans should have learned from Iraq was that just because the neocons and their liberal-interventionist friends identify a foreign “bad guy” and then exaggerate his faults doesn’t mean that his violent removal is the best idea. It might actually lead to something worse. There is wisdom in the doctor’s oath, “first, do no harm,” and there’s truth in the old warning that before you tear down a wall, you should ask why someone built it in the first place.

However, in the propaganda world of Official Washington, a different lesson was learned: that it is easy to create designated villains and no one of importance will dare challenge the wisdom of removing that villain through another “regime change.”

Instead of the neocons and their liberal helpers being held accountable and removed from the corridors of power, they entrenched themselves more deeply inside the U.S. government, mainstream media and big-name think tanks. They also found new allies among the self-righteous “human rights” community espousing the theory of “responsibility to protect” or “R2P.”

Despite President Obama’s election partly driven by the American people’s revulsion over the neocon excesses during President George W. Bush’s administration there was no real purge of the neocons and their accomplices. Indeed, Obama kept in place Bush’s Defense Secretary Robert Gates and the neocons’ beloved Gen. David Petraeus while installing neocon-lite Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Around Obama at the White House were prominent R2Pers such as Samantha Power.

So, although Obama may have personally favored a more realist-driven foreign policy that would deal with the world as it is, not as one might dream it to be, he never took control of his own administration, passively accepting the rise of a new generation of interventionists who continued depicting designated foreign villains as evil and rejecting any discouraging word that “regime change” might actually unleash even worse evil.

In 2011, the R2Pers, as the neocons’ junior partners, largely initiated the U.S.-orchestrated “regime change” in Libya, which starred Muammar Gaddafi in a returning role as “the world’s most dangerous man.” All the old terror charges against him were resurrected, including some like the Pam Am 103 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 that he very likely didn’t do. But, again, no one wanted to quibble because that would make you a “Gaddafi apologist.”

So, to the gleeful delight of Secretary of State Clinton, Gaddafi was overthrown, captured, beaten, sodomized with a knife, and then murdered. Clinton made no effort to conceal her glee. “We came, we saw, he died,” she joked at the news of his murder (although it was not clear that she knew all the grisly

details at the time).

But Gaddafi's demise did not bring Nirvana to Libya. Indeed, Gaddafi's warning about the need to attack Islamic terrorists operating in eastern Libya his military offensive that led to the R2P demand that Obama intervene militarily to stop Gaddafi proved to be prophetic.

Extremists grabbed control of much of Libya. They overran the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, killing the U.S. ambassador and three other U.S. diplomatic personnel. A civil war has now spread anarchy and mayhem across Libya and nearby countries.

Libya also now has its own branch of the Islamic State, which videotaped its beheadings of Coptic Christians along a beach on the Mediterranean Sea, a sickening sign of what could be expected after a possible Syrian "regime change" next. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The US Hand in Libya's Tragedy.](#)"]

On to Ukraine

While U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power and other R2Pers took the lead in provoking the Libyan fiasco, neocon holdovers demonstrated their own "regime change" skills by turning a pedestrian political dispute in Ukraine about how fast to build new economic ties to Europe while maintaining old ones with Russia into not only a civil war in Ukraine but a revival of the Cold War between the United States and Russia.

In the Ukraine case, the neocons made elected President Viktor Yanukovich wear the black hat with Russian President Vladimir Putin fitted for even a bigger black hat. So, as Yanukovich and Putin were scripted as the new "bad guys," the anti-Yanukovich protesters and rioters at the Maidan square were made into the white-hatted "good guys."

Much as with the Sandinistas and the Contras in the 1980s, this dichotomy required assigning all evil to Yanukovich and Putin while absolving the Maidan crowd of all sins, including the key role played by neo-Nazi militias in both the Feb. 22, 2014 coup and the subsequent civil war. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Seeing No Neo-Nazi Militias in Ukraine.](#)"]

As the Ukraine crisis has played out, Official Washington and the mainstream U.S. news media have consistently placed all blame for the violence on Yanukovich lodging the dubious charge that he had snipers kill both police and protesters on Feb. 20, 2014 or on Putin fingering him for the still-unsolved case of the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 shoot-down on July 17, 2014.

Evidence that suggests that right-wing Ukrainian elements were responsible for those pivotal events is sloughed off with anyone daring to dispute the

conventional wisdom deemed a “Putin apologist.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“How Ukraine Commemorates the Holocaust.”](#)]

Meanwhile, starting in 2011, the neocons and the R2Pers were both active in pushing for the overthrow of Syria’s President Assad, who like all the other “bad guys” has been made into a one-dimensional villain brutalizing innocent “moderates” who stand for all that is good and right in the world.

The fact that the anti-Assad opposition has always included Sunni extremists and terrorists drawing support from Saudi Arabia and other authoritarian Sunni Persian Gulf states is another inconvenient truth that usually gets kept out of the mainstream narrative.

Though it’s surely true that both sides in the Syrian civil war have engaged in atrocities, the neocon-R2P storyline for much of the civil war was to consistently blame Assad and to conveniently absolve the rebels. Thus, on Aug. 21, 2013, when a mysterious sarin gas attack killed several hundred people in a Damascus suburb, the rush to judgment blamed Assad’s forces, despite logic and evidence that it was more likely a provocation by rebel extremists. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“A Fact-Resistant ‘Group Think’ on Syria.”](#)]

Though it was less clear in August 2013, it soon became obvious that the most effective rebel fighters were Al-Qaeda’s Nusra Front and the Islamic State, which had evolved from the hyper-violent “Al-Qaeda in Iraq” into the “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” before adopting the name, “Islamic State.” By September 2013, many of the U.S.-armed and CIA-trained fighters of the Free Syrian Army had thrown in their lot with either Nusra Front or Islamic State. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Syrian Rebels Embrace Al-Qaeda.”](#)]

No Self-Criticism

But the opinion leaders of Official Washington are not exactly self-critical when they misread a foreign crisis. To explain why the beloved Syrian “moderates” joined forces with Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State, the neocons and the R2Pers blamed Obama for not intervening militarily earlier to achieve “regime change” against Assad.

In other words, no lessons were learned from the experiences in Iraq and Libya that “regime change” is a dangerous strategy that fails to take into account the complexities of the countries where the United States decides to overthrow governments.

The same unlearned lesson should have applied to Ukraine, a strategically important nation to Russia and one in which much of the population is ethnic Russian. But there neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs

Victoria Nuland brushed aside the possibility of a costly showdown with Russia a conflict that could potentially evolve into a nuclear conflagration in order to pursue the "regime change" model.

While Ukraine today remains engulfed in chaos the same as "regime change" experiments Iraq and Libya the most potentially catastrophic "regime change" could come in Syria. The neocons and the R2Pers as well as the mainstream U.S. media remain set on ousting Assad, a goal also shared by Israel, Saudi Arabia and other hard-line Sunni states.

For his part, President Obama seems incapable of making the tough decisions that would avert a Syrian victory by Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. That's because to help salvage the Assad regime as the preferable alternative to transforming Syria into the bedlam of "terror central" would require cooperating with Iran and Russia, Assad's two most important backers.

That, in turn, would infuriate the neocons, the R2Pers and the mainstream media. Obama would face a rebellion across Official Washington, where the debating points regarding "who lost Syria" are more valuable than taking realistic actions to protect vital American interests.

Obama would also have to face down both Saudi Arabia and Israel, something he does not seem capable of doing, especially as he tries to salvage an international agreement to restrict Iran's nuclear program to peaceful purposes only when Saudi Arabia and Israel want to enlist the U.S. military in another "regime change" war in Iran.

Indeed, the recent decision by the Saudi-Israeli alliance to go on the offensive against what it deems Iranian "proxies" is possibly the major reason why the United States is incapable of taking action to avert what may be an impending Al-Qaeda/Islamic State victory in Syria. Between Saudi Arabia's power over finance and energy and Israel's political and media clout, these "strange-bedfellow" allies wield enormous influence over Official Washington. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["Did Money Seal Israeli-Saudi Alliance?"](#)]

This alliance is now entangling the United States in ancient Sunni-Shiite rivalries dating back to the Seventh Century. Saudi Arabia, Israel and their many U.S. backers are gluing black hats on Shiite-ruled Iran and its allies while adjusting white hats on the Saudi royals and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has unleashed the potent Israel Lobby to get Official Washington in line.

Israel also has intensified its airstrikes inside Syria, bombing targets associated with Lebanon's Hezbollah militia which is supporting the Assad

regime. Israel rationalizes these attacks as designed to prevent Hezbollah from obtaining sophisticated weaponry but the practical effect is to weaken the forces battling Al-Qaeda's Nusra Front and the Islamic State.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, along with Turkey and some Persian Gulf states, has stepped up support for the Sunni Islamists battling Assad's army, thus explaining the recent surge of new recruits and improved fighting capabilities of the rebels.

Yemen's Suffering

In another front in this Sunni-Shiite regional war, Saudi Arabia deploying sophisticated American warplanes continues to pummel neighboring Yemen where Houthi rebels, belonging to a Shiite offshoot, have gained control of the capital Sanaa and other major cities.

On Tuesday, Saudi jets bombed Sanaa's airport to prevent an Iranian humanitarian aid flight from landing, but the destruction also made the runway unusable for other supplies desperately needed by the Yemeni people. While the Saudis prevented this aid from the air, the U.S. Navy has mounted what amounts to a blockade at sea, turning back nine Iranian ships last weekend because of unconfirmed suspicions that weapons might be hidden in the food and medicine.

The combination of these interdictions is creating a humanitarian crisis in Yemen, the poorest nation in the Middle East. The U.S. Navy, which likes to call itself "a global force for good," has, in effect, been drawn into a strategy of starving the Yemeni people into submission as just more collateral damage in the Saudi war against Iranian influence.

Another consequence of the Saudi air campaign has been to boost "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" which has exploited the Saudi targeting of Houthi forces to seize more territory in Yemen's east.

Yet, as tragic as the Yemeni situation is becoming, the more consequential crisis is emerging in Syria, where some analysts are seeing signs of a possible collapse of the Assad regime, a chief goal of the Saudi-Israeli alliance. Senior Israelis have been saying since 2013 that they would prefer a victory by Al-Qaeda over a victory by Assad.

For instance, in September 2013, Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren, then a close adviser to Prime Minister Netanyahu, told the Jerusalem Post in an interview: "The greatest danger to Israel is by the strategic arc that extends from Tehran, to Damascus to Beirut. And we saw the Assad regime as the keystone in that arc. We always wanted Bashar Assad to go, we always preferred the bad guys who weren't backed by Iran to the bad guys who were backed by

Iran.” He said this was the case even if the “bad guys” were affiliated with Al-Qaeda.

In June 2014, Oren expanded on this thinking at an Aspen Institute conference, extending Israel’s preference to include even the hyper-brutal Islamic State. “From Israel’s perspective, if there’s got to be an evil that’s got to prevail, let the Sunni evil prevail,” Oren said.

During Netanyahu’s March 3, 2015 speech to a joint session of the U.S. Congress, he also downplayed the danger from the Islamic State with its “butcher knives, captured weapons and YouTube” compared to Iran, which he accused of “gobbling up the nations” of the Middle East. However, Iran has not gobbled up any nations in the Middle East. It has not invaded any country for centuries. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Inventing a Record of Iranian Aggression.”]

Yet, while the Saudi-Israeli alarums about Iran may border on the hysterical, the alliance’s combined influence over Official Washington cannot be overstated. Thus, as absurd and outrageous as many of the claims are, they are not only taken seriously, they are treated as gospel. Anyone who points to the reality immediately becomes an “Iranian apologist.”

But the power of the Saudi-Israeli alliance is not simply a political curiosity or an obstacle to sensible policies. As it creates the conditions for an Al-Qaeda/Islamic State victory in Syria and the possible reintroduction of the U.S. military into the middle of the Middle East the Saudi-Israeli alliance has become an existential threat to the survival of the American Republic.

As the nation’s first presidents wisely recognized, there are grave dangers to a republic when it entangles itself in foreign conflicts. It’s almost always wiser to seek out realistic albeit imperfect political solutions or at least to evaluate what the negative ramifications of the military option might be before undertaking it. Otherwise, as the early presidents realized, if the country plunges into one costly conflict after another, it becomes a martial state, not a democratic republic.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in print here or as an e-book (from Amazon and barnesandnoble.com). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, click here.

A Call to End War on Whistleblowers

The post-9/11 expansion of U.S. government spying on citizens has coincided with an equally draconian crackdown on government whistleblowers who try to alert the American people to what is happening, an assault on the Constitution that seven whistleblowers say must end, writes John Hanrahan.

By John Hanrahan

Seven prominent national security whistleblowers on Monday called for a number of wide-ranging reforms, including passage of the "Surveillance State Repeal Act," which would repeal the USA Patriot Act, in an effort to restore the Constitutionally guaranteed Fourth Amendment right to be free from government spying.

Several of the whistleblowers also said that the recent lenient sentence of probation and a fine for General David Petraeus, for his providing of classified information to his mistress Paula Broadwell, underscores the double standard of justice at work in the area of classified information handling.

Speakers said Petraeus's favorable treatment should become the standard applied to defendants who are actual national security whistleblowers, such as Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden and Jeffrey Sterling (who has denied guilt but who nevertheless faces sentencing May 11 for an Espionage Act conviction for allegedly providing classified information to New York Times reporter James Risen).

In a news conference sponsored by the ExposeFacts project of the Institute for Public Accuracy at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., speakers included William Binney, former high-level National Security Agency (NSA) official; Thomas Drake, former NSA senior executive; Daniel Ellsberg, former U.S. military analyst and the Pentagon Papers whistleblower; Ray McGovern, formerly CIA analyst who chaired the National Intelligence Estimates in the 1980s; Jesselyn Radack, former Justice Department trial attorney and ethics adviser, and now director of National Security and Human Rights at the Government Accountability Project; Coleen Rowley, attorney and former FBI special agent; J. Kirk Wiebe, 32-year former employee at the NSA.

Several speakers warned that the Constitution, since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, has been shredded under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, and that Obama's unprecedented "war on whistleblowers" is part of the effort for the government to, as NSA whistleblower Thomas Drake put it, "unchain itself from the Constitution." Drake said he and other national security whistleblowers were

“the canaries in the Constitutional coal mine” to warn of the NSA mantra “to collect it all.”

Drake said he personally was “throwing my weight behind” passage of H.R. 1466, the Surveillance State Repeal Act, which was introduced by the bipartisan duo of Reps. Mark Pocan, D-Wisconsin, and Thomas Massie, R-Kentucky.

According to its sponsors, the measure would remove NSA’s claimed justification for its bulk phone metadata accumulation, but would also repeal the FISA Amendments Act through which the government claims the right to spy on Internet users. The issue is coming up now because three key provisions of the Patriot Act expire later this month. Responding to a question from a reporter, the other six whistleblowers said they also supported passage of H.R. 1466.

Petraeus’s recent favorable treatment from the Justice Department and a federal court judge came in for pointed comments from several speakers. In his deal with the government, Petraeus was allowed to plead to a misdemeanor for turning over classified materials to Paula Broadwell, who was writing an admiring biography of the general. Also, as part of the plea deal Petraeus was not even charged with the felony of lying to the FBI.

This stands in marked contrast to as many as nine individuals, including whistleblowers such as Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning, Edward Snowden, John Kiriakou (CIA) and the soon-to-be-sentenced Jeffrey Sterling, who have all been charged under the Espionage Act since Barack Obama became president.

Until the Obama administration came into office, the Act had only been used three times since its passage in 1917, which means Obama has used it three times as much as all of his predecessors put together since the law’s passage. But General Petraeus somehow gets to skate free.

“We all owe a debt of gratitude to General David Petraeus for showing us what a farce (the Obama administration’s) war on whistleblowers and leaks more generally really is,” said Jesselyn Radack.

She said she personally had represented seven whistleblowers “charged under the draconian Espionage Act the weapon of choice for the Obama administration except in the case of General Petraeus who was allowed to enter a plea on a minor misdemeanor charge,” which subjected him to two years probation and a \$100,000 fine.

Drawing on Petraeus’ favored treatment despite the seriousness of his offense and his lying to the FBI about it, Radack said probation and a fine, such as Petraeus received, was “a more appropriate response” to unauthorized disclosure or leaks of classified information, rather than prison sentences.

Daniel Ellsberg commented in the same vein that, "I don't think General Petraeus should go to prison" for providing classified material to Broadwell, but neither did he think true whistleblowers in the public interest should go to jail. He added, though, that "it would be wonderful for once to see a public official" go to jail for lying to Congress, or the courts, or the FBI, and for that I'd be willing to see him go to jail."

As for the Obama administration's overuse of the Espionage Act, Ellsberg said, "nobody but spies" who provide classified information to foreign governments should be tried under the Espionage Act.

Ellsberg prodded the mainstream press not only to protect whistleblower sources, but also to recognize that such sources are "the grist of investigative journalism." Too many in the mainstream press, Ellsberg said, seem to regard whistleblowers the way police officers regard their informants, as "snitches" and "law-breakers." He warned that Obama has "set the precedent" for dealing with whistleblowers, and the press needs to be more supportive of whistleblowers.

Ellsberg, Radack and Ray McGovern also said the Espionage Act, which prohibits whistleblowers from presenting their motives for disclosing classified information as part of their defense, needs to be amended to allow for "a public interest defense." Illustrating the need for reform, McGovern said that in the Manning court-martial and the Sterling trial, as soon as defense attorneys started to raise the issue of motive, there was an immediate government objection and an immediate ruling of sustained from the judge.

McGovern said Sterling was convicted on "the vaguest of circumstantial evidence" in a "case that was not proven" against him. The government showed that Sterling had had telephone conversations with New York Times reporter James Risen, who had previously written about Sterling's workplace discrimination lawsuit against the CIA, and prosecutors apparently convinced the jury that they were not discussing Sterling's discrimination suit, but rather his knowledge of a CIA plan to provide flawed nuclear weapons blueprints to Iran .

What was the lesson any intelligence agency employee might draw from the flimsy evidence used in the Sterling case? Said McGovern: "Do not speak to journalists." And, especially, "don't speak to James Risen."

Contrasting Sterling's situation (facing a possible long prison sentence) with Petraeus (walking free, with a \$100,000 fine, which McGovern noted was three-fourths of a one-hour speaking engagement fee for the general), McGovern said: "Equal justice? Forget about it."

Coleen Rowley centered her remarks around a statement Obama made last week in apologizing for the deaths of two hostages, an American and an Italian, in a drone strike in Pakistan. Obama, she said, opined that “one of the things that sets America apart from many other nations, one of the things that makes us exceptional is our willingness to confront squarely our imperfections and to learn from our mistakes.”

“I wish that were true,” Rowley said. “That would be nice if we learned from our mistakes,” but instead the government is going in the opposite direction in areas such as the drone program, as witness the accidental killing of the hostages.

Gathering an accurate assessment of intelligence is inherently going to happen at the bottom levels of intelligence agencies, Rowley said, so employees in the lower positions have to resist someone at the top stating a desired outcome and asking people at the bottom to tailor the intelligence accordingly.

She said that government officials and employees’ “highest loyalty is to the rule of law itself.” That is where whistleblowers come in.

Kirk Wiebe said that the public and political response to the NSA surveillance disclosures has not been encouraging, and painted a dire picture of civil liberties abuses, the militarization of local police forces and the “de facto destruction of the Constitution.”

“I am now entering the phase where I am becoming frightened,” Wiebe said. “People have asked me, are we going to be able to get out of this mess to turn the Titanic around? I don’t see the way to miss hitting the iceberg.”

“We as a nation are more aware of these issues than ever before,” Wiebe said, but “we’ve become a society willing to look the other way in the face of wrongdoing,” adding: “We are no longer afraid of the police state happening. It’s here in small measures, in increasing measures, week by week, day by day”

In introducing William Binney, IPA’s executive director Norman Solomon noted that 10 months before Edward Snowden’s NSA surveillance documents began to appear in The Guardian in June 2013, Binney had already gone public in a mini-documentary by filmmaker Laura Poitras.

In that interview Binney, without documents, raised many of the spying allegations that Snowden subsequently disclosed. It was this video that apparently encouraged Snowden to contact Poitras, who in turn contacted journalist Glenn Greenwald, to give them the NSA documents.

Binney said the NSA since 2002 had managed to use “terrorizing and fear-

mongering” as a way to manipulate and “co-opt Congress and a senior judge at the FISA court,” while keeping the public in the dark about “violating the Constitutional rights of everybody in the country.”

Since it had the White House blessing, Binney said the NSA controlled all three branches of government before its activities came to light. Former NSA director Michael Hayden “to this day” continues to lie that the agency doesn’t collect content, only metadata, Binney said.

In raising the alarm about the sweep of NSA programs since leaving the agency, Binney said he had been painted by NSA as someone who had no credibility “because I was a disgruntled former employee.”

John Hanrahan, currently on the editorial board of ExposeFacts, is a former executive director of The Fund for Investigative Journalism and reporter for The Washington Post, The Washington Star, UPI and other news organizations. He also has extensive experience as a legal investigator. Hanrahan is the author of *Government by Contract* and co-author of *Lost Frontier: The Marketing of Alaska*. He has written extensively for NiemanWatchdog.org, a project of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University. [This story originally appeared at ExposeFacts.org]
